

McLean County Museum of History

McLean County Courthouses Collection

Processed by Carol Straka
June 2023

Collection Information

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 Box
COLLECTION DATES:	1857-2021
RESTRICTIONS:	None
PROVENANCE:	
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	See also: - Price, William B.—McLean County Courthouse Preservation Collection - McLean County Courthouse Preservation Collection - McLean County Courthouse Clock Collection - McLean County Courthouse Dome Restoration Collection - McLean County Courthouse Renovation Collection - Blueprints, etc in Annex (courthouse #4) - <i>The old McLean County courthouse</i> by Greg Koos Call no: IL (MCLEAN) KOOS - <i>The McLean County courthouse: American renaissance in Bloomington</i> by Timothy J. Garvey Call no: IL (MCLEAN) ARCH 1988

Brief History

Over the years, McLean County has had four different courthouses, followed by the current “Law and Justice Center” and the auxiliary “Government Center,” all in the county seat of Bloomington.

The courthouse square was platted in 1831 by Isaac Baker, and four successive courthouses have graced the square. The first, made of whip-sawn cherry and black walnut, was built near the Center Street side of the square in 1832.

Anticipating an economic boom due to the state internal improvements efforts, the county constructed a Federal style, two-story brick courthouse in 1836. Two wings were added to it during the 1850s. Eighth Circuit lawyers used this courthouse, including Abraham Lincoln.

During the prosperous post-Civil War era, the county erected an Italian Renaissance style courthouse whose cost (\$420,000) was a subject of considerable public debate. Architect Alfred Piquenard designed this 1868 structure.

Although the building was touted as “fireproof,” it was partly destroyed in June 1900 when burning embers ignited birds' nests in the wooden roof cornice. The county commissioned William H. Reeves to design a replacement, using as much of the old structure as salvageable. Unfortunately, that turned out to be very little. That replacement structure echoed the style of the prior building and was used from 1903 to 1988. In 1965, the county decided to raze and replace the no longer adequate building. William B. Price led opposition to the demolition. Finally, in 1974, the county determined to use the courthouse for administrative offices and moved the courtrooms to the new Law and Justice Center at the end of 1976.

In 1988, the county again decided to demolish the building. County Board Chair Nancy Froelich led efforts to identify a new use for the structure. Ultimately the county partnered with the McLean County Historical Society to use it as a museum. The County pays much of the building upkeep and utilities, while the Historical Society pays the costs to operate the Museum. The remaining county offices left the 1903 Courthouse for an expanded Law and Justice Center to accommodate the Historical Society's occupancy.

Scope

Documents include general histories, newspaper articles, architects' specifications, cornerstone and dedication ceremony programs, timeline, notes on use of each room, a rebuilding bond coupon, and correspondence for each of the first four courthouses plus the Law and Justice Center.

Folder Inventory

A First Courthouse (1832-1836)

Folder A1 Miscellaneous

- A1.1 "Court House to Hog Pen," (history of the building), *Daily Pantagraph*, August 5, 1901.

B Second Courthouse (1836-1868)

Folder B1 Newspaper articles (*Weekly Pantagraph* unless otherwise noted)

- B1.1 "In Bloom," *Daily Pantagraph*, June 11, 1857.
B1.2 "For a New Courthouse," (1 of 6 items on the page), January 15, 1868.
B1.3 "Sale of the Old Court House," (2 of 6 items on the page), March 18, 1868.
B1.4 "Sold." (3 of 6 items on the page), March 25, 1868.
B1.5 "The Final Downfall," (4 of 6 items on the page), April 8, 1868.
B1.6 "Torn Down in Time," (5 of 6 items on the page), April 8, 1868.
B1.7 "Making up Their Bids," (6 of 6 items on the page), April 15, 1868.
B1.8 Untitled, (formation of a committee to oversee the removal of the old Court House), March 11, 1868.
B1.9 "Court House Meeting," (Farewell dinner in the old Court House), March 25, 1868.

C Third Courthouse (1868-1900 fire)

Folder C1 Architects' Specifications

- C1.1 "Description and Specifications for the McLean County Courthouse," by J C Cochrane & A H Piquenard of Chicago, 1868. Photocopy, 15 pp. 3 copies.

Folder C2 Newspaper Articles

- C2.1 "For a New Courthouse," (1 of 6 items on the page), January 15, 1868.
C2.2 "Making up Their Bids," (6 of 6 items on the page), April 15, 1868.
C2.3 "The Court House Committee," March 4, 1868.
C2.4 Untitled (resolution to appoint supervisors to oversee destruction of old court house and contract for new one), March 11, 1868.
C2.5 Untitled, (outlines the qualifications for prospective members of the Court House Commissioners who are charged with building a new court house), March 11, 1868.
C2.6 Untitled, (report from O.M. Colman, Chairman of the Special Committee on New Court House," March 11, 1868.
C2.7 "History of the Courthouse," *Weekly Pantagraph*, June 26, 1900.
C2.8 "Defends 'Dutch Mike,' Annette Comes to the Rescue of the Dynamiter," *Daily Bulletin*, August 5, 1900, 2 pp. Mdme Annette article on destroying the fire-ravaged courthouse.

Folder C3 Cornerstone Ceremony

- C3.1 Program of the Laying of the Cornerstone, July 4, 1868.

D Fourth Courthouse (1903-1988)

Folder D1 General

- D1.1 Timeline Events by Bob Bradley, 4pp typescript covering 1903-1976.
- D1.2 "History of the Present McLean County Courthouse" by Kathryn Erickson, nd. 6pp typescript.
- D1.3 "History of the Third McLean County Court House" by Wm. Price, c1967. 30 pp booklet advocating building preservation and including many particulars on the building.
- D1.4 "McLean County's Hidden Treasure: The House of Courts, photocopy of 4pp typescript sponsored by American State bank, nd.
- D1.5 "McLean County's Hidden Treasure" by Don Shirley. Photocopy of 4pp in *Bloomington Normal Magazine*, April 1980. Plus Apr 1994 cover letter from Shirley.
- D1.6 "The McLean County Courthouse" by Illinois State University student Nancy Hill, Apr 1997. 17pp typescript including footnotes.
- D1.7 Untitled notes on use of various rooms in the courthouse, nd, anonymous. 19pp manuscript.

Folder D2 Tim Garvey Essays

- D2.1 "McLean County Courthouse: Interpretive Storyline" by Timothy J. Garvey. 38pp typescript, nd.
- D2.2 "The McLean County Courthouse: American Renaissance in Bloomington" by Timothy J. Garvey. 24pp typescript, nd.
- D2.3 Excerpt from *A History of St. Joseph County Indiana* by Timothy Edward Howard, Volume One, 1907. 2pp photocopy.
- D2.4 Photo print of St. Joseph County Indiana courthouse, nd.

Folder D3 Dedication Ceremonies, 1901-1903

- D3.1 Ticket: for Cornerstone Ceremony on May 22, 1901.
- D3.2 Card: County Superintendent's Reception to McLean County Teachers, Aug 27, 1903.
- D3.3 Invitation to [teachers?] and their scholars to attend dedication ceremony, Sep 24, 1903.
- D3.4 Program: Dedication ceremonies, Sep 24, 1903. 3 copies.

Folder D4 News Coverage at 1903 Opening

- D4.1 "Under Roof Before August," no source, nd.
- D4.2 "Dedication of McLean County's Super& New Court House –Official Progamme and Historical Facts from Log Cabin to Marble Palace," *Daily Bulletin*, Sep 23, 1903.
- D4.3 "Interior is Rich," *Pantagraph*, Sep 24, 1903.
- D4.4 "The Frescoing and Furniture," *Pantagraph*, Sep 24, 1903.
- D4.5 "Monument in Masonry," *Pantagraph*, Sep 24, 1903.
- D4.6 "The New McLean County Court House and the Members of the Special Building Committee," *Pantagraph*, Sep 24, 1903.
- D4.7 "County Legislators," *Pantagraph*, Sep 24, 1903.
- D4.8 "McLean County's House Warming," *Daily Bulletin*, Sep 24, 1903.
- D4.9 Hand printed note from Jon C. Sage(sp?) with list of major contractors, their locations, and their work, nd.
- D4.10 Handwritten bid from Peoria Steam Marble Works to County Board, 3pp photocopy, nd.

Folder D5 Clock Bell

Originally used in Courthouse #3 (1868), the bell was transferred to Courthouse #4 (1903)

- D5.1 "Henry McShane: Baltimore Bell Maker" by Mollie McShane Fenger in *The Timepiece Journal of the American Clock & Watch Museum, Inc.* Vol 6, No 3, Winter/Spring 2000, pp53-61 photocopy. The McShane Bell Foundry produced the bell weighing 2,942 pounds.
- D5.2 "William M. Loehr" obituary in *Pantagraph*, Feb 20, 1905. Mentions Loehr, B.F. Funk & David Kern of the county board who selected the bell which was later transferred to the new courthouse. The names of the three men reportedly appear around the rim of the bell.

Folder D6 Fresco

Fresco inside the dome.

- D6.1 "Francis Pedretti & Sons" 6pp typescript compiled from book and newspapers by Marilyn Clifton Davis of Columbus, OH, nd.
- D6.2 Photocopy of *Pedretti Art and Family Book* by Ladina Jaecklin-Pedretti of Switzerland, nd.

Folder D7 Doorknobs

- D7.1 Email from Paul Woodfin, coeditor of *The Doorknob Exchange* via Andy Streenz, April 2019, with the following two attachments.
- D7.2 Scan printout of 1905 catalog: Hardware manufacture by P.& F. Corbin, 1905. 6pp
- D7.3 Scan printout of Corbin Special Catalogue pages including one with what was used at McLean County (S1614), 3pp. Although hand labelled c1911, Woodfin's email advises that it's at least mid-1920s based on models shown.

Folder D8 County Board Property Committee Documents

- D8.1 Correspondence from City of Bloomington, McLean County Acting Administrator, a Streator pes control service, plus a proffered agreement for pest control including pigeons, Feb-Mar 1976.
- D8.2 Correspondence involving renting courthouse for public sale, Nov-Dec 1975. 2 items.
- D8.3 Correspondence from Chief Judge John T. McCullough with attached Oct 31, 1975 letter copy regarding continuing need for some courtroom space in the "old" courthouse, May 1976.

Folder D9 Miscellaneous

- D9.1 Rebuilding Bond coupon, clipped and cancelled, due Nov 1, 1903. \$20 for semi-annual interest.
- D9.2 "Four Fountains on Court House Square," *Pantagraph*, Dec 9, 1915.
- D9.3 "Provide Ice water During Summer Months," *Pantagraph*, Jun 16, 1916. Includes plans to furnish the public with ice water.
- D9.4 "Install New Ice Tanks," *Pantagraph*, Jun 17, 1916. Installing new bubbler fountains on courthouse square plus ice store tanks.
- D9.5 "Ready to Install Fountains," *Pantagraph* Jun 29, 1916. Includes description of concrete ice pits.
- D9.6 Two notes recovered during restoration awork in summer 2021:
- Card: "Painted the Ceiling & Cleaned Up All Light Fixtures 1984 & 85" with list of workers names.
- Union card for Intl Brotherhood of Electrical Workers for interior electrical worker

John Bornholdt, March 17, 1903. Verso reads” These fixtures were hung – April 1903”
- Captioned photos “Illuminating the Past” from *Pantagraph*, April 25, 2021.

E Fifth: Law & Justice Center (1976-present)

Folder E1 Miscellaneous

- E1.1 “Major expansion OK’d,” *Pantagraph*, September 17, 1986.
- E1.2 Brochure, including floor plans, 1977.

F Miscellaneous

Folder F1 Histories

- F1.1 McLean County Court Houses, Lyman Tay, 2pp MS. Includes first Circuit Court held in Sept 1831 at log cabin built by Jas Allin.