

## A NEW HOUSE FOR THE COURT



GREENE COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
IN EARLY YEARS



GREENE COUNTY COURTHOUSE TODAY!



The present courthouse was built in 1850 after the November 1849, and February 1850, grand juries had recommended the same to the county commissioners. The foremen of those grand juries being Simon Fuller and William Gillespie respectively. The old courthouse was removed by George Zimmerman in the winter of 1849-50. The cornerstone of the new courthouse was laid by the Free Masons of the County on June 24, 1850, in which a niche was cut encasing a copper box, which contained certain relics and souvenirs placed therein together with copies of the *Waynesburg Messenger* and *Greene County Democrat* newspapers. The contractors for the courthouse construction were Samuel and John Bryan of Uniontown and the contract provided that it was to conform to the plan, style and materials of the Fayette County Courthouse as it existed at that time and total contract cost was \$16,000. It was completed and occupied by the Court in September of 1851, with Judge Samuel A. Gilmore presiding, and associate judges, Thomas Burson, Esquire, and Mark Gordon, Esquire, assisting. The High Sheriff was Rufus Campbell, the District

Attorney was William H. Babbitt, Esquire, and the Prothonotary and Clerk of Courts was Harry Pennock. It is worthy of note that the bell in the present courthouse was taken from the first courthouse, it having been remolded in 1926. The building is considered a classic specimen of colonial architecture.

The former jail and sheriff's residence, annexed to the south side of the courthouse was constructed 1880-1881, to replace the sheriff's house and the old stone jail (circa 1800) at a cost of \$29,000. The jail consisted of ten cells constructed of iron and four of brick as well as two cells for females adjacent to the lobby, jailor's room and bathroom. The jail was in service until 1980 when the new county prison on Rolling Meadows Road in Franklin Township was occupied.

## **MINOR CHANGES**

In 1939, a third story was added to the jail and sheriff's residence to the rear of the courthouse to accommodate the grand jury and serve as the jury deliberation room. Around 1935, the courthouse was painted white over the red brick. It was thereafter completely restored and renovated in 1952-53 on the outside, all the paint having been removed, and the original brick, the hand made product of county clay, exposed and cleaned. The courtroom remained very much the same in basic form as when the courthouse was originally constructed, having been redecorated in 1968, with only routine maintenance since that time. A stainless steel roof replaced the tin roof in 1988, with renovations to the front portico, columns, windows, soffit, and fascia completed in 1992.

As the twenty-first century approached, it was evident that the court facilities must be expanded significantly to accommodate efficiency of service to the public, record preservation, accessibility, and facilities for a second judge. In 1997 a project costing approximately \$4.1 million was undertaken to raze the old jail and a portion of the old sheriff's residence annexed to the courthouse of the purpose of housing an elevator, public

### **Greene County Courthouse**

Wednesday, October 28, 1998

One of the biggest progress stories of the year was the completed renovations of the Greene County Courthouse. On Wednesday, October 28, 1998, numerous local dignitaries and officials joined state officials, including Senator J. Barry Stout, Rep. H . William DeWeese, and the Honorable Governor Tom Ridge, in celebrating the official rededication of the county courthouse.

The courthouse was re-dedicated following a 14-month, \$4.1 million renovation project that began in

restrooms, a second courtroom, judge's chambers, law library, and other necessary facilities and offices. The project also included renovation to the original courthouse with an attempt to maintain the historical integrity of that building to the extent possible while complying with current regulations.

September 1997. The total cost of the project was estimated to be around \$4.1 million, and was funded using part of the county's 1997 refinanced \$6,935,000 bond issue.

Renovations to the courthouse included a new courtroom, a new roof and a 4<sup>th</sup> floor on the Church Street side of the building, two new elevators, a new wall around the courthouse grounds, and a police and handicapped entrance from Church Street.

Following approximately 15 months of temporarily being housed in the former Fort Jackson Hotel Building, the courts and the related offices moved into the new and renovated facilities. The formal dedication took place on October 28, 1988 with the Honorable Thomas Ridge, Governor of Pennsylvania, providing the keynote address.

### **August 2007: COURTHOUSE INSTALLS METAL-DETECTOR, X-RAY MACHINE**

Out-of-county lawyers used to marvel over how easy it was to just walk into the Greene County Courthouse. Those days are about over, because county workers installed a magnetometer, or walk-through metal detector, as well as an X-ray machine at the building's Church Street entrance Monday.

The security equipment has been commonplace for years at other county courthouses; but, those entering the Greene County Courthouse have experienced an almost *old-fashioned convenience* of coming and going unhampered by any visible security.

The county received a grant from Pennsylvania State Commission on Crime and Delinquency to pay for the equipment. The X-ray machine cost \$21,210; the magnetometer, \$3,800; and it will cost \$13,093 for several panic buttons to be installed in various offices throughout the courthouse. It was probable that added security measures would eventually be mandated at Government facilities, so the grant money allowed it to happen.

After a few instances occurred in our county courthouse (a criminal defendant lost his temper and had a outburst at a sentencing hearing before Judge; the cursing at the judge and violently slammed a door damaging it, on his way to prison; probation workers had also voiced some concerns about being approached by victims on probation, etc). So a committee composed of the County Commissioners Pam Snyder, Dave Coder, and Judy Gardner, the Honorable Judge Terry Grimes and

Honorable William Nalitz, Sheriff Richard Ketchum, and Magisterial District Judge Lou Dayich, researched ways to increase security at the courthouse. The committee applied for the state grant for the equipment in February 2007.

The machines will not be used all the time. Sheriff's deputies man the equipment only when a high profile trial or sensitive domestic hearing takes place. It will be up to the judge to determine when the added security is needed. On those days, doors to the main entrance on High Street, as well as the door at the side entrance on Washington Street, will be locked, requiring everyone to use the Church Street entrance and pass a security check.

During previous high profile court proceedings, sheriff's deputies beefed up security by using handheld metal detectors to check people as they enter the courtroom.

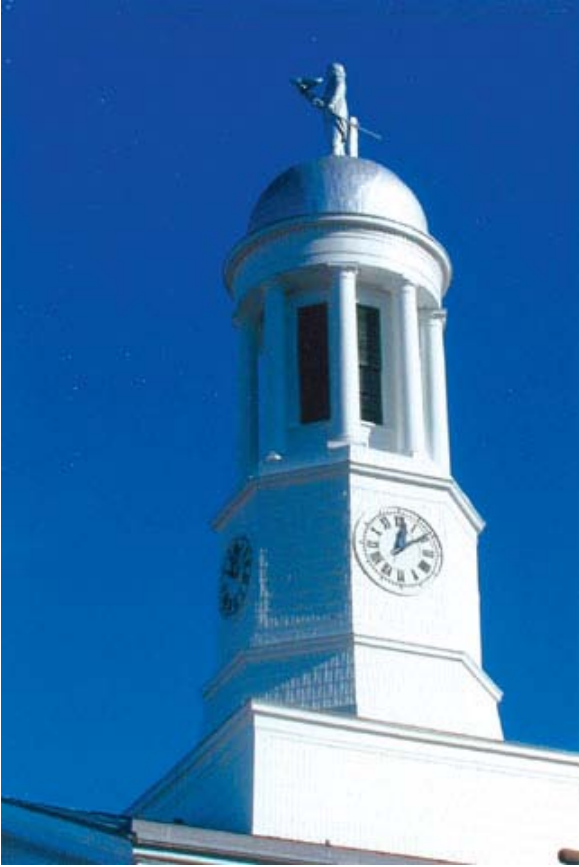
On most days, the security will continue with the "open-door" policy and no security devices will be used. The metal detectors will be turned off and people will be able to come and go at any entrance, unencumbered by any additional security.

The committee chose the Church Street entrance to host the security equipment because it is the only one that is handicapped accessible. The committee decided not to have security checks at all the doors because it would require additional equipment and too many workers. Assuming that the fewer entrances available, the fewer problems will exist. People will walk through the magnetometer and any bags will pass through the X-ray machine.

The deputies will complete training classes to learn how to use the new equipment. Deputies will confiscate any weapons, which include firearms, pocket knives and other objects considered dangerous. For a person who has a permit to carry a gun, the weapon will be taken from him and kept in a lockbox at the sheriff's office. The confiscated items will be returned when the person leaves the courthouse.

# GREENE COUNTY COURTHOUSE BELL/CLOCK TOWER

Source of following photos: [www.greencountycourt.net](http://www.greencountycourt.net) website

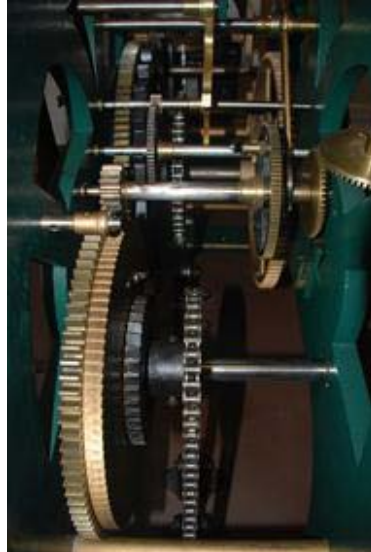


Greene County Courthouse



George Blystone, Clock Timekeeper

Inside the clock tower:





The Original Timepiece at Museum