

HISTORY OF THE STARK COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Compiled by Marc R. Warner

The Stark County Courthouse is a beautiful structure built in the architectural style known as Beaux Arts Classicism. Completed in 1895, it is the third courthouse to occupy this site.



The history of the Stark County Courthouse begins earlier, with the first courthouse, built in 1816-1817 on land provided by Bezaleel Wells, the founder of Canton, Ohio. The land he provided, at a cost of \$10.00, was specifically designated for a courthouse and has remained so ever since.



The first courthouse was a forty-four foot square brick two-story structure with a pitched roof and topped with a cupola. An annex was added in the 1840's to provide space for other County offices. This first courthouse served the county for more than five decades, including the Civil War years when people would come to the courthouse to hear news of battles and casualty reports.



By the late 1860's, with increasing population and prosperity, Stark County was in need of a larger courthouse. The second courthouse, designed by Architect



H.E. Myer, was constructed from 1868 to 1870 and dedicated on Washington's Birthday on February 22, 1870. Built in the Italianate style of architecture, it featured two towers and had a separate annex constructed in the same style. It contained one courtroom, which would later become known as the "McKinley Courtroom". A beautiful fountain was installed on the grounds between the courthouse and Market Avenue.

The eventual fate of this fountain is unknown. It was removed for construction of the third courthouse and was placed for a time at Canton's Waterworks Park. From there it is unknown what happened to the fountain.

The second courthouse was outgrown within 23 years but County Commissioners were reluctant to undertake the cost of a new structure during the depression years of the 1890's. Accordingly, Architect George F. Hammond from Cleveland, Ohio was commissioned to remodel and expand the existing structure. Hammond's plans actually called for the construction of a new, larger building around the body of the existing structure. Construction began in 1893 and included the removal of the two towers of the second courthouse and expansion of the building to include two additional courtrooms on the second



floor, along with several other significant changes. The beautiful “McKinley Courtroom” was preserved as part of this third courthouse and still exists today.



Completed in 1895, this third courthouse has many noteworthy architectural features. Most notable among these features is the imposing clock and bell tower, crowned by the four “Trumpeters of Justice”, once visible for some distance along most approaches to the city. In addition, the building has two porticos: an elaborate pedimented design on the Tuscarawas Street side; and a simple, single story portico facing Market Avenue.

The Market Avenue portico is supported by four Tuscan columns with Ionic capitals crowned by a balustrade. The



Tuscarawas Street façade is of the greatest architectural interest. It is a Beaux Arts fantasy composed of triple Roman arches on the first floor, above which rise paired, unfluted columns with large Ionic capitals. The carving in the triangular pediment is a magnificent presentation in carved sandstone, the symbolism of which is derived partially from the rural commerce of the county itself and partially from ancient Greece and Rome.

THE SCULPTED PEDIMENT

The triangular pediment on the Tuscarawas Street façade combines symbolic figures with representations of two major nineteenth century industries in Stark County. Filling the left angle of the pediment, a farmer rigs up his plow to a pair of horses. Tightly framed by the right angle of the pediment are two Merino sheep: a standing ram and a reclining ewe. As early as 1826 plows were being manufactured in Stark County and within two to three decades had become a major county industry. Factories were established in Wilmot, Greentown, Alliance, Navarre and Canton. Merino sheep, noted for the fine quality of wool they produced, were brought to Stark County in the early 1800's. Raising this type of sheep soon became an important industry in the county.



The center of the pediment is filled with four allegorical figures representing Commerce, Justice, Agriculture and Industry. Each is depicted with objects appropriate to her representation. Commerce leans upon a globe of the world; Agriculture holds a rake and a sickle; Industry is seated and holds a hammer on an anvil and nearby is a gearwheel and a bundle of rope. Justice alone is raised to the full height of the pediment by a two-stepped pedestal. Two of the other figures place a foot on the lower step but their poses are more casual than Justice, standing at full attention holding the scales of justice in one hand and a sword in the other

hand. An open book of laws (LEX) stands open next to her on the second step of the pedestal. An owl, ancient symbol of wisdom, perches on the top of the bench adjacent to Justice.

The pediment pays homage to both the Greek and Roman sculptural traditions. The diagonal movement from corner to peak can create a major problem for pediment sculptors. Here, however, the space and figures have been neatly arranged and no area of the pediment suffers excessive crowding or spaciousness. There is effective movement from plow, over the farmer and his horses to Commerce, to the extended hand of Justice with the scales. The head of Justice fills the peak, and the descending cornice passes over the head of Agriculture with the rake, the seated Industry, and the two Merino sheep.

Though the pediment is bas-relief, certain features are fully dimensional, such as the heads of the four female figures, their extended legs, the arm of Industry, and the feet of the ram. For the past several decades, the sculptor of the pediment was unknown. There is no identifying mark or signature that has ever been found on the sculpture itself. However, as part of the research conducted for the courthouse bicentennial, a volunteer researcher, Tom Haas at the McKinley Presidential Library and Museum located a small article in the Cleveland Plain Dealer dated February 2, 1894 that identifies the sculptor as Mr. J.G.C. Hamilton of Cleveland, Ohio.



THE TRUMPETERS OF JUSTICE

The Trumpeters of Justice, more affectionately known to the citizens of Stark County as the Courthouse Angels, have kept vigil over our community for more than a century. They first took their place high atop the clock tower of the newly completed Stark County Courthouse in 1895, the third structure on the site, a masterpiece in the Beaux Arts style of architecture. Its most attractive feature is the 140-foot clock-and-bell tower surmounted by the four “Trumpeters of Justice.” For many years the

Courthouse tower was Canton's tallest structure, visible on a clear day at a great distance from the city, the four "Trumpeters" indicating the location of downtown Canton.

The "Trumpeters" were manufactured by the W. H. Mullins Art Metal Works in Salem, Ohio and designed by its primary sculptor, John S. Segesman, who produced many other decorative and sculptural pieces which can be found on buildings across the United States to this day.

Each "Trumpeter" stands over eleven feet tall and weighs nearly 450 pounds, made of 24-gauge copper. All four are identical and stand in a classic contrapposto pose, the weight of the body resting on the left leg while the other is relaxed, slightly displacing the right hip. One leg is covered by her garment, the other is exposed above the knee; her garment falls to her waist, and the left hand is beautifully posed apart from her body. The extended right arm holds a trumpet five-and-a-half feet long.



The "Trumpeters" stood atop the clock and bell tower for more than 100 years. However, in 1998, due to deterioration of the tower stonework and mortar joints, the tower had to be deconstructed to the level just above the clock. The "Trumpeters" were removed from the tower on November 17, 1998 and would not return to the top of the tower for nearly five years due to problems in obtaining new stonework for the tower. During most of that time the "Trumpeters" remained in storage, however, their exterior was refinished and one of them was even placed on public display for several weeks at the Cultural Center for the Arts. Finally, the tower was reconstructed in 2003 and a rededication ceremony was held on October 30, 2003 to commemorate the

completion of this project and the return of the “Trumpeters of Justice” to their proper place atop the tower.

William McKinley and the Stark County Courthouse

The histories of William McKinley and the Stark County Courthouse are closely intertwined. It is actually more accurate to state that the history of William McKinley is closely intertwined with all three of the Stark County Courthouses that have existed during the last two hundred years. Those intertwined histories began in 1867 when a young William McKinley moved to Canton, Ohio to establish his law practice with Judge George W. Belden. At that time, the first courthouse, constructed in 1817, was still in use and William McKinley practiced his craft in that building for a short time. In 1868 construction of a new courthouse began and would not be completed until early 1870. During that time, Mr. McKinley was elected Stark County Prosecutor in the fall of 1869 for a two year term. The second courthouse was dedicated on Washington’s Birthday on February 22, 1870. This second courthouse contained one courtroom and Mr. McKinley practiced in this courtroom as both the Prosecutor and as a private attorney. He was defeated in



his re-election bid for Prosecutor in the fall of 1871 but continued his private law practice for the next several years.

In the fall of 1876 William McKinley ran for and was elected to the United States House of Representatives and served fourteen years as a Congressman before being defeated in his re-election bid in the fall of 1890. However, he had larger political aspirations and successfully ran for Governor of Ohio in the fall of 1891 and took office on January 11, 1892. At that time, the term of office for the Governor was two years and Mr. McKinley successfully ran for a second term in 1893 and was sworn in on January 8, 1894. It was during the time that he served as Governor that the third Stark County Courthouse was constructed from 1893 to 1895. Following completion of his second term in 1896, William McKinley returned home to Canton and began his campaign for President of the United States. This included his famous “front porch campaign” from his residence on Market Avenue.

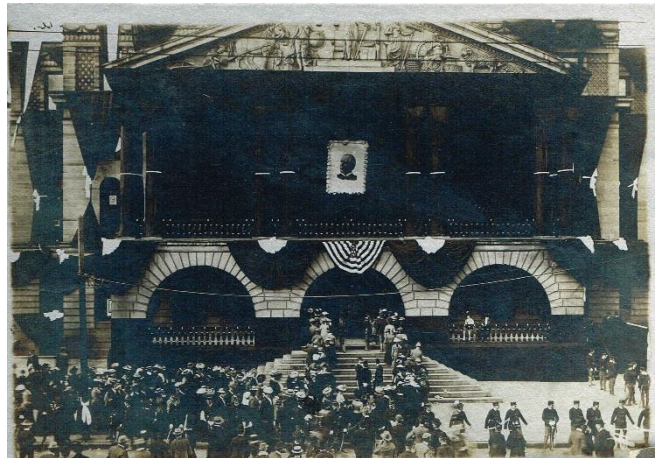


William McKinley was elected President of the United States in November 1896 and was inaugurated on March 5, 1897. He ran for and was elected to a second term in 1900. Tragically, he was shot while attending a reception at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York on September 6, 1901. It was more than a week later before he passed away, on September 14, 1901.



Following ceremonies to honor the fallen President in Buffalo and Washington, D. C., his body was brought back to Canton and on September 18, 1901 a funeral procession was held in Canton. His casket was brought down Market Avenue by horse drawn carriage and after making the turn onto Tuscarawas Street in front of the courthouse, his casket was carried by Honor Guard into

the lobby of the courthouse. The President lie in state in the lobby of the courthouse while an estimated 35,000 people came through the courthouse to pay their final respects. The line to see the President in the courthouse was four abreast and stretched west on Tuscarawas Street for a half mile. President McKinley was then placed in the Werts Receiving Vault at Westlawn Cemetery until completion of the McKinley Monument in 1907, at which time he and his wife Ida Saxton McKinley and their two daughters, Katherine and Ida, were interred there as their final resting place.



It is noteworthy that the courtroom in which William McKinley served as both Prosecutor and private attorney still exists today in the third courthouse and is known as the "McKinley Courtroom." That courtroom was the only courtroom that existed in the second courthouse, constructed from 1868-1870. When the third courthouse was constructed in 1893-1895, it was built around most of the

structure of the second courthouse. Much of that second courthouse is encased within the current courthouse and the single courtroom within the second courthouse was preserved as part of the third courthouse. It is a large two-story courtroom with many beautiful, ornate architectural features that helps to preserve the closely intertwined histories of William McKinley and the Stark County Courthouse.

RENOVATION OF THE STARK COUNTY COURTHOUSE 1992 – 1995

The Stark County Courthouse is a beautiful structure built in the Neo-Classical style of architecture. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 because of its architectural and historical significance. However, the



courthouse was not always maintained in the condition it is seen today. Over the course of several decades after its completion in 1895, the building did not receive proper care and maintenance. In addition, structural additions and makeshift repairs were made both inside and outside that detracted from its appearance and architectural beauty. For example, in 1950 the large granite columns of the south porch were filled in with masonry and glass block to create additional interior space, with no apparent consideration for the architectural appearance of the building. The exterior also suffered from the effects of air pollution and a general lack of maintenance. The overall effect inside the courthouse was generally that of an uncared for building.

Between the deteriorating condition of the courthouse and the need for more space for county government operations, consideration was given at various times over the decades from the 1940's and into the 1970's to demolishing the courthouse and replacing it with a larger, more modern structure. Newspaper clippings during that time period provide details of the public discussions and

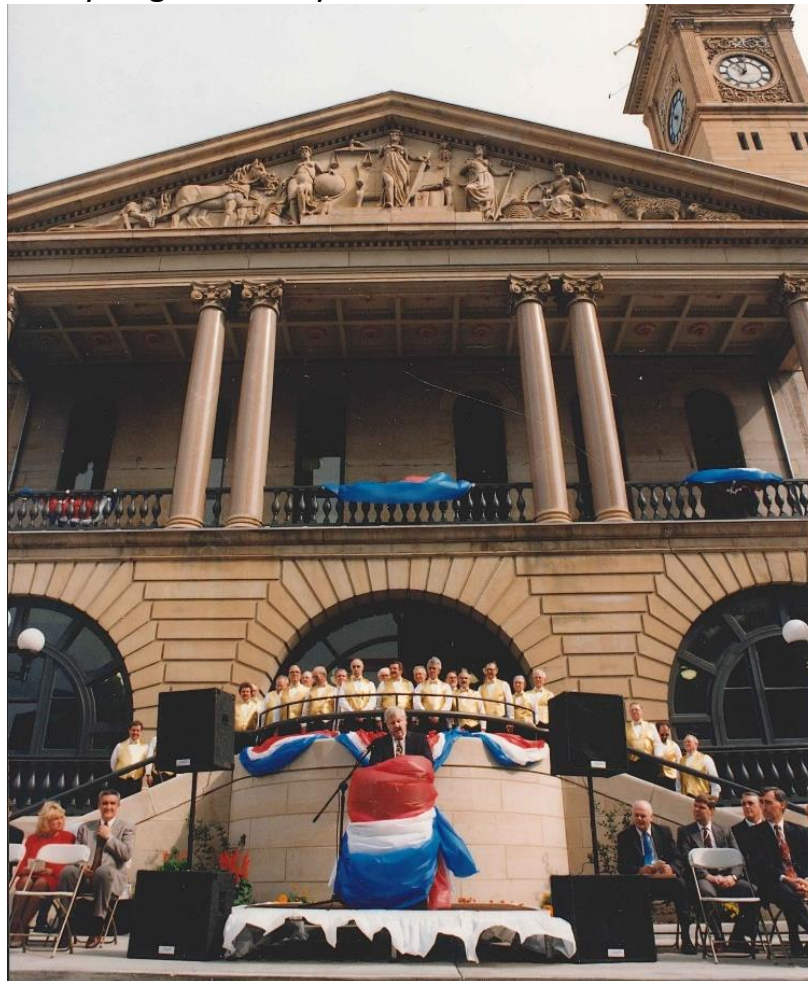
considerations given to replacing the courthouse. On a few occasions actual plans were developed and approved for replacement of the courthouse. However, due to lack of sufficient county funding and failure of ballot issues to raise the necessary capital, those plans were not carried out. Thankfully there were also individuals and organizations devoted to historic preservation who strongly and effectively advocated for saving the courthouse.

The poor condition of the courthouse came to the forefront in the late 1980's as a result of a visit to the courthouse by then-Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, Thomas J. Moyer. During his visit, he described the condition of the courthouse as perhaps the worst in the State of Ohio. Chief Justice Moyer's comments provided the impetus for a collaborative effort between governmental and civic organizations to address this situation. A plan was developed between Stark County government and local foundations to fund the renovation of the courthouse. Plans were developed by the architectural firm of Lawrence, Dykes, Goodenberger and Clancy to renovate, restore and in many ways improve the condition and function of the building. Funding was provided by the Deuble Foundation, the Hoover Foundation, the Stark Community Foundation, and the Timken Foundation totaling \$6.5 million. Stark County Government contributed \$4 million to the project. The project began in 1992 and the scope of the project was immense, from the courthouse foundation to its roof. Part of the project included the demolition of the adjacent Stark County Office Building (formerly the St. Francis Hotel) and the Courthouse Annex. The condition of those two buildings and the total available project funding made it cost prohibitive to preserve them.



For the renovation of the courthouse, all new windows were installed along with new building systems including electrical, plumbing, security, and heating and cooling. All interior facilities were renovated and some new offices and facilities were constructed for greater efficiency. For example, a new juror assembly room

was created to accommodate the large number of jurors who report to the courthouse. The three existing second floor two-story courtrooms were preserved and restored and two new courtrooms were constructed on the first floor to match the décor of the second floor courtrooms. The masonry and glass block was removed between the granite pillars above the main entrance and the exterior was restored to its original appearance. The project took more than three years to complete and the architects and contractors did a masterful job of renovating, preserving and modernizing this historic building. A Rededication Ceremony was held on September 16, 1995. Chief Justice Thomas J. Moyer returned to the Courthouse that day to give the keynote address for the rededication.



With this major renovation of the Stark County Courthouse, there was also a commitment made by the Judges and County Commissioners to preserve and maintain it so that it can continue to serve the citizens of Stark County for many more decades to come.

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