

JEFFERSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

BUILT 1890-1892



(From the collection of James Hermanson)

The Elected Officials and Employees of Jefferson County welcome you to the Jefferson County Courthouse. Those of us that have the pleasure of working here hope you can take a few moments to look around and appreciate this magnificent building. The information contained in

this pamphlet is provided solely for your enjoyment.

The Jefferson County Courthouse majestically overlooks Port Townsend Bay and the entrance to Admiralty Inlet. Approved for construction in 1890 by the Jefferson County Commissioners, the Romanesque style courthouse, brainchild of Seattle architect W. A. Ritchie, was let out to contractors at an estimated cost of \$150,000.00. Reportedly \$117,600.00 was designated for the building and \$17,287.00 for the jail in 1892, which was located in the South half of the basement. John Rigby, Bldg. Contractor, and C. P. Wakeman, Supt. of Construction, were the contractors.

While the deep red, smooth bricks were shipped in from St. Louis, some 786 tons of sandstone were brought in from Alaska. Corridor walls were accented with wainscoting and in the two main halls geometrically patterned quarry tile floors were laid. (pictured below)



(Photo by Dennis Pownall)

The counters in the offices were modular units of oak that could be reassembled and all were faced with rose marble.

The courtroom, housed on the second floor, still displays panels of intricately carved solid oak. (Pictured below)



(Photo by Dennis Pownall)

The addition of automatic openers on the main entrance doors enabled the removal of an attached “woodshed” put up years before as a windbreak. The homely structure was known locally as the “Outhouse”, and with its removal the beautiful arched entry (pictured below) could again be viewed.



(Photo by Dennis Pownall)



(Photo by Bobby DuBois)

Rising stoically over the town is the Jefferson County Courthouse Clock Tower, which was installed in the newly completed building in November 1892. Although the original plans drawn by W. A. Ritchie called for a tower 140 feet tall, according to an article in an issue of the Port Townsend Morning Leader, the tower measures only 124 feet, 4 inches. No explanation can be found for the discrepancy.

Legend has it that the bell was pulled across the plains and the clock mechanism was shipped around the Horn. The bell was reportedly drawn into position by a white horse.

The E. Howard Watch & Clock Company of Boston, Mass. built both the bell and the clock mechanism of solid brass in 1891.



(Photo by Adriana Janovich)

Illumination of the clock was made possible in 1912 when the courthouse received electrical power. The addition of electricity also eased the chore of winding the huge clock, which previously required two men half a day and was wound by hand. The task demanded a climb up the 154 steps from the basement to the tower, and since 1914, the winding has been performed each Friday. From 1963 to 1981 Custodian Tom Heinbaugh climbed the steps to the tower. Presently, lead custodian Patrick Whiteman (pictured with the clock) maintains the tradition. However, with the use of the elevator (installed in 1970) and an electric winch, the process of winding now takes about 15 minutes.

On the North and East faces of the nine-foot clock the original cedar hands still mark time. However, in 1954 with the aid of a boson's chair, Dale Smith of Port Townsend replaced the 62-year-old

severely weathered South and West hands.

The original hammer, produced by the former Irondale Iron Works, has been replaced by a new one manufactured locally by Jerry Pohl and Russell Jaqua. The striking area on the bell has worn down only slightly more than ¼ inch in all these years. In 1975 the clock was disassembled and taken to Bellevue for complete rejuvenation and in 1982 the clock bushings also were replaced by a local machine shop while being overseen by clock smith Bill Sperry.

The clock operates on the same principle as a cuckoo clock. The weights (250-pound boxes of brick and stone) drop slowly from the tower to the basement, enclosed in a cedar shaft. Steel airplane cables that support the weights must be replaced every 3 to 4 years as they become frayed.

A highlight of past Courthouse tours was to be present in the tower as the hammer struck the hour, however due to remodeling in the Prosecutor's office and safety concerns, tours to the clock tower are regrettably precluded at this time.