

COURTHOUSE: Space holds history

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Nearly as historically significant as the courthouse, the grounds themselves harbor their share of history, including the 1927 destruction by ax of 11 illegal liquor stills. The Wallowa County sheriff, a deputy and a state prohibition agent participated in the slaughter.

Several replantings of both deciduous and coniferous trees on the grounds took place over the years, as well as, several additions of historical significance:

Sometime in the 1920s, the county installed a granite bench commemorating two Wallowa County pioneers who donated the land for the courthouse square.

The American Legion placed a granite boulder on the grounds in 1925 with a plaque honoring the World War I (WWI) dead. In 1986, additional plaques were placed on the stone to honor veterans of subsequent wars up to that time.

The year 1926 saw placement of a memorial WWI cannon. Melted for scrap during WWII, it was replaced with a Japanese cannon from the same conflict circa 1947.

The county placed a 1936 concrete memorial arch on the grounds to honor Wallowa County pioneers.

Even with the advent of the modern age, the courthouse maintains many of its original functions. Several county offices originally housed there were relocated to other addresses in town. Also gone is the basement jail, which included a living space for the jailer and his wife. One of the former jail doors resides in a ground floor office.

The circuit courtroom is the crowning jewel of the court-



S.F. Tool/Chieftain

A room with a view — one of the five semi-circular windows on the third floor of the courthouse.

house interior. Upon entering the courtroom (on a tour, in this instance), one is greeted by the pleasant sight of its oak décor, nearly all of it original to the room. The bench (where the judge presides) is of ancient oak and surrounded by oak balustrade.

The jury box features two rows of original swiveling oak chairs with arm rests and cushioned seats. On the floor below both rows of chairs is a real brass rail on which jurors can rest their feet. Court observers can watch proceedings from the comfort of oak pews that would not look out of place in the finest churches. At 100 years old, they look to easily last another 100.

While the county replaced many of the courtroom's original oak blinds, some remain in place to shield spectators and court employees from the sun.

All the Circuit Court personnel express great pride in their courtroom and it appears to receive the care it deserves.

A tour through the third floor and attic reveals the complex structure of the upper framing of the courthouse, which features

numerous gables and the cupola. The basement contains two staircases for ingress/egress, and houses several county offices. The basement's interesting feature is the load-bearing walls and foundation of unhewn, natural stone. Something about the stone in its natural state imparts the sturdiness and perpetuity of earth.

Starting in 1995, a Wallowa County employee set the wheels in motion to examine the possibility of placing the courthouse on the National Historic Places Register. The courthouse submitted the actual application in December of 1999 with approval coming in September of the following year.

SQUINTS & GLANCES:

Handwriting on the back of this local photo identifies the woman as Mrs. I.S. McDonald, of Promise, with her June cactus plant.



HAPPILY AT HOME BEHIND BARS

Tells Officers He's Insane And Insists on Going to Jail

Chieftain, Oct. 9, 1920

The sheriff's office has been called upon to make a good many arrests and occasionally has had considerable trouble to locate the person or persons so wanted so it is not to be wondered at when a man by the name of Maxwell went in search of the sheriff in order to be put in jail, there was some amazement expressed by the officials.

The man in question showed up Sunday evening, claiming to be insane and asked to be placed in jail. Janitor Sanders informed him that he had no authority to lock him up and he would have to see the sheriff. He was somewhat put out as he said the sheriff had agreed to meet him

at the courthouse and attend to him. He was then informed that Sheriff Rinehart was in Portland but that if he so desired he could look up Harry H. Nottingham and state his case to him. So anxious was he to secure an audience that he walked to the Nottingham residence and gave himself up.

He was placed in jail and so anxious were the officials that he stay that they forgot to lock the door. Monday morning he was still there and seemed to think he had found a home. Dr. B.F. Roseman, the county physician, was called but could find no trace of insanity and very little else wrong except that there seemed no inclination to work

and a desire for a home for the winter.

Now the officers are wondering if it wouldn't be a good idea to keep the jail doors securely locked at all times and post a special guard in order to keep sufficient rooms at the county hotel to accommodate those who are really worthy of admittance.

The county decided to send Maxwell to Pendleton, where he desired to go, Tuesday. They thought that this would be a cheaper method of disposing of his case than keeping him as a free guest at the county hotel, and there is small likelihood that he will land in a public institution at that city.



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