

OJC Court Spotlight: Harrison County

Harrison County, with a population of 16,085, is a rural eastern Ohio county, part of the Appalachian region, rich in history, with beautifully scenic rolling hills and lakes. It is located 50 miles west of Pittsburgh, 115 miles east of Columbus, 110 miles south of Cleveland, and 90 miles north of Marietta.

The area retains a strong rural atmosphere. In fact, there are only two stoplights in the entire county. Harrison County was once a top wool-producing center and was at one time considered to be the richest area in the country, with more millionaires per capita than any other location, because of sheep farming and the wool industry. Recently, however, depressed markets for coal, the major product of the county since the 1920s, have hurt the local economy.

Three popular lake areas attract anglers, boaters and hunters to Harrison County. The county's greatest asset, though, has always been its people. Cadiz, the county seat, has been nationally portrayed as "The Proudest Small Town in America." Harrison County's former residents include actor Clark Gable, soldier George Armstrong Custer and prosecutor of Lincoln's assassins John A. Bingham, whose statue graces the Courthouse lawn. Former Attorney General William Brown was raised in Cadiz.

Prior to the Civil War, the Confederate Calvary of Morgan's Raiders passed through the county. The Cadiz area was an important stop for escaping slaves on the Underground Railroad. Cadiz was also at the crossroads of several important Indian trails. Harrison County was a favored hunting ground for both Indians and the early settlers of the 1700s who ventured the 30 miles from the fort at Wheeling, West Virginia. There were two massacres of hunting parties during this period, with the Indians and settlers each losing a complete hunting party.

Harrison County was formed by the legislature in 1813 from Jefferson and Tuscarawas Counties, and later, part of Harrison County was partitioned as Carroll County. The county was named after William Henry Harrison, twenty-three years before he was President, in honor of his successes over the Indians. Harrison was the first of two Presidents to speak from the Courthouse, from the balcony in 1838.

In 1895, the population of Harrison County was 20,456, and there were three colleges: Scio College, Hopedale Normal School, and Franklin College in New Athens (still standing). Franklin College holds the distinction of being the alma mater of the first black college graduate in Ohio.

The current Courthouse was built in 1895 on the same site where the first Courthouse was built in 1815: in Cadiz, on the highest hill in town, at the town square. It is said that from the top of the Courthouse, near Lady Justice, one can see the Belmont County Courthouse, over twenty miles distant to the southeast.

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One can see from windows to the east smoke rising over the thirty-miles distant Ohio River. At the turn of the century, because of their elevations above sea level, the Harrison and Belmont County bars waged a friendly disagreement over who had the "highest" seat of justice in the state. The outcome of the disagreement seems to have been forgotten, but one bench in Harrison County still sports extra risers.

The Courthouse was bid at \$86,985 for construction. Its cornerstone was laid on May 17, 1894 with nearly 10,000 people in attendance. The Courthouse is a marvel of construction genius. A railroad track was laid right to the building site. Materials were railed in and elevated by block and tackle with human and horse power. Most interior walls are solid brick, and all walls were plastered. Both gas and electrical fixtures were put in place, along with a fireplace in the Courtroom. Above the mansard slate roof is a clock tower. Atop the tower perches Lady Justice, who on occasion has had the scales of justice torn from her hand by the weather. The clock, a Rube Goldberg-like contraption, was constructed for the sum of \$625, making it the lowest-priced clock tower in the entire state. On September 25, 1895, it was announced that "the Courthouse now belongs to the residents of Harrison County."

Several years after completion of the building, President William McKinley spoke outside from the Courthouse portico. Photographs show throngs of people crowded about the streets below the portico. The area was later partitioned off and used for storage. Common Pleas Court Judge Steven Ray Karto has re-opened the area and situated genealogical records for research just inside the "McKinley portico."

A restoration of the Courthouse has been ongoing for more than ten years. Judge Karto has been chairman of the Restoration Commission for the last seven years, devoting much time to the project. Great care has been used to restore the Courthouse to its original beauty and to be faithful to colors and styles used in the 1890's. The architecture is a mixture of many styles, with the French Second Empire dominant. The building gives an impression of great size, but is only one hundred feet square and fits beautifully into its

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location.

The exterior is made of massive Berea stone. The outside stairway entrances, as well as the interior hallways, are spacious and impart a sense of access to the government, including the courts. Massive steps lead to the main entrance. Fifty-one yards of concrete were needed to replace these steps during restoration.

The building has high ceilings, beautiful oak woodwork and many furnishings from the early part of the century. The Courtroom contains a large stained glass window, which is now backlit, in the ceiling. The ceiling has cast plaster flowers and other ornamentation.



Six colors were used to paint the courtroom, and a carpet specially commissioned for this project was laid in the courtroom, jury room and some offices. The original bench and jury box remain in use. Very few alterations have been made to the building over the years, except on the ground floor, where the original public library space has been partitioned.

It would probably be impossible to duplicate the Courthouse entirely today, and the cost of any attempted duplication would exceed fifteen million dollars. Restoration has been a long, difficult project. Updating the heating and plumbing remains to be done, but funds are depleted.

During restoration of the Courthouse, some offices moved to new spaces for more efficient utilization of space and for security considerations. The County Court was moved to the former Probate Juvenile Court on the second floor so that the County Court could have, for the first time, its own courtroom.

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The Juvenile and Probate divisions were moved to the top floor to consolidate the Common Pleas Court in one area of the Courthouse. The entire operation of the Common Pleas Court occupies this floor. Judge Karto handles all the jurisdictions in Harrison County.

Because of the nature of the building and because of extremely tight budgets, providing security is a challenge. Without the grant funds provided by the Ohio Supreme court and the Ohio Judicial Conference, improvements would not have been possible. Judge Karto and the staff of the Common Pleas Court deeply appreciate these funds and are using them wisely. With ten entrances on the ground floor, many directly into offices, restricting access to one entrance is not presently feasible. Therefore, the funds are being used for several alternative projects.

Already installed is one-way view film on the windows. Building occupants cannot be seen through the windows. Not only is the film aesthetically pleasing, it cuts glare, assists heating and cooling and is relatively inexpensive.

A panic-alarm system is being installed in each office and in the Courtroom. Cameras are being mounted to monitor the courtroom and the hallways. The camera control monitor will be located in the Probation Department Office for quick response. Inexpensive handheld FM radios with a range of up to two miles will be utilized for security communications. Handheld metal detectors will be available. Access to certain areas will be restricted by signage. A gate will be installed and connected to the one hundred-year-old counter in the Probate Juvenile Office to restrict access behind the counter. The staff will receive training in first aid and will be trained to be sensitive to security risks and instructed in the use of security equipment.

Judge Karto is eager to provide a safe environment for litigants, attorneys and court personnel. Concurrently, the court desires to preserve the integrity of this historic Courthouse and the integrity of the court. The 104-year-old courtroom has been the scene of thousands of cases involving nearly everything imaginable. The walls have echoed with sounds of every human emotion. Important figure and plain citizen alike have had their day

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at the bar of justice. It's the court's goal that no one should fear for their safety in the Courthouse under any circumstances. This important historical building will hopefully be here at the turn of the next century. What stories can be told then?