

# LUZERNE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

WHEN?  
1906--1909

WHERE?  
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania



VOCABULARY  
Architects      sandstone  
rotunda          marble

EVENT  
Fourth Courthouse built in  
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

The fourth county courthouse was built on what had been the North Branch canal basin near the river. On the corner of North River Street and North Street, it is considered to be one of the most beautiful buildings not only in the county, but the state as judged by the many architects and others who have come to see the magnificent structure. The well-kept lawn and beautiful flowers and shrubs enhance the look of the courthouse. From the steps and windows, you can see the two bridges that cross Susquehanna River as well as part of the commons. A statue



Palm House in front of courthouse  
1920s

commemorating the veterans of the Vietnam War, a Korean War memorial, the anchor and bell from the USS Wilkes-Barre (World War 2 vessel) are also located on the grounds. The "Deer" (made of iron around 1866) was moved from its former home on Public Square at the site of the third courthouse to its present location.

Controversy surrounded the building from the start. Those who thought that a new building was not needed since the "new" one was only about thirty years old, those who did not want the expense of construction, those who did not like the location were enough to delay the plans for more than one-half of a decade. It took from 1894 to 1901 and several court battles including an appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to settle on a site (Kashatus 78). The architects were changed and F.J. Osterling's plans were accepted. After several more court appeals and work stoppages, McCormick and French, Wilkes-Barre architects were now assigned the task of completing the building and the interior including furniture and furnishings.

Construction was completed in 1909. Though built of Ohio sandstone on a concrete foundation, it became infested with rats and ferrets had to be used to get rid of the rodents (Kashatus 78). By October of 1909, "criminal warrants were brought against the commissioners, county controller, architect, and subcontractors. Among the charges were overcharging, kickbacks, and the use of inferior building materials" (Kashatus 79).

It is thought that the 1893 World's Columbia Exposition held in Chicago had a great influence on the design of the cross-shaped building. Built in the Classical Revival style, Ohio sandstone was used for all the exterior walls and the roof is covered with terra cotta. There are five courtrooms finished in either mahogany or walnut with a judge chamber adjacent to each using the same materials. The rotunda, steps to the second





and third floors, and arches are made of various kinds of marble. The dome is a fitting capstone to the building. One hundred feet above the floor it displays the seal of the Commissioners' office of Luzerne County in stained glass (courthouse brochure 1987). Murals that commemorate various historical events are in tile above each archway. Each corridor and wing have portraits of those who played a significant role in the history of the county.

The courthouse frescoes and interior damage from over 100 years of use were repaired in 1987.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

[Luz.Co. Courthouse history](#)

[Courthouse Restoration Times Leader](#)

[Courthouse Tour](#)

### PRINT RESOURCES

History Luzerne County Courthouse brochure.  
1987

Kashatus, William. *Valley With A Heart*. Luzerne County, PA: Luzerne County Historical Society and Luzerne Community College. 2012.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Schedule a tour of the courthouse. After the tour, what stood out most to you?
2. Invite a courthouse official to speak to your group about the various offices of the building and what is housed there.