

The Lincoln County Court House

By ROBERT E. MOODY

THE Lincoln County Court House at Wiscasset, Maine, is one of New England's best-known public buildings. Built in 1824, it is still in use, an addition having been built in recent years to accommodate the business of the county. Here are the old records of Lincoln County, many of them unread since they were written, some of them over two hundred years ago, in the days when the County, set off from York in 1761, was still young.

Among the old records is a small package containing the accounts of N. Coffin, Esquire, "County Agent for building a Court House—1824." Carefully kept by the Agent who obviously knew that they would be as carefully scrutinized by the Committee entrusted with the task of supervising the construction of the new building, they consist of an itemized listing of the materials used and the work done in the course of building, together with the cost of each item and a careful description of the building itself. Coffin did his work at \$1.00 a day, and his accounting is dated February 10, 1825.

The beauty of the building and its justified fame make the documentation of its construction of interest to architectural historians and to students of New England social history.

The description of the Court House is given first, followed by a summary of the financial accounts.

The first order of the Court, concerning the New Court House, empowered me merely to erect the building. The second order, passed at the last September term, authorized me to furnish as well as finish it and under advisement of the Committee to procure a bell for it.

The Committee will find on examination that the building is accordingly finished and

furnished and a bell of suitable size provided & suspended for use.

The building is 44 feet by 50 on the ground, having a porch at the west end 14 feet by 7 of sufficient height to form a convenient room immediately back of the Judge's seats and to admit a flight of stairs from it into the yard below.

It is built upon a rock, its floors are solid, the foundation being levelled off with stone & floored over with hewn stone & brick, so that every room below is proof against fire so far as it could be in danger from that element within, and three closets connected with as many of these rooms for the three public offices are secured by stone or brick coverings & double iron-doors so as to be proof against it from above as well as from the rooms adjoining. These closets are fitted with alcoves and bead-reaus [*sic*] for books & papers & are sufficiently capacious to contain all the Records & Files which will probably accumulate for a hundred years to come.

Besides the three Offices with their fire proof closets, there is upon this floor a Grand Jury room with a spacious anti-room connected with it, and also an Office for the County Treasurer, or for any other use to which it may be appropriated by the Courts.

The stairs leading to the Court Room are of stone & the rail & banisters of iron.

The Court room is nearly square: it contains seats with desks for 42 Counsellors & attornies, and has all those accommodations for Jurors, Parties, and witnesses & also for the Judges & Officers of the Courts, which are usually found, in other similar buildings.

The Judge's bench & all the desks and capping of the seats are of mahogany, varnished, all the rest of the work is of pine well painted, and so much of the floor as it is necessary to cover on account of noise is carpeted.

A Gallery over the entrance opens upon this room, and is furnished with shutters so as to be closed or opened at pleasure.

Connected with the Court room is a room for the law library, furnished with table, benches, book case &c. & also a lobby back of the Judges seats already mentioned.

Two convenient Jury rooms are provided & furnished, one of them opening upon a gallery & the other upon the entrance to the Court room, sufficiently retired for secrecy & safety,

& yet so near the Court as to be under its immediate protection & control.

The Court room is furnished with an elegant chandelier, a present from several gentlemen of Wiscasset; and the agent owes it to the gentlemen of that place to observe that they have gratuitously rendered him every assistance & accommodation, desired in prosecuting this work; that a principal part of the valuable site covered by the building & all the back yard & front land belonging to it were given by the first parish & town of Wiscasset, & that \$250. besides were subscribed & presented by citizens of the town to assist in purchasing the residue. This sum is Credited to the County in my Court House account.

The workmanship of this building is submitted to the Committee and must speak for it-

self; with regard to the Bills of the Workmen, the Agent is perfectly satisfied that every man employed by him endeavored faithfully to perform his duty & that nothing has been wasted or lost thro' their negligence or want of skill

During the progress of the building, many articles which had been used about it, & had been damaged as to be of no further benefit such as plank for staging & a variety of other articles which would have been wasted as rubbish, if not secured, were put up in lots & sold, and at the completion of the building, all the materials remaining, which it was not thought proper to preserve as well as all the useless furniture of the old offices, were sold.

The account of sales is herewith presented and the balance \$247.16 is carried to the Credit of the County in the Court House Account.

Recapitulation of the Accounts

Shed to secure bricks & tile from weather			\$61.54
Site, levelling rough stone for foundation			
\$500.00 of this to Bailey for land		\$522.25	
Removing stone to site, "blowing rocks," levelling for foundation	86.06		
More rough stone	68.08		\$ 676.39
Hewn stone for underpinning steps, stairs, flagging & window caps & stools, & trucking			641.67
289,862 Brick			1505.28
2,596 tile			108.10
Lime, sand, hair &c. hauling, shovelling			467.44
Windows, frames, glazing, blinds, weights, fasteners			436.95
Timber, boards, joist, shingles, materials of wood			1017.34
Iron doors, locks, hinges, bolts, nails, screws, stair rail, and all other materials of brass or iron except windows, bell, fence &c.			652.18
Paints & painting			369.87
Fence in front—stone posts			129.78½
Bell \$105.61 freight .62 instal 27.81			134.04
Carpenters & laborers			1457.54½
Masons & laborers			1631.37
Incidentals including furniture, drags, hods, stoves, inkstands, drawers, desks			939.84
Commissions on above sums being 10,229.34 @ 6%			613.76
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			\$10,843.10
Proceeds for sale of articles left at completion or rejection as useless			262.93
Sale Old Court House \$200			
expenses 76		net	124.00
How Court House was paid for			
Two notes \$5000 each			10,000
Order of County Treas.			700
Cash			124.
Balance due			282.44

Note. I have not found it possible to reconcile the accounts. Coffin says that the balance to the credit of the County is \$247.16. If the County raised \$10,000 by bonds, \$700 by County Treasurer's order and received the sums of \$1,262.93 for sale of materials and \$124 net for the sale of the old court house, the amount raised by the county is \$11,086.93. If we subtract the cost of the new court house—\$10,843.10—the amount standing to the County Treasurer's account would be \$243.83. In any event, it would appear that never was so handsome a building more economically built.—R. E. M.