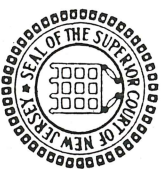


*OK per [unclear]*

# Superior Court of New Jersey

CHAMBERS OF  
JUDGE EUGENE D. SERPENTELLI  
ASSIGNMENT JUDGE



OCEAN COUNTY COURT HOUSE  
C.N. 2191  
TOMS RIVER, N.J. 08754

December 11, 1987

Mr. James W. Hyres  
HANKIN & HYRES,  
Architects  
528 White Horse Avenue  
Trenton, New Jersey 08610

Re: Restoration of Courtroom One

Dear Jim:

I am enclosing for your information several articles which Ed Kole has located in the Monmouth County Historical Society in his effort to get more information on the inside design of the courtroom and the bench. You will note that one of the articles contains a notice to architects to transmit to the Board of Freeholders, plans for the construction of the county courthouse which includes the Clerk's and Surrogate's office, jail and rooms for the Sheriff's family "all to be under one roof". Ed tried to track down the articles which you would expect to be available concerning the receipt of bids on the courthouse or plans for the courthouse. He was successful in locating plans for the jail but so far the papers relating to the period in which plans might be expected to be found are unavailable to us. They are apparently missing from the offices of the historical society.

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James W. Hyres,  
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In any event, you will note in the article of April 19, 1935, a rather detailed description of the interior of the courthouse. Interestingly, it confirms that the courthouse was patterned after the Hudson County Courthouse, but that the citizens of Ocean County being a "plain people" were not interested in the "friperies and adornments" that were apparently contained in the Hudson County Courthouse. It also notes that the people of Ocean County while being plain, were also generous. That Joseph B. Coward donated the plot which was located "on the road leading to the new meeting house east of Schenck's Mill Road" and also threw in 6,000 bricks as part of his gift. The businessmen of the town were agitated because the courthouse was too far from the center of town -- 300 yards. However, they felt that the town would never grow to have the courthouse close to the business center. In any event, the courtroom itself is described as seating 250 persons. That is beyond its capacity today. It is possible that the rail was further forward than it is presently. The bench is described as being of black walnut, elaborately carved and the walls and ceilings were covered with elaborate decorative schemes with ribbons, birds and cupids -- a favorite device of the French

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Rococo period. The spectator benches were plain and straight backed but the railing between the spectator and the court area was of black walnut. Apparently, fire destroyed most of these features in 1927. Clearly the bench was reduced to ashes and all of the rear rooms severely damaged. The article which Beth supplied to us from the Courier had indicated that the benches were singed. I presume it was at that time that the current chairs were put in place of the benches.

In terms of the value of this information to us, I have some doubt that we can easily acquire black walnut, but I assume that some close walnut substitute is available. The elaborate carving on the bench may not be easily duplicated. We have a small glimpse of it in a picture I have in my Chambers dating before the fire.

We should consider whether it would be feasible -- and at what expense, to replace the rather unattractive rail with a walnut rail. Certainly the balusters could be duplicated. It would only be a question of the expense involved in duplicating the railing. Again, we have a good picture of the railing as it existed prior to the fire.

The articles which we have accumulated also indicate

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that the room we call a jury room was a law library and an attorneys "retiring room". In the restoration process, while we certainly want to dedicate it to a jury room, I think we should concentrate on also giving it some of the flavor of that period. Ed has suggested that we might do that by the installation of some glass enclosed shelving which would permit us to display some very old books and other memorabilia of the period. That could be done on the far west wall to consume the least amount of space and there would still be adequate room for a twelve person jury. We will be cutting a door through from the bench area to the jury room which I am sure existed from the time that room was added on to the "Grecian bend" portion of the courthouse.

Finally, I am enclosing a copy of a page of a book which Ed spotted while he was in Freehold. I call Jim's attention to the third paragraph. Apparently, his ancestors were saloon keepers. The article notes that James Hyres was operating a tavern which later became the Riverview Hotel. I am sure that there were no Serpentellis in Ocean County in 1850.

Very truly yours,

  
Eugene D. Serpentelli  
A.J.S.C.

EDS:toc  
Enclosures  
cc: SEE DISTRIBUTION

(Continued)

December 11, 1987

James W. Hyres,  
HANKIN & HYRES, Architects

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