

## THE OCEAN COUNTY COURTHOUSE

A Greek Revival style courthouse, built in 1851 in the Village of Toms River, was located on land considered to be 'too far from the business center of the town, the town would never grow to it.'

On February 15, 1850, the New Jersey Legislature created Ocean County out of Monmouth County, after Joel Haywood of West Creek petitioned the legislative body to create the lands south of the Manasquan River into a new county, for better representation of its people, for roads and to aid the poor.

At the first all-day meeting of the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders, held on May 8, 1850, at two local hotels in Toms River, the Board selected three official seals to be used on their official documents. The County Freeholders' seal was a sloop, the County Clerk's seal was a schooner while the County Surrogate's seal was a steamboat. They also decided to build a courthouse, using the same plans as the Hudson County Courthouse.

The bricks for the new building were brought to Toms River by schooners from Haverstraw, New York and unloaded at Robbins Cove, at the foot of Allen Street. Teams of horses pulled the wagon load of bricks up the hill to the new site; the building was completed in September 1851.

The new Courthouse contained a large courtroom on the second floor, with auxiliary offices on the first floor. The walls and ceiling of the courtroom were decorated with intricate plaster designs of ribbons, birds and cupids. A fire destroyed these features in 1927, along with the judges' bench and railing. This historic courtroom is still in use today with a Superior Court Judge occupying the chambers.

Historically, the building has served continuously for over 133 years as the county 'hall of justice' and place of county government business.

The building has also served as a meeting place for political and social gatherings. The Republican and Democratic parties have held their conventions in the courtroom. During the Civil War, the courtroom was the scene of Union recruiting



rallies. Company F, Fourteenth New Jersey Volunteers, drilled in front of the courthouse steps before they marched off to war.

A Federal/Greek Revival brick jail and sheriff's residence was built in the courtyard behind the courthouse, also completed in 1851.

Ocean County had 10,000 inhabitants in 1850, clammers, oystermen, boat builders, charcoalers and seamen whose English ancestors began settling along our coastline around 1700. The sons of the owners of a Monmouth County Whaling Company were the first to build temporary shacks on our barrier beaches in the 1690's and extracted the whale oil from the huge mammals they caught offshore. These men returned to build their homes around the sawmills and gristmills they built along our bays and streams. Between 1693 and 1849 at least 73 mills operated in Ocean County.

Ocean County, located within the Outer Coastal Plain of East-Central New Jersey, now contains 638 square miles, and is the second largest county in the state. Bordering the Atlantic Ocean, its coastline spans 45 miles, including highly developed barrier islands. Some 283,000 acres of the interior form of the county lies within the Pine Barrens, characterized by pine and oak forests and vast pure water reservoirs.

These pinelands, for over 200 years, supported the industries of the county. Besides the mill sites, there were seven forges and furnaces established to produce pig iron from the native bog ore; they were in operation from 1789 to 1866. The products of the pines were shipped, by resident sea captains in sloops and schooners, from our local ports to markets up and down the eastern seaboard. A new system of transportation was introduced in 1856, when the "Delaware and Raritan Bay Railroad" was the first to penetrate the county. With the later addition of the Tuckerton and Pennsylvania Railroads, these new and faster sources of transportation moved fresh produce and fish to the markets. The new passenger trains liberated the urban middle class as city dwellers flocked to the new tourist hotels along the beaches.

By 1900, most of the Ocean County resort towns and villages had been founded, however the introduction of the automobile and super highways, especially the



opening of the Garden State Parkway in 1954, altered the makeup and role of the county. With new senior citizen complexes, new housing developments along our barrier islands and inland towns bulging from population growth, the population had grown to 367,422 by 1984.

As the county grew, so did the building and services of county government. The old formal and elegant Greek Revival 1851 Courthouse, with its six fluted Doric columns, became the central feature of new wings added to this courthouse in the 1950's and '60's to provide additional courtrooms and auxiliary space for the constitutional services for its citizens.

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