

Courthouse History



Elko County Courthouse completed in 1869



Elko County Courthouse completed in 1911

The Nevada State Legislature carved Elko County out of the northeastern part of Lander County on March 5, 1869. Named after its principal town and seat of government, the name Elko occurs elsewhere in the nation associated with railroad stations. The origin of the name is uncertain.

Elko County officials initially occupied three adobe buildings and a tent. Within months, the Commissioners accepted the plans of Walter Moberly for a courthouse. "The building is to be...of the Roman Doric style of architecture," reported *The Elko Independent*. "On the first or lower floor there will be four rooms for offices..., with a fireproof vault in one; and also on this floor, five cells for holding prisoners...One the second floor will be the courtroom...and four offices...and a portico in front."

In August 1869, the County Commissioners awarded a construction contract for \$17,744 to W.P. Monroe. As Monroe began building the courthouse, some people called for a more elaborate design. In spite of the addition of higher walls, a heavy cornice, and alterations to the front stairway, Monroe finished the brick courthouse in a little more than three months, on December 18, 1869.

Monroe and the county disagreed over the final bill. After paying him over \$20,000 for the courthouse, the commissioners rejected his bill for \$240 for the locks. Monroe duplicated the keys and distributed them throughout the town, forcing the county to

replace the locks at a cost of \$600.



Laying of cornerstone for new courthouse

In 1910, the Elko County Commissioners voted to build a new courthouse. The two-story structures, designed by William H. Weeks and built by the Sellman Brothers of western Nevada cost \$150,000. The courthouse is on the site of its predecessor. It is a Neo-Classical building with a shallow dome and a two-story pedimented portico supported by Doric columns. A balustrade follows the roof line and accentuated an ornate cornice.

In 1916, an article in the "industrial issue" of The Elko Independent boasted that the courthouse "isn't the State Capitol, as many might suppose, at first glance. It is the beautiful \$150,000 county courthouse...built for the needs of the present."



Elko County Courthouse 2018



New Additions Behind the Courthouse

Newsflash (appeared in *The Elko Independent*, July 20, 1870)

A Scene of Terror at the Elko County Courthouse

*Chandelier, containing six lamps filled with coal oil, falls in midst of a dense throng of men, women and children ---Woman in Flames --- The panic and stampede --- Children leap from second-story window --- Under foot --- Heroic, and other conduct --
- Incidents, ludicrous and otherwise*

A terrible accident occurred at the Court House night before last, during the performance given by Professor C.A. Lewis and troupe. The Court Room was filled to overflowing, the greater portion of the seated audience being ladies and children. The entertainment was a most excellent one, and the audience was delighted and in high spirits until near the close, when the janitor of the Court House essayed to turn the lights down in order to darken the room for the exhibition of the tableau. The middle chandelier, containing six large coal oil lamps, with their globes and chimneys, hung immediately over the heads of a number of ladies, and was attached to a pendant bar from the ceiling by a spiral screw, of the existence of which, it appears, the janitor was ignorant, though he knew the chandelier could be easily turned around. In thus turning it, as he had frequently done before, in order to reach all the lamps, the whole thing came down with a crash, the lamps rolling upon the floor under the feet of the

audience, two of them bursting and scattering their flaming contents over the ladies, and a great column of flame shooting up almost instantly to the ceiling.

The Wounded:

Mrs. Smith, wife of D.L. Smith, the druggist, sustained more severe injuries than any one else...

Mrs. Harry Harville was knocked down in the doorway and severely trampled before she could be extricated. It is feared she received dangerous internal injuries.

Mrs. Richard Cameron, who also sat under the chandelier, received the contents of the lamp in her slippers and had both feet badly burned, but received no injury, we believe, above the ankles.

Miss N. Cope made a miraculous escape...

William B. Dyer had his left hand severely burned from the wrist to the extremity of the fingers, while endeavoring to extinguish the flames.

William Owens, L. Wilsey, Mr. Osborne and other received slight burns about the hands while rescuing the ladies and extinguishing the flames.

Little Alice, aged eight years, daughter of Mrs. Mac of the Verando Hotel, jumped out through a second story window, and sustained no injury save a light scratch on the knee.

History Courtesy of Linda Sarman, former employee of the Fourth Judicial District Court, Department 1