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TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM ... while dusting



When the courthouse repair of brickwork and replacement of the roof were done last year, a problem arose with the continued usage of the weathervane. The workers realized early on that the finials needed to be refabricated. The museum received two of these finials which are now housed in the Wagon Shed of the complex. But the hope was to salvage the weathervane. Unfortunately, once the weather vane was brought down it was discovered that its longevity had long since reached

its peak – it simply was not strong enough to return to the roof. The workers then fabricated an identical weathervane, which you can now view atop the courthouse roof. So, what to do with that original weathervane? The county commissioners gave the weathervane to the Society with skeptical hopes. But after much consulting by the museum staff, it began to appear hopeful that the weathervane could not only be preserved but also placed on display. Methods of metal “sanding” and preparation of metal “paint” for preservation were applied to the piece. The paint suggested by Ben Lejedal at his hardware store and recommended by conservators in Harrisburg went on like a murky cloud. It dried basically clear with just a touch of black as though the metal was freshly done. Okay, now it was itself ready for display, but how? So, we went to Ed Cranmer of Elkland Twp. Ed has done numerous beautiful book shelves, made to order for our large and odd sized books and ledgers, but this was going to be “a horse of a different color”. The thought was to make a plywood square base, affix a pipe to it with an adapted appendage and washers so that the weather vane could twirl around. Sounded simple enough but it didn’t satisfy Ed as to the safety of the piece and for visitors. So he and his wife Donna put their heads together and came up with an alternate plan – the result of which is pictured here. Then Ed went on to create a podium for not only this display but also a larger one for the eventual blacksmith display, also located in the Wagon Shed. You can now walk up to the weathervane and actually twirl it around without concern for damaging it. There isn’t room enough in this article to give proper thanks, not only to Ed and Donna, but the many people who contribute to the history of Sullivan County for YOUR museum. Suffice it to say that the efforts of folks like these are deeply appreciated.

While researching the basic history of weathervanes we discovered that the first known one was in 48 B.C. depicting Greek gods and it was to indicate which of the eight of them was in control of the weather. Then in the ninth century A.D., the Popes made edicts that all church steeples have placed on them a weathervane depicting the cock (rooster) to symbolize Jesus’ prophecy of Peter’s betrayal that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed on the morning following the Last Supper. Over time weathervanes evolved into other configurations and could be as simple as just arrows to show the wind direction. In the case of the one atop the Sullivan County Courthouse, no record has yet been unearthed as to its origin or explanation of its meaning. But because the present (our second) courthouse was built in 1894-95 and the first courthouse didn’t have a weathervane we can assume that this weathervane we’re speaking of was at least in the works during the building of our courthouse. That and the architects conception in the 1893 proposal announcement shows a sketchy weather vane on the etching. Some think that the weathervane depicts a music scroll, while others think it represents a document. When you stand in front of the original piece and then take a moment to go out and look up at the newly fabricated one up on the roof: you be the judge.

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