

Sept. 4, 2013

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . . while dusting



Have you been to Laporte this summer? The courthouse is getting much needed exterior renovations. One such improvement is the new slate roof. But let's back up a bit: in 1893 the original (1851) three story brick courthouse was torn down in fifteen days. By June of 1894 the 'new courthouse' or the nucleus of the building we now have was being built. William Johnson and Thomas Edwards of Jamestown, N.Y. laid the brick which came on the train to Domms Switch (Sattersfield), James Gansel did the plastering and the contractors for the construction were the Lawrence Brothers. Then the first court session in this second (now present day) courthouse was held in December of that same year! The bid award to the Lawrence Brothers was \$24,400. Within the museum's compiling about the two courthouse buildings there was much to be gleaned about the decision to demolish the first and the efforts to build the second.

An interesting article written in 1893 states a report from an architecture concerning the first courthouse: "(we) find the exterior walls badly bulged outward and cracked in many places, also parted from the division walls, showing openings

one half inch to one inch wide. The brick used in the construction of those walls are very soft, being easily picked in places with a common pen knife. The brick walls are now held in place with iron rods running through the building both ways. The building is decidedly unsafe for occupancy and should be condemned." Later writings that same year tell of the abandonment of the courthouse with row officers moving to different locations throughout Laporte. Then by September there was discussion about whether to build the new courthouse of stone or brick and decided that whichever one was cheaper was what they'd go with – brick must've been the cheaper.

Now to the present and the current replacement of the roof on the courthouse: the shingle roofing material is being torn off and the slate shingles put in their place. Those shingles are approximately 12" by 12", averaging three pounds each. Because stone slate when chipped and cut will not always fall away in an exact measurement, the word approximate needs to be utilized. The company installing the new roof is Easter Roofing Systems, Inc. from Jessup, Pennsylvania. They estimate that a ten foot by ten foot area of slate roof can weigh on average five hundred and fifty pounds. This method and material for the courthouse roof meets with historical preservation since our courthouse is on the National Registry for Historic Sites.

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