

Located at the terminus of Market Street, the Armstrong County Courthouse and Jail command a view of the main street of Kittanning. Set against the hillside, this Greek Revival-style courthouse with its castle-like jail to the left is an impressive site. The present courthouse is the third for Armstrong County and the second on the site.



Armstrong County was formed out of parts of Allegheny, Westmoreland and Lycoming Counties on March 12, 1800. On December 17, 1804 the trustees of the new county, John Craig, James Sloan and James Barr, bought 150 acres from Dr. James Armstrong of Carlisle. This 150 acres was to be divided into lots not more than $\frac{2}{3}$ acre nor less than $\frac{1}{4}$ acre. At this time two acres were saved for public use; one acre on the southeast corner of Market and Jefferson Streets and one acre on the northwest corner of Market and McKean.

The County was organized for judicial purposes in 1805 and the first court was held in a log house on lot 121, the old site of the Reynolds House. The first courthouse building was located in the one-acre plot at the southeast corner of Market and Jefferson Streets. This courthouse was a 50-foot square, two-story, brick building. Two one-story wings, one fronting on Market Street and the other on Jefferson Street, housed county offices. The roof was hipped with a central cupola and bell. Erection began circa 1809 and was completed in 1820.

On April 8, 1850, an act was passed for erection of a new courthouse and the division and

selling of the original lots. The money was to be used for the purchase of new lots. Land was purchased at the head of Market Street and a two-story brick courthouse was erected circa 1852-1853. This second courthouse was destroyed by fire on March 10, 1858.

The third and present Courthouse was erected by Hulings and Dickey on the site of the burned courthouse in 1858-1860, at the cost of about \$32,000. Part-brick and part-stone, this Greek Revival courthouse has an impressive portico and arcaded stone base. Although its dome and second-story windows show tendencies toward the undermining of Greek Revival purity, the Armstrong County Courthouse is the best and primary example of this style in the county.

Associated and connected to the Courthouse by a covered walkway of 13 feet is the old Armstrong County Jail. This is the third jail erected for the County. The first jail, built in 1805 was a substantial two-story stone structure located on the public lot on Market and McKean Streets. The second jail building was constructed at the same time and near the second courthouse. The two-story, brick structure had an attached two-story brick jailers house. This jail however proved unsatisfactory, owing to the numerous escapes through the roof. The County Commissioners contracted with Harrison Brothers of Pittsburgh to raise the walls and construct a new roof. It was discovered that the walls would not support raising so the building was razed. The Commissioners then contracted with Harrison Brothers to erect a new jail next to the courthouse on Market Street.

Construction began in 1870 and was completed by 1873, at a total cost of \$252,000. Stone for this massive, castle-like jail was quarried from the sandstone quarry at Catfish in Clarion County. Constructed of stone, brick and iron and measuring 114 feet by 50 feet, it contained 24 cells, each of which measured 8 feet by 13 feet at construction. Foundations were 24 feet deep from ground surface and 7 feet deep at the bottom. The tower reached 96 feet high, 18 feet squared at the base and 10 feet squared at the top, all made of solid stone neatly tooled and surmounted with battlements. All the outer surfaces of the building, including gutters and cornice, were made of an ashlar facing of stone. The outer walls measured at 2 1/2 feet thick and were lined on the inside with brick 4 inches thick. All stonework was laid with hydraulic cement, no lime was used except in plastering the inner walls. The windows featured rounded solid concrete arches with keystones. The interior woodwork was done in pine while the floors in brick, measuring 13 inches thick. The front bay areas were used as jailers residences.

The existing old Armstrong County Jail was the third built in the county. It was built between 1870 and 1873 by Harrison Brothers. At the time the jail, connected to the Armstrong County Courthouse by an enclosed walkway, was considered one of the strongest, securest and most substantial buildings in the United States. The jail's exterior appearance has been relatively

unaltered with its Victorian architecture strongly influenced by Gothic Revival features. Two front-facing towers topped with battlements frame the structure's entrance. The center battlemented tower has recessed carved stonework in the shape of medieval crosses on each side. The windows feature rounded solid concrete arches with elaborate keystones. A plaque on the front of the building reads; "Armstrong County Prison, Built 1871, Commissioners D. Slagle, P. Miller, T. Pontius and T. Montgomery".

Today the former jail is known as the Records Center and houses the County's records and the Information Technology offices.