

# Upcoming Exhibit Explores Jersey County Courthouse History

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter  
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JERSEY COUNTY - An upcoming exhibit at the Jersey County Historical Society museum will dive into the history behind the Jersey County Courthouse, displaying original artifacts and law books salvaged from inside the building.

Connor Ashlock, Historical Society board member and overseer of this project, said someone from the courthouse approached him when they were preparing to get rid of the courthouse's old law library - they had no need for it since cases have been logged into computers. To avoid throwing away anything of historical significance, they asked Ashlock to take one last look.

"They said, 'Would you want to come in and take what you want for the Historical Society?' and I said, 'Absolutely,'" Ashlock said. "Whenever I first started taking those books, I'm thinking to myself, 'I know that we're going to give these to the Historical Society somehow, I just don't know how I'm going to incorporate it.'"

After finding antique furniture original to the courthouse in another government building, Ashlock enlisted the help of sisters Kari Jo and Alyssa Alexander to build the "Courthouse Room," which will become a permanent fixture of the museum once completed. Alyssa, an attorney, was designated the courthouse researcher, while Kari Jo, Jersey County coroner, was named the project's design coordinator.

Alyssa said her research has taught her a few interesting things about the courthouse's history.

"This is Jersey County's third courthouse and the first one burned down actually, and there were multiple inmates that were killed during a fire that occurred there in the late 1800s," Alyssa said. "There used to be gargoyles at the courthouse up by the rotunda area. I've seen pictures of them and they were massive, and no one really knows whatever happened to those gargoyles."

Kari Jo said the salvaged law library books have been ordered by year, and other steps are being taken to display these objects the best way possible, a process she's found both enjoyable and challenging.

"It's been really fun because it's been like, 'What can go on this wall? What works well with everything else?'" Kari Jo said. "There's quite a bit, so we've had to put stuff up and take it down and figure out what flows best for the room, and it's definitely a lot harder than how it sounds."

Overall, Ashlock said the goal of this exhibit is to give visitors a new appreciation for the courthouse and county's history, which may even include their own family history.

"My goal is for people to ultimately respect the county's past," Ashlock said. "We have a desk in this courthouse exhibit that people's grandparents - and great grandparents, and so on and so forth - would have stood in front of to get their marriage license signed. We've got a connection for everyone with this exhibit."

Ashlock also emphasized the importance of maintaining historically significant pieces of local architecture like the county courthouse.

“I believe that people need to take a focused approach to preserve those architectural details that make their community significant and make their community unique because once they’re gone forever, they’re gone forever,” he said.

Alyssa said this exhibit will allow locals to see the courthouse in a different light than what they might be used to.

“It’s a building that we all see so often and we don’t think too much of it, but it really is a very important building for our county and it has a lot of rich history in there that a lot of times we don’t get to see,” Alyssa said. “Usually, if people have to go to the courthouse, unfortunately, most times it’s for something negative, and so they’re not really taking into consideration the architecture of the building. So I think it’ll be neat ... to see aspects of the courthouse through more of a beautiful lens of architecture.”

The Jersey County Historical Society, located on the site of the Cheney Mansion in Jerseyville, hopes to have the exhibit open to the public in time for their annual meeting on March 13 at 1:30 pm. For more information, visit their [Facebook page](#).