

Interview With Bill Downey

By: Adam Kraemer, Steve Poorman, Jeremy Shotts, Darrick Wilson

Q: Please state your name and occupation for the recorder.

Bill: My name is Bill Downey, I am the county clerk and recorder.

Q: What is your association with the courthouse?

Bill: I am the county clerk and my office is in the courthouse.

Q: When was the courthouse built?

Bill: It was built between 1903 and 1904. It was a replacement for the old courthouse that burnt down.

Q: How long was it under construction?

Bill: It was probably under construction for a year.

Q: Were there ever any death sentences carried out here?

Bill: Not to my knowledge, but that is not to say that there should not have been.

Q: What was the most famous trial?

Bill: The Fred Grabbe murder trial is probably one of the more famous and recent trials. He killed his wife and burned her in a trash barrel.

Q: What are some of the renovations/ additions since the courthouse was built?

Bill: Elevators were installed along with handicap ramps and wheelchair lifts to meet ADA standards. New rest rooms were recently built inside to replace the original facilities outside. The roof was recently replaced along with the usual remodeling of the offices.

Q: How many people work in the courthouse?

Bill: There are about thirty employees in the courthouse. They are found in six different offices. Which would be the State Attorney, Probation Officer, Supervisor of Assessments, the County Treasurer, Circuit Clerk, County Clerk/ Recorder, the judges office, and the Clark County Title Company which rents its office space.

Q: How modernized has the courthouse become in regards to computers and technology?

Bill: As with most offices these days, computers are in use in all of the offices here at the courthouse. The county usually sends office employees to computer classes annually at least once a year. The county treasurer and supervisor of assessments go to computer classes frequently, but yes, everyone receives computer training

Q: Are there any historical contents there?

Bill: There are lots of old records stored in the basement and the attic. We have on file deeds and mortgages dating back to about 1818 when Illinois became a state. There are also birth and death certificates of record back to about 1877. We also have records of marriage licenses from 1818. And of course we have court records from the 1850's. Just within the last couple of years, papers

were found in the courthouse basement that contain references to Abraham Lincoln as well as his signature on some historic documents which have since been put into a museum.

Q: Have there ever been any famous visitors to the courthouse?

Bill: Well like I said Abraham Lincoln visited the old courthouse on several occasions. Also Governor Jim Edgar has made stops at our courthouse. Glenn Poshard has also visited. John Lewis one of Illinois's past Secretaries of State also made frequent stops at the courthouse since he was a Marshall resident.

Q: Have there been any notable cases in recent years?

Bill: In the last year there was a Mr. Montgomery killed his wife. And there was the double murder in Casey (IL) which was tried at the (Clark County) courthouse.