## Starke County 27 "Tidbits of Starke County"

The Starke County Courthouse was being built in 1897-98.

Courthouse tours are coming up during the Harvest Festival, Saturday and Sunday, August 29-30 in Knox, Indiana. If you haven't been on this historic/architectural tour, you don't know what you're missing. The Starke County Historical Society has been conducting tours of the magnificent building for the past 14 years, and more than 4600 people have climbed the 157 steps to the top. It may be the only courthouse in Indiana where tours to the very top are possible.

Did you know that we have a sister courthouse? Yes, lots of courthouses look similar to ours - Fulton County, Pulaski County and on and on - but the one I have in mind isn't even in Indiana. It is in Ohio - the Ottawa County Courthouse at Port Clinton, Ohio.

The county officials are in charge of keeping the vital records of the county. During the 1800's, the old wooden courthouses throughout the nation had fireplaces or stoves in each room and were often prone to an accidental fire. Many state legislatures were mandating counties to build more substantial and fire proof courthouse buildings. This was true of Ottawa County, Ohio, also. In fact, it is my understanding that in the late1890s the state of Ohio was going to impose a heavy fine on the Ottawa County Commissioners if they didn't present plans to the state very soon. The Commissioners and a building committee toured several newly-built courthouses in Ohio and Indiana. When they came to Starke County, they were so impressed with the design of our courthouse that they telegraphed our courthouse architects, and then took the Nickel Plate train to meet them (Wing and Mahurin) in Ft. Wayne.

The Ottawa County Courthouse was completed in 1901 from the same architectural plans as our Starke County Courthouse. When one drives up in front of their courthouse, it looks just like ours. The grounds and the inside are different, but the two old stone structures look the same. The Starke County Historical Society has made a video of this Ohio courthouse showing some of the interiors as well as the tower, clock and bell, and how it compares to ours. However, the Ohio courthouse tower is not accessible to the public because there are no stairs - only ladders to get to the clock and bell. We are fortunate that our Commissioners had the foresight to put in stairs when the Courthouse tower was remodeled in 1993. This allowed the public to view these wonderful features of our historic building.

One website which shows some of the Ottawa Co. Courthouse is <a href="http://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/history.htm">http://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/history.htm</a> Attached is a photo of this Ohio courthouse - can you tell the difference?

As in the past, the tours of the Starke County Courthouse at the Harvest Festival will be conducted by high school students. This year the students are: Brittnie Rannells and John Strejc from Oregon Davis; Alyssa Smrt and Graham Folkers from Knox; and Nathan Hankins from North Judson/San Pierre. Come, join us on a courthouse tour on Saturday, August 29th (9-5) or Sunday, August 30th (10-2). Where else can you get a conducted tour and breathtaking birdseye view of Starke County for \$2.00?

## Jim Shilling

Starke County Historical Society http://www.starkehistory.com http://www.scpl.lib.in.us/historical/

