

Lee County Courthouse-Dixon, Illinois

The early courthouses

What was to become Lee County was first settled in the late 1820's, but it wasn't until 1839 that the area became Lee County. During this interim period, Lee County was under the jurisdiction of Peoria (until 1827), Jo Daviess (1827-36), and Ogle Counties (1836-39). Legal proceedings for this area were initially held in Peoria, but were later held in Galena-upon the incorporation of Jo Daviess County in 1827. When Ogle County was incorporated in 1836, legal proceedings were to be held in Oregon. However, during the period that Lee County was a part of Ogle County, legal proceedings were held in Dixon.

Lee County built their first courthouse in 1840. The first courthouse was constructed by Samuel Bowman. It was made of brick. It was later expanded. Prior to that, court proceedings had been held at the local school house in Dixon, a frame building constructed in 1837.

Before Lee County was incorporated, and before the school house was built in Dixon, and before the incorporation of Jo Daviess County, court proceedings had been held at Joseph Ogee's cabin in Peoria. Ogee would go on to become one of the early settlers in Lee County, establishing a ferry over the Rock River, at what was to become Dixon, in 1828. The first murder trial in Lee County (which was at the time still a part of the jurisdiction of Peoria County) was of the Potawatomie Indian Nom-a-que, who was accused of murdering the Frenchman Pierre Laundri in a drunken brawl. Nom-a-que was convicted in November of 1825, but his case was appealed to the Illinois Supreme Court by his lawyer William S. Hamilton, the son of Alexander Hamilton. Nom-a-que won his appeal, and a new trial was ordered. Nom-a-que was indicted again for murder in 1826, but his attorneys argued that the courts had no jurisdiction over the case-due to the fact that the State of Illinois and the Potawatomie had never decided by treaty how such matters would be handled. The case was again appealed to the Illinois Supreme Court. However, in 1827, Nom-a-que escaped. His case was then stricken from the record in May of 1828. It was said later that he was discovered as one of the casualties of the Black Hawk War, being found on the battlefield of Stillman's Run in 1832, but this is disputed. Ogee would go on to become the interpreter for the U.S. in its treaty negotiations with the Winnebago and Potawatomie Indians in 1829; this treaty ceded all lands north and west of the Illinois River, and the area that would become Lee County, to the state of Illinois.

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Thomas C. Brown served as the Circuit Judge for Lee County from 1841-48, and future Illinois Supreme Court Justice Benjamin R. Sheldon served as the Circuit Judge for Lee County from 1848-51.



COURT HOUSE, DIXON



LEE COUNTY'S SECOND COURT HOUSE

Sources:

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See, *History of Lee County*, Frank Everett Stevens, 1914, pg. 63, available at:
<http://www.archive.org/details/historyleecount01stevgoog>

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<http://www.archive.org/details/historyofleecoun00hill>

See, *Nomaque v. People*, 1 Ill. (Breese), 145

See, *The Boundaries between Us: Natives and Newcomers along the Frontiers of the Old Northwest Territory, 1750-1850*, edited by Daniel Barr, Chapter 8, "Negotiating Law on the Frontier: Responses to Cross-Cultural Homicide in Illinois, 1810-1825", by Bruce P. Smith, pgs. 161-177, Kent State University Press, 2006.

See, *Early Lee County, Being Some Chapters in the History of the Early Days in Lee County, Illinois*, by William D. Barge, "Joseph Ogee and His Ferry", pg. 40, 1918, available at:
http://books.google.com/books?id=-oEUAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA41&dq=Nom-a-que%2Billinois&hl=en&ei=wZOkTf2KGOrg0QGT1MnkCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=10&ved=0CFUQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q&f=false

<http://www.discoverdixon.org/online-visitor-guide/history-heritage/old-lee-county-courthouse.html>

The current courthouse

The current courthouse was built in 1900. It was constructed out of stone. It was designed by the architectural firm of Charles E. Brush.

