



County of Lancaster
Pennsylvania

History of the Lancaster County Courthouse

Prior to the formal creation of Lancaster County in 1729, land in this area was a vast wilderness known as the 'backcountry'. The expanding population of immigrants and great distances for residents from the existing county seat necessitated the creation of a new County. Early petitioners complained of lack of public officials to maintain laws, poor roadways, few bridges, and undivided townships. Lancaster County was formed on May 10, 1729 from a portion of Chester County (the original petition to create Lancaster County is kept at the State Archives). It was the first county created beyond William Penn's original three counties of Bucks, Chester, and Philadelphia.



Georgian- style courthouse
Images Courtesy of LancasterHistory.org

The first court sessions for Lancaster were held in a tavern in Conestoga. Finally in 1738 Lancaster's first downtown courthouse was completed at the center of the Square in Lancaster. This courthouse was destroyed by fire in 1784 and a new one was built in its place in 1787. This courthouse became known by residents as the State House when Lancaster served as the state capital from 1799-1812. It was here in this building at Penn Square that lawyers such as Thaddeus Stevens, James Buchanan, and Jasper Yeates first made history.



Lancaster County Courthouse c.1875

By the mid-nineteenth century it was clear that the old courthouse at Penn Square could no longer accommodate the expanding population and court demands. After much deliberation a new courthouse was constructed in 1852 at its current location at North Duke and East King Street. The Roman Revival style courthouse building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Today the archives preserves over 275 years of local history produced in each of these courthouses.