



Wenatchee's Oldest Brick Building Survives (Or what's left of it!)

by Ron Lodge and Chris Rader

It may surprise many to know that part of the original Chelan County courthouse and first county jail, both well over a century old, are still standing in Wenatchee. The brick jail building is best seen from the alley between South Wenatchee Avenue and Mission Street, adjacent to Kittitas Street. The original brick of the former courthouse can be seen adjacent to the old jail. The courthouse building, which has been extensively remodeled, most recently housed Keyhole Security; that business is now located further south on the Avenue.

The first courthouse was built in 1893 as the Clark Hotel. Its location was ideal for the new Great Northern Railway line that paralleled the Columbia River and Wenatchee Avenue. The train stopped at the foot of Kittitas Street, so it was an easy trek for passengers to walk a block up the hill to the hotel. The hotel had three stories; it's rumored that the upper floor served for a time as a brothel, but you won't see that mentioned in print and there's nobody alive today to verify it.

The Wenatchee Development Company, headed by Seattle Judge Thomas Burke and other wealthy investors, built the Clark Hotel. The company platted the townsite of Wenatchee in 1892 and owned much property in the area. It is not known why the town's first hotel was named Clark. It was surely not named after W.T. Clark, developer of the Highline Canal and Columbia River Bridge, for he didn't come to Wenatchee until about 1901 and had no known prior association with the region.

Wenatchee was officially incorporated on December 23, 1892, by a vote of city residents: 107 for, 7 against and 8 abstentions or illegible ballots. The new fourth-class city was situated in Kittitas County; north of the Wenatchee River was Okanogan County. An effort to create a new county between those two was successful in 1899. Several towns, especially Chelan and Wenatchee, wanted to claim the county seat. Judge Burke settled the question by offering to sell for one dollar Wenatchee's Clark Hotel to the new county to serve as a courthouse – and let the county be named after Chelan. A deal was also struck that the city of Chelan would provide several of the first county officials.

First Chelan County courthouse

It is evident that the county moved in and began operations with the building still in its original hotel form and managed to remodel it while occupying it. By 1901, from photographic evidence, it appears that two windows and a door were bricked up on the south side, presumably to construct a walk-in vault in that area.

Sometime later, but by 1906 at the latest, several top floor dormers were removed, as well as the second floor wrap-around balcony, and a new, more stately portico entrance was created.

Another educated guess: there were also a couple of second floor windows that got bricked up later and replaced with a very small single window. That could possibly have been a prisoner holding cell, created prior to building the county jail next door. The courtroom was on the second floor.

As the City of Wenatchee grew tenfold from 410 residents in 1900 to 4,040 in 1910, and the new county expanded from 3,931 in 1900 to 15,104 in 1910, many residents found a need to visit the courthouse once in a while. John Gellatly, Chelan County's first deputy auditor, noted:

They come tiptoeing to the auditor's office in quest of a license which will permit them to marry, and for some unexplainable reason, most applicants develop a mental or nervous complex that is hard to resolve. I have even seen one or two who became so agitated they completely forgot their names when requested for the record. In fact, some of the boldest characters perceptibly weakened when they were making their first written move toward the marriage state. Other citizens come to the courthouse to see the treasurer (the tax collector) for the purpose of resisting a tax



Courtesy of Ron Lodge

The building at the corner of Kittitas Street and South Wenatchee Avenue, formerly the Clark Hotel, was Chelan County's first courthouse until 1924. Pictured above in 1906, it had been remodeled from the photo on the Confluence cover that shows its original architecture.



Courtesy of Ron Lodge



Chelan County staff pose in front of the old courthouse on June 7, 1924, the day before the county moved into the new courthouse at Memorial Park.

claim, and others come to seek redress in the courts because of a real or imaginary sustained injury.¹

Gellatly cited two memorable examples of people seeking marriage licenses while he was deputy and then chief auditor in the old courthouse. In the first:

Two elderly people from Chelan drove to Wenatchee during a heavy snowstorm in an old-fashioned homemade cutter, tied their team to a telephone pole in front of the Courthouse and staggered half frozen into the auditor's office.... All went well while going through the usual preliminaries, but when I told them that the fee would be \$5.00 they both blew their tops. The old gentleman emptied his old-fashioned buckskin money pouch onto the counter and began to count his nickels and dimes. The old lady all the while was dressing me down for making such an outlandish charge.... As the old gentleman did not possess the necessary fee, she then emptied her belongings onto the counter and finally, between the two, they produced the \$5.00. Replacing their heavy wraps, they headed back to Chelan to have the job completed, but were still mad.



John Gellatly

In Gellatly's second example:

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In the summer of 1901 a very refined middle-aged man and woman came to town and took a room at the old Bell Hotel, the best one in town at the time. They seemed to have no business in particular other than to be looking the town and valley over. They dropped into the auditor's office several times under the guise of learning about land values. I became fairly well acquainted with them, when much to my surprise they motioned me to one side of the room and confidentially advised me of their purpose in coming to Wenatchee. They stated that they had been living in Everett for a number of years and that everyone believed them to be man and wife, while in fact they had never married. They stated further that they had been worried a great deal about the deceptive life they had been living, and had decided to come over to Wenatchee where they were not known to get married.

They asked Gellatly if he could arrange for a minister; he did, and the simple ceremony was performed. The couple left on the next train for the coast and that was the last Gellatly ever saw of them.²

First county jail was made of brick

Chelan County's first five sheriffs, with offices in the original courthouse building from 1900 to 1924, were Frank Keller (elected in 1900), R.P. Webb (1904), J. Edward Ferguson (1908), Charles Kenyon (1912) and Bert McManus (1916). One can imagine that they and their deputies responded to a wide variety of misdemeanor and felony reports. For the first several years, county prisoners were lodged in the city jail. The late newspaper publisher and historian Wilfred Woods told Ron Lodge he thought the county built its first jail in 1908.

The jail building was (and still is) at the rear of the lot



A crowd watches the Apple Blossom Parade on Mission Street in 1927. The old courthouse, catwalk and jail can be seen behind the Hotel Columbia float.

WVMCC #78-218-22

Wenatchee Valley Museum #79-8-31



Courtesy of Ron Lodge



The county sold the courthouse to John Doneen, who operated it as a hotel for about 15 years.

between South Wenatchee Avenue, Kittitas Street and an alley. Its upper story was connected to the second floor of the courthouse by a closed-in catwalk, which enabled the secure escorting of prisoners for court appearances.

In 1924 Chelan County moved into a new courthouse building next to Memorial Park. The county sold the old courthouse to John Doneen, who turned it back into a hotel. He applied stucco to the front and changed interior walls of both the old courthouse and old jail to create hotel rooms. He added back in the dormers that had been removed by the county. The interior cells and exterior bars in the windows of the jail were removed and sold to Okanogan County. The old jail was referred to as the Hotel Annex.

The Doneen Hotel operated through the 1930s. Doneen then leased the property to Signal Oil in 1939 for a gas station and remodeled the main building according to Signal's specifications – taking down the top 1½ floors, removing the front third, and attaching a small addition. During the 1950s John Doneen's daughter, Mary Ellen, lived in the former jail/hotel annex. Signal closed up shop in the early 1960s and was followed by several automotive-related businesses: Terry's Motorcycle Shop, TC Auto Repair, Shepherd's Auto Body Shop and Erickson's Radiator Shop.

Keyhole Security moves in

In 1983 Keyhole Security would become the next, most recent, and longest tenant of the former courthouse building at the corner of Kittitas Street

and South Wenatchee Avenue. The locksmith business had started inside Archie Lodge's Wenatchee Cycle and Toy around 1948, then in 1976 became its own entity under Archie's son Ron in a storefront next to the cycle shop. (The Doneen family owned the southern portion of the 200 block of South Wenatchee Avenue until 2020.) Ron Lodge remembers paying \$400 per month rent for 3,600 square feet, when he moved Keyhole Security into the corner building in 1983. He did a major remodel of the former courthouse building, including interior partitions, plumbing and electrical systems.

After the remodel and move in, many Keyhole customers would comment on how it looked so different from when it had been a gas station or auto repair shop. But the remark that really threw Lodge for a loop was when an older gentleman looked around and declared, "It sure looks different than it did when my wife and I were married here!" This was more than 60 years after it had last served as the county courthouse.

Lodge wanted to use the old jail building for storage. It had been boarded up for decades but vandals had broken windows and trespassed, leaving garbage strewn around and graffiti on the walls. Another set of trespassers had also violated the old jail: a large flock of pigeons. Lodge screened over most of the broken windows, leaving one that could open and close. He then went in with a butterfly net and caught pigeons, one by one, and released them through that window. "It was a mess in there!" he said. But he cleaned up the



A Signal Oil station was the next tenant of the former courthouse building.



Keyhole Security occupied the space from 1983 to 2016.

Wenatchee Valley Museum #88-108-66

Courtesy of Ron Lodge



The former Keyhole Security building on South Wenatchee Avenue stands empty today, as does the old jail visible behind it. Next door is Taco Loco, in the spot where the Little Brick Cafe slung hash for decades.



Photo by Chris Rader

Viewed from Mission Street, the first Chelan County jail building and much of the original courthouse still stand today. The historic brick buildings are slated for renovation as part of a large construction project by Weidner Properties that will transform the block bordered by South Wenatchee Avenue and Kittitas, Mission and Yakima streets.



Photo by Chris Rader

trash and droppings, and utilized the old jail as a roomy storage building.

Lodge purchased another, larger building at 708 South Wenatchee Avenue in 2016 and, after overseeing another major remodel, moved Keyhole Security into it, ending the business' 33-year residency at 238 South Wenatchee Ave. The former courthouse building has remained vacant since then.

Weidner Apartment Homes, which built the Riverside 9 complex along the Columbia River in Wenatchee, is the current, and just the fourth, owner of the 132-year-old former courthouse and jail. The Kirkland-based commercial real estate company plans to build a new seven-story, 212-unit mixed-use development, The

Majestic Apartments, on the corner of South Mission and Yakima streets. Two floors will be used as an underground parking garage. The development will "revitalize and restore the jailhouse building and add two other buildings to bring six new commercial spaces to the area," according to Weidner communications manager Lauren Charleson. "The projects aim to provide new, quality housing options and expand Wenatchee's business and entertainment offerings."

Site preparation work has already begun and construction is expected to begin this year.

ENDNOTES

1. John Gellatly, *A History of Wenatchee*, 1962.
2. *Ibid.*



Courtesy Wenatchee Downtown Association

Weidner Apartment Homes published the above conceptual drawing on the Wenatchee Downtown Association website. Viewed from South Wenatchee Avenue, it shows several unidentified buildings (including highrises facing Mission Street) and appears to preserve the old jail building.