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Pieces of Supreme Court History Find Home in New Nez Perce Courthouse

Court proceedings in Nez Perce County are moving to a brand-new courthouse — and with them, a bit of Idaho court history.

Lewiston has long played a notable role in Idaho state government.

In the early 1860s, the city was briefly Idaho's territorial capitol and the initial home of the Idaho Territorial Supreme Court. In the years after statehood, it remained a significant legal and governmental center. The state Constitution requires the Idaho Supreme Court to hold court in Lewiston each year, and the Court in 1904 established a library and other facilities there. The justices used a distinctive, curved wooden bench that became a hallmark of early legal activities in north Idaho.

In 1954, with the appellate court facilities no longer in use, the bench was moved to the Nez Perce County Courthouse. Its continued use there has preserved the legacy of Idaho's early judiciary and its connection to Lewiston.

Through efforts of the county and the Second Judicial District, that bench and a similarly historic courtroom railing and gates will now be removed, restored and relocated to Courtroom 1 of the county's new courthouse. The preservation work is expected to start next week and was the focus of a hearing Thursday afternoon before Administrative District Judge Mark Monson — the final court hearing held in the old building.

"I am thrilled to be a part of this important moment in Idaho's judicial history. The restoration and relocation of the historic Supreme Court bench not only honors the legacy of those who came before us but also preserves a meaningful piece of our state's legal heritage," Judge Monson said after Thursday's proceeding.

The bench was long believed to date back to early use by the Territorial Supreme Court. According to court filings this week, it can at very least be traced to 1904 and the Idaho Supreme Court building established then.

“That’s more than 100 years of bearing witness to people’s worries, people’s joy, as justice was administered in our courts,” Nez Perce County Clerk Patty Weeks said. “I’m glad that in a building developed to serve the public’s modern needs, we can continue this connection to our past.”

“Preserving this bench is more than a nod to history — it’s a reminder of the enduring principles of justice that continue to guide our courts today,” said Roland Gammill, Second District trial court administrator.

“The Idaho Supreme Court extends its sincere thanks to Nez Perce County and the Second Judicial District for their thoughtful preservation of this historic bench and for incorporating it into the beautiful new courthouse,” Chief Justice G. Richard Bevan said. “This gesture honors our state’s legal heritage while serving the needs of today’s citizens. When the Court convenes in Lewiston next spring, I will be proud to take my seat at a bench that so meaningfully connects our past to our present.”

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