



On This Site in 1784

Hunterdon County Courthouse and Jail

East side of Warren

From 1719 until 1780, Trenton was the county seat of Hunterdon County. The Hunterdon County Court House and Jail stood on this spot. Historians aren't sure when it was built, but certainly before 1730. It was a two-story building of grey sandstone with a stucco front; there's a fine rendition of it on the mural across the street. The cells were on the ground floor, and the second floor was used as a court room. A strange feature of the building was that the only access to the second floor was by a number of stone steps with an iron railing, which were erected on the outside of the building.



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When court was in session, the dirt roads of Trenton were routinely clogged with wagons, carriages, sulkies and public coaches. Lawyers, witnesses, and jurors would remain in Trenton for a week or more, waiting for their cases to be resolved. The inns and taverns were full to overflowing, and Trenton residents would congregate with people from all over the county to share information and argue about politics.

Committees and commissions of both the Provincial and the Continental Congress met here. But the Courthouse was more than a legal center, it was the information center of the community. Trenton residents hustled to the courthouse for all the important news. This was where the residents heard the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence, and it was here that they heard the proclamation declaring that the war between England and the United States was over.