

HISTORIC PRESERVATION RECOGNITION AWARD APPLICATION  
WASHINGTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Washington County Historical Society is a non-profit organization incorporated on April 25, 1983, to promote and perpetuate the history of Washington County, Utah. WCHS exists to encourage and assist all interested Washington County communities with the organization of their city historical societies and to encourage them to promote historical preservation in their communities.

WCHS has been involved in many activities and projects since it was organized. The most recent endeavor was the successful negotiation with the City of St. George to use its historical landmark, the Pioneer Courthouse, to serve as a hub for teaching the history of Washington County. In collaboration with three other non-profit organizations, the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, the Sons of the Utah Pioneers and Arts to Zion, the building has been opened to the public, offering tours, educational materials, lectures, musical programs, and a venue for a variety of programs and meetings for non-profit organizations.

All work is performed by volunteers, and all funding is through grants and donations.

The Society maintains a website as a way of making the history readily available to anyone with internet access. It provides a place to record information about the county's people, places, organizations, and activities and includes links to other such information elsewhere on the web. The site is constantly evolving.

An online calendar is maintained for current activities.

A monthly newsletter has been started to keep interested parties informed of the activities and other items of interest.

The Pioneer Courthouse is one of the oldest standing buildings in the county and was in constant use from 1870 through 1960, when there was a need for additional space to govern the county. It was abandoned for many years until the St. George Chamber of Commerce called it home for 30 years. During this time, the building was registered on the National Registry of Historic Buildings. After the Chamber outgrew the building, it was again abandoned, and left standing empty. Through the efforts of Jeanine Vander Bruggen, a member of both the Washington County Historical Society and the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, an agreement was reached with the City of St. George to provide the building for promoting the history of the area to the many visitors who come to see the beautiful, natural sites, surrounding the County, and to the growing number of new residents.

There are exhibits developed around various themes. There is the original courtroom where the activities are held, and in the basement is an existing jail cell that shows the effect of alkaline in the water that gradually destroys the sandstone that was so prevalent in building up the community, and later proved to be inferior for use as a foundation.

This proud building, once the center of all civic activity, is finally being recognized for its historic value. Thanks to the supporting organizations, and the endless efforts of volunteers, the contributions of the early settlers are being better understood. Only through great sacrifice, toil, and endurance was Washington County developed.