

Judge Emmet L. Cosgrove
Administrative Judge, New London Judicial District
Rededication of the New London Courthouse
May 29, 2013

Welcome to all. Welcome to Chief Justice Chase Rogers. Welcome to our local senators and representatives, to the mayor and city council of New London, to the New London Fire and Police Departments, the local history community, my fellow judges and court staff. Welcome to members of the New London County Bar Association, to neighbors, friends and admirers of this beautiful and historic courthouse. Thank you for coming this morning.

We started the month with our celebration of Law Day, and we close the month with our celebration of the completion of the renovation and preservation of our 1784 courthouse, the oldest continually used courthouse in New England.

In 1724 New London's courthouse was located on the City Parade, roughly where the Nathan Hale Schoolhouse now sits. That courthouse was burned down by Benedict Arnold, on September 6, 1781. For a period of time, court business continued in local inns and taverns, a practice some of us might appreciate today. This was, however, the period when we were constructing our new nation, and "purpose built" courthouses were being built in those towns that had previously used a room in a town hall. A true city like New London, which had already had a courthouse, could not continue with its ad-hoc post-wartime practices and so in April of 1784 the Common Council of New London voted to build a new courthouse and the site was acquired later that month. At that time this site was a bit up from the center of the city, and was chosen for the way it looked out over the harbor.

Isaac Fitch of Lebanon was the builder/architect selected for the job. By September of 1781, the courthouse was framed out. It originally had an interior balcony running along three sides of the second story, looking down into the courtroom. Although the court

almost immediately began to handle cases, the lower story wasn't completed until 1814, 33 years later when the money to complete it was finally raised. This timeline makes the renovation we celebrate today seem quite quick by comparison.

In 1839 the courthouse was moved back to allow an open square joining what are now Broad, Hempstead and State streets.

Many fascinating events have taken place here over the years, not all of them legal proceedings. In 1798 the courthouse served as a makeshift hospital during the Yellow Fever epidemic. The Methodist church and the Universalist church both used the courthouse as their first meetinghouses. Until 1825, county fairs were held here, and there was judging not only guilt and innocence, but potatoes and tomatoes. General Lafayette spoke here on one of his tours of the United States. On February 23, 1815, Commodore Stephen Decatur hosted the Royal Navy at a Peace Ball in this courthouse to celebrate the end of the War of 1812.

In 1860, Horace Greeley hosted a rally for the Republican ticket and Abraham Lincoln here and in 1861, New Londoners gathered here to pledge support for the Union cause in the Civil War.

For all these fascinating events, this has always been primarily a courthouse. We believe that the first trial to take place here was that of 12-year-old Hannah Ocquish for murder. From then until now the court has heard civil, family and criminal cases, including, of course, the Kelo case where the judgment of the Superior Court was affirmed by the State and U.S. Supreme Courts. Every day this week, the court has been used for judicial business, continuing its long tradition.

In 1895, Frances Caulkins, an historian of New London County, wrote that "The old Court House at the head of State Street is now in its seventy-fourth year of age. It is a wooden building, ungraceful, common-lace and generally regarded as an unsightly blot, disfiguring the neighborhood where it stands, yet as a stately relic of a former age still

doing service in this, it maintains its respectability and is regarded with interest.” This was not the opinion of everyone, and in 1906, when there was a suggestion that the courthouse was too small and should be razed, the community fought back, leading to the expansion of the building in 1910, with the addition of Courtroom One and the law library. Over the years there have been proposals to relocate the court that were defeated by the people of the county, who recognized its civic and historic importance. In 1984, the courthouse celebrated its bicentennial, and we are fortunate today to be able to celebrate the latest renovation. I think no one today would share Caulkin’s view of the building as a blot, instead seeing it as one of the jewels of the region. The importance of the building to the people of New London, and of the State of Connecticut, has continued unbroken for over 200 years. Even today, the courthouse sits over the city, serving the people of the county, and it is now in a position to do so for at least another 100 years.

We thank the New London Fire Department for its efficient work in September of last year suppressing a fire that threatened this structure.

It is my great pleasure and honor now to introduce Chief Justice Chase Rogers.

Justice Rogers.

Justice Rogers has served the state of Connecticut and its citizens as a judge of the Superior Court beginning in 1998, the Appellate Court beginning in 2006 and in current position as Chief Justice of our Supreme Court since 2007. She has led the Judicial Branch by identifying and then addressing the many challenges that face a judicial system in the 21st century. She has kept the Branch focused on its core mission, which is to serve the interests of justice and the public by resolving matters brought before it in a fair, timely, efficient and open manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers.

Thank you Chief Justice Rogers. I have a small memento for you. In 1984, when this courthouse celebrated its bicentennial anniversary, the New London Bar Association, led by its then-President Barbara M. Quinn held a celebration and a history of this courthouse was commissioned from local historical societies. Here is a copy of that history.

Thank you, thanks to all of you. I have asked the judicial marshals to open up the front doors of the courthouse so you might appreciate more fully the central role and the central location of this courthouse with the City of New London. As you look across the threshold, think of the changes that this building has seen since 1784, and imagine the changes that it will see in the next 100 years.

Thank you.