Judges vacating old Family Court took antiques

Even as institutional buildings go, Philadelphia’s new Family Court is a spartan place. No architectural flourishes relieve the dreary expanse of its milky glass facade. No murals celebrate benevolent justice or family virtues. No modern art adds color to its bland white walls.

But for a brief moment, Family Court’s cold, unadorned rooms were brought to life by decorative antique lamps, ornate torchères, and fine wooden chairs.

According to the city’s commissioner of public property, Bridget Collins-Greenwald, those valuable, custom-designed objects were stripped by Family Court judges and court employees took custom-designed objects such as these desk lamps, since returned, when they changed buildings.
employees from the historic Logan Square palazzo that served as the court's home for seven decades, and carted off to their new building overlooking LOVE Park, to be used to decorate the judges’ chambers.

All the items have now been returned. "It's all back," she said.

Officials did not realize the objects were missing from the old courthouse until earlier this month, when a city employee spotted a familiar pair of Depression-era torchères gracing the lobby of the new Family Court. That's when city officials asked for a sidebar with the judges.

"I'm willing to say what happened happened accidentally," said Deputy Mayor Alan Greenberger, who was brought in to help negotiate the delicate matter. Although built for Family Court, the Logan Square property is city-owned.

"There was a communications disconnect about what they could take," Greenberger said.

Family Court's administrative judge, Margaret T. Murphy, did not respond to requests for comment, nor did officials who oversee the new building's day-to-day operations.

The judges' sticky fingers were particularly disturbing to city officials because they are in the process of selling the Neoclassical building to developers who plan to convert it into a 210-room Kimpton Hotel. As part of the deal, the city promised to throw in the collection of historic objects, custom-designed for the courthouse while it was under construction during the Depression.

Unlike its boxy successor, the elegant, columned courthouse - designed by Philadelphia architect John T. Windrim and engineer Morton Keast - is lavished with art, including stained glass by Philadelphia's D'Ascenzo Studios, murals by nine nationally known artists, and an immense assortment of decorative metal lamps, lacy radiator grills, and wooden desk chairs.

Although the courthouse was not completed until 1941, it reflects Philadelphia's long love affair with Parisian architecture. Just as the Parkway was modeled on the Champs-Elysees, the facades of the courthouse and the adjacent Free Library were inspired by two classical palaces on the Place de la Concorde.

In preparation for the building's sale, the city took the unusual step of having the interior listed on Philadelphia's historic register, ensuring that all the decorative objects would have to be preserved by future owners. The action was intended to help the buyers qualify for federal tax credits, thus reducing the costs of the renovation. But all the historic elements need to be intact for the buyers to get the tax write-off.

During the process of preparing the courthouse for sale, the city hired a consultant to document all the historic objects and
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When asked whether the city had done a systematic check of the inventory to confirm that Family Court had returned every fixture, Collins-Greenwald declined to respond.

One member of the hotel's development team, Peter Shaw of P&A Associates, said no one had informed him that the objects had been removed. "We didn't hear about any of this," he said.

"They're not supposed to take any of that stuff out. It's in our agreement that it's supposed to be transferred the way it is," Shaw continued. "The torchères are something we think of as absolutely part of the historic fabric."

Now that the objects have been returned, Greenberger said he was less concerned about what was taken than what the court left behind. The building is still piled high with papers and worthless junk.

"We're waiting for them to clean that stuff out," he added.

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POF  •  6 days ago
I don’t consider it stealing...they relocated the items from one city owned facility to another.

23  •  Reply  •  Share

EIK  •  POF  •  6 days ago
Whoever was in charge of this move did not do a good job!

If my office was moving, I would assume *my office is moving* and that includes the furniture and the bookshelves etc.

Any other possibility: the person in charge specifically informs the people what is supposed to go and what is supposed to stay!!

Why would people assume that the city is selling the building to private interests with the furnishings?

14  •  Reply  •  Share

Tatts  •  EIK  •  6 days ago
Antique lamps and torcheres aren't "furnishings" in the way that bookshelves and furniture may be. It's clear in such buildings what is part of the design and what isn't--they are custom-fit to the spaces, they match designs of built-in items, the colors and materials make it clear that they aren't stock items.

3  •  Reply  •  Share

EIK  •  Tatts  •  6 days ago
No matter how one classifies any specific item, one makes clear everybody knows the rule!!!
People need to know the rule and then, one goes after the ones that break that rule!

4  •  Reply  •  Share

Frank  •  POF  •  6 days ago
POF, not all the items are accounted for?

7  •  Reply  •  Share

John Smith 1882  •  POF  •  6 days ago
They took items for their private offices. Items that were on public display. They KNEW they shouldn’t have taken them.

5  •  Reply  •  Share

Disco Dave  •  POF  •  6 days ago
Somebody once relocated my TV.

5  •  Reply  •  Share

Guest  •  POF  •  6 days ago
They gain control and take what they want; look at what they did with Barnes.

4  •  Reply  •  Share

gb  •  POF  •  6 days ago
Amen. The taxpayers should have had a say to start, and they own the items. I’m glad that the new courthouse has them to use.

Media Mike  •  6 days ago
So historic objects owned by the citizens are being given to a developer rather than remaining in the courthouse owned by the citizens? Seems like the object belong with the court, not some low life developer.

15  •  Reply  •  Share

Tatts  •  Media Mike  •  6 days ago
These things are included in the sale price, just like the doors and windows. Would you seriously claim that the roof is being given to the developer? If they weren’t included, the sale price would be lower (but then it wouldn’t qualify for the interior being listed on the historic register).

If the interior is going to get historic designation, it has to include all the items that make it historic. Duh.

EIK ➔ Tatts • 6 days ago
You are sure that the sale price in this case reflects the market value of the items (and the building), considering the track record of the city, could we be sure of that one?

gb ➔ Tatts • 6 days ago
Some privately owned houses in the city have historic designation. Would you include the current owners items a must stay, even if they brought them to furnish their homes i.e. cooking utensils, family heirlooms, mattress, bed, bed linens, etc.?

pat ➔ Media Mike • 6 days ago
I think there’s a difference between giving something to someone and having something to be part of the building that’s included in the building’s sale or lease price.

twopartysystem1 ➔ Media Mike • 5 days ago
Yep, that’s what happens when dead-broke cities sell assets to try and keep the peace. Unsustainable and desperate of course.

KilkennyKissin • 6 days ago
This is a tempest in a tea pot. All people did was move the furniture from one courthouse to another. I believe that it was probably not communicated or poorly communicated that the items were to remain in the original court.

It’s not like people took the items home.

It'sNicki ➔ KilkennyKissin • 6 days ago
Um, yeah they did take them home. People were carrying a ton of stuff out and said they were putting them in their houses. We watched them do it.

Cmacan ➔ KilkennyKissin • 6 days ago
Shhh... You’re raining on the trolls outrage.

billat • 6 days ago
Democrat party city gubmint...take as much as you can carry.

Neighbor ➔ billat • 6 days ago
little willie, you have nothing of value to offer. You lack the insight sufficient to justify your petty outrage. Go back and read the story again. This has nothing to do with theft or Democrats. You are a piano with one key.

billat ➔ Neighbor • 6 days ago
Don’t you have a “Let’s Kill All The Coos” rally to attend?
Neighbors vacating old Family Court took antiques


- [Reply](#)
- [Don't you have a “Let’s Kill All The Cops” rally to attend?](#)

Little willie, you’re a crusader in search of a crusade. Where is anybody holding a “Let’s Kill All Cops” rally? Is that even a thing or is that just a delusional manifestation brought on by too much Mountain Dew and the stale air of your mother’s basement? No matter how much you try to force your ideological distortions into every conversation, this story had nothing to do with any of your standard talking-point based partisan jabs.

In your flailing to make a point, you spilled your peas all over the floor and made a mess of your chair. Let your mother clean you up and then go take a nap. When you wake up, you may have a more solid attachment to reality.

- [Reply](#)
- [Neighbor](#)

Communications Disconnect” says Greenberg. Now this is an administrator of the court system erring on theft of property. It is going to be interesting to see if Seth Williams goes after his judicial buddies like he did the legislators. How much more must we shove down our throats with excuses instead of arrests.

- [Reply](#)
- [MrSmith](#)

They must’ve thought; no one would notice, dumb City doesn’t keep track, and they’re knocking the place down or something anyway. Every time a Judge visits count the silverware after.

- [Reply](#)
- [StevieToo](#)

Philly and governmental sticky fingers - perfect together, like ham and cheese..

- [Reply](#)
- [xy](#)

It’s not “Philly and governmental sticky fingers”, it’s JUDGES!

- [Reply](#)
- [politeia](#)

The words corruption and judges go hand-in-hand in PA. Judges have more power than most in government. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Corrupt judges are commonplace at all levels (district justice, municipal, county, appellate, on up) across the state. Heck, look at the PA Supreme Court in the last year. One Supreme Court justice in jail for campaigning out of her office with tax dollars and another justice resigned in disgrace for forwarding dirty emails to state employees on tax payer owned computers, appearing to be in cahoots with prosecutors, and having his lawyer wife on staff making a fortune possibly using his contacts in a very questionable manner.
Neighbors vacating old Family Court took antiques


1/1/2015

What does any of what you just said have to do with the story posted above?

The story is about judges. I just posted my opinion on PA judges. Philly Traffic Court judges being arrested left and right. PA Supreme Court justices being arrested and imprisoned. Two judges sentenced to long prison sentences in Luzerne County for accepting millions from private prison owners to illegally lock juveniles up in the "kids for cash" scandal. It goes on and on. Just Google "kids for cash".

Even if nothing illegal happened from the story, even the slightest appearance of impropriety given judges are criminals at extremely unacceptable rates in PA should be news. The judicial system in PA is deeply and inherently corrupt, and makes Wall Street bankers, con-artists and blatant criminals look like boy scouts.

So from your rant, you mentioned a few judges. While some judges are indeed corrupt, as are many other individuals inside and outside of government, that doesn’t mean that every other judge on the bench is guilty of anything. You’re falling down the rabbit hole of faulty association. You’ve also presented no evidence that judges are "criminals” at extremely unacceptable rates disproportionate to the general population. You cite a few cases, then presume to declare that all judges are criminals which you tie to a non-story about the slightest appearance of impropriety. What proportion of judges are actually corrupt? What proportion of judges in the Family Court are corrupt? Do you have any evidence of corruption or is this more standard "civic outrage" based on a jaded perception because you read a few news stories?

You must be a judge. Judges should only be allowed on the bench with impeccable credentials and records. The amount of criminality by PA judges is out of control. And I’m not even getting into biased and prejudicial rulings. Yes, all are guilty by association. Just like a person dressed in gang attire is thought to be a thug, same goes for PA government "officials" in black robes.

Not a judge. Just a disappointed citizen watching this absurdity of the angry mob ready to crucify respected and committed members of the bench based on a grotesquely limited amount of information and understanding. While there are legitimately corrupt and flawed members of the bench, your outrage chubby is unfairly directed at many judges who are principled and reasonable. You have no evidence or information to support your claim that a disproportionate number of judges (let alone all of them) are guilty of anything.
You just mindlessly stumble along casting aspersions based on nothing more than a passing wind.

One last thing, don’t assume that just because you don’t understand it, a decision made by a judge is prejudicial.

politeia ➔ Neighbor • 6 days ago

When a Montco judge fabricates and re-writes pages upon pages of the transcripts of a civil hearing I had before him with his love-interest court reporter, I not only consider is prejudicial, I consider it criminal.

Now, all court of common please hearings are audio recorded along with the court reporter. That would have easily proven my claim of criminally fabricated transcripts that I swore under oath happened, yet the judge “lost” the audio tape and entire record of the court hearing when I complained to law enforcement. I have friends who are lawyers who see this happen all the time in Montco and Philly. Just speaking to facts based on experience. Rampant judicial corruption.

Neighbor ➔ politeia • 6 days ago

So you’re speaking on a limited set of facts based on your own prejudices in a VERY anecdotal and limited case. Based on that, every judge is a criminal. I’m sorry you’ve been righteously wronged, but step outside your own vendetta for a moment to consider the ridiculousness of your broad assertions.

Again, because you don’t understand something doesn’t make it criminal. We have a code of laws that, while somewhat flawed in places, dictate what is actually criminal. We do not regularly leave the determination of criminality to the whims of passersby.

politeia ➔ Neighbor • 6 days ago

I don’t understand the system? So it is part of the system for judges to fabricate and re-write transcripts of a hearing? That’s some system!

No doubt there are some honest judges. I have every right to consider every judge a criminal until proven otherwise.

It'sNicki ➔ politeia • 6 days ago

Actually, yes, it IS part of the system to recreate notes if the original notes are destroyed or unavailable. It doesn’t happen all the time- in 10 years of practice I’ve had it happen once- but sometimes it happens. It does t mean a judge is dirty.

politeia ➔ It'sNicki • 6 days ago

In the case I am referencing it does. Pages and pages of testimony deleted from the transcripts. Other pages entirely re-written. I complained to the county detectives. They said what I was saying was an extremely serious accusation so I swore to it under oath - which is perjury and a felony if I lied. They said they would check the audio tapes that back up the court reporter - and would bust me for perjury if I lied about what happened. The audio tapes “disappeared”, along with the entire record of the hearing save for the fabricated
transcripts. The entire record and the audio tape was last in the hands of the judge and he said they must have been misplaced. So the entire record of the hearing and the audio tape "disappeared" after I complained and swore under oath the transcripts had numerous pages deleted and re-written. Quite the coincidence.

Neighbor ➔ politeia • 6 days ago
And that is why the rest of us retain the right to choose more esteemed and emotionally stable individuals to determine criminality and the best interests of the child.

politeia ➔ Neighbor • 6 days ago
Exactly, which is why the president judge and the senior judge in the "kids for cash" scandal are serving lengthy prison sentences.

I have a friend who is a lawyer for AOPC and he investigated the the "kids for cash" scandal. While that one was particularly egregious, he has stated to me the average citizen would be floored by the amount of corruption in PA courthouses, but the judges are very adept at making sure they don't get caught.

Neighbor ➔ politeia • 6 days ago
I was more referring to the Family Court judges, but yes. Very esteemed individuals ensured that those corrupt judges suffer penalties commiserate with their crimes.

politeia ➔ Neighbor • 6 days ago
Glad you agree with that. Now you have me curious about the Philly Family Court. My friend who is a lawyer with the AOPC works at 15th and Market. I’ll ask him his opinion on the Philly Family Court, and perhaps I will be pleasantly surprised, but for the most part he does not have positive things to say about our judicial system in general, though he has praised some judges to me.

It'sNicki ➔ politeia • 6 days ago
As someone who practices daily in the new Family Court (I also practiced daily in the old one), it sucks. Staff and attorneys hate it. The judges don’t love it either.

Neighbor ➔ It'sNicki • 6 days ago
It’s all because they wouldn’t let you take that mural of B-Hop, isn’t it? Or the Fela Kuti mural? That would ruin my experience, too.

It'sNicki ➔ Neighbor • 6 days ago
Nah. I would, however, have loved to get the mural shown above (I believe that's from the former A court).

mensa ➔ xy • 6 days ago
the city had no right to sell off antiques, in a deal witdevelopers who will make out like bandits because art work and antiques always
Judges vacating old Family Court took antiques

You must be from NYC by the way.

It's all self-dealing when government workers are involved. For myself, nothing for the taxpayer; that for myself, nothing for the taxpayer; everything for myself, nothing for the taxpayer.

Is EVERY JUDGE in Philly corrupt?

If some black kid steals something he gets a fine and 30 days in jail. The judges steal, they get asked to give the items back. In-fing-justice

It's probably time to cool your civic outrage and up the salt pewter dosage. They took fixtures that were in their offices at 1801 and moved them to their offices in the new Family Court building at 15th and Arch. There's no theft or great conspiracy here. Once they learned of the miscommunication, they returned all of the items that were moved. The story doesn't suggest that anything was "stolen." There's no corruption here. Go breathe into a paper bag until you've calmed down and can put things back in perspective.

Missing items not returned, is that stealing?

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