

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE

Through the Act of the State Legislature in 1824 Orleans County officially came into being January 1, 1826. On the sixteenth day of June that same year the Board of Supervisors met for the purpose of accepting the deed for the land which now makes up one-half of the County Square, a gift of Nehemiah Ingersoll. This deed was examined and the title accepted June 22, 1826 by Robert Anderson of Gaines, the first chairman of the Board of Supervisors and Jerimiah Brown. The first Court House on the site was built in 1827 at a cost of \$6,000.

In December 1856 the Board of Supervisors invited the citizens of the county to meet to consider the subject of a new Court House. On February 17, 1857 the Board resolved the following: "that the Treasurer of the county make immediate application to the Comptroller of the State for a loan of twenty thousand dollars, payable in six annual installments, to defray the expense of erecting a new Court House in said county and that the payment of the same be made by a tax upon the county." All supervisors voted for this in the affirmative except Kendall and Shelby. Construction of the present Court House began in 1857. The architect and builder was William V.N. Barlow. Our Court House is somewhat copied after the one in Wayne County as a building committee visited there prior to construction to glean ideas.

In November 1858 it was reported: "Your committee is of the opinion that the Court House should be lighted with gas, believing that it will be much cheaper than candles or oil". On November 17 it was resolved that V. Vullock Bullock enter into a contract with the Albion Gas Company to lay pipes to the Court House and to obtain the necessary chandeliers, and that the work be completed for the amount of \$160.00. Also two hot air furnaces were contracted from F.C. Hill for \$553.62 including piping, registers and four chimney tops. Mr. Hill warranted the furnaces capable of providing all the heat required or they could be returned.

When completed in late 1858, including total costs of construction, fixtures and furnishings, the building committee turned back to the County Treasurer \$153.39 of the original \$20,000 which was unexpended, an act which would be considered lunacy nowadays! In part a final report of the building committee is as follows: "A Court House has been built...which for beauty of design, strength of structure and completeness of finish is not excelled by any similar building of equal cost in the State."

It was one of the last buildings in our area to be built in the Greek Revival Style. The four Ionic columns on the front portion are approximately forty feet in height. Constructed of brick with limestone lintels and sills, the original trim was painted grey to match, and the dome was painted gold. All the windows were outfitted with inside boldding shutters and the Court Room was originally painted dark green.

In 1927 a section of false ceiling collapsed in the Court Room which has been installed during the 1870's. At that point the interior of the room was restored and again in 1970 it was redecorated through funds bequeathed to the county for such purpose by John Husha of Kendall. Remaining today it is one of the finest examples of a Greek Revival design to be found anywhere.