

= DeKalb County Courthouse ( Illinois ) =

The DeKalb County Courthouse is located in the county seat of DeKalb County , Illinois , U.S.A. , the city of Sycamore . The Classical Revival structure sits on a square facing Illinois Route 64 as it passes through the city . The current courthouse was constructed in 1905 amid controversy over where the courthouse and thus , ultimately , the county seat would be located . The current building is the third structure to bear the name " DeKalb County Courthouse . " DeKalb County 's Courthouse still serves as the county 's primary judicial center and is a contributing property to the Sycamore Historic District . The district joined the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 . As the county 's primary courthouse for over 100 years , the site has been host to many trials , including prominent murder cases .

The building is cast in the Classical Revival architectural style and contains elements common to that style . Stained glass , columns and a pediment are among the more noticeable features at a glance . The rear facade of the building is designed to resemble a temple and also features stained glass windows . A stone porte @-@ cochere covers the rear driveway . Inside the building 's third floor courtroom is more stained glass , in the form of a skylight . During the early 1980s a made for television movie had scenes filmed in the DeKalb County Courthouse 's courtroom .

= = History = =

Today 's DeKalb County Courthouse is the third in a line of structures to carry that name . In 1839 a log structure was built and called the county courthouse ; the log building stood across the street from the current courthouse . Ten years later , in 1850 , the second DeKalb County Courthouse was erected . From December 13 , 1902 until April 17 , 1924 , DeKalb @-@ Sycamore Electric Traction Company operated a trolley route between the two cities ( DeKalb and Sycamore ) , which ended at the DeKalb County Courthouse . The current courthouse , which sits on the same site as the 1850 building , was erected in 1905 .

= = = First courthouse = = =

The DeKalb County Circuit Court came into existence in June 1839 when the first session of court met in Sycamore 's first courthouse building , though the building was somewhat incomplete . At first , it seemed , that Sycamore might not be the location of the DeKalb County Courthouse ; other towns were vying for the county seat title . A now defunct town called Brush Point was the choice of a Dr. Henry Madden and Rufus Colton would have preferred Coltonville , where he made his home .

Colton , the Clerk of the Court and preparer of the writs and process of the court , had set the first session of county court to be held at his home , in Coltonville . In his attempt to make Coltonville the county seat , Colton decided to hold a new election for the status . Colton made sure that Coltonville would win the election by telling only the population of Coltonville about it . His political tactics were eventually cancelled by an act of the Illinois General Assembly , after the DeKalb County court intervened . When court convened the sheriff served a court order declaring a courthouse be built in Sycamore . Afterward , Coltonville eventually suffered the same fate as Brush Point and disappeared from the map . These events seemingly settled the issue of where the courthouse and , in turn , the DeKalb County seat was going to be located .

= = = Second courthouse = = =

By 1849 growth in DeKalb County necessitated a new courthouse . That year the county commissioners appointed three citizens , Ellzey P. Young , Kimball Dow , and J.C. Kellogg , to contract for a new courthouse building . The courthouse building was to be constructed at the center of the public square ; the location of the 1850 DeKalb County Courthouse . The county commissioners also stipulated the building be brick and 60 by 40 feet ( 12 m ) wide . The cost , as

directed by the commissioners , was not to exceed \$ 6 @, @ 000 . Twenty five percent of that cost was contributed by private citizens . Young and the other appointees were also authorized , by the county , to sell the old courthouse as well as any town lots owned by the county in order to help raise money for the project . Eventually , William Phelps was contracted for the construction of the two @-@ story brick structure which was topped with a large cupola clock tower . It was completed in 1850 and the county inaugurated the courthouse with Grand Ball in 1851 .

= = = Third courthouse = = =

The third and current DeKalb County Courthouse was constructed in 1905 at an approximate cost of \$ 137 @, @ 000 . The project reignited the debate over the county courthouse 's location and , once again , the debate over which town would hold the coveted title of county seat . The county Board of Supervisors authorized the project in 1901 and appropriated \$ 100 @, @ 000 for the new building . The idea for a new courthouse originated as early as 1900 , when the essential design elements of the Lee County courthouse were chosen as the model for the new DeKalb County Courthouse . Though the courthouse was modeled after the Lee County structure it does differ ; the Lee County building , in Dixon , Illinois , has a rooftop dome and also is longer and wider than the DeKalb County building . By 1903 , the appropriation had been upped to \$ 140 @, @ 000 and the battle over the county seat had begun .

This time , it was the city of DeKalb that sought to wrest the title of county seat away from Sycamore . Two of DeKalb 's most prominent citizens , Jacob Haish and Isaac L. Ellwood , each promised to donate \$ 20 @, @ 000 to help absorb some of the new building 's cost ; their donation hinged upon the courthouse being moved to and constructed in DeKalb . The city of Sycamore responded by raising \$ 70 @, @ 000 in donations from its citizens and legal wrangling continued , until 1904 . Haish eventually pledged \$ 103 @, @ 000 for a DeKalb courthouse but it was decided that the county seat would stay in Sycamore and ground was broken , despite the continuing legal battle , on October 29 , 1903 . The building was completed on March 1 , 1905 and the Crew Brothers Company was hired to demolish the 1850 DeKalb County Courthouse .

In recent history the third DeKalb County Courthouse has figured in films , as well as the Global War on Terrorism . Courtroom scenes for the 1982 made for television movie Will , the story of G. Gordon Liddy ( of Watergate infamy ) , were filmed in the courthouse 's third floor courtroom . In 2006 the United States Department of Justice announced it had arrested Derrick Shareef on terrorism related charges . Among the crimes the government accused Shareef of plotting was a plan to assault the DeKalb County Courthouse in order to " smoke a judge . "

= = = Circuit court history = = =

The DeKalb County Courthouse serves DeKalb County , Illinois as its main judiciary building . As such , it is the location of any trials and court proceedings in the county . The DeKalb County Circuit Court falls under the Illinois 16th Judicial Circuit , along with the circuit courts in Kendall and Kane Counties . Through its 100 @-@ year history prominent criminal trials and other events have occurred at the courthouse .

One of the earliest notable cases in the DeKalb County Circuit Court was the murder trial of Henry C. Atwood in 1866 , in the second DeKalb Courthouse building . Atwood , 17 years old at the time , was charged with murdering his wife , Ada , then 15 . The Chicago Tribune called the events " a thrilling tragedy enacted in the little town of DeKalb , in the county of DeKalb . " Prominent DeKalb resident Jacob Haish testified for the prosecution during Atwood 's trial .

During the summer of 1966 the trial of Russell Charles Dewey was underway at the courthouse . Dewey was accused of murdering and burning the body of Susan Brady , who disappeared on December 20 , 1965 ; he was arrested in for the crime in February 1966 . Dewey was convicted of the crime on August 21 , 1966 .

On March 22 , 1971 a group of Northern Illinois University students were arrested while protesting the clear cutting of a forested area on the DeKalb , Illinois campus . About 150 students blockaded

the roads leading to the forested site with debris ; twelve were arrested and the subsequent proceedings at the DeKalb County Courthouse were covered by the Chicago Tribune . All charges were eventually dismissed in the case .

During the summer of 1990 an exiting judge , Rex Meilinger , presented an unusual request to the DeKalb County Board . Meilinger announced , partway through his term , that he planned to retire and requested that his retirement dinner be held " at the courthouse " when asked . Meilinger assured the board that the move was legal and preparations began for a catered dinner for more than 200 guests at the DeKalb County Courthouse . Tables were set up in the lobbies on each floor of the building and the circuit clerk 's first floor office was transformed into a bar . The third floor courtroom hosted an after @-@ dinner roast in honor of the exiting judge .

= = Architecture = =

= = = Exterior = = =

The building faces south , toward Illinois Route 64 and was designed by architect Herbert T. Hazelton , of the Chicago firm Watson & Hazelton . The 128 @-@ foot ( 39 m ) by 100 @-@ foot ( 30 m ) building stands three stories ; its exterior covered in Bedford Indiana limestone . The courthouse 's setting , on the public square in downtown Sycamore , renders it an impressive structure from most approach angles . Heavily carved stone brackets support a lintel over the main doors on the building 's front facades . The four columns dominating the front extend two stories and blend Ionic and Corinthian elements as they ascend from the second floor to the cornice level of the courthouse . Stone balustrades accent the small balcony on the second floor and the windows on the same floor , in the east and west wings , have a row of six balustrades below their sills , which form a continuous stringcourse around the building .

Classical sculpture covers the pediment above the front colonnade , with the seal of the State of Illinois dominating the relief . Stained glass windows can be found topping the third floor windows . The cornice on the roof consists of three rows of eight balustrades and stone blocks . A common decorative ornament in Greek Revival and Classical Revival architecture can be found in an anthemion at the peak of the pediment . The courthouse roof is enclosed in stonework and balustrades .

The north side of the DeKalb County Courthouse is not as ornately decorated as the south face but each has its own distinctive qualities . The courthouse drive , entering from Exchange Street , crosses below a stone porte @-@ cochere on the courthouse property . The back side of the building features four pilasters with composite capitals which give the courthouse a temple appearance .

= = = Interior = = =

From November 1984 to June 1987 the DeKalb County Courthouse underwent an interior restoration , which was completed in time for the sesquicentennial celebration for DeKalb County . The restoration , at an approximate cost of \$ 100 @,@ 000 , was undertaken by Conrad Schmitt Studios of New Berlin , Wisconsin . The modern front doors to the courthouse hide the original , beveled glass front doors from view . Once inside the modern doors , the nonfunctional original doors can be seen , standing wide open , to be admired ; each door weighs several hundred pounds . Past the doors , in the building 's main lobby , is the large , marble staircase to the second floor . The staircase , as well as the lobby 's wainscoting , is done in gray Tennessee marble . Most of the first floor is original to the building , including the hexagonal marble flooring , stained glass windows and two original , first floor courtrooms . The plasterwork along the walls and ceilings of the lobby is ornately decorated .

Ascending the staircase are bronze railings with mahogany banisters . The railings are decorated with the swastika symbol which , whilst mostly associated with Nazi Germany , has been traced

back as far as the 3rd millennium B.C.E. in Asia . The stairway 's newel posts , on the landing between the second and third floors , are a pair of bronze ram 's heads , identical newel posts grace the bottom of the stairs as well . The second floor landing offers a view of the stained glass windows , all original , which were fully restored during the 1980s renovation . Elevator access is also located on the second floor landing , the elevator was a 1950s addition to the courthouse . Originally , to access the third floor , the only option was one of two staircases . Both staircases rose from the second floor landing to the third floor , one staircase was located to either side of the stairwell leading to the landing . When the elevator was installed the staircase on the left @-@ hand side of the landing was removed .

Inside the ornate building 's third floor courtroom is a stained glass skylight centered by a ten @-@ pointed star . The room is adorned with six brass lamps , and chandeliers , which are clustered with glass globes . In its original state an old @-@ fashioned , four @-@ bladed ceiling fan hung from the courtroom ceiling . The third floor courtroom has been called , " the building 's single most distinctive interior space " by Steve Bigolin . The furnishings in the courtroom , including the chandeliers , plasterwork , beveled glass doors and stained glass work are all original .

= = Significance = =

The courthouse was included in the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Sycamore Historic District in 1978 . Of the 209 structures contained within the district when it was originally nominated the courthouse is one of 40 possessing " special architectural and / or historical significance , " which strongly contributes to the character of the historic district . The courthouse was one of twenty structures detailed on the 1978 nomination form and was noted as having " architectural significance . "