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: WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS :
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THE PROPOSED WASHTENAW COUNTY BUILDING
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Architect

Historical In 1822 the boundary lines of Washtenaw County were es-
Background tablished by Territorial Legislative Council. Two years
later John Allen and Elisha Rumsey built the first cabin
on Allen Creek just south of the Huron River. Anson Brown and Edward
Fuller built their cabins on the north side of the river. These
early settlements grew rapidly and were known as the "Upper Village"
and the "Lower Village."

Ann Arbor became the County Seat in 1824. Settlers flocking
into the County made it apparent that a county courthouse was needed
to keep the records of land sales, births, and deaths. Civic-minded
John Allen donated the site upon which the present building stands.
Controversy raged. Both "villages" wanted the courthouse, and even
many "Hill Toppers" thought the site was too far removed from their
business center.

Nevertheless, the contract was let in 1833 and the first court-
house was completed in 1834. It was of brick, 42'x60', and 2 stories
high. It faced south and stood close to the Ann Street line. On
each side was a one-story brick building which housed the register of
deeds and county clerk. This courthouse lasted for 44 years, and
then became "too small and unsuited to a wealthy and growing county!"

During these years, 1834-1878, the county population increased
from 14,000 to 40,000. Ann Arbor grew from 830 to 8,000.

As early as 1866 agitation was started to build a new court-
house. A special election on an \$85,000 bond issue was held in De-
cember of that year. It was defeated 2966 to 1431. Most of the op-
position came from Ypsilanti and Dexter. Dexter residents believed
the courthouse should be located there. Finally ten years later, in
1875, the Board of Supervisors at their December meeting adopted the
following resolution:

The courthouse now in use, by reason of age and
use, has become dilapidated, inconvenient, uncomfortable,
unhealthy, and unsafe for use. . .the records and documents
of the several offices are exposed and liable to be de-
stroyed by fire. . .it is the opinion of the Board that

public interest and safety and permanent preservation of important records and documents of the several county offices demand the early erection of a new courthouse..."

It was decided to place the question before the voters in the spring election. Fortunately, a fire broke out in the building just before the election. No damage resulted other than charring the walls, but it did awaken interest. When the votes were counted, 2428 were for a new courthouse and 2049 opposed. The cornerstone was laid on October 25, 1877, and the building was completed in 1878. It was 80'x127' and cost \$83,000. Now, 71 years later, the second courthouse has become "too small and unsuited to a wealthy and growing county."

Conditions Today In this period, 1878-1949, the population of the county has increased from 40,000 to an estimated 115,000. Ann Arbor has grown from 8,000 to nearly 40,000. At the present time approximately 90,000 are residing in the cities of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, the fringe areas of each, and the corridor between. No other part of the county is so densely populated.

Even so, the courthouse square remains the focal point for the major city street and county highway pattern. Automobile traffic is extremely heavy and parking space is limited. Buildings around this small block are old, dingy, and with few exceptions present a dilapidated appearance. Front foot values of land have declined and the business center has moved to the 200 S. Main block. It will undoubtedly continue to move farther away and in a southeasterly direction. Changes in both city and county since 1878, and even since 1940, have been tremendous. Trends in population, business, and industry are upward. New patterns of distribution are evident. It is, therefore, proper that other sites, in addition to the present one, be considered when the county's third courthouse is built.

Recent Planning During the past ten years the Board of Supervisors has considered more seriously securing plans for a new building. On March 12, 1945, R. S. Gerganoff, Architect, of Ypsilanti, was commissioned to prepare plans for a county building. Plans were completed on March 6, 1946, and the cost was established at approximately \$2,300,000.

Funds were not available in 1946, and shortly after the voters were asked to express themselves at the following election if they wanted a new county building. The vote was favorable for a new building and the next task was to find a way to finance it. During this period the issue of building a joint County Building and City Hall was brought in. The other issue that is to be decided in the near future is whether the County Building is to be built on the same site or on a new location.

Investigating for New Building As soon as the Architect was selected a series of visits were made by the Building Committee to various County Buildings in the State to determine the size, type, cost, and materials to be used.

The Architect also made additional visits to County Buildings in other states, which were serving counties of similar population.

The Architect made a study of the Washtenaw County population, past, present, and future growth. A study was also made of the requirements for each county department, each office, court room, future expansion, and other requirements.

When all these facts and particulars were assembled and presented to the entire body of Supervisors, the Architect was instructed to prepare plans for a 5-story building above sidewalk level and a full basement below the sidewalk level.

The Plans The plans completed on March 6, 1946, for the present building site contain the following accommodations:

Basement (Below the sidewalk and street level)

- Heating plant
- Storage vaults for all departments
- Building maintenance shop
- General storage rooms
- Some unassigned areas

Ground Floor (above sidewalk level)

- School Commissioner
- Department of Agriculture
- Health Department
- Drain Commissioner
- Department of Weights and Measures

This floor has a wide corridor in the center connecting Main Street and Fourth Avenue entrances on sidewalk level. This floor is also accessible at the Ann Atreet entrance at sidewalk level and at the Huron Street entrance from the landing at the main entrance.

First Floor

- County Clerk
- County Treasurer
- Recorder of Deeds
- County Auditor

This floor has the main entrance of the building on Huron Street with broad steps and terrace approach on the outside.

Second Floor

2 Main Circuit Court Rooms
2 Judges' Chambers and Secretaries
2 sets of Jury Rooms
2 sets of Bailiff Rooms
2 Conference Rooms
2 Court Reporter Rooms
2 Prison Cell Rooms
Clerk of the Court
Friend of the Court
Probation Officers
Prosecutor's Offices
Jury Assembly Room
Attorney's Lounge Room
Court Library

Third Floor

Probate Court Room
Probate Record Room
Probate Judge's Office
Probate Court work space
Probation Officer's Room
Juvenile Court Room
County Agent
2 Jury Deliberation Rooms
2 Jury Rooms for men
2 Jury Rooms for women
1 Press Room
1 Conference Room

Fourth Floor

Board of Supervisors' Assembly Room
Board of Supervisors' Lounge
2 Conference Rooms for Supervisors
Meeting Room for about 200
Hearing Room for about 30
Historic Room - space
Poor Commission - space
Women's Pension - space
Welfare Bureau - space
Red Cross Room - space

Fifth Floor and Roof

Fan rooms
Elevator machinery

Construction of Building

The structure is of fireproof materials. Exterior is of limestone. Windows and exterior doors are to be of bronze or aluminum. Interior floors are to be of terrazzo finish on lower floor and asphalt tile on other floors. Toilet accommodations are provided on all floors. There will be two elevators from basement to roof. Finish woodwork is to be of hard wood. Air conditioning is to be provided for the

Court Rooms and Assembly Rooms at least. Heating shall be by steam and radiators, in addition to air conditioning. Furniture and furnishings are to be complete, using metal equipment for shelving and for majority of desks and chairs. Court rooms and large Assembly rooms are to have indirect lighting. Acoustical materials are to be used for Assembly rooms, Court Rooms, large rooms, and corridors. Marble is to be used for lower corridors and for toilet rooms wainscoting.

Paper delivered at regular October meeting of Society, October 28, 1949.

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Note:

Vol. VI of Washtenaw Impressions consists of:

- No. 1, April, 1948, 7 pp.
- No. 2, May, 1948, 9 pp.
- No. 3, June, 1948, 5 pp.

Vol. VII consists of:

- No. 1, April, 1949, 8 pp., 1 map