

May/June 1978

**Courthouses**

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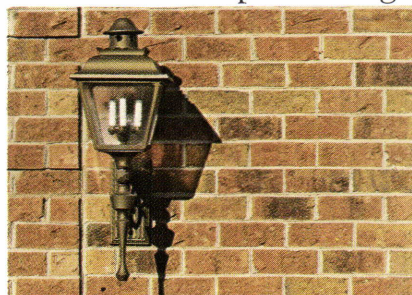




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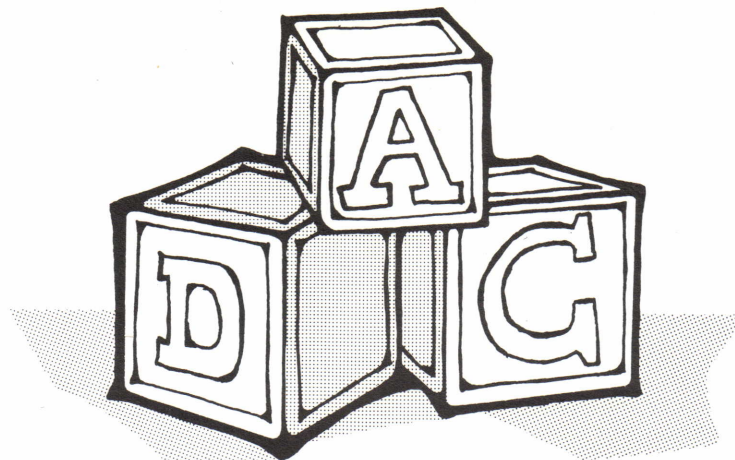
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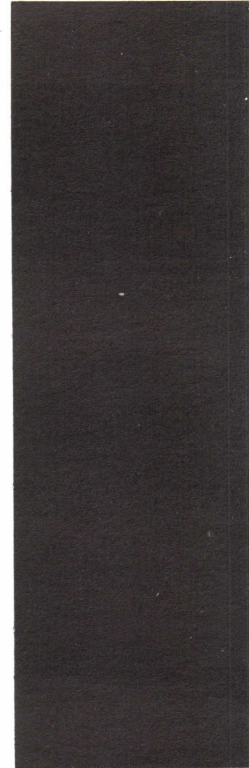


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Official Magazine of the  
North Carolina Chapter  
American Institute of Architects

May/June 1978

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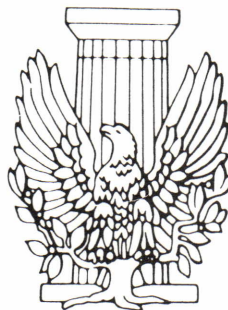
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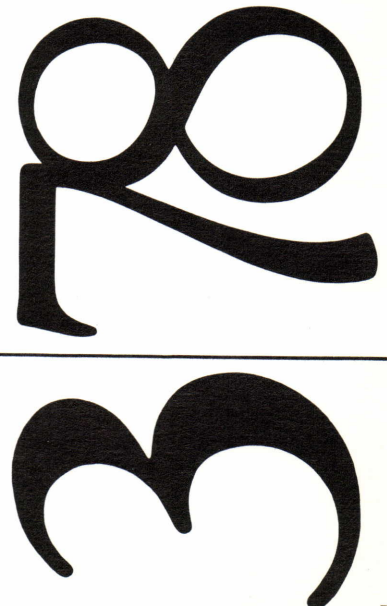
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## Letters

**Editor:** Congratulations on your first issue (*Regionalism*, 1/78), certainly one of the best such publications I've seen, with a rare focus on the quality of the region in its broader sense. I'm glad to see you haven't gone overboard on the sort of self-preening which so many "regionalists" undertake. It is all too easy to find unique qualities through over-researching one's own navel, and your issue skillfully avoids that pitfall.

I must confess, however, that I miss a determined exploration into the other-side-of-the-images. What was and is the nature of tobacco culture in the Carolinas that produces (or produced) those tobacco barns on pages seven and 20? Why is one, the most distant on page seven, covered with vines? And why is the Nag's Head house "a perfect response" to site and climate, as your caption states? One who knows Nag's Head knows that tides can sweep under the house,

hence its stilts. But such a caption assumes, it seems to me, an ingroup knowledge whereas the lessons from such a house might also include a warning *not* to build in such a known hazardous location. Nag's Head is notoriously vulnerable to hurricanes, as is much of the Carolinas' coast; so that any examination of indigenous architecture should recognize and point out the risks. That handsome house may, in fact, be less than a "perfect response" to its environment.

Some of the dialogue in "Regionalism Present" does suggest a unique role for your journal to play... Namely, to explore with decided vigor the nature of indigenous architecture, landscape architecture and vernacular building and do it with strict attention to the telling detail.

Too much guff, goo and blather get printed these days under the slogan "Indige-

nous." Is the slant-roof indigenous to the Carolinas but not to New England or Oregon? Does a church with wooden buttresses (page 25) resemble a North Carolina tobacco barn simply because it's also made of wood and has large shingled roof masses? How neat, how simplistic and, in the end, how trivial!

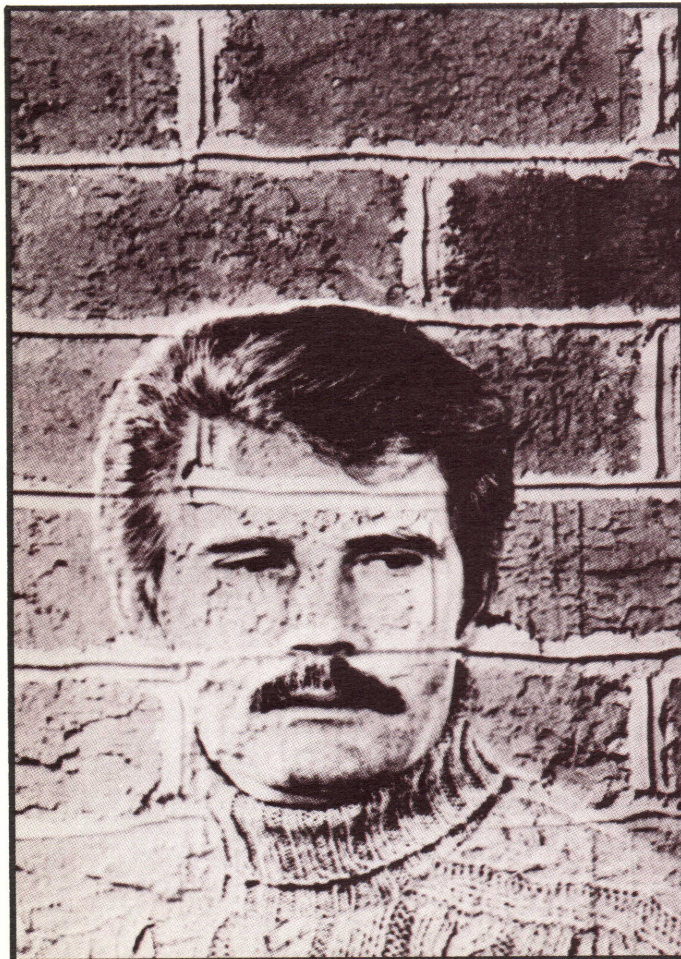
Using brick veneer buildings is hardly "regional," inasmuch as clay for brick is to be found in most of the 50 states. Yet, if my memory serves, one of the characteristics of the Carolinas North and South (especially the former) is the widespread use of red and salmon-colored brick in the piers and garden retaining walls of homes — on a far wider scale than one sees in the Midwest. On my trip through the Crescent, from Chapel Hill to Charlotte, I was impressed by this redbrick-wall presence, especially in houses 50 years old and older. Is this now disappearing? If so, is it

merely the increased cost of labor and the cheapness of the bulldozed site, or are other forces at work?

All these questions are intended to suggest that regionalism needs all the hard interpretation, all the factual backup, all the solid research you and others can invest in it. How have people succeeded uniquely to fitting themselves and their activities into this unique environment? On the detailed answers to such questions lies the future of the building and design professions. The best of luck to you in opening the subject with your first issue.

**Grady Clay**  
*Editor*  
*Landscape Architecture*  
*Louisville, Ky.*

(More letters, pages 11,39)



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# Frontispiece

By Ernest Wood, Editor

It may be a bit premature to say that North Carolina's courthouses are in a crisis. But if they aren't now, they will be soon. Caseloads of the courts are rapidly growing, as are the functions of county government. And when courts and government both are accommodated in the courthouse, something's often got to give. A new building (or separate buildings for the courts and for administration) may be the answer — especially since many courthouses have not been very well maintained. But the preservation movement is now declaring these structures, many of which would have been summarily torn down and replaced only a few years ago, candidates for landmark status. On top of it all, court reforms of recent years completely restructured the state's judicial system and created new needs for old buildings.

As a response to these problems, the state Administrative Office of the Courts in 1976 commissioned a study of the state's court facilities by a team from the N.C. State University School of Design. The team, headed by Robert P. Burns, professor of architecture, consisted of faculty members, research assistants and consultants. Each of the state's 100 courthouses was visited at least three times; the state Division of Archives and History provided stylistic and historic analyses of each courthouse; 15 architectural firms were engaged to conduct detailed on-site surveys to determine the condition of existing court facilities. A preliminary report of the project, *The North Carolina Courthouse Study*, was issued last fall and totaled nearly 1,000 pages in two volumes; the final report, of equal length, is expected in mid-summer.

This is not just an academic exercise. Neither is it just a specialized consulting job for another profession. Court-

houses may be the everyday domain of judges and lawyers, but as repositories of history and culture, as central buildings of many towns, as symbolic statements of the way we envision our government, they are important to us all. We therefore have devoted this issue of *North Carolina Architect* to courthouses, drawing in large part on *The North Carolina Courthouse Study*.

As the study itself and the articles in this magazine clearly suggest, the issues involved in courthouses are much greater than whether or not space, lighting, air conditioning and other functional requirements are adequate. Although such considerations are important, as they are in any building, we have only touched on those issues here. Such technical data is better treated in the study itself. (Copies may be ordered in advance of publication from *The North Carolina Courthouse Study*, School of Design, N.C. State University, Raleigh, N.C. 27650.) Instead, we have taken a broader, and, in some instances, more romantic view of courthouses than a technical study can.

We open our discussion, for example, with the way three Southern writers look at courthouses.

More objective looks at courthouses follow: their historical development and their needs in the future, along with detailed case studies and looks at specific issues — conservation, monuments and public art, interiors and symbolism.

As with any complicated issue, however, these subjects really cannot be separated. In her article on courthouse conservation, for example, Catherine Bishir tells us what has happened to some of the "former courthouses" that Mary Ann Lee cites in her stylistic history. In their article on monuments, Jerrold Hirsch and Doug Swaim



J. Weiland

On the Cover:  
Jackson County  
Courthouse,  
Sylva

provide some important insights into the role of the courthouse in the townscape, a role which nearly every other author — including the novelists — alludes to.

Courthouses provide a special kind of architectural problem. Each of the state's 100 counties has a courthouse; so we are examining existing buildings. But because very few of these are adequate, we also are examining new construction. How to accommodate future needs in these old buildings is a major point of *The North Carolina Courthouse Study*.

We may, in fact, be on the brink of a surge in courthouse construction. (Ms. Bishir notes that such construction does seem to come in waves; Professor Burns' analysis of existing buildings seems to indicate that many are so inadequate that such a movement is inevitable.)

But courthouse construction

and renovation are issues that are growing everywhere. "Keep an eye on courthouse work," announced the national architectural marketing newsletter *The Coxe Letter*, in its 1978 Outlook Issue last January. "Renovation, expansion and replacement of inadequate court facilities is becoming a priority in many cities and counties across the country."

The important point to remember, however, is that renovating, adding to or constructing a courthouse is not just a matter of filling space needs. And it's not just another construction job. The courthouse may be the single most important building in many communities. But even for those who do not live in the county seat, the courthouse is important. If ever a building reflected the aspirations and priorities of a people, the courthouse does. That's something that the governmental, legal and architectural professions must never forget. ■



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# There's a dramatic change taking place in North Carolina.

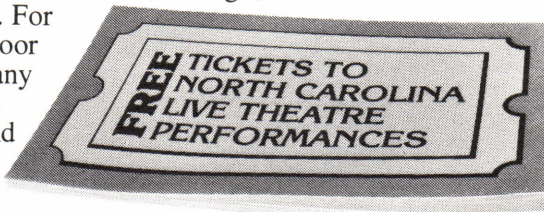
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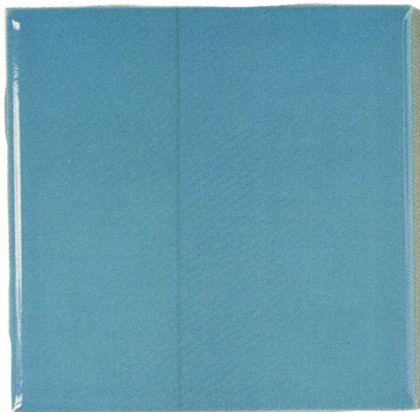
Now that you've seen blueberry, turn the page and we'll dazzle you with all the other luscious shades.



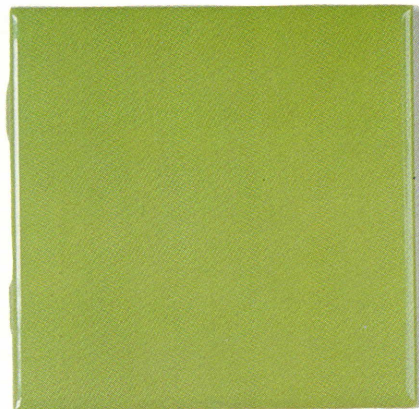
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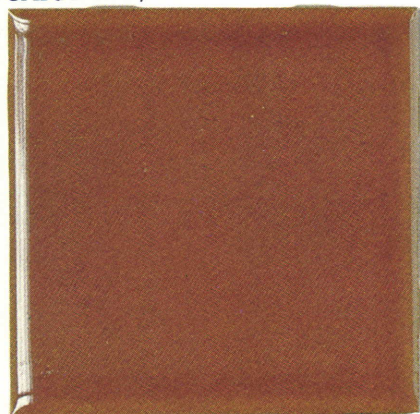
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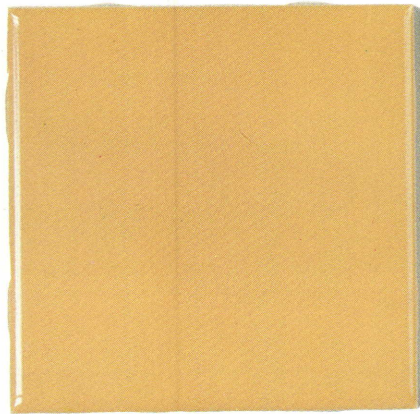
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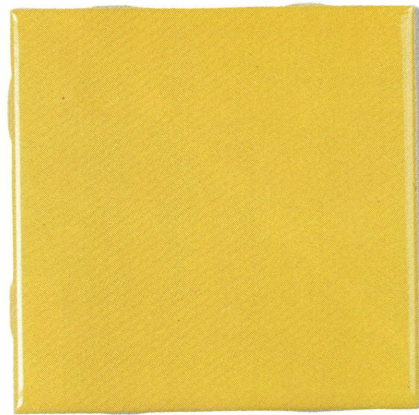
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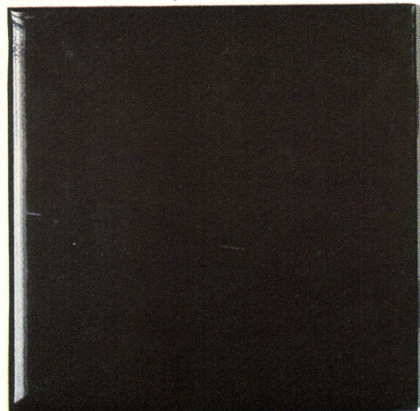
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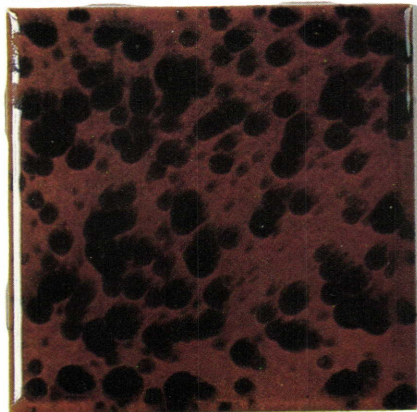
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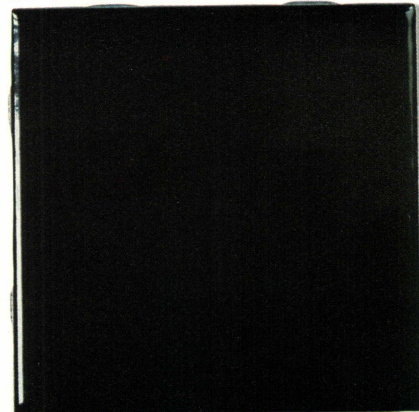
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**Editor:** Charlotte Brown's review (*North Carolina Architect* 2/78) of *Carolina Dwelling* (Volume 26 of the Student Publication of the School of Design) was in many ways an unfortunate exercise.

I say "unfortunate" for several reasons. First and foremost, although the review does justice to a select number of essays, it fails to capture the vitality of the collection as a whole — as a book with a purpose and, especially, as a publishing event. In addition, although many of Ms. Brown's critical observations can be defended from the deeper trenches of academia, others cannot and simply represent misreadings and/or the expression of her bias, which is that of the architectural historian.

As Ms. Brown notes, the purpose of *Carolina Dwelling* is to promote reflection on our vernacular landscape in order, ultimately, to conserve the particularity that is there. The

case for conserving the landscape is by no means a simple one. It cannot, and should not, be reduced to a single dimension. It will never, I suggest, be based on hard facts.

Eric Rosenburg's introductory essay suggests — without pretending to lay to rest the difficult issues he raises — what meaningful places are like. Ms. Brown notwithstanding, his discussion relies on a clearly stated theory of meaning that is not Jungian, although Jungian concepts are introduced as he elaborates his highly original scheme.

North Carolina's domestic vernacular architecture, which is treated as never before, though by no means exhaustively, in *Carolina Dwelling's* text, had its sources in two widely divergent cultural streams: conservative folk tradition usually provided basic house form; the popular styles provided the inspiration if not the letter of ornament. Ms. Brown rightfully

praises Michael Southern for his innovative look at the confluence of these streams, but she displays the traditional architectural historian's blindness for things folk when she completely ignores my essay on folk housing — a first attempt to categorize the folk forms found in the state.

Nor does Ms. Brown seem to realize the significance of Bernard Herman's challenge to Waterman's longstanding theory of the "Quaker plan." If Mr. Herman is correct — and his argument is perhaps the most "scholarly" in the book — we have been seeing things Quaker in things German for over 30 years!

Perhaps the most annoying aspect of Ms. Brown's review, however, is its tone. Thus, Davyd Hood's and Eliza Davidson's fine essays "denigrate" the other pieces because they lack footnotes. We are told they should have been excluded along with Steve

Arnaudin's unpretentious essay on Nags Head and, apparently, all the other essays that the reviewer chose to "simply ignore" because they deal in "simple clichés."

If Charlotte Brown had her wish, *Carolina Dwelling* would be a small, scholarly tome safe for use as a text in her courses in architectural history at Duke. Instead, it is an uneven but enthusiastic experiment in reading the vernacular landscape, capable of inspiring conservation activity in the non-university community. It is the most adventurous book of its type yet to be published *anywhere*. And the most amazing fact is that it was conceived and published by *architectural* students at the North Carolina State University School of Design. She didn't say it — so I must!

**Doug Swaim**

Editor, *Carolina Dwelling*  
Raleigh

(More letters, page 39)

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# Courthouses South

Three Southern novelists reveal ways we see the region's courthouses

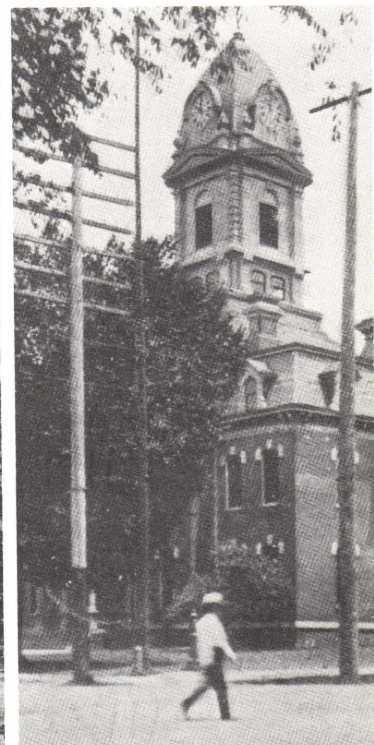
He rolled them to another muddy crossing and turned them around with a clumsy churning of wheels, then headed back to the macadam.

"This is Main Street," he announced as they gained the pavement. "At least that's hard-topped. Maybe the folks will listen to spending money to pave Jackson Street yonder at the courthouse, maybe Creek Street where I live." They clattered across a wooden-floored, iron-railed bridge. "That's Boot Heel Creek. Ask why it's named that, I can't tell you, nor I never found nobody that could."

beyond. A cross street duplicated the arrangement at right angles. Buildings clamped together all the way around. Drumm drove past the courthouse, left and left again, back the way he had come.

"Yonder's the bank on that corner," he said. "That's Jackson Street, the courthouse kind of ties Jackson and Main in a knot."

*From Not at These Hands by Manly Wade Wellman  
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Courtesy Stephen E. Massengill

They moved between shops, wooden or brick or cement block, some huddled in rows, some standing separated. "Telephone company," said Drumm, nodding to show where. "Evans' store. Yonder on that there street's the Baptist Church ..."

"I'll swing around the square and back," Drumm declared.

Ahead rose the courthouse, a lofty window-flecked crag of yellow-painted brick. From the jug-shaped cupola gazed a clock dial, its hands indicating a quarter to two. The courthouse stood island-like in a square, around which Main Street divided itself into two bracket-shaped lanes that joined and continued as one street

Macedon, like most of the Southern towns founded during that part of the nineteenth century, is built around the town square. It is a pleasant square, with elms and magnolias and an old watering trough that drips a trickle of coolness through even the hottest day, and in its center stands the courthouse. The courthouse is built in the form of an Attic temple, with fourteen Ionic columns and a marble sculpture of the state's palmetto seal, and before it, near the shaded pitted place where the countrymen and more sporting citizens pitch horseshoes on Saturday afternoons, is the bronze statue of the town's founder and principal hero of the Civil War: Cincinnatus Quintius Legendre. He stands with one foot forward, the metal folds of his cloak swirling as in a storm, brooding with fixed and rigid



eyes, and gray, as from the dust of a long campaign, with the accumulated droppings of many generations of birds.

Every Fourth of July, before the public speaking and the thirteen skyrockets that follow (one for each of the original colonies) the ladies of Macedon hang a wreath about his neck; but now, though it was March, David noticed that last year's wreath was still there: all the blossoms fallen and the twisted wire skeleton naked and red with rust. He lingered on the curb, still conscious of his New York clothes, trying to decide if anything had changed. Nothing, he concluded, had. It seemed as if even the mules and horses tethered to the hitching posts, like the two old men playing checkers before the hardware store, were the identical ones he had passed on his way to the station the day he went away . . . It was beginning to grow dark, earth and sky held in the subtle suspension of fading light, the courthouse clock and the shingled spire of the Episcopal church becoming like black cutouts pasted on the sky. A Negro woman passed . . . and David realized, watching old Cincinnatus recede into the dusk, that these were the deep unremembered things he had never really forgotten.

*Reprinted with the permission of Charles Scribner's Sons from **Courthouse Square** by Hamilton Basso, copyright 1936 Charles Scribner's Sons.*

The Maycomb County courthouse was faintly reminiscent of Arlington in one respect: the concrete pillars supporting its south roof were too heavy for their light burden. The pillars were all that remained standing when the original courthouse burned in 1856. Another courthouse was built around them. It is better to say, built in spite of them. But for the south porch, the Maycomb County courthouse was early Victorian, presenting an unoffensive vista when seen from the north. From the other side, however, Greek revival columns clashed with a big nineteenth-century clock tower housing a rusty unreliable instrument, a view indicating a people determined to preserve every physical scrap of the past.

To reach the courtroom, on the second floor, one passed sundry sunless county cubbyholes: the tax assessor, the tax collector, the county clerk, the county solicitor, the circuit clerk, the judge of probate lived in cool dim hutches that smelled of decaying record books mingled with old damp cement and stale urine. It was necessary

to turn on the lights in the daytime; there was always a film of dust on the rough floorboards. The inhabitants of these offices were creatures of their environment: little gray-faced men, they seemed untouched by wind or sun.

We knew there was a crowd, but we had not bargained for the multitudes in the first-floor hallway. I got separated from Jem and Dill, but made my way toward the wall by the stairwell, knowing Jem would come for me eventually. I found myself in the middle of the Idler's Club and made myself as unobtrusive as



Courtesy Robert M. Topkins

From Left: Cherokee, Union and Cleveland County Courthouses, depicted in old postcards

possible. This was a group of white-shirted, khaki-trousered, suspended old men who had spent their lives doing nothing and passed their twilight days doing same on pine benches under the live oaks on the square. Attentive critics of courthouse business, Atticus said they knew as much as the Chief Justice, from long years of observation. Normally, they were the court's only spectators, and today they seemed resentful of the interruption of their comfortable routine.

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# Courthouse Styles

Recurring classicism and colonial revival highlight two centuries of development



By Mary Ann Lee

The county courthouse in North Carolina is perhaps the most significant single type of governmental building: throughout most of the state's history, North Carolina has been an overwhelmingly rural place, where the county, not the town, is a dominant center of power and law. As a symbolic force and a functional center for community activity, the courthouse is without peer in North Carolina. The architecture of the courthouse reflects this importance: the courthouse is frequently the grandest, most sophisticated, and best constructed building of its era in the county. Centrally located, often distinguished by a cupola or dome and an imposing portico, the courthouse expresses in forceful terms its pivotal role in the community.

Viewed as a group, the courthouses of North Carolina from the pre-Revolutionary period to the 1930s display remarkable continuity. Throughout the entire group runs a unifying thread of classicism, restraint, and dignity appropriate to the role of the courthouse as a "temple of justice." Variations of this character do appear, however, from period to period, region to region and architect to architect, creating identifiable clusters of related buildings.

In addition, the courthouse setting is as integral a part of the courthouse as its architecture and contributes to the legibility of the building's functional and symbolic roles. Traditionally, the courthouse has been placed to face or to be the centerpiece of a central open space. The most common placement in North Carolina, however, is the courthouse set in a central square, so as to be seen and approached from all sides. Shaded with mature trees and decorated with monuments to the county's history and heroes, the courthouse square is the hub of the county seat. Other sitings have been employed, such as the courthouse set in a circular plot with the town's

Top: Chowan County Courthouse, Edenton

Above: Courtroom, Chowan County



Far Right:  
Perquimans  
County  
Courthouse

Right:  
Northampton  
County Clerk's  
Office



major roads radiating from the central axis, or the courthouse located with its facade serving as the focal point of a vista created by a lawn or main road. This ensemble of the courthouse and its square presents one of the most traditional and prevalent features of North Carolina's architectural heritage and has been the stage of important social and political events.

North Carolina's first courthouses were small frame or log structures which literally housed the court. These temporary buildings, none of which survives, were erected in the designated site of the county seat, and were often the first structures of the newly created town. Clustered around the modest courthouse were ancillary buildings, such as the jail, sheriff's office, and clerk's office. The Northampton County courthouse square still retains its 1831 clerk's office and the 1847 Union County jail survives adjacent to the courthouse square.

The threat of fire or theft of important records necessitated the eventual replacement of these frame buildings by more permanent structures, often of masonry construction. North Carolina's oldest county courthouse, the Chowan County Courthouse, is a brick building erected in 1767. A National Historic Landmark, it is the earliest surviving public building in the state and is among the finest Georgian style public buildings in the South.

The Chowan County Courthouse displays the proportions and detail typical of English Palladian architecture of the colonial period. The building presents a balanced three-part facade dominated by a pedimented center pavilion. A well-preserved courtroom occupies most of the first floor, while the second floor contains a large, fully paneled, assembly hall. The siting of the courthouse is also drawn from English precedents; in its foreground is the Edenton town green, which is framed by many of Edenton's earliest houses.

A product of one of the most prosperous and important colonial counties, the Chowan County Courthouse epitomizes early courthouses in its use of brick, conservative classical detail, and almost domestic scale.

These characteristics, along with the building's impressive siting and its three-stage cupola, also established a precedent for courthouse design in North Carolina that persisted throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The only other surviving eighteenth century courthouse is the former Beaufort County Courthouse (1786), a small, rectangular two-story brick building which has undergone extensive renovations.

Of considerably later date and different stylistic detail, the Perquimans County Courthouse (1825) and the former Gates County Courthouse (1836) are somewhat akin in appearance and plan to that of Chowan. Both are of brick, two stories tall with three-part facades and center pediments. Originally the courtrooms were on the first floor, as is the courtroom at the Chowan County Courthouse. The Gates County and the Perquimans County courthouses are the only surviving examples of the Federal style in courthouse architecture in the state.

The academic and formal character initiated in the Chowan County Courthouse found its most forceful expression in the Greek Revival style courthouses of the mid-1800's. The temple-form building, the most literal interpretation of the "temple of justice" concept, was the dominant type in Greek Revival courthouse design from the 1830s to the 1850s. The former Orange County Courthouse, designed by Captain John Berry in 1845, illustrates the temple-form in its rectangular shape and gable end tetrastyle Doric portico. The Northampton



County Courthouse (1859) and the Rowan County Courthouse (1855) are other notable examples of the temple-form building which convey a sense of monumentality through their imposing porticoes and simple massing (page 20).

The temple-form was an appropriate model for a public building placed in a central square. The regularity of the elevations presents a symmetrical composition on all sides, and the prostyle portico, often surmounted by a cupola, announces the principal entrance to the building.



JoAnn Sieburg-Baker



N. C. Courthouse Study

Although the temple-form was the dominant expression of the Greek Revival style in courthouse architecture in North Carolina, other formulae also were employed. The Polk County Courthouse (1859) is a T-shaped Greek Revival building and the former Burke County Courthouse (1833) is cubical in shape with matching pedimented porticoes.

While exterior styles changed, the interior plan of the courthouse remained consistent throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A standard layout, consisting of first floor offices divided by a wide center hall or cross halls and the courtroom occupying the second floor, underwent minor alterations. The courtroom arrangement is also constant throughout the evolution of the building: judge's bench, jury box, and court officials are separated from the spectators by a simple balustrade. The wall opposite the bench contains public exits while the side walls are pierced by tall windows. During the Greek Revival period, decoration of the chambers was restricted to simple symmetrically molded door and window surrounds and turned balusters supporting the balustrade.

During the late nineteenth century, in reaction to the formality of the Greek Revival style, more varied outlets were sought in historical and romantic styles in public as well as domestic architecture. Gothic, Romanesque, Italian, and French modes were revived and combined in an eclectic manner. First demonstrated in the former Caswell County Courthouse (1858-1861), an exuberant hybrid of Italian, Romanesque, and Classical themes, these picturesque styles began to exert a wide influence on North Carolina courthouses during the late 1800s. The Transylvania County (1873) and the Martin County (1885) courthouses feature the arched windows

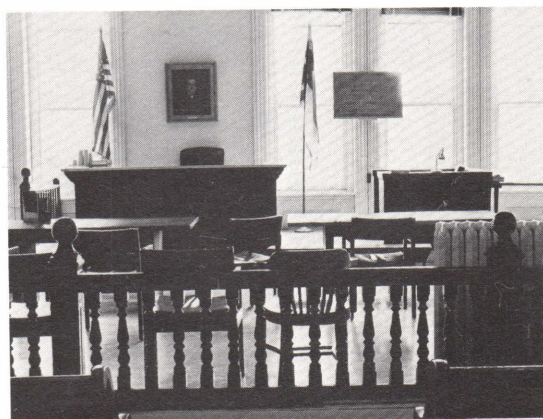


Far Left: Orange County Courthouse

Bottom Left: Transylvania County Courthouse

Left: New Hanover County Courthouse

Bottom: Courtroom, New Hanover County



N. C. Courthouse Study

and central square towers of the Italianate style. A pronounced use of surface ornament is evident in the decorative brickwork; however, the plans are still symmetrical and the scale conservative.

The liberal borrowing and combining of revival motifs produced some elaborate hybrids of Victorian styles. The former Cabarrus County Courthouse (1876) and the former Union County Courthouse (1886) are enlivened by complexity of form and an abundance of shadow-casting ornament. The courthouses' bold facades and monumental scale signaled a departure from the sober temples of justice of antebellum courthouses.

This stylistic license continued into the 1890s, and the





New Hanover County Courthouse (1892) represents the epitome of Victorian eclecticism. One of the most robust examples of Victorian public architecture in the South, the New Hanover County Courthouse's interior plan retained the regularity and accessibility of earlier and less complex forms; however, a more decorative treatment of woodwork in the forms of spindlework and applied trim on doors, benches, and balustrades continued the ornamental theme of the exterior.

Concurrent with — and finally outlasting — the flamboyance of High Victorianism was the persistent classical strain, however. Buildings such as the Pasquotank County Courthouse (1882) and the Chatham County Courthouse (1881) reveal a strong reliance on classical models. The Bertie County Courthouse (1889) is characterized by a return to the simple rectangular form and dominant portico of its temple-form predecessors.

By early twentieth century, the Neo-Classical Revival style expressed a renaissance of classicism, which was to become the uncontested courthouse style in North Carolina for over 40 years. This reemergence of a conservative classical vocabulary in architecture was the result of a reaction against Victorian eclecticism and a reassertion of the "temple of justice" concept.

The courthouses of the Neo-Classical Revival are large in scale and usually richer in interior detail than earlier ones. While brick was the predominant building material of the nineteenth century courthouse, stone was used as a facing material during the early twentieth century, and the buildings in general are broader and less complex in massing than Victorian counterparts. Within the Neo-Classical Revival style a clear progression can be perceived.

The early Neo-Classical Revival style, from the 1890s to the 1910s, is characterized by a vernacular interpretation of classical forms and by a retention of Victorian elements. The scale is generally small and the massing complex. A notable group of Early Neo-Classical Revival courthouses was designed by Charlotte architect Oliver Wheeler and his associates Runge, Stern, and Schwenn. Between 1899 and 1913 they planned nine courthouses, mainly in the western

counties. These buildings reveal little variation upon a standard theme, and the repetition within the region established a strong and uniform concept of what a courthouse's appearance should be (pages 22, 23). The former Iredell County Courthouse (1899) is characteristic of Wheeler's Beaux-Arts idiom. Its complex and ornate tan brick facade is fronted by an Ionic portico and an oblong mansard cupola crowns the roof.

Toward the end of the first decade of the twentieth century a more mature and assured handling of the Neo-Classical Revival style emerged; the courthouses of this era are larger in scale, with simple axial massing, a decoration limited to cupolas and dominating porticoes. The Jackson County Courthouse's (1914) well-proportioned portico and dramatically scaled cupola, crowned by a statue of Blind Justice, reveal a return to a monumentality achieved through simplicity of form and towering scale. The courthouse's majestic siting atop Sylva's loftiest hill contributes to the building's visual impact (see cover).

The architectural firm of Milburn and Heister of Washington, D. C. exerted a pervasive influence on courthouse design from the 1890s to the 1920s in North Carolina by directing courthouse architecture toward an increasingly academic and sophisticated character. This prolific firm produced more than 16 county courthouses throughout the state. The Wayne County Courthouse (1913) is representative of Milburn and Heister's courthouse style: the tan brick wall surfaces are quiet, the form simple, and monumentality is achieved through heroic porticoes sheltering the three principal entrances in a park-like setting.

The prosperous decade of the 1920s produced 16 county courthouses which embody the formal and academic character of the mature Neo-Classical Revival style.



Above, Left:  
Chatham County  
Courthouse

Left: Wayne  
County  
Courthouse

Below: Alamance  
County  
Courthouse

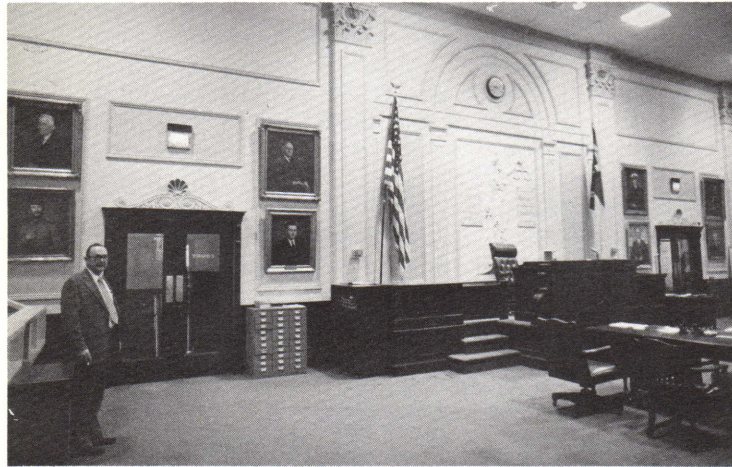






Right: Haywood County Courthouse

Below: Courtroom, Haywood County



Right: Buncombe County Courthouse



Overall, courthouses of this period are characterized by quiet facades, strict symmetry, lavishly decorated interiors, and simple skylines. Cupolas are generally absent with the conspicuous exception of the Cherokee County Courthouse (1926), designed by James Baldwin.

A leading architect of the period was Harry Barton (1876-1936) of Greensboro. Barton influenced courthouse design in the 1920s as Milburn and Heister did in the 1900s and 1910s. Barton worked in a suave Beaux-Arts mode, and his buildings, such as the Alamance County (1924), Johnston County (1921), and Guilford County (1918) courthouses display an elegant use of stone and wood, simplicity of composition, and thorough integration of classical motifs in handsome tile, wood, and plaster work throughout the interior.

In general, the courthouses of this period combine Roman and Greek forms and often the courtrooms borrow French and Italian motifs. The courtrooms of the mature Neo-Classical Revival period are particularly noteworthy; they are the most handsome of any era. The courtroom, the largest chamber of the building, is the focus of interior decoration. The Catawba County Courthouse (1924) and the Haywood County Courthouse (1932), designed by Willard G. Rogers, have courtrooms sumptuously decorated with plaster and woodwork employing many allegorical symbols of justice and sophisticated, classical architectonic forms. Frequently the solemn nature of the chamber is heightened by the display of the Ten Commandments or Blind Justice holding the Scales of Justice.

The Nash County Courthouse, designed by J. C. Stout in 1921, stands out as the only example of Colonial Revival style architecture in courthouses of this period, even though this style, based on America's own architectural heritage, was popular in institutional and domestic architecture in the 1910s and 1920s. The Nash County Courthouse design is inspired by the Federal style, and it exhibits delicate Roman and Adamesque ornament typical of this early nineteenth century style.

Milburn and Heister's Buncombe County Courthouse (1927) is a radical departure from the conventional courthouse of this period. Set in an urban context, it is the state's first multistory courthouse, rising 17 stories above Asheville's Pack Square. The building is an interesting solution to the design of highrise buildings, using setbacks and an overlay of classical ornament to enliven the vertical composition. Inside, the characteristically liberal use of fine materials and classical motifs is evident in the splendid lobby and various courtrooms. The Buncombe County Courthouse prefigures modern courthouse architecture in its interior compartmentalization of spaces to serve the ever-expanding bureaucratic functions of county government. This was Milburn and Heister's last courthouse in North Carolina, completed a year after Milburn's death in 1926, and its distinction as the loftiest North Carolina courthouse is unrivaled.

By the end of the 1920s there was a growing reaction to the historical eclecticism of architectural design. A trend toward modern theories of abstraction and



functionalism began to be manifested in the reduction of form and ornament, although still in the classical tradition. The Caldwell County Courthouse (1905, remodeled 1929), exemplifies the flattening and restriction of ornament and the simplicity of form influenced by contemporary progressive architecture.

The Person County Courthouse (1930), designed by Greensboro architect Charles C. Hartman, combines the Neo-Classical Revival and modernistic styles. The form and ornament are classical, but the building's vertical emphasis, and its rectilinear and geometric trim indicate a transition to contemporary principles of basics of shape, plane and texture.

The modern aesthetic is more pronounced in the Lenoir County Courthouse (1939), designed by A. Mitchell Wooten and John J. Rowland, still classical in form, yet nearly devoid of traditional ornament. The dramatic, clean exterior is fronted by a tetrastyle *in antis* portico of square, fluted piers suggesting the conventional porticoes of Neo-Classical Revival models. Yet instead of traditional ornament, a modicum of flattened, geometric detail is used in this rare and important example of the sleek, modernistic style. The interior details are also of a streamlined design. The standard cross hall plan is used, but fluid lines and strictly geometric details create a bold, modern appearance.

The Lenoir County Courthouse was built under the guidance of the Works Progress Administration, but its modern design was the exception rather than the rule in courthouse architecture of this federal program. A return to traditional styles and conservative scale is evident in the Greene County Courthouse (1935), whose severe classical facade and sparse detail convey a monumental impact. "Colonial" styled courthouses became popular in the 1930s. The Pender County Courthouse (1938) and the Jones County Courthouse (1938), both WPA projects, exhibit Georgian Revival proportions and detail. The colonial decorative theme is evident in the interior trim, and the scale and interpretation of colonial forms is academic, as opposed to later bastardized versions of colonial models.



Left: Lenoir County Courthouse

The evolution of courthouse architecture in North Carolina up to World War II represents a complete stylistic cycle from Chowan County Courthouse's Georgian facade to Jones County Courthouse's colonial revival design. Throughout the various interpretations of the classical vocabulary, the courthouse's architecture perpetuated the building's impact and image. The courthouses built prior to World War II were the temples of justice. Despite the brief stylistic digression of the late nineteenth century, in which the Victorian courthouse was altered stylistically (but not functionally or symbolically), the concept was constant. The courthouse remained the central and inspiring focus of the community. This concept has served to maintain many early courthouses despite the state's growth and despite changes in government and the judicial system. ■



Above: Courtroom, Pender County Courthouse



Above: Pender County Courthouse

**Mary Ann Lee**, working as a consultant to the N. C. Division of Archives and History, recently completed a group nomination of approximately 60 North Carolina courthouses to the National Register of Historic Places. A graduate of Duke University with a B.A. in art history, she plans to enter the University of Virginia in the fall to study for her masters in architectural history.



## Case Study

# Northampton County

A well preserved "Temple of Justice"

Jackson, the county seat of Northampton County, is tiny. It has only 780 residents. But, then, the largest town in the county, Garysburg, has only 1,520; and the entire county has only 23,100. So the tiny Northampton County Courthouse, with its single courtroom serving both district and superior courts, is properly in scale.

But many other things about the courthouse seem proper, as well. This county, located in the Roanoke River Valley on the Virginia border in northeastern North Carolina, is an area historically known for large plantations. The white, painted brick courthouse is an exceptional example of the columned, Greek Revival "temple of justice." It sits in a well shaded square (which it shares with four smaller buildings) at Jackson's main intersection, extending its two banks of stairs to the sidewalk in a gesture to the public of their welcome participation in the judicial process. Even its additions, made in 1939 to the rear of the building (and giving it a T shape), are sympathetically scaled to the small structure.

This is only the county's second courthouse. The first, constructed in 1741, was a wooden structure. In 1831 a separate, fireproof structure which still stands was



N. C. Division of Archives and History

Left: Courthouse steps gesture welcome

Below, left: Courtroom, remodeled in 1939

Below, right: Corridor, "functional" in appearance

constructed beside the courthouse to house the clerk and register of deeds. (According to local tradition, militia troops were quartered in that building during Nat Turner's slave insurrection in neighboring Southampton County, Va., in August 1831. The people of Northampton supposedly were thrown into a panic when a militiaman accidentally fired his musket, a prearranged signal that the Turner insurgents were moving on Jackson.)

In 1859, the courthouse apparently was demolished

and the present structure erected on the site. Henry King Burgwyn traditionally has been credited as architect. In 1939, through the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, major renovations of the 1859 courthouse were made. A. Mitchell Wooten of Kinston, who in the same year designed the Lenoir County Courthouse, was architect for the renovations and addition.

Aside from the addition and two small doors cut on either side of the original, single entrance, that renovation left

the exterior of the 1859 building essentially unchanged. Inside, however, the courtroom today is characterized by elaborate classical ornamentation which dates from the renovation. Offices in the rear addition and basement are functional in appearance.

The Northampton County Courthouse nevertheless is a well preserved example of Greek Revival public architecture. As such, it was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.



N. C. Courthouse Study



# Case Study

## Davie County

A successful addition to an old building



Left: Courthouse is adjacent to town square

Below: Old and new relate in scale and materials

Bottom: Juncture of two buildings

Like many North Carolina courthouses, the Davie County Courthouse in Mocksville has seen a steady evolution. The first 1839 courthouse (which had a ground floor central hallway that reportedly was "a temptation to spirited horse-men" to gallop through) was replaced in 1909. It later served as a community center and library until, in 1922, it was torn down with the paving of Main Street. Meanwhile, the second, 1909 structure in 1916 was severely damaged by fire; repair and renovation, costing \$29,000, added an ornate, square clock cupola to the Neo-Classical Revival structure. A final renovation in 1971 left little of the original fabric to the old structure; but it provided an unusually successful modern addition to the courthouse.

The main courthouse facade presents a central four-columned recessed Corinthian portico. A similar portico also frames the rear entrance. Double-bay projecting wings define the corners of the rectangular building. New single pane windows have replaced the original sash type, giving the facade something of a severe appearance. Glass and metal doors also have been installed. The most important change, however, is the courthouse addition.

The addition is important, in part, because while it clearly

functions as part of the courthouse its appearance does not disrupt the old building. It follows the philosophy that an addition should be a contrast to an existing structure.

Designed by Williams and Associates of Matthews, the addition is basically a three level box connected to the main building by only a narrow public circulation element which bridges the small gap between the two structures. Each floor is designed to be occupied by functions which correspond to existing functions in the old building. The basement houses the county accountant's offices, the Highway Patrol and a boiler room; the ground floor offers quarters for the Register of Deeds and the Clerk of Court; and the second floor contains support services for the courtroom.

Although housing the same number of levels as the courthouse, the addition has been limited in scale in two ways: embellishing ornamentation which could increase its apparent height has been omitted and its narrower dimension has been presented to the street. A yellow brick facing similar to that of the original courthouse has been employed; but horizontal bands of concrete and the bridge connection of glass and concrete allow the addition to stand on its own.





## Case Study

# Six Courthouses

These look-alike court-houses are not simply a coincidence



The courthouse square placed in the center of a town's main intersection is a common sight in North Carolina. But in some of the state's counties, the courthouse itself looks a lot like those elsewhere.

This is more than mere similarity of detailing within an architectural style. Some counties, impressed by their neighbors' courthouses, hired the same architects as their neighbors had and directed them to reproduce their plans. Wilkes County, for example, in 1902 appointed a committee to visit Scotland and Iredell Counties to examine their courthouses, designed by Charlotte architect Oliver Wheeler. "We think," the committee reported after the visit, "this courthouse in point of size, convenience and price decidedly best suited to our ability and wants . . . we are reliably informed (that it is) the best and most convenient cheap courthouse in the state." The county subsequently hired not only Wheeler to design the building but the same

Left: Stokes County



Randolph County



Ashe County



Charlotte contractor to construct the courthouse who had built those in the counties they had visited.

Wheeler and his associates Runge, Stern and Schwen, in total produced a series of eight courthouses that are nearly identical. Most are in the western counties.

Five are still in use: Wilkes (1902), Stokes (1904), Ashe (1904), Randolph (1908) and Avery (1903). One, Iredell (1899), still stands but has been replaced by a new building (1972, designed by Adams and Pegram of Statesville.) Classrooms and offices for Mitchell Community College now occupy the old building. Two have been demolished. Scotland (1901) was replaced in 1964 by a courthouse designed by Jordan, Snowden and McVicker of Laurinburg and Watauga (1904) was replaced in 1968 by a courthouse designed by Coffey and Annas of Lenoir.



Right: *Iredell County*



*Wilkes County*



*Avery County*



# Courthouse Planning

## Cumberland County

A new courthouse is a monument to perseverance as well as justice

By Dan MacMillan, AIA

Since its formation in 1754, Cumberland County has built six courthouses. The last one was completed in 1926 for a rural population of 35,000 people; the newest courthouse, currently being completed and scheduled to be occupied in mid-July, will serve a population of 275,000 in the fastest growing metropolitan area in the Southeast. Growth, then — and its concomitant competition for funds between the government agencies that serve the increasing population — was the prime political and architectural consideration which ultimately determined that the courthouse would be built and what it would be.

We made our first study in 1965 because one county commissioner had the vision to know that court reform, then being phased in across the state, would require radically different facilities than those we had. For the next five years, we studied make-shift alteration and addition schemes to the old courthouse. As the pressure of population and caseload mounted, the commissioners stuffed offices and courtrooms into adjoining store buildings. Visiting judges complained of facilities; editorials appeared in the newspaper.

By 1970, we were convinced that these schemes for a courthouse annex on a three acre site would never meet the county's needs. Our study of the old courthouse established a pattern of dispersal of such county functions as welfare, schools, health and planning; and we felt a three building complex would distill remaining functions to their purest form. Such a plan would also allow each building to be scheduled for construction as funds became available.

Instead of the traditional courthouse, therefore, we proposed a complex of three



Cumberland County Courthouse under construction

buildings: law enforcement, courts and administration.

Our proposal was accepted in principle and by 1972, the first phase, the Law Enforcement Center (housing jointly such city and county functions as police, sheriff, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board and the jail) was under construction. In 1975, after almost 10 years of study, we started design of the courthouse.

Designing a courthouse is a unique experience. Decisions are made in public meetings and mild disagreements appear enlarged on the evening news. Tradition is superior to logic in this ancient institution. The clerk's duties have changed little in 300 years; but today's caseloads generate duplications of work and require complex communications between courtrooms and supporting facilities. One thinks of the courtroom as the dramatic symbol of mankind's struggle for justice; but the judge's mandates are

administered in a hundred 10 x 10 offices inhabited by probation officers, district attorneys and others.

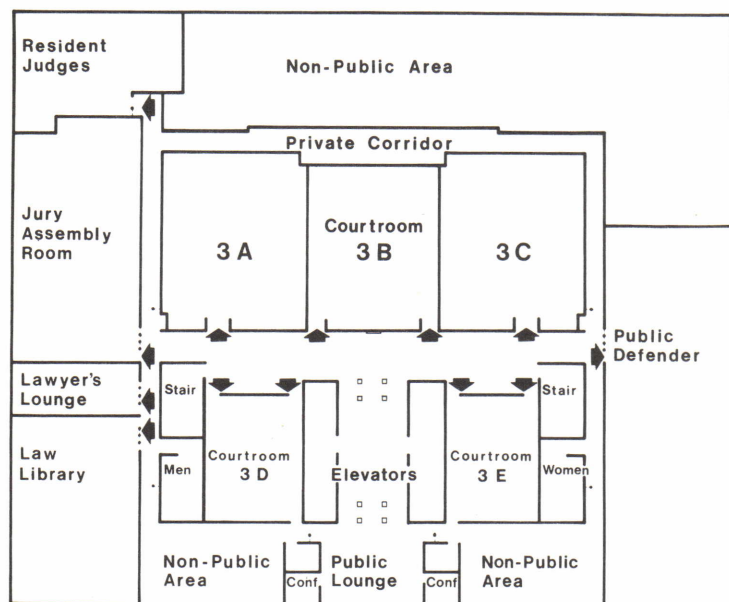
An experienced lawyer warned me not to get caught up in the idealized picture of Blind Justice. "It's a process," he said cynically, "not too different from a turkey plant." That image of turkeys slaughtered and processed en masse stuck in my mind as I sat in countless courtrooms over the years observing speeders and bad check writers parade in lines before harried judges. We felt the overpowering numbers of people caught up in the system were entitled to be treated with dignity as well as efficiency. This conviction set the theme. With our budget (\$30 per square foot) we had to restrict the symbols and concentrate on a no-nonsense office building approach, however. Courtrooms and public corridors do exceed minimum finishes; but most of the interiors are "dignified" vinyl covered sheet rock and carpet.

Courthouse planning information is available now, but it was hard to find in 1965. For theoretical principles, we read Judge Fort in *Judicature* and followed Aaron Green in the *AIA Journal*. Courthouse visits furnished largely negative examples; but publication of the Chicago circuit and federal court buildings by Skidmore Owings and Merrill and Mies van der Rohe in the late 1960's showed clearly a new direction. This arrangement of interior courtrooms connected by private corridors to perimeter jury rooms and judges' chamber made sense to us but was accepted less enthusiastically by our Advisory Committee. The committee agreed with the separation but preferred access to private areas directly from the courtroom instead of via corridors. The final corridor plan, however, provides a clarity rarely seen in large buildings.

Courtrooms are still the principal business places of courthouses. We proposed a

N. C. Courthouse Study





Third Floor

diagonal arrangement, seating the judge in a corner to save space and give him a more direct view of all the proceedings, but we could not sell the idea except in the small courtrooms where the traditional layout would not fit. An acoustical consultant provided speech clarity without microphones, and each judge has his own thermostat. Security was considered, but as the bombings of the sixties receded, we deleted steel plates from the judges' benches and postponed television cameras and door controls.

How well will the courthouse, work? We do not know yet, of course, but the principles are correct. The front door-back door problem is compounded in this building by the split level site. Rear entry is well defined from the parking area, but the connection to the elevators is obscure and confusing. Elevator lobbies are in the wrong place for the *High Rise Code*, but the code's adoption caught us in the middle of design and we

could not change the lobbies without starting over. The courtrooms probably could have been smaller, saving space and money, if the 40 foot module were reduced to 36 feet.

On the other hand, the courthouse's plaza will be a major public space and will play an important role in revitalizing downtown Fayetteville. The building includes room for still more growth: four 35,000 square foot floors are finished, two more are constructed but left as shells and the structure will allow for more floors to be added. The old courthouse may be saved: it temporarily houses county administration now, but we are studying the possibility of making it a joint city/county administrative center.

And the new courthouse is there, completed. Looking back over all those years, that is an accomplishment in itself. ■

**Dan MacMillan** is a principal of MacMillan and MacMillan, a Fayetteville architectural firm.

## By Judge E. Maurice Braswell

Necessity spawned the drive for a new courthouse for Cumberland County. The space available in the 1926 building had become functionally obsolete long before 1975 when the \$7 million bond issue for the new construction finally was passed. Economic growth, a population increase, a rise in violence in our culture and an eagerness to litigate at the drop of the hat what years ago would never have left the sanctity of a private conference overtaxed to the breaking point the ability of the two existing courtrooms. To accommodate the functions of the administration of justice in this new generation, more physical space was essential.

In May 1968, I, as the Senior Resident Judge of the Superior Court, made a study of space needs in comparison with volume of court business. The clerk and several members of the Bar helped. (We were unaware that the architect was working simultaneously on the same problem.) Upon completion of the study, we presented an explanatory pamphlet on our findings to the Board of County Commissioners. Although warmly received, the idea of a new courthouse was turned down. The reason given was lack of money — and, "It's not politically right for a bond issue just now." A bond issue for another project recently had been defeated and the commissioners thought this, too, would be defeated. The skirmish was lost, but the battle continued.

We were persistent in our advocacy of a new courthouse; this was a need that would not go away. Meanwhile, the city fire marshal condemned the old courthouse. And in July of 1975, the commissioners agreed to a bond issue. In November, the public approved financing the building. Moving date to occupy the new facility is now set for mid-July 1978.

The most important lesson to be learned from the acquisition struggle for the new courthouse is to have dedicated leadership, long on patience. Once our leadership made apparent the need for a new building, no one opposed the basic idea for change. The response, however, then became: "I like your idea, but we don't have the money."

So after leadership comes financing. Alternatives which can be explored are: bond issue; direct raise in taxes to support the project; commercial loan; federal grant or contribution; lease-purchase; or gift.

As to the structure required to meet our needs, this evolved after innumerable conferences with the architect, the Bar Association, trips to other counties (and states) to see their new courthouses and individual planning with department heads occupying the old building as to what their space needs would be in the future.

Population growth and potential for increased crime — as it affects number of courtrooms — were also investigated. So were the size and location of ancillary rooms for court support personnel.

Many people did many isolated bits of planning. The architect consolidated our ideas, our needs and our dreams. A very functional building resulted. The organization of plan of use makes the staff feel that it is truly being helpful in the administration of justice. The new facility is more than a house for the court. It is a monument to perseverance in planning and cooperation. ■

**E. Maurice Braswell** is Senior Resident Superior Court Judge of the 12th Judicial District, which includes Cumberland County.



## Case Study

# Brunswick County

A rural campus plan for county government

Right:  
Government  
complex among  
trees on rural  
site

Below:  
Courthouse  
entrance, under  
construction

Below, right:  
Courtroom  
litigation area



One of the state's fastest growing counties, with an increase of 34.6 per cent in the past five years to a present population of 32,000, coastal Brunswick County in 1976 decided by public referendum to move its county seat from the historical location in Southport to a more central location, and the county commissioners selected a site near the town of Bolivia. Located on a large, level 184 acre, previously undeveloped site on a rural stretch of U.S. Highway 17, the new "Brunswick County Government Office Complex" is more than the courthouse. The campus-like plan will feature a cluster of low, one story structures housing in separate buildings the county administration, tax offices, jail and court facilities.

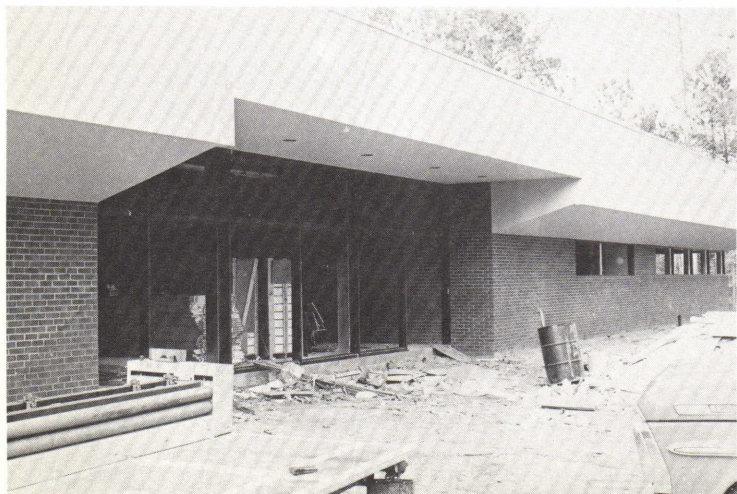
The master plan for the site anticipates expansion of the first phase structures and construction of additional buildings at a later date to accommodate public assemblies, the health department, county planning and agriculture facilities. Ample parking lots, a small lake and open spaces crossed by walkways which connect the new facilities have been incorporated into the plan. The courthouse, while not visible from the highway, is the largest structure in the complex, occupying a prominent site, and is the first building encountered upon entering by the main drive.

This is Brunswick's fourth courthouse — and third county seat. The first building was a wooden structure built in 1764 at Lockwood's Folly.

The second, also of wood, was erected in 1809 after the county seat was moved to Smithville (now Southport, a name adopted in 1889 because the town is the most southerly seaport in the state). That second courthouse was replaced in 1844. Following a fire in 1922, the structure was extensively altered on the front and second floor. It is still sound, however, and has served the courts until the move to the new facility.

The new courthouse (designed by Lyles, Bissett, Carlyle and Wolf of Greensboro and Columbia, S.C. and currently under construction) is a one story, steel framed structure of conventional design. Exterior walls are of unornamented brick veneer, crisply punctuated by glazed entranceways and narrow

strip windows. A low, flat roof extends into wide, sheltering overhangs, its deep fascias clad with ribbed cement-asbestos panels. A small paved entrance plaza leads to a 36 by 19 foot vestibule which serves as a public waiting room for the superior and district courtrooms. All the county's judicial functions have been organized to provide easy access for the public and to minimize confusion and unnecessary circulation spaces. The two courtrooms have been planned with elliptical trial arenas and depressed litigation areas. A system of totally segregated egress to the courtrooms is provided for judges, jurors and prisoners, the latter by means of a secure corridor from the jail, which lies to the rear of the courthouse.





# Before You Build...



From the North Carolina AIA  
Series on Architectural Services





Making the first set of decisions in a building project is a lot like putting together the classic newspaper story. You need to know the “who, what, when, where, why,” not to mention that all important “how.”

*Who* will design the building? *What* will it be? *When* must you have it completed? *Where* will it be? *Why* do you need it? And *how* will you finance it; *how* will you meet the building codes and get zoning approval; *how* will you find good workmen?

How do you begin?

On the simplest and most basic level, people build to keep warm and dry; to provide a place to perform a specific task or activity; to make an improvement over the place they currently occupy. But from there, things get progressively more complicated. The way people build can be an art, can reflect their values — what they think is important. And the forces — political, economic and all the rest — that influence why and how they build can be very complex indeed. This means that designing and constructing any building first takes careful study.

If you think you need to build, you’ll have to ask yourself a lot of questions.

Some are very general. If, for example, you are a public agency or a corporation, you will have to review your charge from the public or board of directors to see whether construction is appropriate. And whether you are a government agency planning new offices or an individual contemplating a house, you must examine your long range goals and objectives. A custom

designed house, for example, may not be a wise investment if you may move soon. Or a temporary government operation may be better off in a renovated building than in a new one.

More specifically, you’ll have to evaluate your present structure — or closely examine why you need a building at all. You will need to examine changes in building codes, zoning and other laws and regulations that may affect you. Natural resources and man-made resources such as sewer, water and transportation also will have an effect. In business and government, you’ll need to project the growth and movement of population.

These are some of the basics. Architecture is affected constantly by these outside forces of politics, economics, geography, climate and resources.

Outside forces are not the only influences, however. There also are decisions to make concerning how to set about construction itself. If you are a committee, you will have to decide your procedures not only for hiring architects, engineers, landscape architects and others, but you will have to decide in advance what your procedures will be for approving each phase of their work. Committees and individuals alike will have to determine their own expectations and limitations: time schedule, budget, other “nuts and bolts” items. Every building owner will have to realize that participation in design is crucial; owners must communicate their desires and wishes to their architects if their buildings are to be successful. In the end, the owner’s attitude directly affects the final outcome, the building.



This early phase, in a word, means "planning." This is the key. A rush job can cause problems in the future, from higher construction cost to poor circulation patterns to higher maintenance and operating costs.

At this early stage, some people also go so far as to purchase sites, obtain financing for their projects and work out the details of how their buildings will function. But this is not always wise. There comes a time in a project when professional help is necessary. Sometimes all these decisions about needs, site and finance become too much for the owner to make alone. And as construction becomes more complicated — as governments introduce more regulations and codes, as we use up our natural resources and land, as prices soar and construction becomes a bigger and bigger investment and as citizen interest in the built environment becomes more and more intense — it becomes increasingly important to get help as early as possible.

But who? Why? When?

If you are putting up a building with a value over a specified dollar amount or with more than two dwelling units in it, state law will require you — unless you, as an individual owner, draw plans for the building yourself — to obtain professional design assistance "in order to safeguard life, health and property." But no matter what the project, there are advantages to working with an architect. And there are advantages to involving the architect as early as possible.

State laws requiring design services for certain projects are based on the need to protect the public welfare. Someone has to take responsibility for the safety of buildings. In the case of public buildings, a professional must see to it that the public's money is spent wisely.

But welfare can mean a lot more than whether a building will stand up or not. Welfare can mean a state of mind: whether schools are conducive to learning, whether hospitals are conducive to recuperation. It can mean accessibility and usability: whether the handicapped face barriers to going up and down stairs or to opening doors; whether the people who work there can do their jobs and are productive at them. Welfare can be as simple a thing as whether people enjoy being in a building. These, and the art of design, are some of the elements that create architecture.

Because we use buildings every day, we may feel we know about architecture. But there is a difference between knowing about something and being able to do it. Most people do not have the ability to design — just as they do not have the ability to argue a case in court, sing on the concert stage or play professional football. A layman is not familiar with building codes, construction technology, materials, illumination and the hundreds of other details that go into a building. Yet these details must be considered and pulled together into a unified building. It's a big job.

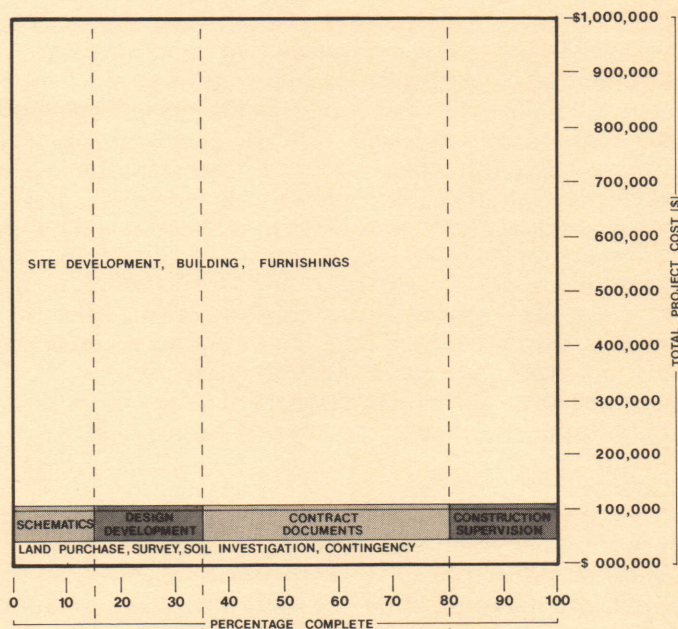
Somewhere along the line, someone has to perform this function, to design the building. And unless you do it yourself, you are going to have to pay to have it done. (Even if you do the work yourself, you'll be expending time. And time, as the old saying goes, is money.) So it only makes sense to get the best help you can.

Good help is not really that expensive, either, especially when seen in context of the total construction cost. And when considered in relation to the life-time operating cost of the building and the payroll of the people who work there, the design costs are miniscule. Design is a one-time expense. But if an office staff works at less than capacity because people are unhappy in their surroundings, a company's loss in productivity over the years will be many times more than it saved with a do-it-yourself building.





## ARCHITECTURAL PLANNING SERVICES RELATIVE TO A TOTAL PROJECT



The architect can help you analyze the functions you need to accommodate in your building and can help you decide how they can be organized and how the building can respond to those needs. And the architect may have landscape architects, engineers and others on the staff to consult on other details of the job, too.

This early consultation, however, in no way commits you to a building. And it in no way commits you to a single architect. If, after this analysis, you decide to build, you may continue with the same architect, or you may select another.

With the decision to build, you will have taken the first important step toward construction. You must, however, continue to be involved in making decisions all through the process. There is an old saying that good owners get good buildings. And it is largely true. The result of these decisions, the "who," "when," "where," "why" and "how" will be the "what," your building.

Produced by the NCAIA Architectural Services Task Force, C. Robert Shields, AIA, chairman. Members: J. Hyatt Hammond, FAIA; Marvin R. A. Johnson, FAIA; Wesley A. McClure, AIA; William H. Sigmon, AIA; Lloyd G. Walter, AIA. Written by Ernest Wood. Design by Gary Hixson. Photos by Bob Kretz. Graph by J. Hyatt Hammond and Associates.

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Architects are trained to consider their client's needs in designing a building — to be the owner's representative in the construction process. Architects are professionals with a combination of academic work in their field (often to the masters level) and internship in a professional office. In addition, they must successfully complete a state administered licensing exam. This background includes training not only in the aesthetics of design, but in planning a project, coordinating other design professionals, meeting government regulations and more. Architects do not just "draw plans" for buildings. Drawing is only a way of communicating ideas. It is a special language of the construction industry that tells how a building is to be built. The architect's job is to take the owner's needs and desires and synthesize them into a building.

But though design is the basic function of the profession, architects do perform other jobs as well. Many of these are especially important to the person just beginning a construction project.

You will want, for example, to consult an architect as early in your plans as possible to talk about the very basic question of whether or not you should build at all. This early consultation, similar to the "diagnosis" phase of a physician's work or the visit to a lawyer to find out if you "have a case," might well turn up alternatives to new construction — renovating your present building or buying another, for example. From their professional experience, architects are knowledgeable about costs and can give you estimates on your project. They can advise you on the suitability of various sites. Topography and location, traffic and zoning, for example, all can be important considerations. Architects can advise you on the best way to locate your building within your site. If they have had experience with similar projects elsewhere, they can provide special insights into your project based on that work.

This pamphlet is one of a series on architectural services. Others include: Architects & Architecture: Some Questions and Some Answers. What is Architecture? Selecting and Compensating the Architect. Services an Architect Provides. The pamphlets are free to the public.

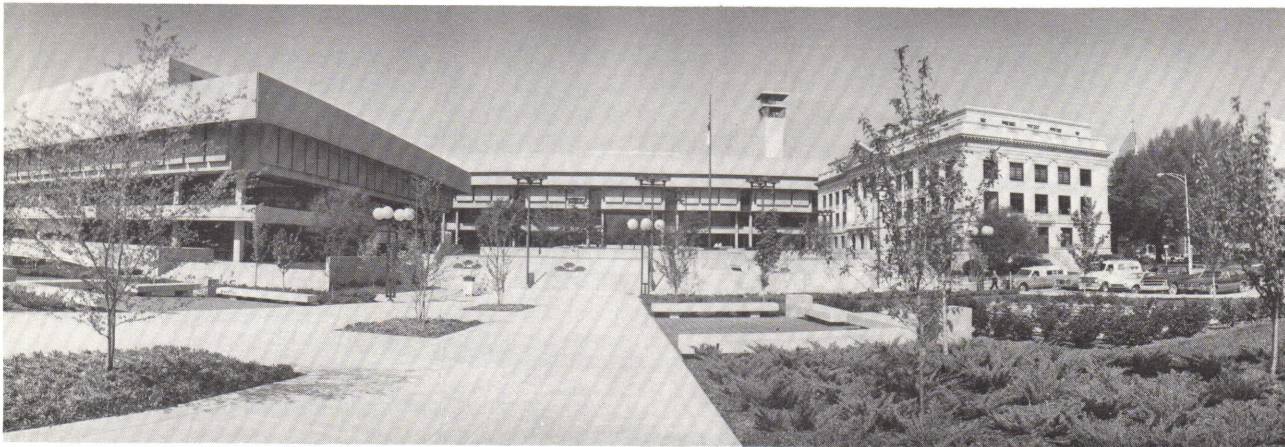
To order, write: North Carolina Chapter, American Institute of Architects, 115 W. Morgan St., Raleigh, N. C. 27601



# Case Study

## Guilford County

A major urban complex combining old and new



Left: Courthouse, center, is flanked by office building and old courthouse

Below, left: Guilford County Courthouse

Bottom: courtroom



Back in 1954, architect Eduardo Catalano achieved international acclaim for the hyperbolic paraboloid roofed house he built for himself in Raleigh. Twenty years later, he designed one of the state's more successful modern houses for the courts.

The courthouse, located in Greensboro, joins an older courthouse designed in 1918 by Henry Barton and a government office building also by Catalano (now of Cambridge, Mass.) Together, the buildings create a Greensboro/Guilford County Governmental Complex that is a focus of renewed interest in Greensboro's downtown.

The complex, with its prominent siting, is easily identifiable as a coherent unit. The three buildings, the county courthouse, the old courthouse and the municipal office building, have major entrances on a common plaza at the center of two combined city blocks.

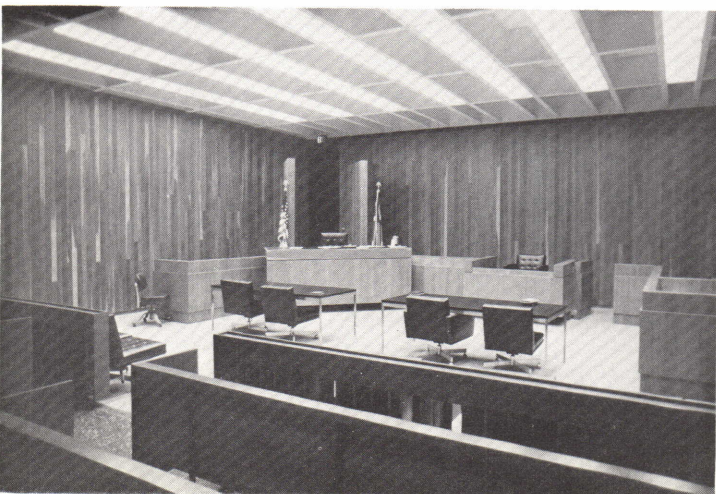
This is a far cry from Guilford County's earliest courthouse which, like many elsewhere, was constructed of logs. But it culminates a tradition of rapid construction and replacement of courthouses in a county that is today (after Mecklenburg) the second most populous and second most urbanized in the state.

The county's first permanent courthouse was a log structure

built in 1773 in Guilford Courthouse; in 1788, the county seat's name was changed to Martinsville and a new courthouse constructed of brick; in 1807, the county seat moved to the more centrally located Greensboro and two years later a third courthouse was built of brick there. New courthouses followed in 1830, 1858 and 1873. The last of that series remained until the Henry Barton designed 1918 structure was erected.

The new courthouse by Catalano is a six story reinforced concrete structure which achieves a dramatic visual presence by counterpointing paired concrete columns with the unbroken cantilevered planes of the upper floor. Lower levels are predominantly glass with exposed concrete spandrels. The dynamic articulation of concrete panels, set between vertical structural forms, dominates the principal facades. Courtroom interiors of exposed concrete ceilings, brick walls and cherry wood furnishings are among the most dignified of North Carolina's modern courthouses.

The municipal office building, also designed by Catalano, shares many of the visual and structural characteristics of the courthouse. The old courthouse, an imposing Neo-Classical Revival structure, now houses court related and county offices.





# Courthouse Needs

A changing system of justice will require both new courthouses and alteration of old facilities

*The doors of the temples of justice must always be open to the people. They must also lead into facilities appropriate for the important functions performed there. Each courthouse must be a symbol of the American dream of true justice. Whether it houses a traffic court or a supreme court, it should provide facilities for prompt and appropriate adjudication by competent personnel using the most advanced clerical and office techniques. Only thus will citizens be assured that justice is a functioning reality of the American way of life.*

## The American Courthouse

By Robert P. Burns, AIA

The post-World War II period has seen the construction of 28 courthouses in North Carolina, 19 of which were completed since 1969. Interestingly, revivalist styles continued into this period, although the reliance on modern design principles has been far more prevalent. Courthouses built in the 1950's such as those in Hertford, Davidson, and Yadkin Counties were early (by North Carolina standards) exercises in the modernist theory of architecture. Low profile geometrical forms, smooth unbroken surfaces, and an absence of ornament characterize these buildings.

Significantly, however, along with the growing acceptance of modern forms, the courthouse lost its distinct and readily acknowledgeable identity as the county's temple of justice. The familiar porticoes and cupolas of the preceding two centuries were absent; and often the new facility, following the lead of commercial development, was located away from the traditional center of the county seat on a suburban site in order to provide room for automobiles and expansion. This trend has been taken to a logical extreme in Brunswick County (page 26), which is now erecting a campus-like government center, including a courthouse, on a rural stretch of U.S. Highway 17 near the small town of Bolivia, leaving behind its historic county seat, Southport. The shift away from the heart of the county seat and the tendency to employ visual features derived from industrial and commercial buildings has produced, with few exceptions, courthouses which fail to achieve the sense of dignity and symbolic presence of courthouses of earlier eras.

Within the past two decades a multiplicity of styles, contemporary and traditional, have found expression in courthouse design. The colonial mode has been employed in the Beaufort County Courthouse (1971), the Edgecombe County Courthouse (1965), and the Yancey County Courthouse, (1965). However, the expanding roles of county government and the judicial system have necessitated the erection of larger facilities; and colonial motifs, which originated in small-scale structures, have become stretched, enlarged, and distorted to accommodate massive forms. This awkward marriage is especially evident in the Beaufort County Courthouse.

Another approach to the design of larger courthouses can be seen in the trend toward contemporary, high-rise buildings such as the Wake County (1970), Union County (1972), and Forsyth County (1975) courthouses where structural elements (or items masquerading as such) became the dominant expressive features of the buildings.

Right: Beaufort County Courthouse

Below: Yadkin County Courthouse





Right: New Union County Courthouse, seen through portico of old courthouse

Below: Mecklenburg County Courthouse



Chris Mackay

One of the most progressive trends in modern courthouse design has been realized in the Greensboro/Guilford County Governmental Center (page 27). The complex is composed of the old county courthouse — a 1918 Harry Barton Neo-Classical Revival building, a new 1974 courthouse and a new municipal office building. Both new buildings were designed by Eduardo Catalano and Associates of Cambridge, Mass. Organized around landscaped plazas which cover two levels of underground parking, the complex is a sensible and visually exciting approach to the restrictions of an urban site and constitutes a successful merger of old and new architecture. In fact, each of the state's most populous counties — Wake, Forsyth, Guilford, Durham, Cumberland, and Mecklenburg — has constructed a new courthouse in or near the historic center of its county seat. These structures, conceived as part of overt efforts to revitalize the urban cores of these important cities, can be seen as dramatic reassertions of the traditional role of the courthouse in the life and fabric of North Carolina's county seats. The success of the Mecklenburg County Courthouse, designed by Wolf Associates, as a work of architecture and urban design

has been indicated by its selection for a 1978 Honor Award by the North Carolina Chapter, American Institute of Architects.

The past three decades have seen not just a change in architectural form and townscape in new courthouse construction but also the continuing evolution of older courthouses, many of which have been drastically altered and not infrequently mutilated by additions and internal modifications. Well-intentioned efforts to match the growing and generally unpredictable demands of the court system and county government with suitable facilities has all too often resulted in courthouses which ill serve the lofty ideals and processes of justice. The inadequacies of many court facilities in North Carolina can be attributed to several conditions: a lack of financial resources to provide and maintain satisfactory facilities; the desire to preserve historically important courthouses which have become functionally or physically obsolete over the years; and, perhaps most important, the changing role of the judicial system which has created new and altered expectations of court facilities.

### Reorganization of the Court System

From the early Colonial period, North Carolina's judiciary has stood as a perplexing and often controversial component of government — the focus of recurrent concern, dissatisfaction, and adjustment. And while the workings of the individual courts in their courtrooms may have been obscure to the public, there has been marked political awareness of the courts as a system, providing impetus again and again to efforts to re-shape the formal *structure* of the judiciary.

By the late 1950's, a multitude of legislative enactments, designed to meet various judicial needs and to respond to local political pressures, had heavily encumbered the basic judicial structure. Incremental changes and additions to the court system were most evident at the lower, local court level, where hundreds of courts specially created by statute operated with widely dissimilar structures and jurisdictions.

The stage was set for comprehensive reform, and the decade of the 1960's witnessed a sweeping restructuring of North Carolina's judiciary. Originating in the joint efforts of the North Carolina Bar Association and a special legislative commission, constitutional amendments were adopted which created a new, uniformly-organized and centrally-administered system whose unitary nature was symbolized by the name, the General Court of Justice. Trial courts were organized into 30 judicial districts, which in turn were grouped into four geographical divisions. A particularly important change was the elimination of local statutory courts and their replacement by a single District Court,



which would share trial court responsibility, though at a lower level, with the Superior Court.

Implementation of this system was accomplished in stages; by the end of 1970, all of the counties and their courts had been incorporated into the new structure. It is this unified system whose radically altered needs must be satisfied by existing and future court facilities.

### The Need for Design Guidelines

Had there been satisfactory existing guidelines for the design and construction of court facilities prior to the reorganization of the 1960's, they would hardly be appropriate to the reorganized judicial system existing today. However, until the current decade there have been virtually no comprehensive data or guidelines available to aid the local official or architect in planning a courthouse. It has been in only the last few years that several major efforts have been made to define and establish spatial, functional, environmental and, occasionally, symbolic criteria for court buildings.

The establishment of the National Clearinghouse for Criminal Justice Planning and Architecture at the University of Illinois has led to the publication of a series of detailed monographs on court facilities design. Another important effort, the joint ABA-AIA study of courtrooms and court facilities, resulted in an ambitious report, *The American Courthouse — Planning and Design for the Judicial Process*, published in 1974. Several other useful documents relating to design criteria for judicial facilities have been produced in recent years (see *Books*), and a number of states have commissioned studies of their court facilities, which include inventories and evaluation of existing courthouses and the development of guidelines for their improvement.

While all of these recent studies provide valuable assistance to the courthouse designer, none of them is directly applicable to North Carolina's judicial situation. Some are oriented principally to the problems of large metropolitan court systems; others focus on courtroom design issues and pay minimal attention to systemic relationships; none is addressed in a wholly satisfactory way to the most prevalent and characteristic conditions found in North Carolina. It was to those unique conditions and needs that the North Carolina Courthouse Study was directed.

### The North Carolina Courthouse Study

The courthouse study, commissioned in 1976 by the Administrative Office of the Courts, had as its goal, quite simply, to identify means of improving the physical environment of court facilities in North Carolina and, thus, their performance. With this overall objective in mind, the study was structured in four broad divisions: (1) an inventory and analysis of court facilities in the state, including their historical, functional, physical, contextual and symbolic characteristics; (2) design guidelines (or standards) appropriate for North Carolina's judicial system; (3) the determination of current and future (through the year 2000) space needs for each of the state's one hundred counties; and (4) specific recommendations for meeting

those needs, referring to the guidelines established for design and construction. The project team also sought to identify and to encourage the preservation of historically and architecturally significant courthouses through renovation or adaptive re-use.

### Composition of the Design Guidelines

The concept of design guidelines is hardly new. The ancient injunction to "commodity, firmness, and delight" defines a general performance specification to which all architecture must aspire if it is to serve fully the needs and aspirations of man. Guidelines for North Carolina's courthouses have been organized consistent with these traditional ideals.

The first category describes *spatial and functional standards* ("commodity") which include a description of the functional components of the judicial system (for example, courtrooms, judge's chambers, law library, jury facilities, etc.), desirable adjacency relationships between them, area standards in square feet, and considerations of courthouse circulation: public access, segregated circulation systems, and handicapped accessibility.



The second section is concerned with *physical standards* ("firmness") and sets guidelines for construction systems, environmental control systems (thermal-atmospheric, illumination, acoustical and mechanical-electrical), energy conservation and life safety requirements.

The third section introduces *architectonic and symbolic criteria* ("delight"). It addresses issues of form and imagery, as well as site and contextual factors. The values of historic and architecturally significant buildings, as well as their contributions to the townscape of the county seat, are identified.

A final section of the guidelines consists of case studies of North Carolina courthouses which exemplify desirable functional, physical, or architectonic/symbolic qualities. A sensitive renovation of an older courthouse (Greene County), well-planned circulation systems for courtrooms and ancillary spaces (Cabarrus and Wake Counties), and well-designed additions to historic court buildings (Montgomery and Davie Counties) are cited as useful models for counties seeking guidance in similar circumstances (page 21).



The guidelines, derived from a careful analysis of all existing references on judicial facilities as well as recommendations from North Carolina court personnel and direct observations and testing by the project team, seek to inform and to persuade rather than to mandate. Standards outlined in the report are approximate, often minimal (1,600 square feet and seating for 125 spectators, for example, in the First Superior Courtroom) and are intended to establish a basis for productive communication between local officials and design professionals during the design process.

## Architectural Implications of Selected Guidelines

In response to several celebrated instances of courtroom violence in the 1960's, much of the recent literature on courthouse design has centered on *security*. Indeed some new metropolitan courthouses (such as the new District of Columbia Superior Court Building), in over-reaction to this concern, have taken on the appearance of fortresses. The guidelines, derived for application in North Carolina, take a less extreme position. Certain minimum measures — division of the courthouse into secure, restricted and public zones, defensive design of



N. C. Courthouse Study

courtroom furnishings, emergency alarms, and exterior floodlighting — are recommended, while more exotic provisions such as electronic surveillance are described for possible use where local circumstances dictate.

Like most buildings of recent years, the North Carolina courthouse has been an "energy-guzzler." The guidelines recognize that this is no longer acceptable: new court buildings, and old ones as well, must find ways to reduce their consumption of energy; and this must be done without significant sacrifices in the functional performance of courthouses. Newly-developed provisions of the *North Carolina State Building Code* which establish mandatory procedures for energy conservation in new buildings are cited. However, the guidelines define other, possibly more fundamental *energy-conserving strategies* for the design for new courthouses or for "retro-fitting" existing facilities. These include the sensible use of natural energies — heat and light from the sun and wind power, orientation and siting, building geometry and envelope factors, energy-conscious design of windows, as well as the use of efficient heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems and flexible

control systems (systems conceived in the era of cheap energy often found it economical to heat or cool all spaces continuously and to light whole floors on a single switch, a luxury we can no longer afford.)

*Environmental criteria*, using general task descriptions and specific quantitative standards where appropriate, are set forth for each of the typical components of a court facility. Standards for illumination, acoustical, and thermal-atmospheric performance are intended to create spaces which are comfortable and free of distractions which can impair the business of the courts. Acoustical problems were cited again and again by court personnel asked to evaluate existing courthouses. Considerable attention is given to the acoustical improvement of older courthouses and courtrooms. The installation of a lowered acoustical tile ceiling in a once-dignified courtroom is not only visually offensive; but, by removing the most valuable surface for sound reflection, such "modernizations" typically have a detrimental effect on speech communications. Electronic speech amplification systems ("loudspeakers"), also installed to overcome problems of hearing, similarly tend to create an entire



Far Left: Judge's chamber, Stanly County Courthouse

Center: Law library, Stanly County Courthouse

Left: Clerk's office, Burke County Courthouse

new set of difficulties.

Environmental guidelines also identify *electronic and mechanical equipment* commonly required for day-to-day court operations. While still in its infancy and therefore difficult to assess at this time, communications technology could prove to be an increasingly valuable instrument of the justice system and might well, as some observers contend, change the shape of the courthouse itself.

Other issues of crucial importance to the courthouse designer are incorporated in the guidelines. These include *public access*, the process by which the county's citizens understand the organization of the courthouse and gain admittance to the offices of the clerk of court, the courtroom, or other important public spaces. It has been observed that architects and court officials often overlook the fact that a majority of people, especially witnesses and jurors, are in the courthouse for the first time. The guidelines call for extreme care in the sequencing of public functions and further require a coordinated directory and graphic identification system.



*Life safety* provisions in most North Carolina courthouses have been notoriously inadequate. Older structures particularly, conceived before the day of modern building codes, often lack the most basic measures to protect the public and employees from danger posed by fire, smoke, interruption of electrical power and other threats to life and security. The guidelines urge immediate conformance with all relevant life safety requirements in the building code.

Similarly the removal of *architectural barriers* to the handicapped is established as a high priority for all courthouses. Even some of the State's newest court facilities discriminate against the handicapped in subtle and, occasionally, blatant ways.



Left: Anson County: Lowered ceilings are detrimental both aesthetically and acoustically



Below: Granville County: Many courthouses suffer from ad hoc renovations



Bottom: Pitt County: Law enforcement offices emphasize punitive role of the courts

important event in the life of a people, a community, or a state. It would appear that the concern for such intangible qualities, once so paramount in the conception of a county's "temple of justice," has drastically declined in recent years, as the concern for functional efficiency and economy has produced business-like court facilities which are all too often indistinguishable from contemporary office buildings and schools.

Without calling for a belated return to revivalist architectural styles, the design guidelines attempt to make a convincing case for: (1) creating a special image for the county's one unique building; (2) siting the courthouse in a prominent civic setting; (3) establishing a sympathetic, though not necessarily subservient, formal relationship with its immediate context; (4) utilizing quality finish materials and spatial geometries for important ceremonial spaces, such as courtrooms, which will enhance rather than demean the processes of justice; and (5) employing within and about the courthouse overt symbolic elements such as historic monuments, sculpture, paintings, and other evidences of the county's history and traditions.

Furthermore, the guidelines challenge on symbolic grounds the traditional place of law enforcement facilities, the sheriff's offices and the jail, in the courthouse. The system of justice depends on a *perceived* as well as *actual* sense of equality and fairness. Anything which compromises that perception erodes the judicial process. The courthouse jail, the clearest physical expression of the punitive role of government, becomes associated in the public mind with the courts by its proximity and implies the courts are for administering punishment, not for establishing justice. The guidelines call for phased removal of jails and other law enforcement agencies from the courthouse; in fact, the guidelines support the growing trend, observed in a large number of recent court buildings, to establish the courthouse as the exclusive domain of the judicial system, with government and service functions accommodated in separate structures.

## Existing Court Facilities and the Space Shortage

While the development of design guidelines constituted the core of the study, the evaluation of existing facilities and the projection of space needs for individual counties were seen as important tasks. Though the study is not yet complete, the preliminary draft of the final report presents a dramatic picture of the existing situation and the scale of future needs.

Present allocations of space for judicial purposes in the state total approximately 1.3 million square feet, which, applying area standards proposed in the guidelines, represents an existing deficiency of almost one half million square feet. By 1985 judicial space needs will exceed 2 million square feet. And by the year 2000 the judicial system will require almost 2.5 million square feet.

In summary, there is at this time a significant space shortage confronting the State's judicial system. Additionally, future expansion of judicial activity

## The Significance of Intangible Considerations

The guidelines are not limited to physical standards, however. It is in the area of intangibles — form, imagery, and contextual relationships — that *buildings* become *architecture*. It is those qualities, often more than others, that provide valid links with history and culture and make of a mere building an



reflected in caseload and personnel projections demands the provision of massive quantities of appropriate building space during the next two decades.

This space shortage defines only one dimension of the problem, however. The physical condition analysis of 160 court facilities surveyed (courthouses, annexes, jails and other court related buildings) indicates that almost 80 per cent are, when viewed in their entirety, sub-standard. While many of the deficiencies observed are of a "minor" nature (the need for a general cleaning and painting), others are more serious (lack of central air conditioning, lack of an elevator) and will require major renovation. In fact, only 10 of 96 courthouses surveyed (four courthouses under construction could not be evaluated) were rated adequate-to-excellent in each of the 11 systems which constituted the evaluation. Courthouses as a group also exhibit serious deficiencies in public access (it's difficult to find one's way in them), and well over half are entirely inaccessible to the handicapped. Only three courthouses surveyed (Forsyth, Wake and Guilford) can be considered essentially barrier-free.

### The Scale of the Problem

These findings, coupled with standards set forth in the design guidelines, formed the basis for recommendations to each of the state's 100 counties. These recommendations outline means by which suitable judicial facilities can be provided to meet immediate and long range needs. Subject to changes in the final report, 18 counties are urged to construct new courthouses during the next few years, 30 counties will require renovation of their present courthouses and construction of new annexes, and 52 counties can meet their judicial space needs by internal expansion and renovation of their existing facilities. In cases where a new courthouse is recommended, adaptation of existing courthouses to county government or other appropriate uses is strongly advised.

Thus the scale of the building problem is enormous and constitutes a challenge which should engage the concern not only of court personnel and county officials but of all the state's citizens.

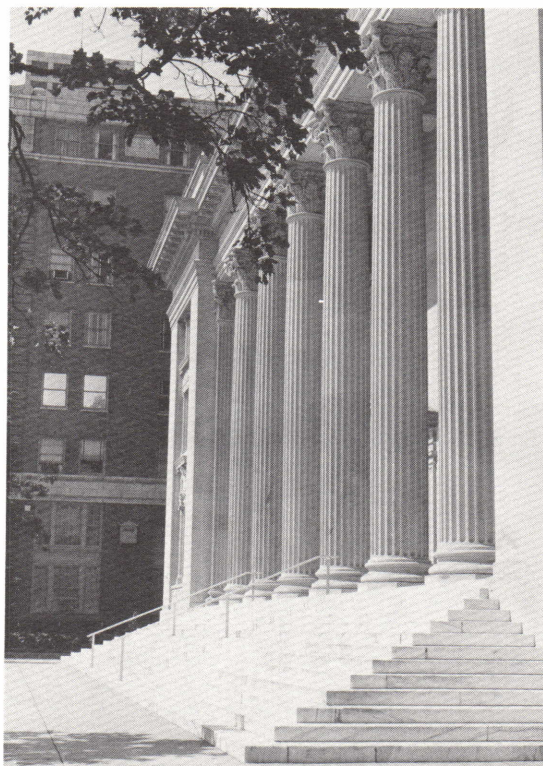
County officials face a particularly thorny problem, because they are required by statute to build and maintain adequate court facilities. The legal power of a county to levy taxes and to issue bonds for this purpose is limited only by economic and political considerations. However, in an era in which expanding services of county government make larger and larger demands on tax revenues, the needs of the judicial system, increasingly seen as a state government function, may have difficulty getting a fair hearing at the county level, no matter how desperate the situation. Some county officials are already calling for an expanded State role in financing court facilities.

### Challenges for the Architecture Profession

But what opportunities and challenges does the need for new and improved court facilities present to the architecture profession in North Carolina? Even

though most of the large, populous counties have completed new courthouses in the past decade, the need is still formidable. The publication of the final report of the North Carolina Courthouse Study and its dissemination to county, state, and judicial officials within the next few months may set off an unprecedented wave of courthouse planning and construction. The report itself urges counties to engage architects of the highest professional caliber and outlines procedures for productive participation in the programming and design processes.

The design guidelines incorporated in the report should assist the creative designer faced with the task of either designing a new courthouse or revitalizing a noble Neo-



Left: Wilson County: The image of the courthouse is important

N. C. Courthouse Study

Classical Revival structure to serve an expanding judiciary for additional decades. They will *not* provide easy answers to the county seeking a cheap "quick-fix" or the architect intent on "bread-and-butter" work.

The design challenge is unmistakable and awesome: to create "a symbol of the American dream of true justice," the architect must conceive of the courthouse not only in terms of functional and technical excellence but, more importantly, as an expression of the lofty ideals of the court system and the aspirations of its citizens. ■

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**Robert P. Burns** is professor of architecture at the N.C. State University School of Design. For the past two years, he has been director of The North Carolina Courthouse Study, a joint project of the school and the state Administrative Office of the Courts.



# Interiors

Economy and technology may return courthouses to their simple roots

By Gerard W. Peer, AIA

The North Carolina courthouse today presents architects and county administrators with the difficult challenge of designing a building that evokes the dignity of the past while at the same time responding to the complexities of the computer age — all without losing touch with the masses of humanity the facility is to serve. This is true for the large issues of the building as a whole; but it is especially true of the plan and details of the interior, where the judicial process functions.

Looking back at history, we see that the earliest North Carolina courthouses, though little more than one room structures, had a certain simplicity and directness of design that owed much to the residential construction of the period. To an even greater degree, however, the plan, materials and furnishings — the clapboard exterior, the wooden floors, the high ceilings and tall windows, the pew type seating for spectators and choir type seating for the jury — are often identical to those of churches and schoolhouses of the day. And while the courthouses lacked sophistication, their warmth and character must have been easy for the general public to relate to.

The next major generation of county courthouses (most of which are still with us in one form or another) were much more ambitious in design. Carved stone collonades and pediments on the exterior and monumentally scaled lobbies and courtrooms identified the building as the most important and impressive building in town, the symbol of government for the county. Art and sculpture, some mosaics, paintings, carved woodwork, marble and brass and ornate plasterwork embellished the interior,

further underlining the building's significance.

On the technological front, the pot bellied stove had been replaced by radiators, but the need for natural ventilation in the courtroom still necessitated windows which were, after the fashion, incorporated on a grand scale.

Unfortunately, the interior organization often suffered at the expense of symmetry. Courtrooms, in the interest of grandeur, were placed in the most prestigious locations at the sacrifice of efficient interior circulation. Prisoner movement and security were not great problems and received little attention.

Meanwhile, the courthouse, in becoming the county's showplace, also had become more formidable and forbidding in appearance, losing some of the earlier directness and warmth of the colonial period.

By the end of World War II, the pressures of new technology and the demand for more extensive court facilities created another form of courthouse construction — renovation. Rather than abandon the grand old county courthouses, court officials and county administrators modified the interiors for the new functions and technologies. Once again, the interior form of the courthouse would change.

The buildings were upgraded with air conditioning, often exposed on the roof, and generally without humidity control. New fluorescent fixtures (early institutional in design, complete with exposed conduits and the inherent cold cast to the light) replaced the elegant old incandescent fixtures. New ceilings, installed to cover ductwork, also



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covered the beautiful old decorative plasterwork; acoustical tiles were glued to fine wood paneling. Finally, additional makeshift courtrooms were added in the basement — complete with plastic chairs and yards of vinyl asbestos tile. In the name of technology, the elegant but antiquated courtrooms had been given a facelift that too often traded their dignity and character for antiseptic institutionalism. The major consideration of improved circulation went unresolved.

Technological advances continued to keep pace with the need for more facilities until the courthouse no longer could be expanded further. A new form of courthouse needed to be created in North Carolina.

Technology and economics now dictate that the Greek collonade and pediment and the decoratively carved, cavernous courtrooms of the past be abandoned and replaced by cost conscious efficiency and flexibility. The contemporary courthouse must solve the problems not only of systems technology and functional complexity, but, of equal importance, the design must respond to the

ever increasing social pressures to de-institutionalize the court system. Yet the courthouse must not become a sterile office building. The effort must be made to retain, within the modern idiom, the warmth, character and dignity of the past.

The key to the organization of the modern courthouse lies in the dual circulation system for the public and private sectors. The new Mecklenburg County Courthouse, for example, makes use of public and private corridors located along the building's two long sides. These not only separate traffic but provide natural light and extensive views (particularly in the public corridor) to brighten the inevitable wait involved in going to court.

Circular columns were exposed in the public corridor to evoke the old courthouse collonade. And to create a feeling of dignity and warmth, materials included an exterior of cordova shell limestone (with its warm tan color and its texture created by embedded fossilized shells) combined with oak flooring and travertine wainscoting capped with polished brass railings in the public corridors and lobby.



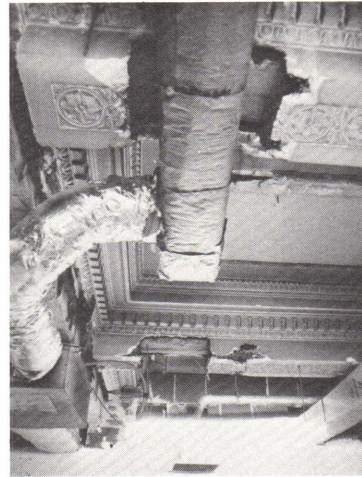


In the design of the courtroom itself, the architect today is confronted with a particularly confusing array of approaches: circular, oval, rectangular or angular. Contemporary courthouses have tried them all. *The American Courthouse*, produced jointly by the ABA and AIA (see *Books*), combines the courtroom elements into simple diagrams which resolve the myriad of functional requirements. Mecklenburg County translates these into a rectangular scheme to economically fit the building's structural system. A custom designed, movable court reporter's station further aids in meeting the critical criteria. And economy dictated that spaces of a more

human scale be substituted for the monumentality of the past.

In two centuries, the courthouse had come full circle from its humble beginnings.

So it is with furnishings. The Mecklenburg courtrooms' furnishings were designed with warmth and dignity as well as economy and flexibility in mind. For the public, English oak church pew seating was found to be more economical than individual fixed seats and allowed spectator densities to vary from case to case. In the litigation area, extensive English oak woodwork is capped with polished brass to



Far Left: Nash County: a dignified interior

Center: Currituck County: "modernized" interior

Left: Mecklenburg County: Renovations to old courthouse

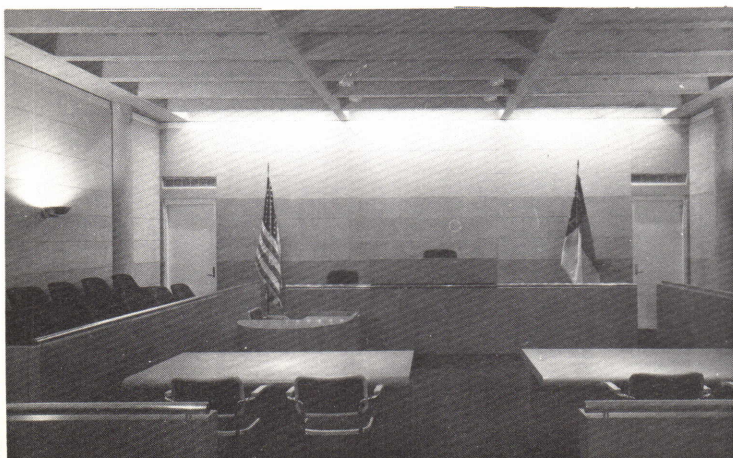
Gerard W. Peer

further reinforce the dignified character of the courtrooms. The colors are earth tones, except in the appellate court, where a more regal burgundy underscores the court's particular significance. The availability of new, rugged fabrics and carpets allows their extensive use as both a visual amenity and an acoustical absorbant. The courtrooms initially were wired for voice reinforcement, but acoustic wall panels made the system unnecessary.

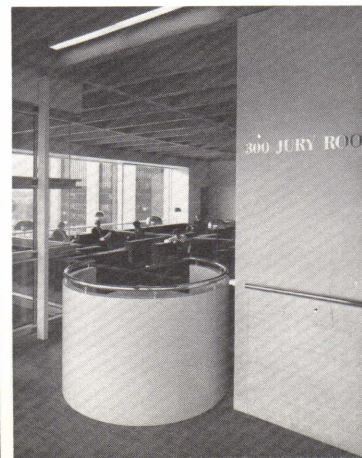
The theme of comfortable, dignified facilities should be extended through all courthouse spaces, not just the courtrooms. Client/attorney conference rooms should be numerous and well appointed.

The jury assembly area should have comfortable lounge seating, work areas, vending machines, telephones and, if at all possible, exterior views. (The public snack facility in Mecklenburg County was designed with a glass wall which opens to an intimate azalea garden.)

Today, courthouses require an almost entirely new approach to design. Economics forbid the return to the ornate architecture of the past. But warmth and dignity still are necessary. After reaching a solution for the complexities of the judicial system, the designer must carefully think about how the public will respond to the building. The result may well reflect the vernacular of our earliest courthouses. ■



David Franzen



Far Left: Mecklenburg County: courtroom, new courthouse

Left: Mecklenburg county: jury room, new courthouse

**Gerard W. Peer** is a partner in Wolf Associates, Charlotte and was project architect for the recently completed Mecklenburg County Courthouse which received an Honor Award in the 1978 North Carolina Chapter, AIA, design competition.



# Conservation

Saving old courthouses presents a special set of problems

By Catherine W. Bishir

*The new (Davidson County Courthouse) is indeed magnificent, the best we ever saw ... Beautiful and magnificent Temple of Justice, it will stand for ages as a monument both of ... taste and liberality, while the stranger in passing will involuntarily stop to gaze on its beautiful proportions, its majestic columns and admire the skill of the master workmen*

**Greensborough Patriot**  
October 15, 1858

In North Carolina, as across the nation, historic courthouses are an endangered species. Despite increasing recognition that the courthouses from our counties' pasts are valuable, irreplaceable landmarks, courthouse facilities are under growing pressures generated by population growth and shift and by ever-increasing government services that must be crowded into the buildings. Code requirements, neglect and rising expectations for functional arrangements demand change. As a result, counties — the citizenry, county commissioners, as well as the architects and other professionals involved in planning and design — face questions about the future of their courthouses which must be addressed with careful study of all values involved.

Much of the value, and, ironically, many of the problems affecting the conservation of the historic courthouse spring from its unique place in the county. Unlike houses, stores, churches and the like, which occur plurally in a town or county, there is only one county courthouse per county. (Federal courthouses exist in some cities, but are not operated by the county.) And historical continuity, architectural importance, government and justice, all the doings of daily business, all concentrated in one building, give the courthouse unparalleled meaning to the community.

But as there is only one courthouse per county, so is there only one county per courthouse. Unlike houses and stores (where, if one owner finds the building no longer attractive or adequate, sale to another resident or



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investor is the normal succession), for the courthouse there is only one chief client: the county government and county commissioners. If one set of county commissioners, penurious in maintenance or casual about historic values, finds a courthouse disposable, there is not likely to be an interested buyer standing in the wings or in the next county. The courthouse must meet the needs of its clients or face serious trouble.

Unique though each is, historic courthouses across the nation face similar problems, and a common story emerges. At a time of prosperity in the county, a courthouse is erected, well-built, of good materials, the pride of the county, usually with all the familiar, powerful monumentality of classical

portico and dome. For decades, even generations, it serves the needs of the county well, despite a gradual increase in court traffic and the cumulative generation of records. Slowly, however, deterioration sets in — the roof leaks and is patched cheaply, wiring problems are inadequately handled, partitions are installed casually to create new offices — as the county commissioners, beset with citizen and government demands to accommodate new services and proliferating agencies, place a lower priority on courthouse maintenance. Finally, brought to a head by angry officials, a negative report by courthouse facilities analysts or tempting heaps of federal construction funds, the issue is clear: Our courthouse is inadequate. Something must be done.



Too often, in the face of so many pressing and complicated issues, the temptation is strong to abandon the historic courthouse — dismissing its symbolic and community values as well as its bad wiring and leaky roof — and start from scratch with a brand new modern building that will be designed to avoid all those problems.

(Replacement of courthouses seems to come in waves, often with specific causes. Frank Milburn, a prolific Southern architect who erected dozens of North Carolina courthouses in the early twentieth century, in at least some cases had on a previous visit urged the commissioners to recognize that the existing courthouse was “unsafe” and desperately needed replacing. In 1923, a legislative act authorized counties to issue bonds for erecting and remodeling courthouses and other county buildings. During the Depression, federal funds supported the construction of many courthouses and the demolition of their predecessors. Current federal construction programs and growing insistence on meeting codes and criteria for function have stimulated another wave of replacements.)

A new courthouse is not a panacea, however. Open-minded consideration of alternatives may reveal that careful adoption of the existing courthouse is the best choice. Many components are involved.

First, intangible but undeniably valuable, is the historic and symbolic role of the historic courthouse to the county, as an emblem of continuity in an increasingly rootless society.

Second, the workmanship and the materials in a historic building expressive of civic pride — the marble, the cast bronze, the hardwood floors, the well-cut stone and the generous scale — often are of a quality that cannot be replaced today amid the stringent budgets of bureaucracy and constantly inflated construction costs. Relatively few counties can afford a major new building of high creativity and stature. As a result, a handsome and sturdy building may be replaced by a new one of common brick, sheet rock, wood laminates and mass-produced components, a building whose economy-inspired form, far from proclaiming proudly its role as a courthouse, could easily be mistaken for a school, a shopping complex or doctors’ or insurance offices.

Third, with careful planning, the historic courthouse can be adapted for new use, perhaps accompanied by some new construction, at much lower cost than new construction would require. The shell exists already and the costs of foundation, walls, roof framing, etc. — often estimated at over half the total cost of new construction — do not need to be met again. Thus, even if wiring, heating and air conditioning, partitions and other elements must be replaced or extensively renewed, the cost may still be lower — and the final product far more satisfying and longer-lasting.

Even the best intentions directed toward preserving and reusing a historic courthouse may go astray, however. Well-informed, sensitive planning is essential. For many courthouses, the way to defacement has been paved with good intentions. Rehabilitation of the interior



Opposite:  
Cabarrus  
County  
Courthouse,  
preserved as a  
community  
center

Left:  
Pasquotank  
County  
Courthouse; an  
addition is  
proposed

Below:  
Courtroom,  
Pasquotank  
County, facing  
renovation



and the construction of additional space can be executed tactfully and skillfully; or, unfortunately and all too frequently, insensitively — and with dire results.

(Currently in North Carolina, additions to or renovations of courthouses are being planned in several counties, most notably Pasquotank and Person).

Construction of an addition to a courthouse is tricky business. Should the new portion mimic the design of the old or clearly state its role as an addition of later date? How much of the old building must be destroyed to add the new section? Does the scale of the new building respect that of the old or overwhelm it?

Some of these problems can be dealt with more effectively if a



courthouse annex — still respecting the scale and form of the old — is built nearby, rather than an abutting addition. Especially for those functions which do not require immediate proximity to the courthouse, this is often a reasonable alternative.

Rehabilitation, too, can do as much harm as it does good. A makeshift fix-up degrades the character of the building and guarantees more problems later. In a more generously budgeted rehabilitation, where problems of code, efficiency, shabbiness, and condition are thoroughly addressed, vigorous remodeling may destroy much of what was being preserved in the first place. It is vital to identify the important elements of the building's historic character and to find ways of retaining these while solving other problems.

The besetting problems of courtrooms themselves, of course, are that they are too lofty, too dim and not energy efficient and that the furnishings are not conveniently arranged. To "solve" these — and often in the name of preserving the historic courthouse — the ceilings are lowered several feet and acoustical tile installed, big fluorescent lights hung, the tall windows bricked up, the old walnut or pine furniture and heavy turned balustrade removed and replaced with new veneered or laminate furnishings and, to complete the job, the walls covered with laminate paneling. The village has been destroyed to save it from the enemy. Or nearly so. This despoliation can be avoided, however; courtrooms can be rehabilitated to meet modern needs while retaining the quality of the original place. (The courthouses in Nash, Johnston and Haywood Counties are exemplary in satisfying both.)

For the rest of the building, the same kinds of alternatives are possible. Introduction of ramps to satisfy handicapped codes, strengthening of structural elements, enclosure of stairs to meet fire codes, illumination of offices and corridors, improvement of

circulation and security needs, freshening of exterior and interior appearance — all these *can* be accomplished with respect for the quality of the existing building and at reasonable cost.

Nevertheless, despite the possibilities for recycling a historic courthouse as courthouse, some communities decide to construct a new facility. Where the size of the old building is dramatically inadequate and adaption to new needs would require unacceptable change to important fabric — as in the case, perhaps, of the 1767 Chowan County Courthouse in Edenton, soon to be replaced — this may be the wiser choice. Yet, as best it robs the courthouse of its reality as courthouse, center of public activity; and at worst it may leave the once-vital building standing as a white elephant that is eventually demolished.

In Cabarrus County, erection of a new courthouse placed the dramatic, towered 1876 building in jeopardy, a situation eventually resolved with successful adaptive use for a community center. Many former courthouses have been preserved to serve in various museum of community functions. The superb antebellum temples of justice in Hillsborough, Lexington and Salisbury are important examples, as is the exuberant eclectic Yanceyville building. The eighteenth century gem of Edenton will be added to their number.

Despite the reverence of the community, however, maintenance and security for the non-courthouse courthouse may be a low budget priority, and, no longer functionally necessary, it may suffer. Adaptation as a library or theater or meeting place is logical, but care must be taken not to destroy essential fabric. In museum use, the temptation of quaintness and stuffiness must be avoided as antithetical to a building once resounding with debate and bustling with public business.

North Carolina's historic courthouses stand as proud



Left: Henderson County: laminate paneling in jury box


Below: Craven County: dropped ceiling



N. C. Courthouse Study

reminders of the ambitions of county government and the skill of past builders. They were built to last and can, with care, gain additional usefulness. Decisions made today by officials and planners determine whether future generations may "stop to gaze on the beautiful proportions" of our "Temples of Justice" and whether these buildings, whose quality is beyond our present economic capabilities, will continue to serve as unifying community symbols. ■

Catherine W. Bishir is head of the Survey and Planning Branch, N. C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.



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## Letters

(From page 11)

**Editor:** I read with interest the mixed review of *Carolina Dwelling* that appeared in the past issue of *North Carolina Architect* (2/78). As I was one of the numerous contributors, my own reaction to the book is admittedly subjective; but I do want to offer a point of rebuttal.

In my view, the real significance of the book is that it is a work about history, historic architecture and, to a degree, historic preservation produced and partly written by architectural students rather than trained historians. *Carolina Dwelling* together with the first issue (1/78) of the born again *North Carolina Architect* (with regionalism as its theme) is proof that preservation related issues are slowly becoming legitimate concerns of the architectural establishment. This has not always been the case. It does not take much looking around Raleigh and every other city and town in North Carolina to discover that most architects and those who make the decisions about

how our cities look and function have had little regard for old buildings, and virtually none for vernacular architecture.

The editor reports that his inspiration for the book comes from "a need to tend to what is here." This is a point of view that every North Carolina architect, planner and decision maker ought to ponder seriously. That *Carolina Dwelling* fails to meet the standards of traditional academic scholarship is not in my view a critical test of its value. The real importance of *Carolina Dwelling* lies in the urgency of its message and the exceptional vitality of its subject matter. Considerations justifiably important to the art historian, such as the frequency of footnotes, are incidental when you consider what a real breakthrough this book is, coming, as it does, from the architectural profession itself.

McKelden Smith  
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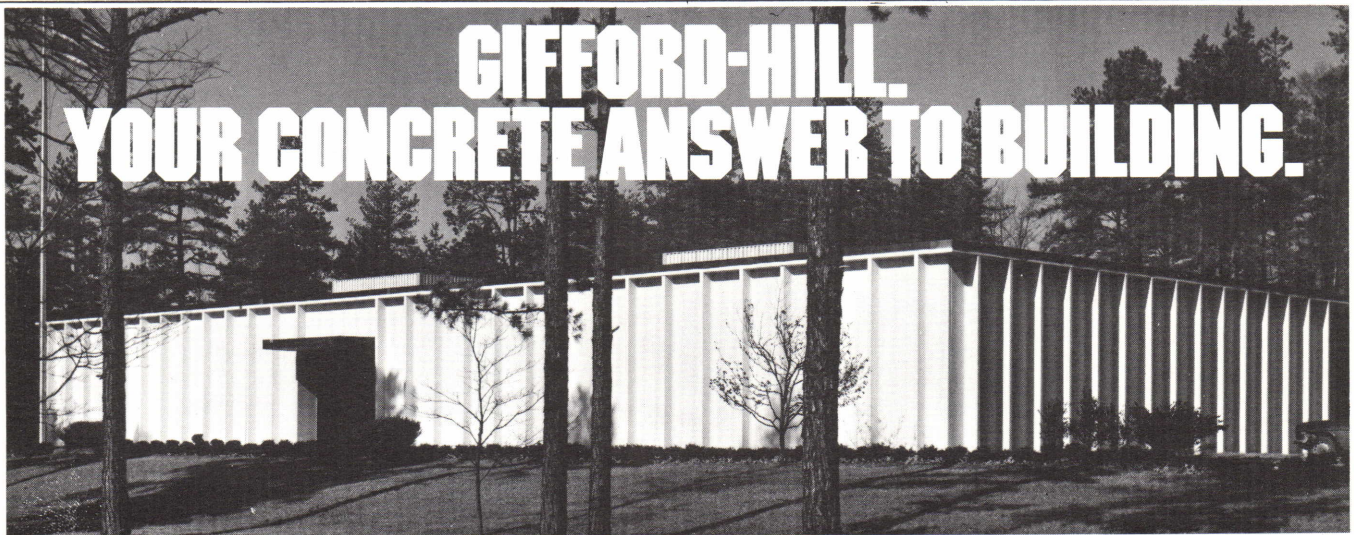
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# The Arts

Courthouse monuments are public art with special meaning to a community

By Jerrold Hirsch and Doug Swaim

Traffic draws a tight knot around the courthouse square in Pittsboro these days. The courthouse itself still looms monumentally, but the space it occupies has diminished both literally and psychologically over the years. A 1930's addition to the original building filled in a part of the square to the east. Mainly, though, it is the heavy traffic that seems to have the structure and its grounds on the defensive within a complete and bridgeless moat, rendering visits across to it rather daring escapades.

Like most older courthouse squares in the state, Pittsboro's harbors a war memorial: a life-size bronze Confederate who stands at ease, his rifle to his side, atop a 20 foot stone obelisk centered in front of the courthouse's north facade and facing Pittsboro's small main street. As focal and dignified as this memorial may be — elevated above the exhaust and clatter — it shares the fate of the once vital public space it occupies: the monument blends mutely into a composition seen unreflectively in passing.

An inscription on the obelisk reads: "This monument is a gift of those who revere the memory of the Confederate soldier, erected under the auspices of the Winnie Davis chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. August 23, 1907." Late August in Chatham County can be inhumanly hot. Still, according to contemporary accounts, the dedication of the memorial was attended by "the largest crowd" ever gathered in those parts. Chief Marshal for the occasion was a Colonel Lane, the last surviving member of the "famous Twenty-Sixth Regiment" who wore his old



Confederate grays — rather, suffered them in the heat — and rode a "spirited" horse. An "orator" represented officialdom up in Raleigh, children carrying flowers and flags represented the future generations who "shan't forget," and the matrons of the U.D.C., guardians of local culture, presided. Prominent mention was made of the fact that the obelisk was carved of Mount Airy granite. No doubt the soldier atop, "a high order of art," was cast in Dixie.

Two thousand "sons of Chatham" who "wore the gray" were remembered that

day. The monument embodies the recollection. For years afterward, wreaths and garlands were placed upon it annually on Confederate Memorial Day. By contrast, although one still hears of grandfathers walking around the monument telling their grandchildren "the story," all that regularly recalls the significance of the memorial to the community today are the annual pranks of high school promsters.

Memorials are established remembrances intended ultimately to transcend the mortality of individual

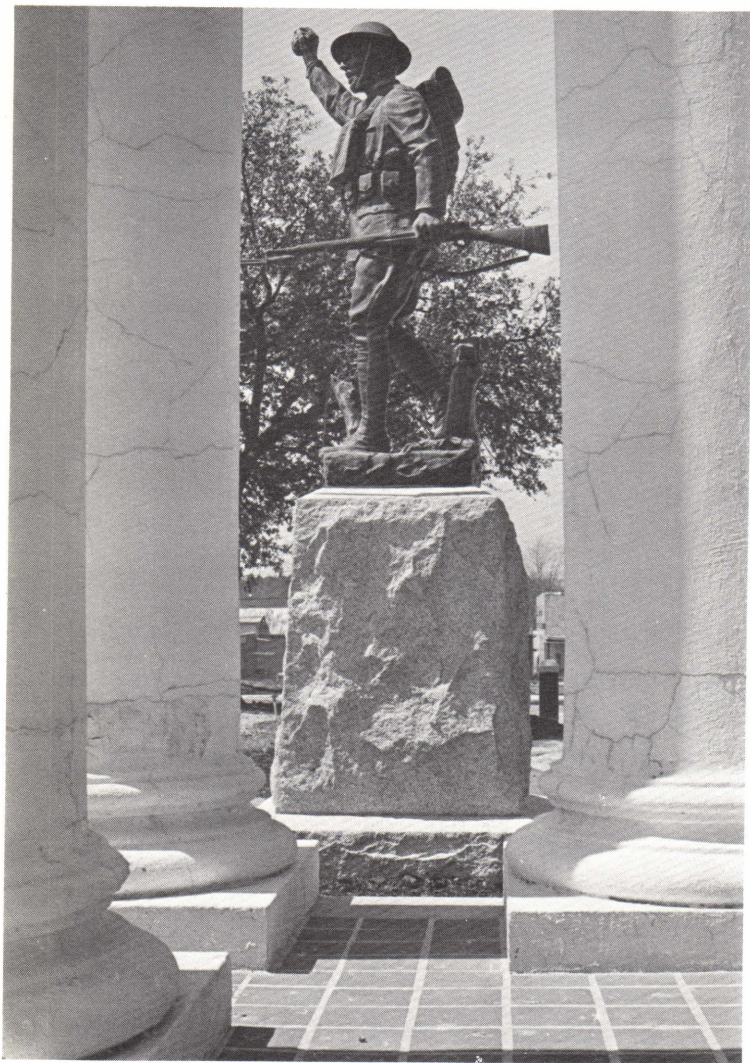


human consciousness. Like gravestones they keep in sight and mind what otherwise would disappear, quite literally buried in time. Public memorials evoke experiences and ideals considered formative in the life of the community. Their role is primarily didactic: they hold before us "the lessons of history."

Two recent Saturdays of exploring the public memorials in this part of the state have left the following impressions: Civil War monuments are our most elaborate. They are generally the oldest as

Doug Swaim





Far Left:  
Chatham  
County: Civil  
War monument,  
hemmed in by  
traffic

Center: Pitt  
County: Civil  
War monument

Left: Nash  
County: World  
War I monument

well, most having been erected during the first decade or so of this century — late enough to be uncontroversial but, significantly, still within living memory. World War I monuments follow closely, then World War II. Plaques listing “Honor Rolls” of war dead are common for both. Stones and plaques commemorate a variety of personalities and events: “In appreciation of the fact that the first flag of the Confederacy, ‘the Stars and Bars,’ was designed by a son of North Carolina,” in Louisburg; “In patriotic commemoration of the visit of George Washington, 1791,” in

Greenville. Flagpoles and benches usually become commemorative as well. Their claims, however, seem more tentative, more perfunctory, perhaps reflecting a waning consensus. Thus the Korean “conflict” and “Vietnam” receive these memorials, if any at all.

If one considers the sites chosen for public memorials as an index of valued public space, then the courthouse square has unquestionably been our region’s most important. By this measure other significant public spaces would include cemeteries,

parks and “greens” and important streets and intersections.

But memorials are not simply placed *in* public space: to an extent they *make* it by occupying it in the sense of claiming it and by concretely manifesting upon it the values of the public “mind.” Thus in the courthouse square’s public space the community memorializes its contributions to larger causes — causes perceived as containing idealistic elements: heroism, noble manhood, courage, and sacrifice. Smithfield’s monument to World War I dead

proclaims: “Mankind has ever revered heroic valor and paid highest tribute to those who in life’s testing time prove well their claim to the noblest manhood. Courageous service in life and a glorious death establish your right to this proud distinction and made humanity your eternal debtor.”

Grief and loss scattered throughout households in the county become, through the monuments, community grief and loss. Returning members of the “Goldsboro Rifles” erected a monument to their comrades lost in the First



World War. The monument helps establish the place's relation to a world of broader concerns. At the same time it draws the community together and symbolizes its wholeness.

The deaths that are memorialized also symbolize the community's claim to a place — a place worth dying for. And those who memorialize their losses can feel a stronger emotional tie to the place.

The monuments do not glorify war. Rather, they represent a belief that these wars were necessary to secure peace. The statue representing "The American Soldier Spirit" in Nashville — as well as the artillery piece set on the courthouse lawn — these are certainly not monuments to pacifism, but neither are they monuments to militarism. They announce a willingness and readiness to defend the nation and community.

These monuments add another dimension to the community's sense of identity, of who and what it is, and what its past experiences have been. Evoking the region's past, Nashville's square also contains a memorial to Revolutionary hero and patriot Francis Nash.

Recent trends in modern art plus the monumental role of these objects tend to keep us from thinking of them as "art." But seen in a broad historical perspective they are a form of art. They are an art form that addresses a public audience. In many communities they are the only candidates for public art. The massiveness and symmetry of the courthouse symbolizes the weight of authority. The public art placed in relation to the courthouse humanizes this authority and gives the courthouse square emotional meaning for the community it serves. The monuments are symbolic even though rendered in a naturalistic idiom. Their appeal has been to ideals, sentiments, and emotions that have been widely shared.

Once the emotional resonance

of these monuments was largely positive for those who made up the community. Those were the days when such organizations as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Daughters of the American Revolution exercised cultural authority. Today, in conversations with local residents in county seats, one gathers that such groups still have authority, but their role is now peripheral. The community is different, the individuals and groups now competing for cultural authority more diverse. And perhaps the strongest of these authorities — television and other manifestations of a national popular culture — exercise their power from outside, without any base in the community.

The contemporary community that the Confederate soldier overlooks is more democratic and inclusive than the one that erected the monument. The civil rights movement, the end of legal segregation, and the enfranchisement of black voters has changed the legal, political, and social definitions of the Southern community. Today, therefore, symbols such as the Confederate memorial are at best unclear in their meaning, and at worst divisive.

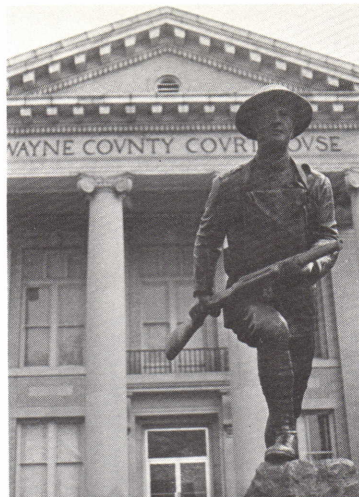
The question is whether these monuments continue to play a place-making and defining

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Doug Swaim

role today and whether they will do so in the future. In the end it depends, of course, on the people in the county. As long as the monuments are there they can be rediscovered. Individuals can strike a relationship between themselves, the monuments and the place. Whether such individual relationships can be shared with others, however, is problematic.

In the meantime should county residents await another war before using this

public space again for public art? Such is the tradition. But perhaps there are other types of public art that could be placed in these spaces that would not contradict tradition, and perhaps could relate to it. Such art would have to function similarly as have these monuments if it were not to appear anomalous. Art objects devoid of any symbolic content or symbolizing the private world of their creators could not play the community role war memorials have.

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Far Left: Wayne County: World War I monument

Center: Pitt County: George Washington monument and Civil War monument

Left: Nash County: cannon, a symbol of willingness to fight for a place

A variety of factors has inhibited recent monument building. Questions about the Vietnam War have made it difficult for many to regard it in the same way as earlier wars. Monuments to it in our communities are inconspicuous, such as the small plaque by the flagpole in front of the Pittsboro courthouse. Whereas patriotic sentiments were once overwhelmingly endorsed by the community, they now seem to many to be hollow words and empty

phrases. Idealism, patriotism, and war are no longer so easily equated. What's more, in a world of images of a bewildering variety, the naturalistic style exhibited in most traditional monuments may not be able to compete. Nonetheless, the monumental space of the courthouse square remains and constitutes an invitation to us to think about how it has been used and how it could be used in the future. ■

**Jerrold Hirsch** is a doctoral candidate in history at UNC-Chapel Hill. **Doug Swaim** received his M.Arch. from the N. C. State University School of Design in 1977. He was editor of the recently published Volume 26 of the *School of Design Student Publication*, *Carolina Dwelling*, which examined North Carolina vernacular architecture.



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# Books

A brief bibliography on courthouses, their design and preservation

Resource material both for the architect preparing a new courthouse or renovations to an older one and for the preservationist working to save an endangered courthouse has been growing in recent years. New historical surveys have been published. And a major photographic essay on the nation's courthouses is in the works. The following is a sample of the books available:

**Courthouses**, a forthcoming book from Horizon Press, is the culmination of a Bicentennial project by the Seagram Co., which commissioned photographers to travel the country photographing courthouses. Though it has its shortcomings as architectural photography (and received some criticism on that account when a show of the photographs was displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York last summer), the project nevertheless includes some excellent examples of photography as art.

**Historic Courthouses of New York State**, by Herbert Alan Johnson and Ralph K. Andrist. Photographs by Milo V. Stewart. (Columbia

University Press, New York, 1977) In some ways similar to the Seagram project, this book presents photographs and descriptive text covering the "18th and 19th Century Halls of Justice Across the Empire State." Though the quality of the photographs is consistently high, some of the photographic selections concentrate too much on building details at the expense of the overall courthouse; most of the text is history of the courthouses' development, rather than their architecture, and the amount and quality of text varies greatly from county to county. But anyone familiar with New York, particularly the upstate region, will feel a wave of

pride and nostalgia upon surveying the architecture presented here. The book is most successful at capturing the flavor of the region. And other states would be fortunate to have a volume documenting their old courthouses so handsomely.

**A Courthouse Conservation Handbook** (The Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C.) Because most courthouses are old buildings, this is a particularly important volume. It provides not only step-by-step procedures to stem demolition of county courthouses but solutions to space, structural and funding problems.

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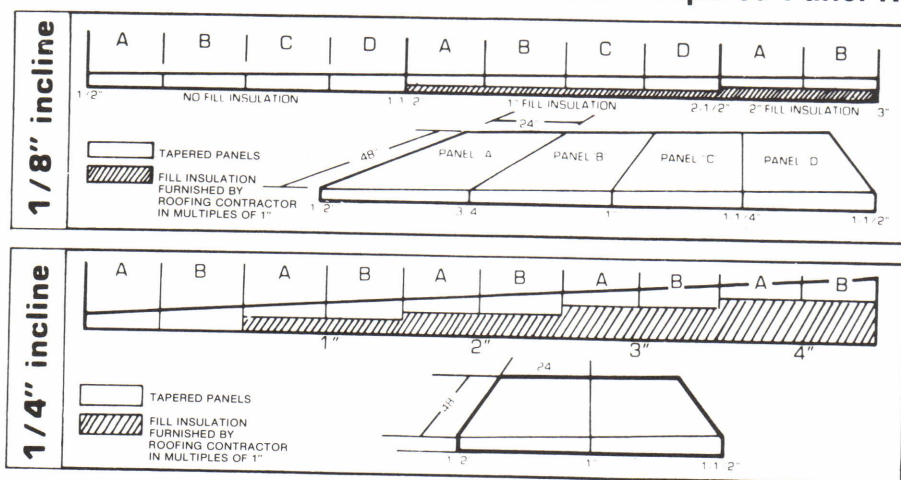
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**Guidelines for the Planning and Design of State Court Programs and Facilities.**

("National Clearinghouse for Criminal Justice Planning and Architecture, Champaign Ill.: University of Illinois.") This is an extensive, multiple-volume examination of judicial facilities. Entire monographs are devoted to various court planning concepts and functional entities such as "Courtroom Design," "Jury Facilities," "Clerk of Court" etc. From the North Carolina standpoint, its principal deficiency is its orientation to extremely large, metropolitan-scale issues and facilities.

**The American Courthouses — Planning and Design for the Judicial Process** (The Institute of Continuing Legal Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. A. Benjamin Handler, project director.) This study, sponsored by the American Bar Association and the American Institute of Architects Joint Committee on the Design of Courtrooms and Court Facilities, is an ambitious one-volume report on the design of courthouses and related facilities, with examples of historic and recently built courthouses. It focuses more heavily on describing judicial processes

than on the means of facilitating them.

**Courthouse Design: A Handbook for Judges and Court Administrators** By Allan Greenburg. (The American Bar Association Commission of Judicial Administration.) This is a useful analysis of courthouse design issues which provides especially valuable guidance in courtroom design criteria.

**Space Management and the Courts**, by F. Michael Wong. (U.S. Department of Justice, 1973.) This government-sponsored design handbook outlines planning methodologies and general physical criteria for judicial facilities.

**State of Georgia Judicial Facilities Study** (The Judicial Council of Georgia and the Administrative Office of the Courts, F. Michael Wong, President.) This four-volume report consists of an inventory of Georgia's judicial facilities and general guidelines for their improvement.

"Information and Guidelines for Planning Court Facilities," by Will Harris, (Division of Research and Planning, Administrative Office of the Courts, State of North

Carolina, 1976) This brief but informative paper has served to provide guidance on court facilities to local officials on an interim basis between its printing and the publication of The North Carolina Courthouse Study.

**North Carolina State Building Code: Volume I General Construction** This document, particularly Chapters 10, 11 and 11x, which specify life safety and handicapped accessibility requirements, stipulates mandatory requirements for buildings (where the code would apply). Buildings existing before the adoption of the code as well as new construction are bound by its provisions. Illustrated supplements on handicapped accessibility are available and one on energy conservation is expected in June. The supplements are available from the N.C. Department of Insurance, Raleigh. ■



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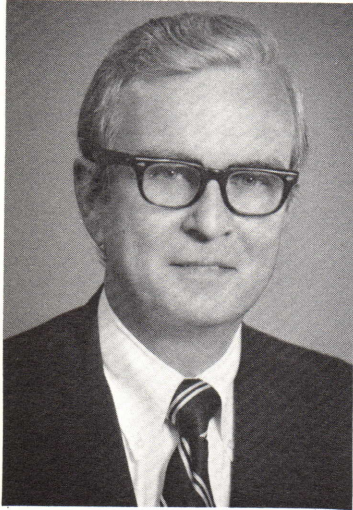
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## People

Two North Carolina architects are named Fellows of AIA



Charles H. Boney, FAIA

Charles H. Boney of Wilmington, partner in charge of design and site planning for the firm of Leslie N. Boney, Architect, was one of 65 newly elected Fellows of the American Institute of Architects invested with fellowship May 21 at the Institute's annual convention in Dallas, Texas.

Honored for his contributions to the profession of architecture, Boney has served as president of the North Carolina Chapter, AIA (1974) and currently serves on the national AIA Committee on Design.

He has combined his architectural career with an interest in architectural

education. Boney currently is president of the North Carolina Architectural Foundation, which is a contributor to the education of architects at N.C. State University and UNC-Charlotte, as well as in technical institutes throughout the state.

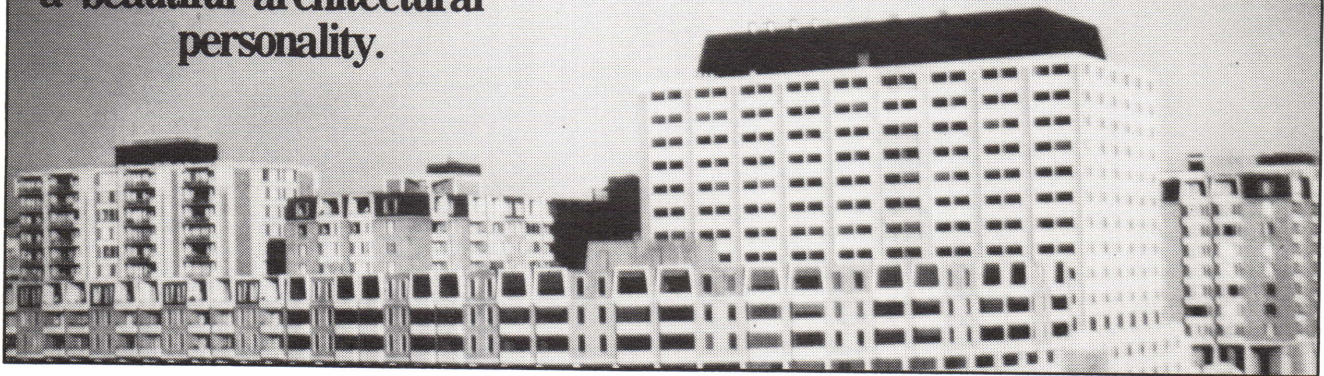
Himself a graduate of the N.C. State University School of Design (1950), Boney as a student was a finalist in the Paris Prize competition on three occasions. The Boney firm in recent years has received recognition for its work in school design, including NCAIA Awards of Merit for Isothermal Community College in Spindale (1971) and Alderman Elementary School in Wilmington

(1967). The American Association of School Administrators presented the firm a citation for the West Rowan High School in Cleveland.

The school was selected as one of the 20 best schools in America and was shown in 1962 at the Second International UNESCO Education Building Conference in London. The Reid Ross High School in Fayetteville was selected in 1968 for exhibition by the American Association of School Administrators. In addition, the firm's Little Chapel on the Boardwalk at Wrightsville Beach received an Honor Award (1955) from the NCAIA and was similarly honored by the South Atlantic Region, AIA.

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Beverly L. Freeman, FAIA

Beverly L. Freeman of Charlotte, president of The Freeman-White Associates, Inc. was one of 65 newly elected Fellows of the American Institute of Architects invested with fellowship May 21 at the Institute's annual convention in Dallas, Texas.

Honored for service to the profession and contributions to architectural practice and design, Freeman has served as president of the North Carolina Chapter, AIA (1972), first president of the Charlotte Section, NCAIA (1963-64) and president of the Clemson University Architectural Foundation (1969-70). Freeman is a 1947 graduate of Clemson University. In addition, he has served as a member of the national AIA

Committee on Architecture for Health and on numerous state professional committees and boards.

Under his leadership, the Freeman-White firm has specialized in health care facilities and has set standards for their design which have served as examples for the rest of the profession. In 1966, the Hamlet School of Nursing won a Merit Award from the South Atlantic Region, AIA. Two hospitals, Nash General Hospital and Gaston Memorial Hospital have received national awards for excellence in interior design. Nash General was honored in 1972 with the Burlington House Award and Gaston County received the Institute of Business Designers Award of

Excellence in 1974.

In addition, the Freeman-White firm received a NCAIA Award of Merit for the West Charlotte High School Auditorium (1969) and a NCAIA Honor Award for the offices of Omnia Design, Inc. (1970). Omnia Design is Freeman-White's interior design subsidiary, of which Freeman is chairman of the board.

In 1971, Freeman and sculptor Richard Lippold received a collaborating artists award from NCAIA for a metal sculpture in the main office of North Carolina National Bank in Charlotte. With NCNB's move to its new headquarters, the sculpture has since been donated to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

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Courthouses need symbolism — but a symbolism appropriate to their age

By Robert P. Burns, AIA

Surviving courthouses from earlier architectural epochs tell us much about their times, their places, and the roles they occupied in their cultural contexts. The courthouse enjoyed a central, pre-eminent position in the life and townscape of the county seat. It was generally the most ambitious and costly building of its era. Its lofty portico and soaring cupola, recalling the structures of republican Rome, signaled the ideals of justice and the citizens' equality before the law. It was the unique emblem of county identity and the principal source of local pride, reflecting in its rich surfaces the industry, affluence and aspirations of the county's citizens. The courthouse and its square, for many years and for many people who grew up in the state's quiet, graceful county seats, formed one of the most evocative environments of the North Carolina landscape and provided a memorable setting for historic events.

In retrospect, however, it would appear that it has been their symbolic function, rather than their functional purposes, which was most critical in fixing the county courthouse firmly in the life and consciousness of the people of the state. This tradition extended well into the twentieth century.

The modern movement in architecture, originating as a reaction against nineteenth and early twentieth century eclecticism, sought to "purify" architecture and to free it from the tyranny of historical recollection. In their most celebrated and extreme manifestos, the early theorists of modern architecture proclaimed a totally new architecture based on bare functionalism, accommodated in technologically advanced, unadorned abstract forms. ("The house is a machine for living in." "Less is more." "Ornament is crime!")

But the prominent Dutch architect, Aldo van Eyck explained the reaction this way: modern architects "have been harping on what is different in our time to such an extent that they have lost touch with what is not different, with what is essentially the same."

As in other buildings, this rejection of historical styles, ornament and symbolic content by most modern architects has had a profound impact on courthouses built in North Carolina over the past three decades. The courthouse was flattened out, stripped of its rich and modeled surfaces, and moved to the strip, nose-to-nose with used car lots and golden arches. Monuments and allegorical sculpture, laden with symbolic and historic content, were scorned and replaced with repetitive planting boxes or abstract lighting fixtures.

With these developments, the values of society, not merely the premises of the modern architecture, are called into question. A society which devalues its most important

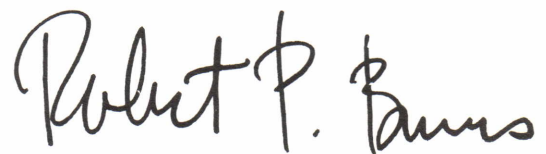
institutions can hardly demand that architects respond to an empty challenge.

The 1970's seem to be a period of reassessment — of our roots, our culture, our environment. Perhaps it is an appropriate time to examine the meaning that certain institutions have in the life of society. Alfred North Whitehead has suggested that at times of crucial adjustment in the social order, old symbols retain their importance, but the creation of new symbols is essential for a vigorous social system. So it may be for the justice system and its courthouses, which until recent years have depended on an acknowledged symbolic code for their continued pivotal role in society.

That the creation of new symbolic-rich architectural forms is in fact possible has been amply demonstrated by the great American triumvirate, H. H. Richardson (whose Alleghany, Pa. Courthouse is one of his masterpieces), Louis Sullivan and Frank

Lloyd Wright (and more recently by Louis I. Kahn), all of whom combined creative invention with valid traditions to produce works of architecture rich in symbolic messages.

It is crucial to understand that what is proposed is neither a return to the irrelevant forms of past eras or a tour-de-force of contemporary expressionism. What is needed is something entirely different, in the words of Robert Venturi, "... a rich and complex and contradictory architecture based on the richness and ambiguity of modern experience ..." It will be neither easy nor swift in coming. Only a few truly creative designers will answer the challenge and only a few clients (counties) will issue it. Is it not now time to heed Whitehead's injunction to revere our ancient symbols but to seek new, revised symbols relevant to our own age? The future of the courthouse as a significant public institution and architectural event may well depend on our response. ■



**Robert P. Burns** is professor of architecture at the N. C. State University School of Design and project director of *The North Carolina Courthouse Study*.



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