

## DEKALB COUNTY COURTHOUSE HISTORY

The site of the first DeKalb County Court session was held on October 9, 1837 in the home of Rufus Colton who was the first clerk of the court. The site on Coltonville Road is presently identified by a Historical Marker erected by the DAR in 1917 and DeKalb County in 2006. A bitter battle was waged over the exact site to be designated as the county seat of the new county of DeKalb. The settlements of Coltonville, Brush Point and Orange (now known as Sycamore) were competing for this distinction with Sycamore finally being designated as the county seat in 1839.

The first of the three courthouses was a 20-by-30 foot two story wooden structure located on the south side of West State Street across from the present courthouse. This building was constructed of wood from various sawmills acquired by citizens as trades and donations and erected by volunteers. This building was used from 1839 until 1850. No photographs of this original structure are known to exist. As a memorial to the site of the first courthouse, a plaque is presently located on the front of an existing insurance building.

The second courthouse, located at the present site, was a two-story brick structure, 60 feet long by 40 feet wide, containing a cupola-like clock tower and was completed in 1850. In 1864 a two-story addition was built to house certain county offices and eight years later vaults for records were added to the rear of the addition.

In the fall of 1901 the County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a resolution authorizing the construction of the third courthouse appropriating \$100,000 for that purpose. On October 29, 1903 the cornerstone for the new courthouse was laid and construction continued through 1904 with the dedication occurring in 1905. This new courthouse is a three story building, 128 feet by 100 feet, with the exterior constructed of Bedford limestone quarried in Indiana. The interior contains many classic architectural features which were prominent in the early 1900's. Several minor updates were made to the interior of the building throughout the years but no major renovations occurred until 1983 when Judge Rex F. Meilinger spearheaded a movement to renovate and restore the 78 year-old building to its original grace and grandeur. Maintaining all the classic and historical features of the structure was of utmost importance. Great care was taken in the restoration of the original furniture, doors, wood trim, plaster work, stained glass, Tennessee marble, bronze and brass used throughout the building to restore its original dignity and elegance. This renovation was completed in 1987. Due to increased demands on court services, all unrelated offices were moved from the courthouse to other locations in other county buildings. Only the courtrooms, the Circuit Clerks offices, Court Security, States Attorney's offices and Court Services remained until the State's Attorney's Office and Court Services were relocated to the Legislative Center in 2002. At that time the Public Defender was relocated to a renovated space in the Courthouse basement. Several other minor renovations and updating have occurred between 1987 and 2010.

With the passage of time, the increasing need for advancing technology, and the over-burdening volume of courtroom demands, Judge Kurt P. Klein recognized the need for a major expansion of the courthouse. With the assistance and urging of Committee Chair Ruth Ann Tobias, County Administrator Ray Bockman and Circuit Clerk Maureen Josh, Judge Klein convinced the DeKalb County Board to pass a resolution approving a fifteen million dollar expansion of the courthouse. A committee was formed in the early months of 2009 to determine whether a new courthouse should be constructed at another site or if an expansion at the present site was feasible. The overwhelming response from the public and those working within the court system was to make every effort to maintain most court services at the present location. Taking into consideration the historical significance of the present structure, the primary concern was to seek restoration specialists with the knowledge and skill to construct an addition which would include current and advanced technology while retaining the historical integrity of the building. Detailed attention was given to incorporate the structural design used in 1903 with the design of the new addition. The results of the efforts given this expansion by Judge Klein and his committee is evident in the courthouse as it looks today. The 42,000 square foot expansion includes the addition of one courtroom, judges' chambers, jury assembly area, enhanced court security and offices for the State's Attorney on the first floor. The second floor contains two courtrooms, judges' chambers, an atrium, jury rooms and public restrooms. The Public Defender's offices, Sally Port garage and elevators and prisoner holding cells are located on the lower level. At the time of the November 2012 dedication the third floor remains unfinished and in reserve for future use. In describing our newly expanded DeKalb County Courthouse the quote from the Sycamore Prospectus is as applicable today as when it was originally used to describe our courthouse in 1906. "There is not a building in the state that is better adapted, more substantially built, or furnished in better taste."