

History of the Cook County Courthouses

The early courthouses

Cook County built their first courthouse in 1835. The county's second courthouse (and city hall) was built in 1853. It was constructed in the Greek Revival style, and built with stone. The stone had been brought to Chicago from Lockport, New York. It was designed by the architectural firm of John M. Van Osdel, Chicago's first professional architect. An additional story was constructed in 1858-59. The courthouse was expanded again, just before the Great Chicago Fire. Unfortunately, this historic courthouse was destroyed, along with many other buildings, in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871.

The second courthouse (and city hall), and courthouse square, was utilized in a variety of ways. Trees were planted there in 1854; and in 1860 a crop of wheat was harvested from the square. Cows and horses also grazed on the square during the Civil War. In 1863, it was made known in the local papers that the courthouse square was littered with refuse, ashes, old hats, dead cats, and filth, and notice was made to get the square cleaned up. The second courthouse (and city hall), and courthouse square, was also the location for political meetings and demonstrations. The Free-Soilers convened at the courthouse in 1854, and in 1856 a meeting to protest the expansion of slavery into Kansas spilled over into the courthouse square from nearby Metropolitan Hall. In 1858, Democrat Isaac Cook held a county convention at the courthouse to support the pro-slavery LeCompton Constitution in Kansas. U.S. Senator Stephen Douglas spoke at the courthouse in September of 1856, and the newly formed Republican Party held a mass meeting on the courthouse square in November of 1856.

Unique forms of punishment were also held on the courthouse square, like when betters who lost on the election of 1858 were penalized by having to saw wood there.

During the Civil War, "War Democrats" met at the courthouse square to support the Emancipation Proclamation in September of 1862, and in May of 1863 there was a mass meeting for advocates of Lincoln's war policy focused on the quelling of treason and disloyalty at home; while "Copperhead" Congressman Clement Vallandigham delivered an anti-war speech there in August of 1864. In late April and early May of 1865, the courthouse was draped in black in remembrance of President Lincoln-the President would also lay in state there prior to being buried in Springfield.

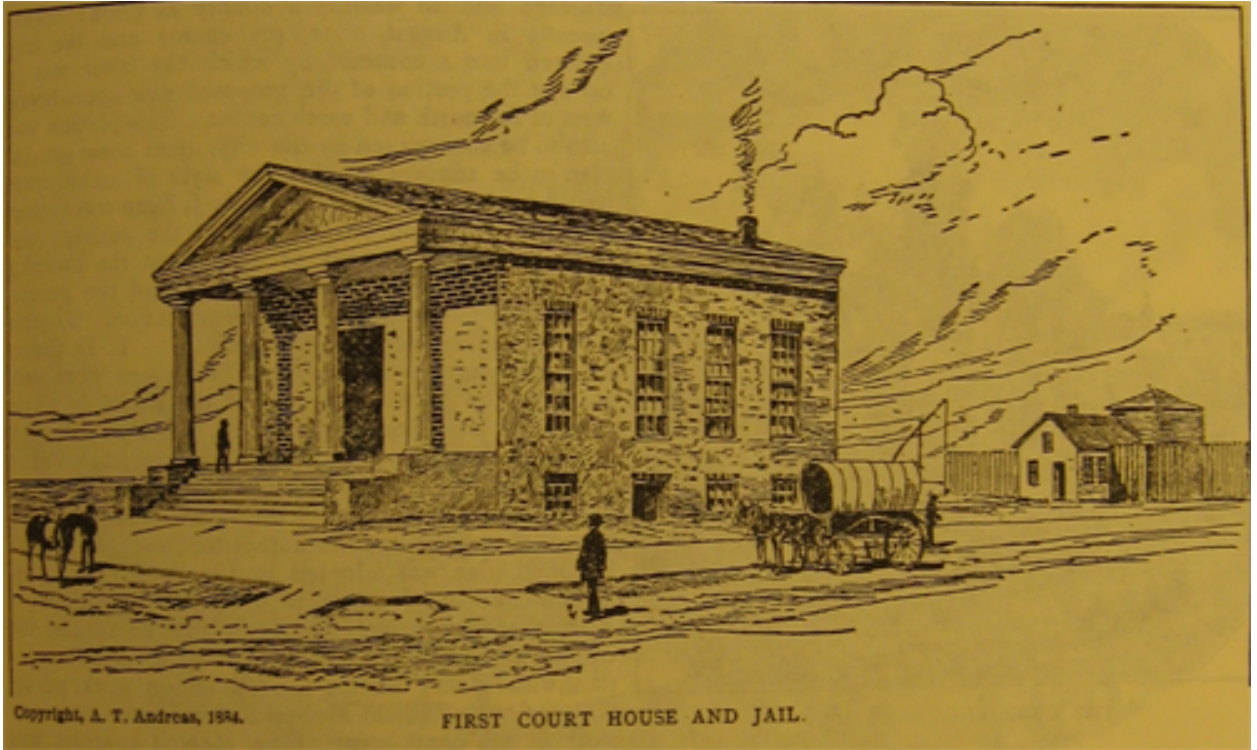
Sources:

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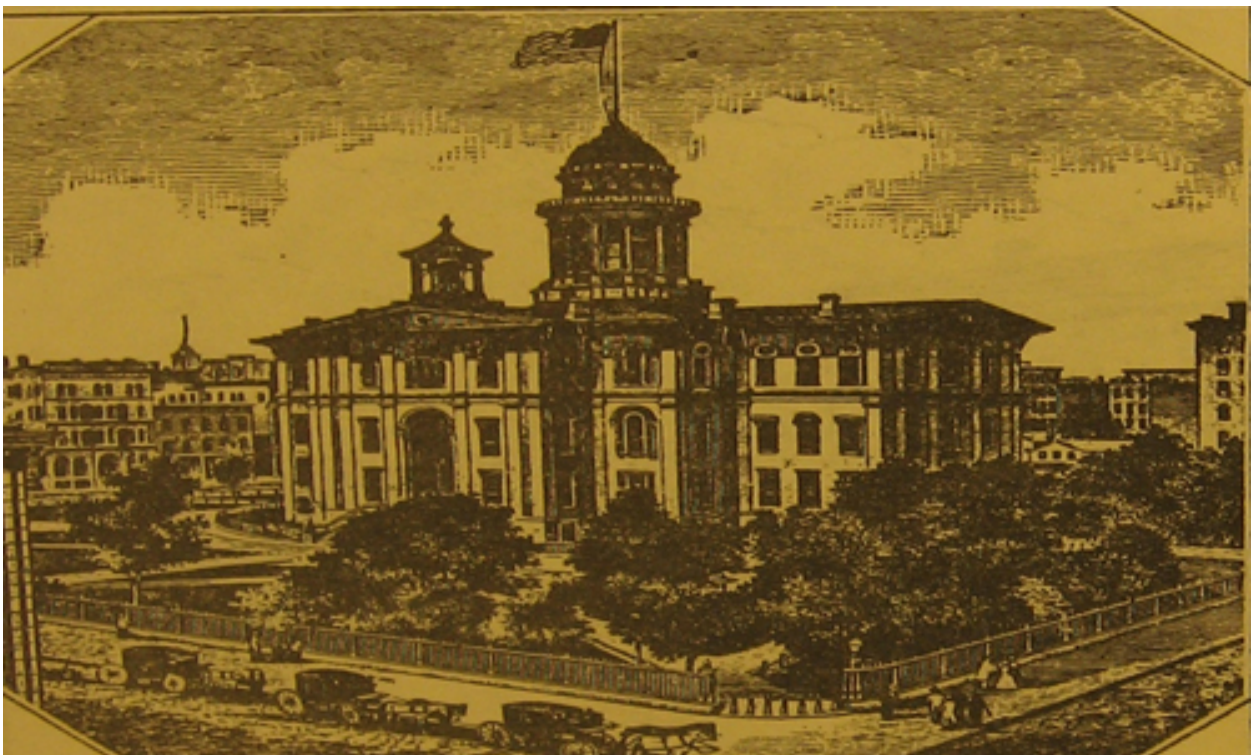
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The first Cook County Courthouse, 1835-1853



The second Cook County Courthouse (and City Hall) with additional story, 1858-1871



The second Cook County Courthouse (and City Hall), showing expansion, 1871

The later courthouses

After the Chicago fire, Cook County held its court proceedings at a building that came to be known as “The Rookery”. It was meant to be a temporary accommodation, but was used for nearly fifteen years. In 1877, Cook County, and the city, decided to replace the courthouse (and city hall) that had been destroyed in the Chicago fire, but construction wasn’t complete until 1885. It was designed by city architect James J. Egan, and was built with limestone and granite. It was designed in the Second Empire style. Another courthouse (and city hall) was constructed between 1905 and 1911. This courthouse was designed by the architectural firm of Holabird & Roche. It was constructed in the Beaux-Arts style. This courthouse is now the current City Hall and County Building. The current courthouse was built in 1965, and is known as the Daley Center. It is built like a skyscraper. The Daley Center was designed by the architectural firm of C.F. Murphy.

“In Chicago, a joint project for city and Cook County buildings was characterized by wasteful political warfare of comic opera absurdity which received extensive coverage in the 1877 issues of American Architect and Building News. Montgomery Schuyler described these short-lived buildings in 1891, mentioning the notoriety they attained by the assignment to different architects of halves of a single design. [1] “

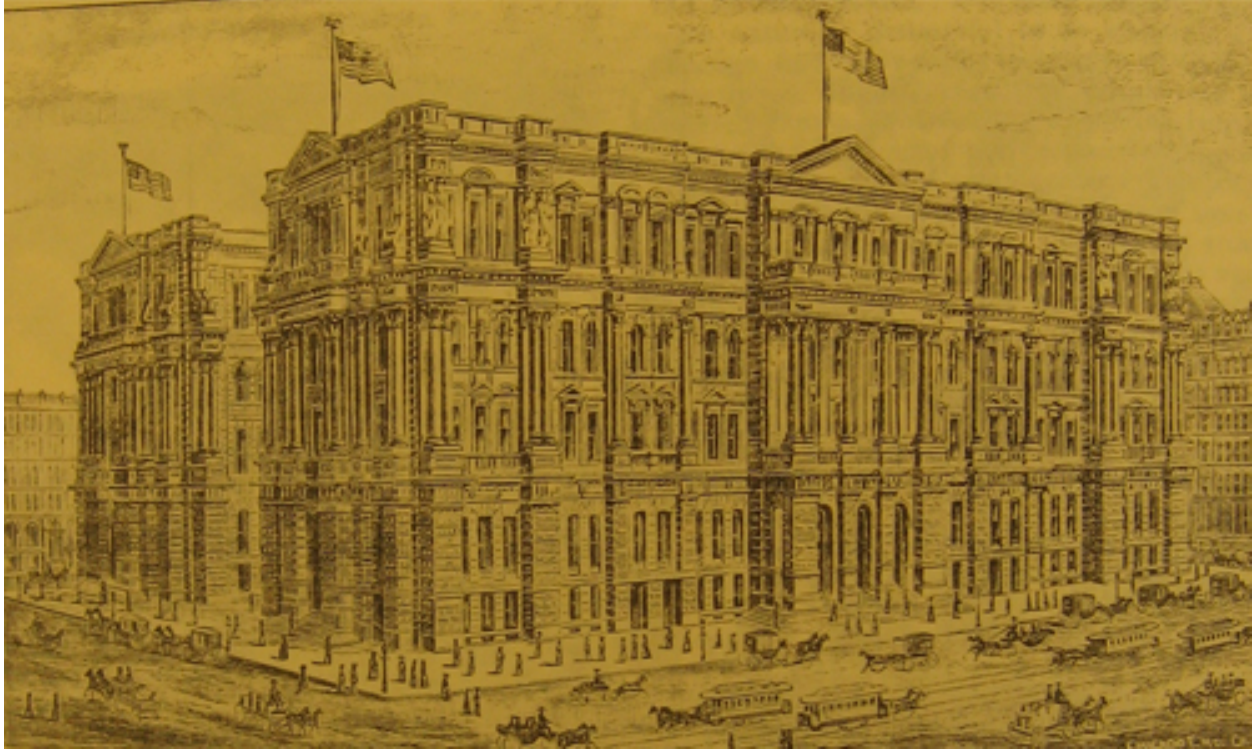
[1] Montgomery Schuyler, “Glimpses of Western Architecture: St. Paul and Minneapolis,” American Architecture and Other Writings, ed. William Jordy and Ralph Coe (New York, 1964), pgs. 85-88

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The third Cook County Courthouse (and City Hall), 1885-1911



The fourth Cook County Courthouse (and City Hall), while under construction, 1911-1965



The current Cook County Courthouse, known as the Daley Center, 1965-present