

## History of the Coles County Courthouses

### *The first two courthouses*

Coles County built their first courthouse in 1831. It was constructed out of hewn logs. In 1835, the county's second courthouse was built. It was constructed with brick, and additions were added in 1858 and 1864.



The second Coles County Courthouse, 1835-1858

Abraham Lincoln tried the case *In re Bryant et al* at this courthouse in 1847.

According to the *History of Coles County*, the first circuit court proceedings were administered by Illinois Supreme Court Justice William Wilson.

The first murder trial held in Coles County was in 1836 when Todd Waltrip was tried for the murder of Nathaniel Killim; Waltrip was sent to the penitentiary.

Despite the existence of the rule of law, two men were the victims of lynching and one riot occurred in Coles County between 1856 and 1888. The first lynching occurred in February of 1856 when Adolph Monroe was lynched, the second lynching occurred in 1888 when William Moore was lynched. The "Charleston Riot" occurred on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1864.

“Probably the first brick structure in Charleston, the Coles County courthouse was constructed by Leander Munsell of Edgar County. It was similar in design to the other foursquare or “coffee mill” courthouses in Edgar and McLean Counties, which Munsell also erected. A square brick building, it was constructed on a foundation of Embarras River stone. Standing at the center of the public square, it contained the courtroom, grand-jury room and treasurer’s office. The clerk’s office was in a small detached building to the west, and the judge’s office was in a similar structure to the east. In 1858, the building was enlarged by an addition to the north side, with wide porticos supported by great round, brick pillars. The same classical revival design was carried out on the other three sides of the building in 1864, when the courtroom was moved to the second floor, and additional offices and a jail filled the first floor. The courthouse building was demolished in 1898.”

See, *“From Log Cabins to Temples of Justice: Courthouses in Lincoln’s Illinois”*, pg. 18-19.



**The second Coles County Courthouse, 1858-1898**

Sources:

*Illinois Courthouses: An Illustrated History*, Dennis Weiser, 2009

*From Log Cabins to Temples of Justice: Courthouses in Lincoln's Illinois*, Susan Krause, 2000

*Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Coles County*, Newton Bateman, 1906, available online at <http://www.archive.org/details/historicalencyclcoc00bate>

*History of Coles County*, William Perrin, 1879, available online at <http://www.archive.org/details/historyofcolesco00perr>

"In view of the uncertainty of life": A Coles County Lynching, John Lupton, 1996, accessed at <http://dig.lib.niu.edu/ISHS/ishs-1996autumn/ishs-1996autumn134.pdf>

"Pretty damned warm times": The 1864 Charleston Riot and "the inalienable right of revolution", Robert Sampson, 1996, accessed at <http://dig.lib.niu.edu/ISHS/ishs-1996summer/ishs-1996summer099.pdf>

*In Re Bryant*: <http://www.matsontrial1847.org/story/accounts> , <http://papersofabrahamlincoln.org/>

Information on Justice William Wilson: <http://www.illinoiscourthistory.org/justices/156>

### *The current courthouse*

The current courthouse was built in 1898. It was constructed in the Victorian style. The courthouse was designed by the architectural firm of C.W. Rapp. Construction of this courthouse was controversial at the time, due to the fact that the voters did not approve its construction beforehand.

“It was relatively common for the interiors of a courthouse to have a Renaissance character while the exterior remained Romanesque. Alfred Grindle’s Jasper County Courthouse at Rensselaer, Indiana, (1896-98) is a good example but C.W. Rapp’s Coles County Courthouse at Charleston, Illinois, (1898-1900) may be a better one. It has a square plan covering most of the public square and is three stories high. Gables are centered over triple-arched entrance porches at each side and there is a hip-roofed pavilion at each corner. A slim tower rises out of the center, completely unrelated to the central rotunda and dome of the interior below.”

See, “*Temples of Justice*”, pg. 392

Sources:

*Illinois Courthouses: An Illustrated History*, Dennis Weiser, 2009

*Temples of Justice: Nineteenth Century County Courthouses in the Midwest and Texas*, Paul Kenneth Goeldner, 1970



**The current Coles County Courthouse, 1898-present**