

HISTORY OF THE SHELBY COUNTY COURTHOUSE

In 1851 the General Assembly of Iowa fixed the boundaries of Shelby County. The new county was named after General Isaac Shelby, who was famous for serving in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and becoming the first governor of the State of Kentucky. Early settling in Shelby County began in 1848 in Galland's Grove.

On February 4, 1855, the county seat of Shelbyville was officially platted in Section 27, Township 81 North, Range 40 West, (Grove Township). There is no record of a courthouse in Shelbyville. By a vote of the people in April of 1859, the county seat was moved from Shelbyville to Harlan, and in 1860 there was erected by James M. Long and Adam T. Ault a frame courthouse in the center of Court and Seventh Streets. The official business of the County was held in this building until 1875 when the Board of Supervisors appropriated \$4,250 for a courthouse, which was built in that year on the Public Square. By 1890, it was recommended to the Board that the vaults of the courthouse containing the records should be condemned and the rooms were no longer adequate for the purpose of transaction of public business.

As in many counties, the proposition to erect a new courthouse was met with opposition and was defeated a couple times before finally carrying in the November, 1891 General Election; the vote was 1898 votes for and 1270 votes against. The new courthouse was to be of solid stone, entire with a slate roof, the dimensions of 72 x 112 feet on the ground, three stories in height, with a ten-foot basement. "The apex of the central tower will kiss the morning sunlight at a height of 130 feet." C. E. Bell of Council Bluffs was the architect. The contract for erection of the courthouse was awarded to W. H. Cockerell for \$43,500.

It may be of interest to note the materials that went into the building of the courthouse: 1,000,000 bricks, 80 carloads of stone. The rest of the materials were measured by wagon loads (in parentheses): galvanized iron (15), vault doors & iron (10), slate (15), brick (1000), stone (800), lime and cement (550), lumber (120), sand (350), plastering (20), iron work (20), tile (10), concrete (150), sash & doors (40) for a total of 3,100 wagon loads of materials. "One of the great days in Shelby County history was Thursday, August 4, 1892, on which the corner stone of the present courthouse was laid." The Courthouse Dedication was held on September 14, 1893.

"From the minutes of the County Auditor under date of November 13, 1893, it appears that the cost of the courthouse, including furniture, steam heating plant, the fees of architect and superintendent, electric light fixtures, painting, etc. was \$62,733.90.

In April of 1899, the Board ordered that 20 feet of the tower be removed and that the trusses supporting the tower be reinforced or doubled. In June of 1899, it was ordered that the tower be removed.

In 1978, a \$300,000 remodeling project on the interior of the courthouse was completed. The Courthouse was also placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The renovations were done totally with federal dollars: a \$292,000 grant and \$309,000 by federal revenue sharing monies. There was no elevator in the courthouse and this was the chief reason for the renovation. There have been minor changes in various offices to accommodate computer, copy and fax machine and microfilm usage.

On August 1, 1992, the Shelby County Courthouse celebrated its 100th Birthday. The day was filled with children's games, courthouse tours, "home county" entertainment, food stands and speeches. A huge birthday cake was served to those in attendance as a finale.