

ROCK ISLAND COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
210 15<sup>th</sup> Street  
Rock Island  
Rock Island County  
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1282

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
Midwest Region  
601 Riverfront Drive  
Omaha, NE 68102

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### ROCK ISLAND COUNTY COURTHOUSE

HABS No. IL-1282

- Location:** The Rock Island County Courthouse is located at 210 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Rock Island, Rock Island Township, Rock Island County, Illinois.
- The Rock Island County Courthouse is located at latitude: 41.509645, longitude: -90.579678. This coordinate was taken from entering the physical address in Google Earth on June 1, 2022.
- Present Owner/  
Occupant:** Present owners: Rock Island County  
The building is currently vacant. It has been unused since December 2018.
- Present Use:** The building served as a county courthouse from the time it was built until the building was vacated.
- Significance:** The Rock Island County Courthouse is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A: Politics/Government. It reflects the growing importance and rising civic pride of the Quad Cities region and symbolizes the importance of the United States legal system to nineteenth century citizens. As such, the Rock Island County Courthouse was the hub of many county activities and functions that propelled the growth of the region through the first half of the twentieth century.
- Historians:** Andrew J. Elders and Deborah M. Carey, Architectural historians;  
Independent contractors.  
The completion date of this report is January 31, 2023.
- Project  
Information:** Those involved in preparing the documentation for this report include Deborah M. Carey, Andrew J. Elders, and Susan S. Benjamin, of Benjamin Historic Certifications, LLC.
- This documentation project was prepared pursuant to Illinois Historic Resources Preservation Act (20 ILCS 3420) and its rules (17 IAC 4180) to address Stipulation I. MITIGATION of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) Regarding Demolition of the Rock Island County Courthouse at 210 15th St., Rock Island, Illinois, signed October 26, 2021.

## **Part I. Historical Information**

### **A. Physical History**

- 1. Date of erection:** 1895-97
- 2. Architect:** Gunn & Curtiss (original building); Melvin R. Beckstrom (subsequent work)

Gunn & Curtiss was an architectural partnership comprised of Frederick C. Gunn and Louis Curtiss.<sup>1</sup> The firm's office was located in Kansas City, Missouri. Gunn & Curtiss formed their partnership in 1890 and dissolved it ten years later. During this period the firm designed courthouses (including the Tarrant County Courthouse in Fort Worth, Texas in 1895 and the Cabell County Courthouse in Huntington, West Virginia in 1899), the Missouri State Building for the World's Columbian Exposition, churches and other important buildings throughout the United States.

Frederick C. Gunn was born in Atchison, Kansas, in 1863. When he was 14 years old, his family moved to Kansas City, Missouri. He graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, in 1873. He became a sole practitioner after the partnership with Curtiss dissolved. At that point he designed a number of public buildings in the West, including courthouses at Lawrence, Emporia, and Salina, Kansas.<sup>2</sup> From 1892 to 1894, he served on the Kansas City, Missouri City Council. He died in 1959. The State Historical Society of Missouri has a collection of his and his family's papers.

Louis Curtiss was born in Belleville, Ontario, Canada. He reportedly studied architecture at the University of Toronto and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.<sup>3</sup> He settled in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1887 and began his career working at the distinguished firm of Van Brunt and Howe.<sup>4</sup> After his ten-year partnership with Gunn, Curtiss also went out on his own. Through approximately the turn of the twentieth century, Curtiss designed in the revivalist styles that his clients demanded. However, after 1900, he moved away from the revival styles and built in the Prairie, Vienna

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<sup>1</sup> Before 1887, he spelled his name Curtis. By the time he designed the Rock Island County Courthouse, he spelled it Curtiss. Records examined don't indicate exactly when he changed the spelling of his name.

<sup>2</sup> George Creel and John Slavens, "Men who Made Kansas City: Frederick C. Gunn," accessed August 10, 2022, [http://www.vintagekansascity.com/menwhomadekc/gunn\\_frederick\\_c.html](http://www.vintagekansascity.com/menwhomadekc/gunn_frederick_c.html)

<sup>3</sup> Kimberly Harper, "Louis S. Curtiss," Historic Missourians, accessed August 10, 2022, <https://historicmissourians.shsmo.org/louis-curtiss>

<sup>4</sup> Henry Van Brunt, who was born in Boston in 1832, graduated Harvard College and, while a partner of William Ware, designed many buildings in the Boston area, including Harvard's Memorial Hall. In 1874 he published a translation of Eugene Viollet-le-Duc's Discourses on Architecture. After his partnership dissolved, he established the firm of Ven Brunt & Howe and subsequently moved his office to Kansas City, with the promise of numerous commissions for the Union Pacific Railroad for grand stations in western cities.

Secessionist and Art Nouveau styles.<sup>5</sup> Curtiss was a prolific architect, designing over 200 buildings during his career. His career slowed during the First World War as the styles of his buildings were no longer fashionable. Curtiss died on June 24, 1924. He is buried in Mt. Washington Cemetery in Kansas City. Several buildings designed by Curtiss are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There is a monograph on his work, written by Sandy Wilda and Larry K. Hancks, *Stalking Louis Curtiss, Architect: A Portrait of the Man and his Work*. Kansas City, MO: Ward Parkway Press, 1991.

Melvin R. Beckstrom (subsequent work)

Melvin R. Beckstrom was born in Moline, Illinois, in 1904. His mother was from Sweden and his father was a third generation Swedish American. He studied architecture at the University of Illinois College of Engineering and graduated in 1930. After working for other architecture firms, he went out on his own in 1932 and continued to work until 1983.

His work spanned local, state and federal projects. Locally he designed Washington Elementary School in Moline, Alexander Hamilton Grade School, Coal Valley High School, Hillside Heights and Steed Tower. He died in 1988.

### **3. Original and Subsequent Owners:**

The original and only owner of the building is Rock Island County.

### **4. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:**

*Contractor & Stonecutter:* Charles J. Larkin

Charles J. Larkin (C.J.) was born in Schenectady, New York, in 1852. He lived there until he was four after which the family moved to Rock Island, Illinois. His parents were from Ireland and his father was a blacksmith. C.J. attended the public schools in Rock Island and then pursued the stonecutter's trade.

Larkin was the builder for buildings in Rock Island including the Rock Island County Courthouse and the building housing the Modern Woodmen of America. In Davenport, Iowa, (one of the Quad Cities that includes Rock Island and Moline Illinois, and Davenport and Bettendorf, Iowa) he served as builder for a post office and the Scott County Jail. He also was one of the founders of Rock Island Tool Co. that was later called Rock Island Manufacturing Co. Its products included vises for machine shop and foundry use, power grinders, grist grinders, stock waterers, and cement tools. The company was acquired by Birtman Electric in Chicago but continued to operate in Rock

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<sup>5</sup> Keith Eggener, "Louis Curtiss and the Politics of Architectural Reputation," Places Journal, accessed August 10, 2022, <https://placesjournal.org/article/louis-curtiss-and-the-politics-of-architectural-reputation/?cn-reloaded=1>

Island until 1959. At that time, this arm of Birtman Electric was purchased by Production Tool Supply Co. of Warren, Michigan, and the operation moved to that location.

*Fresco Artist:* W.G. Andrews.

W.G. Andrews was an artist based in Clinton, Iowa. He painted frescoes in the Rock Island County Courthouse. What this encompassed is unknown. There are examples of stenciling found in the building. Andrews' firm did several courthouses throughout the Midwest that included a number of murals. He also painted a fresco at the Clinton County Courthouse entitled the Three Sisters of Justice.

*Heating & Ventilation:* Foss & Noble

*Plumbing:* Davis Company

*Electrical Wiring:* Tri-City Electric Company

*Elevators:* Moline Elevator Company

- 5. Original Plans and construction:** Originally constructed between 1895 and 1897, the building was contracted for \$112,201, excluding heating and ventilation. There were originally sixty rooms over four floors and a basement. Each floor had approximately 11,500 square feet. Final cost was approximately \$172,000, including heating and ventilation. Original floorplans and drawings are found in Appendix 2.

**6. Alterations and Additions:**

**The Site**

1895

Construction begins on third county courthouse.

1897

Third county courthouse completed. Second county courthouse and 1883 office building demolished.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mark A. VandeWiele, "ROCK ISLAND COUNTY COURTHOUSE SQUARE 1833-2018." Rock Island County, April 16, 2019, accessed August 15, 2022, <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiKwrHxver6AhWFHjQIHV6sC3sQFnoECCUQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rockislandcounty.org%2FWorkArea%2FDownloadAsset.aspx%3Fid%3D42892&usg=AOvVaw1To5EZYfKD5PhQVw3SINUT>.

The Civil War Soldiers' Monument initially remained at its original location (Appendix 3-A) but was soon moved further towards the northeast corner of courthouse square and placed on a new granite base. At that time the letters were recut.<sup>7</sup>

### 1923

Demolition of the 1857 jail as a new county jail completed on the east side of 15<sup>th</sup> St. between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> avenues, across the street from the main entrance of the courthouse. A tunnel under 15<sup>th</sup> Street connected the courthouse and the jail (Appendix 1-B).

### 1937

Spanish-American War headstone and ventilator cowl added to the Courthouse Square. Appendix 1-D shows a current Google map view with all monument locations noted.

### 1952

Gettysburg Address Tablet was moved from Spencer Square to northeast corner of Courthouse Square (Appendix 1-D).

### 1963

The War Memorial was added to the east side of courthouse square (Appendix 1-D). There are five granite memorial tablets initially engraved with the names of Rock Island County veterans killed in World Wars I and II and the Korean conflict. Later, names from the Spanish-American, Vietnam, and Gulf Wars were added. Gulf Wars includes Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom.

### 1985

New county jail opened on the southwest corner of 14<sup>th</sup> St. and 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave., and was not part of the Courthouse Square. Architects: Phillips Swager Associates (PSA). At this time the 1923 jail was demolished. The tunnel under 15<sup>th</sup> St. was sealed off but remains today.

### 1999-2001

Construction of a 52,000 square foot addition to the county jail providing additional jail cells, three courtrooms and workspace for court officers, state's attorneys and public defenders. The architects were PSA. The addition was constructed along 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. just east of 14<sup>th</sup> St. In 1999, 14<sup>th</sup> St. was permanently closed between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. (appendix 1-C) changing the Courthouse Square to a rectangular space.

### 2014

Marble soldier atop the Civil War Monument removed due to deterioration. Replaced with bronze replica in 2018, which was placed in the Justice Center.

### 2018

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<sup>7</sup> "Yes, It's True," *The Moline Daily Dispatch*, March 12, 1897, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/338634283/?terms=>.

Annex to the Justice Center and County Jail was completed, shifting operations out of the 1897 courthouse. The Annex faces east and runs parallel to the 1897 courthouse. The physical context of the Courthouse Square was changed irrevocably (Appendix 1-C).

### **The Courthouse**

The composition of the façade has been significantly altered since it opened in 1897. Most of these changes are found on the third floor and above. The most significant changes to the interior are found in the layout of the floor plans. The documentation used to analyze changes in the original façade and floor plans have been old photographs, drawings from Gunn & Curtiss, plans from Melvin R. Beckstrom, the architect responsible for the 1960 remodeling, and news articles.

### **Drivers of Alterations**

Significant alterations began in 1940 and were initially driven by two challenges: water infiltration and the rapid population growth of Rock Island County. The main challenge was the impact of deferred maintenance over many decades that would have addressed the impact of water infiltration, a problem for the courthouse shortly after it was completed. Downspouts ran through the interior walls and caused interior damage to the building. The fourth-floor connection between the copper roof and the exterior façade was inadequate and allowed water to enter the building.

#### 1930

Due to roof leaks, the original copper roof was replaced with composite asphalt on flat sections of the courthouse (not the domes or cornice).<sup>8</sup>

#### 1940s

Removal of the square cupola that stood on the rectangular center domes.. This alteration was noted through comparison of photographs. Appendix 3-C shows the east and south facades with the tower and domes with cupolas intact. Appendix 3-D shows the east façade without the cupola.

#### 1950

There were a total of six segmented copper domes, three on the front façade and one on the other three sides. Work began in August 1950 to remove the copper domes on the north and south facades. Per the news article, “The cupolas are being removed because they caused leaks in the roof which have baffled contractors for the last eight or 10 years”.<sup>9</sup> Prior to the removal was a pediment that abutted the domes along the cornice on both the north and south sides. These pediments were also removed.

#### 1954

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<sup>8</sup> “Replace Roofing for Courthouse,” *Moline Daily Dispatch*, July 18, 1930, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/338426553/?terms=courthouse&match=1>.

<sup>9</sup> “Twin Cupolas Being Removed at Courthouse,” *The Rock Island Argus*, August 1, 1950, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/568906275/?terms=courthouse&match=1>.

Copper sheeting on the cornice was replaced. When the copper was removed, the brick below was disintegrating.<sup>10</sup> New gutters and downspouts were added.

### 1958

This year reflects a significant alteration of exterior design of the Courthouse. The center tower and all remaining domes were removed (Appendix 3-E). Stainless steel sheathing encased the base of the tower. The domes were replaced by steel caps.<sup>11</sup>

### 1960

Significant remodeling of the exterior and interior of the courthouse. Throughout the entire building, the limestone exterior was sandblasted, waterproofed and tuck pointed. New stone was used throughout the fourth-floor. The stone is noticeably grayer in tone as compared to the original limestone. The downspouts from inside the façade were removed and placed on the outside. The architect was Melvin R. Beckstrom. Appendix 3-G through 3-I show a comparison of the façade over the years. It includes a postcard of the original façade from 1901, a rendering of the courthouse after the removal of the tower and remaining domes in 1958 and a rendering of the 1960 remodeling. Appendix 3-J shows a postcard that is undated but probably from the 1960s.

The courthouse was designed based on the principles from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Most of these elements were removed from the third and fourth floor exteriors on all four sides. Windows and doors also were replaced. Appendix 3-H shows a rendering from the architect of the façade of the building after the remodeling.

The layout of the interior space was significantly shifted in 1960. When constructed in 1897 there were approximately twenty employees and the rooms were spacious. By 1960, an increase in staff created a need for additional office spaces.<sup>12</sup>

Courtrooms were also added. The circuit courtroom was a prominent space and extended two stories and was referred to as the Circuit Court Wing. In 1960 the Circuit Court Wing was rebuilt adding a fourth floor. On the third floor, two courtrooms were configured. On the fourth floor a new floor was constructed over the circuit court wing providing space for the state's attorney, a new law office and an all-purpose room. Additional courtrooms were also added to the first and second floors.

### 1970

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<sup>10</sup> "Begin Work on Roof of Courthouse," *The Rock Island Argus*, June 19, 1954, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/610733371/?terms=courthouse&match=1>.

<sup>11</sup> "New Look at Courthouse," *The Rock Island Argus*, March 12, 1959, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/610777174/?terms=courthouse&match=1>.

<sup>12</sup> John Donald O'Shea, "RICO: The Young Lady Grew Old," *The Rock Island Argus*, March 22, 2013, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/436305848/?terms=courthouse&match=1>.



The county purchased the former Modern Woodmen Building and moved most of the general government offices to this building to add additional courtrooms on the first, second, and third floors.

#### 1971

Two large fire escapes were added to the west side of the building (Appendix 3-I). Specific windows on each floor were converted into a door allowing access to the fire escape.

#### 1977

A portion of the main double staircase was removed for a new public elevator.

## **B. Historical Context:**

### History of the Region

The Rock Island County Courthouse sits in a region referred to as the Quad Cities. The name refers to the four cities within the region, two in Iowa and two in Illinois. They include Davenport and Bettendorf, Iowa, and Rock Island and Moline, Illinois. Sitting in the Mississippi between Davenport and Rock Island is an island made of solid limestone. Originally called Rock Island, it is over 940 acres and is now controlled by the United States Army and was renamed Arsenal Island. In 1969 the original buildings were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1989. Another section of the island built in 1940-1941 was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2020.

The Quad Cities sit at the confluence of the Mississippi and Rock rivers. Indigenous people settled in this area for thousands of years due to the trading routes and the fertile land. Prior to the settlement of Europeans, the main tribes were the Sauk and the Meskwaki (Fox). They constructed a permanent summer village called Saukenuk on the north shore of the Rock River.

In 1804 a treaty was signed between the federal government and the Sauk and Meskwaki that ceded Indian land east of the Mississippi for \$2,200 in goods and annual payments of \$1,000 in goods. The agreement allowed the Sauk and Mesquakie to live on the land until it was sold to American settlers. However, Black Hawk, a Sauk warrior, felt the treaty was invalid as he did not believe the Native American signers had the authority to enter into the agreement.

In 1816, the federal government constructed Fort Armstrong on Rock Island. The name of Rock Island, both the city and county, came from this island. A trading post and small settlement of non-Native Americans settled in the area. The United States began selling the land and more and more European immigrants moved into the area.

By 1828 the land ceded in the 1804 treaty was surveyed for sale to colonists. Most of the Sauk and Meskwaki moved west of the Mississippi River. A faction of Sauk decided to remain under the leadership of Black Hawk and return each summer to protect the village of Saukenuk. Returning in the summer of 1831 the Sauk found more and more by colonists on the land. A clash with the United States Army and state militia forced Black Hawk and his followers into Iowa. In 1832 Black Hawk led a thousand Sauk back to Illinois. Looking back, it appeared to be a peaceful return, an attempt to regain the land lost in the 1804 treaty. However, the United States felt otherwise. An ensuing war, the Black Hawk War, lasted three months and resulted in Black Hawk leaving the area for good.

Rock Island County was created in 1831 by the Illinois General Assembly and included the Sauk Village. "Counties were created by colonial and state lawmakers, most often by splitting off newly settled outlying parts of established counties whose residents sought a government more truly local."<sup>13</sup> County Seats made state government more accessible to the population. Being selected as a county seat was a source of pride for the surrounding area as it was a reflection of the area's prominence and potential within the state. Included in the functions of the county seat is the county courthouse that houses the circuit court, the sheriff's department and county jail and the hall of records. The 1880s and 1890s was an expansion period for the State of Illinois in terms of population. There were 28 of the 102 county courthouses built from 1880 to 1900 or 27 percent of what exists today.

Rock Island County extends along the Mississippi River reflecting the growing importance of the region both strategically as well as the population growth. It was officially organized in 1833 when an election was held at the house of John Barrel in Farnhamsburg. At this point there was no county seat or county buildings. In 1835 an act was passed that established the town of Stephenson as the county seat. Stephenson was later renamed Rock Island. Between 1840 and 1860 the county population and economy grew driven by the businesses created due to the proximity of the Mississippi River. The waterway transportation system meant cities and towns along the banks had a natural advantage. This area was also an entry point to the western frontier.

The Mississippi River provided the transportation of one of the larger businesses at that time, lumber. Logs were floated down from the north woodlands to mills. Frederick Weyerhaeuser and F. C. A. Denkmann formed a company that operated two large mills. By 1900, easily floated trees in Minnesota and Wisconsin had been depleted and the firm of Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann closed their operation in Rock Island County and moved west.

A significant addition to waterway transportation was the arrival of the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad in 1854. It connected the East with the Mississippi River. It

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<sup>13</sup> Price, Edward T. "The Central Courthouse Square in the American County Seat." *Geographical Review* 58, no. 1 (1968): 31. <https://doi.org/10.2307/212831>.

quickly highlighted the need for a railroad bridge over the Mississippi River. This particular area was ideal given the existing of the Rock Island in the center of the Mississippi River. The Chicago and Rock Island Railroad bridge was completed in 1856 and linked the city of Rock Island to Davenport. This was the first railroad bridge over the Mississippi. Rail service into the region brought even more industry. The population of Rock Island County was 6,900 in 1850 and in 1860 it grew to 21,000.<sup>14</sup>

The surrounding land was and still is very fertile and many of the new arrivals to the area began farming. The soil in Illinois was fertile due to the deeply rooted prairie grass that grew on the land. But it made tilling the hard surface soil very difficult. What emerged was a significant farm implement industry. John Deere arrived in Rock Island County in the 1840s and his company and focused on the development and manufacturing of the plow. This corporation is still headquartered in Rock Island County and the second largest employer in the Quad Cities.

By the close of the nineteenth century, Rock Island County was thriving with a population that was growing. The population was diverse with white settlers, African-Americans, Swedish, German, Irish, Belgium and Jews, to name a few. The built-environment included houses, businesses, schools, churches and hospitals within the backdrop of the beauty of this region and the county seat.

### The Importance of the Courthouse in the United States

*“The significance of this great gathering is a tribute of respect to the grand temple of justice planned to rise from this corner stone; and an acknowledgment of homage to the far Goddess of Justice, who, with sightless eyes and extended hand under the law, holds the balances in which causes between man and man are weighed without partiality or favor, and determined.”<sup>15</sup>*

During the nineteenth century, people immigrated to the United States in great numbers. Some were driven by oppressive conditions in their home countries and others searching for a better way of life. The quote above was spoken by Edward D. Sweeney at the laying of the cornerstone in 1895, for the new Rock Island County Courthouse. The crowd gathered that day was made up of people with diverse nationalities, religions, and political leanings. A premium was placed on the United States justice system that treated all individuals equally. Courthouses have been one of the most important public buildings and became “visual symbols of this freedom...as the principal public edifice; it housed the basic mechanics of a citizens’ rights...”<sup>16</sup> The word courthouse evolved as most of

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<sup>14</sup> “2022 World Population by Country,” 2022 World Population by Country, accessed October 18, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-counties/il/rock-island-county-population>.

<sup>15</sup> *Historic Rock Island County*, (Rock Island, Ill: Kramer and Company, 1908), Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.historicrockisla00kram/?sp=86&st=image&r=-0.238,0.234,1.392,0.721,0>.

<sup>16</sup> William Seale, *Celebrating the Courthouse: A Guide for Architects, Their Clients, and the Public*, ed. Steven Flanders (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 38.

the original courts in the United States were held in private homes. They were simple structures that could service multiple uses.

The independence of the United States prompted a need to identify an architectural style befitting this young democratic country, especially for public buildings. Prior to this point, the architecture of the United States followed that of the British. However, the new nation looked towards Greece, the first democracy, for architectural inspiration in all building types. “The notion that all are bound by the law regardless of their status expressed in the concept of the rule of law has for instance been traced back to the classical Greek period.”<sup>17</sup> Starting in the 1790s the Greek Revival style dominated many types of public buildings.

Following the Civil War there was a boom in courthouse construction driven by a population shift that caused new states and new counties to be formed. From 1870 to 1900, there were styles that are collectively referred to as Victorian architecture used to design courthouses. These styles included Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, and Romanesque Revival. Some of these styles were in part a reaction to the formality of the Greek Revival style and were asymmetrical in plan.

#### The Importance of the Beaux Arts Principles of the Courthouse

*“...legal architecture is both a reflection and source of ideological beliefs which draw on a range of reference points, including the use of architectural styles associated with temples and cathedrals, in order to prompt an attitude of reverence towards the law.*

*“18*

Court houses have always been one of the most important public buildings. The decision around the architect and the architectural style was one of the most important decisions that was made by this committee. Gunn & Curtiss was selected as the architects of the new Rock Island County Courthouse. Their design was based on the principles of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, a school of architecture in Paris, which set the leading standard of education in architecture in the nineteenth century. The style was based on the method of composition that used classical Greek and Roman symmetry and careful proportions with a heavy emphasis on ordered facades based on classical theory. “Although different Beaux-Arts designers favored different styles, which also most all varied their styles with different commissions, and some work in a number of styles, Renaissance forms provided the norm for the period.”<sup>19</sup>

Author James P. Noffsinger wrote a collection of comments from Americans that attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Two phrases were reinforced: ‘think clearly’ and

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<sup>17</sup> Linda Mulcahy and Emma Rowden, in *The Democratic Courthouse: A Modern History of Design, Due Process and Dignity* (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> William H. Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects: Volume 4: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 347.

‘think simple’. It was “a point of view which helped to remedy the [excesses of the] Victorian era [of design] in this country and elsewhere.”<sup>20</sup> Richard Morris Hunt was the first American to study at the Ecole in the 1850s and is considered to be the first American architect to design using the principles instilled in him through the curriculum. His practice was based on the east coast and most of his commissions were in New York City, Boston, and Newport.

In 1893 over 27 million people visited Chicago, Illinois. They arrived in downtown Chicago and were greeted by an industrialized city with tall office buildings. They were transported south to The World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, which is commonly referred to as the ‘Great White City’. The Exposition was built from scratch in two years using plaster. It brought the discipline of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts to the forefront of design far beyond the east coast.

Architects from New York, Boston, Kansas City, and Chicago, many trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, designed the primary buildings. Under the leadership of Daniel Burnham, a model city was created as the centerpiece of the exposition. “The World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 provided America with a vision of what public buildings and their surroundings might be... We consider this work as an object lesson to the United States—to our government.”<sup>21</sup> After the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, the principles of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts began to replace the popular revival styles of the Victorian era. The design dominated many public buildings in the United States until the mid-1920s.

### The Rock Island County Courthouses

The first court in what became Rock Island County was known as John Barrell’s house located in Farnhamsburg, an area that is now part of the City of Rock Island. It was a log structure and was used to transact official business, a post office, tavern and hotel.

The newly formed County of Rock Island decided in 1835 to build a new courthouse on Courthouse Square. A location was selected in the town of Stephenson, which later became part of the town of Rock Island in 1841. The importance of squares in the layout of towns and cities has a long history. Its orientation could be governmental, religious, entertainment or commerce to name a few. “County courthouses in all parts of the country usually stand in, or face, some special open space. The heartland of central courthouse squares lies around the population center of the United States—from Michigan west and south to Kansas—the courthouse is most often placed in the center of

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<sup>20</sup> Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects: Volume 4: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, 346.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Drexler, *The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, (1977), 470.

a block outside the business district.”<sup>22</sup> The Rock Island Courthouse Square was defined by 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> streets and between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> avenues. The location of the square was on the edge of what is now referred to as the Downtown District. From that point on the site was named Courthouse Square. It measures 319.95’ between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> avenues and 321.10’ between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> streets, for a total of 73,853 square feet.

The courthouse was a two-story square Greek Revival form with a temple front and a central cupola (Appendix 3-A). While the construction of the courthouse usually fell under the direction of a judge and a committee of local residents, the design of the courthouse may have come from pattern books. Pattern books allowed architects to share designs with local builders. The most prominent author of builder’s guides at that time was Asher Benjamin.

In 1837 the second courthouse was completed along 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. A county jailhouse was constructed in 1857 on the southwest side of the courthouse. Given the importance of the Courthouse Square and its use as a public gathering place, in 1869, the Civil War Soldiers’ Monument by Leonard Wells Volk was placed on the square on the fourth anniversary of General Robert E. Lee’s surrender. There were originally twelve cannons placed around the monument. Accounting for in the increase in population in the area contributing to addition work a one-story office was opened on the southeast side, providing offices for the county judge, circuit clerk and county clerk.

Given the increase in the population of the surrounding area and the corresponding work and case load, it was clear a larger courthouse was needed. In 1893, the County Supervisor, Joseph Fitzpatrick, introduced a resolution that called for a committee to study the needs and the costs to build a new county courthouse. In 1895 a call for architects, builders, decorators, heating and electric contractors, and others was requested by the Rock Island County Building Committee.

#### The 1897 Rock Island County Courthouse

*“As a structure it stands for truth and justice, for honor and dignity. It is a beautiful building, massive yet graceful, simple yet grand. It is and should be a source of common pride and joy.”*<sup>23</sup>

This was said in an address by Charles J. Searle at the laying of the cornerstone in 1895. He was the Rock Island County State’s Attorney and part of the Court House Committee. The need for the new courthouse was driven by a county that was young and grown due to the importance of this region during the nineteenth century. The design and placement reflected one of the most important decisions. It was a tribute to those that helped build

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<sup>22</sup> Edward T. Price, “The Central Courthouse Square in the American County Seat,” *Geographical Review* 58, no. 1 (1968): p. 29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/212831>.

<sup>23</sup> “Under the Dome,” *The Rock Island Argus*, January 9, 1897, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/174207149/?terms=truth%20and%20justice&match=1>.

the county and a reflection of the importance of the legal systems of the United States. The selection of design was based on the principles of the Ecole des Beaux Arts.

*“The following material was used in construction: 2,000 perch of LeClaire stone was used in the foundation, which is laid on a rock foundation, with one foot of rock concrete on the bottom to fill holes and level off. The base or water table is of Carthage, Mo., granite; the die and sill course of dressed blue Bedford stone. The first and second stories of rock-faced buff Bedford stone and the two upper stories of sand-rubbed buff Bedford. Eighteen thousand cubic feet of stone was used above the foundations; 360 tons of iron beams in the building, 120 tons of steel as used in the construction of the tower, and about eighty tons of steel was used in the ornamental work. One million six hundred thousand hard brick was purchased and used in the structure; eighty tons of copper for the cornices and roofing; 40,000 square feet of fire proofing for arches; 15,000 square feet of plain plastering, besides a large amount of ornamental stucco work; 30,000 feet of maple flooring, together with 11,000 square feet Mosaic flooring; 7,500 feet of Tennessee marble wainscoting. The floor contains 2,250,000 pieces of marble. Four nations contribute to the floor: black marble from Belgium, red from France, white from Italy, and pink from Tennessee.”<sup>24</sup>*

The quote above lists out materials used to build the courthouse and most of the materials remain today.

The original exterior of the courthouse included many details from the Italian Renaissance. “In the public eye, columns, pediments, domes, porticos, arches, and other element of architectural design connected county government to the history and traditions of antiquity.”<sup>25</sup> The courthouse faces east towards downtown Rock Island. It is 170’ long and 60’ tall and originally sat in the middle of Courthouse Square. Each floor of the Rock Island County Courthouse is approximately 11,500 square feet, plus a basement. Originally there were sixty well sized rooms that were significantly reconfiguration over time.

Originally crowned in the center of the roof by a tower that extended 154’ above that created a prominent site in the city skyline. The exterior design of the building varies horizontally with the vertical details that created a complex and balanced composition. The use of rustication on the exterior of the building creates a sense of stability both physically and spiritually. “The early renaissance treated rustication without any artistic reference to Rome, as a principal means of expressing the tremendous urge towards monumentality...”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Historic Rock Island County*, (Rock Island, Illinois: Kramer and Company, 1908), Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.historicrockisla00kram/?sp=96&st=image>

<sup>25</sup> Dennis Weiser, *Illinois Courthouses An Illustrated History*, (Virginia Beach: The Donning Company Publishers, 2009), 10

<sup>26</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Architecture of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Peter Murray and trans. James Palmes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 42

There are details also incorporated in the building that refer to the importance of what goes on inside the building. Originally found on the exterior and today on the interior is the roundel with a laurel wreath. In ancient Rome the laurel wreath was a symbol of power and authority. Incorporated into the mosaic first floor, at the base of the rotunda, is the design of a quincunx. A symbol with one larger center circle surrounded by four circles arranged in a cross. First seen in the Roman Republic it symbolized an orderly universe.<sup>27</sup> This symbol is found in many of the Cosmati floors of churches in Italy.

Other interior design elements call out the importance of the building. Upon entering the main entrance there are the two wings and main stairway that radiated from the central rotunda. The rotunda extends from the ground floor to the fourth floor with a dome that soared over 60' above. Surrounding the rotunda on each floor were eight composite pilasters, a column capital created by the Romans but combining the Ionic order with the Corinthian order and adding egg and dart molding above the acanthus leaves. The prominence of the rotunda has been used throughout important US government buildings, such as the United States Capitol, in Washington D.C.

Originally found on the third floor was the main circuit courtroom, the most important space when it opened. As a person arrived on the third floor, light would come in from the east and a two-story Palladian window. The circuit courtroom stood two stories high, a common design element for the courthouses in the late nineteenth century. It needed a prominent space given the importance of what happened in this room. It was not unusual for people to stop in during the day and to sit and listen to court cases being heard.

Lastly, on the fourth floor, was a Memorial Hall to the Grand Army of the Republic and other loyal societies. The inclusion of a Memorial Hall provided an example that the courthouse as more than the courthouse. It was a space where the public went to get important documents of their lives such as marriage, birth and death certificates. It was a place where meetings could be held by the public similar to what community centers provide today.

The design of the building, the position it stood on courthouse square exemplified this was the people of Rock Island County's house. The courthouse was an edifice that reflected the county's aspirations.

#### The Viability of the Building as the Courthouse

*"As the old court house was for its day a monument to the public spirit, enterprise and pride of the people of the day, so let this building be a testimonial of the pride, ambition and public spirit of our day and age. And when in the future the necessities of the county justify a building to take the place of this one, let us all hope that our county will have made such progress that that building will be as much greater and finer than this as this will be of the old. And above all let us hope that when that time shall have come, the*

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<sup>27</sup> Dani Rhys, "What Is the Symbol of the Quincunx?," Symbol Sage, August 19, 2020, accessed October 18, 2020, <https://symbolsage.com/what-is-the-symbol-of-the-quincunx/>.



*same grand old stars and stripes that now so proudly float over the old county house, will adorn the majestic dome of this; and that then, as now, it will be the glorious banner of the free, the holy emblem of the greatest, grandest and best government ever instituted among men.”<sup>28</sup>*

In an address by Charles J. Searle at the laying of the cornerstone in 1895, he predicted that the 1897 courthouse “will perhaps remain the seat of the justice of the country for a century.”<sup>29</sup>

There are driving forces that caused the significant alterations in the courthouse during the twentieth century. Annually, funds are set aside for building maintenance that were regulated by statute. An article in the *Daily Dispatch* in 1953 stated “...the courthouse building is 57 years old. During the first 30 or 40 years of its existence, the statutory maintenance fund was used, [but] the rate of decay edged beyond the scope of the annual maintenance fund, and the rate increases in speed each year.”<sup>30</sup> Between 1948 and 1953, there were four referenda to issue bonds for courthouse repairs that were put on the election ballot. All were defeated. The last was for \$485,000 in 1953. As a comparison, the maintenance budget for fiscal year 1954 was \$262,000, approximately half of what was needed for repairs. In October of that year, just before the election, an article was published stating “The courthouse building is structurally sound. It is by no means beyond saving. But engineers estimate that the time draws nearer when the building will have reached the point of no return.”<sup>31</sup> The election drew less than 8 percent of eligible voters and the referendum was defeated by 2-1. The deferred maintenance took its toll on the original building design.

Another challenge was the significant population growth of Rock Island County during the twentieth century. In 1890 the population was approximately 42,000 and by 1950 it had grown to 150,000.<sup>32</sup> This strained the layout of the courthouse as staff increases created a need for additional office space. There was an increase in caseload that required more courtrooms, judges, lawyers, employees, and security. In an article in 2013 noted that the 1897 courthouse never conceived a traffic court. At that time there were two courtrooms that alone handled 30,000 traffic cases.

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<sup>28</sup> “Stone Is Laid,” *The Rock Island Argus*, October 1, 1895, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/174175746/?terms=courthouse>.

<sup>29</sup> *Historic Rock Island County*, (Rock Island, Ill.: Kramer and Company, 1908), Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.historicrockisla00kram/?sp=94&st=image>. <https://www.loc.gov/item/20016031/>.

<sup>30</sup> “Why the Courthouse Bond Is Needed,” *The Daily Dispatch*, October 31, 1953, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/339541239/?terms=courthouse&match=1>.

<sup>31</sup> Richard N Gage, “Courthouse Repairs To Be Decided by Voters on Monday,” *The Rock Island Argus*, October 31, 1953, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/569126912/?terms=>.

<sup>32</sup> “2022 World Population by Country,” 2022 World Population by Country, accessed October 18, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-counties/il/rock-island-county-population>.

The last significant challenge to the 1897 courthouse was how to keep up with twenty-first century technology and security needs. This is a significant design consideration to newly constructed courthouses. The county moved out of the 1897 County Courthouse completely in December 2018. As of 2022 the courthouse sits vacant with a sound exterior but an interior in a deteriorated state.<sup>33</sup>

## **Part II. Architectural Information**

### **A. General Statement**

- 1. Architectural Character:** The Rock Island County Courthouse was a fine example of late nineteenth century courthouse design based on the Beaux Arts principles. Subsequent alterations beginning in the 1940s through 1960 removed most of the Beaux-Art details. However today the volume of the structure makes it a prominent public building. It still echoes the values of the people of Rock Island County and the importance they placed with the United States justice system.
- 2. Condition of Fabric:** The condition of the fabric is poor, as the building has been unoccupied and unmaintained since December 2018. There is evidence of significant water infiltration, resulting in mold, collapsed ceilings, and warped floors.

### **B. Description of Exterior**

- 1. Overall Dimensions:** The building is cruciform in plan, with the north-south axis measuring 172'-4" wide x 68'-3" deep, and the east-west axis measuring 58'-4" wide x 98'-3" deep. The roofline is 60' high.
- 2. Foundations:** Foundations are 12'-6" deep and are composed of a combination of locally-quarried LeClaire (Iowa) limestone as rubble stone to a height of 5'-6", topped by brick for the remaining 7'. The exterior of the foundation to the beveled water table is faced in white "Carthage (Missouri) marble," which is actually a limestone (Appendix 4-A).
- 3. Walls:** Blue Bedford limestone of smooth texture forms the base of the building to the height of the sill course of first-floor windows (Appendix 4-B). The sill course has an ogee profile with a beveled top. Above the sill course, the exterior walls are all buff Bedford limestone laid in regular courses. The first two stories are rusticated, with edges finished with a margin draft detail. Between the second and third stories, a belt course consisting of a flat frieze and ogee crown serves as the transition to the upper stories.

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<sup>33</sup> Palma, J. (2018, December 7). *'bittersweet' Day as Rock Island County Courthouse closes, staff moves to New Facility*. <https://www.kwqc.com>. Retrieved October 18, 2022, from <https://www.kwqc.com/content/news/Bittersweet-day-as-Rock-Island-County-Courthouse-closes-staff-moves-to-new-facility--502219941.html>

The third and fourth stories are smooth-finished, with flat Tuscan pilasters set between window bays. Later alterations of the fourth floor and replacement stonework have darkened more than other, older sections of wall.

- 4. Structural System:** Exterior walls are masonry, constructed of structural limestone and limestone facing over brick inner walls (Appendix 4-D). Interior walls are constructed of structural iron framing with terra cotta fireproofing infill, with the original dome in the rotunda being supported by steel. Interior partitions are hollow terra cotta block. The roof structure is steel open web trusses dating to the fourth-floor rebuilding of 1959, and older iron framing with terra cotta fireproofing infill in older areas where the roof was not rebuilt. Some interior partitions of later date are built of a US Gypsum fireproofing block called Pyrobar (Appendix 4-S).
- 5. Porches, stoops, balconies, porticoes, bulkheads:** There are four porches on the building, one on each side and serving as an entrance and exit from the main floor. They are each in the form of an arcade of three openings, supported by square, rusticated limestone pillars. The arches are composed of rusticated voussoirs integrated into the stone coursing, with the central arch being wider and taller than the flanking ones. The tops of the arches on the north, west, and east facades are filled with original fenestration opening into the second floor of the interior. The tops of the south arches were infilled with stucco in 1959. The floors of the north and south porches are mosaic marble, laid with a white field bordered by black bands enclosing a red Greek key motif (Appendix 4-C). The east and west porches are floored in cream-colored terrazzo with a pink terrazzo border. The terrazzo flooring is likely a mid-century replacement for original marble mosaic. A shallow balustraded balcony resting atop the entrance arcade spans the width of the east entrance bay. Two steel exterior fire escapes were placed at the northwest and southwest corners of the building in 1971, allowing egress from all floors.
- 6. Chimneys:** None.
- 7. Openings**

  - a. Doorways:** Entrances composed of double doors and sidelights are located in the porches on each façade. None of the doorways or sidelights are original; they are all modern brushed aluminum and glass commercial doors. There is no decorative trim present.
  - b. Windows and shutters:** Generally, the window pattern consists of single-punched openings filled with modern, brown aluminum one-over-one double-hung sash. Windows on the main length of the first floor are topped with round arches, whereas the windows set between pilasters are squared, as are the windows on the east entrance bay. Upper floor windows are squared, except for the windows on the second floor between the pilasters. Windows flanking the entrance porch and on the north and south sides of the east wing are trimmed with decorative detail with large crowns atop the first and third floor windows, and formal pedimented surrounds with

decorative volutes forming part of the frame on either side of the second floor windows.

## 8. Roofs

- a. **Shape, covering:** The roof of the structure is flat, dating to the removal of the final domes in the 1950s. It is covered in a black membrane roofing system.
- b. **Cornice, eaves:** The exterior walls are topped with a small ogee-profile crown (Appendix 4-D).
- c. **Dormers, cupolas and towers:** Only a remnant of the original towers is present, in the form of a low octagonal peak resting on a rectangular plinth over the interior rotunda. The plinth is covered in a ribbed aluminum product called Zourite.

## C. Description of Interior

1. **Floor Plans:** The floor plans of each of the four floors and basement reflect the building's cruciform footprint with the open rotunda at the center, with wings radiating in each direction. Each wing contains a double-loaded corridor opening into offices, courtrooms, and storage spaces (Appendix 4-E).
2. **Stairways:** There is only one stairway in the building. It occupies the west wing of the building, and is composed of straight stair legs meeting at a mezzanine landing set between each floor. The original configuration of the staircase had two legs leading from each floor to the mezzanine, but an elevator has replaced the north set of stairs. The staircase is made of ornamental cast iron, painted brown. Stringers are decorated with foliate cartouches framing the connection between the rail system and the stringers. A similar foliate motif set into rectangular frames stairstep their way along the stair rail. These rails are topped with wood handrails. Decorative iron newels connect the railings at landings (Appendix 4-V). Risers are cast iron decorated with four panels with foliate motifs at the end of each inset panel, and a rosette separating each pair of panels (Appendix 4-W). Treads are covered in modern rubberized treads laid over original black slate. The final run to the fourth floor retains its original black slate treads (Appendix 4-Y). The entire stairway is supported by decorative cast iron columns holding up each mezzanine, and tied to the flooring structure by a horizontal beam with decoration coordinating with that of the stringers. The underside of each run of the stairway is uncovered, and the back side of each riser is decorated with a pair of narrow inset panels (Appendix 4-X).
3. **Flooring:** Flooring in the rotunda and corridors of the first and second floors is of marble tesserae mosaic. The field tile throughout is white. On the first floor, a border of black bands enclosing a red Greek-key motif lines the borders of the floor area. A series of double-bordered circular decorations are executed in red tile, with a large circle in the

center of the rotunda overlapping with four smaller circles at the junction of each radiating wing. Additional single circles are placed in the entrances to each wing. The second floor repeats the black-and-red border of the first floor, and black double-bordered circles are positioned at each radiating wing, with double-bordered black diamonds placed between the circles (Appendix 4-M). The rotunda and corridors of the two upper floors are finished with white terrazzo flooring with black and red specks, edged with a red terrazzo border (Appendix 4-Q). Courtrooms and offices on the first three floors are floored with modern commercial-grade carpet or 12" square asbestos tile laid over original maple tongue-and-groove flooring. The fourth floor presents a mix of modern commercial-grade carpet and 12" square asbestos tile. Bathrooms are floored in historic white hex tile or modern square tile.

4. **Wall and ceiling finishes:** In the corridors and rotunda, walls are original smooth-finished plaster with pink Tennessee marble wainscoting covering the lower portion of each wall (Appendix 4-F). Historic polychrome wall stenciling in shades of brown, tan, red, and green has been revealed with the removal of a commemorative plaque in the second floor rotunda area (Appendix 4-L). Additional stenciling in a rust-colored anthemion pattern is evident behind dropped ceiling grids on the third floor (appendix 4-R). Walls built in twentieth-century alterations are covered in lightly sanded plaster applied on expanded metal mesh lath. Some areas are covered in wood or simulated wood paneling or have been resurfaced with drywall (Appendix 4-G). The second-floor northwest courtroom has walls covered in raised panels of plastic laminate in a simulated woodgrain pattern (Appendix 4-K). The third-floor northwest courtroom's jury box is walled with panels of light-colored matched wood veneer. Original ceilings were finished in smooth plaster, but nearly all have been covered with fixed acoustical tile or dropped grid ceilings (Appendix 4-K). In corridors, much original plaster crown molding is present behind later dropped ceilings (Appendix 4-N).

## 5. Openings

- a. **Doorways and doors:** Original doors are present throughout much of the building, especially opening from the corridors. They are constructed of quartersawn oak, detailed with vertical raised panels, two below and one above a glass window, many retaining their original glue-chip glass. Many of the doors are set beneath an operating glass transom. Later-renovated areas have flat varnished wood doors separating rooms, some with plain glass lights.
  - b. **Windows:** Windows throughout the building are modern aluminum replacements, with the only historic windows being the arched windows above the west, north, and east entrances.
6. **Decorative features and trim:** Decorative trim is still extant in much of the lower floors. Original trim is of varnished quarter-sawn oak, some of which is now painted. An 11" baseboard consists of a flat lower field, topped by a decorative trim piece at the top. Door and window trim is flat in profile, and door trim meets the baseboard at plinth

blocks. In the rotunda area, the railings are of ornamental cast iron, matching the pattern in the staircase. The handrail is oak. Each level of the rotunda is ringed by eight decorative pilasters with capitals in the composite order. Corridors are visually divided by pairs of simpler, Tuscan-derived pilasters. The dome at the top of the rotunda is octagonal in plan, with half-round lunette windows placed on all eight sides. These windows originally provided light to the rotunda area, but all but one have been covered over. As below, the decorative theme of the dome is circles, incorporating laurel wreaths.

7. **Hardware:** Decorative hardware remains on some interior doors. It is composed of heavy brass, large rectangular backplates with classically-derived anthemion and scrolls at the top and bottom. Matching letter slots are present on many doors. Other door and window hardware is of modern commercial grade.
8. **Mechanical equipment**
  - a. **Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:** The building was heated by a hot-water boiler system, with replacement fin tube units for heat distribution. Air conditioning was provided through ductwork on the top two floors, supplemented by individual window units on lower floors.
  - b. **Lighting:** Most lighting consists of modern fluorescent tube fixtures integrated into dropped ceiling grids. Other fixtures are suspended fluorescent tube lights, and each of the pilasters in the rotunda has a sconce light affixed. There appears to be no original or historic lighting in the building.
  - c. **Plumbing:** All plumbing in the building appears to date from the 1950s or later.
9. **Original furnishings:** Some of the filing cabinets for county record books in the second-floor records room may be original, or historic (Appendix 4-O).

#### D. Site

1. **Historic landscape design:** Historically, the courthouse was approached on all four sides by straight concrete sidewalks. This arrangement remains largely intact, except on the west of the site where 14<sup>th</sup> Street was vacated, and where the new courthouse sits. The grounds of the courthouse are dotted with various monuments installed at various points in the site's history. These monuments are as follows:

*Civil War Monument:* dedicated 1869, moved in 1897 to near the northeast corner of the courthouse.

*Spanish-American War:* dedicated in 1914, incorporating a headstone and ventilator cowl from the battleship Maine. Moved from Longview Park in 1937, now placed to the southeast of the Civil War Monument.

*Gettysburg Address Tablet:* originally in Spencer Square and moved in 1952 and placed at the far northeast corner of courthouse square.

*War Memorial:* Added in 1963; placed directly in front of the north wing of the courthouse near the sidewalk along 15<sup>th</sup> Ave. Composed of five granite memorial tablets, initially engraved with the names of Rock Island County soldiers killed in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. Later, names of casualties from the Spanish-American, Vietnam, and Gulf wars were added.

**2. Outbuildings:** There are no outbuildings.

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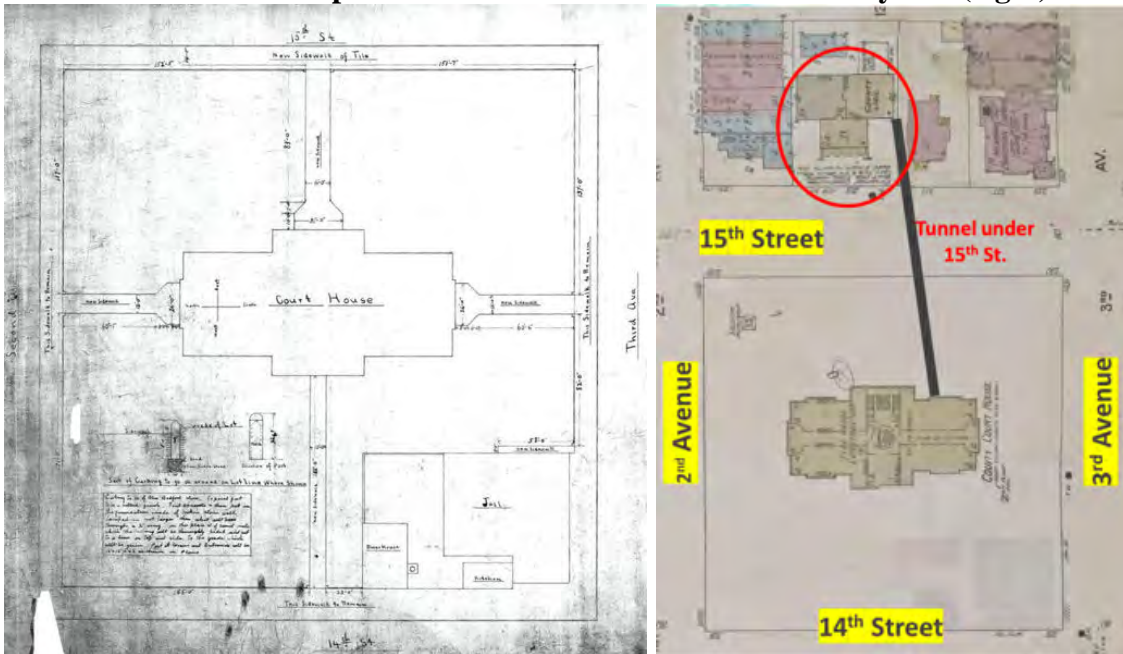
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Appendix 1 - Maps

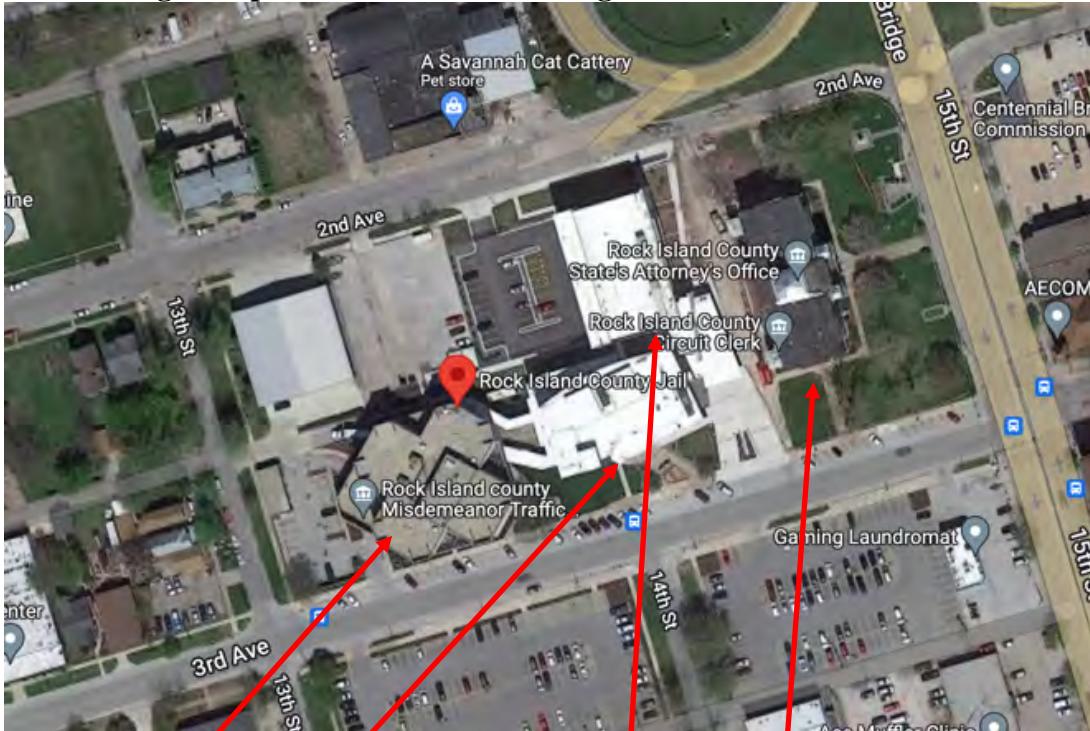
A. Google Map of Site as of November 2022.



B. Original Drawing from Gunn and Curtis of Block Plan for 1897 Courthouse (left) and Sanborn Map after 1923 Construction of New County Jail (right)

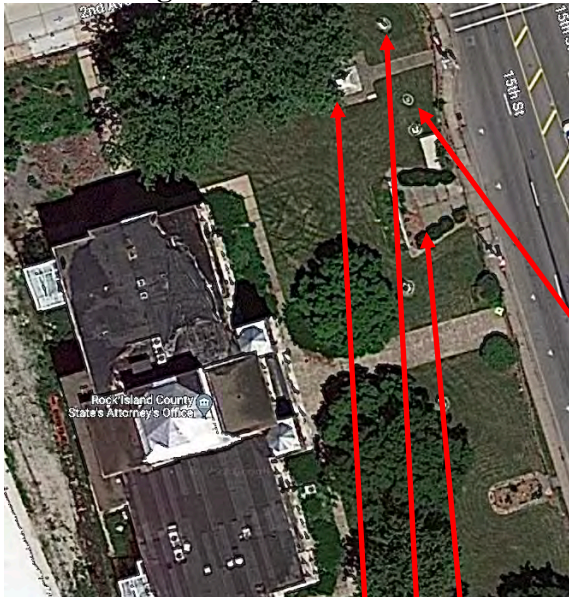


**C. Google Map of Site in 2022 - Buildings**



- 1985 County Jail
- 2001 Justice Center
- 2018 Annex
- 1897 Courthouse

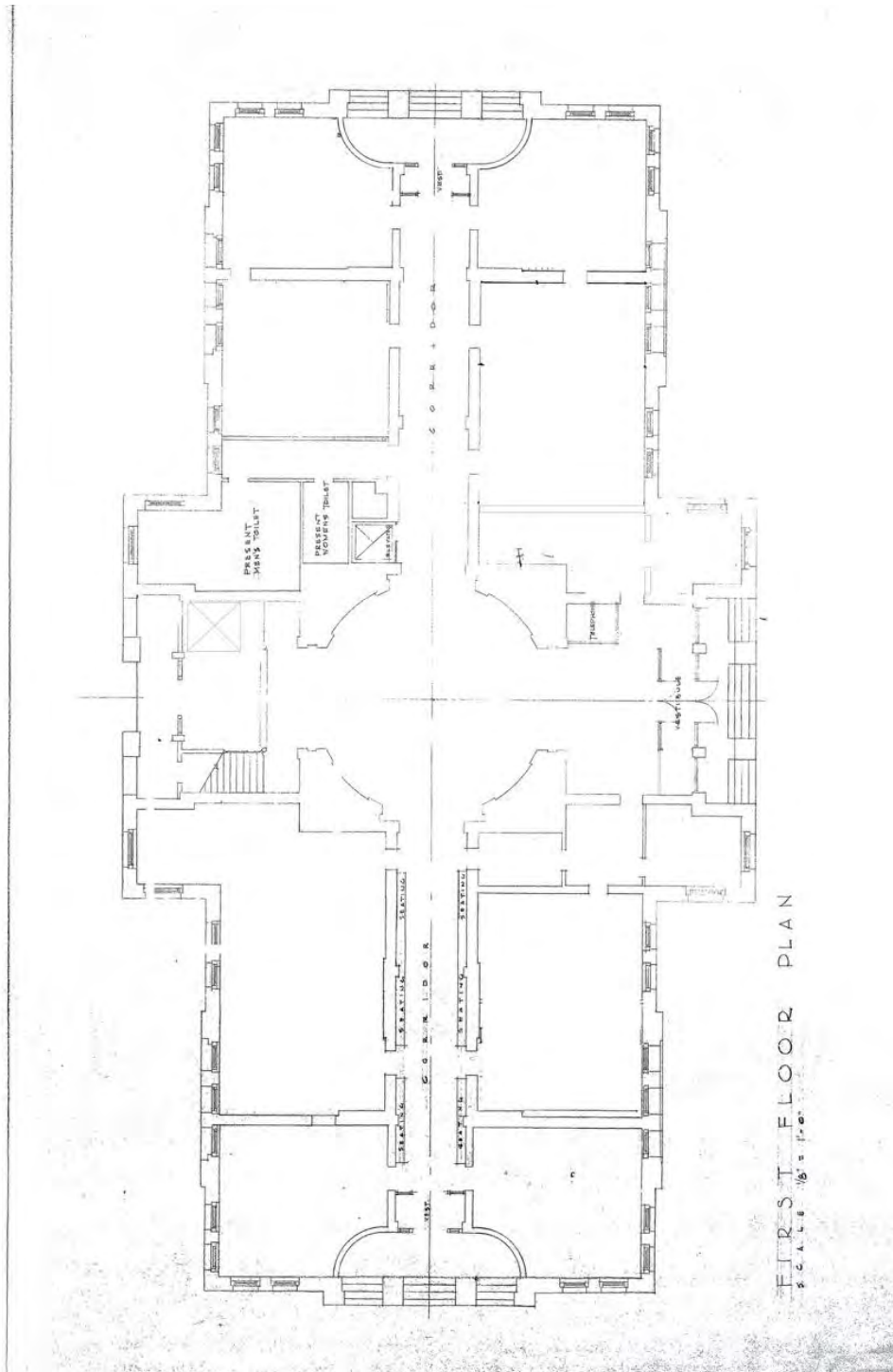
**D. Google Map of Site in 2022 - Monuments**

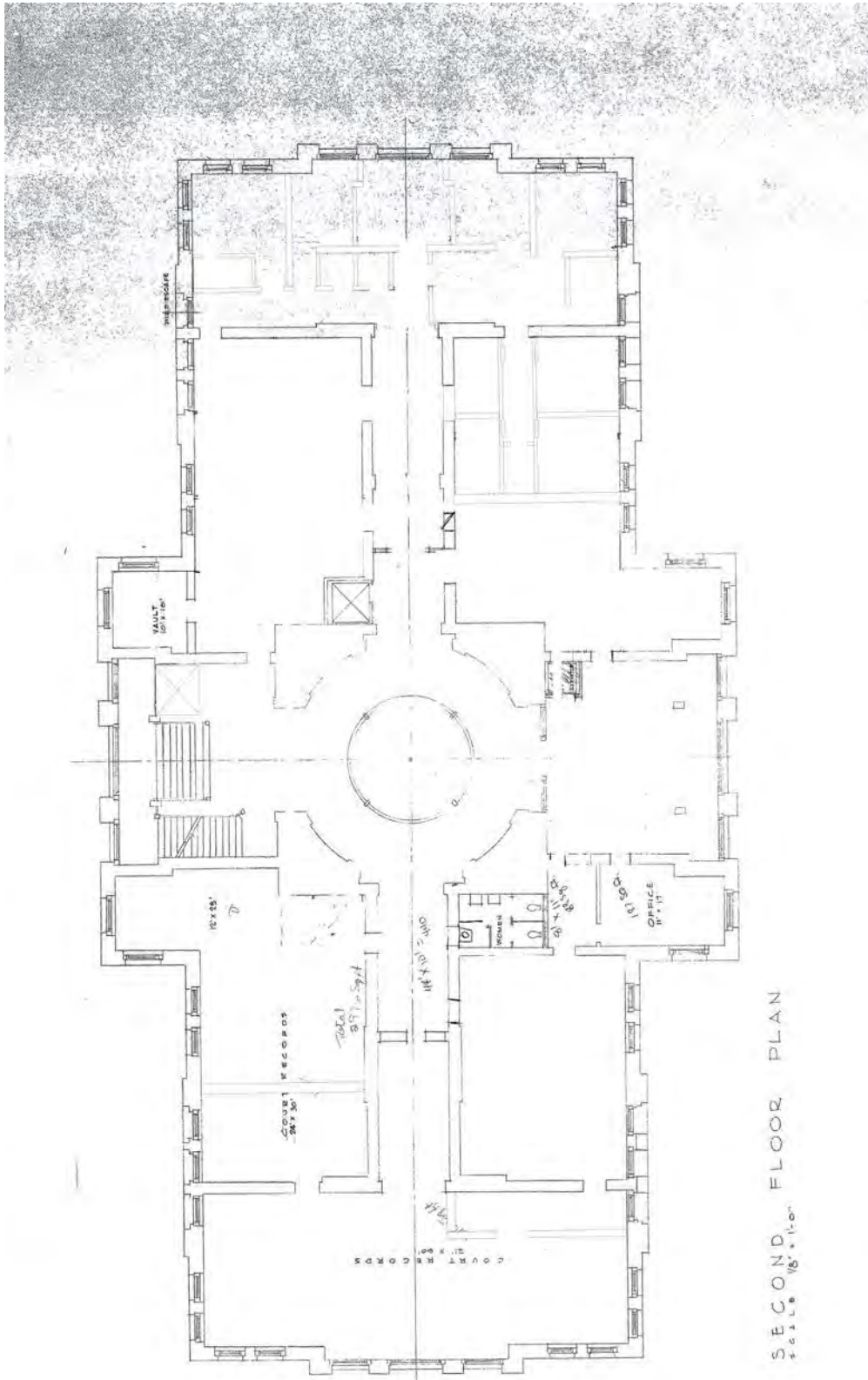


- Civil War Soldiers' Monument
- Gettysburg Address Tablet
- Spanish-American War headstone and ventilator cowl
- War Memorial

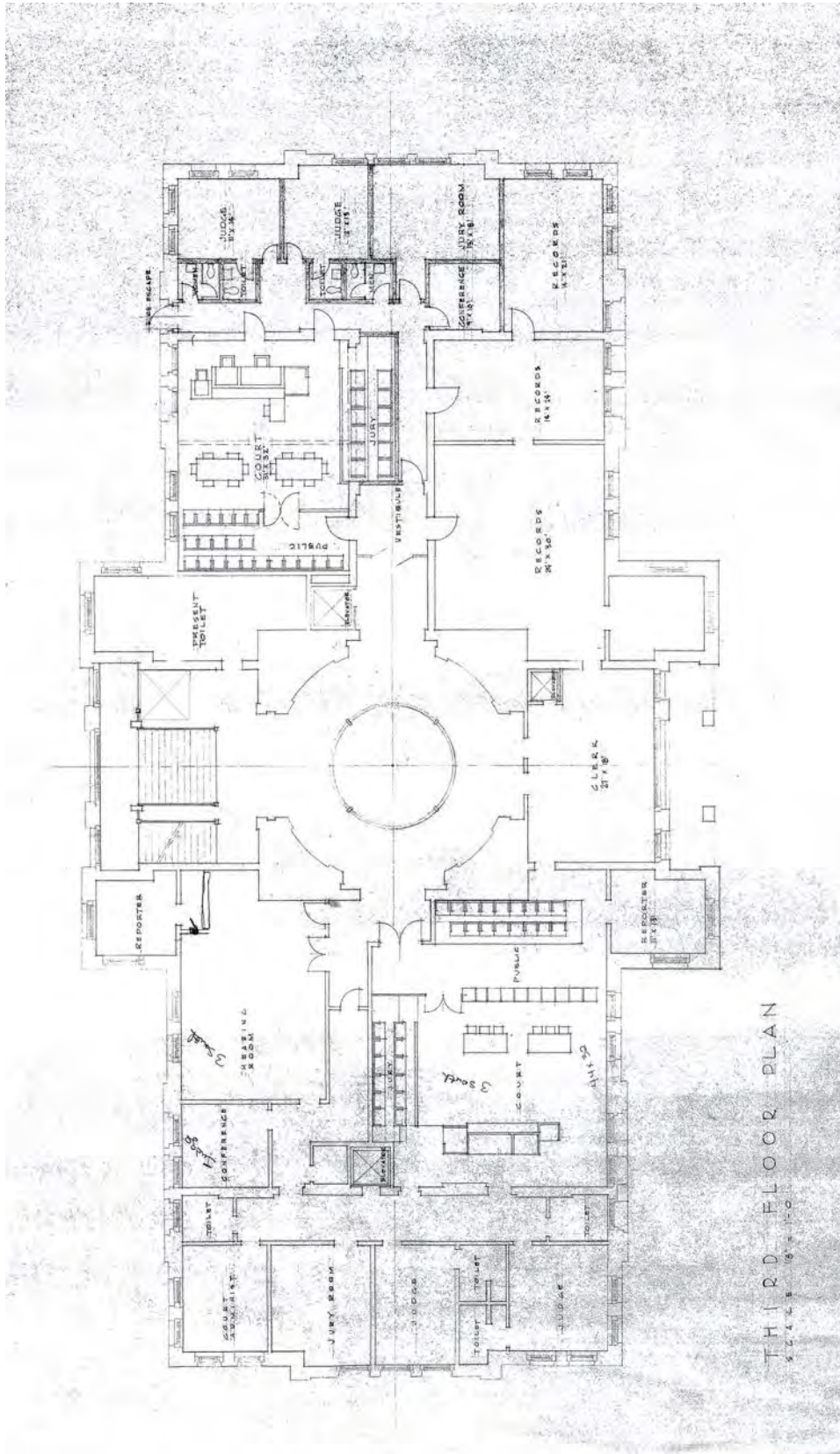
**Appendix 2 – Drawings & Floor Plans**

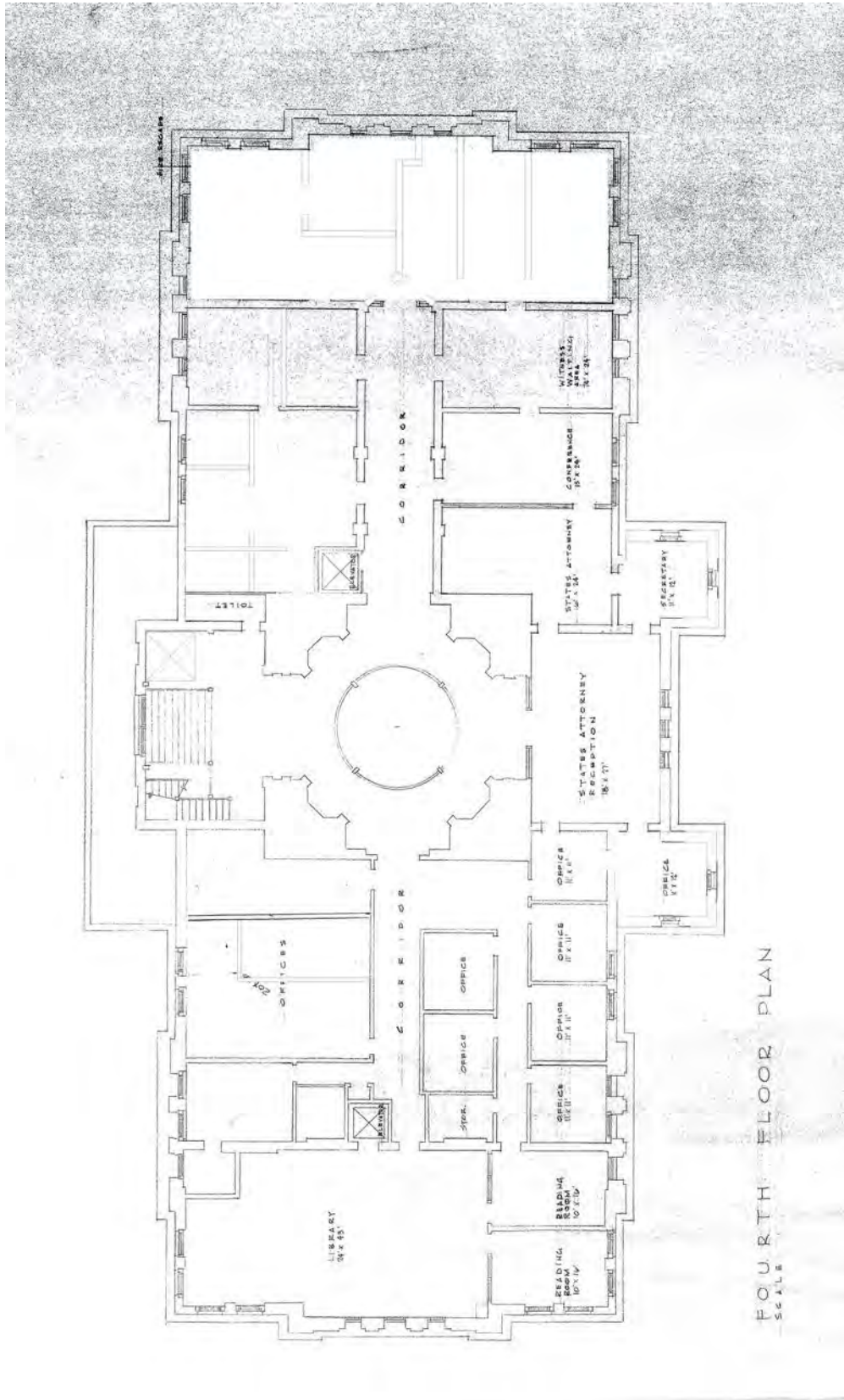
Historic floor plans from 1960 renovation by Melvin Beckstrom, provided by Rock Island County and modified for current configuration by Andrew Elders. North is at top of image for each plan.



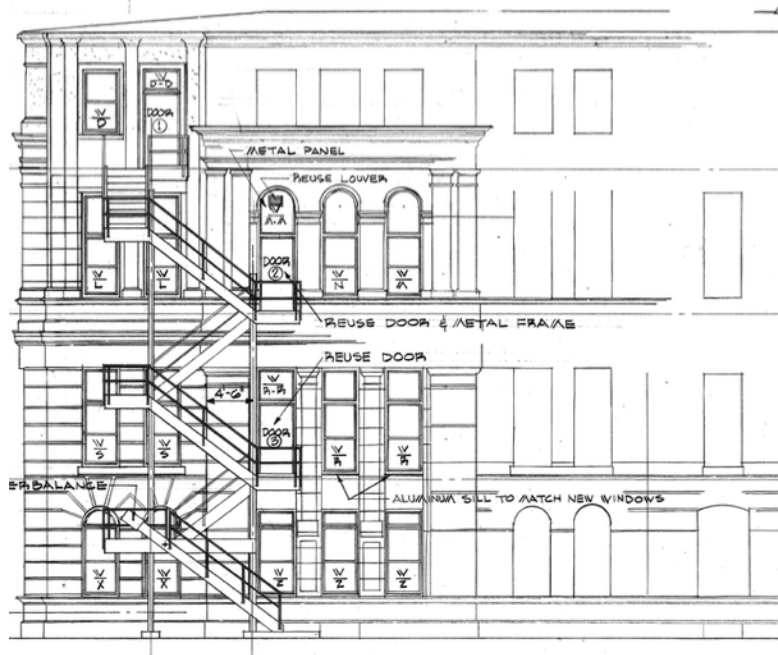


SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
1/8" = 1'-0"





Drawing of changes to west façade needed for fire escapes (firm and date unknown).

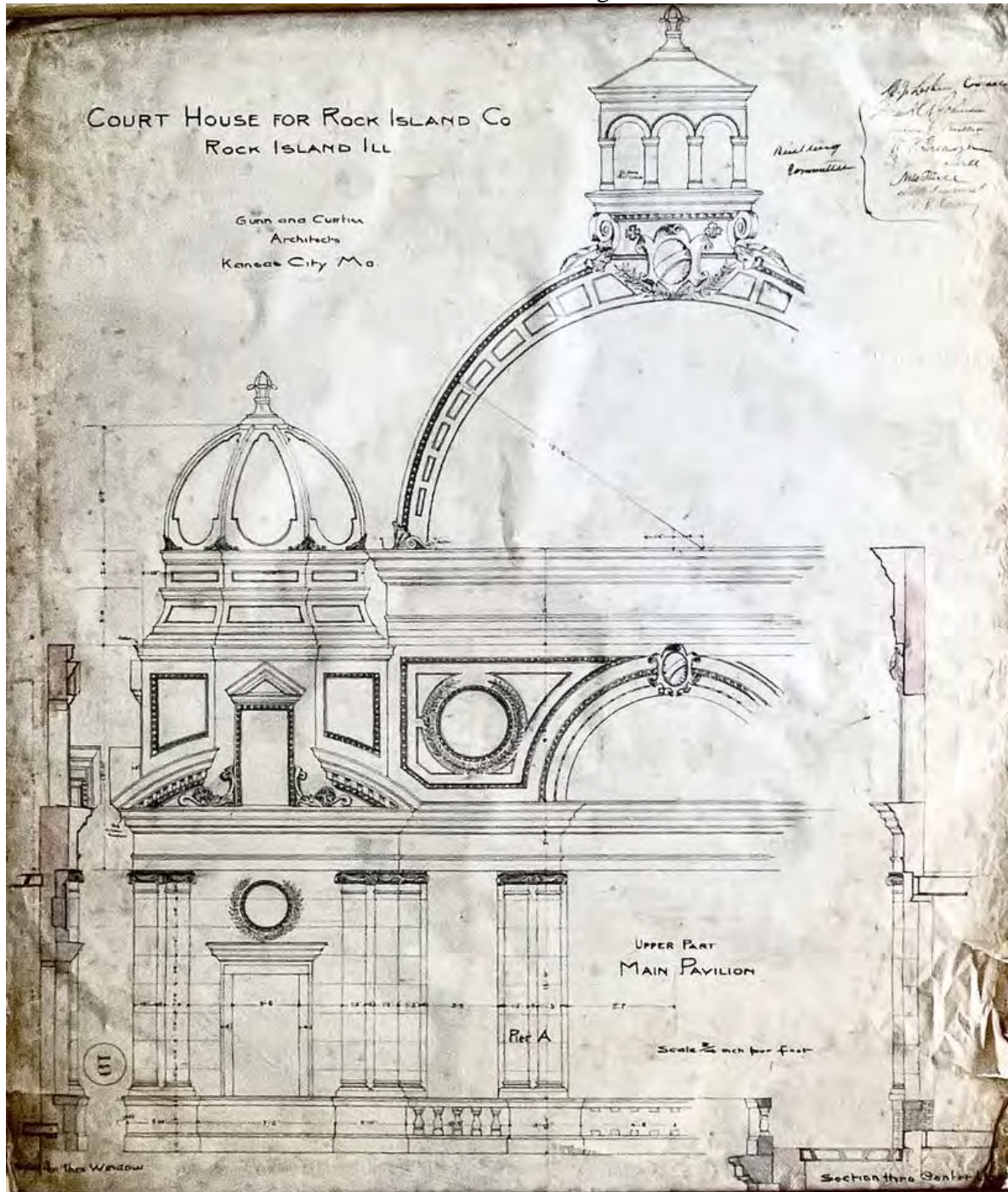




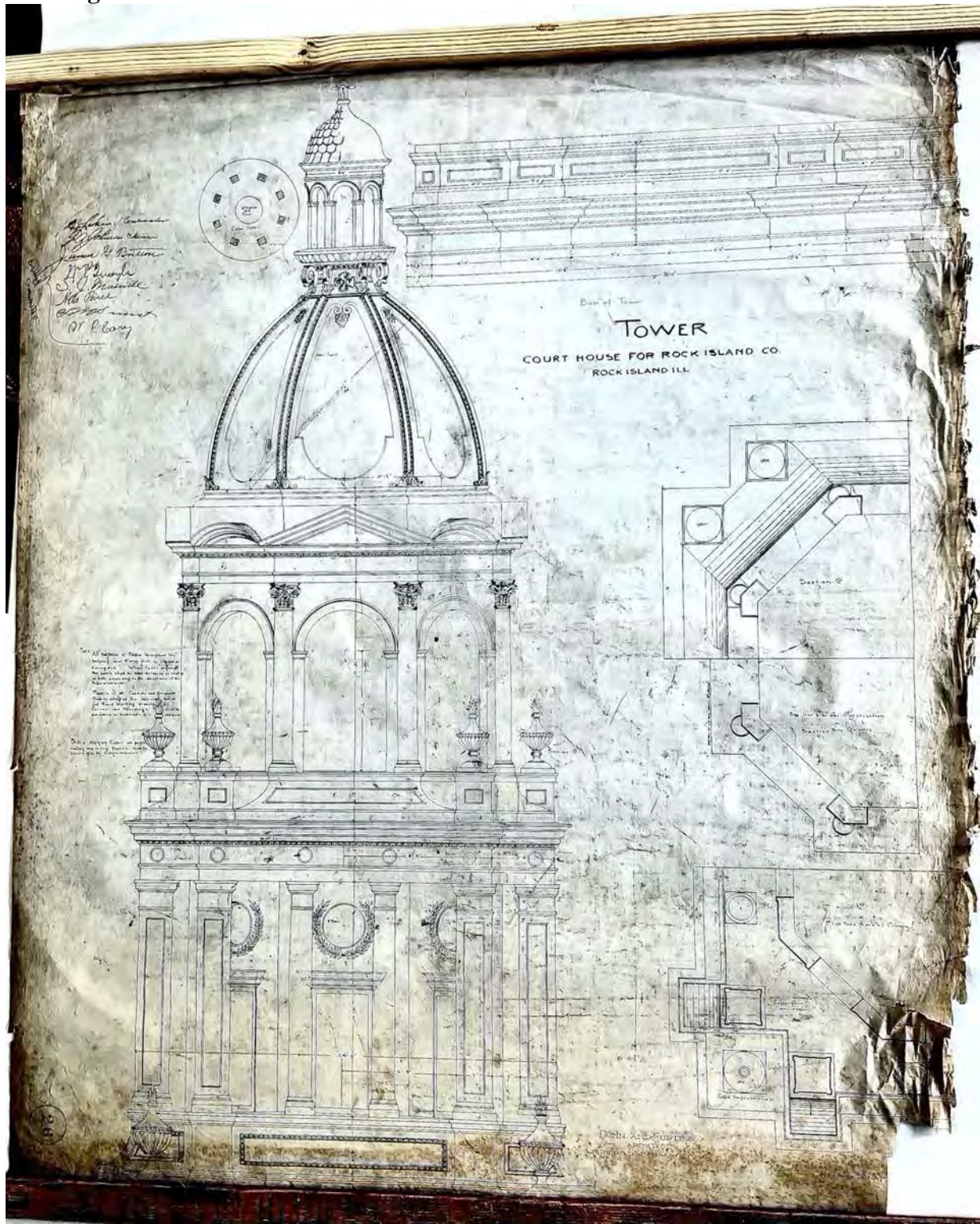
**Original Drawings**

**Source for all drawings: Rock Island Preservation Society**

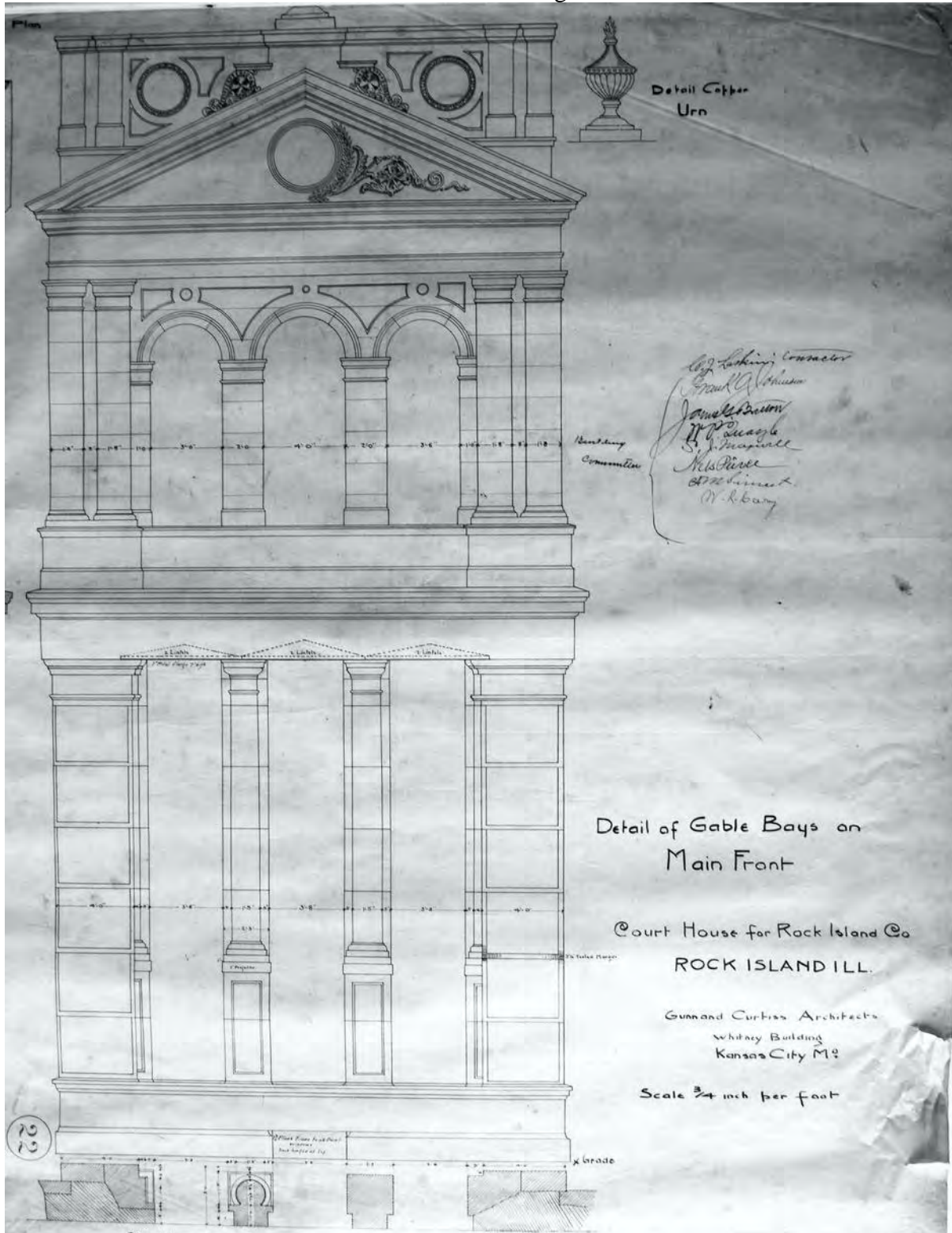
**Main Pavilion on East Façade.** The Main Pavilion was found at the center of the East façade. This drawing details the third floor, fourth floor and the domes on the roof of this section of the building. The cupola was removed in the 1940s. The domes in 1958 and much of the third and fourth floor detail was removed in the 1960 remodeling.



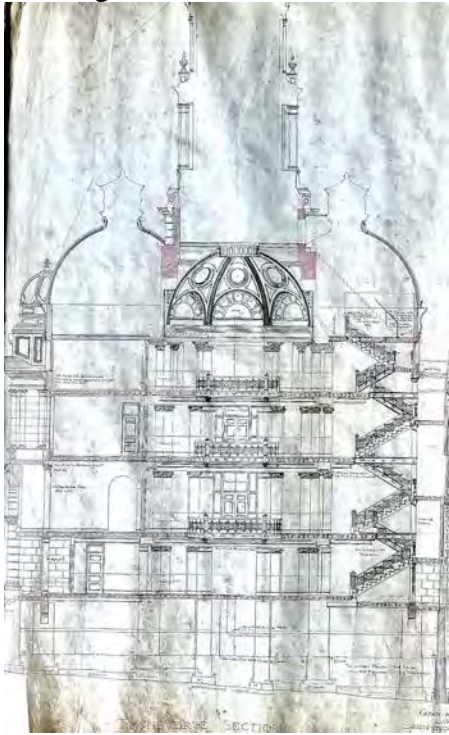
**Drawing of Tower.** The tower stood on the roof of the courthouse and was removed in 1958



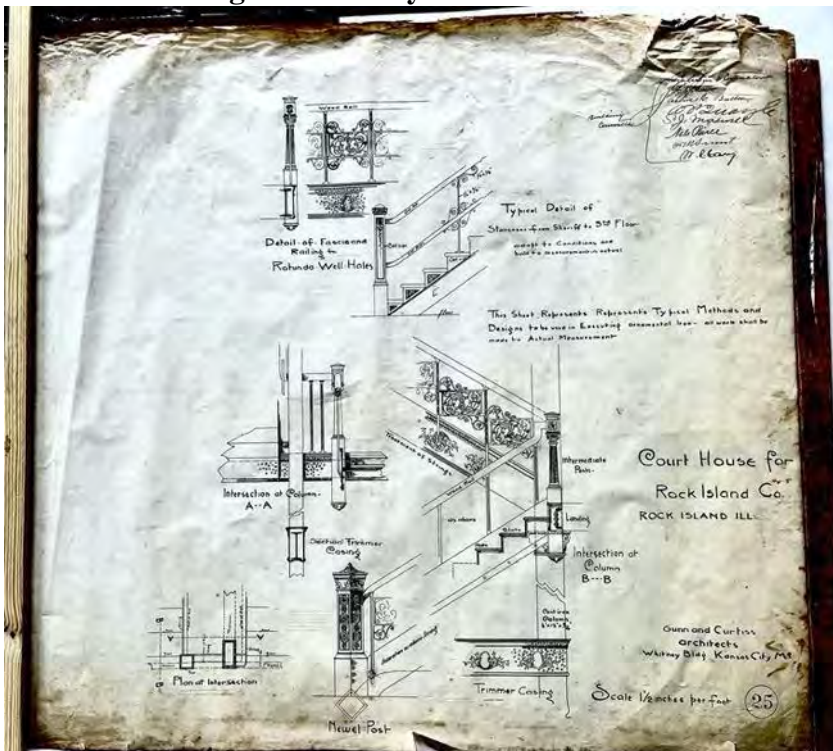
**Drawing of Gabled Bay on East Façade.** On either side of the east facade were gabled bays. Most of the detail was removed in the 1960 remodeling



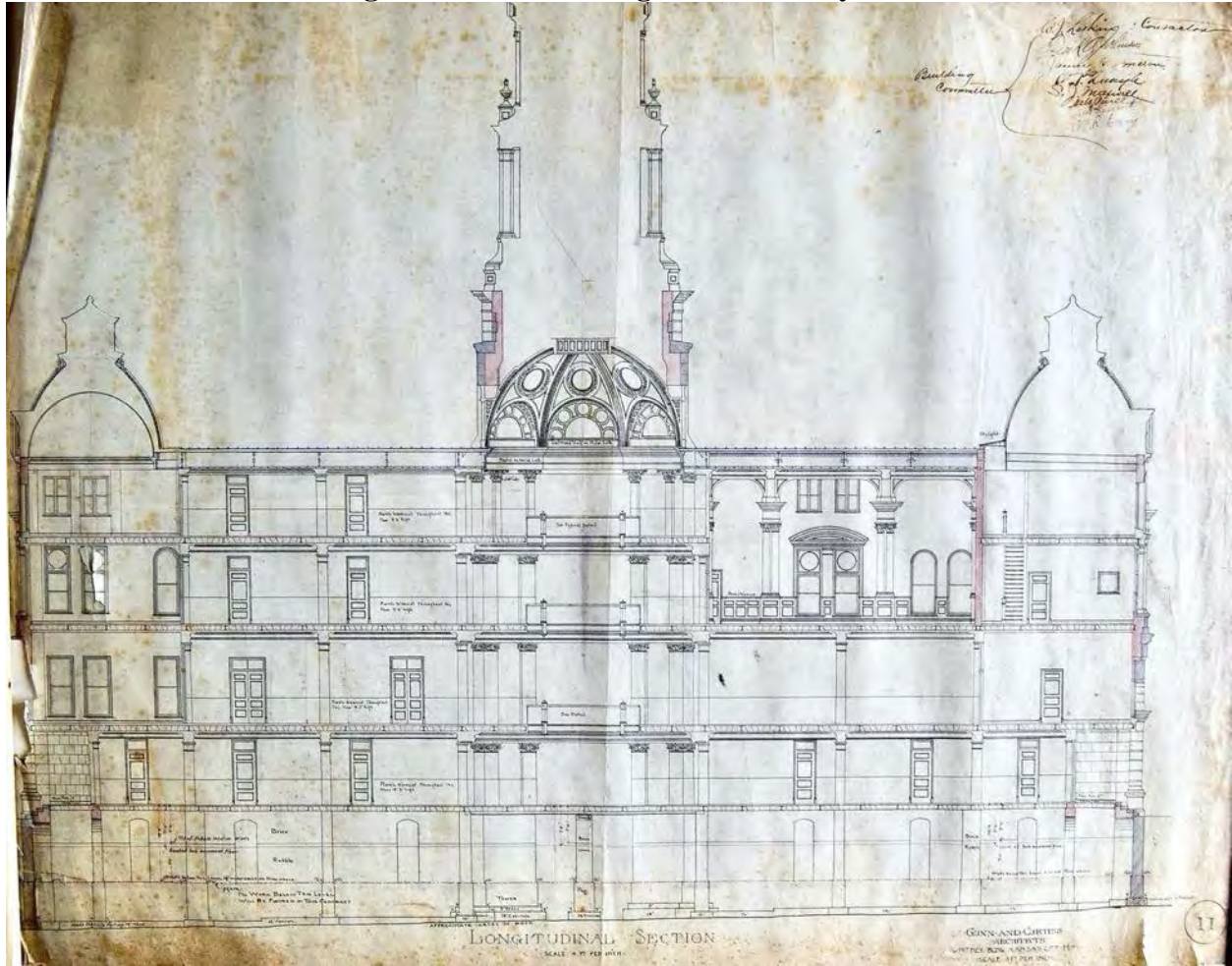
**Side Section.** The side section shows the placement of the main stairs on the west side of the building



**Detailed Drawings of Stairway**



**West Section View Showing Prominence of Original Two-Story Circuit Courtroom.**

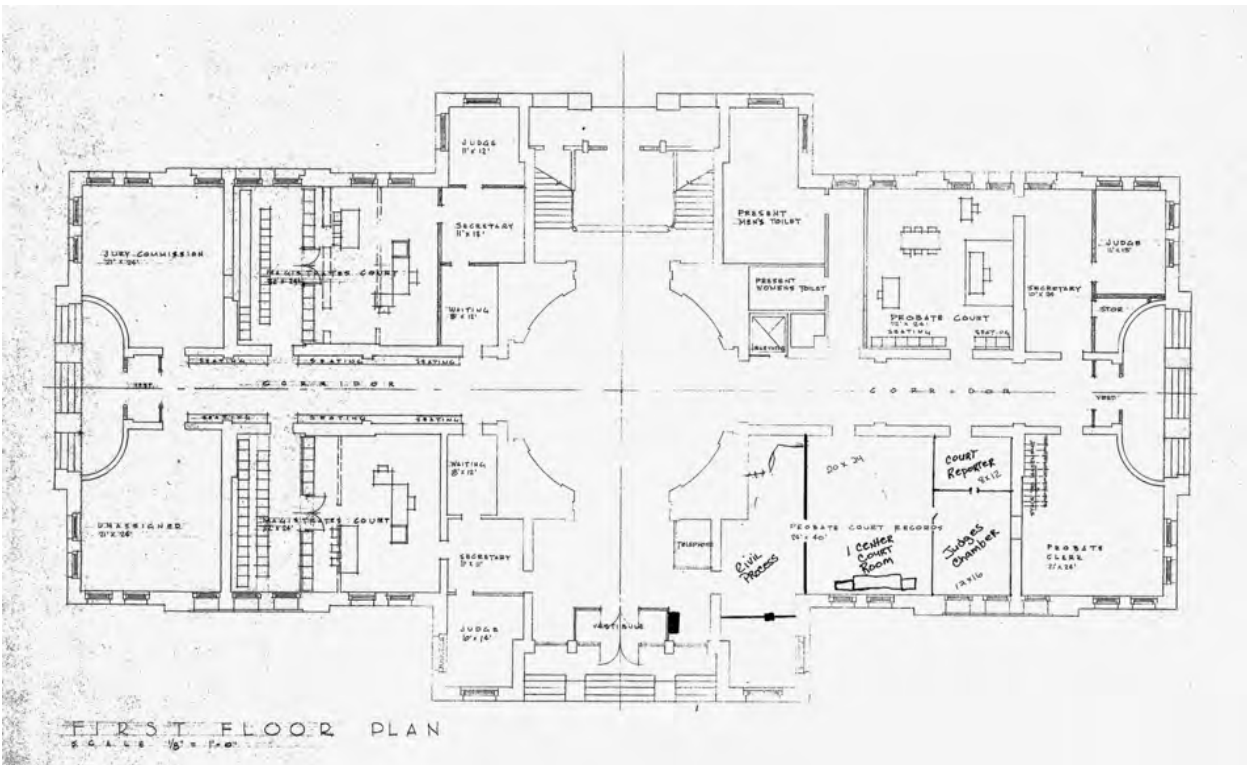


Comparison of Floor Plans - 1897 by Gunn and Curtiss and 1960 by M.R. Beckstrom

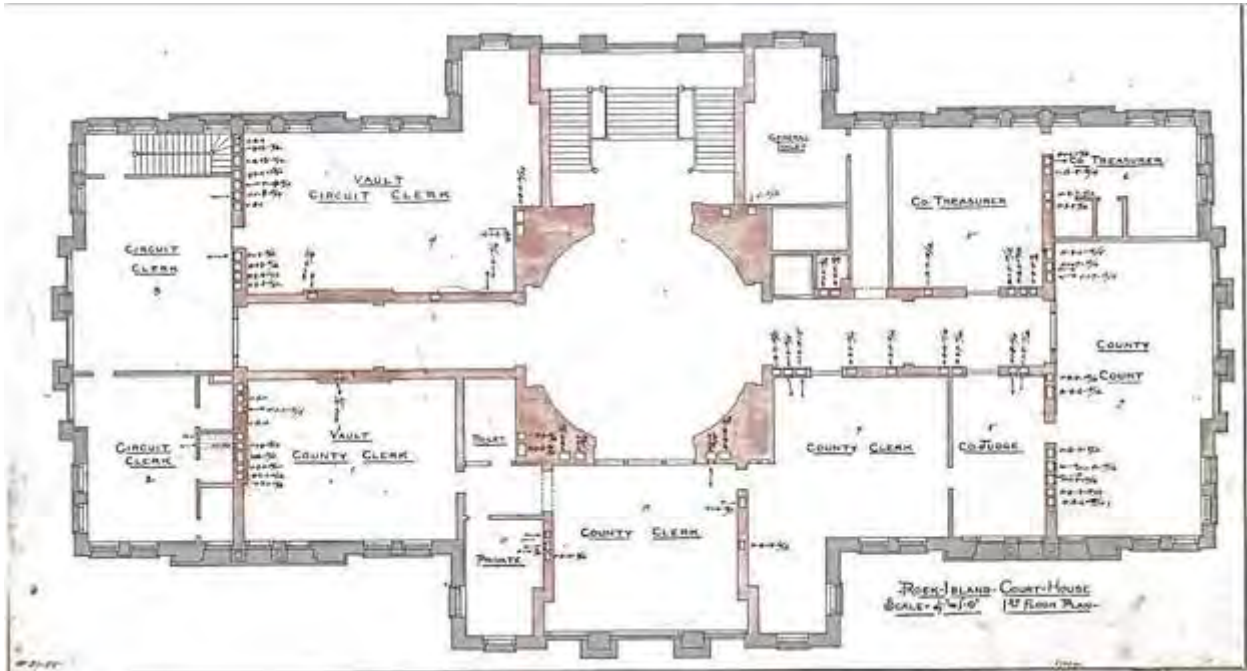
First Floor - 1897



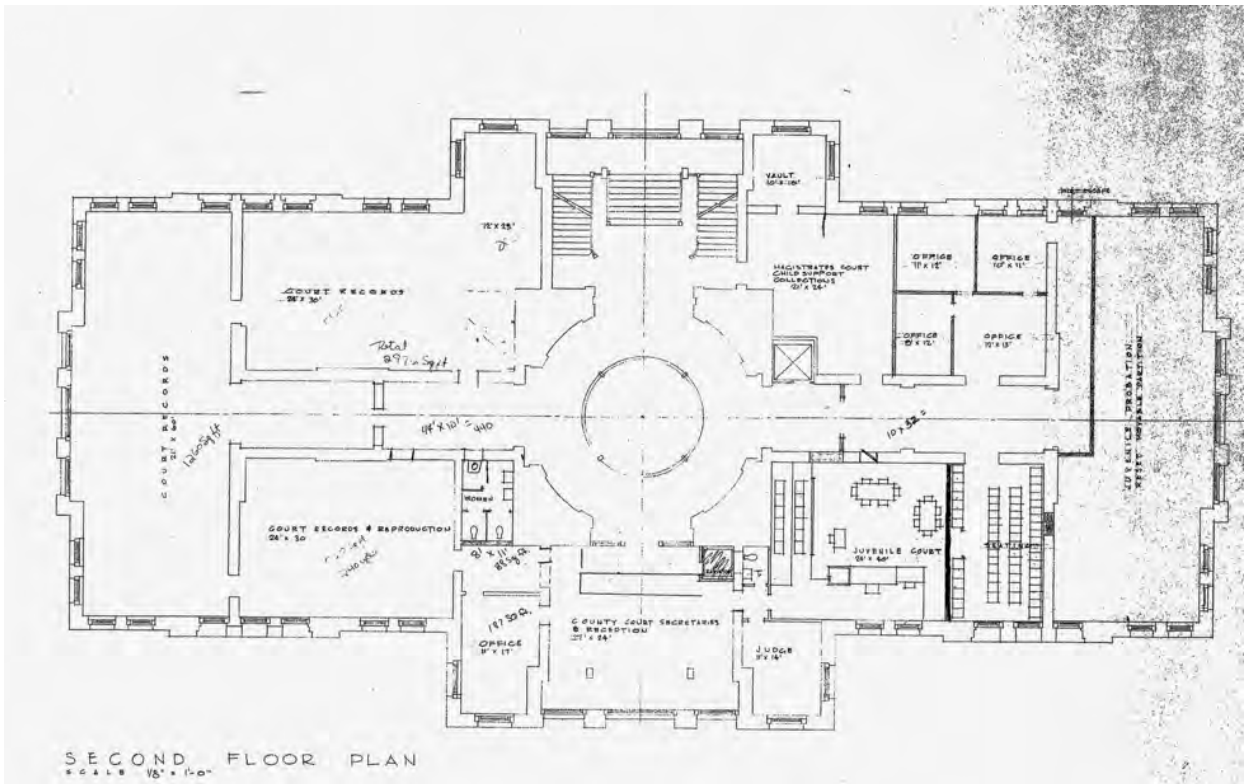
1960



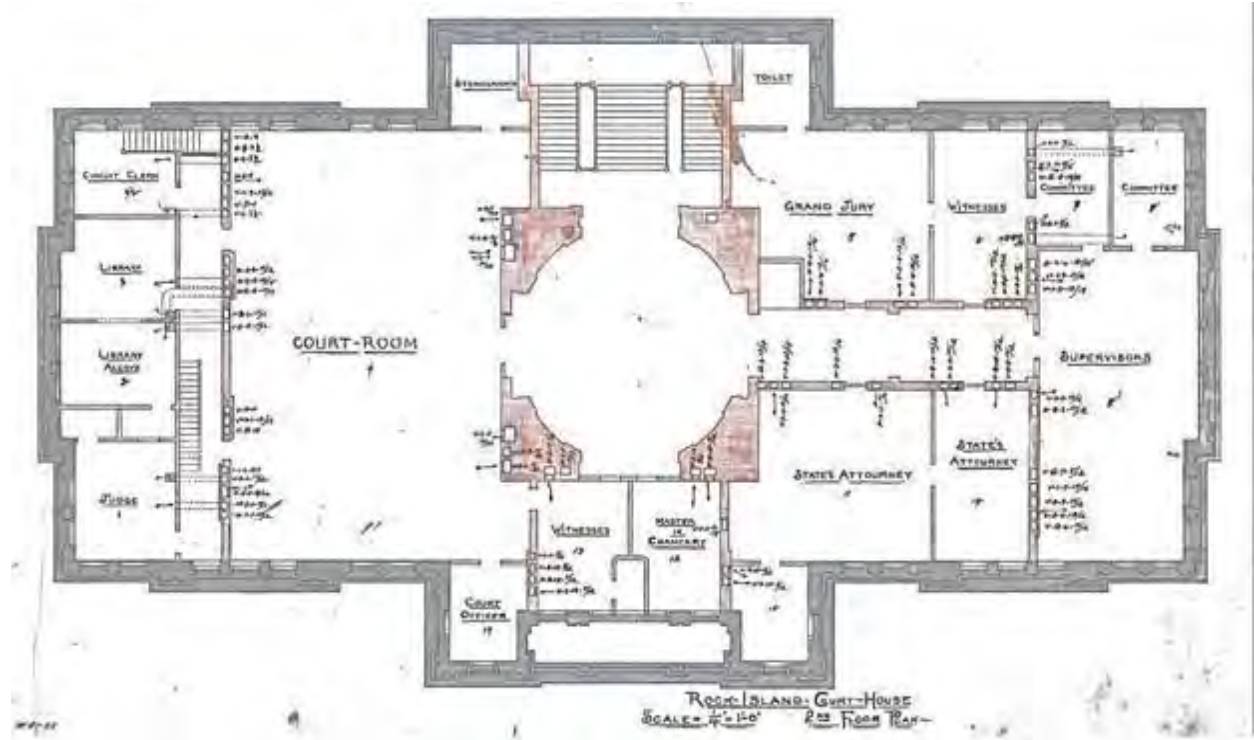
Second floor - 1897



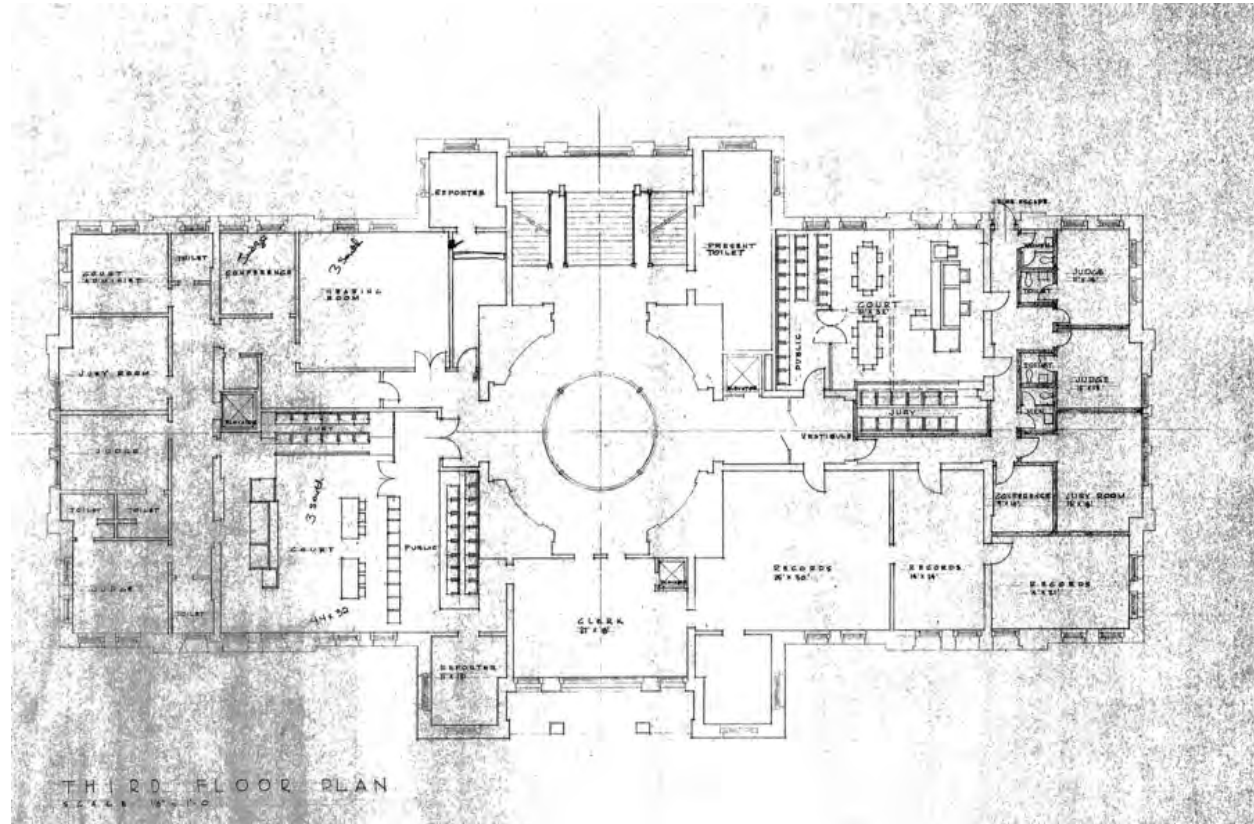
1960



Third Floor - 1897

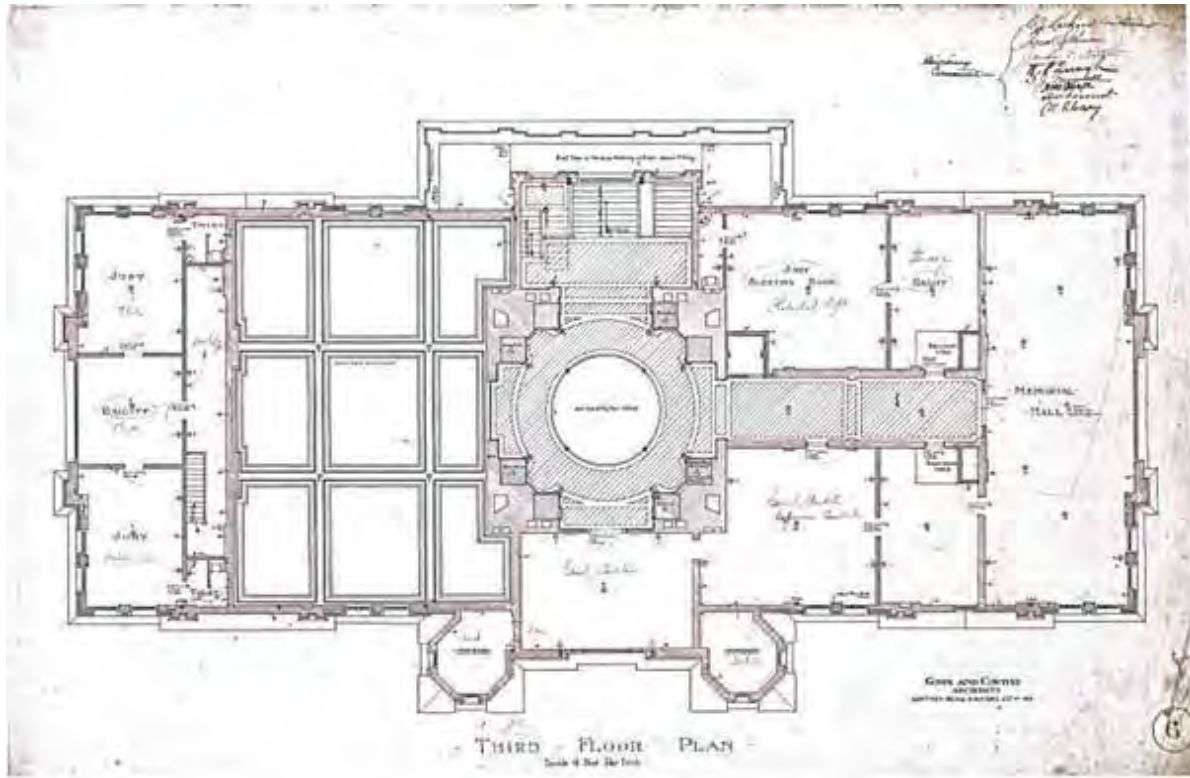


1960

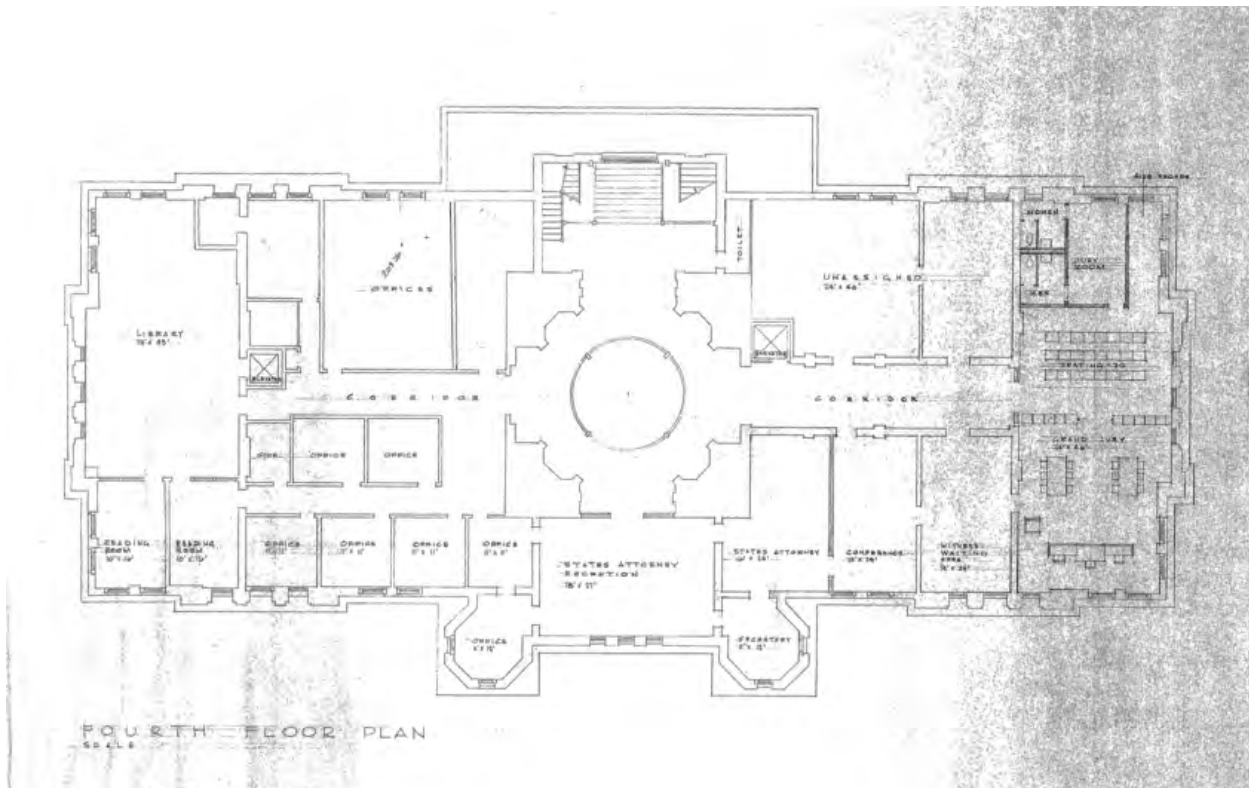




Fourth Floor - 1897



1960



**Appendix 3 – Supporting Images to Part I – Historical Information**

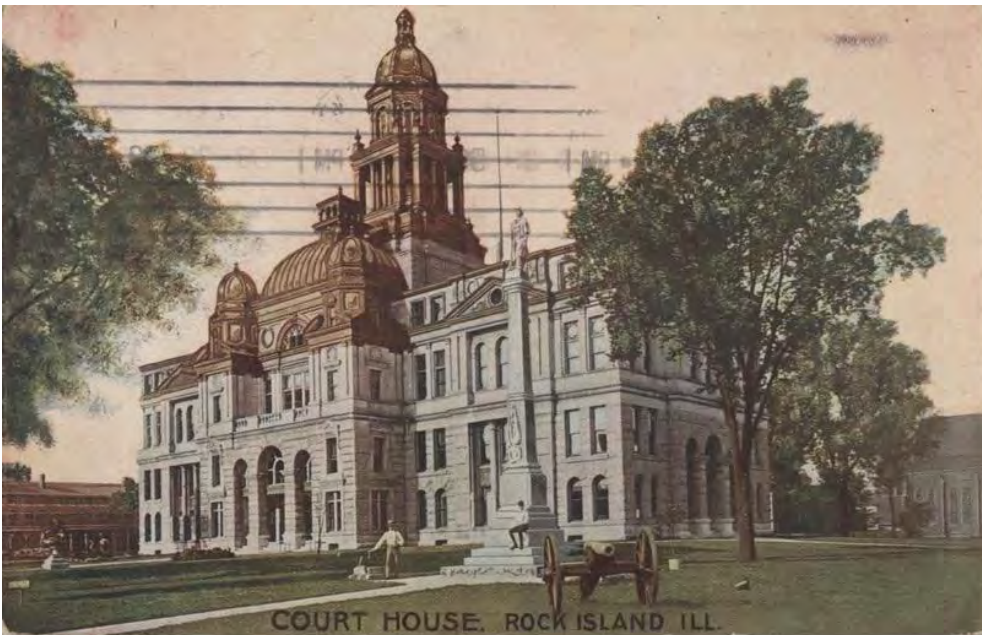
Sources Rock Island County unless otherwise noted.

**A. 2<sup>nd</sup> Rock Island County Courthouse**



Source: Rock Island Historical Society

**B. Postcard Image of Courthouse with Civil War Soldiers' Monument in its original location**



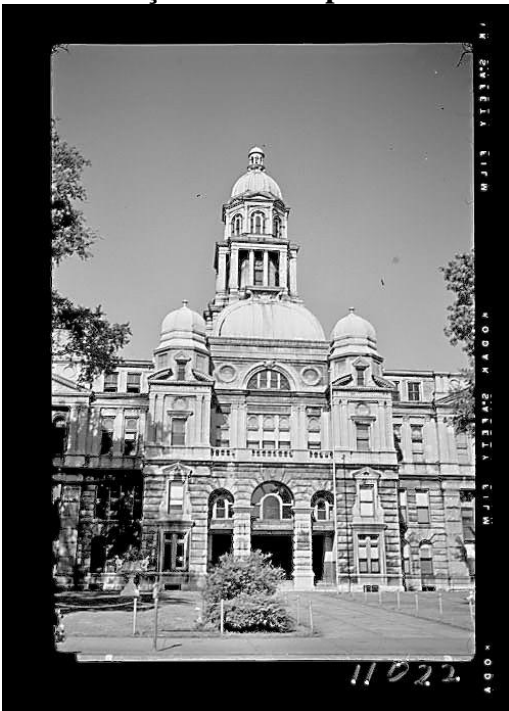
Source: Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission

**C. East Façade With Domes & Cupolas Intact**



Source: Rock Island Historical Society

**D. East façade with Cupola Removed From Dome (1930s)**



Source: Library of Congress

**E. Removal of tower in 1958**

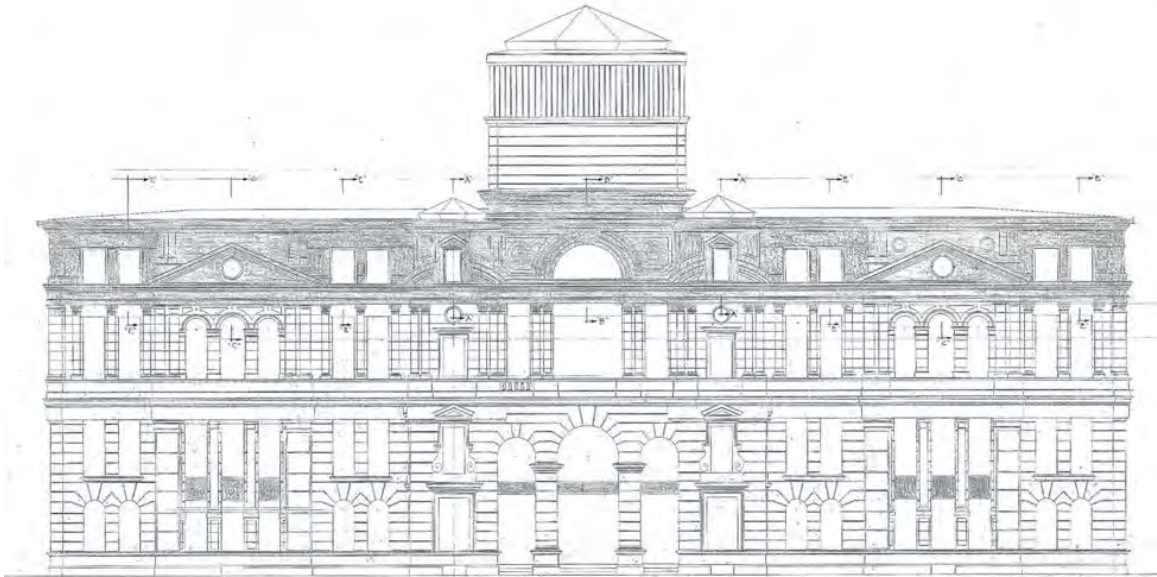


**Source: Rock Island Historical Society**

**G. Significant Alternations to East Façade. Original Courthouse in 1901**

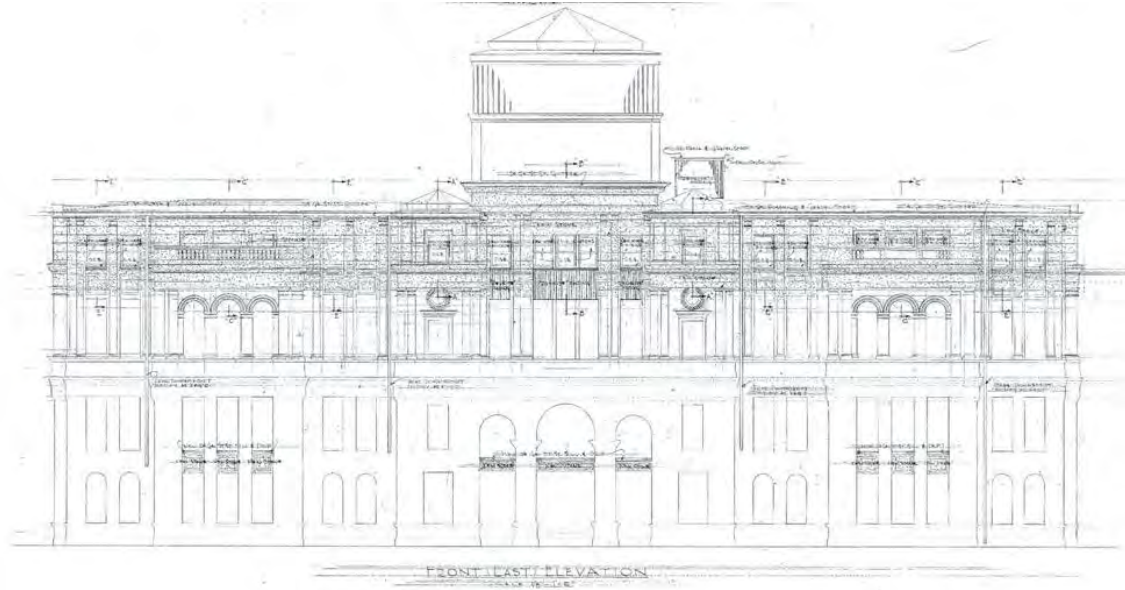


**Significant Alterations to East Façade. Drawing by M.R. Beckstrom of east façade with domes and tower removed as of 1958**



EAST ELEVATION PRESENT STRUCTURE  
1958  
DRAWN BY M. R. BECKSTROM, ARCHITECT, CHICAGO, ILL.  
FOR THE ARCHITECT, ROCK ISLAND COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
THE ALTERATIONS SHOWN ON THIS ELEVATION ARE AS OF 1958

**H. Significant Alterations to East Façade. Drawing by M.R. Beckstrom of 1960  
Remodeling with changes primarily to third and fourth floors**



**I. Courthouse in 2022**



Source: Deb Carey

**J. West View of Fire Escapes on west side of courthouse**



Source: Deb Carey



**Appendix 4 – Supporting Images to Part II – Sections B & C**

(all photos taken by Andrew Elders)



Exhibit A - Detail of Carthage Marble water table



Exhibit B - Detail of south porch, showing blue and buff Bedford stone



Exhibit C - Detail of south porch, showing mosaic floor

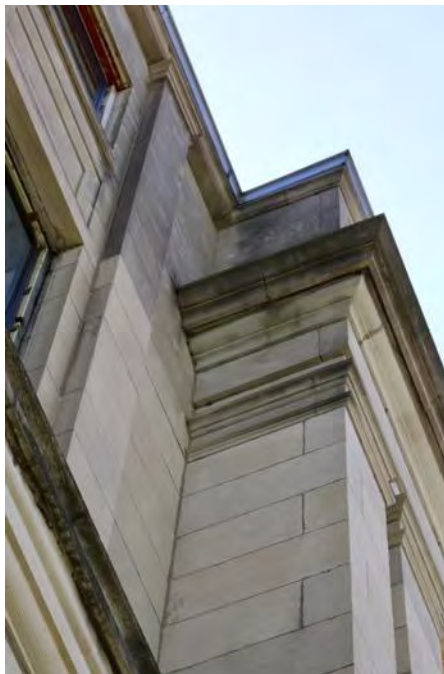


Exhibit D - Detail of north façade, showing darker stone on fourth floor



Exhibit E - First floor rotunda, looking west



Exhibit F - First floor corridor, showing original arch mosaic floor, and Tennessee marble wainscot



Exhibit G - First floor chambers vestibule, showing drop ceiling grid, modern wood paneling and doors



Exhibit H - Second floor office with original arched window



Exhibit I - Second floor county clerk's office



Exhibit J - Second floor northwest courtroom, showing plastic laminate wall panels



Exhibit K - Second floor northwest courtroom showing multiple layers of ceiling replacement



Exhibit L - Second floor rotunda; historic stenciling floor



Exhibit M - Second floor rotunda, original mosaic



Exhibit N - Original plaster cornice in second floor corridor



Exhibit O - Second floor county records room



Exhibit P - Third floor rotunda, looking east



Exhibit Q - Third floor rotunda and corridor terrazzo flooring



Exhibit R - Historic stencil behind dropped ceiling



Exhibit S - Third floor wall construction of Pyrobar fireproofing blocks



Exhibit T - Fourth floor corridor, looking north to rotunda



Exhibit U - Fourth floor office





Exhibit V - Newel detail



Exhibit W - Stair riser detail



Exhibit X - Detail under stairs



Exhibit Y - Stairs to attic area

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS

ROCK ISLAND COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
210 15<sup>th</sup> Street  
Rock Island  
Rock Island County  
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1282

Leslie Schwartz, Photographer, May 2022

- IL-1282-1      General view of rear (west) façade and south façade from south southwest.
- IL-1282-2      General view of south façade from south.
- IL-1282-3      General view of front (east) façade and north façade from northwest.
- IL-1282-4      General view of rear (west) façade and north façade from northwest.
- IL-1282-5      Detail view of south façade porch from south.
- IL-1282-6      Interior view from main (east) entrance, showing floor of rotunda with staircase beyond, looking west.
- IL-1282-7      Interior view of first-floor southwest courtroom, looking south.
- IL-1282-8      Detail view of first floor stair landing, showing mosaic flooring and corner columns, looking southeast.
- IL-1282-9      Detail view of second floor stair landing, showing column and beam stair structure and decorative risers, looking southeast.
- IL-1282-10     Interior view of second floor stair landing, looking south.
- IL-1282-11     Interior view of second floor double doors into corridor.
- IL-1282-12     Detail view of third-floor northwest courtroom, looking northeast.
- IL-1282-13     Detail view of fourth floor corridor, looking north.
- IL-1282-14     Interior view of third floor rotunda area, looking north.
- IL-1282-15     Detail view of original door, trim, and hardware.

- IL-1282-16 Interior view of second floor rotunda area, looking southwest.
- IL-1282-17 Interior view of fourth floor rotunda area, looking southwest.
- IL-1282-18 Interior view of rotunda, looking down from fourth floor.
- IL-1282-19 Interior view of rotunda, looking up from first floor.
- IL-1282-20 Detail view of rotunda dome, looking up from fourth floor.























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#### Customer Service Information

Wood County Circuit Clerk's Office, while respecting the privacy of our customers, we are pleased to assist you with your

needs. Please standards at any time, please contact our Circuit Clerk at 309-558-3312 or our Division on the 3rd Floor of the Courthouse. We know there are many ways to improve our service.

Thank you for your interest and support. We are committed to meeting and exceeding the expectations of our customers. Our staff is here to help you!

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