

The Historic 1883 Walton County

Courthouse – Monroe, Georgia

The 1883 Walton County Courthouse is the third courthouse for Walton County. The County was formed in 1818 from the Creek Indian Cession and the first courthouse was a barn in the community of Cowpens. Court was held in temporary buildings until the first courthouse was completed in 1823 on land donated by Elisha Butts. The modest structure was used until 1845 when a second courthouse was erected at the front of the current Courthouse Square.

The cornerstone was laid on February 14, 1883 for the construction of a Courthouse designed by the regionally famous architectural firm of Bruce and Morgan who designed over twenty courthouses in Georgia. The structure was built by James Smith & Company for a cost of \$ 23,865.00. The building was heated by the twelve fire places and cooled by natural ventilation provided by the large windows throughout the structure.

The structure was hit by a tornado in 1885, two years after its groundbreaking, and the clock tower and a large portion of the roof and structure on the North side of the building were destroyed. The repair work was quickly performed but left the clock tower as a flat pedestal. The current clock tower was built in the 1910's and simulates only the base of the original tower. The dome and clock were not re-built and a clock was installed on the four sides of the tower base. The other substantial damage was that the Superior Court Courtroom's original plaster ceiling and three-foot tall ornamental plaster crown molding were destroyed and were, subsequently replaced with the beaded-board ceiling that was mounted on the original framing and slopes down on four sides to the bottom of the original plaster crown.

The building had various updates and improvements with the advent of lighting and heating systems with the first major renovation being performed as a WPA Works Progress Administration project in the 1930's. This renovation cost \$ 33,000.00 and, during this renovation, the heart pine original floors were replaced with poured terrazzo on the first floor, radiators were installed, the original balcony was removed and replaced with a larger balcony, and the original wooden front porch floor was replaced with a concrete floor with tiles and a knee wall. The original columns were retained and cut off to accommodate the knee wall.

In the 1960's, the historic structure luckily suffered the fate of many 'modernizations'. Many citizens and community leaders spoke of tearing down 'that old building' but it was spared and modernized. During this period, historic items were covered over with furring and gypsum board; the balcony was enlarged again and offices built beneath; original doors and frames made way for commercial interior doors; paneling was installed in the Courtroom and Hallways; and 'modern' green shag carpet and red and black checkerboard vinyl tiles were installed throughout the building. In addition, ceilings were lowered and the two vaults were built on the rear of the building.

The Alcovy Judicial Circuit and the Walton County Board of Commissioners led an effort to restore the historic structure with Sales Tax money that had been approved by the voters in 1988. The restoration work began in earnest in 1994 and was completed in 1996. This work included the restoration of all of the original 1883 interior spaces; replacing the terrazzo floor with historic floors from Chicago; removing all paneling and restoring and replacing all plaster walls; replicating all original trim and replacing where missing; re-building the balcony to the 1883 look; re-building the original sloped floor in the Courtroom; re-building the Courtroom Bar and Railings; replacing the ten large arched-top windows in the Courtroom with historically accurate windows; restoring all ceilings; and integrating state of the art building systems as well as an elevator.

The restoration also included exterior work which consisted of re-building the missing porch balustrade; re-building original steps; providing handicap access; researching and painting the windows sashes the original color; and restoration of the original 1883 roof and the 1920 tower.

The 1883 Walton County Courthouse continued to serve as the County's courthouse until November of 2004. After one hundred and twenty one years of service to the County, the historic structure was given a reprieve and now serves as the office for the Senior Judge as well as for other County Departments.

The historic Courthouse Square received a boost from the Georgia Department of Transportation by receiving funds for the square improvements in 2000. This work included landscaping; sidewalks; handicap access; and installation of all missing granite bollards and chains around the square.

Following are various pictures of the Courthouse:









