

from the courthouse and weakened mortar joints were reinforced before fresh paint was applied. An entrance foyer and restrooms were added onto the clerk's Office. The jail, too, was refurbished. A new cell was constructed upstairs along with living quarters for the jailer.

In 1969 Bailey and Gardner designed the joining of the clerk's office to the old firehouse, adding space for a new records room and offices for the commissioner of the revenue. Don Faulconer contracted this project.

The aging courthouse and its growing appendages came in for renewal and consolidation in 1985. Working from Bailey & Gardener plans, the H.B. Sedwick Jr. firm built an addition onto the rear of the courthouse for additional offices and courtrooms. This Sedwick work reduced the "courthouse campus" to a single structure.

Today we see the splendid results of the efforts of the R.E. Lee Construction Company to restore our old Italianate courthouse to its 19th century splendor. Now Orange folks eagerly wait for the architectural plans drawn by Hayes, Seay Mattern and Mattern of Virginia Beach to be brought to fruition.

The "heart of Orange" has now resumed its function as the administrative, legislative and judicial center of the county, rolling on toward the anniversary of its second century of service.

*(All additions and restorations to the Courthouse were completed in 2005.)*



Orange County Visitors Bureau  
P.O. Box 133  
Orange, Virginia 22960  
[www.VisitOrangeVirginia.com](http://www.VisitOrangeVirginia.com)

*This is a publication of the  
Orange County Visitors Bureau*

---

*The Orange County Department of  
Tourism & Visitors Bureau is committed to  
raising the awareness of Orange County;  
enhancing its image; and promoting its interests  
and name recognition - locally, nationally and  
internationally.*

*The top ten states of visitor origin  
are Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania,  
the District of Columbia, New York, Florida,  
California, Ohio, New Jersey, and Texas.  
Florida, California, and Texas have been in  
the top ten for the past six years!*

*International visitors have come from  
all continents, with the exception of Antarc-  
tica. The United Kingdom, Canada, Thailand,  
and Germany have the largest visitor percent-  
ages of all the countries.*

---

*Look for our other publications:*

*Orange County Calendar of Events  
A Brief History of Orange County  
Orange as a Railroad Town  
It Happened in Orange  
Orange County Visitors Guide*

---

**ORANGE COUNTY**  
VIRGINIA  
[www.VisitOrangeVirginia.com](http://www.VisitOrangeVirginia.com)

# Orange's Courthouse

Biography by Paul Slayton



*Picture by Toyita Rivera*

The arrival of railway locomotives in Orange in 1854 quickly impressed the town's governing board of the need to replace the old courthouse on Railroad Avenue.

*F*ifty years of wear had left the old building in a bedraggled condition. Although more pressing was the fact that the eastern wing of the courthouse sat in the right-of-way of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad!

Passing trains were noisy, odiferous, and emitted showers of sparks that threatened to ignite the judge's beard. Thus, it became imperative that a new courthouse be built at another location.

And so it was! But not without four years of controversy.

The first architectural design presented was in the Jeffersonian Roman Revival Style. The design was initially approved, but then approval was revoked, ostensibly because of costs.

Next, the Washington D.C. architectural firm of Haskins and Alexander was called in. They designed a contemporary Italian villa style structure adorned with a Tuscan tower.

Apparently the style was pleasing and the price was right, probably resulting from 100,000 free bricks gained from a real estate trade with Richard Rawlings. The new design was approved in 1858 and the firm of Spooner and Darrow began construction of the new courthouse at the corner of West Main and what now is Madison Road.

Surprisingly few changes were made over the next 30 years. A bell was placed in the Tuscan tower in 1878 to ring out announcements of court sessions, and a paint job or two has kept the exterior of the building looking fresh.

In 1891 a new jail was built at the back of the courthouse grounds. It replaced the old 1837 jail, which was located on the site currently occupied by the Train Station. In fact, it seems likely that some of the window and cell iron-work, crafted by Richard Boulware for the old jail, were recycled into the new "pokie". Three years later, new quarters were built on the west side of the courthouse to house the clerk of the court and county records.

In 1910 architect Charles Robinson of Richmond was brought in to plan a refurbishment and modernization of the building. Refurbishment consisted primarily of a new coat of paint.

Modernization included central heating from a coal furnace installed under the courtroom and wiring the building to take advantage of Preacher A.J. Harlow's new electric generator, thus relieving the judge and the supervisors of the need to keep candles handy. Plumbing fixtures made possibly by the town's new waterworks made outdoor privies at the courthouse obsolete. Also, an addition built onto the clerk's office doubled the size of that facility.

While in town, architect Robinson also designed the old Orange High School building on Belleview Avenue. In 1924, after years of lobbying for a clock in the courthouse tower in her local newspaper column, Miss Bertha Gray Robinson saw her dream become a reality. The Orange Campfire Girls managed to sell enough cakes and pies to buy a used three-faced clock for the tower.

The clock looked great, but the ability to keep precise time has never been its strong suit. (Shall we donate the tower clock to the James Madison Museum and have Timex to make us an accurate timepiece?)

In 1925 the Board of Supervisors requested that John W. Reynolds submit bids on projects to erect offices for the treasurer, build an addition to the courthouse, and to connect the clerk's office to the courthouse with a corridor and steps.

Mr. Reynolds' estimated that the work could be done for \$17,100. The Board, following typical standard operating procedures for governing bodies, decided to wait to see if it could be done cheaper at a later date.

The courthouse and its grounds underwent major changes during the depression years, courtesy of the Federal Government's Public Works Administration (PWA). Under the courthouse the PWA workers hand-dug a basement to create office spaces.

For many years the Madison roadside office housed the school board, and the commonwealth's attorney occupied the Westside offices.

The grounds of the courthouse were compressed to make way for the widening of Route 15 (Madison Road) and a reinforced concrete wall was installed to keep the courthouse from sliding into the roadway. This job

also required that the Confederate soldiers' monument be relocated a bit closer to the courthouse.

In 1938 County Treasurer O.B. Watson played the role of "Chicken Little". He reported to the supervisors that the mortar in the Tuscan tower had "deteriorated to the extent that only gravity held the building together." (Mr. Watson's office was directly underneath the tower. Perhaps that made him a bit nervous, Or, maybe he was using a bit of hyperbole to encourage the building of a new courthouse.)

Despite Watson's warnings, the supervisors only agreed to have the building inspected. No immediate follow-through took place, and sixty-seven years later the Tower stands, "rock-solid and iron-bound". Another building was added to the courthouse complex in 1938.

Orange's first firehouse had been built in 1922 on county property, just behind the clerk's office. When the volunteer firemen moved into their new quarters on the corner of West Main and Belleview Avenue, the old firehouse reverted to the county. Thus the county was able to convert that space into offices, allowing Treasurer Watson to escape from his precarious perch beneath the Tuscan tower.

The courthouse grounds now consisted of four freestanding buildings; the courthouse, the jail, the clerk's office and the refurbished old firehouse. After the Second World War, two grave desecrations were committed upon Mr. Haskins and Mr. Alexander's Italianate design. First, in 1947, the cathedral ceiling of the courtroom was enclosed. Then, in 1949, the beautiful loggia was bricked-in; all for the purpose of creating two small rooms, neither of which was large enough to "swing a cat in." Who committed these architectural sins? Ultimately the Supervisors must assume responsibility as they approved the expenditure.

Russell Bailey, however, was the offending architect, E.H. Harwell was the contractor and Sheriff M.M. Myers, who also held the title "Superintendent of County Buildings", was the recipient of the new "office space."

Concomitant with the "bricking-in felony" some good things happened. The old paint was stripped

*Experience*

*Remember*

*Celebrate!*