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A Brief History of Hamilton County's Various Courthouses

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Revised July 8, 2025

The year 2022 was a remarkable year in terms of historical Hamilton County governmental records. In that year, one simple question resulted in what would be a worldwide search that lasted several months and led to the discovery of countless records that were believed to be destroyed. For all intents and purposes, the records should have been destroyed in 1884, the year of the worst of Hamilton County's three courthouse fires.

The climate and circumstances leading up to the **"Cincinnati Riots of 1884"** or the **"Cincinnati Courthouse Riot"** if you will, is rather long and complex and will not be the subject of this writing. Numerous books and articles have been written about the events leading to the riots, the riots themselves, as well as the aftermath that ensued after that fateful night of March 29, 1884. After much time evaluating the magnitude and importance of these records, I felt that a brief history of our past Hamilton County Courthouses was warranted.

We started with constructing an inventory of records that survived the fire, as well as the probable, complicated, and torturous path of their survival. There have been various writings regarding our courthouses and the riots. What has been written can be found in a variety of places on the internet and in little-known and arcane publications. It is worth mentioning to the reader that Hamilton County has the dubious distinction of having the most courthouses destroyed by fire of all of Ohio's 88 counties. There have been three courthouses that succumbed to fire in the years 1813, 1849, and 1884.

The purpose behind this paper is not to provide an exhaustive illustration of the rich history of our past courthouses, but rather one concise and condensed compilation of the most important facts as we know them to be. This will hopefully provide a backdrop that will lead one to a deeper understanding of our rich history as well as additional learning about the records that survived the 1884 fire. This riot-caused fire could be considered one of the worst riots in American history.

The information that will be provided in this writing has been extracted from a multitude of sources in the Hamilton County Law Library, the Ohio History Connection, the Ohio Supreme Court Law Library, on local court websites, as well as from various periodicals and publications that have been digitized and placed online.

Hamilton County's First Courthouse

The court first sat for a brief session on February 2, 1790. In May of the same year, it sat for a longer term, then at intervals, and subsequently in a continuous manner. The facilities in which those first Judges, Clerks, Constables, and juries dispensed justice were crude compared to today.

The first courts were held in the barroom of a rented tavern owned by George Avery near the banks of the Ohio River.

From this tavern, located at the present location of the corner of Main and Fifth streets, one could peer out and see a frog pond in the summer and a skating rink in the winter. In front of George Avery's tavern was a public whipping post and at times, gallows. This whipping post was in place due to not having facilities to incarcerate offenders.

The year of our first permanent courthouse is unclear. Conflicting sources state that it was either built in the year of Hamilton County's founding, 1790, or in 1795. Being that Hamilton County was established in 1790 and having it on record numerous times that there were rooms rented in taverns for the courts' use, it is logical to presume that the first permanent courthouse structure was likely built in 1795.

What is not in dispute and has been gleaned from multiple sources is the type of facility that was constructed and the specific location. Hamilton County's first courthouse was located in what is known today as "**Government Square**" because it is the location of the former United States Post Office building which currently houses the United States District Court.

The structure was a simple log cabin built by volunteers thereby costing the county virtually nothing. Sources agree on the description of the terrain and topography of its location. It was swamp land, marshes, and of course the much talked about frog pond.

A quote taken from a 1921 publication from the **Bench and Bar of Cincinnati** titled "*History of Hamilton County Court Houses*" has the following: "Indeed, historical writers upon the old courthouse declare that judicial business was transacted to music furnished by bull frogs."

Hamilton County's Second Courthouse

The second courthouse was constructed in 1802. This was due in large part to the rapid growth of Cincinnati as it was becoming Ohio's most important trading center. At a cost of \$3,000, this was Hamilton County's first judicial structure that was constructed of bricks into a two-story limestone building. This building had a cupola 80 feet high with balustrades across its front. In 1813, this courthouse ultimately was also a victim of fire as this structure served as a military barracks for soldiers during the war of 1812. Sources indicate that it was careless soldiers that were the cause of this fire and this courthouse's ultimate demise.

Hamilton County's Third Courthouse

Hamilton County's third courthouse was not completed until 1819 and was built on the site of our present courthouse, at Court and Main Streets. The county commissioners accepted a lot offered by Jess Hunt, grandfather of noted attorney Elliot Pendleton Hunt. At that time, this location was far removed from the then Village of Cincinnati. The total construction cost was \$15,000. This structure very much reflected the design of the prior courthouse and was an example of Federal style architecture. The "*Williams' Cincinnati Directory*" from 1819 provided details about this structure such as it was a spacious building, 62 feet in length, 56 feet in width, and that the cornice rose to a height of 50 feet. In addition to it having a spacious court room finished in a style of "neatness and elegance", the building had three outside doors and 50 windows, all ornamented with Venetian blinds. At the center of the rooftop of the structure sat a dome. It's quite possible that the

fire that destroyed the prior courthouse is what prompted this one to be built with two fire-proof rooms, once that housed the Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas and Supreme Court, and the other to house the Register of Deeds.

Even more detailed information can be taken from a book titled, *“The Old Court House: Reminiscences and anecdotes of the Courts and Bar of Cincinnati,”* published in 1880 by Judge Alfred George (A.G.) Washington Carter, this book is a very interesting mix of courthouse history and happenings, written in a satirical style, it’s clear that Judge Carter had a wonderful sense of humor. One of the interesting things that is mentioned in this book is that this third courthouse for about 30 years, had a large rectangular stove that was operated by the “old” sergeant-at-arms. In 1838, this time located on the second floor, a smaller courtroom was constructed for what was the new “Superior Court of Cincinnati.” In later years as the population of Cincinnati grew, two separate buildings were erected on Main Street, on the front line of the square, with one being north and the other being south of the line of the courthouse. These new buildings housed the Treasurer, Auditor, County Commissioner’s offices, Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas, and the County Surveyor.

Although the description depicts what appeared to be a beautiful building, it is clear that some citizens were not pleased with the appearance nor the location of this courthouse. In *“Cincinnati in 1826,”* published in 1827, the following statement was found, “It presents neither in its domestic economy nor external architecture a model of convenience or elegance. Its removal from the centre of the city is justly a cause for complaint.” This, our third courthouse, in setting what would become a historical trend for Hamilton County although unbeknownst to everyone at the time, would also burn to the ground in 1849. In his 1880 book, Carter elaborates on the public’s sentiments about this building saying, “It seemed at the time to have outlived its usefulness, and when it caught fire on the combustible roof, on the afternoon of the daytime, none of the fire companies would even lend a hand to put it out, every one about, remarking: ‘Oh let the old thing go, we will only protect the surrounding property.’” This book also makes the point that all of the important records, owing to the fireproof rooms, survived this fire.

It is reported that when the cupola of the roof of the courthouse caught fire, the grand jury was in session in their room on the second floor and the Prosecuting Attorney was with them and was in the process examining witnesses. After hearing the alarm, he quickly thrust his indictments into his “green bag” and evacuated. This fire was the result of a fire in an adjacent pork factory. A witness to the event at the time speaking in 1891 recalled the following: “The fire had been communicated to it by a neighboring pork-house conflagration on a warm summer’s day. It caught on its exposed timber roof and cupola, and soon roof, dome, cupola, spire and steeple were enveloped in flames.” Although many had a dim view of this courthouse, there was at least one person that was somewhat fond of it, a witness who saw the burning said the following, “The cupola had been a long-time home for the pigeons of the city. The old courthouse, it seems was the home of the pigeons as well as the judges and the lawyers. It was a great old courthouse and had a great history in its eventful days. Sorry to part with it.”

Some of Judge Carter’s most memorable and humored memories from that courthouse published in his book are the following: When William Henry Harrison, then a practicing lawyer, used swear words in open court, only to be fined and have the fine remitted. In another anecdote Carter coined “The Old ‘Squire And The Young Lawyer,” a young lawyer was presenting a case before Squire Wing, Justice of the Peace of Cincinnati Township. The trial had gone on far too long due to the young lawyer constantly interrupting the Justice of the Peace, prompting Squire Wing to say, “I am

getting' 'long in years, young man, and I must say, I never saw a lawyer just like you." The young attorney, unphased retorted back, "And I never saw a Squire just like you. I never saw one so long in years." Perhaps one of Carter's most notable memories noted in his book is from a time when he was a young and new attorney, when author Charles Dickens visited the "old" courthouse. In 1843, Dickens, somehow being the guest of Judge Timothy Walker, was ushered in by Walker into the court room to show him how proceedings were conducted there. Out of respect for the author, the court took a recess and Dickens made conversation with the other various judges and lawyers in attendance.

Hamilton County's Fourth Courthouse

Interestingly, while awaiting the construction of Hamilton County's now fourth courthouse, it would be none other than a pork packing house in which the courts and county offices would find their temporary quarters. What the County Commissioners were able to secure as a temporary courthouse were the second and third floors of a large four-story brick building located on the north side of Court Street, between Main and Walnut streets. The two buildings built for the non-judicial offices were not destroyed and the county offices continued to operate out of those structures. Even though this building was being repurposed for use in entirely different ways, it was described as being very accommodating and convenient. And due to its location, and Cincinnati's recently obtained nickname of "Porkopolis," people in the temporary courthouse would constantly smell pork as it wafted into the building. In a humorous moment, during a trial in which counsel was defending a client for none other than stealing hogs, the defense attorney stated to the court, "May it please the court and gentlemen of the jury, we are engaged in a hog case, and it is very fit and appropriate that we should be so engaged in this place, this pork house, this pork court house, where we have hogs below us and hogs above us, and hogs all around us;-but comparisons are 'odorous' and I will make no odious illusions or allusions!"

In 1852, enough of the new building was complete to allow the courts and county offices to start moving in and making use of the facility. Ten years later, our fourth courthouse, coined by some as the "finest building in the West" was officially complete. Unfortunately, this "finest building in the West" would meet its fiery demise as a casualty of what is considered one of the worst mob riots in United States history, something that will be touched on more later. A well-known architect by the name of Isaiah Rogers was commissioned to design this new courthouse. At the time he had also recently completed the design of the "Burnett House" in Cincinnati which was then the largest hotel in the Midwest.

Cincinnati's were now determined to build a stronger structure than had been built for previous courthouses. At a total cost of \$695,253.29, they utilized more fireproof materials such as limestone, marble, and steel. This courthouse has been described as a temple-like Greek Revival style structure with features of a balustraded portico that was complemented with six massive Corinthian columns. The front of the building was finished with locally quarried limestone, known as Dayton Marble.

Iron steps that led to the second and main floor would bring one into the rotunda room. This room also served as the main criminal court room. After viewing pictures subsequent to the 1884 riot, I believe that there are enough indications that it was in this "rotunda room" in which the infamous verdict was rendered which was the tinderbox for the incitement of the mob on that tragic night of March 29. This incident resulted in nationwide and even worldwide coverage regarding the carnage that was ensuing during this period.

This incident resulted in the Ohio National Guard being deployed with a Gatling gun in an attempt to restore order. After three days and nights, order was finally restored, and the end result would be 56 dead and over 300 people injured. Then and now, it cannot be overstated how disastrous this event was. Not only in terms of injury and loss of life, but also with regard to the majority of Hamilton County's oldest records being lost. In an article that appeared in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* on April 1, 1884, it goes on to say that "The destruction of the records at the Court-house is the most serious calamity that has occurred in the history of Hamilton County. These records embraced the whole history of local jurisprudence and even went so far back as the Northwest Territory."

It was not just the official court records and county records that were lost at that time, the Law Library was considered to be the finest and largest law library in the country, and all of its nearly 17,000 volumes perished in the fire. It is said that due to the generosity of local attorneys and around the world, the library was able to rebuild its collection within ten years.

Until that dreadful night, this courthouse was the largest of any in all of Ohio. What is interesting to note from a recently discovered record is the climate and the fear that was gripping the city during the day before the night that the courthouse would fall. Recently discovered is an original Commissioner's Meeting Minute Book from 1884. In that, the first few pages were recreated from their minutes that survived the fire by being in the safe. With the benefit of being able to look back on what we know happened that night, the following find is absolutely chilling. The second to the last meeting minute entry from March 29th 1884 reads "That the superintendent be instructed to place the day and night watchmen in the court house until further relieved by this Board." This is a direct testament and reflection as to the "tinderbox" atmosphere that was enveloping the city and that would ultimately engulf it later that night.

Of the 56 persons killed during the mob, the most prominent was a gentleman by the name of Captain John J. Desmond. He is considered a hero as he gave his life in attempting to defend this palace of justice. Mr. Desmond was a local attorney who also served as a member of the Ohio National Guard. On the night of March 29th 1884, his "B Company of the First Regiment" was activated. As his company approached Main Street, a rioter aimed a revolver at him, shooting him in the head and killing him instantly. To this day, there is one lone statue in the lobby of the current Hamilton County Courthouse and that is a statue of Captain Desmond honoring him as a defender of the Hamilton County Courthouse. To our surprise and astonishment, some of the recently discovered documents that survived the fire bear his original signature when he was signing these legal documents in his capacity as a practicing attorney.

Hamilton County's Fifth Courthouse

Since the fifth courthouse would not be completed for another three years, the courts and other county officials conducted their business in various buildings during these years. We know from various newspaper reports that on April 1, 1884, county business was transacted by the Hamilton County Commissioners at the Public Library. Their first task was establishing temporary quarters for the courts and various county offices to ensure the continuity of functioning government. This is confirmed by the recent discovery of the official Commissioner's Meeting Minute Book from March 1884 in which the minutes are entirely congruent, although of course in more detail, with what the media outlets were reporting at the time.

Published in 1904, *“Centennial History of Cincinnati and Representative Citizens, Volume 1, 1904”* stated that in the interim, the first court was held in the offices of “Forrest & Mayer” at the northeast corner of Court and Main Streets. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* dated April 3, 1884, reported that the Clerk of the Board was to notify the Judges of the several courts that the Board had secured “Lytle Hall” for their use and an article located in the *Courier-Journal*, from Louisville, Kentucky said that the temporary criminal quarters were to be built in the jail yard and would be completed within two weeks’ time. The Grand Jury was to assemble at the old armory near Court and Walnut Streets. Shortly, the courts and Commissioners would conduct business at the Public Library.

Although it does not list a specific building, the *“Williams’ Cincinnati Directory”* from June 1884 reported that by this time, both the Superior Court of Cincinnati and the District Court, were now housed in a building located at on the north side of Court Street, between Main and Walnut Streets. The Court of Common Pleas was also now housed in the same location, in addition to still hearing their cases in the temporary criminal courtrooms in the Jail Yard, while Clerk of Court Daniel J. Dalton’s office was now located inside the Public Library at Vine, between 6th and 7th Streets.

With information gleaned from the June 1885 edition of the *“Williams’ Cincinnati Directory”* we know that both the Superior Court of Cincinnati and Circuit Court, which was the new iteration of the appellate court that took the place of the District Court were now both located in the Albany Building, on the East side of Vine Street, between 3rd and 4th Streets, the current site of the Telephone Building. And, like before, the Court of Common Pleas was hearing cases here as well and in the Jail Yard. Clerk of Court Dalton was now also operating his office out of this building.

The fifth courthouse was built in 1887. It was a most arduous task to recover from the fire and build this fifth structure. The groundwork for this was in the State Legislature passing a bill creating a board of trustees which were appointed by Governor George Hoadley to oversee the construction. Architect James W. McLaughlin was employed to design this new structure. Unfortunately, this courthouse was built to nearly the same dimensions as its predecessor, which meant that it didn’t take long for the size of the city to outpace the size of this courthouse. To that end, this courthouse would outlive its use in serving the city in a very short amount of time.

Interestingly, the building of our sixth courthouse would be the result of the consternation and agitation that was continually present regarding the inadequacies of the jail that would lead to the construction and funding of the next courthouse. On October 2, 1908, the Board of County Commissioners adopted a resolution for the construction of a new jail that levied a tax to support a bond issue for this purpose. The voters of Hamilton County subsequently approved of this measure which allowed for a planning committee to be formed to oversee implementation.

On January 13, 1911, the same day that this planning committee was appointed by the Court of Common Pleas Judges in joint session, another resolution was introduced. Judge Stanley Struble, who was then a member of the Board of County Commissioners, introduced a resolution proclaiming a greater project to be implemented, not only building a new jail, but the erection of a new courthouse as well, or in lieu of that, to enlarge the existing structure.

This came at a pivotal and timely manner as the canal became abandoned as a waterway allowing for possible acquisition in creating the concept that was known as the “Canal Parkway” in which both the new jail and courthouse could be built in creating this “Canal Parkway.” After years of public and civic consensus, everyone voiced their support to acquire the available property.

On September 26, 1911, the Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution regarding the issuance of bonds to the total of \$2,500,000 to fund the new courthouse and jail. With the above being approved by the voters of Hamilton County, the contract for this new construction was signed by the “Charles McCaul Co.” and work began almost immediately.

Hamilton County’s Sixth Courthouse – Construction

Yet again, since this new courthouse was to be built on the same site as the prior one, the “*Williams’ Cincinnati Directory*” from 1915 was instrumental in detailing where the courts were temporarily housed while construction took place on the sixth and present courthouse. All of the courts and offices were moved to what they called the “temporary court house”, located at Broadway and Pioneer Streets. Since this new courthouse would once again be built on the same site, this required not only the existing courthouse to be raised, but since this one would be greater in size, it now also required additional buildings around the site to be razed along the canal, where Central Parkway is located at present day. On the day of March 14, 1915, ground was officially broken to make way for the construction of the next courthouse.

Things appeared to be moving at pretty fast clip as the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* reported on April 8, that the Probate Court had already begun to pack and start moving records to the temporary Courthouse. They even detail how then Probate Court Judge Lueders, along with his deputies, showed up to do some of the heavy lifting wearing overalls.

If moving their offices from what was now referred to as the “old Courthouse” was progressing quickly, the work of deconstructing it was not. On April 13, 1915, both the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* papers reported on what would become the first of at least three recorded worker strikes that would occur while building the sixth courthouse. This first one involved approximately 70 laborers that were employed to excavate the actual site when they learned their wages had been reduced from a rate of \$3.00 a day to just \$1.75 by the McCaul Construction Company. On or around May 6, 1915, the strike now ongoing just shy of a month, Superior Judge Merrill dismissed the injunction which now allowed for the excavation work to proceed.

In between the strikes, on October 1, 1915, it would be none other than former President and future Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, William Howard Taft, who would do us the honor of laying the cornerstone. After Taft was asked to present his authority in laying the cornerstone, he presented his certificate of honorary membership in the International Stone Masons Union No. 63 and according to the *Marysville Evening Tribune*, now in the hands of Taft was a silver trowel that he flashed back and forth across a huge stone that a workman had placed into position. Not only did Taft lay the cornerstone, during this ceremony he would also give what was called by the *Cincinnati Enquirer* a “great speech in his defense of the Courts of America,” in which he denounced the movement for the recall of judges and popular vote on judicial decisions, and as quoted by the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, “severely scoring those who have criticized the courts.”

July 1916 would bring with it the second strike. This time it involved 26 structural iron workers, after a \$50.00 job of hanging steam pipes was performed by steam fitters, and not them. Upon starting arbitration proceedings to try to end this disagreement, the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* reported on July 27 that the members of the Structural Iron Workers’ Union had returned to work in the interim while some type of final remedy could be ironed out.

On January 26, 1917, in what was coined as a “jurisdictional strike,” an injunction was filed on behalf of the “Building Construction Employers’ Association.” This was the result of a dispute between various labor unions, the sheet metal workers, the structural iron workers, and the carpenters’ unions’, not regarding wages, but rather who should be performing certain work on the building. This appeared to stem from who had the right to set the metal door bucks and jams. After the delay, costing approximately \$45,000 in additional costs, in April the dispute was finally resolved. After a meeting of the “New Court House Building Commission,” all of the unions involved agreed to divide all of the work and resume work immediately, pending a decision of an arbitrator that was not yet appointed.

In May 1918, yet another strike occurred. This time it was another jurisdictional dispute, this time between the Steamfitters’ Union and the Elevator Erectors’ Union as to who had the right to install certain pipes in connection with the elevator equipment. This time, after getting D.W. Benjamin, Conciliation Officer of the United State Department of Labor, involved on July 20, 1918, it was announced that the strike had been settled, costing the project an additional \$20,800 due to delay.

In 1919, in keeping with the yearly trend, the final strike occurred. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported that this was the 35th strike that had delayed work on the new building, meaning it is likely that there were many strikes that didn’t receive as much coverage as the ones we’ve mentioned so far. They go on to detail that seven strikes were caused by wage disputes but were settled the same day. Twenty-eight strikes were the result of jurisdictional disputes between the various unions. This latest strike however involved all of the unions affiliated with the Cincinnati Building Trades Union. After three months, in April, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* published in an article titled, “Harmony In Future Is Assured.” In what would be the last of the 35 strikes, a settlement was reached, and the workers were to return to work on the morning of April 17. Perhaps the most interesting and important part of this agreement was a stipulation that if any future disputes were to occur, this time, all work was not to stop, only the particular work being disputed, thus preventing all work from coming to a halt.

Prior to the new courthouse conducting any of its maiden court proceedings, or even being officially dedicated, a very interesting thing occurred. Even though the 1919 World Series played here between the Cincinnati Reds and Chicago White Sox, would be plagued with and remembered for scandal, another memorable note is in the unconventional accommodations of some of the guests. An article was published in the October 2, 1919 edition of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, which read, “Why Worry About Hotels?” Apparently, a group of VIPs from across the state, with tickets in hand, travelled to Cincinnati to attend the 1919 World Series, only to arrive to a city of sold-out hotels. With the specific details being unknown of how they linked up with Court of Common Pleas Judge C.W. Hoffman, the Judge jokingly told them that they were welcome to use the new Juvenile Court dormitories, still vacant because the building had just literally opened up. All of them took him up on it, so the first guests to occupy the brand-new Juvenile detention holding cells weren’t juveniles at all.

Hamilton County’s Sixth (and current) Courthouse

Although the official dedication of this new palace of justice wouldn’t occur until a little later in October, on Monday, October 6, the first court term in this new building was called into session. The first judicial activities that occurred in this building were that of Court of Common Pleas Judge, R.Z. Buchwalter receiving the returns from 27 people summoned for grand jury duty and the judges

of the same court holding a joint session, in which Judge John A. Caldwell formally assigned the Judges to the various new courtrooms within the building.

This quote was found from a pamphlet when the courthouse was dedicated in October 1919, “The court house is a nearly perfect architecturally, structurally, and artistically as possible for man to devise.” Another eloquent quote is from an official who had been on the courthouse construction site all four years, who had inspected every brick and stone in it. He said, “This building contains not one inch of shoddy or imitation, everything in it is genuine.” In 2025, we can take that statement to heart as the sixth courthouse is still standing, and is the longest standing, surviving of all of our courthouses. When it was all said and done, this structure cost a grand total of \$3,022,000 to construct. It’s a structure that in the present day just couldn’t be built as that amount at present amounts to roughly \$57,382,800.

The architecture for this building was very methodical, and extremely symbolically thought out, as even though it was designed in a Renaissance Revival manner, it employed the use of three different architectural styles. The first two stories were intended to typify the substantial material on which the county government should be founded. The great, Ionic columns which mark the third, fourth and fifth stories were intended to represent the dignity of the judiciary. The sixth and seventh stories were to represent the necessities of the county in the enforcement of law. Even the furniture was thought about in detail as it was all metal except for the chairs, just in case there was to be a fourth burning. This added an additional sum of \$250,000. Some of the stonework included New Hampshire granite, Bedford limestone, with marbles received from 25 different quarries within the United States, and one from France. Possibly, one of the most spectacular uses of specialty stone was employed in the two Superior Court rooms, (Now Court of Common Pleas courtrooms), creating an exact duplicate of a famous Egyptian marble.

Further adding to the grandeur of this building was the Law Library, designed to be the crown jewel of the structure. Even in 2025, I can personally attest that the Law Library is still the hidden gem, of this judicial juggernaut, up on the sixth floor. At the time of its completion, it was known as the “finest in the country.” Filled with 10,000 pounds of massive green colored granite columns surrounding you from both sides of a wide center rotunda, lies a solid bronze capital. Filling the ceiling, are specially designed light fixtures, in the center of all of them is an immense representation of the terrestrial globe, with continents raised from its flat background.

The end result of all this would be a structure so grand, that one person stated that, “It is so magnificent that were it in France it would be called a Palace of Justice, but we cling to the simpler speech of the Anglo-Saxon and call it a courthouse.”

After a little research, we were able to find not only the first case that was held in the new courthouse, but also the first conviction that this courthouse was able to witness. On October 20, the first criminal case that this courthouse tried was a trial against a man named John Metzger, charged with assault and battery and on trial before Judge Buchwalter. One day later, on October 21, a jury in the Criminal Division found Metzger guilty. This was the first conviction in this courthouse.

October 18, 1919, was declared a half holiday, as on that day, after five long years of delays, this new and currently standing courthouse was officially turned over to the Hamilton County Commissioners and dedicated. The day of the dedication was full of pomp and circumstance, with a

girls chorus numbering a thousand on hand to sing, a parade, and even Senator Warren G. Harding, who would go on to serve as our 29th President of the United States, on hand to deliver an address. It was reported that thousands of spectators lined the streets to watch the parade and that every available window, window ledge, portico space, and street were packed. Harding's dedication speech was the crowning feature of the day; he hit hard on the necessity of good government, law and order, and justice.

One hundred years later, on October 18, 2019, this bastion of justice was still in existence and celebrated its centennial anniversary. Like in 1919, many dignitaries were on hand, including Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, paying homage to Harding's original speech. We were also fortunate enough to have in attendance Dr. Warren G. Harding III, whose grandfather's brother was President Harding.

In 2025, nearly 106 years later, this temple of justice was truly a structure that was built to last.

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Edited by Lorita Jennings, Communications Director, Hamilton County Clerk of Courts.

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