

The History of the Johnson County Courthouse

The original “Courthouse”

“In the spring of 1859, Frederick W. Case father of Harry and Shelly Case began the erection of a stone building on the corner of Park Street and Kansas Avenue [in Olathe]...This building was occupied by the county for courthouse purposes until the [1891] courthouse was built.” -- Johnson County Democrat, Sept. 1, 1927

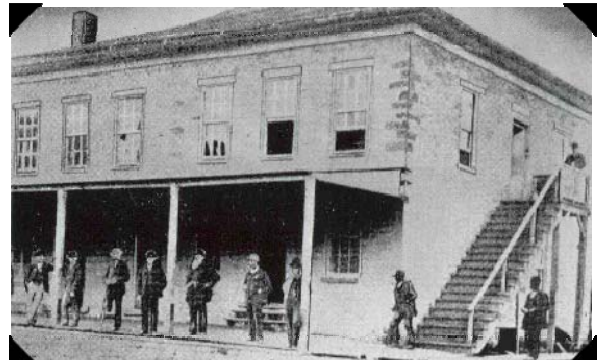


Photo Courtesy of the Johnson County Museum



Photo Courtesy of the Johnson County Museum

The 1891 Courthouse

Three attempts to get voter approval of bond issues to finance the construction failed. Finally, in 1888, county commissioners agreed to a tax levy to raise \$40,000 in three years for the project. The Architect was George Washburn of Ottawa. The project was started in May, 1891, the cornerstone was laid on the fourth of July, 1891 and the building was dedicated in August, 1892. The courthouse stood until after the construction of the first phase of the existing courthouse, when it was demolished. The statue of the “Goddess of Justice” can be seen atop the central gable.

Goddess of Justice

The “Goddess of Justice” statue was a gift from George Washburn. When the courthouse was demolished in 1952, she was stored in a basement for several years, and then put on display in the County Museum, and in 1997 she was returned to the lobby of the courthouse. Her scales are replacements, the originals lost to a lightning strike.



A Courthouse for the 20th Century

In the post-war era, Johnson County saw a building boom and tremendous growth as a suburban community. A need for a new County Courthouse was realized to accommodate the growth in County government. The face of downtown Olathe was about to change. The courtyard in front became the site for the new Courthouse. Ground was broken in 1951 and the building was completed in 1952. The building contained two courtrooms and the County Jail. Shortly afterwards, the old Courthouse was demolished.



Photo Courtesy of the Kansas City Star; Feb 28, 1952



Photo Courtesy of the Kansas City Star



Photo Courtesy of the Johnson County Museum

Adding to the Courthouse

In 1953 work was begun on the second phase of the Courthouse which was completed in 1954. The building housed most departments of the County Government in addition to the courts system.

In 1968, a third wing was added at the north end of the structure. It contained three stacked courtrooms and a space for the IT Department in the basement.



The Tower

1975 saw the completion of the final phase of the existing Courthouse. An eight story tower was added on the east side of the building, providing a new main entry with a three story atrium.

The Olathe Adult Detention Center

In 1988, The Sheriff's Department opened the Olathe Jail. The jail function was moved to that facility, freeing up space for additional court use in the Courthouse.



New Administrative Space

In 1992, The County saw the completion of its Administration building. All of the non-courts functions moved out of the Courthouse and into this new facility. The Administration building was designed with the original courthouse in mind.



And most recently...

In 1996, the entry was relocated to the south doors and the 3 story atrium area was repurposed to accommodate the new physical plant.

