

# History of The Williamson County Courthouse



Williamson County was established in 1799 from part of Davidson County, and was named for Dr. Hugh Williamson, surgeon general of the North Carolina Militia during the Revolutionary War. He was also a member of the Continental Congress, signer of the U.S. Constitution, and a friend of Benjamin Franklin, after whom the county seat of Franklin was named. The Public Square was built on land owned by Abram Maury, who was a close friend of Dr. Williamson.



The first Williamson County Courthouse was a log structure, constructed in 1800. It was thought to be built by volunteer labor because there was no mention in the minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions regarding tax appropriations for building it. In 1806 Williamson County accepted bids to build a public courthouse to replace the log structure, to be “built of good well burnt brick”, on a “good stone foundation”, with a “complete pair of stairs to be run from the lower to the upper floor”. The courthouse was constructed in the center of the Public Square, and was a two story building with a frame cupola housing a bell. The appearance of this building was strongly criticized by Don Cameron, editor of *The Weekly Review* in an 1853 article entitled “Court House Should Be Torn Down”.

A new market house and two small office rooms were built adjoining the east side of the courthouse in 1806. It must have been considered a failure; there is evidence that at times cattle were housed under it.

In 1855 a committee was formed by the Quarterly County Court to select a site, adopt a plan and determine cost of construction of a new courthouse. The total cost for land and building was \$27,594.19. The old courthouse was torn down in 1858, and the new building was completed. Wagons hauling the bricks were driven into the river so as to allow the bricks to take up moisture so they would not absorb moisture later in the walls. The four 30-foot columns are made of iron forged at the Caney Fork Furnace, in western Williamson County.



The current Williamson County Courthouse is of the antebellum Greek Revival style and was built in 1856-58 and is the third. It is the third Courthouse to serve Williamson County, and is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

The courthouse property has been used for various purposes, including hangings, and for branding and beating of criminals. The offices were used for hospital wards after the Battle of Franklin in November 1864.



On April 1, 1873, a tornado hit the courthouse, causing over \$4,000 in damage.

The courthouse has undergone several major renovations through the years, including one in 1976, when the Annex was added, and a \$7.3 million renovation that was completed in 2009. One of the main priorities was preserving the historic integrity of the building. The courthouse now houses a United States Congressman’s office, Public Defender and various County departments.