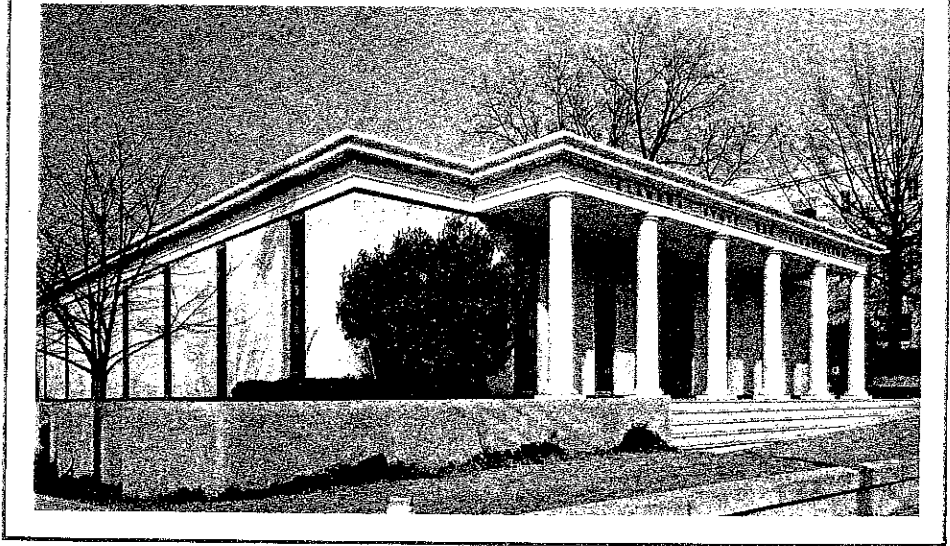


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Covington County Courthouses (1823-1978)

By
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The original inhabitants of the area later to become Covington County were the Lower Creeks of the Muscogee Nation. In time the area would be under the control and claims of Spain, France, Great Britain, United States of America, the Confederate States of America, and again the United States of America when Alabama was re-admitted to the Union.

The defeat of the Creek Confederacy on March 27, 1814, by General Andrew Jackson in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend opened to white settlers the area of which Covington County later became a part. It has been reported that the first white settlers came into the area of Covington County in 1816. The Creeks and Seminole Indians continued to occupy the land which comprises Covington, Coffee, Dale and Geneva counties until the Spanish sold Florida to the United States in 1819.

Covington County became a reality by act of the Alabama Legislature approved December 7, 1821, which subdivided Henry County creating Covington and Pike Counties. Covington County was named for Brigadier General William Covington, a native of Maryland who was killed in Canada during the War of 1812. An act approved December 18, 1821, appointed five Commissioners for Covington County to "designate a suitable place for a seat of Justice, and to contract for and superintend the erection of such public buildings . . ." The act further directed the Commissioners of Covington County "on the third Monday of March next, at house of Aaron Lockhart, hold an election for a Sheriff, a clerk of the Circuit Court, and a clerk of the County Court, for said County; . . ."

The first Covington County Courthouse was a log building which was constructed at the falls of the Conecuh River in 1823 approximately four miles west of the present city of Andalusia. The earliest source referring to a village at this location by the name of Montezuma is in the Congressional Record dated March 3, 1825, authorizing the construction of a Post Road "From Greenville to Montezuma." The originality of naming the village Montezuma is not supported by any factual data although it is obvious that it was named after the famous Aztec Emperor of Mexico.

The first Courthouse at Montezuma burned in the spring of 1839. Before another courthouse was constructed, the town of Montezuma was completely washed away in 1841 in a flood called the "Harrison Freshet." Worse still, the

flood created an epidemic of mosquitos and fever. After much disagreement and several legislative acts, a "New Site" for the courthouse was finally decided upon. In 1844 the Commissioners of Covington County chose a forty acre tract about three miles east of Montezuma on top of the ridge that divides the watersheds of the Conecuh and Yellow Rivers. On July 18, 1844, a post office was designated by the name Andalusia. It is probable that the name Andalusia was selected after the province in Spain bearing the same name. In 1847 the second Covington County Courthouse was constructed of pine logs in the center of the public square. Near it was a small pine pole jail.

Sometime before the Civil War, chinaberry trees were planted around the edge of the square where the second courthouse was located. The last of these chinaberry trees were destroyed around the turn of the century. Originally the square was approached by only two primary roads. These roads were East Three Notch Road running along the present day East and South Three Notch Streets, which were connected diagonally across the south part of the square, and the Montezuma Road from the west, which follows the present day Church Street.

Legend has it that Three Notch Road was a part of the famous "Three Notch Trail." General Andrew Jackson reportedly passed through this area from South Carolina to Pensacola. As his troops passed along, they cut three notches on trees. However, authorities contend that Jackson's line of march was south of the location of Andalusia.

Covington County loyally supported the Confederacy during the Civil War, but there is an interesting incident which occurred that involved a former Covington County Legislator and, indirectly, the second Covington County Courthouse. An account entitled "Facts about the Andalusia Raid" appeared in the *Montgomery Daily Mail* on March 29, 1865. A Federal force came into Andalusia about midnight and left about ten the next morning, but before they left, the following incident occurred:

"Alf Holley, the recreant legislator, was along, and pointed out a few of his old particular friends (?) for vengeance. He rode up to the door of the venerable Judge Jones and called him out. 'Come out, Judge, you have had your day, and now by G d, this is *my* day.'

The Judge was then mounted bareback, on a mule and marched off. They took off also, Wm. F. Bryant, sub-enrolling officer, Judge Acree, Judge Snowden, Judge Salter, and Loden Jones. One man, Jim Davis, the postmaster took the oath. They burnt the Probate's books and papers, and the conscript book—that awful book, book of books! bigger than half a dozen bibles. They bayonnetted and butchered a few beds belonging to the conscript office. The Government had only about 15 bushels of corn, tax in kind, and no other property of consequence."

Another incident of some consequence involving the second Covington County Courthouse took place in 1868 when State Representative Edward Mancill passed a bill in the Legislature changing the name from Covington to Jones County. Reportedly the Representative did this in honor of a leading

political figure by the name of Josiah Jones who had helped the Representative in his successful race for the Legislature. Upon learning the news, Jones asked Mancill to change the county's name back to Covington. Mancill complied with the request, but for several months the county was officially named Jones County.

The second courthouse and all of the records were destroyed by fire in 1878.

After the second courthouse burned in 1878, the third Covington County Courthouse was then constructed on the same location of the previous courthouse in the center of the square. It was a square shaped two-story clapboard building. Accounts of this structure describe the first floor as having large wide halls running east and west and north and south, with an office on each of the four corners of the building. During this picturesque time in the history of Covington County all life centered at the courthouse on the square. Farmers trading at the few businesses located on the square or on business at the courthouse would rest their horses and oxen under the shade of the China trees. Children during daylight hours often played happily under the same trees on the unpaved sandy square surrounding the courthouse.

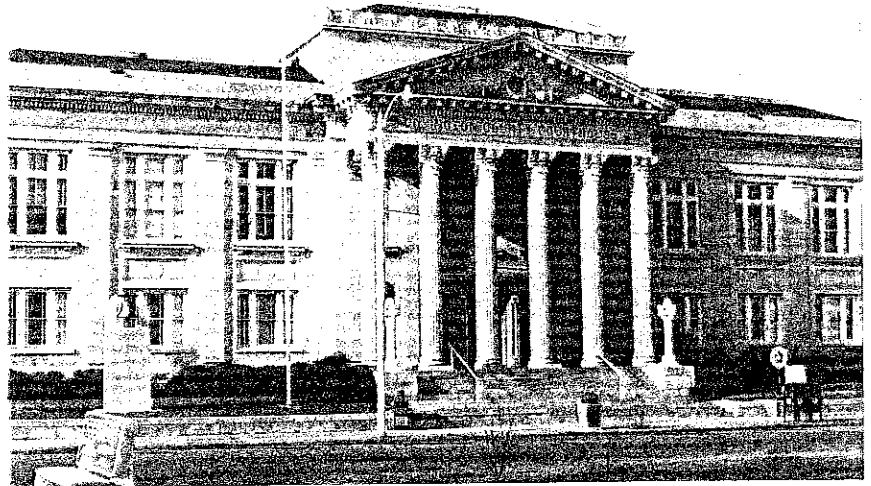
In 1895 the third Covington County Courthouse was also consumed by fire. Some papers were saved due to being in an iron safe which was located in the county judge's office. A man by the name of Marion Lisco was arrested and charged in connection with the fire. He later escaped and was never prosecuted.

The fourth Covington County Courthouse was a two-story red brick building built in 1896 on the same site of the previous courthouse. It was a magnificent structure with two large steeples with a "town clock" on a steeple facing East Three-Notch Street. It was during these years that Andalusia really began to grow. The economy of the area was based upon agriculture and timber industries. With the advent of the railroads the economy became more balanced with industrial development.



COVINGTON COUNTY COURT HOUSE.

A flourishing Andalusia by 1916 required a large and more complete courthouse to better serve the needs of the county. At this time the fifth and present day Covington County Courthouse was erected on the north side of the square facing south and what became known as Court Square. The present day courthouse is a dominant and imposing structure second to none in Alabama. The Greek Revival building, buttressed on the front by six Corinthian stone columns, presides over the square. The entrance, prefaced by eleven marble steps leading to the marble floored courthouse, opens onto a marble encased lobby supported by eight round grey marble columns and numerous grey marble pilasters. Overlooking three-quarters of the lobby is the marble balustrade which borders the wide marble hallway connecting the two courtrooms and other offices on the second floor. Arched above the lobby is the domed ceiling. In the immediate center of the dome is the large circular stained glass heading. Suspended majestically from the center of the dome is an elaborate gold chandelier.



Upon the site that was left vacant when the red brick courthouse was demolished, a beautiful garden area complete with shrubs, trees, and flowers was created in the square. Mrs. Fred Chesser (Bonnie Leigh Carter), a native Andalusian and direct descendent of Judge William T. Acree, one of the early probate judges of Covington County, recalls that in the center was constructed a large circular concrete walk way with walks leading to each of the four corners where benches were provided. This pleasant garden area was a favorite meeting place for the young people as well as the adults.

The beauty of the old Court Square is captured in the memory of many Andalusians. The garden area was later altered and changed providing for a through street directly through the square thereby connecting East Three Notch

Street with Church Street and opening additional parking areas for the downtown businesses.

The present structure has undergone different periods of remodeling in 1938, 1952, and in 1970. In 1952 the courtroom was partially refinished and upgraded. In 1970 a complete renovation of the courthouse was authorized by the County Board of Commissioners. The exterior was sandblasted and the interior renovated and enlarged, creating additional offices and an additional courtroom to be used by the Circuit Court and Intermediate Court. The original courtroom was shortened and modernized. Additional space was provided for the microfilming equipment of the probate records department.

During the period of this renovation in 1970, it was necessary for the Circuit Court to be held in the Fort George G. Gresham National Guard Armory, Recorder's Courtroom at the Andalusia City Hall, and in the basement of the First United Methodist Church in Andalusia. Some sessions of nonjury Circuit Court and Intermediate Court were held upstairs in the O'Neal Building located directly across the street from the courthouse.

Today the stately Covington County Courthouse with its classical architecture is modernized and is well equipped to provide the necessary services for the people of Covington County.

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