

Ohio County Courthouse

By Jerry Long
c.2024



Fourth and present Ohio County Courthouse in Hartford KY; dedicated on 15 May 1943



**Historic Hartford Sesquicentennial, Hartford Sesquicentennial, Inc.,
McLean County News, Calhoun, KY, 1958, pp.11-14:**

PIONEER HARTFORD

By McDowell A. Fogle

The first Ohio County public buildings, which constituted a combined structure, comprising both the courthouse and jail. First built was the jail, constructed of hewed logs. The contractor was William L. Barnard. The pioneer prison was built in 1799; the contract price was 53 pounds and two shillings. In May 1800 a contract was let by the county court for a courthouse, to be built on top of the jail. This, the county's first temple of justice, was built by Charles Wallace for \$1,800.

The contract for the construction of the first courthouse specified that it should be of "well-hewed logs, on the jail, over-setting the same six feet in the front, the overset to be supported by three sufficient pillars or posts, the same to be nine feet in the clear in height, with joices above the overset, to be well floored and the roof to be of joint shingles ... and make a raised bench for the court, a bar for the attorneys, with rails and bannisters, to put in the said courthouse, one twelve light and two nine-light windows, together with stairs and a platform to go up into said house on the outside thereof and also an outside door... to be completed before the first day of September next..."

The 1799-1800 courthouse-jail building did not prove large enough for county business so in 1800, a separate county clerk's office was built nearby, on the south-east corner of the courthouse square. On approximately the same site a one-story brick county clerk's office was later built as an adjunct to the brick courthouse constructed in 1815.

The jail part of above pictured county building was entered from the outside through a ground-level door and from the overhead courtroom through a trapdoor.

This combination structure "fell down" in 1813, according to county court records, and it became necessary for the courts to be held in the clerk's office or private homes. In 1810 a new log jail had been built and at the June term, 1813, the county court ordered the old courthouse jail building torn down and the logs, lumber and other usable building material of the old razed structure sold at auction. However, before the sale had been made, the building material salvaged from the condemned public edifice and stacked in the courthouse yard, was in September of the same year burned by celebrants of Commodore Perry's Lake Erie Victory.

In October 1813 Charles Wallace was again awarded a contract to build a county building, this time a courthouse, separate from the jail. His low bid was \$3,036 for the construction of a brick courthouse on a stone foundation, to be completed by October 1815. It proved to be a handsome structure, considerably ahead of its period, in same architectural features.



County's Third Temple of Justice

The third Ohio County Courthouse was erected 1865 to 1867 on the site of the one burned in December, 1864, by General H. B. Lyon, who was on a raid through Western Kentucky, and, "as a military necessity," burned courthouses used as Federal garrisons. The Federal guards were captured and paroled and the building burned. Dr. Samuel O. Peyton implored the invaders to spare the Clerk's Office, a one-story, two-room brick which stood on the courthouse yard. His request was granted, and the records were saved.

The front and the rear of the courthouse were very much alike, and so were the two sides.



Present Ohio County Court House

The present Ohio County Courthouse was erected during the period 1940 to 1943. Built entirely of concrete with terrazzo floors and wainscoting at a total cost of approximately \$135,000, including furnishings. No convenience of modern design was overlooked in making this building one of the finest in Kentucky. There are sixty-four rooms in the building, including corridors, stair wells, passages and vestibules. Workmen began tearing the old courthouse down, November 20, 1940. The new building was completed early in 1943. The dedication took place May 15, 1943.



Ohio County, Kentucky in the Olden Days,
A series of old newspaper sketches of fragmentary history,
by Harrison D. Taylor, prepared for publication by his
granddaughter, Mary Taylor Logan, Louisville, KY, 1926, p.100a:

OHIO COUNTY COURTHOUSE, ERECTED 1865-1870. From a photograph by Emory G. Schroeter, 1926. The present Ohio County Courthouse was erected during 1865 to 1870 on the site of the one burnt in December, 1864, by General Hylan B. Lyon. General Lyon was then on his raid through western Kentucky, and, "as a military necessity," burned every courthouse used as a Federal garrison. When he approached Hartford, the Federal guards took shelter in the old Courthouse. They were captured and paroled, and the building burned. Dr. Samuel O. Peyton

implored the invaders to spare the Clerk's Office, a one-story two-room brick which stood on the southeast side of the courthouse yard. His request was granted, and the records were saved.

The front and the rear of the Courthouse are very much alike, and so are the two sides. This picture shows the rear and the north corner, and the northwest side.



This picture was taken in January 1910 of the horse drawn Hartford to Beaver Dam transfer which took rail passengers from Hartford to Beaver Dam to catch the train. The (third) Ohio County Court House is pictured in the background as it stood in 1910 in the same location as the present building. Ohio County, Kentucky Pictorial History, Volume II, Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 2000, p.86; Ohio County Times-News, Hartford, KY, 2 December 2015; and “Ohio County History” site, Internet, facebook.com



Third Courthouse that was constructed in 1865 at a cost of \$18,500. This building was torn down in 1940 to make room for the present day Courthouse constructed at a cost of \$135,000. “Ohio County History”, Internet, facebook.com



Third Courthouse; Hartford Republican, Hartford, KY, 22 September 1911, Industrial, Historical and Illustrated supplement, p.3, “Ohio County History”, Internet, facebook.com



Ohio County's third courthouse, erected 1865-67 on the square, on the site of the one burned in Dec. 1864 by Gen. H. B. Lyon "as a military necessity."; Ohio County, Kentucky Pictorial History, Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 1998, p.192; History of Kentucky Courthouses, Elisabeth Headley Garr, The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, 1972, pp.127-128; Ohio County Times-News, Hartford, KY, 9 February 1995; and "Ohio County History", Internet, facebook.com



Third Courthouse; Ohio County, Kentucky Pictorial History, Volume II, Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 2000, p.86.



Third Courthouse; Ohio County Times-News, Hartford, KY, 16 September 1999 & 11 July 2002.



Third Courthouse; Ohio County Times-News, Hartford, KY, 13 August 2014 and “Ohio County History”, Internet, facebook.com



Third Courthouse; "Ohio County History", Internet, facebook.com



Third Courthouse with county officials in early 1900's; Ohio County Historical Society Photo Collection, published on Beaver Dam Deposit Bank calendar in 1990



Unveiling ceremonies of the Fort Hartford Marker on the northwest corner of the Ohio County Courthouse. Main Street, Hartford KY; 4 December 1932; and “Ohio County History”, Internet, facebook.com



Ohio County News, Hartford, KY, Sesquicentennial Edition, 23 May 1958:

General Lyon's Raid Through Hartford Destroys Courthouse

By Thomas M. Galey

In November 1864, General H. B. Lyon with fifteen hundred Confederate soldiers made a raid into Kentucky.

They started from Paris, Tenn., and after burning the courthouse at Princeton, Hopkinsville and Madisonville, they crossed the Green River at Ashbyburg and pushed on to Hartford where they halted long enough to destroy the courthouse after which they headed on Eastward.

When passing through "Devil's Gulch" in Grayson county, an incident occurred which illustrates the terror of the times; a lawless element known as "bush-whackers" plagued the region with robbery and murder.

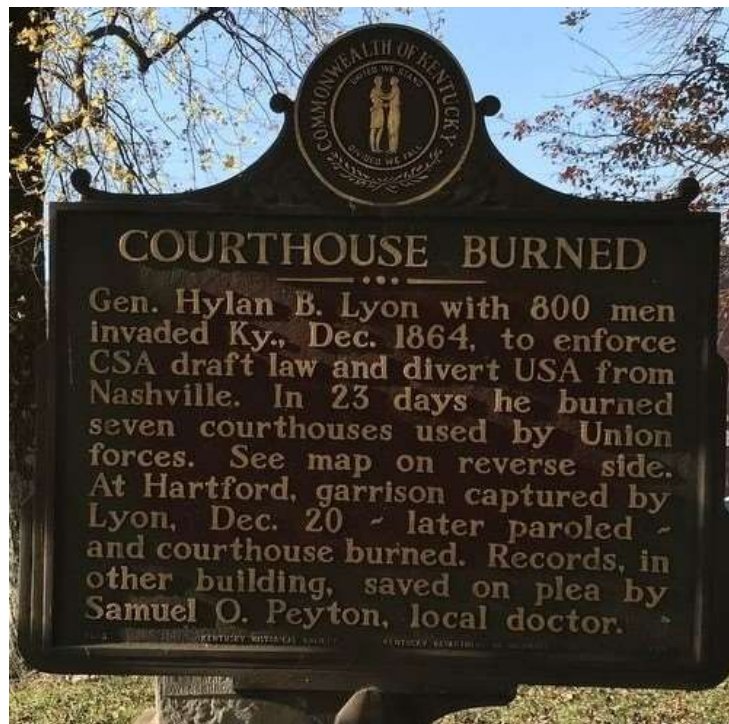
One of Lyon's men had been murdered from behind a projecting rock. Vengeance against any captured bush-whacker was sworn by every man in the command. When one, a supposed leader was taken, the miscreant was placed on an ammunition wagon where his wife joined him.

When the column halted, one of the guards brought a live coal from a cabin by the roadside and proceeded to light his pipe, the prisoner begged for the privilege of a smoke and when the coal was given him, he deliberately dropped it through the hole in a powder keg from which he had previously extracted the stopper.

The mules and driver, and the wife of the prisoner were instantly killed. One of the guards, who was standing nearby, was seriously injured. The prisoner himself, was blown some ten feet where he sprawled in the road, still alive, until a guard fired a bullet into the culprit's head.

The raiders pushed on to Elizabethtown and then to Lebanon and Columbia, then to Burksville, destroying courthouses as a "military necessity" on the claim that the structures were used as military barracks or forts. They ranged as far south as Tuscaloosa, Alabama, before finally returning in April to Paris from whence they had set out six months earlier.

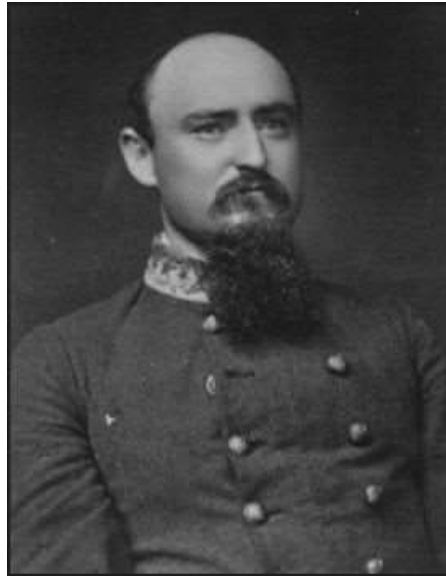
The above account is given in more detail by Brigadier General Adam R. Johnson in his autobiography, "The Partisan Rangers." Johnson was a son of Dr. Thomas Jefferson Johnson, of Henderson. Both of his eyes were shot out in a skirmish at Grubb's Crossroads near Cerevlean Springs. A copy of this scarce book is in the Public Library at Owensboro.



Historical marker erected in 1963 by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways (marker number 581). Marker is on the Ohio County Courthouse lawn in Hartford, Ohio County, KY. Marker is on the right when traveling north on South Main Street (U.S. Highway 231) south of East Center Street.

Inscription: Courthouse Burned – Gen. Hylan B. Lyon with 800 men invaded Ky., Dec. 1864, to enforce CSA draft law and divert USA from Nashville. In 23 days he burned seven courthouses used by Union forces. See map on reverse side. At Hartford, garrison captured by

Lyon, Dec. 20 — later paroled — and courthouse burned. Records, in other building, saved on plea by Samuel O. Peyton, local doctor.



Gen. Hylan Benton Lyon (1836-1907)



**The Kentucky Encyclopedia, John E. Kleber, editor,
The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, 1992, p.587:**

LYON, HYLAN BENTON. Hylan Benton Lyon, Confederate general, a grandson of Matthew Lyon, was born on February 22, 1836, in Caldwell (now Lyon) County, Kentucky. Lyon was orphaned as a child. He was educated in the common schools of Eddyville, where he moved at the age of eight to live with F.H. Skinner. At fourteen, he entered Masonic University in LaGrange, Kentucky. In 1852 he received an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, graduating nineteenth in his class in 1856. He was brevetted a second lieutenant in the 3d Artillery, serving in Florida. In 1857 he was made second lieutenant and stationed in California and in the Washington Territory.

On April 30, 1861, Lyon resigned his commission to join the Confederate army and served as a first lieutenant in Capt. Robert Cobb's battery. He was made lieutenant colonel in the 8th Kentucky Infantry, Army of the Tennessee. During the Battle of Fort Donelson, in February 1862, Lyon was captured by the Union army and imprisoned on Johnson's Island, Ohio. He was released in September 1862.

On June 14, 1864, Lyon was made brigadier general, serving under Gen. Abraham Buford. From September 26, 1864, until the spring of 1865, Lyon commanded the Department of Western Kentucky. He fought in several battles during the Civil War, including the siege of Vicksburg in July 1863. He also took part in the Battle of Chattanooga on October 28, 1863; the Battle of Brice's

Crossroads on June 10, 1864; and the Franklin and Nashville campaign from November 29 to December 27, 1864. Lyon was responsible for burning several western Kentucky courthouses.

After the war, Lyon spent a year in Mexico, then returned to Lyon County to farm. The state penitentiary was built on his land and he served on the State Penitentiary Commission. He served in the Kentucky House of Representatives from 1899 to 1901.

On August 29, 1869, Lyon married Grace Machen. They had six children – Frank, Grace, Hugh, Ernest, Maybelle, and Lorraine. Lyon died on April 25, 1907, on his farm in Eddyville and was buried in the Eddyville Cemetery.



The Louisville Daily Journal, Louisville, KY, Saturday, 24 December 1864, p.3:

Gen. Lyon at Hartford. – Three soldiers arrived in the city yesterday, who stated that they were captured and paroled by Gen. Lyon on the 20th inst. They report that early on last Tuesday morning the rebels entered the town of Hartford, in Ohio county, and forced the garrison there, consisting of twenty-five men of the 52d Kentucky volunteers, to surrender. During the day the soldiers were paroled by Gen. Lyon, and permitted to depart for their respective homes in the State. They estimate the rebel strength at five thousand men, and, judging from the direction they were moving on the morning of the 21st, the soldiers presumed that it was their intention to make a raid on the Nashville Railroad, striking it at a point above Bowling Green. The force, without doubt, is greatly exaggerated, and the destination of the raiders is simply guess-work.

McCook is reported to be in the rear of the rebels, following them closely. It is well enough to be in the rear once in a while, but it won't do to remain there continuously. It is time that Lyon was being made to repent his raid into Kentucky. His campaign should be brought to a speedy close, and McCook has plenty of men to capture or expel the raiders. About the time the paroled soldiers were leaving Hartford, Lyon issued orders to burn the court-house; but they do not know whether the command was carried into execution or not.



Ohio County News, Hartford, KY, 17 May 1940, p.1:

Rough River Ripples

By McDowell A. Fogle

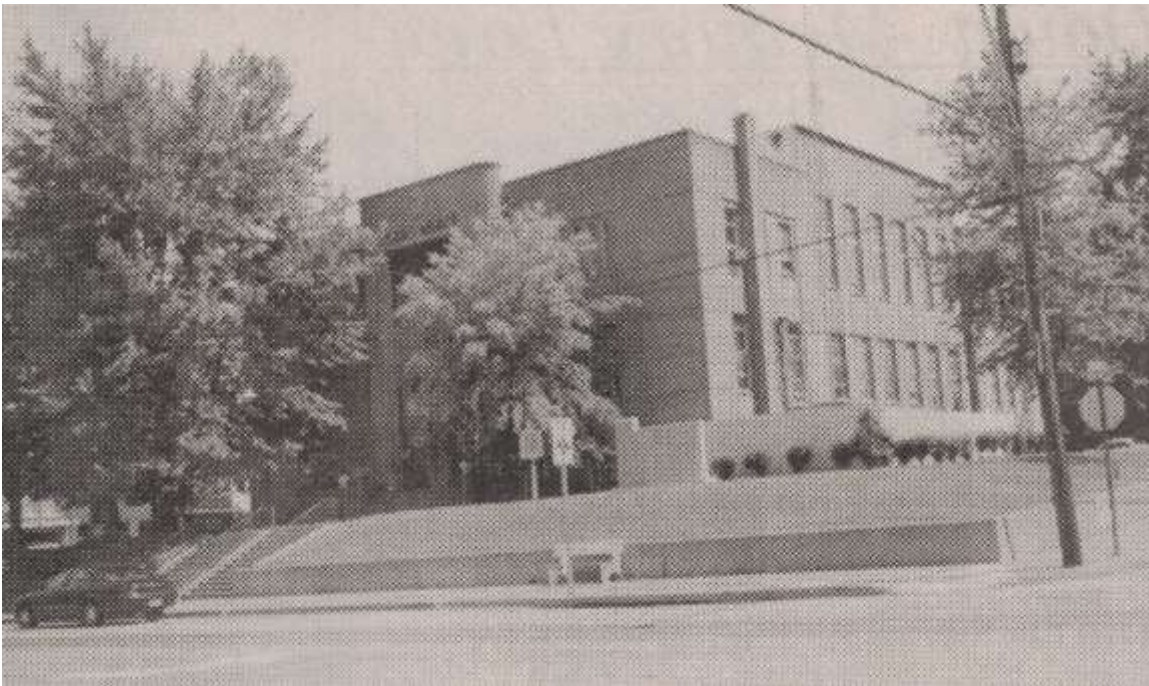
Mrs. Wilsons' husband, Judge [John B.] Wilson, long one of Hartford's leading lawyers and an authority on Ohio county history, now in his 79th year, tells me that since childhood he has heard it told that Colonel Shanks, who, by the way, bore the proud old Roman names, Quintus Cincinnatus, was responsible for saving the county's records from destruction by fire when the court house here was burned by the Confederate General Hylan B. Lyon in December 1864 because it was claimed that it was being used as a Federal garrison. The clerk's office then was a one-story, two-room brick building, separate from the court house proper, and stood on the southeast side of the court house yard. When Gen. Lyon approached Hartford, the local Federal guards took shelter in the court house. They were captured, paroled and the building burned. Judge Wilson says he has always heard that Col. Shanks was the one who prevailed upon the Southern

commander to spare the clerk's office with Its invaluable records. In "Ohio County In The Olden Days", by Harrison P. Taylor, as emended and edited by his granddaughter, Mrs. Mary T. Logan and Otto A. Rothhert, it is stated that Dr. Samuel O. Peyton "implored the invaders to spare the clerk's office —" and that this "request was granted". Be that vs it may, Ohio county owes a debt of deepest gratitude to the person or persons who persuaded Gen Lyon to leave our records intact.



Ohio County Times-News, Hartford, KY, 11 July 2002, p.18B:

**County's Fourth Court House
By Dorothy Gentry**



Present and fourth Court House was completed and dedicated on May 15, 1943 after county officials had occupied offices. A number of county officials made addresses and a program of music was presented by the Camp Campbell Band. The new jail and residence were also included in the dedication.

The first Ohio County Court House was erected in 1800 by Charles Wallace and was located on the Public Square in Hartford which had been donated by Gabriel Madison to the Justices of the County Court "for the use, benefit and advantage" of Hartford for the four-acre Square.

It was a novelty in architecture, being a log structure built on top of a jail, which was also built of logs a year earlier in 1799. The jail was entered through a trap door in the floor of the courthouse.

The building cost \$1,800 and both the courthouse and jail were burned in celebrating the victory of Commodore Perry in 1813.

In October, 1813, Charles Wallace was again awarded the contract to build a new courthouse for the princely sum of \$3,036 to be completed and paid for by October, 1815.

This building was burned December 20, 1864 by General H.B. Lyon, C. S. A., then on his raid through Western Kentucky.

Dr. Samuel O. Peyton or Col. Q. C. Shanks implored the invaders to spare the clerk's office — a one-story, two-room brick building which stood on the Southeast side of the Court House yard. The request was granted and the records were saved.

The third courthouse was erected during 1865-1870 on the site of the one burned in 1864, built of brick with six large office rooms, a courtroom and later a concrete vault added on the northeast corner for the preservation of records. The building cost \$18,500.

On November 7, 1939 the voters of Ohio County authorized the Fiscal Court to levy a tax for the purpose of providing a fund to help pay for the construction of a new County Court House and Jail.

The preamble to the court's order stated that the court house was built in 1869, was inadequate to meet the present needs of the county government, too small to house all the county officials and agencies, had no conveniences and did not have the proper jury, witness and courtrooms.

It further stated that the jail, built in 1869, was an old dilapidated building and that its walls were insecure so that the prisoners could not be confined with safety and were constantly breaking out.

The present and fourth courthouse, built 1943-44 on the original site, was built by the Works Progress Administration at a cost of \$135,000.

Since completion and in recent years, many additions and improvements have been made including an elevator to the fourth floor and other conveniences.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 14 January 1940, p.8B:

**Ohio County Assured of Modern Concrete
Courthouse and New Brick Jail**

By W. E. Daniel,
Owensboro Messenger Staff Writer

Hartford Ky , Jan 13 – A modern concrete court house to cost \$108,000 and a \$68,000 brick jail are included in a building program assured when a special tax was voted and the Works Progress Administration agreed to cooperate. The court house will replace that erected in the late sixties after General Hylan B. Lyon burned its predecessor because some Yankee soldiers sought its shelter from his attack. A tablet on the front of the Jail fixes its age at 65 years.

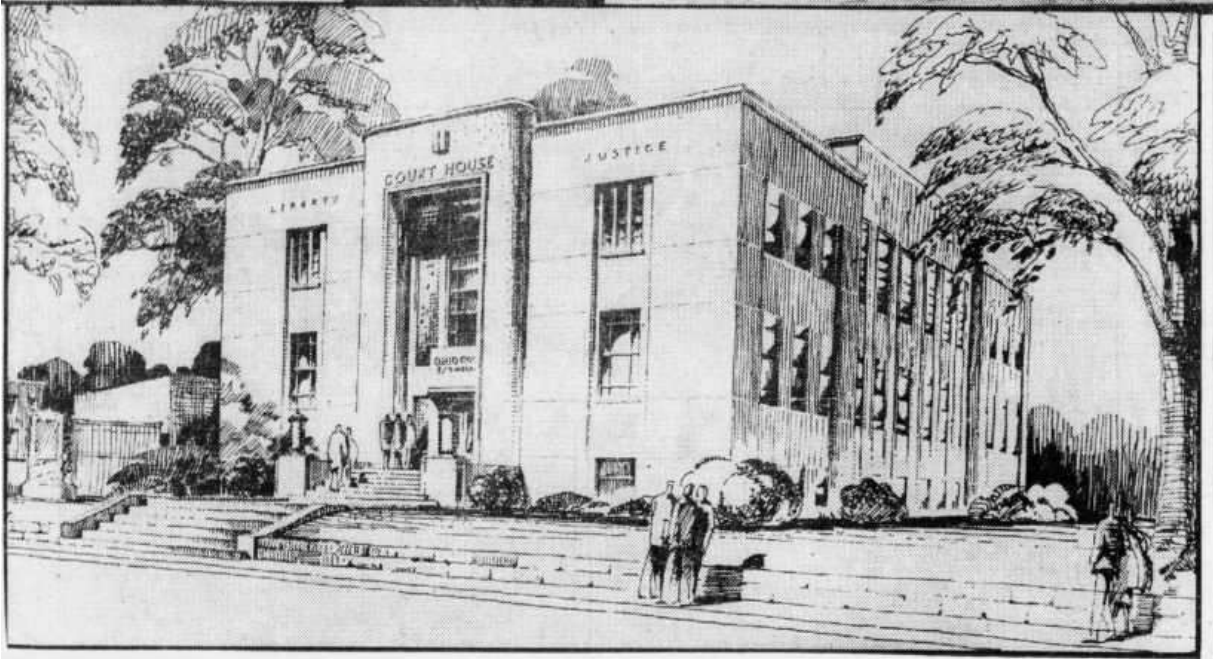
The court house will be a modern structure, two stories and high basement, with quarters for all departments of county government and a court room 48 by 65 feet with no obstructing columns. The jail will include a residence in front, 54 by 83 feet over all with the jail proper at the rear. The jail will contain a heating plant to heat both buildings. The residence will be two stories with eight rooms and the jail one story and basement. Wescott & Thornton, Owensboro, are engineers on the project, and Walter Scott Roberts, Owensboro, the architect. H. H. Harting is on the engineers' staff in drafting plans.



Present Ohio County courthouse at Hartford and county jail

To Remove Land Mark

Razing the old building within a few weeks will remove a landmark that has stood through eras turbulent and calm, and has been the gathering place for crowds, large, critical and enthusiastic, as forensic bouts held attention and intellectual gladiators wrestled for supremacy. For the Hartford bar has long been noted for the strength of its members, a preeminence that began when Joseph Hamilton Daviess and compeers battled while Owensboro was a hamlet on the Ohio; was continued with the mental displays of Dudley Walker, Henry D. McHenry and others of that group, and reached new heights with M. L. Heavrin, J. Edwin Rowe, Herbert Kinsolving, Ben D. Ringo, and Frank Felix, who gave way to Ernest Woodward and later Otto Martin, Clarence Bartlett and others of the younger attorneys.



Architect Walter Scott Roberts' drawing of new courthouse to be erected on site of old one



Fourth Courthouse; "Ohio County History", Internet, facebook.com

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 14 February 1943, pp.1B & 2B:

**Work Near
End On Ohio
Courthouse**
Structure New
Milestone in
County's Progress

By W. E. DANIEL, Owensboro Messenger Staff Writer

Hartford Ky. – From an observation post atop Ohio county's new concrete court house, a lover of history might fancy himself a watcher of the endless procession of progress since first a judicial tribunal sat in Robert Moseley's house almost a century and a half ago. Then courts were held in the log house that burned while Perry's victory on Lake Erie was being celebrated in September 1813, and another building was fuel to the flames of General H. B. Lyon's wrath approximately 50 years later, when that Confederate leader fired all court houses on his route that had sheltered certain Yankee troops. And a few months ago the later house was razed to make way for the modern structure to be dedicated before summer....

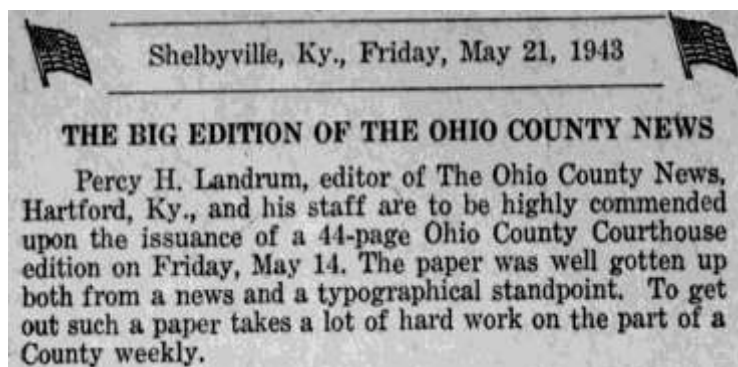
More Than 60 Rooms

Soon the new court house will be occupied, its 60 odd rooms allocated to officials and the various units of government, all housed under one roof instead of being scattered about town as while construction was underway, subjecting priceless records to imminent perils of being lost or destroyed. And again the county machinery will function from the spot so long set apart for that purpose, thwarted at intervals by the enginery of progress....

.... And from the new court house the observer looks longingly about at the many changes and the virility of the people who have built for the future. The new court house is a massive monument to their faith.



The Shelby Sentinel, Shelbyville, KY, 21 May 1943, p.2:





Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 16 May 1943, p.3A:



Hartford Ky. — Dedication of Ohio county's new courthouse Saturday was a gala event. From Camp Campbell came Lieut. Ray Lesse with 45 men, including a band, and some jeeps and trucks, to lend a martial atmosphere. County Attorney Otto C. Martin presided in the afternoon at ceremonies in the spacious circuit court room where addresses were delivered by Ernest Woodward, native Ohio countian now prominent lawyer in Louisville; Ben D. Ringo, from Owensboro, who practiced law here, taught school and edited a newspaper, and who served as commonwealth's attorney; State Highway Commissioner Emory G. Dent, from Bowling Green, and Circuit Judge Clarence Bartlett, who lives here and will hold first court in the new building.

For many it was a homecoming and a first view of the completed structure. The wisdom of its sponsors was extolled by the speakers, and many the glance backward was mingled with comments on the present and predictions of the future for Ohio county There was no attempt at oratory by those who were presented by Chairman Martin but a simple recital of the county's development in the 145 years of its history. Even the large court room could contain but a small part of the crowd that thronged the streets in the forenoon, and who heard appeals to buy war bonds from S. A. Phillips, state director, and E. Leland Taylor, both of Louisville, and of the war bond staff.

Many Singled Out

Chairman Martin paused in his presentation of the speakers to point out many guests who had come to witness the dedication and singled out for special mention Ohio countians who had parts in the building program. Among those recognized were: Claude E. Smith and Arthur D. Kirk, Owensboro lawyers, each county attorney here and Mr. Smith also commonwealth's attorney; former Circuit Judge W. C. Jonson, of Greenville; Daviess County Judge J. Everett Long; G. A. Ralph, former Ohio county judge who was in office at the start of the building campaign; County Judge H. L. Ashby, who followed Judge Ralph, and members of the Ohio county fiscal court; Robert C. McLellan, who was construction superintendent for the W. P. A. through much of the building; M. B. Wescott, Owensboro, construction engineer; Cashier Robert Hudson, of the Hartford Deposit Bank, who was trustee in charge of the bond money and the other present county officials, Sheriff C. W. Stevens; Jailer L. L. Daugherty; School Supt. Warren Peyton; Circuit Clerk

J. W. Kirk and County Clerk Cecil P. Taylor; L. L. Embry, county tax commissioner; Mrs. M. F. Chumley, master commissioner; Robert Plummer, coroner, and several others, officials and private citizens of prominence including members of the holding committee which issued the bonds to supplement W. P. A. funds; J. E. Mitchell, Karl Vanover, G. W. Wallace, Major Willard Lake and E. Y. B. Foster

Before the afternoon program started officials and their deputies were hosts to visitors anxious to see the finished and furnished building. Equipment had been hastily installed the past few days and various bureau personnel moved in including the county and home demonstration agents, the triple A unit, the welfare and health departments.



Fourth Courthouse; Ohio County, Kentucky Pictorial History, Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 1998, p.192 .



Fourth Courthouse, 1941; "Ohio County History", Internet, facebook.com



Present Ohio County Courthouse

