

THE HISTORY OF OUR COURTHOUSE BY MICHELLE STECHMULLER



**Historian
Michelle Stechmuller**

The year was 1840 when McHenry County had its first courthouse. Built by William H. Beach, this building was to

be used as a courthouse and jail, which would be located on Riverside Dr. in McHenry. Due to the location of this building, many of the residents were dissatisfied. Many felt that it was not "centrally located". Thus began the many changes that have brought us to where we are today.

In September of 1844 the courthouse was moved to a plain, two story frame nearly in the center of the public square in Centerville, (now Woodstock). Built by Mr. George C. Dean on 2 acres, to be used also as a courthouse and jail, it proved soon to be too small. Not only did the building become simply too small it also could not hold up in a storm. It was a brick structure with thick walls, and a tin roof. "Yup that's right, tin". They believed that tin would allow it to be fire-proof. However, one winter a heavy wind lifted the roof right off. The building served as the courthouse until 1856, when it was sold for \$723.00.

In 1855 an election took place for the removal of the county seat from Woodstock to Crystal Lake. It was voted against 2095 to



The 1857 Courthouse and N. Donnelly General Store

1049. The outcome of this election was: 1.) Woodstock is now the final spot for the County Seat and, 2.) The Board of Supervisors soon took up the question of building a suitable courthouse to meet the needs and growth of the county.

An arrangement was made that the property just west of the public square was purchased for \$3000.00, while the city transferred the public square for use as a park. The 2-story structure courthouse was then erected and



The 1857 Courthouse and new 1887 Jail

completed in 1857 at a total cost of \$47,000.00.

In 1887, the Sheriff's residence addition was made at a cost of \$17,000.00. Included was a separate jail, as currently prisoners were being held in the basement of the courthouse.

On April 26, 1955, McHenry



1972 the court house moved from the Woodstock Square to it's current location on Rt. 47.

County purchased a school building from dist. 72 for \$85,000 that is now know as the Courthouse Annex. As with growth the space began to get very crowded. The board finally voted on January 9, 1968 to accept the county fair site on Rt. 47 as the new location.

However, in December 1969 the county bought 21 acres of land north of Woodstock on Rt. 47 and south of Ware Rd. At the Building Committee's Board of Supervisors meeting on March 9, 1971, the general contract was warded to 6 contractors for a total bid of \$3,229,000.00. The first office



1991 McHenry County Government Center and Jail

moved in November 17, 1972.

The next few years' things were finally getting into place. Offices were getting settled and things were going smoothly. A 25-million dollar jail and courthouse expansion plan was approved in 1988 by the McHenry County Board. However that cost had increased to 27 million in '89 after everything was finalized. Ground breaking took place on July 11, 1990. This expansion plan tripled the amount of space that had currently existed. Our courthouse has gone thru a lot of changes, changes for the better. But it is not stopping there. The changes are happening as we speak..



Expansion of the third floor began January 5, 2005

On January 5th we began an 11.9 million dollar project to complete the third floor. To keep me posted, I will be following Chief Svoboda's monthly update from corrections. "It's going to be Great!"