

THE FOURTH DISTRICT APPELLATE COURT HOUSE at Mt. Vernon is perhaps the most beautiful historic building in the State of Illinois. It is small, on a side street in Mt. Vernon, but it has dignity and charm, which to our way of thinking, give it the place as the gem of all early structures in the state.

The following is the copy of the certification by the United States Department of the Interior, that the Court House is truly one for the ages:

"DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON, D. C.  
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE  
HISTORIC BUILDING  
KNOWN AS

APPELLATE COURT HOUSE  
IN THE COUNTY OF  
JEFFERSON

AND THE STATE OF  
ILLINOIS

HAS BEEN SELECTED BY THE  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE

HISTORIC AMERICAN  
BUILDINGS SURVEY

AS POSSESSING EXCEPTIONAL  
HISTORIC OR ARCHITECTURAL  
INTEREST AND AS BEING WORTHY  
OF MOST CAREFUL PRESERVATION  
FOR THE BENEFIT OF FUTURE  
GENERATIONS AND THAT TO THIS  
END A RECORD OF ITS PRESENT  
APPEARANCE AND CONDITIONS  
HAS BEEN MADE AND DEPOSITED  
FOR PERMANENT REFERENCE IN THE

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

ATTEST

Edgar E. Lundeen (SEAL) Harold L. Ickes  
District Officer Secretary of the Interior"

In attempting to secure material in regard to this structure, we had help from Mr. George Howard, Jr., Attorney in Mount Vernon, Judge William M. Bardens of Monmouth, one of the three present Justices of the Court, Mr. James R. McLaughlin, the present Clerk of the Court, and "Fizz" Myers of Mt. Vernon.

The following brief history of the building was prepared by Stanley B. Brown, when he was Clerk of the court:

"In 1854 the General Assembly appropriated \$6,000 for the erection of a Supreme Court Building at Mt. Vernon. Zadock Casey, Noah Johnson, William J. Stephenson, Tazewell B. Tanner and John N. Johnson of Jefferson County were appointed commissioners whose duty it was to procure a lot of ground in the town of Mt. Vernon upon which to erect a building to house the Supreme Court.

"The land upon which to build the Court House was given by Zadock Casey, with a reversion clause should the building be used for other than court purposes. Here for twenty years Judges bearing such honorable names as the above, together with those of Sidney Breeze, Walter B. Scates, John H. Mulkey and others, sat in interpretation of the law during what was largely for formative period of jurisprudence in Illinois.

"The judges were to have better quarters, and in 1874 an appropriation was made for the remodeling of the building. The North and South wings were added and it became to all practical purposes as it is today.

"In 1935 a modern fire-proof vault and a garage were erected immediately west of the original building, but placed in such a manner as not to detract from the original beauty of design.

"The Court Building, a two-story brick built in the shape of a Maltese Cross, is 75 feet by 80 feet, with fireproof vault on the ground floor and garage in basement, together with passageway, furnace room, laundry room and coal room under the old Court Building.

"The Court House of Greek Revival type of architecture stands at Fourteenth and Main Streets. It has simple classic lines: two fluted pillars support the front gable, in the center of which is a medallion of the scales of justice. Twin wrought iron stairways on the outside of the front of the building lead to the second floor, and the story is that it took three weeks to bring this stairway from St. Louis by ox-cart.

"The visitor will find in the interior rooms with extremely high ceilings, arched opening in the inner walls, and wide woodwork. Originally the rooms were heated by huge fire-places.

"On the ground floor are three bedrooms with private baths for the use of the justices when they are in Mt. Vernon. Also on this floor is the apartment of the Clerk of the Court.

"The second floor has the Court Room, the Clerk's Office, the Conference Room, and the Library. The shelves of the Library contain 14,000 volumes, all pertaining to law. The inventory value of these books is carried at approximately \$60,000, but that figure does not represent the true worth as many of the books are priceless. In the library there are fifty volumes of law reports printed in England in the 1600's. The oldest book bears the publication date of 1650.

"The Supreme Court records Illinois Reports, Vol. 27 page 64, show that on November 18 and 19, 1859 Abraham Lincoln appeared in the Southern Division of the Supreme Court at Mt. Vernon as the attorney for the Illinois Central Railroad Company in the case of The State of Illinois vs. Illinois Central R. R. Company. Case was heard on Friday and Saturday during which time Lincoln remained in Mt. Vernon. The Court Justices: John D. Caton, Sidney Breeze and Pickney H. Walker found in favor of Mr. Lincoln's client, the Illinois Central. The Opinion was written by Justice Breeze.

"Lincoln came to Mt. Vernon in company with Geo. B. McClellan, vice-president of Illinois Central Railroad Company. McClellan was destined to later become famous as a General in the Civil War. They traveled from Ashley, Illinois by stage-coach to Mt. Vernon.

"In 1877 Appellate Courts were created by the General Assembly and the seat of the Fourth District was designated as Mt. Vernon. The Appellate Court used the same building as the Supreme Court and the jurisdictional limits coincided with those of the Southern Division of the Supreme Court. Since the Supreme Court set-up was changed and the one court established at Springfield, the building at Mt. Vernon has been used exclusively by the Appellate Court, Fourth District of Illinois.

"The three Justices are Circuit Judges appointed by the Supreme Court to a three year term as Justices of the Appellate Court.

"Hospital records in Mt. Vernon show that at the time of the tornado on February 19, 1888 an emergency hospital was housed in the building under the supervision of Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross.

"For a number of years the Illinois Bar Examinations were held in the Appellate Court Building.

"For years the myth has persisted that Mt. Vernon 'chose the Supreme Court instead of the University and picked the wrong one.' The facts are: the first Normal School in Illinois was established at Normal in 1857, the second at Carbondale in 1874, and the University of Illinois in 1867. The enabling act for the erection of the first Court House for the Southern Division of the Illinois Supreme Court at Mt. Vernon was passed by the General Assembly in 1848 nearly nine years before the first Normal School of Illinois was established."

The one item missing in all this, who was the architect? We do not know—nor do the records indicate the name of the builder of the original wing. The Department of the Interior gave up on these points and simply list them as unknown.

We have wanted to do a wood block print of this building for a good many years and feared the complexity of the iron stairways would be too much for us. But here it is—and we hope for the best.

The blocks were cut from some fairly new tulip wood which Gib Butler picked up for us in Edgar County.

The printing, as usual was by hand, using the Japanese method.

FRED AND BETTY TURNER

Christmas, 1957  
Urbana  
Illinois