



# WEBFOOTER EXTRA

**MAY 2024**

## **WASHINGTON COUNTY COURTHOUSES THROUGH THE YEARS**

**BY DONALD R. NELSON**



5001 WASHINGTON COUNTY COURT HOUSE. HILLSBORO. OREGON

Lithographed postcard of the Washington County Courthouse circa 1905.

# WASHINGTON COUNTY COURTHOUSES THROUGH THE YEARS

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The provisional Legislature created Washington County as Tuality District on July 5, 1843 as one of the four original counties created in Oregon. In 1849, the name was changed to Washington in honor of President George Washington.

The first courthouse in Washington County was built of logs in the 1840s. There is no known illustration or drawing of it. By the early 1850s a new courthouse was needed. It was built on the block bounded by East Main, Northeast 1st, Northeast 2nd and Northeast Lincoln.

Oregon's early architect, Absalom B. Hallock, designed a cedar sided two-story courthouse with classical revival elements, that was erected in 1852. The West Union Baptist Church, northeast of Hillsboro, which was built in 1853, had architectural similarities.

At that time, Washington County also included Columbia and Multnomah counties. Official transactions needed to be documented at the courthouse, so those in Portland and other communities, who had deeds or legal papers to file, came to Hillsboro by walking, riding a horse, or by horse and buggy.

The Hallock-designed courthouse was moved to a corner of the property at Northeast First and East Main to allow for construction of the new building in the middle of the block. The words Independent (mounted high on the front of the building) and Office is over the front door. The sign may have been for the Hillsboro Independent newspaper.



Photo of the Hallock-designed courthouse, circa 1873, Don Nelson collection.





By the 1880s, the old courthouse was moved west on East Main Street and was used by various business. It was removed in 1929 after plans to move and preserve it as a museum on the courthouse square did not come to fruition. The old Courthouse was utilized as a bicycle shop on East Main Street, circa 1910, Don Nelson collection.



Photo of the Washington County Courthouse, circa 1873, Don Nelson collection. In the early 1870s, a new courthouse was under construction; this time it would be made of brick. Portland Architectural partners, E. M. Burton and W.W. Piper, signed on for the project in 1871. Before the completion of the building, their partnership had ended in 1872. Piper oversaw the completion of the structure in 1873.





Photo of the Washington County Courthouse, circa 1910, Don Nelson collection.

An addition that gave the front of the courthouse a facelift included a clock tower with a clock face but no clockworks. It was designed by Architect Delos D. Neer and built in 1891. Around the same time a bandstand for concerts and other civic events was constructed.



Patton real photo postcard of the Washington County Courthouse and bandstand, circa 1914, Don Nelson collection.





Photo of Melvin B. Case who was the superintendent of Washington County Schools in the 1910s. He is seen at his desk in his office in the Washington County Courthouse, circa 1912. Don Nelson collection. Photos of school buildings can be seen on the far-left wall of his office.



Real photo postcard of the Washington County Courthouse, circa 1946, by Views Inc. Don Nelson collection. Around 1927 or 1928, a new courthouse, designed by Architect Orlo R.W. Hossack, was built. It replaced the old 1873 building and the 1891 addition.



Today, a double block complex of Washington County buildings in Hillsboro, Oregon includes a courthouse, jail, and many county offices. County structures are also in other nearby blocks.

**Sources:**

1852,1871-1874 Washington County records

Morning Oregonian

Hillsboro Independent

Hillsboro Argus

Oregon State Bar Bulletin December 1986

Architects of Oregon by Richard Ellison Ritz, 2002

State of Oregon Secretary of State Archives



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