
Community Archives – Old Berrien Newsletters
CA-012-002-005

Summer Quarter 2009

Old Berrien Newsletter

Vol. 03, No. 01

For this and additional works see: <https://vtext.valdosta.edu/xmlui/handle/10428/7414>

UUID: 318F8D69-F338-B090-4CB3-59C6A32175E1

Recommended Citation:

Berrien Historical Foundation. *OLD BERRIEN Newsletter of the Berrien Historical Foundation*
Vol 3, no. 1. Valdosta State University Archives and Special Collections, *Community*
Archives: Old Berrien Newsletters Collection.

<https://vtext.valdosta.edu/xmlui/handle/10428/7587>

This item is part of the *Community Archives: Old Berrien Newsletters Collection*, at Valdosta State University Archives and Special Collections. Physical and intellectual rights are reserved by the Berrien County Historical Foundation. If you have any questions or concerns contact archives@valdosta.edu



The Berrien County Courthouse Clock Tower as it appears today. The dome and cupola are copper-covered and a patina has been established. The weather vane is gold leafed. Note the bell is fixed to the tower floor. It originally hung from the center ceiling, and struck every half hour.

with electric motors, out of concern that the massive weights might fall through the tower onto the courthouse below. However, hopes for this to solve the accuracy problem proved futile. The clock continued its erratic behavior for several more years, causing one politician W.G. Tygart to run for County Commissioner on the "Clock Ticket" to keep the courthouse clock running and accurate.

In 1950, local jeweler and watchmaker, Albert H. Folsom, was assigned the task of solving the clock's dilemma. He realized that the old original workings of the clock were sagging and not compatible with the electric motor system. The rocker arm striking mechanism was also too heavy for the small motor, so the bell was mounted in a stationary position on the tower floor and the clapper was anchored as well. This reduced the range that the bell could be heard.

This modification kept the clock in running order, along with the watchful care of Mr. Folsom, until 1972 when a worn out motor and pigeon roosting habits caused the clock to fall silent.

In 1977 a new motor was purchased and the clock was back in order— sort of—stopping again along the way for months at a time until 1984 when it fell completely silent for 12 years. In 1996 Judge W.D. Knight implored the County Commissioners to restore the clock and bell to its rightful place and it has remained operational for the most part ever since. However, it will continue to require a diligent effort to keep it running and accurate.

The information contained within this newsletter was researched, documented, and reprinted with the permission of Skeeter Parker.

returned to its original white face and it remains that way today. The tower itself has undergone several paint schemes ranging from white, to silver, to multicolor, to white again.

The clock itself has been a subject of concern for over a century, as it remains a challenge today to keep it in accurate, good running order.

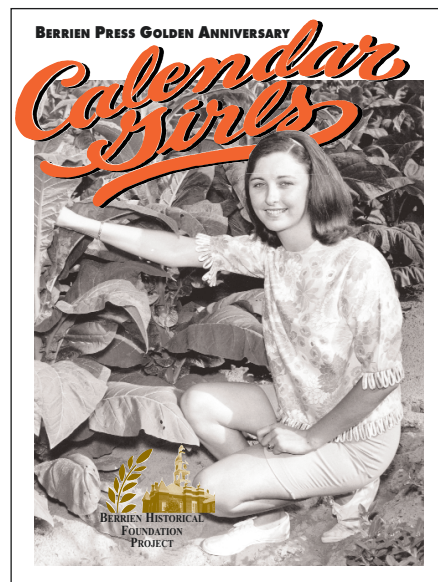
As early as 1905, the clock was running slow, causing some court jurors to arrive late for duty, and being fined by Judge Mitchell for being tardy.

The Nashville Herald is filled with items concerning the state of the time piece. The August 30, 1907 issue simply states, "The courthouse clock ought to be shot—or fixed."

For several decades the clock was used by most merchants and the general citizenry as the official time set, stores opening or closing on the chime of the bell. The bell originally struck on the half hour and the hour.

However by 1932, the inconsistency of the clock was solved by assigning the courthouse janitor, Joe Taylor, the task of maintaining it, and for over ten years it was never more than a few minutes off.

In 1944 the weight driven system of winding the clock was replaced



CALENDAR GIRL EXHIBIT CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BERRIEN PRESS

Almost all of the 600 Calendar Girls who graced the front page of the Berrien Press since its beginning in 1959 have been on display at the Perry Library since mid-June in the 3rd major exhibit sponsored by the Berrien Historical Foundation. Images were retrieved and scanned by Skeeter Parker from annuals, newspapers, and original photos. The exhibit is open to the public at the Perry Memorial Library during regular library hours. The exhibit will remain open through the end of the year, then the photos will be compiled in a series of binders for ongoing public review.



BERRIEN HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Contact Sponsors:
Jane Knight 229-686-2298
Bryan Shaw 229-563-0586
P. O. Box 417 Nashville, GA 31639

OLD BERRIEN

Newsletter of the Berrien Historical Foundation

Volume 3 Number 1

Summer Quarter 2009

THE OLD COURTHOUSE



Only two buildings have actually been called the "Courthouse" in the history of Berrien County, Georgia, even though a new county administration building was built and occupied in 2008. Even so, the first term of Superior Court in November 1856 was held in a log school house according to an article in the Centennial edition of *The Nashville*

Herald in 1956.

The school house was on the farm of Mrs. Amy Kirby who lived on the Coffee Road, just one mile northeast of the present courthouse. "This was the most convenient and accessible building that could be obtained at the time, and being near the newly laid out town of Nashville where visitors to the court and its attaches might find accommodations among citizens who had already

The second-built and most recognizable Berrien County courthouse was completed in 1898, shown above. Note the clock face, and the contrasting color schemes of the painted tower. This front view of the courthouse was changed in 1938, with the unfortunate addition of the sheriff's office on the south west corner of the building,

begun business in town” said the article.

“This arrangement was considered adequate and until the fall of 1957 the terms of Superior Court were held at the log school house, when the Inferior Court passed an order that ‘Future sessions of the Inferior and Superior Courts be held at Nashville instead of the school house at Mrs. Kirby’s’” said the 1956 article.

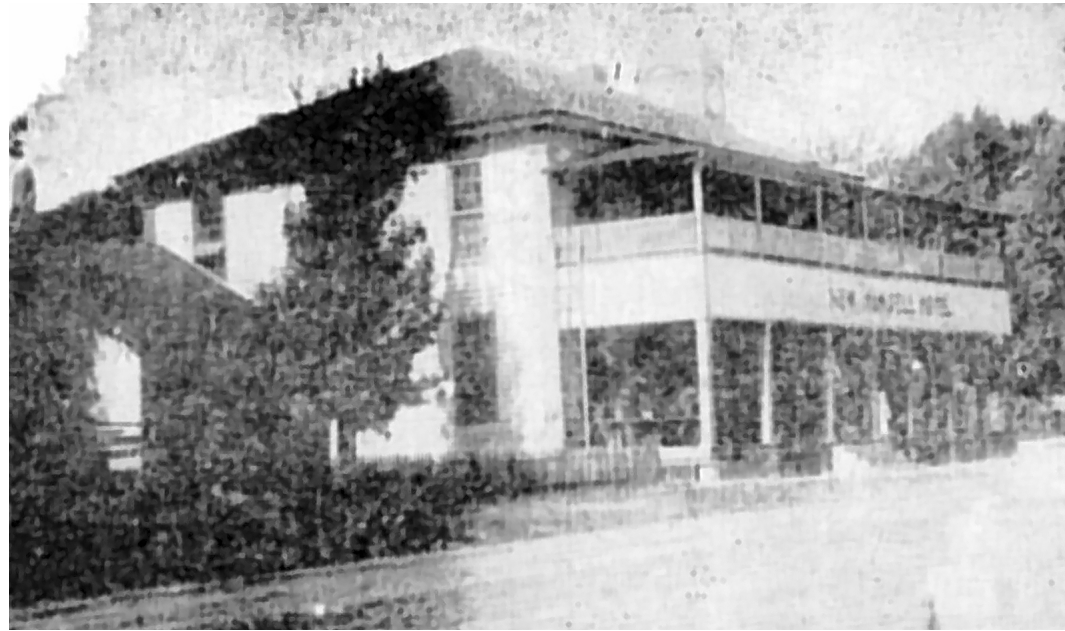
FIRST COURTHOUSE READY FOR OCCUPANCY

Bids for the first courthouse were advertised on orders of the January 1857 term of Inferior Court. A courthouse committee of James Griffin, Sr., R.A. Peeples, and E.C. Morgan, along with a building committee consisting of William Lastinger, Mitchell S. Griffin, W.D. Griffin, Henry T. Peeples, and John Lindsey were formed.

Plans specifically called for a two-story building, and the bid was awarded to Woodford J. Mabry for \$2,600. Joe Newbern was chief carpenter. In a report by the committee it was stated, the dimensions of the wood-framed building were “fifty by sixty feet, and twenty feet high.”

On March 22, 1858 the building committee reported the courthouse ready for occupancy. According to notes in the Berrien County Centennial book, the committee’s reaction was “The workmanship in the construction of the building exceeds our most sanguine expectations.” The only drawback to the new building was that seating arrangements for spectators had not yet been made, resulting in “confusion arising from the tendency of spectators to crowd around the Bar during the sessions of court.” This was soon remedied by the Grand Jury.

This building served the county well, but after 40 years of use the court room grew too small for the needs of a growing county. Thus, the only courthouse that anyone alive today has ever known was then constructed.



When the present courthouse was constructed in 1898, the first structure was moved, still in good repair, to the east side of the square, having been purchased by Dr. W.B. Goodman for \$200. In its new location it was used for almost thirty years as the New Hansell Hotel. An article in the Centennial edition of *The Nashville Herald* said the building was torn down in 1925.

1898—PRESENT COURTHOUSE CONSTRUCTED

The new brick structure was designed in the Romanesque Revival/ Colonial Revival style with designs drawn by W. Chamberlain of Knoxville, TN. It was built by Hugger and Winston with an original bid of \$15, 918, however it topped out at \$17,000 after extras were added to the building.

An article in *The South Georgian*, Vol. 1, Number 1, Thursday, August 3, 1899 shared the following about the courthouse: “There are 535,000 brick, 85,000 of which came from Macon, the others were made here; 600 barrels of lime, 400, barrels of hydraulic cement and a small amount of sand. The tower rests on three steel beams weighing more than 6,000 pounds each, every beam is of iron, no wood supports at all.

The first courthouse of Berrien County, completed in 1858, is shown above after it was moved to make room for the familiar brick structure. The view is from the north east on Marion Street in front of the Carter-Clark House. Note the name of New Hansell Hotel on the veranda. The tower of the newly constructed courthouse is faintly visible in the background above the roof line.

All the ceiling is of steel and every door either solid steel or covered with it. The doors and window frames are also covered with steel. The floor of the upper story is of wood but it is laid upon ten inches of cement, making it impossible to affect the lower story or the roof if this floor with all of its furniture should burn. The entire floor of the first story is of solid cement and the roof of the building covered with slate.

“The clock in the tower is a superb piece of machinery costing \$367.50 and its weights over 600 lbs. each. The bell of the clock weighs 500 lbs. and can be heard for many miles as it strikes the hour. The building was erected by the county without having to issue bonds or borrow money and treasury isn’t broke yet.”



OCCUPANTS OF THE COURTHOUSE

An addition was completed to the southwest corner of the building about 1938, as again after 40 years Berrien County was outgrowing its government facilities.

At one time every county office was located in the court house. This included Clerk of Court, Probate Court, Sheriff, County Commissioners, Tax Commissioner, and School Superintendent

The first floor of the new addition was occupied by the sheriff’s office until they moved out following the 1981 renovation..

Eventually, most of the offices found other locations around the city, and the grand old structure was completely vacated in 2008. Today, the building is occupied by the Berrien Historical Foundation, Berrien County Chamber of Commerce and the Nashville Better Hometown.

MEMORIES OF THE COURTHOUSE AND THE SQUARE

The courthouse has long been a center of activity in the county, as well as the judicial and legal proceedings.

In a 1975 article in *The Berrien Press* long-time Probate Judge Johnny Pat Webb relayed some memories of the court house. He recalled “great politicians who have trod these grounds and the great speeches they have made” and not to forget the “great political rallies on our lawns,” or the old bandstand, Gospel preaching, “Ole” time fiddler conventions, singing conventions, and the like. He went on to recall “huge street dances that used to be held adjacent to the courthouse for the entertainment and amusement of our citizens.” Likewise, he mentioned tobacco harvest drawings from the days when that time of year brought huge crowds to the town square.

This view of the courthouse is the most familiar view for many Berrien County natives. It was taken sometime after the installation of parking meters on the square. Note the bandstand on the left foreground. Also the railing on the veranda over the front door. The last one of the great water oaks pictured here, fell in the summer of 2009.

THE COURTHOUSE CLOCK—HEARTBEAT OF THE COUNTY

As was the case of most Georgia courthouses built at the turn of the century, a clock facing in each of four directions was included in the architecture of the Berrien County courthouse. The original clock face was white with black hands and numerals. In 1944, the face was changed to black with white hands and numerals. Then when the courthouse was restored in 1981, the face was