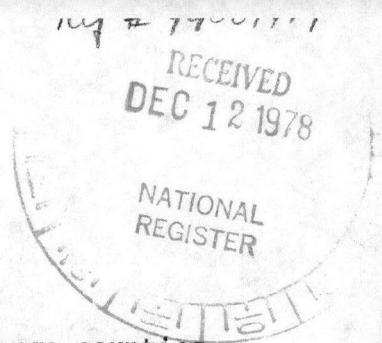


GUILFORD COUNTY COURTHOUSE



Historical Sketch

Guilford County was formed in 1770 from Rowan and Orange counties. The first county seat was Guilford Courthouse, and the county's first permanent courthouse was built of logs there in 1773. The name of the county seat was changed to Martinsville and a new courthouse of brick constructed in 1788. In 1807 the county seat was moved to more centrally-located Greensboro, and two years later a third courthouse was built of brick there. This building was replaced in 1820 by another brick structure which was soon in such disrepair that many citizens considered it unsuitable for use. Local politicians used the question of which was more suitable, "remodeling" or "outright building," as an issue upon which to campaign for office. One candidate, John Gordon, declared in July, 1822:

I think the old courthouse will do tolerably well as it is until corn and money get plentier . . . There are a number of citizens that can hardly pay their county and state taxes . . . let alone paying money for some great show.

Nevertheless, a new brick courthouse appeared in 1830. In 1858 the county demolished this building and erected another which burned in 1872. The following year Guilford County residents constructed their sixth courthouse, which was of the same "Roman Corinthian" design as the 1858 structure except for "a beautiful iron tower with a clock on four sides."¹ It was demolished in 1919, and the Jefferson Building took its place.¹

In 1918 the county commissioners began efforts to construct a new courthouse, and they employed architect Harry Barton to prepare the plans and specifications. The courthouse was officially opened in April, 1920, and it served until 1974 when it became part of the county complex which combines the old and new courthouses as the center of county government.²

Architectural Description

The Guilford County Courthouse is part of a governmental complex composed of three monumental structures facing a terraced plaza in the center of Greensboro. Two contemporary buildings date from the mid 1970s while the third is a 1918 Renaissance Revival structure. Despite the dramatic difference in appearance of the new and old buildings, the stately Neo-Classical Revival courthouse forms a vital link in the complex. While its

¹ Guilford County Courthouse, an unpublished research paper, in An Historical Survey of the Courthouses of North Carolina compiled by the Colonial Dames of America in the State of North Carolina, October, 1966.

² Guilford County, Minutes of Board of County Commissioners, February 5, 1918, April 5, 1920.

monumentality has been minimized by the sheer expanse and scale of the modern buildings, its form and materials harmonize with those of the new. The integration of the 1918 structure into the modern complex is a sensitive and aesthetically pleasing example of the symbiosis of good design of two periods.

Designed by Greensboro architect Harry Barton and built by William P. Rose, the old Guilford County Courthouse presents richly ornamented symmetrical facades. The five-story rectangular structure is clad in an ashlar veneer above a rusticated raised basement. The upper three stories' bays are divided by fluted Ionic pilasters, while the fifth story, treated as an attic level, is screened by a stone balustrade. A shallow pedimented hexastyle portico is centered above the three principal entrances of the identical east and west facades.

The interior is treated as handsomely as the exterior. Richly molded ceiling beams, intricate iron stair railings and marble wainscots typify Barton's liberal use of opulent materials and ornamentation. The second floor courtroom is a well-appointed classically styled chamber epitomizing Barton's knowledgeable manipulation of classical forms. The room is a full two stories with a gallery to the rear. Fluted pilasters with plaster Corinthian capitals divide the paneled walls. A carved pedimented frontispiece occupies the wall behind the judge's bench. Two engaged Doric columns support the pediment and initiate a frieze which encircles the room. Stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments fill the area between the frieze and the crown molding. The coffered ceiling is ornately detailed with a variety of plaster moldings, and Neo-Classical style globe lights are suspended from the coffers.

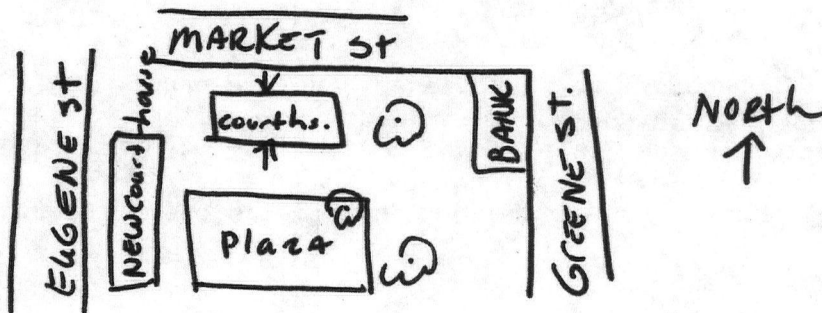
The Guilford County Courthouse is one of Barton's most imposing Neo-Classical Revival courthouses. The simplicity of its form and the grandeur of its detailing result in one of North Carolina's most sophisticated classical public buildings.

Address: Robert Shaw, Chairman, Guilford County Commissioners, Guilford County Courthouse, Greensboro, N.C. 27420

Acreage: less than one acre

UTM reference: 17/608700/3992420

Verbal Boundary Description: The courthouse is bounded to the north by Market Street, to the south by the City-County plaza, to the west by the new Guilford County Courthouse, and to the east by a bank.



Property

North Carolina Courthouses Thematic Group

State

N.C.

Working Number

12.12.78.4763

TECHNICAL

Photos

#62

Maps

57

CONTROL

OK 12.14.78

HISTORIAN

57 county courthouses ranging from early 19th century to 1930s. Significant in long time associations with ~~the~~ commercial, political and legal activities in the communities they serve. Some questions on integrity of collect, justification in 1930s samples. Needs call for minimal information.

OK / ACCEPT 5/16/79

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

The inventory forms cover adequate descriptions and statements of significance yet lack convenience of the cartographic sets are sent importance of many buildings are being nominated. I think we should return for proper completion.

OK 3/6/79

ARCHEOLOGIST

1930's structures justified in continuation sheets; additional photos received. Brunswick Co. Courthouse has suffered some loss of integrity but retains missing fenestration, belfry symbolizing public building - would accept but defer to architectural historian opinion.

ACCEPT 5/18/79

OTHER

HAER

Inventory _____

Review _____

articulate presentation of significance of these Court houses. REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

one apparently eligible property held back because of county opposition, but I cannot see rejecting entire thematic of exclusion of one property. Accept Velovich 5/10/79

BRANCH CHIEF

KEEPER

National Register Write-up

6-5-79

Send-back

Entered

MAY 10 1979

Federal Register Entry

Re-submit

5/10/79



NEGATIVE NUMBER N-77-2-667 DEC 12 1978

PHOTOGRAPHER Mary Lee

PHOTO DATE 3-77 MAY 10 1979

SUBJECT Guilford Co.
Courthouse

North Carolina Courthouses
Thematic Group
~~Currituck~~
Alamance County

FROM DIVISION OF
ARCHIVES & HISTORY
RALEIGH, N. C.

JAN 20 1978

#19 of 62

PRINT BY
HISTORIC PRESERVATION SECTION

MAY 22 1980



DEC 12 1978

NEGATIVE NUMBER N-77-2-667

PHOTOGRAPHER Mary Lee

PHOTO DATE 3-77

SUBJECT Guilford Co.
Courthouse

MAY 22 1980

MAY 10 1979

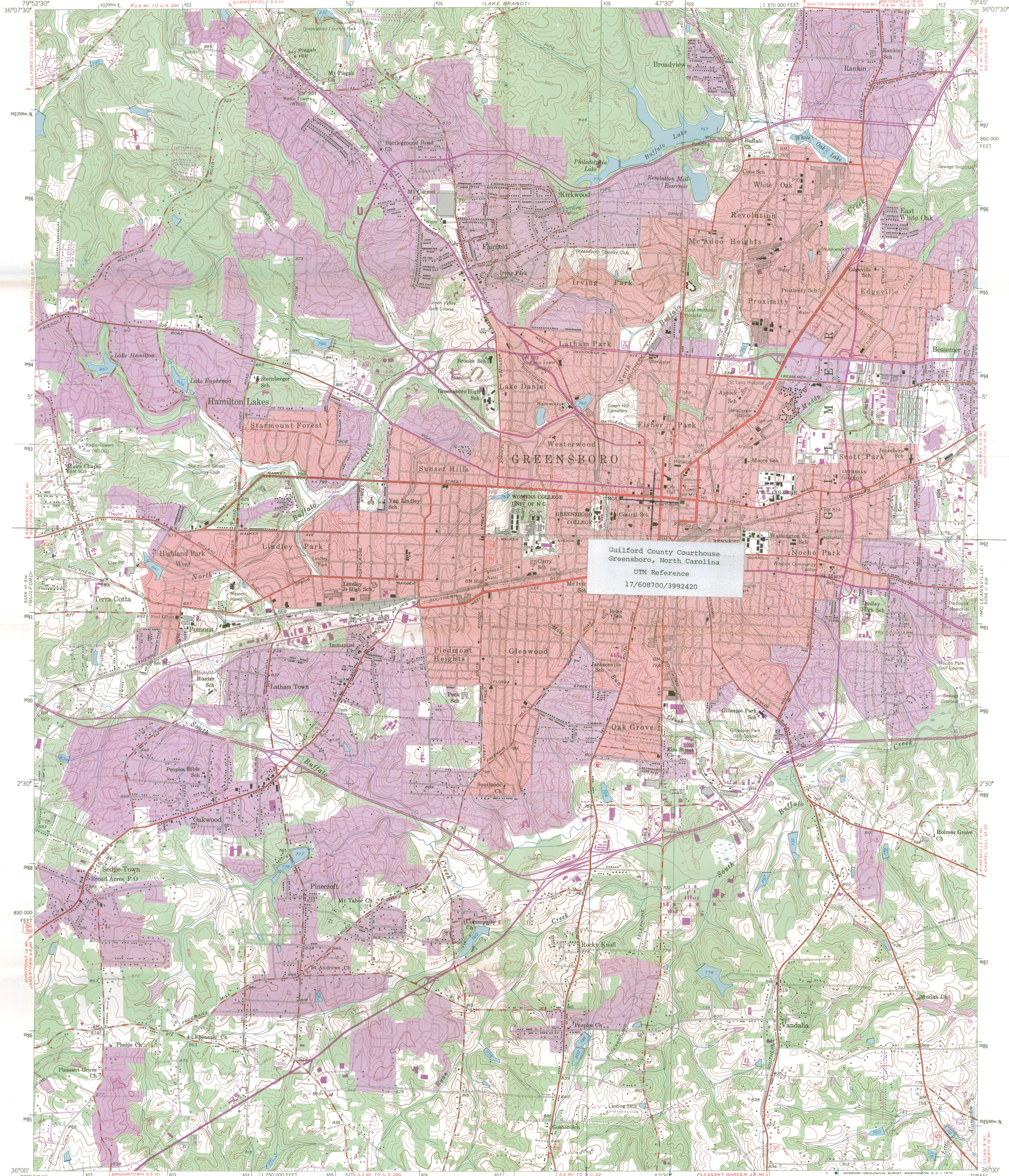
*North Carolina Courthouses Thematic Group
(~~Currituck County Courthouse and Jail~~)
~~Alamance County~~ Currituck co.
60 of 62*

Guilford

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ARCHIVES & HISTORY
RALEIGH, N. C.

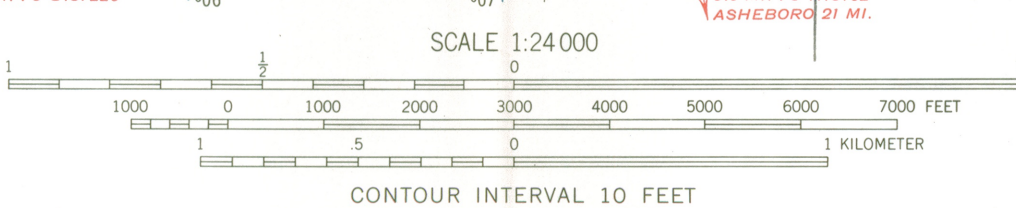
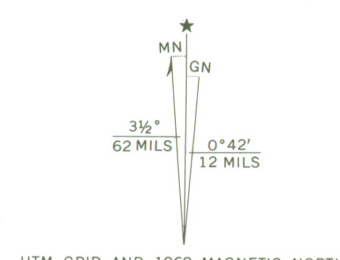
JAN 20 1978

PRINT BY
HISTORIC PRESERVATION SECTION



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS, USC&GS and North Carolina Geodetic Survey
Culture and drainage in part compiled from aerial photographs taken 1948.
Topography by plane-table surveys 1951
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on North Carolina coordinate system
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 17, shown in blue
Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown
Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs taken 1968. This information not field checked
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL



MAY 10 1979

GREENSBORO, N. C.
N3600-W7945/7.5

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D. C. 20242
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

1951
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AMS 5056 III SE-SERIES V842

