

Chatham County Courthouse History

Soon after Chatham County was formed from Orange County in 1771, its seat of government was established in a frame courthouse on Miles Scurlock's farm at what was supposedly the geographic center of the county. County officials abandoned this structure when Pittsboro was established in 1787 and built a new wood building about one-half mile north of the old one. In 1843 that second courthouse was replaced by a third, which is said to have been the first brick structure in the county. In 1881, to correspond to public concern for safe accommodations, Chatham County officials elected to build a new courthouse on the site of the old one. Thomas B. Womack, solicitor of the inferior court, who had no previous experience in architecture, drew the plans. The county commissioners awarded the contract for constructing the building to J. Bynum and William Lord London of Pittsboro, for the sum of \$10,666. A major renovation during the 1930's resulted in a one-story addition to the ground floor. The interior was extensively remodeled at a cost of \$130,000 in 1959.

Architectural Description

Built in 1881, the Chatham County Courthouse is a two-story rectangular brick structure whose predominant feature is a two-story Classical portico crowned with a distinctive three-stage cupola. The first story of the building serves as a base for the tall second story which is articulated by the strong vertical accents of white stuccoed pilasters between the windows. A wide stucco cornice defines the roofline, and all gable ends are pedimented. Round arched entrances are centered on the first story of all elevations except the east where a one-story addition violates the symmetry of the original plan. The courthouse's principle access is indicated by an imposing porch on the north elevation. The porch consists of a ground level arcade and a pedimented Doric portico on the second story.