

# Orange County Court History of Interest

## Courthouse History

Orange County's first court was held in 1753 at the home of James Watson. In 1754 Hillsborough was established as the county seat, and the first courthouse of wood was built there the following year. A new brick building replaced the wooden one in 1782, and it burned in 1789. The third permanent courthouse was of wood, and in 1845 it was moved on rollers to a new location at the intersection of Church and Queen streets in Hillsborough. It became a Quaker school for freedmen after the Civil War and is now part of the Dickerson Chapel of the A.M.E. Church of Hillsborough.

The courthouse of 1845 was designed and constructed by Captain John Berry, local brick mason, builder, and legislator, who also built the third Caswell County courthouse and the Playmakers Theatre on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The courthouse in Paoli, a county seat of Orange County, Indiana, is modeled after the old Orange County courthouse. A new courthouse designed by Archie R. Davis of Durham, was erected behind the old one in 1952 at a cost of \$250,000. Both are part of the Hillsborough Historic District.

## Old Orange County Courthouse



Designed and built in 1845 by Captain John Berry, the Old Orange County Courthouse is an imposing two-story, Greek Revival temple-form building. It has been described in Hamlin's **Greek Revival Architecture in America** as "one of the best of its type anywhere in the country. Its four-column, widely spaced Greek Doric portico, its unusually forceful and well-designed cupola, and its quiet brick walls are almost perfect of their kind." One of the most honored of Hillsborough's antebellum buildings

(listed in the National Register of Historic Places), the courthouse is set on a shady square that is still the site of numerous local festivities.

## Architectural Description

The new courthouse, clad in a Flemish bond brick veneer, is a mixture of Georgian Revival design and motifs that include a broken scroll pediment overdoor supported by Corinthian columns, a modillion cornice, garlanded panels, and three-stage hexagonal cupola. The interior finish is also Neo-Colonial; and the placement of the richly appointed courtroom on the first floor, rather than the second, follows the same plan as the early courthouses in Chowan and Perquimans counties.

While the 1854 courthouse, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, expresses the vitality of antebellum Hillsborough and Orange County, the new building's design reflects the town's emphasis on its Colonial heritage.