

A Look Back in Time

The Kenosha County Courthouse, located at 912 56th Street with the cross streets of Sheridan Road and 10th Avenue is one of five important buildings in the Civic Center District. The building underwent \$5.5 million dollar restoration which was completed in 2012.



*Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance establishes standards for designating structures and sites as historic and the site or structure must meet at least one of these standards. It was determined that **The Kenosha County Courthouse** is architecturally and historically significant under Standards 1,3, and 6; “exemplifies or reflects the City's cultural, social...history; or “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen...; or is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect...” The Kenosha County Courthouse is architecturally significant because it exhibits the fine characteristics of the Neo-Classical style. It also achieves its significance as a landmark in its magnitude and presence.*

The Kenosha County Courthouse is a three story building that is built of gray Indiana limestone in a coursed ashlar pattern. The building has a raised basement and the first floor is divided from the upper floors by a cornice that runs the length of the building. A denticulated cornice line defines the unadorned parapet at the top of the building. The main decoration of the building is on the front facade. Between projecting corner pavilions, the second and third stories lie recessed behind a colonnade of 18 free-standing colossal Ionic columns. Additional columns are placed on the front facade of the corner pavilions. Tall, two-story modern windows are placed between the columns of the main colonnade except above the main entrance where there is a further recessed balcony with balustrade and three round arched windows. The first floor pavilions feature single light modern windows of a more standard size. These windows are flanked in the pavilions by more narrow modern windows. The rear and side facades of the building are more simply decorated with engaged pilasters. Entry pavilions at the side and rear of the building feature pilasters for the most part instead of columns although more Ionic columns appear over the rear entry pavilion. The Kenosha County Courthouse was originally designated in 1979 and re-designated on January 4, 1995.

Behind the courthouse was the three-story jail and now houses the District Attorneys offices, built of the same material as the courthouse and connected to it by an underground passage. This building also features cornices defining an unadorned parapet and separating first and second windows. Windows are similar to those on the courthouse, but consist of their original sashes, instead of modern replacements. They are, however, scaled down benefiting the smaller scale of the building. Entrances feature stone architraves and bracketed cornices, and on the north and south facades, pilasters rise on the second and third stories.

Discussion of providing the county with a new courthouse began at the Kenosha County Board as early as 1918. A commission was established and funding began for a new building with jail. In 1919 the County selected an architectural firm, but the project was canceled because it was perceived as too costly at the time. By 1922, the idea was afloat again and land was selected for the new buildings. At the same time, the City of Kenosha changed their form of government to the council-manager plan, and the new City Manager and civic leaders, who had been promoting a “City Beautiful” Civic Center plan, convinced the County to exchange their land for land the City would acquire and clear on the north side of the proposed civic center plaza to build the new courthouse. The County land would then go to the school board for the new high school. All parties agreed and construction began on the courthouse and jail in 1923. The buildings were completed and dedicated in 1925, anchoring the north side of the Civic Center.