

# COURT SQUARE



## EXPLORE COURT SQUARE

- 1 Court Square
- 2 McIntire's Park Campaign
- 3 McKee Block
- 4 Jefferson Street
- 5 Early Hotels
- 6 Sixth Street
- 7 Number Nothing
- 8 Taverns
- 9 Town Hall & Opera House

## UNDERSTANDING COURT SQUARE

In 1761, the County of Albemarle's seat of government was relocated from Scott's Ferry on the James River to the more central location of Charlottesville. Dr. Thomas Walker donated fifty acres of land to be carved into a court square and city blocks. Colonel William Cabell won the bid for clearing the timber and constructing a new county courthouse.

The first jail was built on Court Square in 1766. The jail, whipping post, stocks and pillory were located on the Courthouse grounds until 1875 when a new jail, still extant, was constructed on a low-lying plot across High Street. This move was consistent with changing national patterns that favored confining inmates away from the general public in less visible locations.

In May 1781, the Virginia General Assembly met at the courthouse after fleeing Richmond to escape capture by British forces active in that area. A quick attempt to capture the legislature here was foiled by Jack Jouett's 40-mile

overland ride from Louisa County. Early on June 4, he warned the legislators, and Gov. Thomas Jefferson at Monticello, in time for most of them to escape.

The Albemarle County Courthouse was the only voting location until the mid-1800s. On Election Day, it was customary for candidates to supply food and drink to their supporters. Rum punch was a favorite beverage during that time. Voting, conducted by voice, was a veritable spectator sport. By 1850, Virginia voters no longer had to own property, and almost all white males could vote.

The Courthouse also served as the sole place of worship for several Christian denominations. In an 1822 letter, Thomas Jefferson noted, "...We have four sects, but without either church or meeting-house, the court-house is the common temple, one Sunday in the month to each. Here Episcopalian and Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist, meet together... and all mix in society with perfect harmony...."



Court Days, 1898  
Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society



Farmer's Day on McKee Block, summer 1910  
Holsinger Studio Collection, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia

## SOCIAL FABRIC

In 1779, the Town of Charlottesville consisted of a courthouse, a tavern and about a dozen houses. Court Square soon became a hub of activity for the Town and surrounding Albemarle County. Many denizens of Court Square also conducted business there, in the buildings and on the street, and among those locals were three Presidents: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe. On Court Days, when the court held session, County residents travelled to Charlottesville to transact legal matters and to do business.

Before the Civil War, enslaved African Americans had a presence on Court Square. Residents in the houses surrounding Court Square often owned one or two slaves. Until the mid-1800s, enslaved people from nearby farms were permitted to conduct business with the grocers on Court Square. Until emancipation, the sale, trade and auctioning of enslaved African Americans occurred on the Courthouse steps, at Number Nothing, outside Eagle Tavern, and at other nearby locations.

With support of local philanthropist Paul Goodloe McIntire, the area immediately west of the courthouse changed significantly when he quietly bought each building on McKee Block. The racially integrated block was demolished in 1918 to create a park, to contain a statue of Confederate General Stonewall Jackson. This is the first known instance of "urban renewal" in Charlottesville.

The 10-story Monticello Hotel changed Court Square's appearance when it opened in 1925 to provide modern overnight accommodations for area attractions, such as the newly opened historic Monticello. The hotel's dining and meeting rooms provided an urban locale for gatherings in Charlottesville's segregated society. A number of African American residents were employed in support occupations within the hotel, which served whites only until desegregation began to occur in the 1960s. The hotel was converted to condominiums in the 1970s. In 2002, the City of Charlottesville renovated the Court Square streetscape.

## CHARLOTTESVILLE PAST AND PRESENT

- 1700s**
  - 1762: Founding of Charlottesville
  - 1766: First Albemarle County jail is built at Court Square
  - 1770: Swan Tavern is built
  - 1775-1783: THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR
  - 1781: Charlottesville serves as the temporary state capital
  - 1781: Jack Jouett's ride to warn of approaching British troops
  - 1790: The Eagle Tavern is built
- 1800s**
  - 1803: Brick courthouse (now facing High Street) replaces wood courthouse
  - 1803-1806: LEWIS & CLARK EXPEDITION FOR THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE
  - 1819: THOMAS JEFFERSON FOUNDS THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
  - 1820: Number Nothing is built as a mercantile duplex
  - 1823: The Charlottesville Library is established on Sixth Street
  - 1829: Thomas Jefferson's memoirs are published on McKee Block
  - 1832: The Swan Tavern falls down
  - 1840s: Businesses on Main Street compete with Court Square as the Town's commercial center
  - 1850s: The Louisa Railroad Company completes a rail line that passes through Charlottesville
  - 1852: Town Hall is built with citizen investment
  - 1861-1865: THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR
  - 1870: A public school system is established in Virginia
  - 1887: Charlottesville's first streetcar is built and pulled by horse and mule
  - 1888: Charlottesville is declared an independent city (population 5,000)
- 1900s**
  - 1910: A Confederate soldier monument is installed south of the courthouse
  - 1914-1918: WORLD WAR I
  - 1918: McKee Block is purchased and demolished by Paul Goodloe McIntire
  - 1920: WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IS LEGALIZED (19TH AMENDMENT)
  - 1921: Jackson Park is created complete with a statue of Stonewall Jackson
  - 1926: The Monticello Hotel is built
  - 1938: Courthouse is remodeled in the Colonial Revival style
  - 1939-1945: WORLD WAR II
  - 1954: PUBLIC SCHOOL SEGREGATION LEGALLY ENDS (BROWN VS. BOARD OF EDUCATION)
  - 1959: The Barracks Road Shopping Center opens
  - 1960: A referendum passes to redevelop Vinegar Hill Using federal Urban Renewal money
  - 1969: City Hall is constructed
- 2000s**
  - 2002-2004: Court Square undergoes rehabilitation
  - 2012: Charlottesville celebrates the 250th Anniversary of its founding
  - 2017: Jackson Park re-named Justice Park

## CHANGING STYLE

Changes to the appearance of Court Square over the years are a civic expression of societal change. The open space of Court Square was once occupied by private law office buildings, a small jail, public punishment structures, and the original Courthouse and Clerk's Office building, all no longer extant. A lively street with commercial buildings called McKee block predated the park and the statue of Stonewall Jackson on the west side of the square.

The original Courthouse, completed in 1762, was a wood frame structure. Surrounded by houses replicating an "English green," the Courthouse was Charlottesville's first civic building. In 1803, the wood structure was replaced with a two-story, late Georgian brick building that now forms the rear of the Courthouse facing High Street.

In 1859, a two-story stucco wing was added to the south side, facing Jefferson Street, with an unusual Gothic Revival facade with octagonal stair towers. In 1871, this front was redesigned, replacing the towers with a classical portico with four Ionic columns.

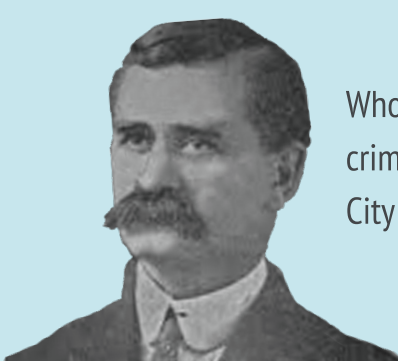
In 1938, Court Square was made over in its current Colonial Revival style. Architects Milton Grigg and Floyd Johnson designed a more imposing portico, removed the stucco and remaining Gothic trim, and stripped the paint from the 1803 exterior to expose the Flemish bond brick pattern. That same year, a Works Progress Administration project replaced the 1891 Clerk's Office building with a Colonial Revival office building that further unified the Courthouse complex.



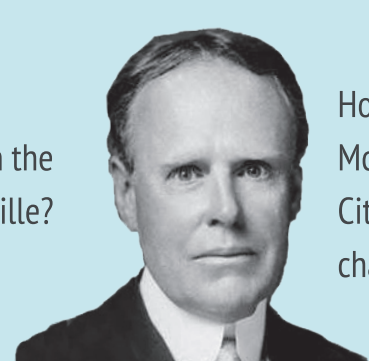
Gothic courthouse with yellow stucco, November 4, 1912  
Holsinger Studio Collection, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia



CHARLOTTESVILLE  
Historic Resources Committee  
Read the rest of the story:  
[charlottesville.org/historicresources](http://charlottesville.org/historicresources)



Who was the last  
criminal hanged in the  
City of Charlottesville?



How did Paul Goodloe  
McIntire and the national  
City Beautiful movement  
change Court Square?



What nickname did Thomas Jefferson  
give the courthouse? Hint: it was the  
first mixed-use building in town.