

COURTHOUSE

Since its formation in 1734 Onslow County has held court in at least eight structures in five locations. Circumstances including vandalism and natural disaster necessitated moving the court to newly built structures and even private homes. By 1757 the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions had settled on its current location for the judicial and administrative business of the county. A recently chartered town known as Wantland Spring, situated where the New River opened up on its way to the ocean, became home to the county seat. While the town changed names, at one time being called Onslow Courthouse, and now known as Jacksonville, it remained the judicial center of the county.

In 1732, at the first session of the Precinct Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, the

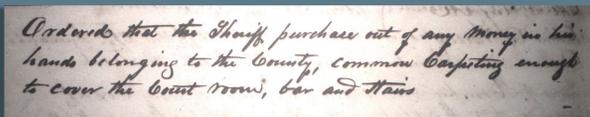


Justices of the Peace ordered that a courthouse be built on the land of John Williams, whose home held the earliest court sessions. They stipulated that the new courthouse be built of brick, with interior dimensions of twenty four feet long and sixteen feet wide. The length changed to 28 feet in the next court session. Williams then gave the court the use of his house until the precinct was confirmed and had land on which to build. Not until 1737 did the construction finish on the first courthouse. This original structure, built by Joseph and Stephen Howard, was 30 feet long and 18 feet wide “weatherboarded with feather edged plank and covered in shingles 2 ft. long and laid on workmanlike.”



In April 1744 the court met to discover that “some malicious and evil disposed person” burned it to the ground. The colonial Assembly already ordered in 1741 that a new town be created on Mittums Point, called Johnston, and that a new courthouse be constructed there. While construction continued, Thomas Black and James Foyle allowed the use of their homes for court business. Before the courthouse could be completed a hurricane destroyed the town and its buildings in 1752. Court then moved to the home of Jonathan Melton on North East Creek. Melton, who was serving as Sheriff, had been ordered to keep

prisoners at his home and simultaneously operated a tavern from the same structure.

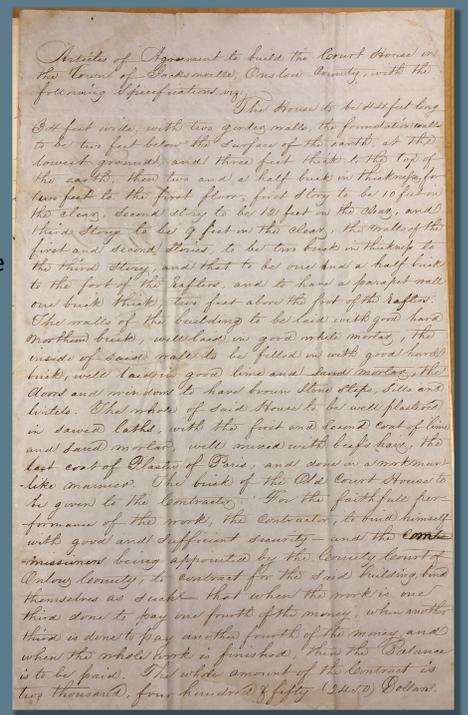


June 1858, Minutes, Onslow County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. The court finally found a permanent home at the site



1881 Courthouse. Hathaway Price Collection, OCM.

of Wantland’s Ferry, when James Wantland agreed to give one acre of land for the construction of a courthouse, which was finished in 1757. A new courthouse constructed in 1787 lasted until 1821, when the Justices decided to construct a new one. Again, in 1839 a new court house was ordered in the town now known as Onslow Courthouse, but was not completed until 1847. In 1867, a court house “44 feet long, 34 feet wide...” and three stories high was ordered constructed in the recently renamed town of Jacksonville.



1867 order to construct a new court house located in the State Office of Archives and History.



1904 Courthouse. HFB Collection, OCM.

In 1881, County Commissioners decided to construct a new courthouse in downtown Jacksonville. Almost immediately after its completion it became evident that poor materials and poor craftsmanship would plague the building, and efforts to construct another began. In 1904 the superior courthouse that still stands as the center of the judicial complex was completed. With remodeling done in 1947, this courthouse is still in use today. After the construction of the Summersill building in 1978 the court added six new courtrooms. Again in 2019, a larger courthouse was constructed to handle the growing number of cases, and the justices and support staff required to work them.



1947 Remodel. Historic Image Collection, OCM.



2019 Courthouse. GHS Collection, OCM



Barbee speaks at dedication of county building. Jacksonville Daily News, September 1979.

