

ILLINOIS HISTORIC SITES SURVEY INVENTORY

KA-H-25

123193

1. Name of Site:

Common

Kankakee County Courthouse

Historic

2. Location:

Bounded by Court, Indiana, Merchant & Harrison

Street and Number

Township

Section

City or Town

Zip Code

Range

1/4 Section

Kankakee

County

Kankakee

3. Classification:

Category (check one)

Integrity (check one)

( ) District

(X) Building

( ) Altered

(X) Unaltered

( ) Site

( ) Structure

( ) Moved

(X) Original Site

4. Ownership:

Status (check one)

( ) Private

(X) Occupied

(X) Public

( ) Unoccupied

( ) Preservation work in progress

Access to Public

( ) Yes

( ) Restricted

( ) Unrestricted

(X) No

Present Use (check one or more)

( ) Agricultural

( ) Industrial

( ) Religious

( ) Commercial

( ) Military

( ) Scientific

( ) Educational

( ) Museum

( ) Transportation

( ) Entertainment

( ) Park

( ) Other

(X) Government

( ) Private Residence

5. Ownership of Property:

Owner's Name

Phone Number

Street and Number

City or Town

State

County

Zip Code

6. Description:

(X) Excellent

( ) Good

( ) Fair

( ) Deteriorated

( ) Ruins

( ) Unexposed

Is there a program of preservation underway?

( ) Yes

(X) No

GOVERNMENT

7. Historical Themes: (check one or more of the following)

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archeological Site       | (Pre-Columbian)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archeological Site       | (Post-Columbian to 1673) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French Influence         | (1673-1780)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois Frontier        | (1780-1818)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois Early           | (1818-1850)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois Middle          | (1850-1900)              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illinois Late | (1900-present)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Famous People            | (give names & dates)     |

8. Specific Date: 1909-1910 constructed

Areas of significance (check one or more of the following)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal (historic)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal (pre-historic) | <input type="checkbox"/> Military                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture               | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication             | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation              | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industry                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Invention                 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture    | Government  |

Brief statement of significance: (include all names and dates)

Use additional sheets if necessary. Kankakee's 3rd county courthouse; constructed on site of previous 2 courthouses.

9. Form prepared by:

Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number: \_\_\_\_\_

City or Town: \_\_\_\_\_

County: \_\_\_\_\_

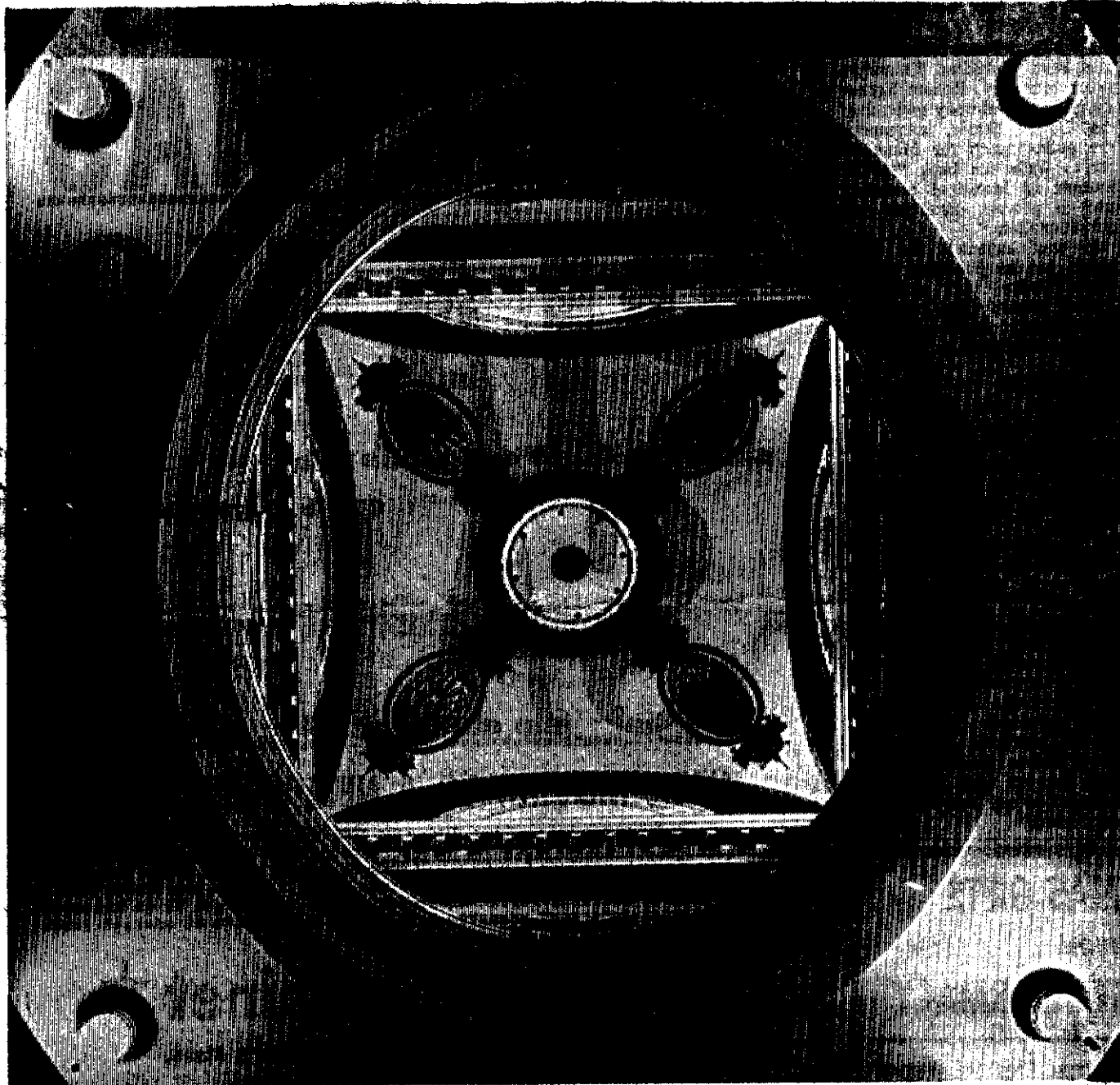
Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

During the course of the Survey we often find it necessary to search for a particular site. When filling out the Survey form, please list according to the following example, published references to the site for which forms are being completed. If a bibliography can be compiled, it will greatly deduct from the Survey's task.

Bibliography

Robertson, Robert, Of Whales and Men. New York, Alfred K. Knopf, Inc., 1954.

# Courthouse Embodies Ideas Of Past, Hope Of Future



## Courthouse Dome Gives Unusual Effect

This kaleidoscope effect of the interior of the courthouse dome was captured by Journal photographer Augustus W. Black, who had to lie on his back on the dome floor to get the shot.

The distance from the photographer's "vantage" point to the top of the dome is 125 feet.

# 'Impressive Strength, Beauty'

Architecturally speaking, the Kankakee County Courthouse is not a particularly beautiful building.

Ronald Moline, Kankakee architect, said that by an architect's standards the huge building is actually "rather plain." He noted that the building's style is Greek Revival although some Baroque influence is evidenced, particularly in the dome.

"IT IS STRIKING in a way and in some ways it is an impressive structure for the type of monumental building that it is. It gives an impression of strength and dignity. In other words, a passerby knows just by looking that this is a governmental building," he observed.

Moline went on to say, however, that the courthouse is not nearly as ornate as the truly beautiful buildings of the world. That is what he means by being "plain."

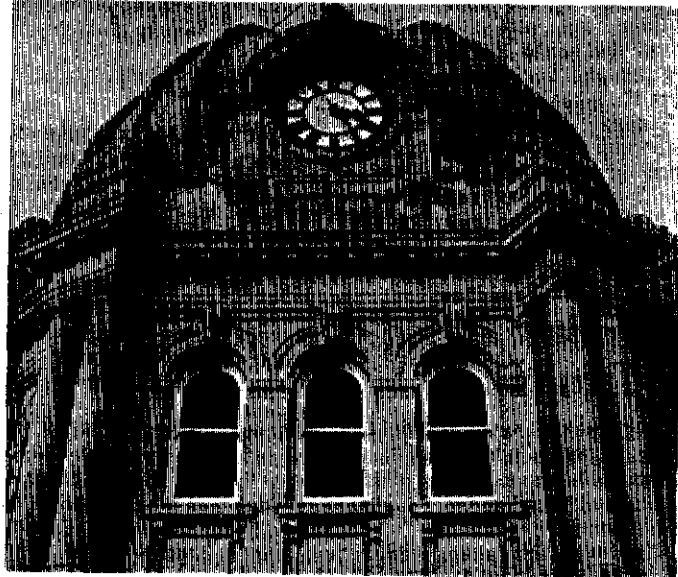
It also has been noted that there is much wasted space in the building and that a builder today could not afford to be so wasteful. However, others feel that this "wasted space" actually creates an aura of spaciousness and adds to the feeling of

size and strength existing in the historic building.

MANY RESIDENTS are proud of the building and are impressed with its granite and Bedford stone exterior and the sub-

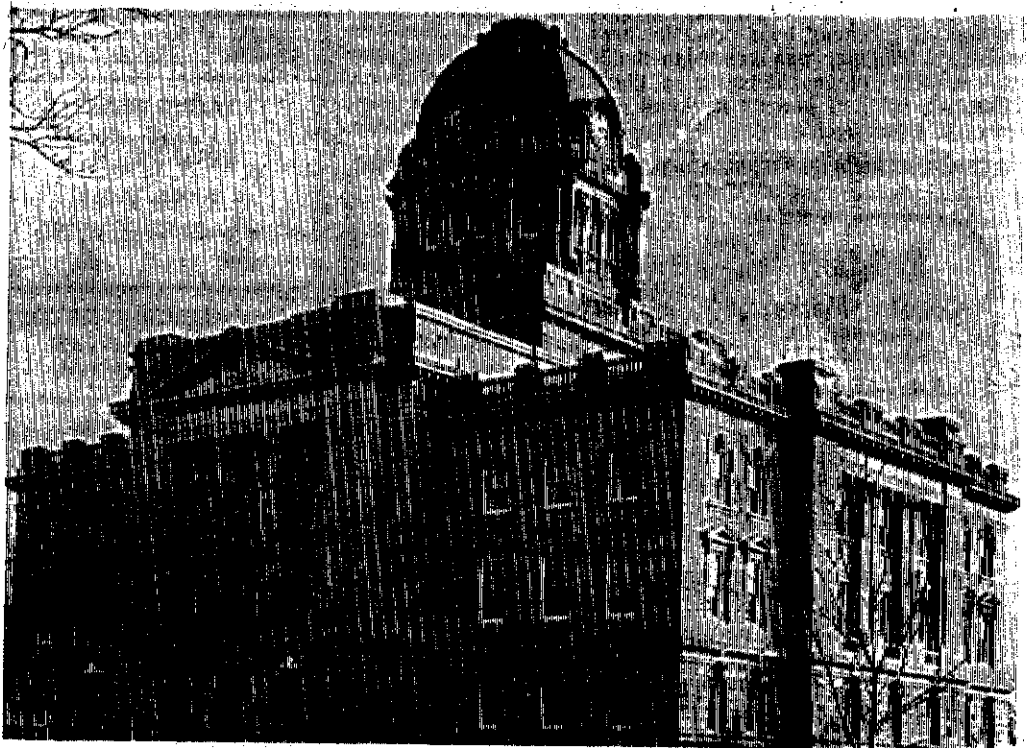
stantial Italian marble evident throughout the interior.

The Journal camera today captures some of the beauty which many people may not heretofore have noticed.



## Baroque Period Copied

The Baroque period influence crops up again on the outside of the courthouse dome. The double columns, shown here at left and right, are a feature of the Baroque period. Architects refer to the top as a ribbed dome.



## Courthouse Embodies Many Architectural Periods

The Kankakee County Courthouse, pictured here from the corner of Court St. and Indiana Ave., is a monumental structure which shows the influence of various architectural periods.

Ronald Moline, local architect, said the building is predominantly Greek Revival, although the ribbed dome, one of its main features, is Baroque.

By JOHN BOWMAN

Kankakee County's present courthouse is the third one in the 113-year history of the county.

All three buildings have stood where the present one does, on Block 16, which has Court Street

ont he south, Harrison Avenue on the east and Indiana Avenue on the West.

The present structure was the most expensive to build, about \$250,000, and has stood longer than either of its predecessors.

THE FIRST courthouse, at a cost of \$22,377.22, was constructed in 1854 - 55. It burned on Oct. 5, 1872, and the second building, an almost exact duplicate of the first, went up in 1873. It was razed in 1909, after standing for 36 years, to make way for a bigger, better building.

The first courthouse was the scene of a number of historical events. The building was the site of the first and last case of capital punishment on May 17, 1861. Wiley J. Morris, a Negro man convicted of the murder of a white girl, was hanged from a second floor scaffold, made especially for the occasion.

The man's last words were that he was innocent of the crime, and a few years later a prisoner in an Indiana state penitentiary said he was the murderer. However, it is said that investigation of the crime was reopened at that time, and the investigators claimed they could find no evidence to change their minds about Morris's guilt.

In 1858 state Sen. Stephen A. Douglas, campaigning for the state legislature against Abraham Lincoln, spoke at the courthouse to a crowd of 2,000. There is no record of Lincoln having ever appeared here, although he was invited during that campaign.

WHEN THE first courthouse burned in 1872 hundreds of persons watched helplessly. Newspaper reports of the fire stated

to inadequate fire-fighting equipment. It was noted that there that the building was lost due was not available a ladder to reach the top of the building, or enough water pressure to reach the second floor.

The second courthouse was built up from the ruins of the first and cost approximately the same amount to build. It was constructed on funds from insurance settlement on the first.

AFTER THE turn of the century, when the second building was starting to deteriorate and it was fast being outgrown, coun-

ty leaders began talk of a new building. Finally, in November, 1908, the proposal was put before the voters.

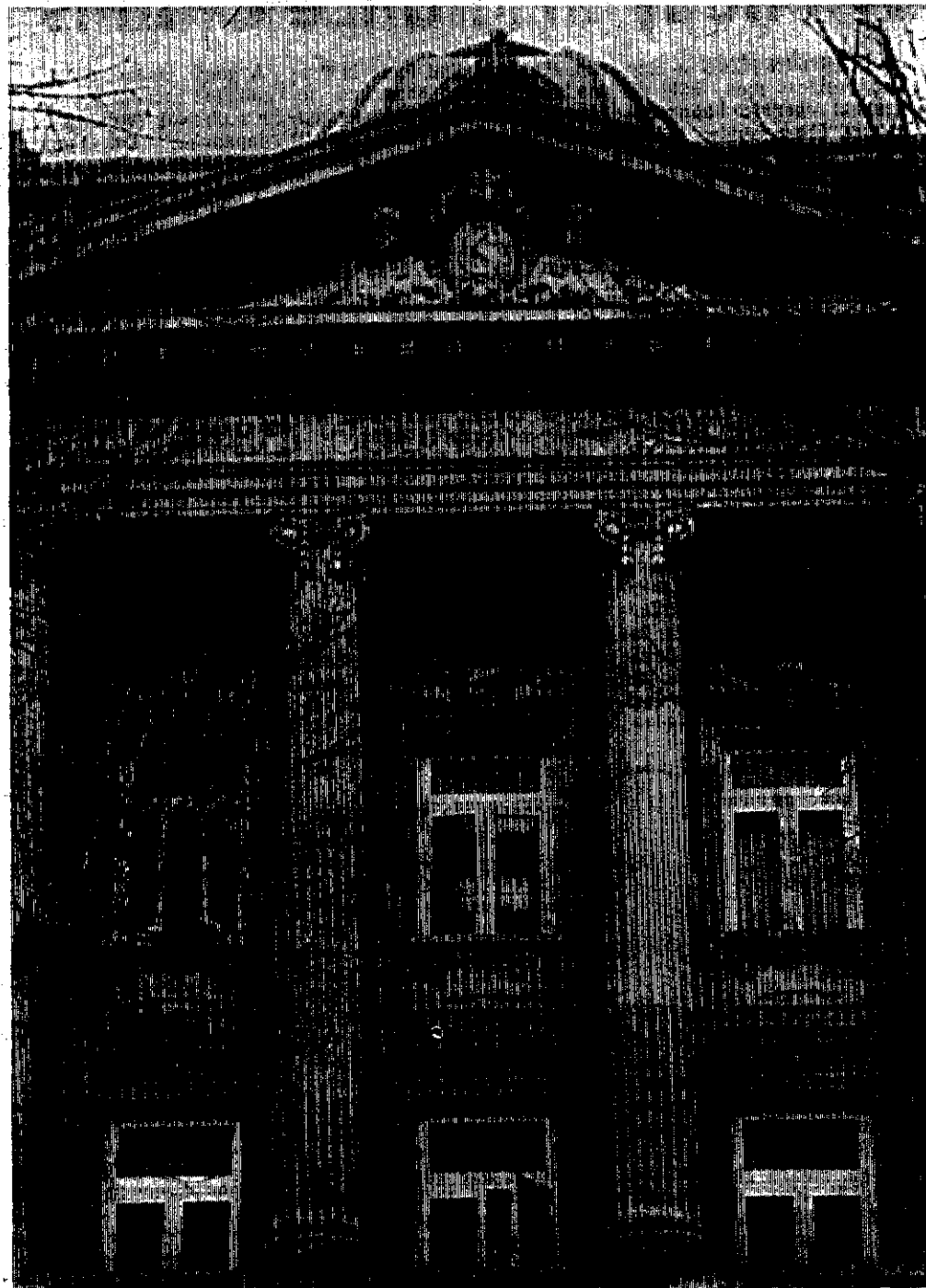
The question, considered an extremely controversial one, was whether the county should have a new court building, to be partially financed by \$150,000 in bonds to be issued by the county.

To the surprise of many, the issue passed by more than 3-1, with 6,500 of the county's estimated 8,000 eligible voters voting.

SO, THE huge granite and

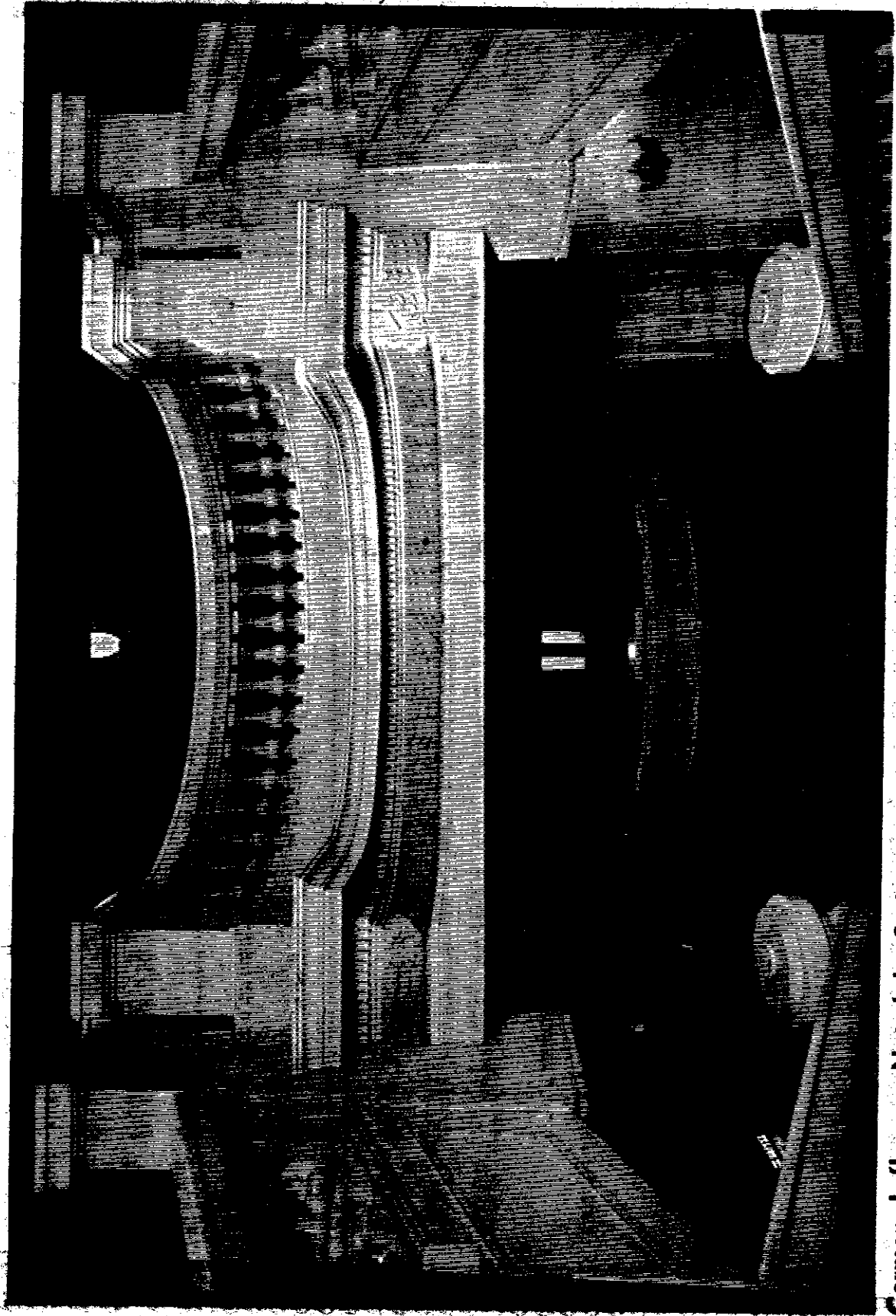
bedrock stone monumental structure went up. It was a magnificent building for its day considered by many as the finest in Illinois. One newspaper editor, after witnessing the laying of the cornerstone, called the building a "modern miracle."

In 1953, Kankakee's centennial year, appraisers said that the cost of preplacing the present courthouse would be in the neighborhood of \$1,400,000. Estimates today run in a richer neighborhood — more than \$2 million.



### Chinese Elms Frame Portico

The portico, framed here by original beams of Chinese elm wood, is the only building of the kind, or such a size, in the Kankakee County courthouse. The beams, which were used in the construction of the building, were developed in the district of Szechwan, China, and are a beautiful example of the finest wood available. The beams were used in the construction of the building, and are a beautiful example of the finest wood available.

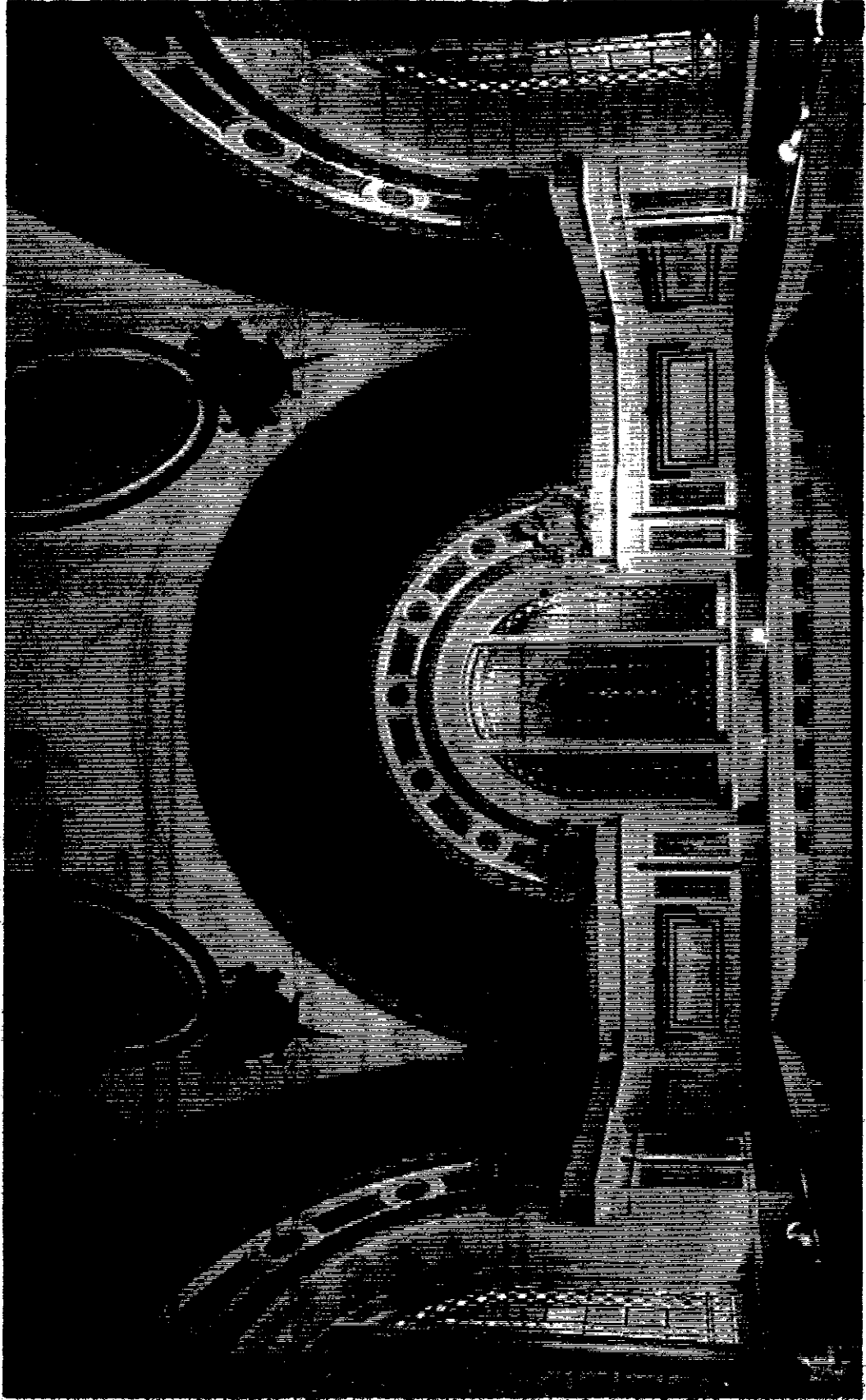


### German Influence Noted In Staircases

The staircases in the courthouse are said to have been modeled after those in the war department building of Germany, a building heralded as the most

beautiful in the world around the turn of the 20th century. This third floor railing, with its curved effect, shows the Baroque architectural influence.

The balusters and newels, or end posts, are made of the finest imported Italian marble.



### **Dome Resembles That Of Cathedral**

A cathedral? The inside of the courthouse dome resembles that of a cathedral in some ways. The stained glass arched windows, for example, are like

those in some churches. The painted murals, sweeping over the windows, depict prosperity, history, dis-

covery and progress. Original domes were in churches, particularly in the Byzantine period.

