

# Self-Guided Tour OF THE COURTHOUSE SQUARE



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1905

SOURCE: MUSEUM OF COLQUITT  
COUNTY HISTORY

## MOULTRIE'S PAST

Moultrie was created by the Georgia Legislature in 1859 three years after the formation of Colquitt County in 1856. This part of the state had been called the dark area of Georgia, referring to the lack of development. Dense pine forests covered the region and the virgin timber was so intertwined that vegetation could not grow beneath it.

For the first few decades of our existence, we were a tiny village at the intersection of two dirt paths. As late as 1890, there were no brick buildings in the downtown area, and the census registered only 65 residents...and then things started to change. The pine forests gave rise to timber and naval stores, and with the arrival of the railroad, Moultrie boomed. Soon, we were known as the 'Magic City' thanks to this economic spurt.

By 1910, the Courthouse Square was surrounded by commercial buildings on all four sides. The timber and naval industries started to run dry, and with the land now cleared, agriculture gained a foothold. By the 1920s, the county was considered one of the greatest farming areas in the South.

In the 1930s, the Moultrie-Colquitt County area was known as the 'Watermelon Center of the World.' Watermelon Festivals were held in the early '30s and one year the prize winning watermelon weighed 84 pounds!





Tobacco was also king. During the 1940s and '50s, we hosted the Southeast Tobacco Festival. It drew thousands of people to downtown Moultrie each year. Participants could enter the Corn Shucking Contest, Hog and Husband Calling Contests, Cake Baking Contest, Bike Race, Hillbilly Jamboree and the Little Miss Brightleaf Beauty Contest.

As the 20th century progressed, our downtown area became the center of community life. Shopping, business, and visiting were all done around the Courthouse Square. Parking meters were installed to manage the limited parking. By the 1960s, traffic congestion led to the creation of one-way streets around the Courthouse Square. In the last quarter of the century, urban flight came even to our rural area. More families chose to live in the suburbs and shopping centers began to pop up.

While some small towns did not survive this outward migration, we did, thanks largely to the adaptability, strength, passion, and determination of our merchants with help from the Main Street Program established in 1989. The Main Street Office, now housed in the Downtown Moultrie Welcome Center, has helped our merchants by adding numerous annual events and developing programs to help new, existing, and expanding business owners. The Main Street Office actively participates in the Downtown Merchants Association, Downtown Moultrie Tomorrow, Inc., and the Downtown Development Authority. Think about joining us for one of our annual events...such as Spring Fling or Lights! Lights! Thanksgiving Night!



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# THE COLQUITT COUNTY COURTHOUSE



# THE COLQUITT COUNTY COURTHOUSE

As you exit the Downtown Moultrie Welcome Center, you will see the first stop on this tour, the Colquitt County Courthouse. Our Courthouse has not always looked like this. For the first years of the county's existence, sessions of court were held in the Mims House. It was located northwest of here near the Ochlochnee River. In 1859, after the formation of Moultrie, native virgin pine forest was cleared and the Courthouse was built in the location we know today. The Courthouse was a one-story log building that was lost to fire in 1881. No known pictures exist. Nearly all county records were lost in the fire, resulting in decades of land ownership litigation over contested property lines.

After the fire, the Courthouse history is unclear: some say county officials built another one-story wooden courthouse, others never mention it. We know definitely that a two-story rectangular white wooden Courthouse was built in 1891. It later became L-shaped due to an addition. When the time came for the present courthouse to be built, the L-shaped courthouse was rolled off the center of the Square on logs.

Our current Courthouse, designed by Atlanta architect Andrew Bryan, Through the years:

**1910**-Workers begin to paint the dome black; outcry ensues

**1938**-WPA (Works Progress Administration) proposes modernization of the building with 45% of costs covered. Three things made officials decide against it: county debt, the recent depression, and the upcoming election.

**1940**-WPA funds more modest renovation

**1956-1957**-Courthouse assumes modern-day configuration of 3 floors with Centennial Renovation

**1980**-Courthouse becomes first downtown building added to the National Register of Historic Sites

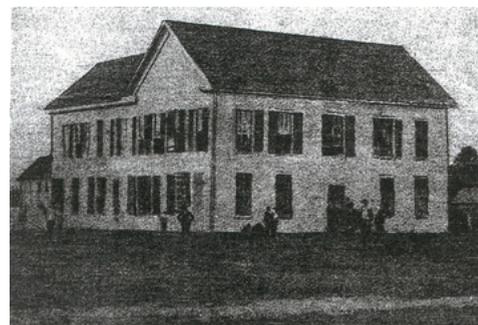
**1990s**-Voters approve sales tax increase that raises \$6,000,000 to fund Courthouse Renovation, making the building ADA compliance-completed in March 2001

The Colquitt County Courthouse is widely acknowledged to be one of the most beautiful courthouses in the state. The Georgia Journal named it the "Perfect Courthouse" in 1994. It is unique among Georgia's 159 courthouses in that it has no main entrance. Instead, there are four entry points, although the Main Street entrance is generally considered to be the front of the courthouse.

Now follow the flow of traffic down the street to the corner of Main Street and Central Avenue. Cross the street and stop at the granite memorial.



**The Mims House  
1857 - 1859**



**The third Courthouse on the Square  
1881-1902**



**The fourth Courthouse on the Square  
1902-present**





# THE ETERNAL FLAME MEMORIAL

This memorial is dedicated to the 179 men from Colquitt County who died in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Iraqi War. The flame you see on top has been burning continuously since the memorial was dedicated on July 4th, 1976, when it was lit to mark our nation's bicentennial. The marble memorial stands on the corner of the square to remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country.



At the foot of this monument lies the Path of Valor. Spearheaded by the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Path of Valor was installed in 2021 to honor United States Armed Forces veterans and active military personnel. Bricks can still be added to the Path of Valor. If you would like more information, inquire at the Downtown Moultrie Welcome Center.

*Next, head up the sidewalk towards the paver lined walk that contains three markers. It is located along South Main Street in front of a massive magnolia tree.*



# THE THREE MARKERS

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## COLQUITT COUNTY HISTORICAL MARKER

The middle plaque in front of you is a state historical marker. It was installed in 1954 to tell citizens and visitors about the founding of Colquitt County. Colquitt County was created from portions of Thomas and Lowndes Counties in 1856. At that time, the City of Moultrie did not exist. There were no towns or villages in the new county. Colquitt County is named after Walter T. Colquitt, a lawyer and Methodist preacher. Additional information about him can be found on the plaque in front of you.





# AGRICULTURAL TOTEM POLE

The second plaque, to the left, talks about the totem pole that once stood on our Courthouse Square. Erecting a totem pole downtown was no easy task. The first challenge its creator faced was where to find a suitable tree for carving. If one were delivered from the west coast, it would cost \$1,500! So, a local search began. After some weeks, its creator, W. E. Aycock, Sr., remembered a cypress tree he had seen several years before. He was able to find it again but couldn't see what the trunk looked like because of underbrush near the tree. He asked the county farm for some convicts who could help. The convicts, with machetes and bush hooks, were able to cut a path to the tree, which appeared ideal for becoming a totem pole. The tree was donated, and work began on drying the log. This was done by drilling a hole the length of the log and using a home vacuum cleaner in reverse to blow heat generated by butane gas through what would become the totem pole. Once the log was dry, it took 88-year-old Aycock, Sr., four and a half months to carve.

Featured on the totem pole were life-sized heads of a Hereford bull, an Aberdeen-Angus bull, a Polled Shorthorn, and a Holstein heifer. Beneath that was a two-foot-long peanut, a five-foot stalk of corn, a leaf

of tobacco, a stalk of cotton, and at the bottom was a glass-enclosed bulletin board and display case. The totem pole was 38 and a half feet tall. State foresters believed it was carved from a 302-year-old Cypress tree. It was installed in 1963 to celebrate the county's agricultural diversity.

Twelve years, three months, and two days after being dedicated, the totem pole was brought down on January 21st, 1976. It was "critically ill" due to termites and was almost completely rotten on the inside. The plan was for it to be taken to a pest control company for termite treatment then to Moultrie High School for touchup work. But after news of it being brought down for repairs, no articles have been found stating it was ever put up again. Its final resting place remains a mystery.





## SOUTHERN MAGNOLIA

The third plaque, on the right, discusses the larger of the two magnolia trees you see on the Courthouse Square. Historians believe this southern magnolia tree, also known as a *Magnolia Grandiflora*, was planted in 1908. This would make the tree more than 114 years old! To put that in perspective, this magnolia tree was around before we started hanging lights from the Courthouse Cupola. It has also been the site of many proposals and weddings.

This magnolia tree located on the northwest corner of the square was officially placed on the Landmark and Historic Tree Register in July 2021.

*Next, continue heading up the South Main Street sidewalk, and take a left to the monument located on the Courthouse Square's Southwest corner, across from Moultrie Pawn Shop.*



# CONFEDERATE MONUMENT



You now stand in front of a 30-foot tall monument made of Oglesby Marble dedicated to Colquitt County men who served in the Confederacy during the Civil War. You can see a nearly life-sized confederate soldier at the top of the monument. On opposite sides of the base are engraved blocks with the names of Colquitt County soldiers who lost their lives during the war. Erected in 1909 by the Moultrie United Daughters of the Confederacy, the marble statue is the tallest confederate monument in Southwest Georgia and one of the tallest in the state.

*Continue heading straight on the sidewalk and go towards the Courthouse's southern entrance (across from the breezeway.) There you will see a marble water fountain.*





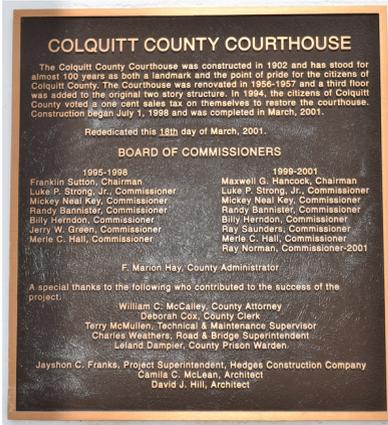
## MARBLE WATER FOUNTAIN

The marble water fountain was erected in memory of Roswell G. Clark after his death in 1923. Clark served as Clerk of Superior Court for 20 years before serving two years in the Georgia House of Representatives. Clark was known for his penmanship, especially his distinctive signature. To honor his memory, Clark's fancy signature was carved into the marble base.

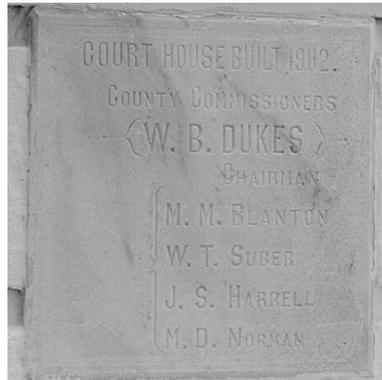


*Now walk up to the Courthouse steps.*

# COURTHOUSE PLAQUES & MARKERS



The side facing the fountain is the southern entrance. There is a large plaque on the left side, noting the completion of the building and its many restorations. Right next to this is a survey bench marker. In 1917, U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey engineers came to Colquitt County. While here, they determined the Colquitt County Courthouse is 333 feet above sea level. To the right of the doors are two plaques. One is for the Centennial Renovation of 1956-1957. The other plaque celebrates the courthouse turning 100 years old.



Additionally, just around the southeastern corner, you will find a courthouse cornerstone noting the completion of the building in 1902. Continue on to the eastern entrance and you will find a plaque noting the Courthouse was improved by the Works Projects Administration in 1940.

*Next return to the sidewalk on the east side of the Courthouse.*





# BELL

To your right, you will see a bell. Donated by local businessman J. Hinton Reeves in 2003, it is dedicated to the memory of Pauline Reeves Kelly and M.D. Kelly, founders of Kelly Reeves Furniture Company (1934-2000).

*Now, continue heading back towards the  
Downtown Moultrie Welcome Center.*



# OFFICER'S MEMORIAL

The rectangular granite monument on your left is the Officer's Memorial, dedicated on November 20th, 2007. It stands on the Square to recognize and remember the fallen heroes that gave their lives in service of the citizens of Moultrie and Colquitt County. When it was erected, the monument contained the names of five police officers that had fallen in the line of duty. The memorial also has spaces to honor fallen firefighters and public safety personnel; however, at this time, those sections remain blank. Harrell-Faircloth Funeral Home donated this monument.



*Walk over to the stage.*





## LEWIS HILL AMPHITHEATER

The Lewis Hill amphitheater was dedicated in 2002. Named after Hill, a former President of the Downtown Moultrie Association, the amphitheater is where people can relax, enjoy a picnic, a concert, and talk. It is also one of the best places to sit during many city sponsored events, including Second Saturdays, Spring Fling, and Lights! Lights! Thanksgiving Night!



*This concludes your tour of our Courthouse Square. Please return this guide to the Downtown Moultrie Welcome Center.*





**As you conclude your tour of the Courthouse Square, you are invited to return for a special treat. On Thanksgiving Night of each year, the City of Moultrie and the Downtown Moultrie Welcome Center host Lights! Lights! Thanksgiving Night! Santa, live reindeer, train and pony rides, stilt-walkers, and more help our fantastic town kick off the Christmas season. At 6:00 PM, all of the strands that make up the Canopy of Lights burst to life, shining bright, in an unforgettable moment.**

***For more information on this event and others throughout the year, visit our website, Facebook, or Instagram pages.***

## **Contact Us:**

 Downtown Moultrie GA

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[www.downtownmoultrie.com](http://www.downtownmoultrie.com)

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