Superior Court of Fulton County:
A Pictorial History

1 8 5 3 - 2 0 0 8

Fulton County Court Timeline

- **1853**: Fulton County Superior Court established.

- **1864**: Courthouse grounds occupied by Federal troops.

- **1882**: Fulton's first free-standing courthouse opens.

- **1911**: Work begins on a new Fulton courthouse.

- **1914**: When completed at a cost of $1,250,000, Fulton County had Georgia's first million-dollar courthouse

- **1960**: a new six-story Fulton County Administration Building is built behind the Courthouse to house county agencies, officials, and the Fulton County Commission

- **1989**: A new Fulton government building opens, replacing the Administration Building.

- **1996**: Fulton's nine-story Justice Center Tower opens.

Court began in City Hall

The Fulton Court's first home, a combination city hall-county courthouse, opened in Oct. 1854. Costing $35,000, the two-story brick building measured 50' x 70', and boasted a wooden, two-tiered tower topped by a small dome with bronze eagle.
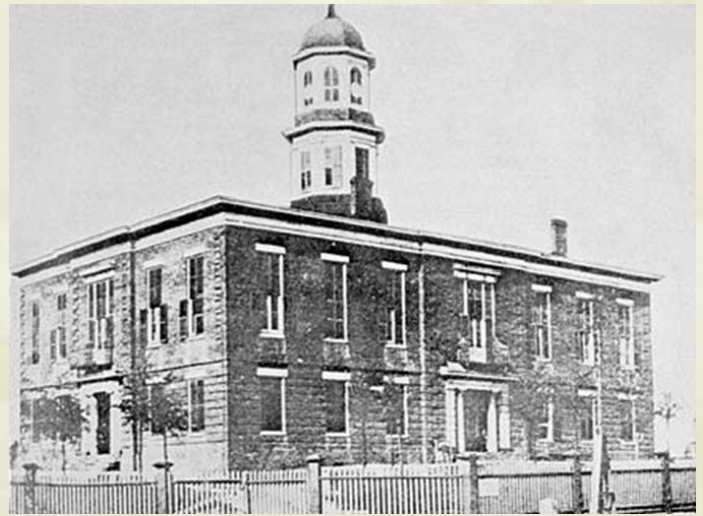
When Fulton County was created in Dec. 1853, the city of Atlanta was building its first city hall on a hill overlooking Atlanta.

City officials agreed to set aside half of the building as a courthouse for the new county.

Fulton County could use the new city hall as its courthouse rent-free for as long as it desired.

The joint city hall — county courthouse opened in Oct. 1854 and served both Atlanta and Fulton County for almost 30 years.

In September 1864, after federal troops captured Atlanta, the 2nd Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry camped on the grounds of the city hall — county courthouse.

Earlier, Fulton officials had moved county records to Zebulon, Ga. for safekeeping.

Though spared from burning, the city hall — county courthouse suffered abuse during its occupation by Sherman's forces.

In Oct. 1865, the Fulton County grand jury recommended that the county's part of the joint building be "repaired thoroughly."

During Reconstruction, Atlanta was designated state capital, and from July 1868 to Jan. 1869, the city hall-

Fulton Courthouse Spared Sherman's Torch

county courthouse took on a third function — Georgia's Capitol. The building served as Georgia's temporary statehouse from July 1868 to January 1869.

Conditions were so overcrowded, however, that the nearby unfinished Kimball Opera House was quickly converted for use as state capitol.

After state government moved to its new home, the city hall — county courthouse continued as home for Atlanta and Fulton County governments.

In 1877, in a deal to keep the state capital from returning to Milledgeville, Atlanta city officials offered to tear down the city hall — county courthouse and build in its place a new state capitol. When the legislature accepted the offer, Fulton County began making plans for a new facility.

In 1879, the legislature to pass a law allowing Fulton County to levy a tax to fund construction of a new courthouse. On Nov. 1, 1880, the land on which the old city hall-county courthouse was located was deeded to the state.

Fulton County officials began planning for a new courthouse. That facility -- a two-story red brick structure with a prominent clock tower -- was completed in 1882. It was located at the corner of Hunter St. [now MLK Jr. Ave.] and Pryor St. — on the site of the current Fulton County Courthouse.

Construction of Fulton's first free-standing courthouse began in 1881

When completed in 1882, Fulton's first free-standing courthouse had cost Fulton taxpayers $100,000.

But before long an even more grand structure would be erected - Georgia's first $1 million Courthouse.

The combined Atlanta City Hall -Fulton County Courthouse was spared by Union soldiers who burned Atlanta in 1864. Its grounds were used as an encampment area for the 2nd Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry.

Atlanta's Post-Civil War Boom Spurs Court Expansion

Fulton's second courthouse as pictured in two 19th Century postcards.

20th Century Dawns to Georgia's First Million-Dollar-Courthouse

This postcard contains no postmark or other information to help identify the date of the postcard or photograph. But, as the courthouse was completed in 1914, this photo probably was taken between 1914 and 1920.

By 1907, plans were underway for an even, larger courthouse, and the legislature passed an act that year allowing the county to issue bonds to finance its construction.

In 1911, the old courthouse was torn down, and on the same site work began on Fulton County's third (and present) courthouse.

When completed in 1914 at a cost of $1,250,000, Fulton County had Georgia's first million-dollar-courthouse.

Growth Brings Changes, but Mission Still Justice for All

It was also the largest government building, surpassing in square footage Georgia's state capitol.

Despite the new courthouse's size, Fulton County's booming population by the 1960s necessitated additional facilities for the county's government which was then housed in the courthouse.

The courthouse occupied half of a square block, so a six-story Fulton County Administration Building was built behind it to house county agencies, officials, and the Fulton County Commission.

By the 1980s, Fulton's county government had outgrown existing facilities, so in 1986 work began on a new Fulton County Government Center -- a large complex across the street from the entrance of the courthouse.

Completed in 1989, this structure remains the home for Fulton County administrative and legislative offices.

The Fulton County Administrative Building was torn down and replaced in 1996 by the nine-story Fulton Justice Tower.

Today, Fulton County Superior Court is Georgia's largest and busiest trial court of general jurisdiction. It is the state's only single-county judicial administrative district.

The Fulton Superior Court's 19 judges preside over administrative appeals, civil, major criminal, and domestic relations cases.

Through several innovative programs, the Court is increasing meaningful access to the judicial system for Fulton County citizens.

The Court's pioneering programs include: , Diversionary Drug Court, Mental Health Court, Family Court, and Business Court.

These and other specialty programs to speed case resolution and reduce jail crowding benefit from the coordinated effort of all justice system partners.

Photo: Ed Jackson
Former Fulton County Administration Building

Photo: Ashley Stollar
The Fulton County Justice Tower, a nine-story glass structure within an easy walk of the State Capitol, houses courtrooms of Fulton County's Superior , State and Magistrate courts. All lawsuits brought by or against state government are heard by the Superior Court of Fulton County.

The future will undoubtedly bring more growth and the need for larger facilities. But as the court grows in this new century it's mission remains:

"Providing Access to Justice for All."