

2018 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

Rock Island County Courthouse



Credit: Landmarks Illinois

- **Location:** 210 15th Street, Rock Island, Rock Island County
- **Built:** 1897
- **Architect:** Fredrick C. Gunn and Louis S. Curtis
- **Current owner:** Rock Island County
- **Historic significance:** Historic example of Spanish Renaissance or Roman-style architecture. Determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2017.
- **Why it is endangered:** Faces demolition following the completion of a new Justice Center in late 2018.

Serving as the seat of county government since 1897, the Rock Island County Courthouse is threatened by demolition following the completion of a new Justice Center in late 2018. The current plan would move courthouse operations from the historic courthouse to the new Justice Center and proponents of demolition are suggesting the 1897 building be replaced with greenspace.

In 1833, when the city of Stephenson (now known as Rock Island) was established, an area was set aside for what would become Courthouse Square. Three years later, the first courthouse was built on the square, but was soon expanded to meet the needs of a growing industrial city.

By the 1890s, the railway had brought industry to Rock Island along with prosperity. As the county's population grew due to work in the lumber, pottery and farm manufacturing industries, it became apparent that a larger building was needed for governmental operations. In 1895, the building committee approved the designs submitted by the Kansas City firm of Fredrick C. Gunn and Louis S. Curtis for a new four-story courthouse adjacent to the outdated structure.

Designed in the Spanish Renaissance, or Roman style, and completed in 1897, this courthouse closely resembles the Tarrant County Courthouse in Fort Worth, Texas, also constructed by Gunn and Curtis around the same time. Constructed at a cost of over \$100,000, the building is of both blue and buff-toned Bedford limestone. The building exhibits a variety of forms, including rounded arch windows and door recesses, balconies and a standing-seam metal roof. The original six domes on the courthouse were removed in 1958, a decision stemming from deterioration of the domes' copper roofing.



Credit: Landmarks Illinois

With the construction of a new Justice Center, the county board turned to the public for feedback on what to do with the historic courthouse, which was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2017. The public overwhelmingly supported retention and reuse of the courthouse. While the authority to retain or demolish the historic courthouse resides with the county board, members of the Public Building Commission (PBC) have been lobbying for the ability to clear the site for green space. In addition, unsubstantiated cost estimates are frequently cited to support calls for demolition. With strong public support for reuse and the potential of substantial demolition costs, a professional evaluation of reuse options with cost estimates would be the most fiscally responsible use of taxpayer funds.

What you can do:

- Contact the [Rock Island County Board](#) to let them know that you support exploring reuse options for the historic courthouse.
- Ideas or contacts to share? Reach out to the [Rock Island Preservation Society](#) or Landmarks Illinois Springfield Office Director Frank Butterfield at fbutterfield@landmarks.org.

Additional Links:

- “Rock Island County Courthouse eligible for National Register of Historic Places,” *Rock Island Argus*, November 17, 2017: http://qconline.com/news/local/rock-island-county-courthouse-eligible-for-national-register-of-historic/article_aa183edf-a509-5e59-990e-2bb5bc8de86d.html
- “Fate of Rock Island County Courthouse in limbo as county board alleges IGA was altered,” *The Rock Island Argus*, January 17, 2018:

http://qconline.com/news/local/fate-of-rock-island-county-courthouse-in-limbo-as-county/article_7coe1fb4-9e39-58a2-925b-b7f1088ab00a.html

- “RIPS launches campaign for RICo Courthouse,” *Rock Island Argus*, April 16, 2018:
http://qconline.com/news/local/rips-launches-campaign-for-rico-courthouse/article_48198473-054f-55fo-b6dc-ba18fddb58a6.html
- Watch a recent WQPT Quad Cities broadcast with the Rock Island Preservation Society:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKPhl6-dcMU>