

Tour Stop #2 – 1885 Courthouse



The 1885 Courthouse, located downtown, is the centerpiece of the Charlotte community. This landmark has been used extensively in advertising as the symbol for the city and is as beautiful today, as the day it was finished in 1885. This tree-story building has a strong presence with its four-foot wide footings, and two-foot thick walls on the first floor. The first floor is an elevated basement faced with rough tooled stone blocks. The upper floors are faced with painted red brick. White stone bands ring the walls. A three-stage cupola rises from the center of the roof containing a column belfry and octagonal clock dome. The structure is 111 feet tall including the nine-foot, pressed zinc statue of Lady Justice.

In 1885, the artist F. A. Grace covered the interior courthouse walls with beautiful murals. He is also known for his paintings in the Honolulu House in Marshall and the Dr. Mary Green house, now Burkhead-Green Funeral Home in Charlotte. The courthouse is home to a beautiful restored stained glass ceiling. A second piece of stained glass above the courtroom doorway was commissioned by the Charlotte Women's Club for the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago and placed in the courthouse upon its return. Overall, the elaborate woodwork, tile floors and stained glass are a testament to the architectural design and craftsmanship of the period.

In addition to the beautiful architecture, the 1885 Courthouse is home to Eaton County's Museum at Courthouse Square. The building now houses numerous exhibits based around the history of Eaton County.

A display of Eaton County's Historical Markers and Sites has recently been added to the Museum.. Also, new this year, are the beautiful display showcases and built in casework from the former Young's Jewelry Store; which contains the recently acquired Dolson Collection.

The **Dolson** was a brass era automobile manufactured in Charlotte, Michigan by the J.L. Dolson & Sons from 1904 to 1907. They later changed the company name to the Dolson Automobile Company. The Dolson was a large car with a 60-horsepower engine. They offered a seven-seater touring car that in 1907 cost US \$3,250. It was advertised as the "Mile-a-Minute" car. They also offered smaller vehicles, with chain- and shaft-driven 20 hp flat-twins, and a shaft driven four of 28/30-horsepower. The formerly stately red brick family home is located at the corner of Horatio and Henry.

Other exhibits on the main floor include the Eaton County Hall of History, with information on each town in the county, the Military Exhibit, with artifacts from the Civil War through the Vietnam War, and our temporary exhibit space, which currently houses an exhibit about David W. Gibbs, the architect who designed the courthouse. The upper floor features the restored Circuit Courtroom, Law Library and Judge's Chambers along with a few other historical exhibits.

Since 1995, the Courthouse Square, its buildings and monuments, have been owned and maintained by the non-profit organization Courthouse Square Association. Exhibits, programming and building restoration are funded entirely through donations and agreements with local governmental organizations that are renegotiated on an annual basis.

We are proud to showcase this wonderful historic building, as it continues to provide a look at the history of Charlotte and the vitality of today's community.

