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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic ROCKINGHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE

and/or common

2. Location

street & number COURTHOUSE SQUARE N/A not for publication

city, town HARRISONBURG N/A vicinity of congressional district

state VIRGINIA code 51 county In City code 660

3. Classification

Table with 4 columns: Category, Ownership, Status, Present Use. Includes options like public/private, occupied/unoccupied, agriculture/commercial/educational/government/industrial/military, museum/park/private residence/religious/scientific/transportation/other.

4. Owner of Property

name Rockingham County Board of Supervisors

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Harrisonburg N/A vicinity of state VIRGINIA zip code 22801

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Rockingham County Courthouse

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Harrisonburg state Virginia zip code 22801

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic American Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1958 federal state county local

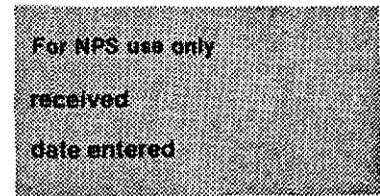
depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state D.C.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
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ROCKINGHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE, Harrisonburg, Va.



Continuation sheet

#3

Item number

6

Page 1

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
1967, 1972, 1982 State
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
221 Governor Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Resources at the center/Location: [faded text]

As a [faded text]

[faded text]

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one		
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed				

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Rockingham County Courthouse is an imposing example of a skillful but somewhat provincial blending of the fashionable late 19th-century Renaissance Revival and Richardsonian Romanesque styles. As such, it shows the period's penchant for monumentality and rich effect. Its mass, materials, and ornament combine to make the courthouse the county's grandest architectural statement. As in the case of many midwestern communities, the courthouse dominates the center of town, being located in a square surrounded by commercial buildings.

COURTHOUSE ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Rockingham County Courthouse is Harrisonburg's most visible landmark located on a central square in the downtown business district. The 3½-story building of coursed rusticated ashlar above a raised basement and stepped water table terminates in a tile-covered hipped roof. A molded cornice with dentilwork above a plain frieze outlines the perimeter of the roof. The overall Richardsonian Romanesque design combined with eclectic details is expressed by the structure's varying elevations. A central projecting pavilion with clock tower marks the main entrance on the building's south end. The entrance, in antis, has wide double doors with sidelights and transom below a heavy balustrade frieze separating the opening from a semi-circular fanlight. The entrance is protected by the pavilion's triple arched portico on the first story formed by slender columns set on squared pedestals with a heavy stone balustrade above. The center second-story bay consisting of paired windows flanked by pilasters supporting a broken pediment and cartouche, breaks forward from the plane of the pavilion. A casement window is centered over the opening with an oval window to each side. The two-stage tower rises up from the central bay. Scrolled consoles decorate its sides at the roof level. Three narrow round-arched windows in the first stage echo the treatment of the portico. The tower is accented by rusticated corners imitating pilasters. A deep molded cornice separates the tower's two levels. The upper stage displays a clock face on each of its sides. A statue of Justice enhances the domical tiled roof with ventilation openings encased in arches.

The rear elevation (north) repeats the treatment of the facade but in a much simpler manner. The central pavilion has plain paired arched windows on the first story with double hung-sash above framed by an elaborate broken arch resting on paired Doric and Corinthian pilasters. A Palladian window provides light through a massive wall dormer which balances the clock tower at the opposite end of the building.

The east and west elevations are identical. On these sides the mass of the building shifts so that the central four bays are recessed and the four-bay end wings project forward from the plane of the elevation. Secondary entrances are located in the center bays sheltered by arcaded porticos similar in form to the building's facade.

Paired semi-circular arched two/two double-hung sash with round arches connected by the impost of the arches creating a string course are used consistently throughout the first story. One/one double-hung sash surmounted by cornices with plain spandrels joining the attic's casement windows with shouldered surrounds defines the upper stories. A double belt-course circles the building uniting the different elevations and creating a horizontal emphasis to the otherwise vertical composition.

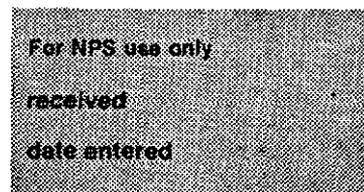
Located within the three stories are the circuit courtroom, the district courtroom, the county records office, and various county administration offices. Prior to the

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

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7 - DESCRIPTION -- Architectural Analysis

remodeling of the interior, carried out in 1931 by C.H. Hinant of Lynchburg, the courts met on the main floor. A ballroom which accommodated 700 people covered the second floor. During the renovation this space was partitioned and remodeled. The Circuit courtroom was moved from the first floor into a portion of the second-floor ballroom space. The focal point of the room is the tall, oak judge's bench set in a recess. Centered behind the bench is a paneled screen with a carved tablet of the scales of justice. A railing composed of heavy turned balusters and swinging paneled doors divides this area from the auditorium which has plain wooden benches in rows creating a center aisle down the sloping floor. Fluted panels set at intervals around the room accentuate its vertical appearance. Horizontal molding bands set in two tiers encircle the room and connect the panels.

The district courtroom was moved to the third floor during the 1931 renovation and has recently been remodeled. During the earlier renovation, the main entrance which had opened into a central lobby was converted into a hall with the main stair and elevator, the stairs having been removed from the tower. At that date the present architrave trim and marble wainscot and baseboard were added on the first floor.

MPM

8. SIGNIFICANCE - Historical Background

design competition in 1792. T. J. Collins, practicing in Washington and Kentucky before moving to Staunton in 1890, was responsible for nearly 200 structures in Staunton and the Shenandoah Valley including Staunton's National Valley Bank, Thornrose Cemetery and the Augusta County Courthouse as well as Harrisonburg's Asbury Methodist Church, Blessed Sacrament Church, Rockingham Motor Company and various houses including the former Presbyterian manse and the John J. Yancey House, both on Market Street. Although Collins was self-taught and clearly relied on current periodicals for many of his ideas, he rarely copied directly. In general, he employed the Gothic style for church designs and incorporated Richardsonian Romanesque and French Renaissance elements in his designs for large residences. The Rockingham County Courthouse, which reflects his personal preference for Richardsonian Romanesque, resembles the design for the U.S. Court in Wilmington, Delaware, a picture of which appeared in the 1892 Annual Report of the Supervising Architect of the U. S. Treasury. However, Collins's own imagination is apparent in such varied elements as the window designs, the wooden elements around the doors, and the differing elevations.³ Collins's firm remains prominent in the Shenandoah Valley under the current leadership of Joseph Johnson, his grandson.

The pride with which citizens regarded the new courthouse is reflected in the speech of Judge John Paul at its dedication in September 1897. He called it "a monument to the energy, industry, and progress of the people of Rockingham..."⁴ Another prominent speaker, Senator John W. Daniel of Lynchburg, regarded it as "a symbol for local self-government and the federated union...a model for other counties."⁵

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1896-7 **Builder/Architect** T. J. Collins

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Rockingham County Courthouse is a monument both to the talent of Staunton architect T. J. Collins and to the civic pride of the citizens of Rockingham at the end of the 19th century. One of nearly 200 buildings designed by Collins during his long career, including a number of prominent Harrisonburg churches and residences, the courthouse reveals Collins's interest in both of the then fashionable Richardsonian Romanesque and Renaissance Revival styles. With its lively and contrasting elevations and lofty clock tower, the courthouse remains Harrisonburg's most conspicuous architectural landmark. The building was constructed by the Washington, D. C. firm of W. E. Spiers between 1896 and 1897, and is the fifth courthouse to stand on the site since Rockingham was formed from Augusta in 1778.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Rockingham County, formed from Augusta County in 1778, is named for Charles Watson Wentworth, Marquess of Rockingham, who championed the rights of the American colonists in Parliament throughout the constitutional struggle that preceded the war for independence. Land for the county's public buildings was given by Thomas Harrison, an early settler at Big Spring in the Shenandoah Valley. A copy of the deed for the 2½-acre parcel, which lay at the center of the settlement that grew to become the city of Harrisonburg, is encased in the cornerstone of the present courthouse. A log structure completed in 1781 served as the first county courthouse until 1791.

Rockingham's second courthouse was constructed of stone by local tavernkeeper Brewer Reeves at a cost of nearly \$1,000 -- an expensive undertaking that raised the ire of some of the local freeholders. The third Rockingham courthouse, a picture of which survives, was a plain neat brick building ... of 50 by 40 feet ... with a gallery between the stories at one of the table ends." Built in 1833, this structure had a center cupola and served the county with some modifications until it was deemed unsafe in the wake of the 1870 Richmond capitol disaster in which many lives were lost.

The fourth courthouse, also built of brick but larger than its predecessor, was completed in 1874 by Holmes and Rust of Charles Town, West Virginia, at a cost of \$11,450. According to an old manuscript discovered by John W. Wayland, the "main building was to front 45 feet and be 85 feet deep, with a portico in front ..., the main walls and partitions were to be of brick, the foundations of stone."²

When estimates for repairs to the fourth courthouse were found to be excessive, the county board of supervisors decided in 1896 to build yet another courthouse for Rockingham. County Judge George Grattan approved a board resolution in favor of the undertaking and the plans of Staunton architect T. J. Collins were selected, with the contract for construction awarded to W. E. Spier of Washington, D. C.

Collins came from a distinguished family of architects with five generations in the same profession. His grandfather, John Collins of Washington, won second prize in the White House (See Continuation Sheet #1)

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8. SIGNIFICANCE - Historical Background

A 1900 publication entitled The New Era - Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, describes the courthouse as a very large and beautiful building of Indiana white sandstone and native limestone, a large and imposing building of fine proportions ... one of the finest county buildings in the state."⁶ One unusual feature of the courthouse was its second floor auditorium or "opera house," both seating 800 and rented out by the county for large meetings and entertainments. Both the scale and materials of the building are indicative of the widespread prosperity which Rockingham County enjoyed in the 1890s.

The interior of the Rockingham County Courthouse was remodeled in 1931 at a cost of \$100,000. The old tower clock, used in both the 1874 and 1896 courthouses, was then replaced with a new one. It is a tribute to Collins's design, the workmanship of the contractors, and the civic pride of the people of Rockingham, that the late-19th century courthouse continues to stand as an important visual focal point for the cityscape.

MTP/RAC

¹ John W. Wayland, Historic Harrisonburg, (Harrisonburg: C. J. Carrier Co., 1973), p. 37.

² Ibid., p. 38.

³ William T. Frazier, "T. J. Collins: A Local Virginia Architect and His Practice at the Turn of the Century" (Master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1970), passim.

⁴ Rockingham Register, 1 October 1897.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The New Era -- Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, Virginia - The Heart of the Shenandoah Valley, (Harrisonburg Evening News: Job Print, 1900), p. 5.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Rockingham Register, 16 October 1896; 13, 20 August 1897; 1 October 1897.

Wayland, John W. A History of Rockingham County, Virginia. Dayton, Virginia, 1912.
Historic Harrisonburg. Harrisonburg: C. J. Carrier Co., 1973; reprint from 1949 edition.

The New Era - Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, Virginia - The Heart of the Shenandoah Valley. Harrisonburg Evening News: Job Print, 1900.

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

