

# Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

## Scanned Record Cover Page

<b>Inventory No:</b>	CON.301
<b>Historic Name:</b>	Middlesex County Courthouse
<b>Common Name:</b>	Middlesex Mutual Fire Insurance Company
<b>Address:</b>	34 Monument Sq
<b>City/Town:</b>	Concord
<b>Village/Neighborhood:</b>	Concord Center
<b>Local No:</b>	H9-845
<b>Year Constructed:</b>	1851
<b>Architect(s):</b>	Little, Harry Britton
<b>Architectural Style(s):</b>	Colonial Revival; Italianate; Renaissance Revival
<b>Use(s):</b>	Business Office; Courthouse; Doctor Or Dentist Office; Furniture Factory; Lawyer Office; Other Religious
<b>Significance:</b>	Architecture; Commerce; Community Planning; Law; Politics Government; Religion
<b>Area(s):</b>	CON.A: Concord Monument Sq-Lexington Road Historic Dist. CON.DV: North Bridge - Monument Square Historic District
<b>Designation(s):</b>	Local Historic District (03/05/1973); Nat'l Register District (09/13/1977)
<b>Building Materials(s):</b>	Roof: Slate Wall: Brick; Copper; Wood; Wood Clapboard Foundation: Coursed Ashlar; Granite; Stone, Cut



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H9-845

Concord

A <sup>DV</sup>

301

NR: DIS; LHD

315173



Concord

Neighborhood or village)

Concord center

34

30

Monument Square

Name Middlesex County Courthouse

Present office building

Original courthouse

Construction 1851

Keyes, Drake, Hurd

Italianate/Renaissance Revival

Architect/Builder main building: unknown;  
 1940 addition: Harry Little

Exterior Material:

Foundation two courses granite block

Wall/Trim wood clapboard (original block);  
 brick (additions)

Roof slate

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures

none

Major Alterations (with dates) additions:

1940, 1950, 1961; major remodeling 1965

Lantern removed ca. 1900

Condition excellent

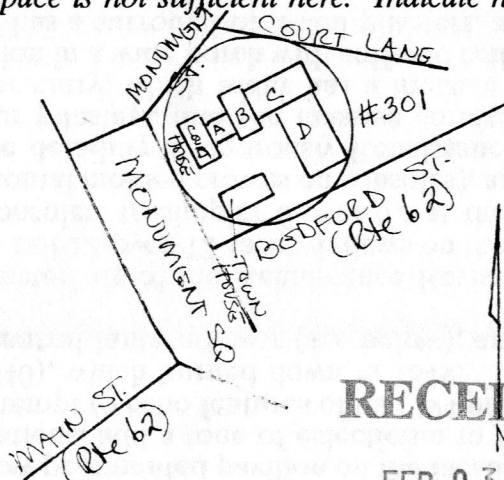
Moved [X] no [ ] yes Date N/A

Acreage one acre

Setting At corner of Court Lane, facing Monument Sq., adjacent to Town House. Mature deciduous trees at front & NW side.

## Sketch Map

Draw a map of the area indicating properties within it. Number each property for which individual inventory forms have been completed. Label streets, including route numbers, if any. Attach a separate sheet if space is not sufficient here. Indicate north.



RECEIVED

FEB 03 1997

Recorded by Anne Forbes, consultant

research by Karen Silver

Organization Concord Hist. Commission

Date 11/96

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION [X] *see continuation sheet*

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

A handsome, well-proportioned building that would be an asset to any community, the former Middlesex County Courthouse at Concord is highly significant as the town's only building in the Renaissance Revival style. It is an unusual example of the style executed in clapboard instead of the more common masonry, three stories high, five- by three bays, with a hipped slate roof, and a shallow pedimented pavilion on the facade. Hints of other styles, some of which may represent later alterations, add a tone of eclecticism to the building. Part of the building's design may come from an attempt to echo features of its 1794 predecessor (remodeled, probably in the Greek Revival style, in 1840), which burned down in 1849. That building also had a hipped roof with roof walk and a tall central lantern/tower (see below), and a shallow, pedimented central facade pavilion.

Characteristic of the Renaissance Revival, there is a hierarchy of windows here, ranging from the three tall 12-over-12-sash windows on the pavilion, which have heavy pedimented crowns supported on consoles, to simpler 6-over-6's at the first and at the rest of the second story (the latter with horizontal molded crowns on consoles), and the small 3-over-3-sash windows at the third story. Most of the detailing is vigorously Renaissance-inspired, including the heavy modillioned cornice, wide corner pilasters, and the massive cornice with paneled frieze below the second story. The main center entry, which today has a modern double multi-light and panel door, is recessed under the pavilion in a wide porch with coffered ceiling, fronted by two pairs of Corinthian columns. The entry itself has a surround of fluted pilasters, and is topped with an open pediment with pineapple finial in the center. (Cont.)

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE [X] *see continuation sheet*

*Explain history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

The Concord Courthouse has major significance at both the state and local levels. Along with the former County House across the square (see Form #330), it stands as a reminder of Concord's longtime status, from at least 1692, as a "shire town". Although in spite of repeated local efforts Concord never became the county seat of Middlesex County, for nearly 200 years court sessions were held regularly here, first in the meetinghouse, then beginning in 1721 in a combined courthouse and townhouse on the southwest side of the common. That courthouse was built at the northwest end of the square, largely of materials salvaged from the second meetinghouse, which, even though it had been superseded by a larger church in 1710-1712, had continued in use for the next ten years for court sessions and town meetings.

In 1794 the county built a new 70 x 50-foot, two-story courthouse on the present site, with a two-stage lantern and cupola in the center of the roof and a narrow, pedimented pavilion on the facade. Its builder is believed to have been Daniel Davis (Davies) of Acton. (At that time David Page purchased the old building, and Deacon John White subsequently bought it and moved it, with the old weathervane from the second meetinghouse still in place, behind his store to use for a barn--see Form #298--Colonial Inn). The 1794 courthouse was large enough to accommodate much of the legal affairs of Middlesex County, including the Supreme, Common Pleas, and Probate Courts, the Court of Sessions, and the office of the County Treasurer. (Cont.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES [X] *see continuation sheet*

Maps and Atlases: 1852, 1856, 1875. 1889, 1893, 1906. Sanborns 1887-1927.

Brooks, J.M. Cummings Elothan Davis 1816-1896: the Story of a Collector and the Early Years of the Concord Antiquarian Society. 1986. (Cont.)

[X] Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places\*. *If checked, a completed National Register Criteria Statement form is attached.* \*NR-listed 1977.



INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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Concord	Middlesex County Courthouse
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A	301

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE, cont.

Entries on the two ends of the building are more characteristic of the Greek Revival. The southeast entry has a 6-panel door surrounded by narrow divided sidelights and a three-light transom, sheltered by a projecting pedimented hood on heavy square columns. The northwest entry, without a hood, is even simpler, with another 6-panel door with applied moldings, and 2-over-2-sash sidelights.

At roof level, four painted, paneled chimneys rise from the corners of the building, and a roof walk with balustrade occupies the center section. The building originally had a large four-sided, hip-roofed lantern (belvedere) in the center, removed about 1900. A handsome divided-light oculus in the center of the pediment echoes the one at the Town House next door. The rear of the building, most of which is obscured by later additions, also has a shallow central pavilion with pediment and oculus.

Considerable period appurtenances remain at this building. Wide granite-block steps lead to all three entries; iron boot-scrapers even remain beside the northwest door. Two metal carriage lanterns, probably of early-twentieth-century date, are mounted on the wall beside the main door. The main exterior alterations to the original building, in addition to the loss of the roof lantern, are the addition of a second modern entry, with flagstone steps, in the west wall of the recessed facade porch, and modern iron railings at the front steps.

Additions

Several twentieth-century brick additions have greatly enlarged this building, which now covers a major portion of the triangular block bounded by Monument Square, Bedford Street, and Court Lane (See Sketch Map, p. 1). Significant in its own right is a two- and three-story end-gabled block directly to the rear (Section "B"), connected to the original building by a short two-story section (Section "A" (the latter remodeled in 1965). Section "B" was designed in 1940 by eminent Concord architect Harry Little, who is responsible for many local buildings, as well as for a major portion of the National Cathedral in Washington. (See Form 394--263 Simon Willard Road). Typical of much of Harry Little's work, it is an eclectic, yet scholarly, mixture of styles, with a respectful sensitivity to the buildings around it. A combination of the Colonial and Renaissance Revivals, it has 9-over-6-sash windows with splayed, keystone lintels at the second story, quoined corners, and a classical wood cornice with a large-scale dentil course. In 1987-88 its southeast entry was altered by the addition of a large copper-roofed cross-vaulted vestibule with French doors and glass sides.

Extending to the rear of the Little addition is a long, ten-bay, three-story wing which was added in 1950 (Section "C"). Its detailing repeats the 6-over-6-sash lower windows and keystone 9-over-6-sash upper windows of the 1940 addition. Its rear facade echoes some features of the main building in its pediment with oculus, and a narrow projecting pavilion with pedimented, transomed entry.

Abutting the east wall of the 1950 wing is a massive three-story addition of 1961. (Section "D"). Although it contrasts with the other sections in its steep mansard roof, it repeats many of the themes of the rest of the building. A high, gable-roofed three-bay pavilion faces Monument Square over what now seems more like a courtyard than a parking area. The pavilion, as does the rest of the structure, emphasizes the second story, here through the presence of a large centrally-placed French door with a segmental-arched pediment and a balcony. Adorning its gable is a large sculpture of an American eagle. The street-level entry to this wing, in the south corner facing Bedford Street, has a 9-light door surmounted by a keystone fanlight, recessed under an open, gabled archway.

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## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE, cont.

Town Meetings and other gatherings continued in the new courthouse. The Charitable Library, and later the Concord Social Library were located in a room there, and the local militia companies convened on the first floor. Other events were also held in the building when the courts were not in session, including the indoor exhibits of the county agricultural fairs. In 1840 the courthouse was updated and remodeled, but the torch of an arsonist, said to be attempting to destroy an indictment against him, burned it down in 1849.

The importance of the courthouse in all aspects of Concord's town life cannot be overestimated. Not only did its presence attract, and keep, some illustrious lawyers, judges, and politicians in the town, but it afforded a bustling trade for local hotels, taverns, and businesses during the several weeks throughout the year when the courts were in session. The court sessions themselves were treated as entertainment by the local citizens, who came in from surrounding towns and outlying farms especially for "September Court Week" when the Court of Common Pleas was in sessions. Booths and pushcarts crowded the open common (later Monument Square) to sell food and drink, performers put on shows, horse races were held, and general carousing gave a brisk business to the jail across the way. Some of the celebrants may even have been among the many who were tied to the elm tree, said to have been planted in 1776, that stood for decades in front of the building and served as a whipping-post for the frequent sentence of thirty-nine lashes.

At times, the Concord courthouse was the scene of events of broad historical significance. The September courts of 1786 were the focus of a major demonstration led by Job Shattuck during Shays' Rebellion, when a mob of some four hundred people occupied the building and the common, blocking the justices from entering the court and forcing a two-month adjournment. Among the illustrious trials that drew crowds to the courtroom was the famous embezzlement trial of "the Phoenix Bank officers" in 1843, when Daniel Webster represented the defendants.

Even prior to the fire of 1849, however, activity at the courthouse had diminished somewhat. The coming of the Fitchburg Railroad line in 1844 meant that many judges, lawyers, jurors and witnesses, who used to stay in Concord during court sessions, commuted into town by the day instead. By the late 1840's both the April term of the state Supreme Court and, most significantly, the September term of the Court of Common Pleas had been removed to Lowell. After the fire, while the court sessions were held temporarily in the vestry of the First Parish Church, an attempt was made to remove the courts from Concord altogether. Concord's State Representative of the time, however, the powerful Samuel Hoar, succeeded in gathering enough votes in the legislature to ensure that some county court activity would continue in Concord, and that the courthouse would be rebuilt. Permission to hold town meetings and other local activities in the courtroom was not granted for the new building, however, and the town was thus forced to construct a separate town hall of its own (the Concord Town House--see Form #302).

The present building was completed in 1851. Over the next fifteen years several illustrious court sessions were held, including a capital-trials session of the Supreme Judicial Court in 1857. Gradually, however, as the organization of the Massachusetts court system changed, fewer and fewer sessions were held in Concord. The Court of Common Pleas was eventually removed to the Superior Court, and its March term was changed to Lowell, leaving only a civil and a criminal term to be held in this building in most years. Finally, in 1867, the County removed all the courts to Cambridge and Lowell, and Concord ceased to be a shire town. (Cont.)

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## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, cont.

In partial compensation to the community, all the county-owned property was given to Concord. In spite of an effort by J.S. Keyes and others to relocate the local high school to this building, the town sold all the county property it received, including the courthouse, and, across the street, the jail and the old County House, the former residence of sheriffs, jailers, and other county officers. The granite jail was dismantled and its stone re-used in culverts, foundations, and walls. The County House was purchased for a rectory for St. Bernards Parish by the Boston Archdiocese, which also attempted to buy the courthouse. Instead, the courthouse was bought for \$7000 by the Middlesex Mutual Fire Insurance Company, a locally-controlled concern which had been located for years in cramped quarters at 46/48 Main Street (see Form #14).

The insurance company had been organized in 1826 by a group of prominent businessmen, including Abiel Haywood, Nathan Brooks, Daniel Shattuck, and Sheriff Abel Moore. It expanded steadily over the years throughout New England, and eventually included operations as far west as Ohio and south to Georgia. The company, which was later affiliated with the Sentry Insurance Company, owned and occupied the building until 1988.

During its long period of ownership the insurance company rented out space to other concerns. Ironically, the most prominent tenant was Middlesex County, which established a District Court in Concord, and again held court sessions here, first in the large second-story courtroom, and later on the first floor. This arrangement was undoubtedly the result of influence by local resident Judge John S. Keyes, who was appointed Justice of the District Court in 1874. One of the first tenants of the building was Cummings E. Davis (1816-1896), Concord's best-known antiquarian. From the time he came to Concord in 1850, he gradually amassed a large collection of antiquities, which he first displayed in his newsstand and lunch counter at the Concord Depot. In about 1857 he moved the collection to rented rooms in the former Academy building on Middle Street. In 1868, with the collection having outgrown that space, as well, he relocated it to several rooms in this building, and began advertising "antiquarian rooms", which could be viewed for a small admission fee. In 1885, failing health forced Mr. Davis to close the courthouse rooms. With the aid of friends, led by James Melvin, a group of local citizens founded the Concord Antiquarian Society to assume responsibility for the Davis collection. In 1886 the Society purchased the former Reuben Brown House for their headquarters, and installed the collection there. (See Form #312--77 Lexington Road.) The Society, and the collection, eventually evolved into the present Concord Museum.

Other tenants who had small offices here included dentist J.T. Stetson and attorney George Heywood in the 1880's, and in the 1890's the Phoenix Rattan Company, which used prison labor to manufacture furniture and other items at the Massachusetts Reformatory for Men at West Concord.

In 1905, the recently-formed Christian Science Church of Concord, which had first met at the home of Charles and Florence Brown at 349 Main Street and in 1904 had moved to the Masonic Hall on the Square, began renting space here for their services here. By 1911 the County wished to expand into the Christian Science rooms, and the congregation purchased the Ball property at 7 Lowell Road for the building of a new church. While construction was underway they shared space with the District Court, and moved to their new building in 1914. (See Form #333).

When the Christian Scientists moved out, the interior of the building was renovated under the supervision of Judge Prescott Keyes. He had succeeded Richard F. Barrett as President of the Insurance Company in 1912, and in 1910 he had risen to the former post of his father, John S. Keyes: Justice of the District Court of Central Middlesex. During his term, the whole second floor was leased to the county for the Central Middlesex District Court.



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## BIBLIOGRAPHY, cont.

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Keyes.

Shattuck.

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Walcott.

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SECTION D, looking North from Bedford St  
 Real Northeast corner