

Introduction

Graham County has had five courthouses during the time the county has been in existence.

This paper describes each facility briefly, then outlines the actions which led to the construction of the present courthouse. Also included are descriptions of the courthouse, its construction details and the commemoration held to dedicate it.

Graham County Courthouses

1. The first courthouse to serve Graham County was an adobe building, erected soon after the county's formation on March 10, 1881. It had a large adjoining adobe corral and stood at about what is now 615 First Ave., Safford. (1) It's dirt roof apparently created some problems, however. as Safford's first newspaper, the *Graham County News*, reported on July 27, 1882, "During the rain last week, the dirt roof over the sheriff's office and the recorder's office caved through in places and the floors were covered with mud and water. The building is not well adapted to the security of public records." (2) It's construction may have been poor but it nevertheless provided a setting for several important stories of the times: During early October 1882, James Addison Reavis, later known as the "Baron of Arizona," appeared at the courthouse where he filed papers which initiated the Peralta Grant land fraud encompassing some 12 million acres of land in Arizona. (2) The building also served as home to Sheriff Geo. H. Stevens; his wife, Francesca, a White Mountain Apache, died at that location in December 1882. (3) After it was no longer a courthouse, it was used by A.M. and Selim Franklin as a store; John Blake operated a general store from the facility, as well. (4)

2. An act of the Arizona Territorial Legislature, approved Feb. 21, 1883, moved the county seat to Solomonville and the courthouse was removed to the town the same year. (4) Pioneer stories persisted for many years linking this change to manipulations by I.E. Solomon and Peter Bolan, noted businessmen of that time. (4) The first Solomonville courthouse was also of adobe, located northwest of the post office. During the first term of the court at this location, three Chinese persons were sentenced to hang the first of many to receive this harsh penalty for their misdeeds. (5)

3. After the removal of the county seat to Solomonville, construction began on an imposing adobe building on the site of the present Solomonville School. The complex was reported to have cost some \$11,700. (6) Evans Coleman described the facility as follows: A hallway ran east and west from the courtroom to the jail. Another hallway ran north and south... Doors opened into offices along either side of the hallways. Two forty-gallon open-top barrels full of

warm, brackish water sat in the hallway. A couple of tin dippers hung on the side of each barrel...A cell block with the sheriff's office on the north occupied the west end...occupants of the cells could...look through the window into an adobe wall enclosure where there was a high scaffold, a horizontal wooden beam with a sea grass rope noose dangling from its end over a trap door. (7) Nine men were to visit those gallows during the time this facility served Graham County. (7) It served as a courthouse until the return of the county seat to Safford. It was later sold to the Solomonville school (8) and was destroyed by fire in 1919. (5)

4. It wasn't long after the loss of the county seat, in 1883, that Safford residents began to lament the loss. The grumbling swelled to a loud road resulting in a June 22, 1896, meeting to talk of bringing the courthouse back to Safford. "The (Solomonville) courthouse is old and run down. It's too far away. There is no place to eat and sleep (when court is in session.) The courthouse should be located in Safford." (1)

But it was not until well after Arizona's 1912 statehood, in 1915, that the necessary elections and acts of the Legislature, needed to overturn the earlier relocation to Solomonville, were accomplished. (1) Once the formalities were over, however, it didn't take long for the relocation to take place. Immediately after victory was declared, the courthouse was moved into the 1901 two-story Riggs building, a remodeled version of which stands on the southwest corner of Main and Central. The two-story brick building was built in 1901 by members of the Brannick Riggs family. (9)

The lower floor of the building was remodeled to serve as temporary courthouse and offices until a new courthouse could be built. (5) The main floor served as courtroom and officers utilized a balcony which encircled the entire room. A centerpiece of the room was a huge kerosene lamp, possibly as much as two feet in diameter. (9) The exterior boasted rare concrete sidewalks, the first in Safford, in which were embedded iron tie rings for the convenience of horseback riders and folks driving wagons and buggies. Quickly built on the southwest corner, for the purpose of housing the county safe and preserving records, was a small concrete windowless building with a flat roof and an iron door. (9)

5. Final location of the Graham County Courthouse is the current imposing structure located at the west end of Main Street, at Eighth Avenue. The structure cost about \$45,000. The remainder of this paper relates the process of why it was built, the design, construction and dedication of this historic facility, which continues to serve the county today.

Laying the groundwork

Two actions, both at the state Legislature, played important roles in the construction of the historic Graham County Courthouse now in use.

First was the splitting of Greenlee County away from Graham County. Second was the move of the county seat from Solomonville back to Safford.

At the turn of the century, the county was large and spread out, with populations centers far apart and roads between them not in the best of condition. The real population center was at the mines in and around Clifton. The mines, notably the Arizona Copper Company, wanted the county seat closer to its place of business.

After months of wrangling in the Arizona Territorial Legislature, the division of the new county was approved Feb. 27, 1909. "The new county, Greenlee, shall bear the bonded indebtedness of the present Graham County, amounting to about \$146,000," said the final report of the agreement for a new county. (10) This agreement, in effect, allowed the copper company to buy not only the new Greenlee County, since most of the valuation in the county was with the mines, but to pay off Graham County as well, by assuming its bonded debt.

Graham County residents, at least in part, were still anxious about the split. "'Graham to be second class" reads a 1911 headline in the *Graham County Guardian*. The article went on to say "The long talked of division of Graham County became a fact at the joint meeting of the boards of supervisors of Graham and Greenlee counties at Solomonville, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The prediction of numerous people that the county could not be divided without trouble and expensive litigation failed to materialize. Everything was amicable and the two boards...worked together. The property was segregated according to the law creating Greenlee County... and all bills created by the original were paid, proceeds divided according to the assessable wealth of each county and the bonds entered into by Greenlee County, assuming all the bonded indebtedness of Graham County. As finally determined, the assessment role of the old county stood at \$8,532,971; Greenlee's proportion was \$5,762,447 and Graham's was \$2,770,523. (11)

Some years later, when the relocation of the county seat from Solomonville to Safford was made, payments were still being made on those bonds and those monies proved instrumental in the funding of the new courthouse.

County Seat Removal

The need for a courthouse in Safford was the result of moving the county seat from Solomonville back to its origins in that community. As Safford grew and discontent with the facility in the eastern community grew, more and more demands were made for a new courthouse and a new county seat. The meeting of 1896 may not have gotten the job done but groundwork laid during following years resulted in a bill being introduced in the Legislature in 1915 to move the county government.

The bill spelled out the way the electorate could petition for an election to move the county seat from one location to another. It also provided the means of selecting a new county seat, calling for a second election on the place if the majority of voters did not agree on one in the first election. (12)

The bill became law in mid-February 1915 and, without delay, Safford citizens organized a committee to gather petitions for the needed election to move the county seat and to name Safford as the new seat of government. So sure of success was the group that they were already talking about five different sites for a new courthouse. (13) Thatcher and Pima residents were also interested in having their communities named as the county seat. (13)

On April 9, it was reported that, "A delegation of Safford businessmen appeared before the board and presented petitions for the county seat removal election. The board counted the names and found 890 signatures, more than enough to call the election. The board set May 11 as the election date. Petitions to place names of candidates on the ballot were to be filed by April 21. (13)

Elaborate explanations were offered the electorate to outline the bonds due from Greenlee County, amounting to \$15,000 per year, plus \$5,000 interest payments made into a sinking fund each year. These payments by Greenlee Co. came from the county split, when Greenlee took on the bonded indebtedness of Graham County. Interest payments began in 1913 and the principal payments were to begin in 1925 and be paid off in five years, or by 1930. (15)

The result of the removal election was overwhelmingly in favor of a move. (16) Due to the three sites on the ballot, a runoff between Safford and Pima was called for June 29. The official canvass of that balloting decreed that Safford as the winner, by 304 votes, and the board made immediate plans to move. (16)

Consideration was given to remaining in Solomonville until a new courthouse could be built but the law clearly ordered the removal of the business of the county without unnecessary delay and said that sessions of the Superior Court must be held at the county seat. That very day, the board began making plans to find a new location and the subsequent move began. It was estimated that the government would be functioning from new quarters within 10 days. (17)

It was reported that Fred W. Dowdle had the honor of transacting the first piece of legal business at the new county seat when he filed on a homestead on Saturday, July 17, in the office of R.W. Smith, clerk of the Superior Court at the court house in the Riggs building. Of special interest was the fact that Mr. Henry Gray, one of the witnesses for Mr. Dowdle, was the man to record the first brand in Graham County after it was formed out of Pima county in 1881. (18) By August, it was determined that calling for special bonds to construct the courthouse would not be necessary and that a building costing approximately \$45,000 would serve the county well. (19)

Courthouse construction

The Board of Supervisors didn't let any grass grow under their feet once the selection of Safford as the county seat was made. As of July 16, 1915, not only did they immediately get temporary offices established in the Riggs building, they were already hard at work selecting both the building plans and the site.

"The board of supervisors have yet to select the site for the new courthouse. There are about six sites offered and the board will probably render a decision the coming week," says a July 16, 1915 report. "The board will get to work with as little delay as possible on the plans for the new court house and there is little doubt but that it will be built and ready for occupancy within the next eight months. (17)

The Aug. 6, 1915, reports: Last Wednesday, "The board gave audience to E.F. Click, representing Trost & Trost, architects, of El Paso, Texas. Mr. Click presented several plans for the new court house which were made by his firm. After looking over the plans submitted by Mr. Click, the board was unanimous in the opinion that a much better building should be erected than the one first contemplated, which was estimated to cost \$40,000. "The plans most favored by the board were of a building to cost \$65,000. This building had the best interior arrangement, providing more room for all the county offices, large court room, rotunda and jail quarters. (20)

By Aug. 13, a visit by supervisors to El Paso, "... resulted in securing new plans for the court house and much information regarding the material to be used in the building. (21)

The plans secured also show a very fine building that will provide for every county office and jail quarters and contains all the latest and best ideas of a modern office building. The expense above the amount stated, \$45,000, would be for better interior finishing material and this added cost to the building could run up to \$65,000..." (21)

After four months, however, the board opted for a more frugal approach. On Dec. 10, 1915, a newspaper report stated: The board of supervisors met Monday... the entire day was taken up in considering the plans and specifications for the county court house, which were submitted by the following architects: Trost & Trost, El Paso; Lescher & Kibbey, Phoenix; E.C. Heck, Clifton. "All plans submitted were exceptionally good and the drawings of buildings were

of artistic and imposing edifices...The board ... finally deciding to accept those submitted by the architectural firm of Lescher & Kibbey, of Phoenix, after several slight alterations were made in the plans. The plans call for a building to cost \$44,000. (22)

It was also reported that "The board finally decided that the site offered by the D.E. Welker estate, situated on I street and fronting west on Tenth street, would be the location for the new county court house. Streets have long since been renamed and the site is known as Main and Eighth Ave.

On March 10, 1916, The contract for building the new county court house, which was awarded Monday by the board of supervisors to Lutgerding and Eagan, Inc. contractors and builders, of Phoenix, was signed up yesterday afternoon and bond in the sum of \$21,000 was given for the fulfillment of the contract, which was for \$40,400. This was the lowest bid, one of 11 submitted for the work. The contractors agreed to complete the building in 140 working days, and pay a penalty of \$10 per day for every day over that time and will receive a bonus of \$10 per day for every day under that time. Work began yesterday afternoon staking out the building on the court house grounds, preparatory to excavating the basement. The contractors will make their own bricks to be used on the inside of the building. A kiln to burn 300,000 red brick will be started at once. The exterior will be faced with El Paso medium mottled pressed brick. The contract for excavating and furnishing gravel was let by the contractors to Scarlett Brothers. (23)

On March 15, reports stated: Letgerding & Eagan, the contractors who will build the new county court house, started in yesterday morning with a force of men and teams to excavate for the foundation and basement of the new building... they have started the work of excavating the pit where the clay will be mixed (for the brick.) The contract for burning the brick was let to Orvil Allen, of Thatcher. About 100,000 more brick than will be needed for the building will be burned, giving an opportunity to anyone desiring brick for building purposes to secure them from the contractors. (24)

On March 15, the board of supervisors met in special session for the purpose of selecting and purchasing the finish hardware to be used in the new courthouse building. After inspection and consideration, the board decided to equip the courthouse with one of the samples. the design to be a plain pattern with a black finish and both material and finish fully guaranteed. The purchase includes all locks to entrance doors and office doors for a sum of \$789. (25)

An April 21 update stated: The concrete walls for the first story and the walls of the vaults in the new court house were completed at 1 o'clock Monday morning and the workmen are now busy removing the forms. The work on the jail and the construction of the forms for the second story of the vaults has commenced. "The first kiln of red brick for the inside walls was a success. Contractor Eagan is now busy getting the second kiln ready. The vault doors and jail equipment were received this week. (26)

By Aug. 16, a report came that representatives from C.F. Weber and Co. of Los Angeles, Calif., and the McNeil Co. of Phoenix, were present at the board of supervisors meeting for the opening of the bids for supplying furniture for the Superior Court room in the new court house. The McNeil Co. was the lowest bidder and was awarded the contract, at \$682.50. (27)

The courthouse was completed in six months and dedicated with much local celebration on Labor Day, September 6, 1916.

Courthouse Dedication

The new courthouse was completed and officials moved into the present building during the late summer of 1916. The actual dedication took place on Labor Day in September 1916. The event included a parade headed by the Thatcher Band followed by county and Chamber of Commerce officials. The Safford Fire Department participated with a new truck. (29)

Flag bearers were young girls dressed in white. Autos and wagons represented various businesses.

Marshal of the Day was R.W. Smith. A program from the courthouse steps commenced with a prayer, an eloquent address by Andrew Kimball, President of the St. Joseph Stake of the LDS Church. David Claridge served as master of ceremonies and the festivities were capped by a big dance in the newly constructed Layton Hall. (28)

A report of the event stated that the dedication of the new courthouse took place Monday, Labor Day afternoon "before the largest crowd of people ever congregated in the county seat. In the large audience that spread itself over the wide lawn in front of the courthouse were people from every part of the county" Following music and remarks, there was "the placing of the tablet" followed by a splendid address on the history of Graham County by President Kimball. (29)

Historical status of building

The Graham County Courthouse was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 25, 1982. (30)

The nomination document provides a technical description of the building. It is a two story building in the Neo Classic style, featuring a symmetrical facade oriented around a central pediment which frames the main entry. Located at the western end of Main Street, the courthouse faces east onto a landscaped public square and functions as the visual terminus of Safford's principal commercial avenue. The main block is a two-story, flat-roofed composition resting on a raised basement of concrete that carries the main floor seven feet above grade. The wall surfaces are faced with El Paso pressed red brick and contrast in texture with the smooth concrete foundation. Overall, the building measures 83 x 62 feet with a one-story 17 x 49 brick wing on the north elevation and a short rear ell.

The architectural design focuses on the central bay of the facade, accentuated by a projecting portico featuring a pediment with a wide brick entablature. Both elements are supported by Doric columns flanked by brick piers. The pediment is centered with a stepped parapet which extends above the height of a balustrade.

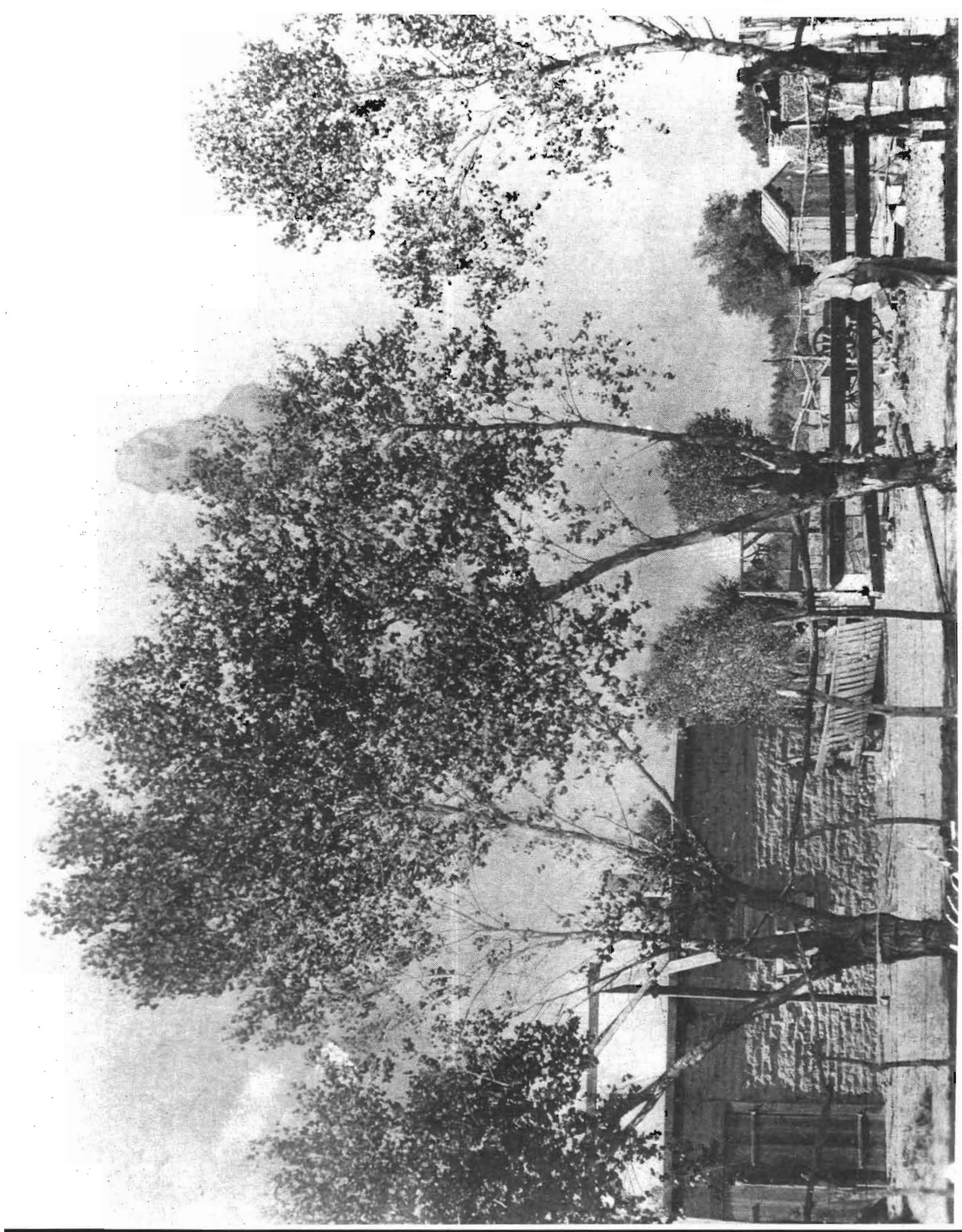
Contrasting with the brick walls, the cornice on the pediment and a block cornice articulating the roofline are of white painted galvanized iron, a material commonly used for ornamentation at the turn of the century.

The portico is approached by a flight of stone steps which emphasize the recessed entry and complement the sense of monumentality exhibited by the facade. The windows have projecting brick sills, a treatment common to all elevations..

The south elevation has five symmetrically spaced bays defined by recessed spandrel panels containing paired windows. In the center bay, a former side entry was enclosed and infilled with air conditioning and mechanical systems during a 1976 renovation. A stone stoop is still intact, indicating the former location of the entry.

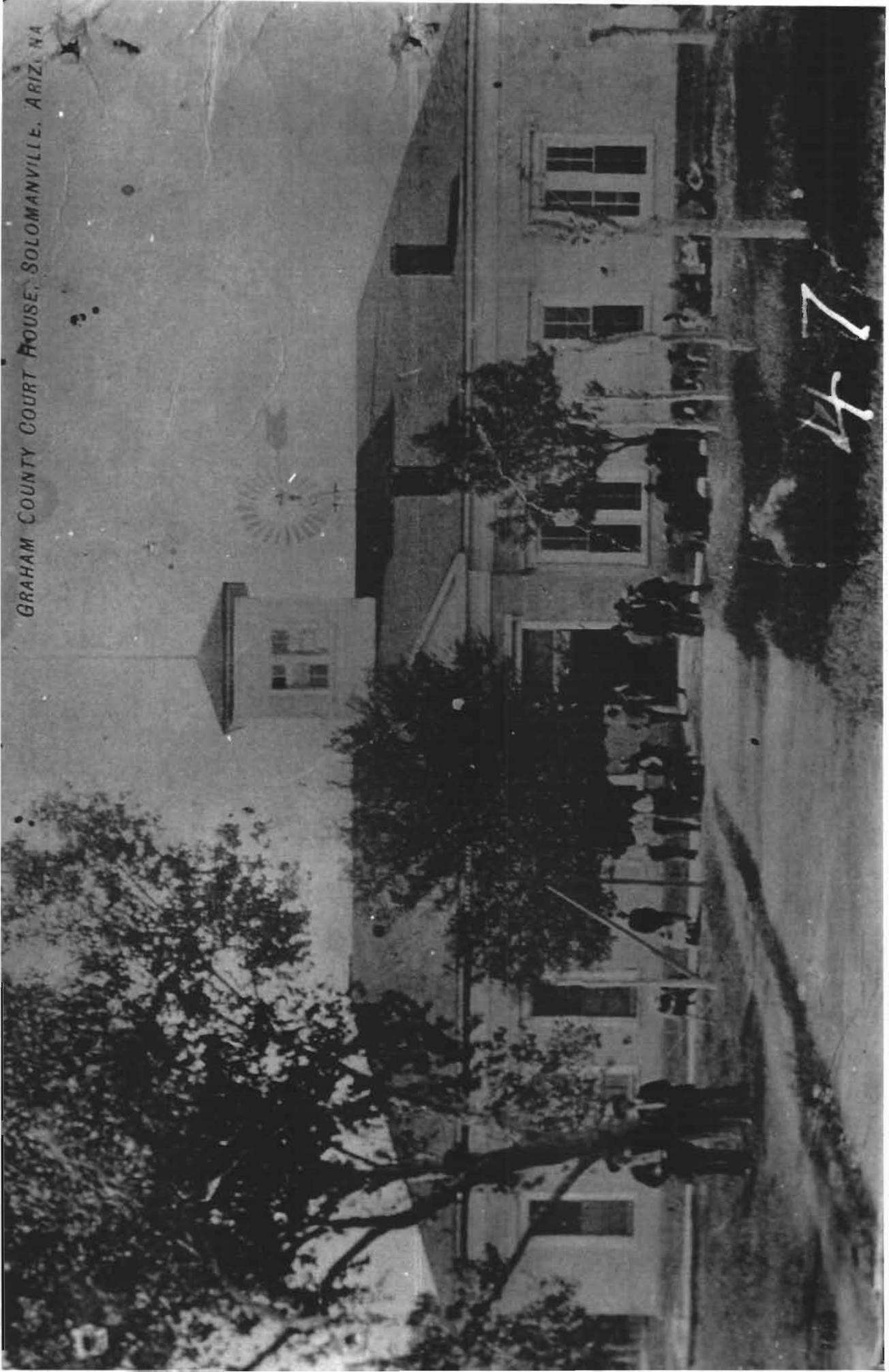
The north elevation is similar, with the exception of the interior bays on the second story. The central bay does not have a window and the windows in the two flanking bays are topped by transoms which pierce the architrave and extend into the brick entablature below the cornice. These enlarged windows correspond to the location of the (superior) court room. A one-story brick wing 17 x 49, added ca. 1976, extends from the center bay.

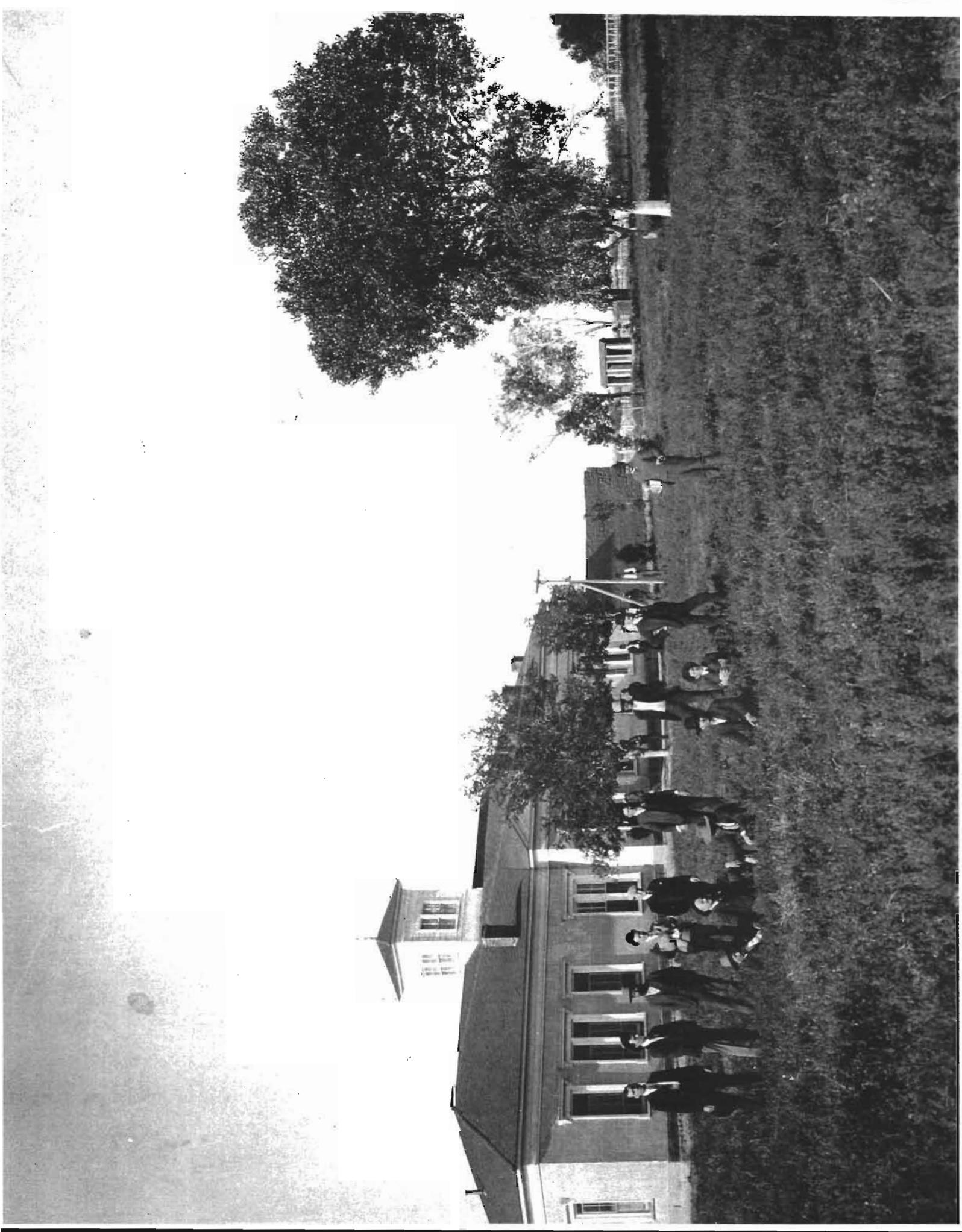
The rear elevation was altered by the 1978 demolition of the jail, an unadorned 29 x 49 two-story ell, due to its poor structural condition. The exterior brick stairwell was appended at this time.. (30) Note: The newest addition to the building was the recent (1994-95) addition in the rear of the building, when an elevator and modest interior space was added at the same west end.

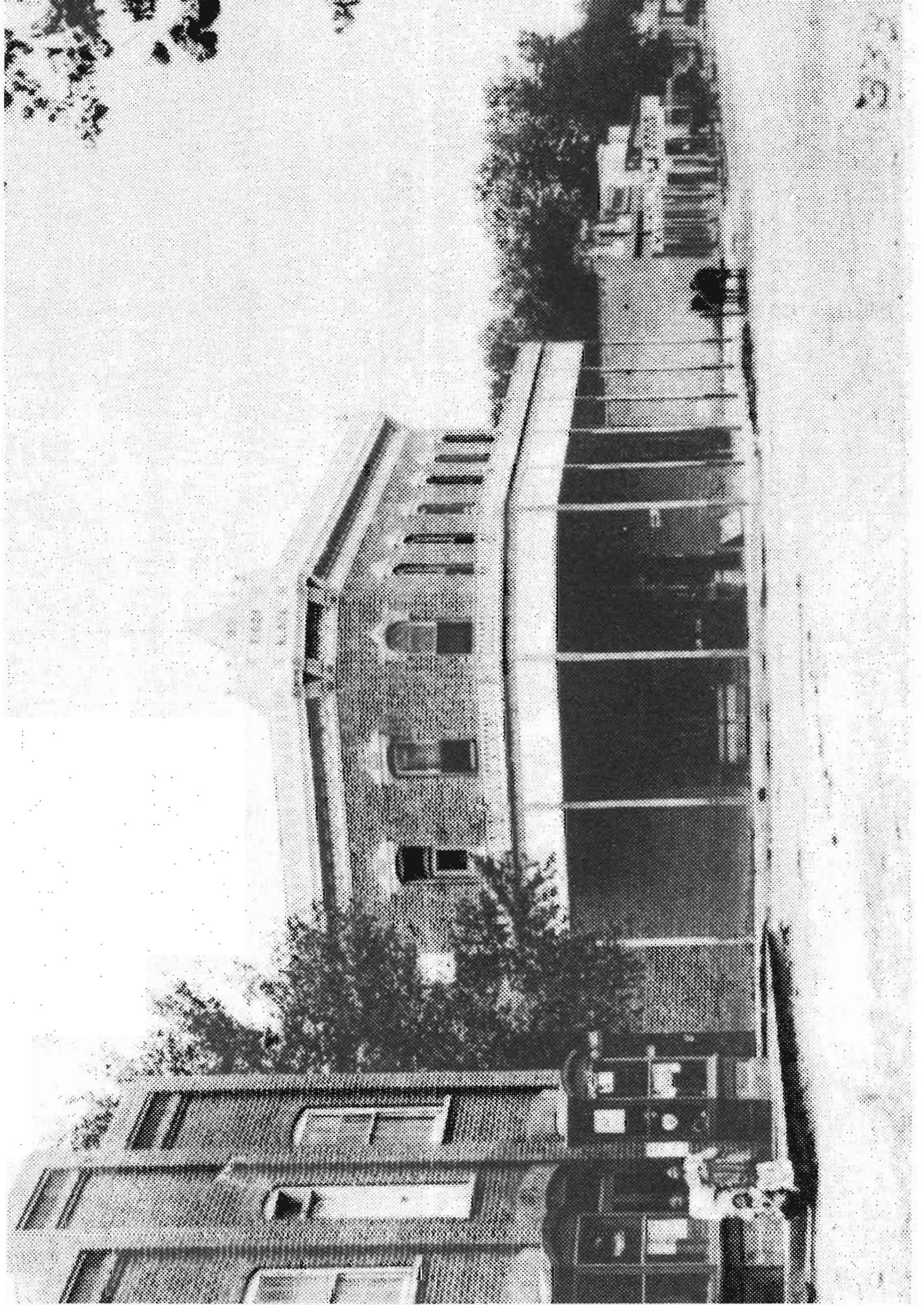


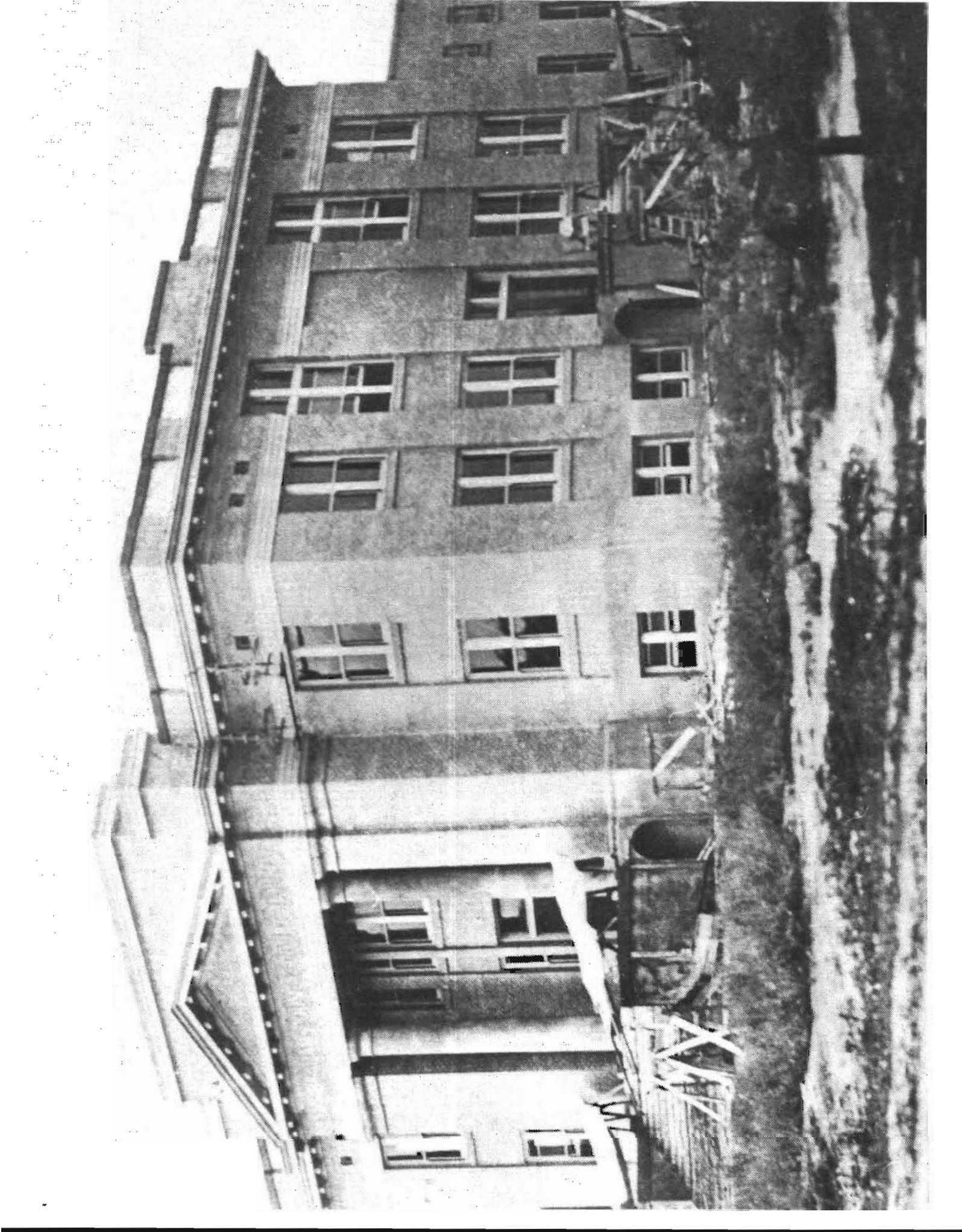
GRAHAM COUNTY COURT HOUSE, SOLOMANVILLE, ARIZONA

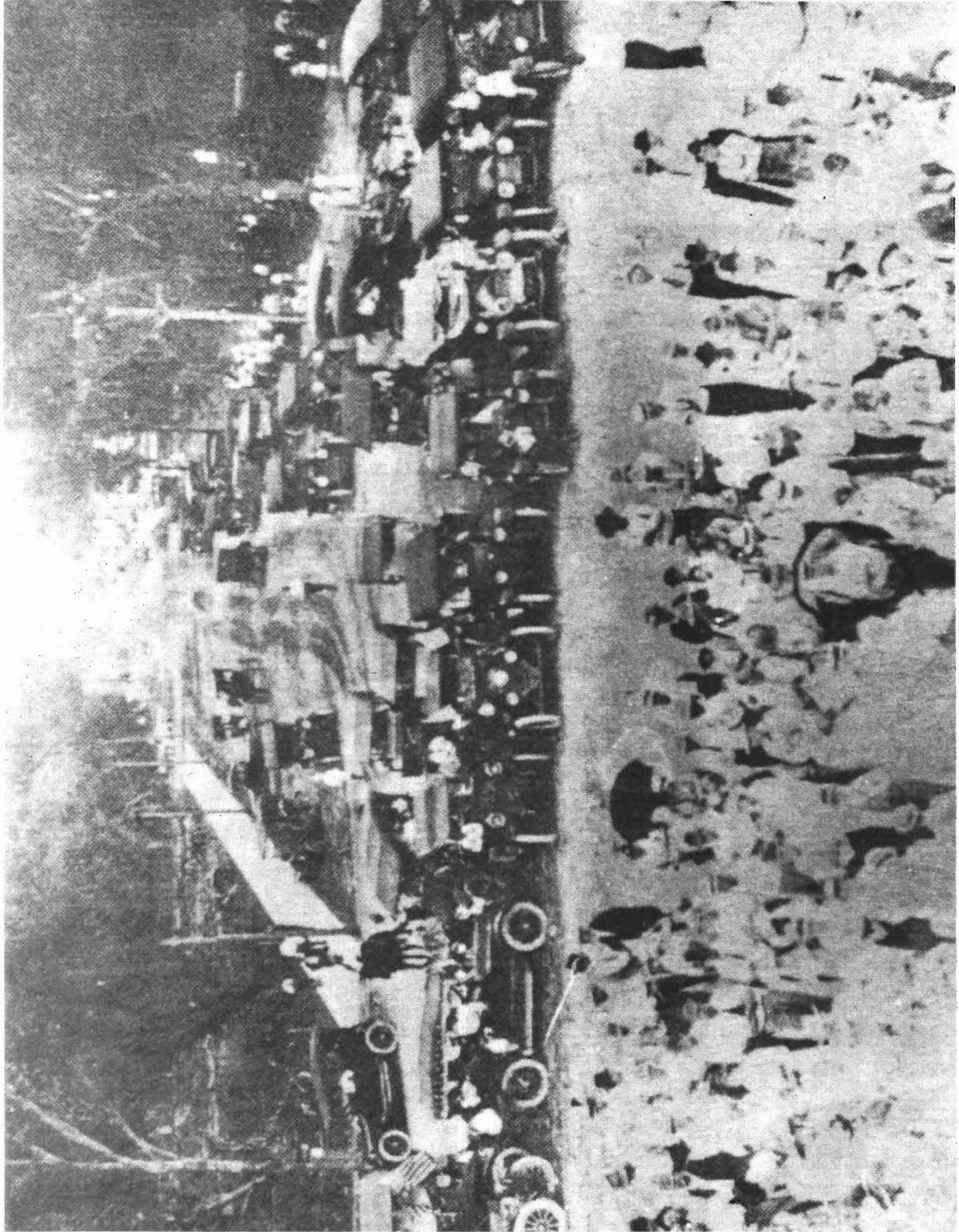
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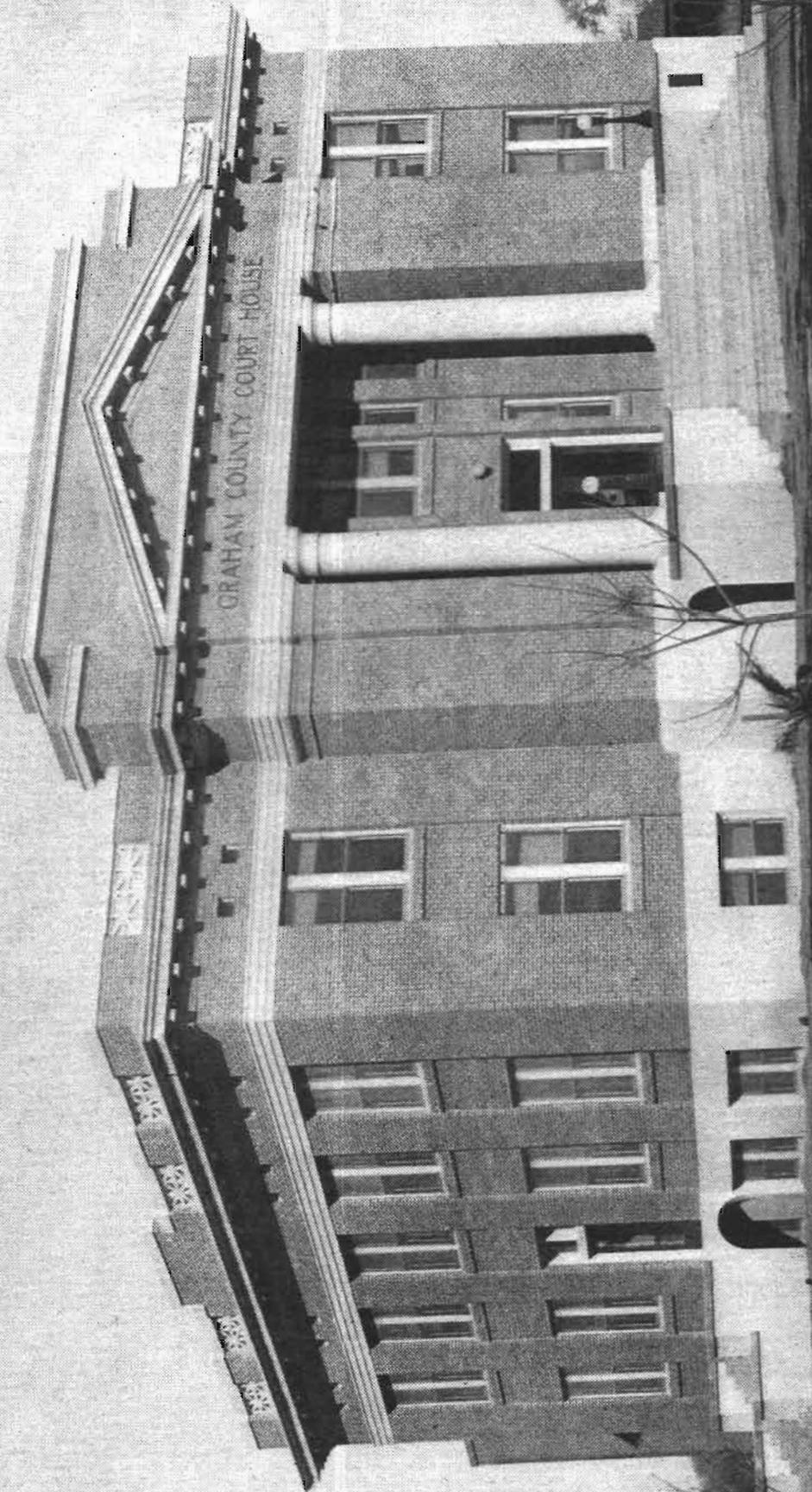




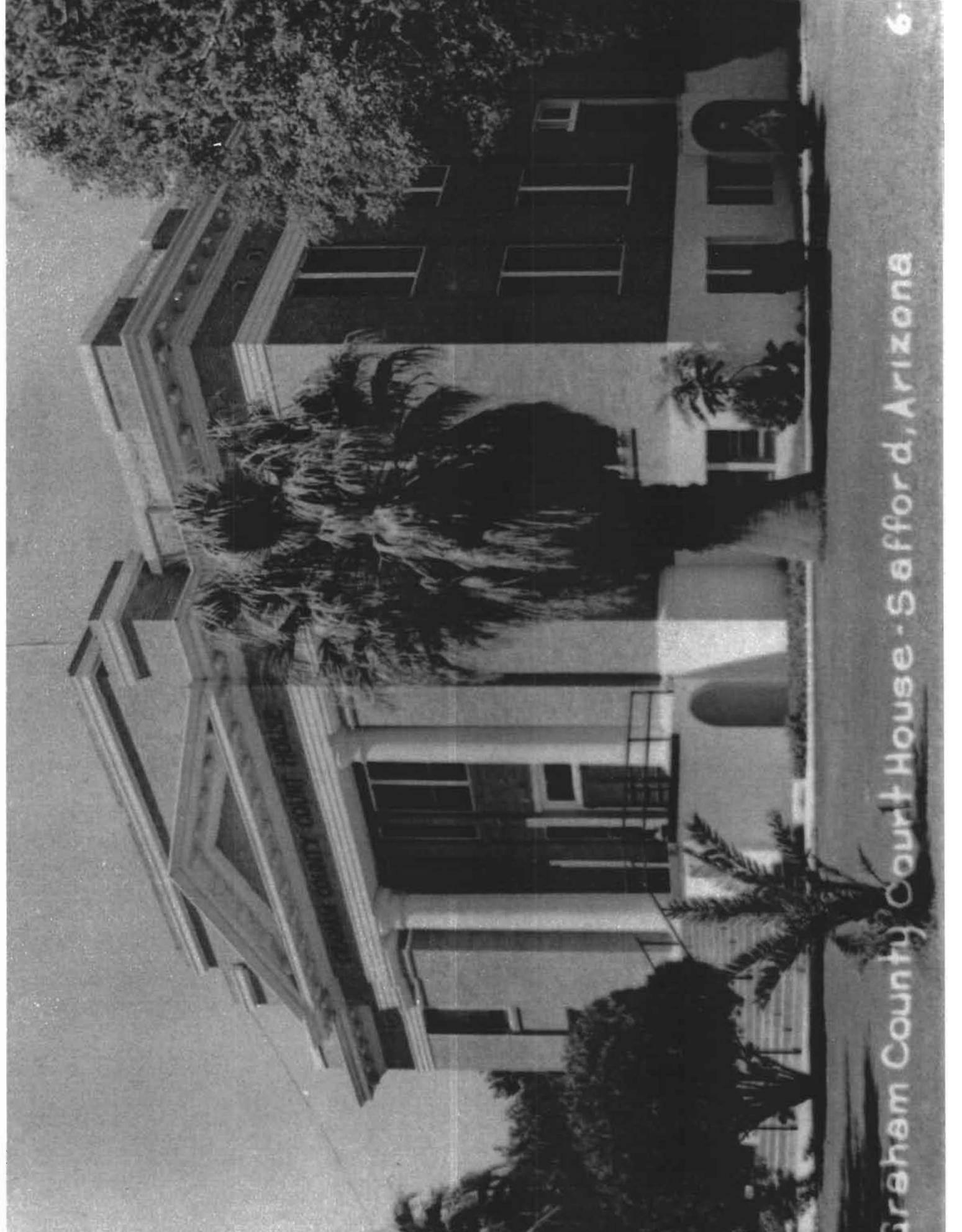




COURTHOUSE
SAFFORD ARIZ.



GRAHAM COUNTY COURT HOUSE



Graham County Court House - Safford, Arizona

Photo 1:

The first Graham County Courthouse, 1881, was located at what is now about 615 First Ave., Safford. It was described as an adobe structure with adjacent adobe corrals. No photo of this building has been found. However, shown is a portion of the first county jail, located near what would now be 516 Main St. It was once encircled by a high adobe wall. The jail later served the town of Safford as a place of incarceration.

Photo 2:

When Solomonville was named county seat in 1883, a temporary adobe building, reported as being northwest of the post office, was used until the new courthouse could be built. No photo was found for this facility. The Solomonville courthouse, about 1898, is shown here; note windmill in rear.

Photo 3:

A 1905 photo of the Solomonville courthouse shows people front, outhouse rear center and a telephone pole front center. The courthouse was on the site of the current Solomon School. This adobe facility was sold to the Solomonville School District when the county seat was moved back to Safford in 1915; it was destroyed by fire in 1919.

Photo 4:

The Riggs Building, a two-story facility built in 1901 by members of the Brannick Riggs family, served as a temporary courthouse in 1915-16, after removal of the county seat from Solomonville to Safford and prior to completion of the present courthouse.

Photo 5:

Under construction, the Graham County Courthouse was receiving finishing touches prior to the 1916 dedication day.

Photo 6:

Dedication day, Sept. 6, 1916. The dedication took place on the front steps of the Graham County Courthouse with Andrew Kimball, president of the LDS St. Joseph Stake, helping to dedicate the new facility before a large assembly of citizens.

Photo 7:

Graham County Courthouse about 1920. Landscaping was still a little sparse.

Photo 8:

Graham County Courthouse before central ramp was installed in the front steps.

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