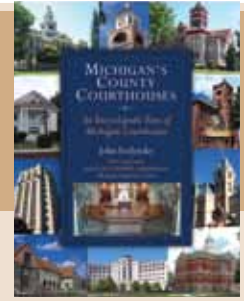


Michigan's County Courthouses: An Encyclopedic Tour of Michigan Courthouses

By John Fedynsky, published by The University of Michigan Press
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<http://www.press.umich.edu>



Reviewed by Jennifer Cordon Thor

Most attorneys, at some point in their careers, have appeared in their local county courthouse. Upon entering the courthouse for the first time, many may have wondered about its history. In *Michigan's County Courthouses: An Encyclopedic Tour of Michigan Courthouses*, John Fedynsky provides that information. Whether you are an attorney, a Michigan history buff, or a lover of architecture, you will find this book is a valuable resource. In Michigan Supreme Court Justice Stephen Markman's foreword he praises Fedynsky's work and declares it will "become the definitive work on an overlooked part of Michigan history."

Fedynsky takes us to each of Michigan's 83 counties in alphabetical order. He dedicates two to three pages to each county and includes photographs of each courthouse. He also provides a map of the state of Michigan and highlights the location of each county for easy reference. Although the book is primarily about county courthouses, Fedynsky adds details about the founding of each county and colorful stories about local political battles. One such story took place in Iron County, where the communities of Iron River and Crystal Falls were fighting over the right to be named the county seat. Crystal Falls' leaders challenged the leaders of Iron River to a poker game. During the game, members of the Crystal Falls community went down to the courthouse in Iron River and stole all the county records! They carried the records through the snow on a sled and stashed them in a freight car. The train carried the records to Crystal Falls, which eventually was named the county seat and is now the home of the Iron

County courthouse. Not all county courthouses had such colorful beginnings; however, through Fedynsky's thorough research we can discover new details about the origins of each of our county courthouses.

Fedynsky depicts each courthouse in beautiful detail, from a stately stone building like that found in Marquette to a simple wood structure like the 1861 courthouse in Eagle River. About the Marquette County courthouse, he writes: "[T]he grandest feature of the courthouse is its copper dome.

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Viewed from outdoors, it appears as a gossamer crown capping an already magnificent building and sheathing the delicate glasswork below. From the inside of the massive courtroom, it is a kaleidoscope of stained glass." In addition to the physical descriptions of each courthouse, Fedynsky provides such details as the construction materials used, the source of the building funds, and the name of the architect.

The front cover of *Michigan's County Courthouses* includes color photographs of 11 courthouses; unfortunately, those are the only color photographs in the book. I would

have enjoyed seeing the colors in the kaleidoscope of the stained glass dome in Marquette County, the blue-tinged windows in Kent County, or the elaborate stenciling and murals in Shiawassee County. Despite that minor criticism, I think this book is a valuable reference for Michigan attorneys.

Fedynsky ends his book with a look at the Michigan Hall of Justice in Lansing—home of the Michigan Supreme Court. This is a fitting conclusion, considering that Michigan was one of the last states in the nation to build a separate building for its highest court. The horseshoe-shaped Hall of Justice contains facilities for the Michigan Supreme Court and Court of Appeals, and also the Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center, which provides resources for learning about the legal system and its history.

Fedynsky tells us that "courthouses are symbols," and we soon discover they are symbols of freedom, equality, truth, and justice. These words are inscribed on the exterior of the Hall of Justice and embodied in every county courthouse in the state. These monuments to freedom, equality, truth, and justice should be celebrated for what they represent, and every attorney who practices within their walls should learn of their history and appreciate their beauty so that "these ideals prevail in every instance and not just at the stage of last resort." ■

Jennifer Cordon Thor is an assistant professor of management at Oakland University. Before joining the world of academia, Ms. Thor was in private practice for 15 years where she practiced in many of Michigan's county courthouses. She is a graduate of the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law.