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Book Review - Courthouses of Georgia

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Off the SHELF

Courthouses of Georgia, Association County Commissioners of Georgia, photographs by Greg Newington, text by George Justice, foreword by Ross King, and introduction by Larry Walker (University of Georgia Press, 2014: ISBN 978-0-8203-4688-5, \$34.95)

Think about the trips you've made to your county courthouse. Jury duty. Paying taxes. Recording an important document. Licenses of all kinds. And, once upon a time when this reviewer was a newspaper reporter, covering trials, reviewing court dockets, and scanning crime reports.

This volume jogs the memory of those visits and reminds us of the important hustle and bustle around a courthouse and the meaning of what goes on inside it. They are a focal point in the life of Georgia and all of the fifty states in the country. Local courts dispense justice, and preside over the bulk of American legal issues, while the day-to-day running of the people's government goes on in other offices.

Courthouses of Georgia is a cooperative editorial publishing venture. In this case that includes the Association County Commissioners of Georgia; noted photographer Greg Newington; attorney and former state legislator Larry Walker; and historian George Justice, with support from the State Bar of Georgia. Books by committee can be bland affairs. This one is not.

The challenge was to provide a word-and-picture profile of all 159 Georgia courthouses, sustaining interest from Dade County in the

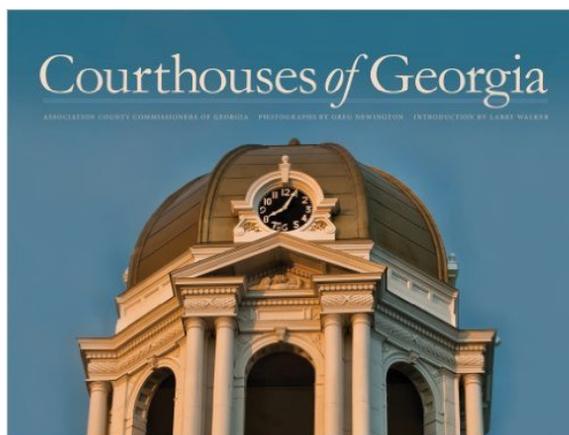
northwest corner to Camden County in the southeast. Only Texas tops Georgia in the number of counties with 254.

Newington's photos have a unique glow to them, whether taken in full daylight or at sunset. Each building, whether erected in the early nineteenth century or late twentieth, are given a quiet, dignified personality. Justice's text tells us just enough about each county to

place it in the historical development of the state. Given the sometimes bewildering restructuring of county boundaries over 200-plus years, this was no easy task. Justice distills the essence skillfully, weaving in enough facts to establish political and historical bearings. The tourism districts of Georgia (Historic Heartland,

Presidential Pathways, etc.) are used to organize the presentation. An alphabetical index gives quick access to any county. We're helped through the lexicon of architectural terms with a section of definitions.

Everyone is entitled to have a favorite courthouse. Hancock County is this reviewer's. One of the routes from Athens to South Georgia takes you through Sparta, where the courthouse greets you as you top a hill coming into town. It is well that photographer Newington captured Sparta's palace when he did. Built in 1883, architectural style Second Empire, it was reduced to shambles by fire on August 11, 2014. But, as this is written, rebuilding to its former grandeur is underway. Before long, the people's business will once



more be open in its proper place in Hancock County.

This publication may fit in the category of coffee table books because of its dimensions and lush photographic quality, but it is much more. It is a landmark record of this state's courthouses, assembled with editorial skill and care. It is a

valuable reference, a gold mine of historical data, and a reminder of the importance of these buildings—varied though they may appear—to American democracy.

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