

Columbus County Memorial Park & Historic Courthouse



History at the Crossroads of Columbus County

Some places become landmarks because of their architecture and others because of the history that happened around them. The Historic Columbus County Courthouse is both.

Standing prominently in Uptown Whiteville, the courthouse occupies a distinctive place within a traffic circle, with approaches and views from the north, south, east, and west, the directions that lead outward to communities across Columbus County.

For more than a century, generations of Columbus County residents have known this building. Today, following an extensive historic restoration and the creation of the adjoining Columbus County Memorial Park, there is even more to discover here.

More Than a Century of History

Columbus County was established in 1808, and its first courthouse was constructed in Whiteville the following year. A brick courthouse followed in 1852, but by the early 20th century, county leaders were ready to build again.

The courthouse visitors see today was constructed in 1914–1915 and designed by architect Joseph F. Leitner. Its Classical Revival architecture, stately columns, and prominent setting have made it Columbus County's most recognizable landmark.

In 1979, the courthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, recognizing a building that had already served generations of Columbus County citizens.

Preserving a Landmark

By 2015, the courthouse had closed, and for several years its future was uncertain. But a building that had been part of Columbus County life for more than 100 years was given another chapter.

A nearly \$7 million restoration carefully brought the courthouse back to life. Historic elements were preserved while the building was updated to serve today's community. Original floors remained in place, modern lighting and accessibility improvements were incorporated, and the grand upstairs courtroom, which had been divided into two rooms decades earlier, was restored to its original single-courtroom design. The Clerk of Superior Court returned to the historic courthouse, and the restored courtroom once again became a place for court proceedings, meetings, and special ceremonies.

When the courthouse reopened in 2024, it was more than the reopening of a government building. It was the preservation of a landmark familiar to generations of Columbus County families.



Columbus County Memorial Park

Adjacent to the restored courthouse, Columbus County Memorial Park brings together pieces of local history in a thoughtfully landscaped setting.

Some of the memorials have stood in the community for generations. Others are more recent. Together, they tell stories of the people, milestones, service and sacrifice that Columbus County has chosen to remember.

Remembering James B. White

Among the park's historic memorials is one honoring James B. White, after whom the town of Whiteville was named.

White was an early North Carolina state senator whose connection to Whiteville dates back to the community's beginnings. He provided land for the county's courthouse and civic center, helping establish the location around which Whiteville would grow.

The memorial honoring White was placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution, preserving the story of a man whose name remains part of the community more than two centuries later.

For visitors, it provides an important connection: Whiteville is more than a name on a map. There is a person and a story behind the name.



A Fountain With a Story

Another treasure in Memorial Park carries a story dating to the years immediately following World War II.

Founded in 1939 with 13 charter members and the motto "Whiteville Beautiful," the Whiteville Garden Club worked to unite local efforts in landscaping, beautification and civic improvement.

In 1948, the club dedicated a fountain and dogwood trees as part of a Memorial Garden on the grounds of the former Columbus County Hospital. The fountain served as the centerpiece of a landscaped setting created for remembrance, beauty, and reflection.

The fountain no longer stands at the former hospital site. Instead of allowing this piece of community history to disappear, it was preserved and relocated to Columbus County Memorial Park.

Today, visitors can see the fountain more than 75 years after its dedication. Its surroundings have changed, but it remains a tangible connection to an earlier generation and to a long tradition of civic pride and remembrance in Whiteville.



Two Centuries of Columbus County

The Columbus County Bicentennial Monument tells another chapter of the story.

Columbus County was established in 1808, and in 2008 residents celebrated the county's 200th anniversary. The monument commemorates that milestone and the generations of people and communities that contributed to the county's first two centuries.



The Blue Star Memorial



The Blue Star Memorial, donated by the Whiteville Garden Club and dedicated in 2025, connects Columbus County to a national tradition of honoring the men and women of the United States Armed Forces.

The Blue Star Marker Program grew out of the garden club movement following World War II and became the first national project undertaken by garden clubs. In 1951, the program expanded to honor all men and women who serve in the United States Armed Forces.

The choice of the Blue Star carries special meaning. During World War II, blue stars became familiar symbols on service flags and banners displayed in homes to signify a son or daughter away at war. Similar flags could be seen in churches and businesses, quietly telling the community that someone connected to that family or organization was serving the nation.

The program eventually expanded to include markers designed for parks, civic spaces and historic grounds. Each carries a simple tribute:

“A tribute to the Armed Forces who have defended the United States of America.”

Its placement here has an especially meaningful local connection. More than 75 years separate the Whiteville Garden Club's 1948 Memorial Garden and its 2025 Blue Star Memorial, yet both reflect a continuing commitment to beauty, service, remembrance, and community care.

Stand Before the Charters of Freedom

The newest chapter in this historic setting arrived in May 2026 with the dedication of the Columbus County Charters of Freedom.

The permanent outdoor installation gives residents, students and visitors the opportunity to stand before life-size reproductions of three of America's founding documents: the Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Rather than encountering these words only in a textbook or on a screen, visitors can stop and read them for themselves.

A companion display highlights the 13th, 14th, 15th, 19th and 24th Amendments, representing important milestones in America's continuing history of citizenship, civil rights and voting rights.

With the dedication of the display, Columbus County became the 77th Charters of Freedom setting in the United States and the 47th in North Carolina.

It is a fitting addition to a place where local history, public service and remembrance already come together.



Keep Exploring the Courthouse Grounds

The history doesn't end at the boundaries of Memorial Park.

Continue around the courthouse grounds to the north side of the courthouse, where a separate memorial honors Columbus County servicemen who lost their lives during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

Read their names. Pause for a moment. Remember that the history represented throughout these grounds is not simply a collection of dates and monuments; it is the history of people, families, and communities.



Then look back toward the courthouse itself.

From its distinctive position within the traffic circle, look north, south, east and west toward the towns, farms, waterways and rural landscapes that together make up Columbus County's 954 square miles.

For more than a century, people have approached this landmark from every direction. Today, take the opportunity to stop.

Walk the grounds. Discover the fountain's story. Find the man behind Whiteville's name. Read the memorials. Stand before America's founding documents. And take a closer look at a courthouse Columbus County chose to preserve rather than lose.

For residents, this is a place filled with familiar history and shared memories.

For visitors, it is an opportunity to discover some of the people, stories and values that have shaped Columbus County.

And for both, it is a reminder that preserving history isn't simply about looking back. It's about carrying it forward.

