

History of the Second Pinal County Courthouse

- 1866 – Florence is established. The town is formed from land patented by Levi Ruggles, who later transferred the title of the land to the Town of Florence. Ruggles is also responsible for the original planned layout of Florence.
- 1875 – Pinal County is established from portions of Maricopa and Pima counties. Florence becomes the county seat.
- 1877 – The first Pinal County Courthouse is constructed. It is known as McFarland State Park today.
- December 21, 1877 – Silver King Mine is established. The mine is operated for about thirty-five years until it was shutdown on May 5, 1912. The prosperity of the mine causes the establishment of the Town of Pinal located 3 miles southwest of present day Superior.
- 1879 – City of Casa Grande is founded. The town is originally called Terminus because it was the end of the rail line. Jere Fryer and Pauline Cashmam, a Civil War Union Spy, meet and move to Casa Grande. They later marry and operate a hotel. Jere Fryer will later become Pinal County Sheriff. Establishment of Casa Grande marks the beginning of rail transportation to the area.
- 1888 – The "Duel at the Tunnel Saloon" takes place in Florence between ex-sheriff Pete Gabriel and his ex-deputy Joe Phy. It is the most notorious gunfight in Florence history. Both Gabriel and Phy are shot. Gabriel recovers and lives 10 more years. Phy dies from his wounds. The shooting reportedly stemmed from jealousy over a woman.
- March 1, 1890 – Pinal County Board of Supervisors (W.C Smith, G.W. Campbell, and E.W. Childs) hire architect J.M. Creighton to design a second county courthouse. The supervisors seek to build a structure that represents their belief in future prosperity through mining and agriculture. Contracts to build the Second Pinal County Courthouse and jail cells are awarded to A.J. Doran and T.A. Adams. The two contracts total \$34,765, an extravagant sum for the time.
- 1890 – The operations at Silver King Mine are largely scaled back due to the devaluation of silver. The Town of Pinal, once 2000 residents strong, dwindles to a mere 10 people.
- February 2, 1891 – The courthouse is completed. Built in American-Victorian architecture and totaling 15,000 square feet the building houses the offices of the Supervisors, the Recorder, the Treasurer, and the Assessor. The Sheriff's Office and jail occupy the back end of the first floor. A clock tower is constructed, but there is not enough money to finance the installation of working clocks. Instead, clock facings are added, with the time set at 11:44.
- June 4, 1899 – Pearl Hart is jailed in the courthouse for robbing a stage coach.
- 1908 – Florence is incorporated.
- 1909 – The Arizona Territorial prison is moved from Yuma to Florence. Florence is still recognized as being the home of the Arizona State Prison.
- 1912 – Arizona officially becomes a state on Valentine's Day.
- 1917 – The first and only two story additions are made to the northwest and southwest corners of the courthouse transforming the cruciform shaped building to a "T" shape.
- 1925 – Ernest W. McFarland is elected Pinal County Attorney. He will serve in that capacity until 1930.
- 1926 – Coolidge Dam is dedicated, increasing agricultural opportunities in Pinal County. Humorist Will Rogers attends the dedication, takes one look as the Gila River is filling the storage dam and says, "If that was my lake, I'd mow it."



- 1930 – Eva Dugan receives a sanity hearing in the court house after a conviction of murder. She is deemed sane and put to death by hanging. Her head comes off during the execution and death by hanging is immediately discontinued. She remains the only woman executed in Arizona. Ernest McFarland served as the attorney for the prosecution.
- 1933 – Winnie Ruth Judd receives a sanity hearing in the courthouse after a double murder conviction. She is represented by McFarland. She is deemed insane and is not executed. Her trials and tribulations become a footnote in Arizona political history. WPA labor helped with the first of three single story additions to the courthouse; this addition expands the northeast edge of the building.
- 1934 – McFarland is elected Pinal County Superior Court Justice. He serves until 1940.
- 1940 – McFarland is elected to the U.S. Senate, where he authors the "G.I. Bill".
- 1943 – Prisoners are moved out of the jail of the courthouse into a new county jail.
- 1952 – The Pinal County Board of Supervisors vote to tear down the cupola, as its weight was causing the building to sag. County residents protest this action and the cupola is saved.
- 1955 – McFarland is elected Governor of Arizona.
- 1961 – Third Pinal County Courthouse is opened, consisting of some 30,000 square feet.
- 1964 – McFarland is chosen Associate Justice of Arizona Supreme Court. He is elevated to Chief Justice in 1968.
- 1975 – The third addition to the second courthouse is constructed and spans the entire length of the north side of the building.
- 1982 – The fourth addition is completed on the southeast side of the courthouse. The building, which had 15,000 square feet when first constructed, is now 24,000 square feet.
- Late 1990s the Pinal County Board of Supervisors researches the cost of restoring the courthouse. A building assessment report concludes the cost of fully repairing the courthouse would be \$3 million.
- 2002 – First construction grant to repair the court house is secured from the State Park Heritage Fund. This grant of nearly \$100,000 and matching funds from Pinal County was used to repair the clock tower.
- May 19, 2004 – The fourth and current Pinal County Courthouse is dedicated. The five story building cost \$26 million and provides the county with 145,000 square feet of space. While the Second Pinal County Court House had one courtroom for the one county judge the new court house consists of seven courtrooms for nine judges. This increase in judgeships alone shows the growth of the county over the last 130 years as does the increase of the number of county employees. Starting with less than 20 employees Pinal County currently employs about 2,400 people in offices throughout the county.
- After all these years, the Second Pinal County Courthouse is still the most significant architectural landmark in Florence, Arizona. The clock tower has been repaired and the roof is under repair. Unfortunately, the building became vacant October 2005 when the last two offices were moved to building 'E' directly east of the courthouse. Future plans are for the building to house the Pinal County Visitor Center and possibly to serve as meeting and conference space.



2nd Pinal County Courthouse circa 1930s.



2nd Pinal County Courthouse today.