

# NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-934 (Rev. 12-2015)

OMB Control No. 1024-0276 (Exp. 01/31/2019)

## MONROE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

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### 1. NAME AND LOCATION OF PROPERTY

**Historic Name:** Monroe County Courthouse

**Other Name/Site Number:** Old Monroe County Courthouse, Monroe County Museum

**Street and Number (if applicable):** 31 North Alabama Avenue

**City/Town:** Monroeville

**County:** Monroe

**State:** AL

### 2. SIGNIFICANCE DATA

**NHL Criteria:** 1

**NHL Criteria Exceptions:** N/A

**NHL Theme(s):** III. Expressing Cultural Values  
3. Literature  
6. Popular and Traditional Culture

**Period(s) of Significance:** 1960-1962

**Significant Person(s) (only Criterion 2):**

**Cultural Affiliation (only Criterion 6):**

**Designer/Creator/Architect/Builder:** Andrew J. Bryan (architect); M.T. Lewman & Company (builder)

**Historic Contexts:** XIX. Literature  
B. Fiction  
1. Novel  
XXI. Motion Pictures  
I. Film Product

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement.** We are collecting this information under the authority of the Historic Sites Act of 1935 (16 U.S.C. 461-467) and 36 CFR part 65. Your response is required to obtain or retain a benefit. We will use the information you provide to evaluate properties nominated as National Historic Landmarks. We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. We estimate the time to prepare an initial inquiry letter is 2 hours, including time to maintain records, gather information, and review and submit the letter. We assume that consultants will prepare nominations at an average cost of \$32,680 per nomination. You may send comments on the burden estimate or any other aspect of this form to the Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 12201 Sunrise Valley Drive, Room 2C114, Mail Stop 242, Reston, VA 20192.

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**3. WITHHOLDING SENSITIVE INFORMATION**

Does this nomination contain sensitive information that should be withheld under Section 304 of the National Historic Preservation Act?

Yes

No

**4. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

1. Acreage of Property: 1.3 acres

2. Use either Latitude/Longitude Coordinates or the UTM system:

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates:**

Datum if other than WGS84:

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

	<b>Latitude:</b>	<b>Longitude:</b>
A:	31.527344°	-87.324805°
B:	31.527350°	-87.324062°
C:	31.526698°	-87.324057°
D:	31.526694°	-87.324800°

**OR**

<b>UTM References:</b>	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Easting</b>	<b>Northing</b>
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3. Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated area encompasses the southern half of Lot 28 in the City of Monroeville (Parcel #51-21-07-36-3-301-037.000), and is bounded on the east by the parking area along North Alabama Avenue, on the south by West Claiborne Street, and on the west by North Mount Pleasant Avenue. The drive-through parking area that bisects the lot forms the northern boundary of the nominated area.

4. Boundary Justification:

The boundary encompasses the 1904 Monroe County Courthouse and the land immediately surrounding it, up to the edges of the courthouse square. The northern portion of the courthouse square is excluded from the NHL boundary because it no longer retains integrity to the period of significance (1960-1962) as a result of the construction of the 1963 courthouse.

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### 5. SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT AND DISCUSSION

#### INTRODUCTION: SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Monroe County Courthouse is significant under National Historic Landmark Criterion 1 in the area of literature for its association with Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and the 1962 film version of the book. The period of significance begins in 1960 with the publication of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book and ends in 1962 with the release of the Academy Award-winning film adaptation. One of the most widely read novels of the twentieth century, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is nationally significant for its discussion of themes of racial injustice and tolerance and for its influence on the legal profession. Set in a small town in Alabama in the 1930s, the novel tells the story of Jean Louise "Scout" Finch, a young white girl whose father, Atticus Finch, takes on the role of defense attorney for Tom Robinson, a Black man accused of raping a white woman. The Monroe County Courthouse was the inspiration for the fictional courthouse in Harper Lee's novel, and its courtroom was recreated as the set for Tom Robinson's trial in the film.

With a compelling story that is accessible to a wide audience, *To Kill a Mockingbird* influenced generations of American readers, promoting tolerance and encouraging people to stand up for what is right. Written and published during the Civil Rights Movement, the novel articulated mid-twentieth-century white liberals' response to racism and segregation. It questioned the morality of racial discrimination in the South, depicted white Southerners challenging racial injustice, and championed the American ideal of equality before the law. In the legal profession, the character of Atticus Finch achieved iconic status as an example of the ideal lawyer: skilled, ethical, courageous, and devoted to his client despite the personal cost. Legal scholars frequently referred to Finch when discussing lawyers' moral responsibilities, and they analyzed and debated the novel's insights into ethics and discrimination in the judicial system. As a legal hero and film icon, Atticus Finch captivated the American public, paving the way for numerous depictions of lawyers as heroes in books, television, and movies.

#### **PROVIDE RELEVANT PROPERTY-SPECIFIC HISTORY, HISTORICAL CONTEXT, AND THEMES. JUSTIFY CRITERIA, EXCEPTIONS, AND PERIODS OF SIGNIFICANCE LISTED IN SECTION 2.**

##### **Monroe County Courthouse (1903-1904)**

Situated in southwest Alabama, Monroeville was founded in 1831 and became the county seat of Monroe County the following year. In the late 1800s, Monroeville was a small, rural community with approximately 400 residents. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the construction of railroads and the expansion of the timber industry in Monroe County brought new residents and businesses to the town. By 1930, a variety of stores lined the courthouse square and the population had risen to 1,300.<sup>1</sup> The construction of a new county courthouse around the turn of the twentieth century was connected to this period of growth in Monroeville.

In 1903, Monroe County Probate Judge Nicholas J. Stallworth engaged architect Andrew J. Bryan to design a more impressive edifice to replace the outdated 1852 courthouse, which stood on the northern half of the town's

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Enzweiler, David Ray, and Pamela King, *Monroeville Downtown Historic District*, National Register of Historic Places Nomination (2009), Section 8, pp. 18-20; Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Monroeville, Monroe County, Alabama* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1920), Sheet 1; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 - Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), p. 85.

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courthouse square.<sup>2</sup> Bryan made a career designing courthouses in the Deep South, catering to communities such as Monroeville that embraced New South municipal boosterism and sought a landmark building to convey their up-and-coming status. On the Monroe County Courthouse and on many other projects, Bryan worked with M.T. Lewman and Company, a builder based in Louisville, Kentucky. One of the largest building companies in the South, the Lewman Company possessed the skills to execute Bryan's complex design, which included curved brick walls and a dome for the clock and bell tower. The building was completed in early 1904 and stood on the south half of the courthouse square. (Figure 1) The 1852 courthouse remained on the north half of the square until 1928, when it was destroyed by fire.<sup>3</sup>

### Nelle Harper Lee and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)

Nelle Harper Lee was born in Monroeville on April 28, 1926 and grew up in a house on South Alabama Avenue, about two blocks south of the courthouse. Her father, A.C. Lee, was a lawyer, part-owner of the local newspaper, and a politician who served on the town council in the 1920s and in the Alabama state legislature from 1927 to 1939. As a child, Nelle Lee frequently walked to the Monroe County Courthouse to watch her father in the courtroom. After graduating from Monroe County High School in 1944, she enrolled at Huntingdon College, a women's college in Montgomery, Alabama. She attended Huntingdon for one year, then transferred to the University of Alabama to study law.<sup>4</sup> While at the university, she honed her writing skills as a contributor to student-run publications and as editor-in-chief of the university's humor magazine, *Rammer Jammer*. Lee soon found that she preferred writing to studying the law. In 1949, she left the University of Alabama and moved to New York City to pursue a career as a writer.<sup>5</sup>

In New York, Lee worked during the day and devoted her evenings and weekends to writing. Seven years after moving to the city, she submitted several short stories to literary agent Maurice Crain, who saw potential in Lee's work. On Christmas Day in 1956, Lee's friends Michael and Joy Brown gave her the funds to quit her day job as an airline ticket agent and spend one year working full-time on a novel. Lee completed a draft in only five months. Teresa "Tay" von Hohoff, an editor at J.B. Lippincott, was intrigued by the manuscript, gave Lee an advance, and advised her to focus on the childhood experiences of the main character, a white woman named Jean Louise Finch. (The unedited draft manuscript was published in 2015 as *Go Set a Watchman*.) Over the next two years, von Hohoff worked with Lee to bring coherence and structure to the novel. Finally, in the spring of 1959, the manuscript for *To Kill a Mockingbird* was ready for publication. As her pen name, the author chose her middle name and last name: Harper Lee.<sup>6</sup>

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is set in the 1930s in fictional Maycomb, Alabama, a small town that is the county seat of Maycomb County. Narrated by Jean Louise "Scout" Finch, the story spans the three years when she is between the ages of six and nine. The first half of the novel centers on Scout and her older brother, Jem, who live with their widowed father, Atticus. Along with their next-door neighbor, Dill, the Finch children become fascinated by the mysterious Boo Radley, a reclusive white man who lives with his parents in a house at the end

<sup>2</sup> The 1852 courthouse was Monroeville's third; fires destroyed the first two courthouses in the town.

<sup>3</sup> Delos D. Hughes, "A Kentucky Builder in the New South: The M. T. Lewman and Falls City Construction Companies in Alabama, 1897-1915," *Alabama Review* 59, no. 2 (April 2006): 107-109, 120-122, 129; Delos Hughes, *Historic Alabama Courthouses: A Century of Their Images and Stories* (Montgomery, Ala.: NewSouth Books, 2016), pp. 40, 52, 76, 111; Enzweiler, Ray, and King, Section 8, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy G. Anderson, "Harper Lee," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-112>; Charles J. Shields, *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), pp. 34-39, 66-67; Mary McDonagh Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo: A Celebration of Fifty Years of To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: Harper, 2010), pp. 19, 120-122.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, "Harper Lee"; Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 88-99.

<sup>6</sup> Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 114-116, 129-131; Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, pp. 26-27.

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of the block. Despite Atticus Finch's warning to leave Radley alone, the children repeatedly attempt to catch a glimpse of him. Although they never see Radley, he clearly sees them and begins to leave small gifts for them in a hole in a tree. Meanwhile, Scout and Jem learn that the local judge has appointed their father to serve as the defense lawyer for Tom Robinson, a Black man accused of raping a white woman named Mayella Ewell. Driven by a moral conviction that all people deserve a fair trial and a firm belief in Robinson's innocence, Atticus Finch prepares to mount a serious defense of Robinson in court, much to the dismay of many of the town's white residents.

While the first half of the novel touches on issues of race, justice, and morality, these issues are at the forefront of the book's second half. At Robinson's trial, Finch attacks the credibility of Mayella Ewell's story and pleads with the all-white jury to put aside their racial prejudices in the interest of justice. Nevertheless, the jury convicts Robinson of rape, which was a capital offense in Alabama at the time. Atticus is resigned to the verdict that he expected from the start, but Robinson's conviction shatters the children's illusions about justice. When Robinson is killed trying to escape from prison, Scout and Jem are devastated. After the trial, Mayella Ewell's father, Bob, retaliates against Atticus Finch by threatening and intimidating the Finch family. Bob Ewell attacks the two children on the way home from a school pageant, breaking Jem's arm and knocking him unconscious. Before Ewell can do more harm, a stranger intervenes to rescue Jem, and Scout escapes home. The stranger turns out to be Boo Radley, who kills Bob Ewell to protect the Finch children. The sheriff refuses to arrest Radley, arguing that he would be acquitted since he killed to protect the children. Therefore, it would be unnecessarily cruel to drag the reclusive man into the spotlight. Drawing on her father's admonition that "it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" because the birds offer a beautiful song and harm no one, Scout says to her father that arresting Radley would "be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it?" (*TKAM*,<sup>7</sup> pp. 94, 279)

Although *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not autobiographical, Lee drew upon her own childhood experiences to create vivid and authentic characters. Accordingly, there are striking similarities between Lee and Scout, though the two are not identical. Both grew up in a small Alabama town in the 1930s, and like Nelle Lee, Scout's father is a lawyer who also serves in the state legislature. Calpurnia, a Black woman who works for Atticus Finch as a cook and housekeeper, plays a major role in caring for the Finch children, whose mother died when Scout was two. Although Lee's mother was alive throughout her childhood, the Lee family did employ a Black housekeeper, Hattie Bell Clausell, who cared for the children. Both Scout and Nelle were tomboys who frequently played with their older brother, though Nelle Lee also had two sisters, whereas Scout has only a brother. In the novel, Scout befriends Dill, a boy from out of town who spends his summers with relatives in Maycomb. Similarly, one of Nelle Harper Lee's childhood friends was Truman Persons, a boy who periodically lived with relatives in Monroeville in the late 1920s and early 1930; Persons later changed his name to Truman Capote and became a well-known writer.<sup>8</sup>

The geography and landscape of Maycomb also reflect the extent to which Lee drew upon her own childhood experiences for the descriptive details that animate the fictional town. The Finches, like the Lees, live a couple of blocks from the courthouse on one of the town's main residential streets. For both Scout Finch and Nelle Lee, it was a short walk from home to the courthouse, where they could watch their lawyer father at work. In the novel, Dill lives next door to the Finches, just as Truman Persons lived next door to the Lees. Scout and Jem Finch must walk past the home of the mysterious Boo Radley in order to reach the elementary school around the corner (*TKAM*, pp. 12-13). During Lee's childhood, the home of Nathan Boleware, the likely inspiration for

<sup>7</sup> References to the novel are cited in the text as *TKAM*, with page numbers from Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 25th Anniversary Edition, 1960-1985 (New York: Warner Books, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, "Harper Lee"; Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 33-35; Monroe County Heritage Museums, *Monroeville: The Search for Harper Lee's Maycomb*, Images of America (S.I.: Arcadia Publishing, 1999), pp. 9-10, 17-18; Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, pp. 121-122.

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the character of Boo Radley, stood at a curve in the road between the Lee house and the elementary school.<sup>9</sup>

Published in July 1960, *To Kill a Mockingbird* quickly became a bestseller and was named a Literary Guild Selection, a Book-of-the-Month Club Alternate, and a Reader's Digest Condensed Book. At the time, these book clubs played a significant role in shaping Americans' literary tastes and boosted sales of the books they selected. In August, Harper Lee's novel entered the *New York Times* best seller list, and remained there for eighty-eight weeks. Within a year of publication, it had sold approximately a half million copies, and the paperback version, published in 1962, sold three million copies in one year. In 1961, *To Kill A Mockingbird* received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, one of the most prestigious awards for American fiction. Lee received additional awards for her novel in later years, including a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2007 and a National Medal of Arts in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

Despite widespread acclaim, the novel is not without its critics. Many literary scholars dismiss the book as popular youth fiction and see flaws in the novel's structure. Among the most common criticisms is that the narrative voice is inconsistent, jumping discordantly between the perspective of Scout as a child narrator and the voice of Scout as an adult looking back on her childhood experiences. Other critics charge that the novel lacks sufficient unity between its first and second parts.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s many devotees admire the appealing characters, the economy of Lee's prose, her vivid descriptions of a Southern town in the 1930s, and the compelling story.<sup>12</sup> The themes of justice, loss of innocence, moral courage, tolerance, and community resonate with readers across time and cultures.<sup>13</sup>

More than fifty years after its publication, *To Kill a Mockingbird* remains one of the most well-known American novels. Generations of American schoolchildren have read the book in literature classes, and numerous guides have been published to assist teachers and students in understanding and interpreting it. *To Kill a Mockingbird* has sold more than forty million copies worldwide, and several surveys place it among the most important books of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Christopher Sergel's play based on the novel premiered in 1991, and schools, community theaters, and repertory theaters throughout the country continue to perform the play. Starting in 1991, the play was performed annually at the Monroe County Courthouse in Monroeville.<sup>15</sup> A new dramatic adaptation written by Aaron Sorkin opened on Broadway in late 2018.

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<sup>9</sup> Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 51, 53-54; Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>10</sup> Claudia Durst Johnson, *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries*, Twayne's Masterwork Studies, no. 139 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), p. 13; Anderson, "Harper Lee"; Best Seller List, *New York Times*, 14 August 1960, p. BR8; Wayne Flynt, "To Kill A Mockingbird," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1140>.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries*, p. 20; Michael J. Meyer, ed., *Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird: New Essays* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2010), p. 10; William Giraldi, "Just How Good Is 'To Kill a Mockingbird'?" *New Republic*, July 15, 2015, <https://newrepublic.com/article/122306/just-how-good-kill-mockingbird>; Jennifer Murray, "More Than One Way to (Mis)Read a 'Mockingbird,'" *Southern Literary Journal* 43, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 75-91.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries*, pp. 21-23; Alice Hall Petry, ed., *On Harper Lee: Essays and Reflections*, 1st ed (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), pp. 96-98.

<sup>13</sup> Wayne Flynt, "Universal Values: The Enduring Legacy of To Kill a Mockingbird," *Alabama Heritage*, no. 97 (Summer 2010): 11-13; Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>14</sup> William Grimes, "Harper Lee, Author of 'To Kill a Mockingbird,' Dies at 89," accessed April 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/20/arts/harper-lee-dies.html>; Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries*, pp. 13-14; Flynt, "To Kill A Mockingbird."

<sup>15</sup> The website for Dramatic Publishing, which owns the rights to the play, provides a map of current productions (<http://www.dramaticpublishing.com/to-kill-a-mockingbird>, accessed April 10, 2017). In 2020, the annual performance at Monroe County Courthouse was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic; this was the first time since 1990 that the play was not performed at the courthouse.

***To Kill a Mockingbird: The Film (1962)***

In January 1961, producer Alan Pakula and director Robert Mulligan acquired the film rights for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When they began working on the project, both men were early in their careers. Pakula had produced just one film, and although Mulligan had been directing for television since the early 1950s, he had directed only a handful of feature films. After Lee declined to write the screenplay, Pakula and Mulligan turned to Horton Foote, a writer with extensive experience in television who was just beginning to move into writing movie screenplays.<sup>16</sup> In the screenplay, Scout remains the narrator and a main character, but Foote places greater emphasis on Atticus Finch and the trial of Tom Robinson. As a result, the movie omits scenes and storylines from the book that relate primarily to Scout and her brother, Jem.<sup>17</sup> Gregory Peck, the actor chosen to play Atticus Finch, firmly believed that his character was the hero of the film and successfully lobbied Mulligan to cut additional scenes that focused on the children. Despite these changes, Harper Lee believed the screenplay remained true to her intent in writing the novel.<sup>18</sup>

Peck was the only Hollywood star to appear in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. For the other characters, Pakula and Mulligan cast less well-known actors. Brock Peters (Tom Robinson), Estelle Evans (Calpurnia), James Anderson (Bob Ewell), and Paul Fix (Judge Taylor) had film, stage, or television experience but had played few if any leading roles on film. Collin Wilcox Paxton (Mayella Ewell) and William Windom (Mr. Gilmer) made their film debuts in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as did Robert Duvall, who played Boo Radley. Duvall went on to receive seven Academy Award nominations and won an Oscar in 1984 for his role in *Tender Mercies*. At open auditions in Birmingham, Alabama, about 150 miles north of Monroeville, casting director Boaty Boatwright found nine-year-old Mary Badham, whom she cast as Scout, and thirteen-year-old Philip Alford, who played Jem.<sup>19</sup>

The film opened in Los Angeles on Christmas Day in 1962, in New York City in February 1963, and in Alabama in mid-March. The film garnered generally favorable and, in some instances, glowing reviews. Writing for *Variety* magazine, Larry Tubelle declared it “a major film achievement, a significant, captivating and memorable picture that ranks with the best of recent years,” and James Powers of *The Hollywood Reporter* dubbed it “a rare and worthy treasure.”<sup>20</sup>

The movie earned eight Academy Award nominations. In a year that included multiple films that would become classics of American cinema, *To Kill a Mockingbird* won in three categories. Henry Bumstead, Alexander Golitzen, and Oliver Emert won the award for best art direction (black-and-white), Horton Foote took home an Oscar for his screenplay, and Gregory Peck won Best Actor for his performance as Atticus Finch. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was nominated for Best Picture, Music Score, and Best Director (Robert Mulligan) but *Lawrence of Arabia* took home the awards in these categories. Actress Mary Badham was nominated in the category of Best Supporting Actress, which Patty Duke won for her performance in *The Miracle Worker*. In the category of

<sup>16</sup> Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 191-195, 205; Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, the film does not include Scout’s experiences with her school teacher, her relationship with Aunt Alexandra, the children’s trip to Calpurnia’s church, or Jem reading to the drug-addicted Mrs. DuBose. Because the film takes place over the course of one year instead of three, viewers also do not see the evolution of the relationship between Scout and Jem that occurs as Jem begins to enter adolescence.

<sup>18</sup> Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 204, 205-206, 218; Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>19</sup> Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 210-212; Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, pp. 46, 53-54.

<sup>20</sup> Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 225-226; Larry Tubelle, “Review: ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ (1962),” *Variety*, December 11, 1962, <http://variety.com/1962/film/reviews/to-kill-a-mockingbird-1200420238/>; James Powers, “Pakula-Mulligan Pic in Line for Honors,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, December 11, 1962, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/kill-a-mockingbird-1962-film-867767>; Bosley Crowther, “‘To Kill a Mockingbird’: One Adult Omission in a Fine Film,” *New York Times*, February 15, 1963, <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9D06EEDF143CEF3BBC4D52DFB4668388679EDE>.

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black-and-white cinematography, *To Kill a Mockingbird* lost to *The Longest Day*.<sup>21</sup> In the early 2000s, to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of American cinema, the American Film Institute (AFI) compiled lists of the best movies in various categories. The AFI named Gregory Peck's Atticus Finch its #1 Hollywood Hero, and chose *To Kill a Mockingbird* as the #1 courtroom drama, the second most inspiring film, and the twenty-fifth of the "Greatest American Films of All Time."<sup>22</sup>

### **Racial Injustice and Mid-Twentieth-Century Liberalism in *To Kill a Mockingbird***

*To Kill a Mockingbird* showed the ways in which racism permeated and corrupted the judicial system in the racially segregated South in the first half of the twentieth century. During this period, white Southerners manipulated the legal system to enforce and sustain white supremacy. Judges, juries, and law enforcement officers were all white, and the word of a white person carried greater weight in court than did the word of a Black person. As a result, African Americans routinely received egregiously unfair treatment in Southern courts.<sup>23</sup> In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this pattern of injustice is evident from the time Mayella Ewell, a white woman, accuses Tom Robinson, a Black man, of rape. As Scout puts it in the novel, "Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed." (*TKAM*, p. 244) Whites in Maycomb assume Robinson is guilty even before the case goes to court simply because he is a Black man and Ewell is a white woman. Although the evidence presented in the trial casts doubt on the veracity of Ewell's accusation, the jury nevertheless returns the guilty verdict that residents of both races expected.

Harper Lee wrote from her experiences growing up in the segregated South, where racial injustice was commonplace. The novel describes the intimidation and extra-legal violence that white Southerners used to maintain racial inequality. Between 1880 and 1940, white mobs in the South kidnapped, tortured, and lynched thousands of Black citizens, using terror to deter them from challenging white supremacy. Lynchings typically occurred when whites suspected a Black person of committing a crime against a white person or violating the unwritten codes of conduct that governed race relations. Lynch mobs were particularly likely to target Black men accused of any sort of sexual advance towards a white woman. The white-dominated judicial system rarely took action against the perpetrators, and crowds of whites often gathered to witness the lynchings.<sup>24</sup> This culture of violence and intimidation in the service of white supremacy appears in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. After agreeing to defend Tom Robinson, Atticus Finch receives word that a lynch mob is planning to seize Robinson from the county jail. On the night the lynching is to occur, Finch stations himself in front of the jail to protect his client. When the mob arrives and threatens both Robinson and Finch, it is Scout who ultimately dispels the group by striking up a conversation with one of the men, Walter Cunningham, who is the father of one of her classmates and one of Atticus Finch's clients. White residents of Maycomb also ridicule and threaten Finch and his children because he is defending Robinson. At the conclusion of the novel, Mayella Ewell's father stalks and ultimately assaults the Finch children in retaliation for their father defending Robinson and casting aspersions on his daughter's character.

<sup>21</sup> "The 35th Academy Awards | 1963," *Oscars.org* | *Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1963/T>.

<sup>22</sup> American Film Institute, "AFI's Ten Top Ten" (<http://www.afi.com/10top10/category.aspx?cat=9>), "AFI's 100 Years... 100 Cheers" (<http://www.afi.com/100Years/cheers.aspx>), "AFI's 100 Years... 100 Movies" (<http://www.afi.com/100Years/movies10.aspx>), and "AFI's 100 Years... 100 Heroes & Villains" (<http://www.afi.com/100Years/handv.aspx>).

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, 2nd ed. (Montgomery, Ala.: Equal Justice Initiative, 2015), pp. 28-45; Stewart Emory Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), pp. 17-51.

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Lee denied that any specific court case directly inspired the Tom Robinson case *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but she acknowledged that it was informed by similar trials that took place throughout the South. The events described in the novel resemble two 1930s court cases that she would have been familiar with and that typified racial discrimination in the Southern judicial system.<sup>25</sup> The case of Walter Lett, an African American resident of Monroeville who was accused of rape in 1933, is similar to Tom Robinson's case in several ways. The accusers in both cases were poor white women, and neither jury returned a verdict immediately since there was some doubt as to whether a crime had actually occurred. Both juries ultimately found the men guilty, and Lett and Robinson were sentenced to death. In Harper Lee's novel, some local whites express support for Robinson during the trial, and in Lett's case, local white residents petitioned the governor to commute the death sentence in light of doubts over his guilt. Like Robinson, Lett was sentenced to death but not executed. After suffering a mental breakdown while awaiting execution, Lett died in the state mental hospital, while Robinson is shot trying to escape from prison.<sup>26</sup>

Tom Robinson's trial also echoes the 1931 case of the Scottsboro Boys, a group of young Black men who were unjustly convicted of raping a white woman in Jackson County, Alabama. Although there were substantial holes in the accuser's account of the incident, an all-white jury in the town of Scottsboro, Alabama, nevertheless returned guilty verdicts. The trial and subsequent appeals were widely publicized throughout the country and galvanized civil rights activists. Published about twenty-five years after the last major Scottsboro trial, Harper Lee's story of a Black man wrongly accused of rape yet convicted by an all-white jury resonated with contemporary readers who were familiar with the Scottsboro case.<sup>27</sup> Lee later noted that while Tom Robinson's trial was not based on any specific trial, the Scottsboro trials "will more than do as an example (albeit a lurid one) of deep-South attitudes on race vs. justice that prevailed at the time."<sup>28</sup>

The Scottsboro trials were a key turning point in the evolution of the African American Civil Rights Movement, a multi-faceted campaign to end racial segregation and secure equal rights. In the mid-1950s, as Harper Lee was writing the stories that culminated in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the Civil Rights Movement achieved some important victories, gained momentum, and provoked violent responses from white segregationists. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court declared racial segregation in public schools to be unconstitutional. In the wake of the decision, white citizens and politicians defied the court's order, leading to violence and the closure of some public schools. In 1955, white men in Mississippi brutally murdered fourteen-year-old Emmet Till for reportedly whistling at a white woman. Till's murder and the subsequent acquittal of his accused murderers by an all-white jury in Mississippi focused national attention on the judicial system's failure to protect Black Southerners. In 1955-1956, African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, boycotted the city buses to protest racial discrimination, ultimately forcing the city to end segregation in public transit. Between the publication of Harper Lee's novel in 1960 and the film's release in 1962, civil rights activists organized sit-ins and other protests to demand the end of racial segregation in dining establishments and on interstate buses. As protests spread in the early 1960s, so, too, did violent responses from white Southerners.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Wayne Flynt and Harper Lee, *Mockingbird Songs: My Friendship with Harper Lee* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), p. 93

<sup>26</sup> Flynt, "To Kill a Mockingbird"; Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 118-120.

<sup>27</sup> Flynt, "To Kill a Mockingbird"; Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries*, pp. 4-11; Eric J. Sundquist, "Blues for Atticus Finch: Scottsboro, Brown, and Harper Lee," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird*, updated edition (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), pp. 79-80, 88-94.

<sup>28</sup> Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 117-118 (quotation from 1999 letter from Lee to Hazel Rowley, p. 118).

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Crespi, "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch," *Southern Cultures* 6, no. 2 (January 4, 2012): 12; Susan Salvatore et al., "Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States: Theme Study" (Washington, D.C.: National Historic Landmarks Program, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, August 2000), pp. 71-84; Susan Salvatore, "Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Accommodations: A National Historic Landmarks Theme Study" (Washington, D.C.: National Historic Landmarks Program, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2004 (revised 2009)), pp. 45-47, 51-57, 61-63.

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In its depictions of racial discrimination, white Southerners, and the path towards racial equality, *To Kill a Mockingbird* articulated mid-twentieth-century white liberals' approach to race relations.<sup>30</sup> Eric J. Sundquist argues that the book "harks back to the tradition of liberal exposés of southern racism" that were published in the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>31</sup> In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the character of Atticus Finch exposes racial injustice in Southern courts, and a key aspect of the coming-of-age story in the book is Scout's and Jem's dawning realization of the existence of racial prejudice and its tragic results. By appealing to whites' sense of morality and justice and placing white characters at the center of the story, the book and film helped garner white sympathy for the plight of Blacks in the segregated South.

Appearing at a time when Americans confronted images of white segregationists in the South attacking peaceful Black protesters and schoolchildren, *To Kill a Mockingbird* presented a counter-narrative that showed white, Southern liberals who were troubled by the racial injustice surrounding them. In the aftermath of defeating totalitarianism in World War II and in the midst of ideological warfare against Communism, white liberals increasingly saw racism as "a moral and logical aberration, the glaring contradiction to the American egalitarian spirit." In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this theme is particularly evident in Atticus Finch's approach to defending Tom Robinson.<sup>32</sup> Finch knows that the all-white jury will likely convict Robinson regardless of what anyone says at the trial. He defends Robinson because he believes in the American ideal of equality before the law. In his closing statement to the jury, Finch professes his faith in the courts when he tells jurors that, "in this country our courts are the great levelers, and in our courts all men are created equal." In keeping with this egalitarian vision of American justice, he pleads with them to "review without passion the evidence you have heard" and to jettison their racist assumptions when considering whether Robinson is guilty (*TKAM*, p. 208). Finch, along with his children and a few other members of the white community, recognize that racial prejudice in the judicial system is incompatible with American ideals, and they resist the social pressures to condone this injustice.<sup>33</sup>

*To Kill a Mockingbird* reflects mid-twentieth-century white liberals' vision of who should lead the fight against racial discrimination and how that battle should be fought. The novel and film envision "a form of racial change that would occur through the leadership of people like Atticus Finch in other words, through elite southern white liberals" who would change the "hearts and minds" of white Southerners. During and after the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans objected to this approach to racial change, observing that it was paternalistic, condescending, and racist. Scholars and readers of *To Kill a Mockingbird* have expressed similar critiques of the novel. By focusing on the sacrifices made by the Finch family, the novel and film grant the Black characters little agency in the fight against injustice and discrimination. Robinson, for instance, is presented as a helpless victim whose only hope lies in the efforts of his white lawyer.<sup>34</sup> The "hearts-and-minds" approach of mid-twentieth-century liberalism also evaded systemic reform. While *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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Some scholars see echoes of Emmett Till's murder in *To Kill a Mockingbird*; see Patrick Chura, "Emmett Till and the Historicity of *To Kill a Mockingbird*," in Bloom, pp. 115-140.

<sup>30</sup> The primary proponents of the argument that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is emblematic of mid-twentieth-century white liberalism are Crespino, "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch"; Malcolm Gladwell, "The Courthouse Ring: Atticus Finch and the Limits of Classic Southern Liberalism," in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 57-65; and Sundquist, "Blues for Atticus Finch," in Bloom, pp. 75-102.

<sup>31</sup> Sundquist, "Blues for Atticus Finch," in Bloom, pp. 81-82.

<sup>32</sup> Crespino, "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch," pp. 11-14 (quotation, p. 14).

<sup>33</sup> Other white characters also appear sympathetic to Tom Robinson, including the Finches' neighbor, Miss Maudie. In appointing Atticus Finch to the case, the judge gives Robinson a lawyer who will actually mount a defense, and Sheriff Heck Tate alerts Finch when Robinson is in danger of being attacked by a lynch mob (*TKAM*, p. 218).

<sup>34</sup> Gladwell, "The Courthouse Ring" in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 57-60; Crespino, "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch." pp. 14-15 (quotation), 18, 23; Angela Shaw-Thornburg, "On Reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Fifty Years Later," in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 113-115.

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exposes and condemns racial injustice, it contains no call for reform of what the novel itself presents as a deeply flawed judicial system that is in conflict with American values. For example, the novel does not emphasize the role that disfranchisement and the exclusion of Black citizens from juries played in Tom Robinson's conviction. Finch tries to persuade the jury of Robinson's innocence, all the while believing that the jurors are fundamentally good people who are misguided on the subject of race, but he does not challenge the system that created an all-white, all-male jury. As Malcolm Gladwell noted in a 2009 article, Finch stands up to racists but not to racism.<sup>35</sup>

Criticisms of *To Kill a Mockingbird's* depiction of the relationship between class and racism similarly mirror critiques of mid-twentieth-century liberalism. Scholars have argued that both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and liberalism obscure middle-class whites' roles in sustaining discriminatory social, political, and legal structures by placing most of the blame for racism on lower-class whites. In both the film and the novel, nearly all of the characters who are sympathetic to Tom Robinson are from the middle class, while the characters that espouse the most virulent and violent racism, most notably, Bob Ewell, are all lower-class and working-class.<sup>36</sup> Historian Wayne Flynt counters this argument, noting that "Bob Ewell is no more her [Harper Lee's] chief villain, the moral cripple in her story, than are the twelve men, good and true, who make up the jury."<sup>37</sup>

Particularly for the generation raised in the 1950s and 1960s, *To Kill a Mockingbird* shaped the way whites understood racial discrimination and inspired support or at least sympathy for the Civil Rights Movement. James Carville, campaign manager for President Bill Clinton and a white man from Louisiana, claimed that as soon as he read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, he knew "that she [Lee] was right and I had been wrong" about racial discrimination. Forced to read the novel in school in north Alabama in the 1960s, author Rick Bragg later observed that "you hear that over and over again, especially from young men that have been forced to read it, young men who grew up on the wrong side of the issue that dominates this book, they start reading it, and the next thing you know, it's not just held their interest, it's changed their views." For Lee Smith, an author born in the Appalachian region of Virginia, "this novel changed my life – changed the way I thought about race, class, and discrimination."<sup>38</sup>

Although neither the film nor the novel is progressive on the subject of race by early twenty-first-century standards, *To Kill a Mockingbird* endured as a point of reference in discussions of race and tolerance in the United States. In 2016, President Barack Obama, who was born in the year between the novel and the film, referred to Atticus Finch in his farewell speech as President. Discussing the need to continually fight against discrimination, he remarked that "...each one of us must try to heed the advice of one of the great characters in American fiction, Atticus Finch, who said, 'You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.'"<sup>39</sup> As historian Wayne Flynt observed in 2017, *To Kill a Mockingbird* "has become the primary literary instrument worldwide for teaching values of racial justice, tolerance for people different from ourselves, and the need for moral courage in the face of

<sup>35</sup> Gladwell, "The Courthouse Ring," in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 59-61; Crespino, "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch," pp. 19-20, 21-22, 24-26. Monroe Freedman's 1992 article in *Legal Times* offered a scathing critique of Atticus Finch for doing too little in the fight for racial justice, paving the way for future critiques; for a summary of Freedman's arguments, see Christopher Metress, "The Rise and Fall of Atticus Finch," in Bloom, pp. 143-145.

<sup>36</sup> Crespino, "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch," pp. 20-28; Shaw-Thornburg, "On Reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*," in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 116-126; Gladwell, "The Courthouse Ring," in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>37</sup> Flynt, "Universal Values," p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries*, p. 16 (Carville quotation); Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, pp. 58 (Bragg quotation), 78-79, 142, 177 (Smith quotation).

<sup>39</sup> "Remarks by the President in Farewell Address," *Whitehouse.gov*, January 10, 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/10/remarks-president-farewell-address>.

community prejudice and ostracism.”<sup>40</sup>

### Atticus Finch and *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the Legal Profession

At the time that Harper Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*, lawyers had a reputation for using unscrupulous and even dishonest tactics in the interest of themselves and their clients, regardless of whether their clients were guilty or innocent. As the main character in a best-selling novel and Oscar-winning movie, Atticus Finch offered a powerful antidote to this negative image of lawyers. As “a gallant, eloquent, and courageous attorney defending an innocent man,” Atticus Finch brought “respectability and honor upon the legal profession.”<sup>41</sup> In 1997, the Alabama State Bar placed a monument honoring “Atticus Finch: Lawyer-Hero” at the Monroe County Courthouse; the inscription states, “The legal profession has in Atticus Finch, a lawyer-hero who knows how to use power and advantage for moral purposes, and who is willing to stand alone as the conscience of the community.” Reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* not only led people to enter the legal profession but also inspired lawyers to work for social justice, or to take on *pro bono* cases in the interest of defending those who cannot afford a lawyer. Lawyers and legal scholars consciously deployed the image of Atticus Finch both to attract people to the profession and to encourage *pro bono* work, further solidifying the character’s influence.<sup>42</sup>

For over fifty years, the legal profession has held up Atticus Finch as a model lawyer, praising his skills in the courtroom, his morality, and his commitment to equal treatment before the law. As evidence of Finch’s skill as a trial lawyer, they point to his dedication to his client, courtroom demeanor, relentless cross-examination, and impassioned closing statement. Although he loses the case, Finch’s skills earn him a small victory. The all-white jury spends several hours deliberating a case involving a Black man accused of assaulting a white woman; Southern juries usually returned guilty verdicts in such cases quickly and with little deliberation. Finch shows his commitment to equal justice by risking his reputation to defend Tom Robinson to the best of his ability and by providing legal services to Walter Cunningham, a poor white man who pays his legal fees with hickory nuts, turnip greens, and stove wood (*TKAM*, p. 25). Explaining to his young daughter, Scout, why he defends Tom Robinson, Finch says: “This case, Tom Robinson’s case, is something that goes to the essence of a man’s conscience. Scout, I couldn’t go to church and worship God if I didn’t try to help that man” (*TKAM*, p. 109). Atticus Finch foresees that an innocent man will be judged guilty, and likely executed, because of his race and consequently feels a moral obligation to come to Robinson’s aid. Through discussions of Atticus Finch’s character and his conduct during the trial of Tom Robinson, lawyers have explored a variety of topics relevant to the profession, including legal ethics, the limitations of the American judicial system, the importance of public defenders, and the balance between work and family.<sup>43</sup>

Particularly since the 1990s, legal scholars have debated whether Finch is worthy of the adulation that lawyers shower upon him. Monroe H. Freedman, Malcolm Gladwell, Joseph Crespino, and others have questioned the depth of Finch’s commitment to racial equality, noting that he does not volunteer to defend Tom Robinson but only agrees to take the case when the judge appoints him. Moreover, Finch takes a paternalistic attitude towards African Americans and accepts racial segregation and the legal and political structures (such as all-white juries)

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<sup>40</sup> Flynt, “To Kill A Mockingbird.”

<sup>41</sup> Ann Engar, “*To Kill a Mockingbird*: Fifty Years of Influence on the Legal Profession,” in Meyer, *New Essays*, p. 66.

<sup>42</sup> Engar, “Fifty Years of Influence,” in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 66, 69-71; Cliff Collins, “Atticus Finch: In Your Own Words: The Influence of *To Kill a Mockingbird* Resonates Still,” *Oregon State Bar Bulletin* 70, no. 1 (2010): 35-39; Jonathan A. Rapping, “It’s a Sin to Kill a Mockingbird: The Need for Idealism in the Legal Profession,” *Michigan Law Review* 114, no. 6 (April 2016): 847-865.

<sup>43</sup> Engar, “Fifty Years of Influence,” in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 66-69; Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries*, pp. 17-18; Steven Lubet, “Reconstructing Atticus Finch,” *Michigan Law Review* 97, no. 6 (May 1999): 1339-1340; Collins, “Atticus Finch: In Your Own Words,” pp. 35-39.

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that aided and abetted discrimination.<sup>44</sup> His treatment of Mayella Ewell and Bob Ewell has drawn criticism as well, since Finch's defense of Tom Robinson comes at the expense of humiliating the Ewells, whom he dismisses as "white trash." Malcolm Gladwell argues that Finch asks jurors to trade their prejudice against Blacks for prejudice against poor whites in hopes of securing a not guilty verdict for Tom Robinson.<sup>45</sup> Although these critiques tarnished Finch's image, they also provoked extended and impassioned rebuttals in legal journals. These vigorous defenses of Finch and the discussions he inspired about ethics, the moral responsibilities of lawyers, and strategies of legal reform demonstrate that Finch became an influential, though imperfect, role model for American lawyers.<sup>46</sup>

The publication in 2015 of *Go Set a Watchman*, Lee's unedited draft of the novel that would eventually become *To Kill a Mockingbird*, renewed discussions of Atticus Finch's merits as a legal and literary hero. Completed in 1957 and rejected by publisher J.B. Lippincott, *Go Set a Watchman* tells the story of Jean Louise Finch's return from New York City to her small, Southern hometown in the mid-1950s as the town is grappling with the prospect of racial integration. To her shock and dismay, Jean Louise quickly discovers that her father Atticus, along with many of her relatives and friends, is an active member of the segregationist White Citizens Council. Whereas the Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* preaches tolerance, the Atticus Finch in *Go Set a Watchman* displays an explicitly paternalistic and condescending attitude towards African Americans. He opposes the Civil Rights Movement and resents the Supreme Court's intervention in Southern social and legal customs intended to subjugate Black citizens. Critics of Atticus Finch view *Go Set a Watchman* as the logical evolution of the latent racial paternalism, sympathy for white racists, and resistance to systemic change that Finch shows in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Finch's defenders argue that the version of Atticus Finch in *Go Set a Watchman* need not "destroy a symbol that has helped define justice in America for the better" and view Atticus Finch in *Go Set a Watchman* as a character related to but distinct from Finch of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.<sup>47</sup>

Atticus Finch is a leading light among a group of fictional lawyers that rehabilitated the image of the legal profession in films, television, and popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Finch's character and Gregory Peck's portrayal of him in the 1962 movie of *To Kill a Mockingbird* contributed to the popularity and prevalence of lawyer-heroes in literature and film. Earlier movies such as *Inherit the Wind* (1960) and *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961) portrayed lawyers crusading for justice, but the main characters of these films did not capture the public imagination as Atticus Finch did. The popularity of Atticus Finch and *To Kill a Mockingbird* laid the foundation for a late-1980s resurgence of novels and films that focus on lawyers who risk their reputations and even their lives in pursuit of justice. Bestselling authors John Grisham and Scott Turow cite Lee's novel as an important influence on their legal thrillers, which typically feature lawyer-heroes. Echoes of Atticus Finch and the scene of Tom Robinson's trial appear in movies based on Grisham's and Turow's novels,

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<sup>44</sup> Gladwell, "The Courthouse Ring," in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 57-65; Crespino, "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch"; Sundquist, "Blues for Atticus Finch," in Bloom, pp. 75-102. Christopher Metress provides a concise summary of the arguments against Finch (including Monroe Freedman's) in his article "The Rise and Fall of Atticus Finch," reprinted in Bloom, pp. 141-148.

<sup>45</sup> Lubet, "Reconstructing Atticus Finch," pp. 1359-1361; Gladwell, "The Courthouse Ring," in Meyer, *New Essays*, pp. 63-64; Crespino, "The Strange Career of Atticus Finch," pp. 22-23.

<sup>46</sup> Engar, "Fifty Years of Influence," in Meyer, *New Essays*, p. 73; Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>47</sup> Harper Lee, *Go Set a Watchman* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015); Wayne Flynt, "Go Set a Watchman," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3768>; Adam Gopnik, "The Real Racial Politics of 'Go Set a Watchman,'" *The New Yorker*, July 15, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/27/sweet-home-alabama>; Michiko Kakutani, "Review: Harper Lee's 'Go Set a Watchman' Gives Atticus Finch a Dark Side," *The New York Times*, July 10, 2015, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/11/books/review-harper-lees-go-set-a-watchman-gives-atticus-finch-a-dark-side.html>; Laura Marsh, "These Scholars Have Been Pointing Out Atticus Finch's Racism for Years," *The New Republic*, July 14, 2015, <https://newrepublic.com/article/122295/these-scholars-have-been-pointing-out-atticus-finchs-racism-years>; Rapping, "CLASSIC REVISITED," p. 863 (quotation); W. Ralph Eubanks, "Atticus Finch Confronted What the South Couldn't," *Time*, July 20, 2015, <http://time.com/3962991/harper-lee-atticus-finch-essay/>.

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as well as in films such as *The Accused* (1988), *Mississippi Burning* (1988), *A Few Good Men* (1992), *Philadelphia* (1993), and *Erin Brockovich* (2000), which depict lawyers defending the downtrodden or arguing cases that highlight the shortcomings of the judicial system.<sup>48</sup>

### The Monroe County Courthouse and *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Like the 1904 Monroe County Courthouse, the fictional Maycomb County Courthouse is situated on a square at the center of town (*TKAM*, pp. 9, 162). Though not identical, the real and fictional courthouses share some general characteristics. Setting the scene for the trial of Tom Robinson, Lee describes the building's exterior:

“But for the south porch, the Maycomb County courthouse was early Victorian, presenting an unoffensive vista when seen from the north. From the other side, however, Greek revival columns clashed with a big nineteenth-century clock tower housing a rusty unreliable instrument, a view indicating a people determined to preserve every physical scrap of the past” (*TKAM*, p. 165).

The Monroe County Courthouse is not “early Victorian,” but like the fictional courthouse in Maycomb, it juxtaposes a classically inspired façade and a Victorian-style clock tower (Photo 1 and Figure 1). The interior arrangement of the real and fictional courthouses is similar as well, with the courtroom on the second floor and the entrance to the courtroom balconies on the third floor. The Maycomb County Courthouse has offices on the first floor, “sundry sunless county cubbyholes” (*TKAM*, p. 165), that included one for Atticus Finch. Likewise, on the first floor of the Monroe County Courthouse, small offices that typically have a single window are arrayed around a windowless first-floor lobby (Photos 12 and 13). During her childhood, Harper Lee's father, A.C. Lee, occupied one of these offices.

As the setting of the trial of Tom Robinson, the courtroom of the Maycomb County Courthouse is among the most memorable locations in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. (See Photos 8-11.) Lee's description of the fictional courtroom matches the one in the Monroe County Courthouse in key details: the balcony along three walls of the courtroom, “long windows,” and a jury box to the left of the judge's bench (*TKAM*, p. 166). The author generally avoided linking people, places, and events in *To Kill a Mockingbird* to real life, but she made an exception in the case of the courtroom. In a 1961 *LIFE* magazine interview accompanied by a picture of the author on the courtroom balcony, Harper Lee acknowledged the connection between the real courtroom in Monroeville and the fictional one where Tom Robinson's trial took place: “The trial was a composite of all the trials in the world, some in the South. But the courthouse was this one. My father was a lawyer, so I grew up on this room and mostly watched him from here.”<sup>49</sup> She voiced a similar sentiment in a 1962 interview with John K. Hutchens of the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* after re-iterating that nothing in the book was strictly factual: “What I did present as exactly as I could were the clime and tone, as I remember them, of the town in which I lived. From childhood on, I did sit in the courtroom watching my father argue cases and talk to juries.”<sup>50</sup> Lee withdrew from the public spotlight after 1964 and made no further commentary on the relationship between the Monroe County Courthouse and the Maycomb County Courthouse. However, her statements in the 1961 and 1962 interviews, the photograph in *LIFE* magazine, and the similarities between the descriptions of the building in the novel and the actual building in Monroeville establish a strong association

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<sup>48</sup> A. B. A. Journal, “John Grisham on Grappling with Race, the Death Penalty; and Lawyers ‘Polluting Their Own Profession,’” *ABA Journal*, September 23, 2011, [http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/john\\_grisham\\_awarded\\_inaugural\\_harper\\_lee\\_prize/](http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/john_grisham_awarded_inaugural_harper_lee_prize/); Andrew Macdonald and Gina Macdonald, *Scott Turow: A Critical Companion* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005); Engar, “Fifty Years of Influence,” in Meyer, *New Essays*, p. 67; Crespino, “The Strange Career of Atticus Finch,” p. 26

<sup>49</sup> Lee, quoted in Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, p. 19. A few quotations from the interview were published in the May 26, 1961 issue of *LIFE* magazine (“Literary Laurels for a Novice,” pp. 78A-78B).

<sup>50</sup> John K. Hutchens, “Harper Lee: On Life with Father,” *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, April 15, 1962, quoted on the *To Kill a Mockingbird* page on the Monroe County Museum website, <https://www.monroecountymuseum.org/mockingbird>.

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between the two buildings.

The movie set for the courtroom strengthened the connection between the Monroe County Courthouse and the fictional Maycomb County Courthouse. In 1962, Harper Lee welcomed director Robert Mulligan, lead actor Gregory Peck, and art director Henry Bumstead to Monroeville, and showed them around the town in order to help them get a feel for the setting of the novel. Henry Bumstead quickly determined the town's streetscapes had been too heavily altered since the 1930s, and as a result, the movie could not be filmed on location in Monroeville. But Bumstead was captivated by the courtroom and wrote to producer Alan Pakula, "I can't tell you how thrilled I am by the architecture and the little touches which will add to our sets." Using photographs and measurements taken of the courtroom during the visit to Monroeville, set designers recreated a nearly identical courtroom for the movie set. The movie set was different from the original in only a few ways: pediments adorn the doorways, the judge's bench is wider, and the balcony continues along the full width of the rear wall.<sup>51</sup> Scenes on the stairs and stair landing convey that the courtroom is located on the second floor. That Harper Lee approved of the film, which prominently featured a courtroom nearly identical to the one in the Monroe County Courthouse, further supports the association between Monroe County Courthouse and the novel.

Subsequent use of the courthouse has cemented its association with *To Kill a Mockingbird*. One year after the film was released, the county courts moved into the new courthouse, and in 1968, the 1904 courthouse reopened as a museum, with exhibits in the courtroom. It continues to function as a museum, with exhibits focusing on the history of the courthouse, Harper Lee and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Truman Capote. Every year since 1991, local actors have performed a play based on the novel, using stage sets adjacent to the courthouse and acting out the trial of Tom Robinson in the historic courtroom.<sup>52</sup> Because of the strong connection between the courtroom and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the courthouse has become a mecca for fans of the novel and film.

### Comparable Properties

The Monroe County Courthouse is the most well-preserved property associated with *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the one most closely associated with the novel and the film. Of the locations in Monroeville that figure prominently in the novel, only the courthouse remains standing and in good condition. The block on South Alabama Avenue where Nelle Harper Lee grew up and that bears striking resemblances to the street where the Finch family lived was significantly altered even before the novel was published. Harper Lee's childhood home was demolished in the 1950s, and by 1971, most of the houses in the block had been torn down, including the Boleware house, which likely served as the inspiration for Boo Radley's house in the novel. The house where Truman Capote lived was gone by the late 1990s. The jail on the courthouse square, which inspired the setting for Atticus, Scout, and Jem Finch facing the lynch mob, is no longer standing, nor is the 1930s elementary school.<sup>53</sup> In addition to being closely associated with the fictional Maycomb County Courthouse that Lee described in the novel, the courtroom in the 1904 Monroe County Courthouse is also the only Monroeville location to appear in the film, a fact that helped establish its association with *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Although the courtroom scenes were not filmed in Monroeville, the movie set was a nearly exact replica of the courtroom in Monroeville, based on measurements and photographs taken by the production team in 1962.

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<sup>51</sup> Shields, *Mockingbird*, p. 212; Letter from Henry Bumstead to Alan Pakula, reprinted on exhibit panel in Monroe County Heritage Museum. The exterior of the courthouse is shown only briefly in the film and bears no resemblance to the Monroe County Courthouse.

<sup>52</sup> The 2020 performance was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>53</sup> Monroe County Heritage Museums, *Monroeville*, pp. 10, 24, 29-36; Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*, pp. 91-92; Aerial photographs, 1971 and 1997, [www.historicaerials.com](http://www.historicaerials.com) (accessed April 5, 2017).

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Many National Historic Landmarks that are associated with nationally significant works of literature are places where the author lived while writing. However, no property survives with strong associations with Harper Lee during the period when she wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She wrote the novel mostly while living in New York City, but did not stay in the same apartment for the entire time. In 1953, as she was writing the stories that would become *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she resided in an apartment on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, but she moved out of that apartment within a couple of years. She completed the novel in an apartment building at 1539 York Street, but this building is no longer standing. Although she wrote and revised some of the novel during visits to Monroeville in the late 1950s, her primary residence was in New York City.<sup>54</sup> Because Lee moved several times during the creation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there is no single, extant property that is strongly associated with her during the period when she created the novel that made a nationally significant contribution to American literature and culture.

One other property that was not the home of an author has been designated a National Historic Landmark for its association with a nationally significant work of literature. Rancho Camulos (NHL, 2000) in Ventura County, California is significant for its association with Helen Hunt Jackson's novel, *Ramona* (1884). The novel and the three films based on the written work popularized a romanticized vision of the Mission era in California and "played a central role in fashioning a regional identity for Southern California..."<sup>55</sup> Rancho Camulos was one of many places that Jackson visited in the early 1880s for inspiration while writing, and the buildings and landscape are clearly reflected in the novel. In the case of *Ramona* there were several other properties that claimed to have played a role in inspiring the setting for *Ramona* at the time of Rancho Camulos' NHL designation. In comparison, the Monroe County Courthouse's claim to be the inspiration for the courthouse in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is unchallenged and well-documented. In the decades following the publication of *Ramona*, Rancho Camulos became indelibly linked to the novel and the "romanticized image of California" that it promoted, much in the same way that the Monroe County Courthouse developed a strong cultural association with *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a result of the museum and annual play based on the novel.

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<sup>54</sup> Shields, *Mockingbird*, pp. 12, 129; Manhattan, New York City Directory (1953, p. 963, in Ancestry.com, *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line] (Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Judy Triem, Mitch Stone, and Edna E. Kimbro, *Rancho Camulos*, National Historic Landmark Nomination (1996-1999), p. 19.

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### 6. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION AND STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

#### Ownership of Property

Private:  
Public-Local: X  
Public-State:  
Public-Federal:

#### Category of Property

Building(s): X  
District:  
Site:  
Structure:  
Object:

#### Number of Resources within Boundary of Property:

##### Contributing

Buildings: 1  
Sites:  
Structures:  
Objects:  
Total: 1

##### Noncontributing

Buildings: 4  
Sites:  
Structures: 1  
Objects: 2  
Total: 7

### PROVIDE PRESENT AND PAST PHYSICAL DESCRIPTIONS OF PROPERTY

(Please see specific guidance for type of resource[s] being nominated)

#### Summary Description<sup>56</sup>

Built in 1903-1904, the Monroe County Courthouse stands on the courthouse square in downtown Monroeville, a town of approximately 6,500 people in Monroe County in southern Alabama. The Classical-style, brick courthouse is situated at the northeast corner of the 1.25-acre southern half of the courthouse square. Designed by architect Andrew J. Bryan, the building has an irregular footprint that is centered around a large, three-story oval-shaped section that houses a two-story courtroom. In 1952, a one-story addition was constructed on the north elevation of the center section. The building is in excellent condition and has seen few modifications since the period of significance (1960-1962). The elements of the building that are most closely associated with *To Kill a Mockingbird* retain a high degree of integrity, and the courthouse is the only remaining extant property with strong associations with the novel. Additions to the site are generally unobtrusive and concentrated along the north (rear) edge of the property.

#### Location and Setting

The Monroe County Courthouse is situated at the northeast corner of the southern half of Monroeville's courthouse square. The northern half contains the current county courthouse, a two-story brick building that was constructed in 1963 (Photo 6). The courthouse square is bounded by Pineville Road on the north, North Mount Pleasant Avenue (State Route 41) on the west, West Claiborne Street (State Route 47) on the south, and North Alabama Avenue (State Route 41) on the east. A linear parking area runs along the west side of North Alabama Avenue adjacent to the courthouse square. An asphalt parking lot that was built after 1966 runs east-west through the center of the square, dividing it into two roughly equal halves. This parking lot defines the NHL's northern boundary (Photo 5). All of the roads and parking areas along and through the courthouse square

<sup>56</sup> The description reflects the appearance of the property in 2016-2017, when the fieldwork was completed. No major changes have occurred to the property between 2017 and designation as a National Historic Landmark.

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have diagonal parking spaces. Most of the one- and two-story commercial buildings that line the streets around the square were constructed in the first half of the twentieth century.

### Site

The Monroe County Courthouse faces east and is set back approximately fifteen feet from the parking area along North Alabama Avenue. To the south of the building is a large, grassy lawn with several concrete walkways and scattered trees. An amphitheater constructed in 2012 is located near the building's northwest corner. Other resources on the property include a storage shed, a statue, a monument to Atticus Finch, and three stage sets associated with the amphitheater.

To the east of the courthouse, concrete walkways extend from the two front entrances to a sidewalk along the North Alabama Avenue parking area (Photos 1 and 2). A brick walkway lined with azaleas bushes connects the building's northeast entrance to the **Atticus Finch monument (*non-contributing object*)**, which is set within a brick-paved, semicircular area that projects into the parking lot that extends east-west through the courthouse square. It is enclosed on three sides by brick walls with concrete coping. Erected by the Alabama State Bar in 1997, this monument to fictional lawyer Atticus Finch, one of the main characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, consists of a roughly cut rock with a bronze plaque affixed to its south face. Originally situated on the south lawn of the courthouse, the monument was moved to its current location in 2014. Two park benches also stand within the monument site.

An Alabama Historical Commission marker (erected 1995) describing the history and significance of the courthouse stands to the south of the Atticus Finch monument (Photo 1). Small trees, flowering shrubs, a short sidewalk, and a park bench occupy the area between the northeast and southeast entrances. Adjacent to the southeast entrance to the courthouse is a painted, wood sign for the Monroe County Heritage Museum and water fountains for people and dogs (Photo 2).

The grassy lawn to the south of the courthouse features scattered trees and concrete sidewalks laid out in an orthogonal pattern (Photos 3 and 6). Two north-south sidewalks divide the lawn roughly into thirds. Another sidewalk extends southwest from the northeast corner of the lawn to its southern boundary; a trellis arches over this walkway near its northeast end. All of the existing sidewalks were present during the period of significance. Trees and flowering bushes line the eastern edge of the south lawn and continue along the eastern half of its southern edge. Picnic tables are scattered in the center part of the south lawn.

In the western half of the south lawn is *A Celebration of Reading*, a **statue (*non-contributing object*)** erected in 2014 to celebrate reading and Monroeville's literary history (Photo 3). The life-size, bronze sculpture by Branko Medenica depicts a girl sitting on a park bench reading a book, while two boys stand behind her, looking over her shoulder. The statue is set within a landscaped area that consists of curved, gravel paths lined with small trees, camellias, and other flowering plants. A 2015 historical marker stands near the southern edge of the south lawn, and provides information about the statue, which was commissioned by the Alabama Tourism Department and the Monroeville/Monroe County Chamber of Commerce.

An open-air **amphitheater (*non-contributing structure*)** occupies the northwest corner of the property, extending from the courthouse to the sidewalk along North Mount Pleasant Avenue (Photo 4). Built in 2012, the amphitheater is surrounded by a brick retaining wall with concrete coping. A mixture of flowering trees and bushes, including magnolia, holly, azalea, and dwarf hawthorn are planted along the outer edges of the retaining wall. A brick walkway with a herringbone pattern separates the seating area in the western part of the amphitheater from the stage to the east. Stairs in the south wall lead to the seating area, which consists of a sloping, grassy lawn and three wide, concrete risers. Two sets of brick and concrete steps lead up from the brick

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walkway to the grassy surface of the stage.

On the stage are **three stage sets (*non-contributing buildings*)** whose façades are decorated to resemble houses in *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Photo 4). The sets were constructed for the annual performance of a play based on the book. Each of the front-gabled stage sets has a V-crimp metal roof, wood floors, and wood steps. The rear walls have double doors and are clad in vinyl drop siding. The fronts and sides of the two southernmost sets also have vinyl drop siding, while the front and side walls of the northernmost set are clad in plywood painted to look like weathered wood siding. The northernmost stage set, which represents the Radley house, includes a full-width front porch that shelters a door and window. The set for the Finch house stands in the center of the stage and faces west; it has a full-width front porch and a central door that is flanked by windows. The southernmost stage set has two doors in the front elevation, with a set of steps leading to each door.

The north side of the courthouse functions as the building's rear elevation (Photo 5). A grassy strip and sidewalks occupy the area between the courthouse and the parking lot to its north. HVAC equipment is located within a fenced enclosure between the parking lot and the 1952 addition to the courthouse; shrubbery screens the enclosure on the north and east.

A frame **storage building (*non-contributing building*)** with wood siding stands on a concrete pad at the western end of the courthouse's north elevation (Photo 5). The shed-roofed storage building has double doors on its north elevation; a shed roof connects it to the west wall of the 1952 addition to the courthouse.

### **Courthouse (*contributing building*)**

Architect Andrew J. Bryan designed the Monroe County Courthouse, combining Classical design elements with an eclectic building footprint. It is one of six courthouses designed by Bryan that include a round center section that contains the courtroom.<sup>57</sup> M.T. Lewman and Company of Louisville, Kentucky won the contract to construct the building and completed it in 1904. The brick edifice faces east and comprises three distinct but connected sections that are lined up on center along an east-west axis. The two-story east section contains the two front entrances, as well as a clock and bell tower. The oval-shaped center section stands three stories tall and has an octagonal roof, and the three-story, hipped-roofed west section has a two-story vestibule on its west elevation. In 1952, a one-story brick addition was constructed on the north side of the center section.

### Exterior (Photos 1-6)

The exterior brick walls of all sections of the courthouse are laid in stretcher bond; the 1904 portions of the building also have a six-course, corbelled brick water table. All windows are one-over-one, wood sash with square-edged, painted, stone sills. The first-story windows are the largest in the building, and the windows get progressively smaller in the upper stories. Most of the windows in the raised basement have brick infill. The exterior stone steps on the east, south, and west elevations are set between brick walls with concrete coping; non-historic metal railings are placed along the outer edges of the steps in order to meet current safety standards.

### *East Section (Photos 1, 2 and 5)*

The T-shaped east section incorporates Classical embellishments such as pedimented gables, a wide frieze band, and roofline balustrades. On the front-gabled north, east, and south elevations of the east section, four brick

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<sup>57</sup> Delos D. Hughes, "A Kentucky Builder in the New South: The M. T. Lewman and Falls City Construction Companies in Alabama, 1897-1915," *Alabama Review* 59, no. 2 (April 2006): 129. The other Bryan courthouses with a similar design were constructed in Dothan, Alabama; LaGrange, Georgia; Gulfport, Mississippi; and Franklinton and Minden in Louisiana.

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pilasters with corbelled brick capitals extend from the water table to the cornice and divide the façade into three bays. Each elevation features a classical pediment with raking cornices and a centered, circular window with four keystones. A wide, tripartite frieze and a projecting wood cornice with cyma molding decorate the roofline. An interior brick chimney rises from the roof behind each pediment, and the clock and bell tower sits atop the intersection of the three gable roofs.

Originally, all of the first- and second-story openings on the front-gable elevations were windows. During the 1991-2002 renovation, the west opening in the first story of the north elevation was enlarged to hold a five-panel wood door and single-light transom. A flat-roofed overhang with molded cornice shelters this door, which opens onto a brick and concrete stoop that connects to a handicapped ramp that wraps around the adjacent 1952 addition.

The two identical entrances are nestled in the corners between the front-gable elevations. The entrances are set back approximately five feet from the main elevations, and each contains a double, wood, five-panel door with a two-light, wood transom and a stone threshold. The door frames have narrow, molded trim, and a wide header between the door and transom. Engaged brick posts flanking each door support an entry porch with a balcony, a beadboard ceiling, and wide, molded, wood cornices. Two second-story windows above each door open onto the porch balcony, which features symmetrical balustrades composed of wood panels flanking a series of turned balusters. Cornice-line balustrades similar to the ones on the entry porches adorn the roofs above the entrances. All balustrades are aluminum and were installed during the 1991-2002 renovation to match those shown in early photographs of the courthouse. The original balustrades were removed before 1932.

The clock and bell tower comprises an eight-sided belfry topped by a dome with four clocks, one facing each cardinal direction (Photos 1 and 3-6). A platform with a turned aluminum balustrade surrounds the belfry. Like the other exterior balustrades, the one around the belfry was installed in 1991-2002 to match one shown in historic photographs. On each face of the belfry is a narrow opening with a single-light window in the lower half and louvers in the upper half. Wood pilasters with corbelled capitals wrap around each of the belfry's eight corners. A wide, flat frieze band encircles the belfry above the capitals and is capped by a wood cornice with fluting. Each of the four clocks is surmounted by a semi-circular, molded frame with a keystone and urn. Atop the domed roof is a finial with a large bulb at the base and a smaller bulb near the top of the spire.

### *Center Section* (Photos 3, 5, and 6)

The north and south elevations of the three-story, oval-shaped center section are seven bays wide and have curved exterior walls. On the south elevation, stairs lead from ground level to a first-story loggia that is supported by six square, brick columns and two engaged columns at each end. The brick posts have corbelled capitals, as well as corbelling just above the low, brick walls with concrete coping that fill the spaces between the columns. The openings between each column frame the first-story windows. Originally, a similar loggia existed on the north elevation, but it was enclosed when the north addition was constructed in 1952.

The windows on the north and south elevations of the center section are evenly spaced. Recessed brick panels between the second and third stories align with the centers of the windows. The roofline features a one-course, corbelled brick cornice. The double-pitched, octagonal roof comprises a low-pitched outer slope leading to a steeper inner slope that terminates at a flat-roofed, eight-sided, louvered lantern.

### *West Section* (Photos 3-6)

The rectangular, three-story west section has a hipped roof with interior end chimneys; another interior chimney is located in the northern portion of the east wall. The symmetrical, five-bay west elevation includes a two-

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story, one-bay, projecting vestibule with a first-story door opening and a second-story window. Exterior stairs to the vestibule lead directly to a five-panel, wood door with two-light, wood transom. This door opening and one at the basement level on the south elevation of the vestibule have segmental arches; the basement-level door opening was filled with brick during the 1991-2002 renovation.

The center window and the two outermost windows on the west elevation are wider than the other windows, and the basement-level windows have brick infill. On the north and south elevations, there are two windows per story; the basement-level window openings hold vents. Along the foundation to the north of the vestibule is a graveled drainage trench that was installed in 2012 when the amphitheater was constructed.

### *1952 Addition (Photos 1 and 5)*

The one-story, flat-roofed, brick addition that is attached to the north elevation of the center section was constructed in 1952 as a fireproof space to store county records. The brick walls are capped with rectangular concrete coping. The north elevation features four windows on the first story and four basement-level windows that have been infilled with brick. There are no openings in the east and west elevations. A switchback handicapped ramp with a metal railing extends across most of the north elevation and wraps around the addition's northeast corner.

### Interior (Photos 7-14)

Situated on the second floor of the building's center section, the oval-shaped courtroom is the largest interior space in the Monroe County Courthouse and the room most closely associated with Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The eight-sided lobby for the courtroom is situated in the east section of the building, directly beneath the clock and bell tower; two staircases and rooms for offices and exhibits are arrayed around the lobby. Doors in the west wall of the courtroom lead to the judge's chambers and jury room in the west section of the building, which has a central stair hall and two rooms on each floor. The basement and first floor of the 1952 addition house the museum's library and archives.

The interior finishes in the 1904 sections of the courthouse are generally consistent, with variations reflecting the hierarchy of spaces within the building and replacement of deteriorated materials. Most of the wood flooring consists of 1½" boards, with wider boards in less formal areas. The ten-inch wood baseboards are flat with two rows of beading; the baseboards in the more formal, public areas also have an ogee base mold as well. Pressed tin ceilings and crown moldings are present in the courtroom, on the second floor of the east section, and in the hallway and judge's chambers on the second floor of the west section. Most of the remaining ceilings are plaster or drywall. Nearly all of the doors in the 1904 courthouse are wood with five horizontal panels. Wood transoms are present above all exterior doors and above the doors in the lobby and stair halls in the east section. Door openings typically have flat, wood trim with base blocks. Most window openings are arched and feature flat, wood trim with a raised bead on the inside edge of the side casing.

### *Courtroom (Photos 8-11)*

The public entrance at the east end of the courtroom has double, five-panel, wood doors and a two-light, wood transom. This door and the two on either side of it are recessed in uncased openings. The tray ceiling incorporates two beams crossing a recessed, octagonal area with a square medallion. Both the main ceiling and the ceilings under the balconies are pressed tin. Crown molding is present on all sections of the main ceiling but is absent on the ceilings beneath the balconies.

The gallery (the part of the courtroom where spectators could observe trials) occupies a little more than half of

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the main level of the courtroom and is furnished with pew-like benches and two coal stoves.<sup>58</sup> A step up and a wood balustrade define the edge of the bar, the barrier between the public gallery and the part of the courtroom that was restricted to those participating in a trial. The three-sided bar stretches across the center of the room, then angles away from the gallery to intersect with the exterior walls. The turned wood balustrade on the bar features a shaped handrail and is anchored at the corners and at the centered opening by square, wood posts capped by square-edged caps and half-spheres.

Two tables, one for the prosecution and one for the defense, stand just inside the bar and face a judge's bench that is centered in the west wall of the courtroom. The courtroom side of the three-sided judge's bench has beadboard paneling and baseboards similar to those along the main walls. Two wood steps lead up to the interior of the bench, which features a wood desk with a curved edge. A movable witness stand is located directly in front of the bench. The judge's bench is flanked by a grand jury box to the north and a trial jury box to the south. Both jury boxes are angled to face the well, the area between the judge's bench and the tables for the prosecution and the defense. The railings around the two jury boxes have a simpler design than the railing at the bar: the balusters are square, the handrails are flat, and the square-edged caps on the posts are flat. Each jury box has two risers and wide (5½") wood plank floors. Low (9 ½") railings with fourteen-inch end posts separate the risers and are similar in design to the main jury box railings.

Square wood posts with baseboards and molded capitals support two balconies, one along the north wall and the other along the south wall; the posts continue to the main ceiling. The curved railings along the edges of the balconies have flat, square-edged balusters and handrails. The floors and the two risers on each balcony are composed of 3¼" floorboards, and there are no baseboards. The five-panel wood doors at the east end of each balcony provide access to the third-floor lobby. Between the balconies, there is an arched, interior window that looks into the third-floor lobby. A railing similar to that along the balconies extends across the lower part of this fixed, eight-light, wood window.

### *Center Section (First Floor) and 1952 Addition*

On the first floor of the center section and directly below the courtroom is a large, undivided, oval-shaped room that currently serves as the museum gift shop. Doors at each end of the room lead to the east and west sections, and stairs at the west end provide access to the basement. The windows along the south wall open onto the loggia, while recessed alcoves on the north wall reflect the location of the window openings that were filled in when the north loggia was enclosed in 1952.

At the east end of the south loggia is a short hallway that leads to the lobby of the east section; a door at the west end of the loggia opens into the building's west section. A similar hallway connects the east section to the enclosed north loggia. The original pillars of the north loggia remain visible. One mechanical room is located at the western end of the former north loggia, and another is situated in the triangular space between the 1952 addition, the center section, and the west section.

A vault door in the north wall of the enclosed north loggia leads to the 1952 addition. The addition's north wall features square-edged, flat pilasters between the windows, which have metal, interior shutters. The main room of the one-story addition serves as the library. A small room that was created during the 1991-2002 renovation occupies the western third of the addition and is used for archival storage. The library has wood floors, narrow baseboards, a plaster ceiling, and vertical wall paneling with a molded chair rail. In the center of the room is a

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<sup>58</sup> Photographs from the early twentieth century show a stovepipe exiting through a panel placed in the upper part of a window on the south elevation.

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square post with a molded capital and base.

A vault door from the enclosed north loggia provides access to concrete stairs leading to the basement of the 1952 addition. The basement is undivided, and the floor, ceiling, and walls are concrete. Interior metal shutters cover the bricked-in windows.

### *East Section (Photos 7, 12, and 13)*

The floor plan of the east section is centered on an eight-sided lobby that is located directly below the clock and bell tower. On the first and second floors, the floor plan is similar. Arched openings in the northeast and southeast walls of the lobbies lead to stair halls containing dogleg stairs. On the first floor, the stair halls also lead to the entrances. The open-string stairs begin with a quarter turn at the base of the stairs and feature turned wood balusters and square newel posts with ogee molding under a square cap. The undersides of the stair landings are clad in beadboard.

Door openings in the west side of the first- and second-floor lobbies lead to the center section. On the first floor, the southwest and northwest openings open into short hallways, while the west door leads to the large room beneath the courtroom. The second-floor lobby serves as the foyer for the courtroom and is one of the more elaborately finished spaces in the building. The double doors leading to the courtroom are situated in the west wall of the lobby, and the northwest and southwest walls are solid.

The first- and second-floor rooms to the north, south, and east of the lobby functioned as offices when the building was a courthouse and currently serve as offices or exhibit spaces. These rooms are irregularly shaped due to the diagonal walls of the adjacent stair passages. On the first floor, the two east rooms open into the stair passages. As a result, there is no door in the east wall of the first-floor lobby. On the second floor, the space to the east of the lobby is undivided, has two fireplaces, and is accessed through the lobby.

Small rooms occupy the northwest and southwest corners of the east section on the first and second floors. The southwest rooms on both floors house an elevator that was installed in the 1991-2002 renovation. The northwest room on the first floor originally functioned as a vault and was accessible only through the north office. During the 1991-2002 renovation, the window in the north wall of this room was replaced with a door that opens onto the exterior handicapped ramp, and a new doorway was added in the room's south wall. At the same time, the vault door to the north office was sealed shut. On the second floor, both of the corner rooms open directly into the courtroom.

The southeast stair is the only one that continues to the third floor, where under-eave closets are located on either side of the upper stair landing and an arched-opening leads to the third-floor lobby. The west wall of the third-floor lobby contains a window overlooking the two-story courtroom, and doors in the northwest and southwest walls lead to the courtroom balconies.

Originally, all of the rooms in the east section had either a fireplace or coal grate, but only two mantelpieces and three coal grates remain. The wood mantelpiece in the northwest room on the second floor has mostly flat surfaces and incorporates base blocks with ogee molding, and flat, canted brackets with molding at the top and bottom. The mantelpiece in the southern portion of the east room on the first floor features turned wood pilasters and likely is not original to the building.

The interior finishes on the first and third floors of the east section are generally typical of the less formal spaces in the 1904 courthouse. Whereas the second-floor lobby and offices have pressed tin ceilings, the first-

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floor lobby and offices have plaster ceilings and the third-floor lobby has a beadboard ceiling. The first floor displays a few features unique to this part of the building such as wood corner trim, and the glass panes in the upper halves of some doors.

The intricate framing systems supporting the bell and clock tower are visible on its interior, which is accessed via a pull-down stair in the ceiling of the third-floor lobby. To construct the dome, the builders used the Delorme technique, in which short lengths of wood form the ribs and the ribs are secured by horizontal ties.<sup>59</sup> The metal bell and the clock machinery remain in place and are functional.

### *West Section (Photo 14)*

The floor plan of the west section of the 1904 courthouse consists of two rooms per floor, one on each side of a central stair. The stair begins on the first floor as a dogleg stair with a landing that extends into the vestibule; between the second and third floors, winders create the half turn in the stair. The open-string stairs have turned balusters. The newel posts are rectangular, except on the first floor, where there is a square newel post. The ceilings under the stair landings are beadboard.

On all three floors, the north room opens directly into the stair hall. On the second and third floors, a short corridor provides access to the south room. A large closet occupies the space between the south room and the stair hall. On the first floor, the stairs emerge into a foyer that provides access to the vestibule, the south and north rooms of the west section, the south loggia of the center section, and the oval-shaped room directly below the courtroom.

All rooms on the first floor currently serve as bathrooms. On the second floor, the north room historically functioned as the jury room and has a door that opens directly into the courtroom. The south room on the second floor was the judge's chambers (Photo 14). The fireplace in the jury room is plastered over, and the judge's chambers has a coal grate. The third-floor rooms were used as offices, and the wood mantelpieces in these rooms are identical to the one on the second floor of the east section. The interior finishes on the third floor are less elaborate than in the rest of the 1904 courthouse: the ogee molding is absent from the baseboards, the ceilings are beadboard, and the windows are not arched.

### *Basement: 1904 Courthouse*

At the west end of the center section, a curved, concrete staircase leads down to a basement-level landing with two doors. A metal vault door with a combination lock opens into a windowless room under part of the center section. The other doorway from the landing provides access to the north room of the west section's three-room basement; although the door is missing, a metal door frame manufactured by the Diebold Company (which produced safes) remains in place. Both of these rooms have parged concrete walls and were used to store county records before the construction of the 1952 addition.

Originally, an exterior door in the south wall of the west vestibule provided access to the center and south rooms of the west basement. During the 1991-2002 renovation, this exterior door was sealed with masonry, and a new interior opening was added in the wall separating the north room from the center room. On the east wall of the center room is a relieving arch. The south room functioned as a bathroom at one time, and some bathroom fixtures remain.

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<sup>59</sup> Hughes, "A Kentucky Builder in the New South," p. 122.

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### Evaluation of Integrity

The nominated property is associated with the nationally significant novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), which was written by Monroeville native Nelle Harper Lee and adapted into an Academy-Award-winning film in 1962. The courtroom has a particularly strong association with the novel, since it serves as the setting for a significant and pivotal event in the novel: the trial of Tom Robinson. The courtroom of the Monroe County Courthouse also served as the model for the set of the 1962 film based on the book. Although the period of significance is 1960-1962, the building's ability to convey its association with *To Kill a Mockingbird* also depends in part on its integrity to the 1930s, when the author was a child living in Monroeville and visiting her father at work at the courthouse.

The aspects of the Monroe County Courthouse that are most closely associated with *To Kill a Mockingbird* retain a high level of integrity both to the 1930s and the early 1960s. The courtroom remains virtually unaltered, except for minor modifications in 1991-2002 to install a modern heating and air conditioning system. Several vents were inserted in the pressed tin ceiling, but they are relatively inconspicuous and do not detract from the overall feeling of the courtroom. As a result, the courtroom appears almost exactly as it did when Harper Lee was a child watching her father in court and when the film's art director, Henry Bumstead, visited the courthouse in 1961 to make notes and sketches for the movie set.

The floor plan, including the route that Scout, Jem, and Dill take to the courtroom balcony to watch Robinson's trial, remains largely intact to the period of significance. During the 1991-2002 renovation, a few interior spaces were modified to create modern bathroom facilities and to provide access for people with mobility impairments, but the historic interior finishes remain in place throughout the majority of the building and in all of the spaces specifically mentioned in the novel: the courtroom, the offices and lobbies in the east section, the stairs in the east section, and the basement.

The exterior of the courthouse also looks much as it did during the period of significance. There have been no additions since 1952, when the north addition was constructed, and the building retains nearly all of its historic windows and doors. Exterior changes made during the 1991-2002 renovation were minor and primarily affected the less prominent north and west elevations. On the north (rear) elevation, a door, entry porch, and handicap ramp were added, while on the west elevation, a basement-level entrance was bricked in and the associated well was removed. The renovations also included the installation of tie rods to stabilize the masonry walls and the addition of aluminum balustrades above the east entrances and on the clock and bell tower. The design and placement of the balustrades were based on historic photographs of similar features that were removed before 1932.

Built in 1952, the one-story addition on the north side of the building's center section was constructed before the period of significance (1960-1962) but was not present when Harper Lee was a child in Monroeville. This addition and the associated enclosure of the north loggia do not substantially affect the building's ability to convey its significance since neither the loggia nor the first-floor space beneath the courtroom figure in the novel.

The setting and site of the Monroe County Courthouse retain sufficient integrity to convey its association with *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There have been storefront and façade alterations to the buildings around the square, but most of the buildings were present during the period of significance.<sup>60</sup> The boundary and function of the

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<sup>60</sup> Susan Enzweiler, David Ray, and Pamela King, *Monroeville Downtown Historic District*, National Register of Historic Places Nomination (2009), Section 7.

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courthouse square remain unchanged since the early twentieth century, and the park-like setting of the area to the south of the 1904 courthouse accurately reflects the appearance of the courthouse square in the 1930s and the early 1960s. The commemorative features on the lawns to the south and east of the courthouse are not intrusive and are consistent with the character of early and mid-twentieth-century courthouse squares.

Notable additions to the site and setting of the Monroe Courthouse since the end of the period of significance include the 1963 courthouse on the north half of the courthouse square, a parking lot that bisects the square and passes between the two courthouses, and the amphitheater. The construction of the 1963 courthouse facilitated the preservation of the Monroe County Courthouse by making it possible to avoid altering the older building to provide more space for county offices. The new courthouse and the parking lot, combined with the 1952 addition, established the north elevation as the rear elevation of the 1904 courthouse. As a result, mechanical equipment, storage sheds, and other alterations have been concentrated on this side of the building, reducing changes to the other three sides. The amphitheater at the northwest corner of the property has a low profile with a retaining wall along the street side. As a result, it does not substantially impede views of the building's west elevation and is not visible from the street. Moreover, its design, which incorporates grassy areas on the risers and brick retaining walls, is consistent with the park-like setting and materials of the courthouse.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Previously listed in the National Register (fill in 1 through 6 below)
- Not previously listed in the National Register (fill in **only** 4, 5, and 6 below)

- 1. NR #: 73000366
- 2. Date of listing: April 26, 1973
- 3. Level of significance: n/a
- 4. Applicable National Register Criteria: A  B  C  D
- 5. Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A  B  C  D  E  F  G
- 6. Areas of Significance: Architecture, Literature, Politics

- Previously Determined Eligible for the National Register: Date of determination:
- Designated a National Historic Landmark: Date of designation:
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: HABS No.
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: HAER No.
- Recorded by Historic American Landscapes Survey: HALS No.

Location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office:
- Other State Agency:
- Federal Agency:
- Local Government:
- University:
- Other (Specify Repository): Monroe County Museum

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