

History of the buildings

Courthouse and the Saint-Antoine Building



REPUBLIQUE
ET CANTON
DE GENEVE

POSS TENEBRAS LUX

POUVOIR JUDICIAIRE

Courthouse

“ Authorities maintained their blessings in counterpart of prayers for the prosperity of the city.



Convent of Santa Clara 1474

The current site of the courthouse was first occupied by the convent of Santa Clara, built in 1474 at the initiative of the pious Duchess Yolande, regent of Savoy and sister of the King of France, Louis XI.

The life of the Clarisses sisters, a catholic order, was particularly austere. If the authorities maintained their blessings, it was only in counterpart of their prayers for the prosperity of the city. However, this harmony was not to resist the Reformation movement, which had won Geneva over to its cause as of 1535.

At that time the convent has been ransacked. The Clarisses abandoned Geneva in August 1535 to take refuge in Annecy (France).

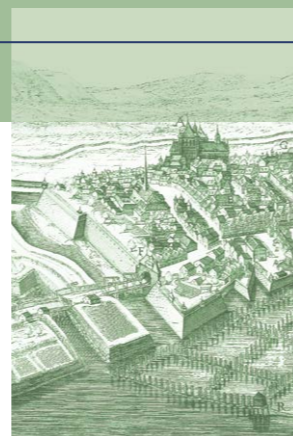
↑ Courtroom of the Court of Justice: Gothic archway of the 15th century, remnant of the former convent church.
Photo: Think utopia

“ The General Hospital housed not only the sick, but also the needy.

General Hospital 1535

The convent was then converted into a hospital, called the General Hospital, to house not only the sick but also the needy.

The general appearance of the convent had not been changed. The church remained a place of worship, while the cloister was transformed into dormitories.



↑ Former convent of the Clarisses sisters used as a General Hospital. Engraving of 1655.
BGE, 16M 03

“ The honor of the Republic prompted the authorities to rebuild a new hospital, more imposing, on the same site.



New General Hospital 1712

However, the confined space – and the honor of the Republic represented by these buildings – prompted the authorities to rebuild a new hospital, more imposing, on the same site.

The construction of the new building began in 1706 and was completed in 1712. Only the church of the former convent was preserved and continued to serve as a place of worship. Its high vault and bell tower were demolished, however, to make room for the new multi-storey building.

↑ Plan of the General Hospital by J. P. Guillebaud: 1st floor and part of the garden, 1835.
CHAEG Archives hospitalières Ee 19. 1

“ The Court of Justice deliberates in a chapel of the former convent.

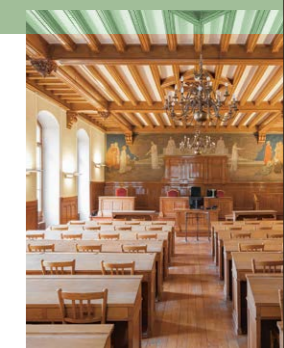


→ Court of Justice Deliberations Room.
Photo: Think utopia

Courthouse Since 1860

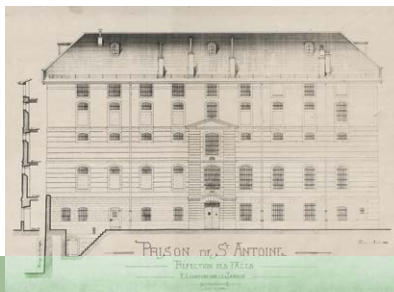
The building designed to be spacious and open while constructed around two inner courtyards, became the «Palais de Justice», or Court House, in 1860. Indeed, after the completion of the Cantonal Hospital in 1856, which replaced the old General Hospital, a decision was made to transfer courts, which were previously cramped at the city house.

Since then, for the needs of the Judiciary, many adjustments (courtrooms, offices) have been made inside the main building. Nowadays, the Court of Justice deliberates in a chapel of the former convent. In the courtroom there is still a Gothic archway, still visible, which separated the chapel from the convent church, under which the judges of the Court pass to enter the courtroom.



↑ Courtroom (Civil) on the 1st floor of the north building built between 1910 and 1914.
Photo: Think utopia

The Saint-Antoine Building



The «Discipline» and the Saint-Antoine Prison 1712 ————— 1977

The General Hospital included a so-called «correction chamber» intended to confine persons considered to be socially out-of-step, such as «idlers», beggars and – of course – lawbreakers.

However, the cohabitation of society’s outcasts with the other hospital residents raised fears that it might become a place of «corruption». Hence the decision to build – together with the new General Hospital – an independent house of discipline, which was completed in 1712.

The «Discipline», which had previously served in a variety of capacities and was known as the «Prison de Saint-Antoine» from 1866, was ultimately put to use as a facility for preventive detention. This situation, which was supposed to be temporary, actually lasted for more than a century, until 1977, when the new Champ-Dollon prison was opened – and is still in function today.

↑ Former House of Discipline: survey of the northwest façade, 1906. CHAEG Travaux B 18/1

“ The renovation work confirmed the existence of a luxurious residence, built between 20 and 40 A.D., and identified thermal basins from a «villa».

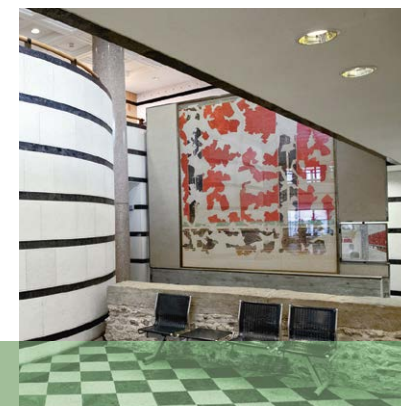
Discovery of archaeological remains Since 1987

The rehabilitation of this building has made it possible to carry out interesting excavations, firstly in the inner courtyard separating the rear of the courthouse from the former prison. Archaeologists uncovered Roman remains during the construction of the extension to the Palace, which was inaugurated in May 1995.

The renovation work undertaken in the basements of Saint-Antoine confirmed the existence of a luxurious residence, built between 20 and 40 A.D., and identified thermal basins from a «villa».



↑ Detail of the Roman fresco presented in the hall of the building G. Photo: Pouvoir judiciaire



↑ Roman fresco presented in the hall of the building G. Photo: Stéphane Etter

Most of the Roman frescoes uncovered on the site of Saint-Antoine belong to the painted walls of the residence. About 700 pieces have been reconstructed into a large puzzle that is visible nowadays on the extension’s wall.

This decorative style adorned the porticoes of the peristyle, 30 metres long and 16 metres wide, surrounding the gardens. These dimensions measure the magnitude of this massive and expensive construction.

This discovery reminds us of the artistic affinities that existed at the time between Geneva and the province of Narbonne, since similar decorations have been found along the Rhône valley.