

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

BOONE COUNTY

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Smithton Company, a real estate enterprise, founded the town of Smithton in 1818, anticipating that it might become the seat of justice for the county of Boone. Located about ½ mile west of the present courthouse in Columbia, Smithton did serve as Boone County's first county seat until 1821 when Columbia became the favored site.

Tradition maintains that first Circuit Courts met under an arbor of sugar trees. But in Boone, as most counties, courts met outdoors in pleasant weather and then moved indoors to private homes as winter came.

Three years after the move to Columbia, the court contracted for building a "hull of a courthouse," that is, the shell of the building. Subsequent contracts for interior work and exterior finishing continued into 1828. The 40-foot-square, two-story, brick courthouse with hipped roof featured a cupola-like structure at the apex. The courtroom occupied the first floor. After only 20 years, the building was reported in deplorable condition.

In 1845 the court appropriated \$10,000 for a new courthouse and appointed William Jewell commissioner. The court boosted the appropriation \$5,000 after approving the plan Jewell presented in January 1846 (Figs. 1, 2). Architect probably was W. M. Winter, whose name originally appeared on a plaque. Little is known about Winter. He entered a proposal for the University of Missouri Academic Hall building, but was not awarded the commission.

The building measured 84 by 51 feet and fronted south. The columns of this courthouse aligned with the columns on Academic Hall at the University of Mis-

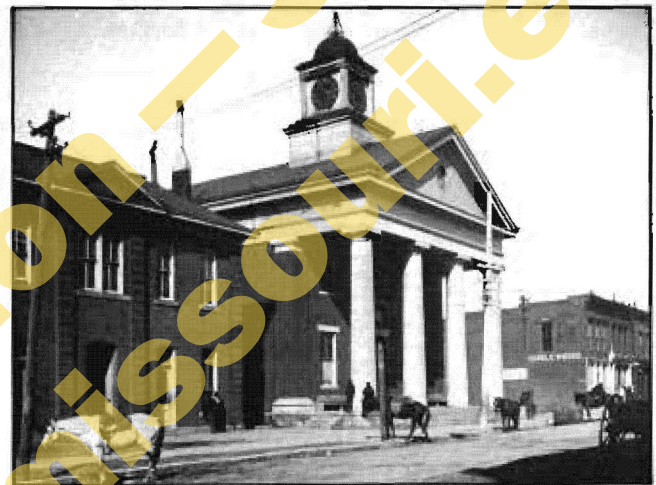
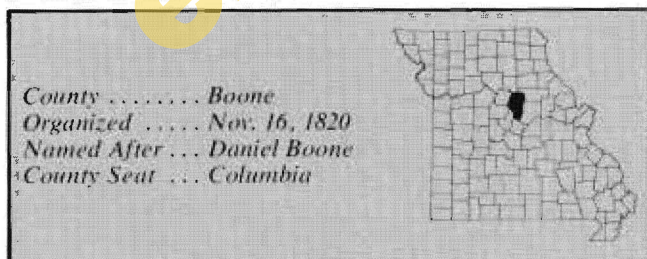


Fig. 1. Boone County Courthouse, 1847-1909.
Probable Architect: W. N. Winter
(Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)



Fig. 2. Facing north on Eighth street toward 1847 courthouse, photo ca. 1900.
(Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)



souri several blocks south of the courthouse; this explains the unusual corner placement of the courthouse on the square.

Boone County used this courthouse throughout the 19th century. When the 1906-09 courthouse neared completion, the County Court ordered the old building



Fig. 3. George Caleb Bingham's painting, *Verdict of the People*, 1855, shows scene on Boone County Courthouse steps. (From: Collection of the Boatmen's National Bank of St. Louis)

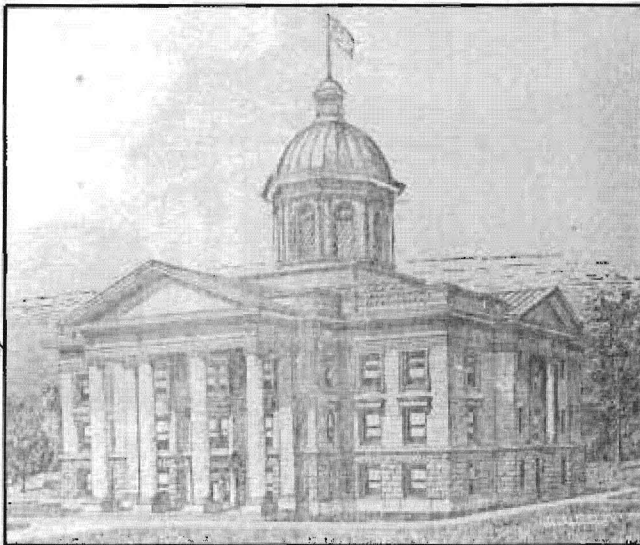


Fig. 4. Proposed Boone County Courthouse, 1906. Architect: J. H. Felt (From: *Columbia Missouri Statesman*, Feb. 23, 1906.)

razed. However, after a concerted effort by townspeople to save the building, the decision was made to preserve the columns (see remaining columns in Fig. 5). Today, the columns of the 1846 courthouse and the columns of the University's Academic Hall stand in their original alignment of the mid-19th century.

This courthouse, which housed a studio of George Caleb Bingham, appears as the courthouse in both ver-



Fig. 5. Boone County Courthouse, 1906. Architect: J. H. Felt

sions of Bingham's 1855 painting *Verdict of the People* (Fig. 3).

For the third and present courthouse, the location was moved to the center of the square. Twenty-two architects visited with the court before the court commissioned John H. Felt to draw plans for the new building. The court requested that Felt design a building conforming with their wishes for a restrained classic design. A taller dome, originally planned for the courthouse, met with disapproval (Fig. 4); the architect altered the design, producing the lower, rounded dome (Fig. 5). Construction began in 1906 and was finished in 1909. The contractor was J. A. McCarter, Macon, Missouri; costs came to about \$100,000.

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