

# MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

## LINN COUNTY

Marian M. Ohman  
Coordinator, Art History Programs

Linn County's first courthouse, a hewn-log building, was built off the square in 1841. It was a two-story, 36-by-20-foot, weatherboarded structure, with oak shingles covering the roof. One center door with flanking windows was in the narrow end of the building, which faced the square. The court appropriated \$400, and the final cost came to \$516.50. Contractors were David Jenkins and Goldsby Quinn (also referred to as Goolsby Quine). By the time it was completed, the original plan had been altered considerably.

In March 1846 the court appropriated \$4,000 and instructed Thomas Barbee to prepare plans for a new courthouse to be in the center of the square. Contractor of the brick, two-story building was Joseph (or James) L. Nelson, who built the Daviess County courthouse in Gallatin. Nelson completed the building in the fall of 1848 for \$3,894.85 (Fig. 1).

In June 1857 the county paid \$800 for repairs; the building was extensively remodeled between 1865-1867. In only 20 years Linn County spent almost \$8,500 on repairing this building (Fig. 2). Even so, by 1879 the building was considered unsafe, and the county offices moved out. Although the accounts are unclear, repairs and remodeling once again must have kept at least part of the structure in use, for Sanborn maps show a square, brick building in the center of the square from 1894 to 1910 that measures about 40 feet square.

Early in the 20th century grand juries repeatedly reported the courthouse in deplorable condition. Linn County citizens presented a petition to the court calling for a new courthouse. After receiving the petition, the County Court scheduled an election for a \$60,000 bond

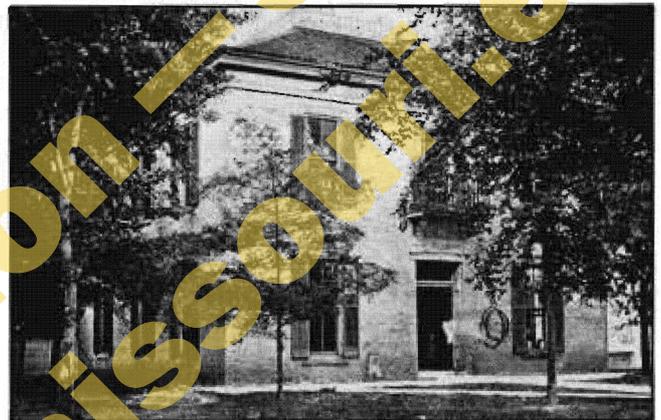
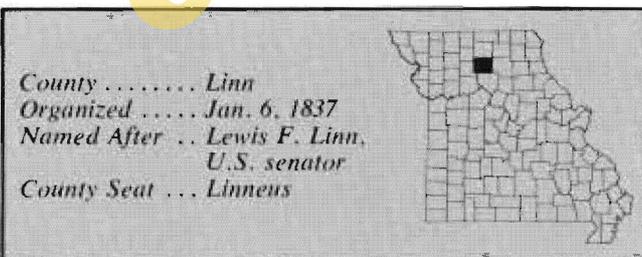


Fig. 1. Linn County Courthouse, 1848, remodeled 1867.  
(From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)



Fig. 2. Linn County Courthouse, after remodeling ca. 1867.  
(From: *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Linn County, Missouri*, 1876.)



issue August 1, 1911. They timed the election to coincide with the state-wide election to approve appropriations for a new state capitol to replace the one destroyed by fire February 5, 1911. County officials anticipated support for the capitol and thought voters might be more inclined on that day to approve the county bond issue. Election expenses also would be reduced.

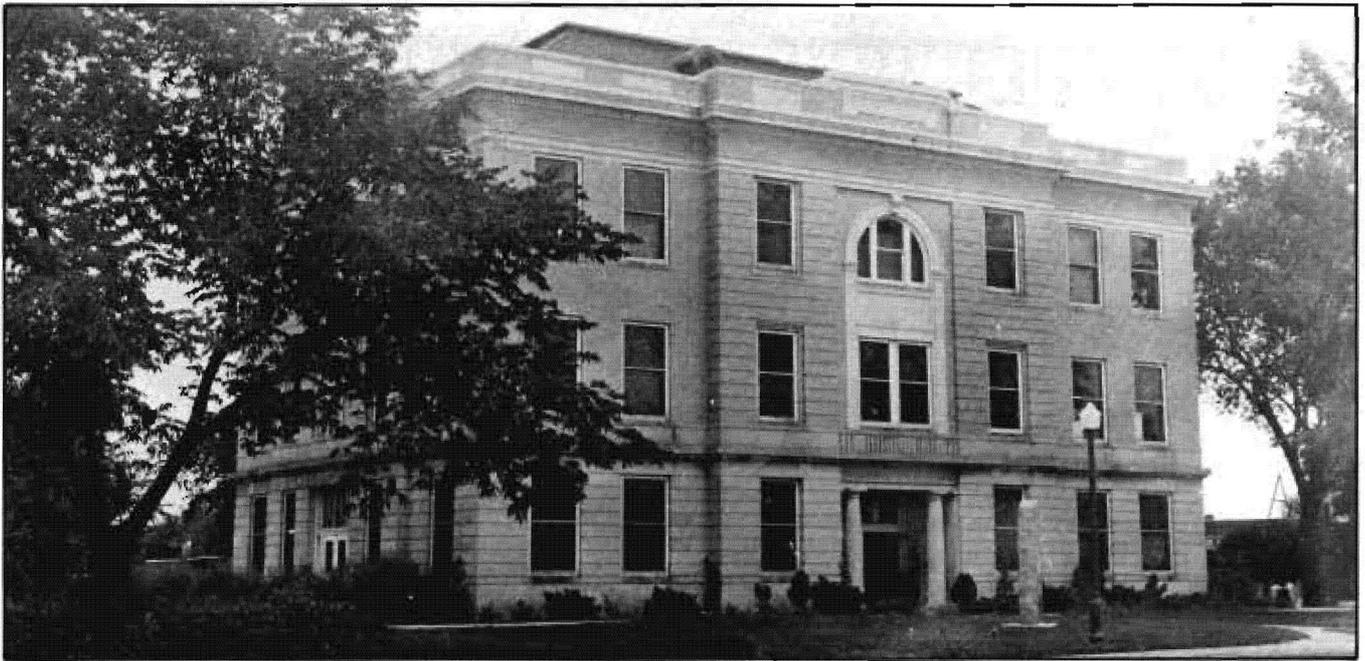


Fig. 3. Linn County Courthouse, 1915-. Architects: Rae Sanneman and R. W. Van Trump (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

For two months before the election, the newspaper publicized the issue, gathering support. Finally, after weeks of anticipation, headlines in the *Linneus Bulletin* announced the results: "Go Ring the Bells and Fire the Guns." When the returns came in, the town went wild with delight. Bells rang, whistles blew, cars honked and anvils roared; bands, skyrockets and bonfires all demonstrated the enthusiasm in the county.

The court appointed a Kansas City firm, Rae Sanneman and R. W. Van Trump, to prepare plans. Together the court and the architects visited Carroll, Daviess,

Vernon, Johnson and Grundy counties to examine recent projects. The preliminary concept indicated a building with dark-red brick for the main walls, trimmed with stone, but ultimately a gray brick replaced the red. The court wanted no gingerbread or unnecessary trim; they did not consider a dome because of the fire hazard and expense, but columns flanked the entry, and a balustrade at the roof line added classical details.

The building measured 55 by 80 feet (Fig. 3). Offices were on the first two floors; the Circuit Court room was on the third. Ray and Son received the building contract in January 1913 for \$56,000. Cornerstone ceremonies were conducted June 5, 1913. A year later the dedication took place. Final costs came to about \$60,000.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- History and Biography of Linn County*. Chicago: Henry Taylor and Company, 1912.  
*History of Linn County, Missouri*. Kansas City: Birdsall and Dean, 1882.

### Newspapers

- (Linneus) *The Bulletin*, May 4, June 8, 15, Aug. 3, 10, Sept. 7, 21, Oct. 5, Dec. 7, 1911; Feb. 1, Nov. 28, 1912; Jan. 11, 16, May 22, June 5, Nov. 20, 1913; June 4, 14, 18, 1914.

### Manuscript Collections

- Work Projects Administration, Historical Records Survey, Missouri, 1935-1942, Linn County. Located in Joint Collection: University of Missouri, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Columbia and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts.

### Atlases

- An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Linn County, Missouri*. Philadelphia: Edwards Brothers of Missouri, 1876.  
*Standard Atlas of Linn County, Missouri*. Chicago: George A. Ogle and Company, 1897.