

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

LIVINGSTON COUNTY

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Livingston County planned a temporary building in Chillicothe, the county seat, for its first courthouse in 1837; the cost was not to exceed \$50. The court ordered the 18-foot-square, log building to be built in the manner of cabins, covered with clapboards and laid with a puncheon floor (split log with a smoothed face). For the first 18 months the building apparently had no windows. The court later made arrangements to have them cut in. The court held session in the building during May 1838. As soon as the need for this courthouse passed, it was used as a schoolhouse.

The court arranged for the first permanent courthouse to be built on the square. An initial appropriation of \$4,000 in September 1839, later supplemented by an additional \$1,600, provided funds for the two-story, brick courthouse with cupola.

In February 1840 the court awarded the building contract for \$5,600 to Moses Burton. He completed the building November 2, 1841. An early postmaster in Livingston County drew an eyewitness rendering of the courthouse in 1840 (Fig. 1).

In 1864 the court condemned the building as unsafe and ordered it razed. For many years the square remained open and available to the public. Townspeople called the area "Elm Park." County officers occupied quarters in different buildings around town until the 20th century courthouse was built.

Voters in Livingston County rejected several bond issues to finance a courthouse. Finally, a direct tax of 25¢ per \$100 valuation passed in April 1912, providing funds for a \$100,000 building.

The question of where to locate the courthouse caused some disagreement. Many in Chillicothe

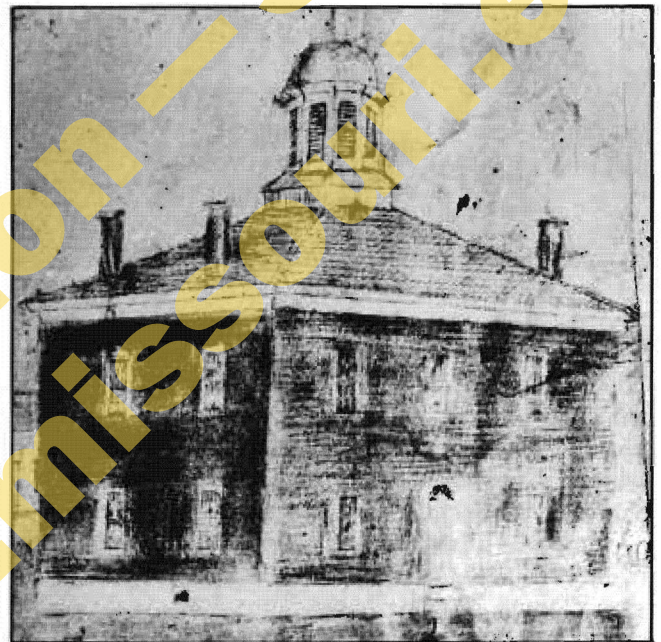


Fig. 1. Livingston County Courthouse, 1840-1864.
(Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri, drawing dated 1840)

wanted to keep the pleasant park atmosphere on the square, but the park was county property, and apparently the judges felt the majority of county residents favored a courthouse site on the square.

The court visited Carroll, Boone, Vernon, Jasper, Barton and Monroe counties to examine their recently constructed courthouses. The commissioners were not favorably impressed with Jasper and Barton; the exterior of Carroll they found acceptable, but they did not care for the plan. They liked Vernon; Boone was closer to what they had in mind, and they were impressed with City Hall in Kansas City, Kansas.

Eighteen architects presented plans before the court; one brought a model of his work. Late in July 1912 the court accepted the proposal of Warren Roberts and George Saase for a three-story building, 80 by 100 feet, of Bedford stone.

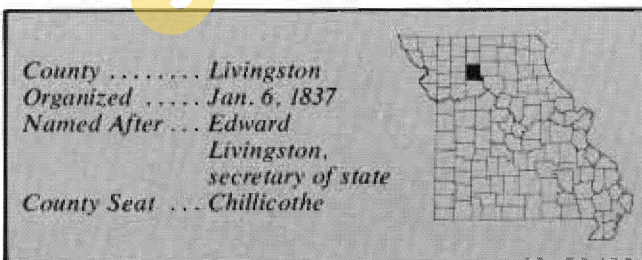




Fig. 2. Livingston County Courthouse, 1913-. Architect: Warren Roberts and George Saase (From: W.P.A., Historical Records Survey)

The general contract was let to L. W. Dumas, Jr. Construction Co. of Columbia, Missouri, for \$97,890. Ground was broken in April 1913. Cornerstone ceremonies were conducted June 28, 1914, and the court accepted the completed building July 25 (Fig. 2).

This was a popular courthouse design in Missouri from 1910-1930. Ray County officials visited Livingston County during construction of this courthouse, talked with architect Roberts, then chose him to design their 1914 courthouse. Both buildings continue to serve the counties, excellent examples of Warren Roberts' work.

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