

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

JEFFERSON COUNTY

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Jefferson County, organized in 1818, is one of Missouri's oldest counties. Six commissioners established the first county seat at Herculaneum, but no courthouse was built there. A black man rented space in his log cabin to the county for the first courtroom; for several years the court met wherever circumstances and convenience permitted.

As early as 1832 the court considered moving to Monticello, a more central location, but this suggestion met defeat at the polls. A persistent effort to relocate caused the court to appropriate \$400 in July 1836 for building a 20-by-25-foot, 1½-story, hewn-log courthouse, but because of continued opposition, the project did not materialize.

In November, J. J. Parnell was appointed commissioner and asked to determine whether stone or brick would be best and least expensive for the courthouse. This time the court considered a 30-foot-square building and appropriated \$1,000. Still the courthouse seems not to have been built, probably because of continued dissatisfaction with the site.

Hillsboro became permanently established as the county seat in 1838. Samuel Merry and Hugh O'Neil donated the site of 50 acres; the deed is dated April 7, 1838.

The county surveyor laid out the county seat in June 1839. An advertisement for sealed bids, published in the *St. Louis Argus Weekly* in 1839, described the proposed courthouse as a brick structure, 50 by 33 feet, with stone basement, and two feet above ground. There were to be four rooms on the first floor and a 31-by-37-foot courtroom on the second floor with a 10-foot lobby.

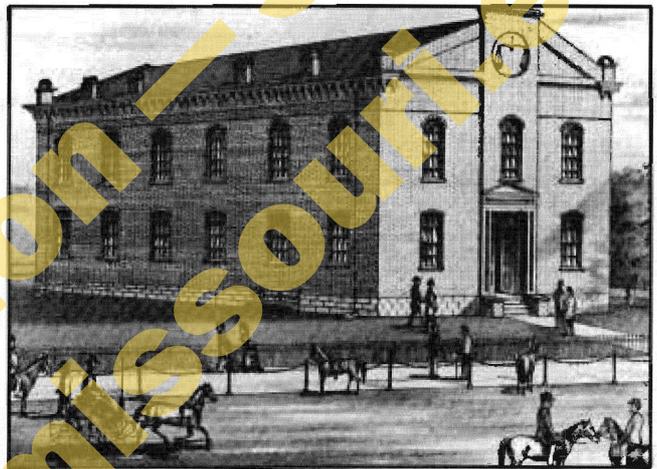


Fig. 1. Jefferson County Courthouse, 1863.
(From: *An Illustrated Historical Map of Jefferson County, Missouri*, 1876)

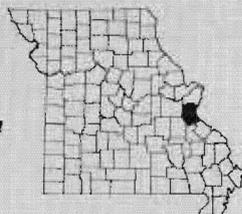


Fig. 2. 1892 addition on left; courthouse on right.
(From: Western Historical Manuscript Collection)

Roche and Erisman submitted a bid of \$3,800, which the court accepted. Subsequent appropriations raised the cost to over \$4,000. This building apparently continued in use until the 1863-65 building replaced it.

Charles H. Pond built the second courthouse, a 40-by-60-foot building, at a cost of \$16,500 (Fig. 1). It was placed on a different location in Hillsboro. Scales of justice recessed in a circle above the entry at the roof

County Jefferson
Organized Dec. 8, 1818
Named After Thomas Jefferson
County Seat Hillsboro



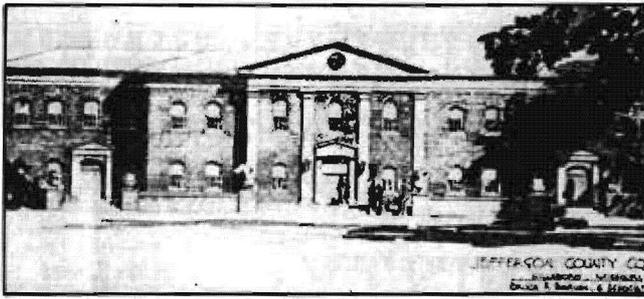


Fig. 3. Proposed 1953 remodeling.
From: *Jefferson County Record*, December 3, 1953.

line distinguished this simple brick courthouse. The court accepted the completed building on July 5, 1865. County offices were on the first floor, the Circuit Court room on the second.

A fireproof addition east of the courthouse was built in 1892 with a second-story connecting walkway. Joseph Hoeken was contractor and builder of this \$5,000 structure (Fig. 2).

The court dispelled rumors of building a courthouse in one of the larger areas of Jefferson County in July 1953 when they appointed Howard Donald to get plans and estimates for repairing and modernizing the courthouse. On September 14 the court examined a proposal and preliminary drawings prepared by Bruce Barnes and Associates, architectural engineers from Poplar Bluff. Barnes estimated a cost of \$280,000-\$300,000 to increase the space by three-fourths.

Originally, the plans called for features reminiscent of the 1865 courthouse: round, arched, multipaned windows and ornate cornice. Wings were to be added on either side of the principal entrances, which featured pilasters (shallow rectangular projections from the wall) designed to suggest a columned temple front (Fig. 3).



Fig. 4. Jefferson County Courthouse, after 1954 remodeling.
Architect: Bruce Barnes and Associates

However, alterations changed the final appearance (Fig. 4).

The court reached an agreement with Barnes that he would receive no compensation for his plans unless the bond issue passed. If it passed, the architect was to receive 7 percent of the total cost of the building. The issue passed in December 1953.

The court received bids on July 15, 1954, and early in August accepted the bid of \$233,700 for general contracting from Plez Lewis. Separate bids for heating, plumbing and electrical work came to about \$62,250. Dedication ceremonies took place May 5, 1957; a crowd of 600 attended the ceremonies that included the presentation of a flagpole, flag and keys to the court.

Jefferson County, just south of St. Louis, has grown rapidly. The courthouse's several stages of renovation and expansion continued in 1975-76 when a \$950,000 project provided space for a third Circuit Court and law enforcement facilities. Architect was Jack Stefanski of the firm Hastings and Chivetta, Clayton.

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