

COOPER COUNTY

At the March term of Circuit Court in 1819 the circuit judge appointed three commissioners to locate and superintend the building of a courthouse and jail for Cooper County. Eight persons promised to donate 50 acres if the county seat were located in Boonville. At the September term in 1820 the commissioners reported they reserved places for the courthouse and jail on the 50 acres, and the remainder of the property would be surveyed into lots, streets and alleys. Lots sold at public auction September 2, 1820, brought \$16,245.25.

On March 21, 1821, the commissioners let to the lowest bidder, William C. Porter (or Potter) and Willis Kempshall, for \$9,699, the building of a brick courthouse about 40 feet square, with stone foundation and two stories, one room below, two jury rooms above. Some alterations were made in the plan before the building was completed in 1823.

In 1831 a brick floor replaced the wooden one on the first floor, and additional work was done on the second-story gallery floor. At the July term of court in 1838 the courthouse was ordered to be sold at public auction. When the building was razed, some of the brick was reportedly used in the next courthouse.

The \$9,000 cost would have been a great sum in 1821. The county used the courthouse for only 15 years before replacing it, certainly not a typical lifespan for such a costly building.

In May 1838 the County Court ordered a portion of the public square to be laid off into lots and sold to raise funds in order to build a larger courthouse (Fig. 1.). The site for the courthouse was retained but reduced in size; it overlooked the river and provided an excellent view

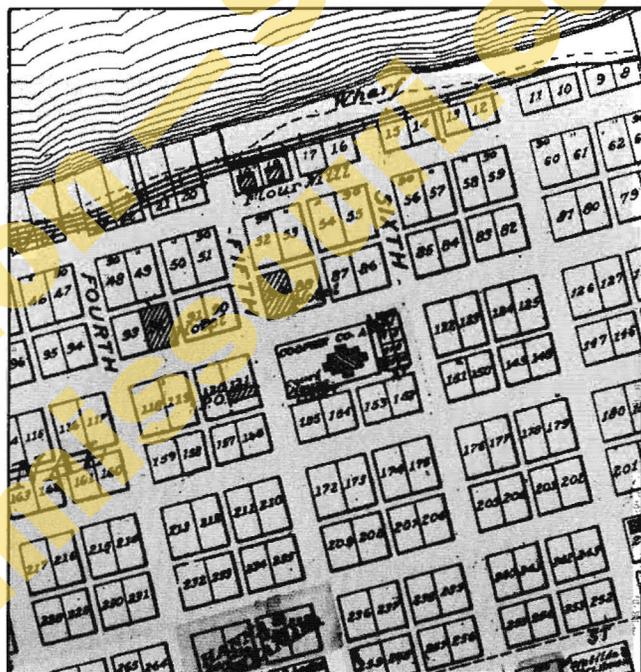


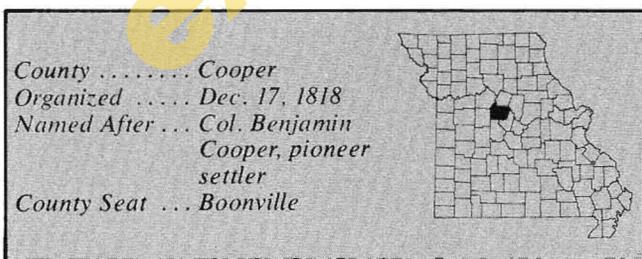
Fig. 1. Plan of Boonville, Missouri.
(From: *Standard Atlas of Cooper County, Missouri*, 1915)

from the cupola. Specific instructions for dividing the public square were recorded in the County Court Record.

A model and plan of the courthouse were filed with the county clerk. The court appropriated \$10,800. Subsequent appropriations for the courthouse brought the total to approximately \$30,000, again a very high figure for the time. The court ordered the second story to remain unfinished until a later date, and requested that the ornamental work remain simple.

The County Court received the building at the August term in 1840. Jacob Wyan and Charles W. Johnson were commissioners. Seltcer and McCullough were the contractors (Fig. 2).

This building served Cooper County until 1911,



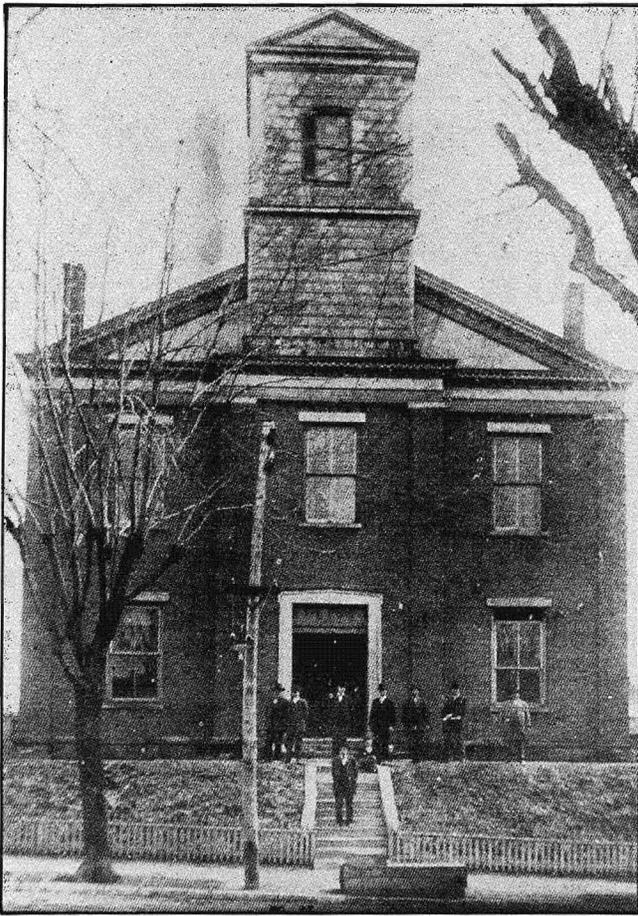


Fig. 2. Cooper County Courthouse, 1838-1911.
(Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

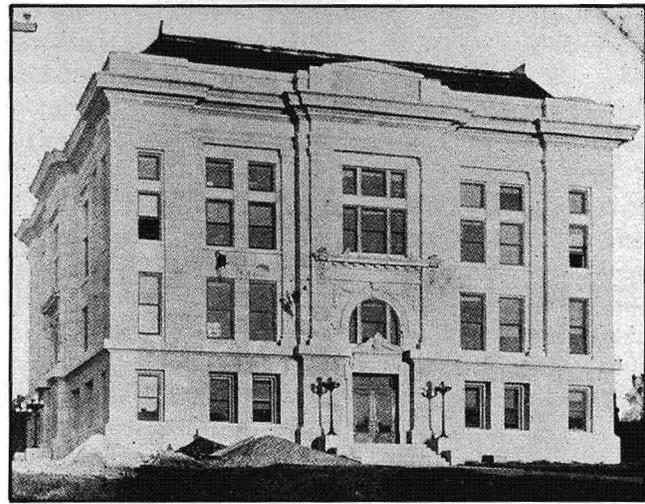


Fig. 3. Cooper County Courthouse, 1912-
Architect: Robert G. Kirsch
(From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

when commissioners who reported on the building declared it unfit. It was sold to W. J. Cochran, contractor

for the 1912 courthouse, for \$300 and demolished in March of 1912.

Petitions to the court asking for a \$100,000 bond issue to finance a new courthouse resulted in an election in June 1911. The town of Boonville made a contribution of \$15,000 toward construction. Plans of R. G. Kirsch for a three-story, 80-by-100-foot building were accepted, and the contract was given to W. J. Cochran of Boonville for about \$95,000.

Cornerstone ceremonies were conducted July 9, 1912, and the building was received by the court September 15, 1913 (Fig. 3). The main facade of the building faces Fifth Street, which became the principal artery through town.

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