

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

MILLER COUNTY

Marian M. Ohman
Coordinator, Art History Programs

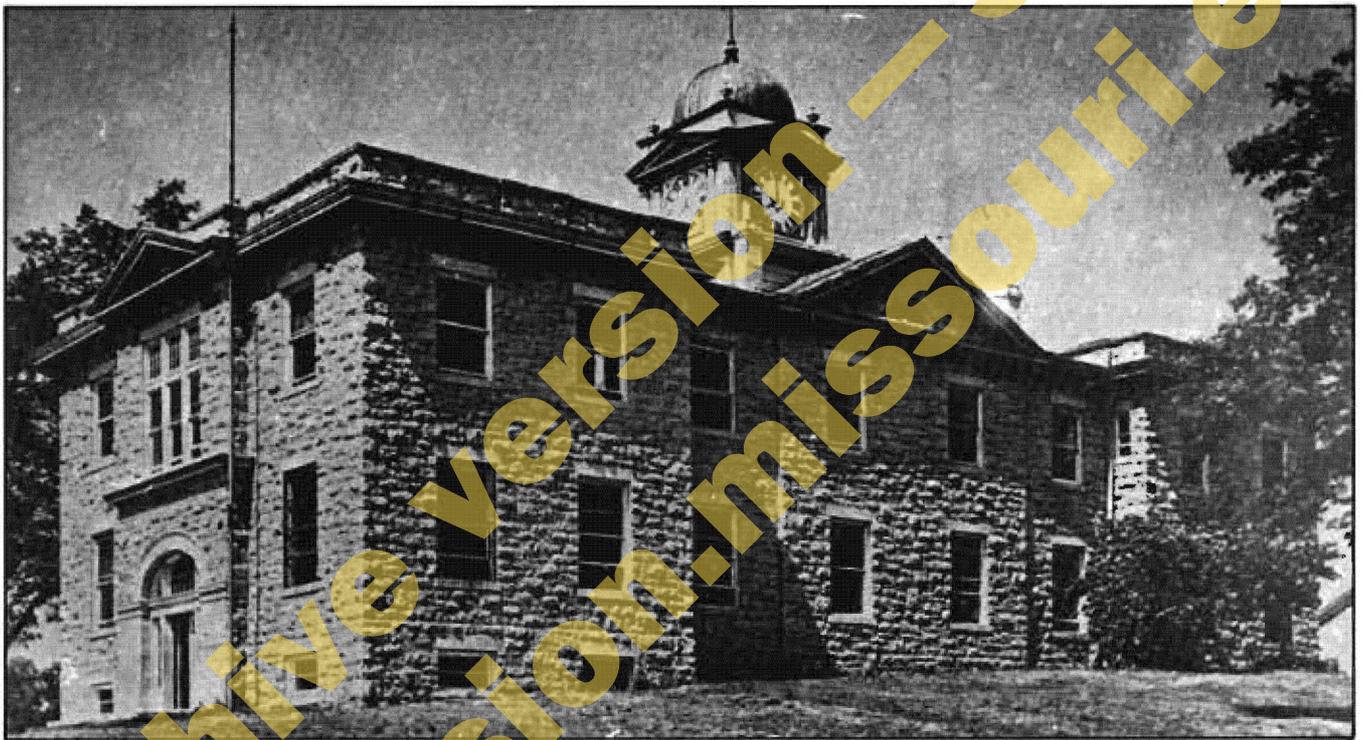


Fig. 1. Miller County Courthouse, after 1910 remodeling. Architects: Frank B. Miller and Charles Opel (From: W.P.A., Western Historical Manuscripts Collection)

Miller County attempted to build a courthouse in Tuscumbia in 1838. In February judges appropriated \$400 and advertised for construction, but received no bids. The court tried again in 1839, appropriating \$250 and appointing Hardin M. Williams superintendent.

This time they succeeded when John Davis, one of the judges, submitted a low bid of \$199.

The 32-by-20-foot, hewn-log building had a stone foundation, rough plank floor, hewn boards covering the cracks (apparently board and batten construction) and a gable roof. A partition wall divided the courthouse into two rooms.

Davis completed his work during August 1840. Finishing work continued until May 1841. Repairs on the building in 1843 and 1847 still did not provide satisfactory accommodations, and the clerk twice sought quarters elsewhere. Finally, in 1858, as preparations were made for a new facility, the courthouse of 1839-40 was ordered sold to the highest bidder.

County Miller
Organized Feb. 6, 1837
Named After . . . John Miller,
governor of
Missouri, 1826
County Seat . . . Tuscumbia



Petitions from citizens asked for a new courthouse in 1856, and the court made an initial appropriation of \$4,000. The court awarded the contract to Robert McKim and Robert Ainsworth for \$6,000 in November 1857. They built a two-story, brick, 56-by-40-foot courthouse, on a plan which the court accepted from Owen Riggs, the superintendent. The brick was made locally, but the masonry was of such poor quality the court had it painted with two coats of red paint. The court accepted the completed building in February 1859. This courthouse continued in use into the 20th century.

Numerous attempts to vote bonds for a new courthouse were defeated, partly because there was some desire to relocate the county seat. In 1909 one prominent citizen encouraged relocation advocates to stop talking about it, because, he said, "Elephants will turn to ants and flies to dianasauruses.[sic] before the county seat is removed from Tuscumbia."

The following month the court decided to repair the old courthouse, for approval by vote was not necessary when repairing county property. On November 6, 1909, the clerk was ordered to contact different architectural firms for a remodeling design. The court then commissioned the Jefferson City firm of Miller and Opel, who presented a plan that reversed the previous arrangement by putting the courtroom on the second floor, with offices on the first.

Wings were added to the north and south of the central block, which had been the 1858 courthouse. The court awarded a contract April 14, 1910, for veneering the sides of the old building with native limestone and making two 28-by-50-foot additions, increasing the size of the building to 110 by 50 feet (Fig. 1). P. F. Havenstein (or Hauenstein) and R. T. Roberts received the contract for \$13,800.

Finally the county did need to pass a \$10,000 bond issue to finish the project. W. W. Whitlock received the contract in September 1913 for \$8,483 to complete the remodeling. He finished the work in December 1913.

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