

# MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

## ATCHISON COUNTY

Marian M. Ohman  
Coordinator, Art History Programs

Linden, about five miles north of Rock Port, became the first county seat of Atchison County in 1846 and remained so until 1856. A two-story, frame courthouse, built of dressed walnut weatherboarding, measured 20 by 30 feet. Exterior stairs provided access to the second story. On the lower story, five windows framed in walnut featured window shutters. A complete description may be found in the County Court Record. Jesse Cole was superintendent, Isaac F. Wallis the contractor, and the building was apparently completed in May 1848 at a cost of \$475.

After the northern boundary of Missouri was permanently established by a Supreme Court decision in 1849, 10 miles of Atchison County became part of Iowa. Linden then was considered too far from the center of the county, and after bitter arguments the seat of justice was moved to Rock Port in 1855. In August 1856, the commissioner of the former seat of justice was ordered to sell the remaining lots, courthouse and jail in Linden.

The court accepted a donation of land for the site of the county building in the Nuckoll and White addition at the western edge of Rock Port.

W. H. Dunbar, commissioner of the new Rock Port courthouse, received instructions from the court to submit a plan and cost estimate in September 1856. Dunbar visited Oregon, in neighboring Holt County, as instructed, to make a draft of the courthouse there. Dunbar offered this draft, along with another plan which he personally preferred, to the court with specifications and cost estimates. The court accepted Dunbar's preferred plan and made an initial appropriation of \$6,000 for the construction of the building on the city



Fig. 1. Atchison County Courthouse, 1856-1880s.  
(From: *History of Atchison County*, 1882)

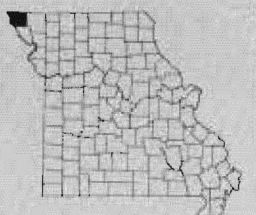
square, which was situated on a lofty hill west of the city.

The two-story brick structure was approximately 50 by 60 feet (Fig. 1). Pilasters (rectangular columns projecting slightly from walls) with cast-iron caps extended the height of the two stories and encircled the building. Lintels (horizontal crosspieces over doors) were also of cast iron. There were seven rooms, large and well lighted, plus the jury room. A zinc-covered cupola rose from a base on the roof but was later destroyed by wind. Figure 1 shows the building after the cupola was removed.

In spite of flooring that did not meet specifications because of improper seasoning, the superintendent recommended the court receive the building on February 16, 1858. Final costs were estimated between \$12,000-\$15,000. Several contractors were identified. A privy in the courthouse yard, built in 1859, and a fence around the square in 1860 completed the public square.

During the Civil War the courthouse sheltered soldiers in the upper level and horses in the lower. In the 1880s the building was condemned and sold to John Dopf for \$600.

County . . . . . Atchison  
Organized . . . . . Feb. 14, 1845  
Named After . . . David R.  
Atchison,  
Missouri's U.S.  
Senator, 1843-54  
County Seat . . . Rock Port



Once again a fierce struggle ensued for the location of the seat of justice, as Tarkio offered to donate a new courthouse. But Tarkio's challenge was to no avail; the seat remained at Rock Port.

The members of the County Court visited neighboring Nodaway County to inspect its courthouse. Then they contacted architects Edmund J. Eckel and George R. Mann of St. Joseph to discuss a proposed courthouse for Atchison County. The court accepted the architects' plans on December 26, 1881, but then citizens rejected bond issues in January and March of 1882 in the amount of \$40,000 for construction.

Determined to proceed, the court set aside \$15,000 of the general revenue fund in May 1882. They appointed F. A. Foster superintendent and ordered the construction of the Eckel- and Mann-proposed design (Fig. 2). Private subscriptions amounted to \$10,000.

In June the court accepted the bid of R. K. Allen, who had built the Nodaway courthouse. The court rejected a lower bid because they questioned its validity. Cornerstone ceremonies were conducted October 19, 1882. The shell of the building was erected first, and the interior was finished as finances allowed. The court received the building May 9, 1883.

The imposing two-story brick building, 75 by 91

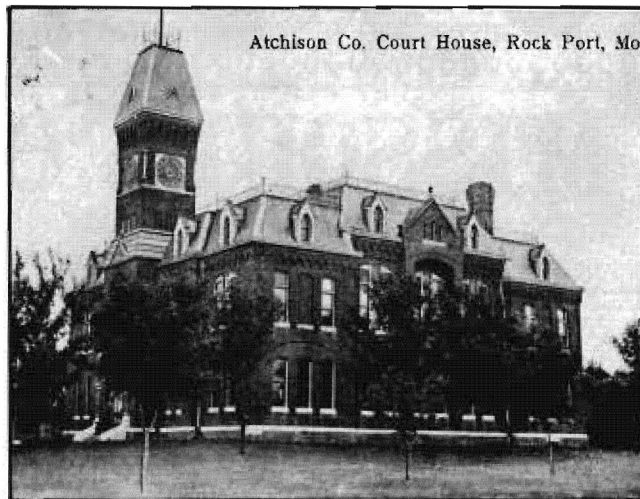


Fig. 2. Atchison County Courthouse, 1882-  
Architects: Eckel and Mann  
(From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

feet, sits on an elevated spot with spacious surrounding grounds and still serves as the Atchison County courthouse. The tall, square tower above the entry, as shown in Fig. 2, is no longer there. Decorative brick corbeling just below the eaves provides a transition from wall to roof. The steeply sloped mansard roofs and projecting dormer windows are covered with slate and metal roofing. Cresting originally crowned the roof line.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

*History of Holt and Atchison Counties.* St. Joseph: National Historical Co., 1882.

### Newspapers

(Rock Port) *Atchison County Journal*, Aug. 30, 1879; Jan. 21, Feb. 4, 11, May 6, June 17, Aug. 5, Sept. 30, Oct. 21, Nov. 11, 1882; Feb. 10, 1883.  
(Rock Port) *Atchison County Mail*, Jan. 26, June 17, 1882.

### Manuscript Collections

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

### Maps

*Plat Book of Atchison County, Missouri.* Minneapolis: Northwest Publishing Co., 1904.