

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

WAYNE COUNTY

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Wayne County is one of Missouri's oldest counties. At one time the county embraced a vast portion of the state. Fire destroyed two Wayne County courthouses, one in 1853 or 1854, the other in 1892, at which time all county records were burned. Therefore, the early history of the courthouses depends on secondary sources.

For several years courts were held in rented facilities. The county is believed to have had six courthouses. The first courthouse, a two-story, log structure, was located on the square in historic Greenville and financed through the sale of lots. This building was used until 1849.

The second courthouse, a brick structure built in 1849, was used for about five years before it burned in 1853 or 1854.

For the next courthouse, built in 1856, the county appropriated \$2,500. This two-story, brick building was damaged by fire December 14, 1892. The extent of architectural damage is uncertain, but a fire insurance policy paid the county \$4,300.

The fourth courthouse of the 19th century may have been a rebuilding of the 1856 courthouse. The court approved plans for a two-story, brick building with hip roof in 1893. C. Lindeman and Son, Cape Girardeau, contracted for the building at \$4,350. Final costs, including vaults and interior finishing, amounted to about \$7,000. The building was completed and accepted by the court December 20, 1893. In 1912 the exterior was painted, and benches in the courtroom were replaced with opera chairs. A report in the May 24, 1923, *Wayne County Journal* described the court-

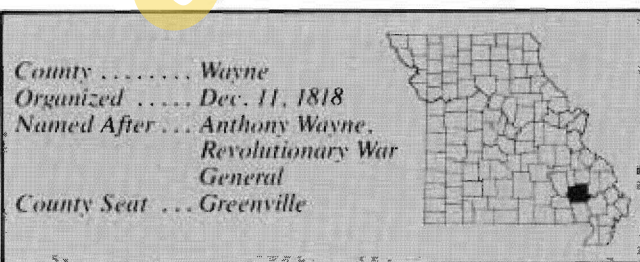


Fig. 1. Wayne County Courthouse, Old Greenville, photo undated. It is either the 1856-1892 courthouse or after the 1893 rebuilding.
(From: *Wayne County Journal*, Jan. 25, 1912)

house and said the main section had been built before the War; an addition to the north had been made more than 30 years before (which would have been the 1893 project). The building was razed in 1924.

Grand juries had recommended for years that a new courthouse should be built; records were kept in offices all over Greenville. In May 1923 the grand jury called this a shameful arrangement, before they condemned the courthouse and ordered all officials to vacate.

A November 1923 election authorized a bond issue of \$50,000 for a red brick and white algonite stone building designed by Martin Laubis, Poplar Bluff, which had been simplified from an earlier, more elaborate design to keep within the \$50,000 limit (Figs. 2 and 3). The structure was to be as substantial and convenient as originally planned, but not as ornamented. The size was reduced by narrowing hallways; the Circuit Court room was on the north part of the third floor and not much larger than the previous one. Cornerstone ceremonies were held May 21, 1925. Completed in December 1926, this courthouse was in use less than 20 years when the government condemned it and compensated Wayne



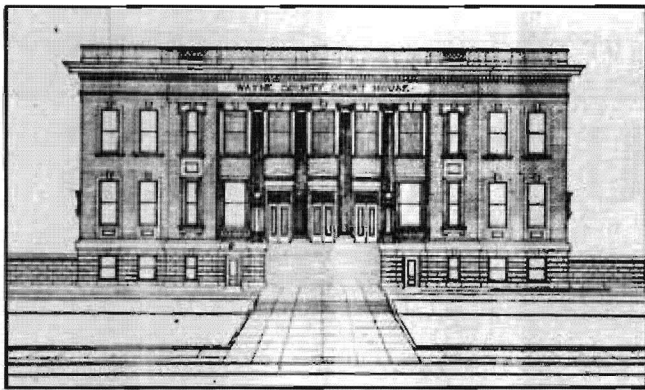


Fig. 2. Proposed Wayne County Courthouse, 1923.
 Architect: Martin Laubis
 From: *Greenville Sun*, Oct. 18, 1923.

County about \$70,000; Wappapello Lake, formed by a government dam project, would soon inundate old, historic Greenville.

Twice petitions asked for removal of the county seat from Greenville to Patterson; twice they were defeated. Piedmont was another contender, but Greenville remained the preferred site. F. W. Carlton, a

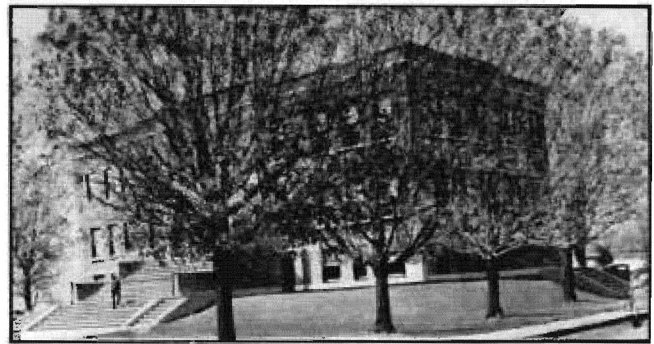


Fig. 3. Wayne County Courthouse, Old Greenville, 1925-1941.
 Architect: Martin Laubis
 (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

former banker, was given the responsibility of selecting a site on higher ground and procuring courthouse plans. Eugene S. Johnson and Albert Maack, members of a St. Louis firm who had provided preliminary sketches, were retained as architects. They completed the plans and supervised construction of the three-story building, which cost about \$98,000 and was funded in part by W. P. A. Construction began in March 1941 and was completed in September 1943 (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Wayne County Courthouse, 1940-. Architects: Eugene S. Johnson and Albert C. Maack (Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

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