

# MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

## POLK COUNTY

Marian M. Ohman  
Coordinator, Art History Programs



Fig. 1. Polk County Courthouse, 1841-1905. (From: W.P.A., Historical Records Survey)

Courts first met in Polk County in private homes. William Jamison purchased the site of Bolivar from the U. S. government in 1835 for the county seat. In May 1837 the court appropriated \$125 for the courthouse, a sum supplemented by private donors. By 1842 the

building, located on a corner of the square, had served its purpose and in November was ordered sold to the highest bidder on 12 months credit.

Jamison also acted as the first superintendent of the second courthouse. An advertisement appeared in the *Jeffersonian Republican* March 30, 1839, for a 50-foot-square, brick building with separate contracts for masonry and woodwork. By November 1841 the brick work was almost complete. The courthouse was located in the center of the square with a board fence and hitching post around the perimeter (Fig. 1). The building survived the Civil War. It was sold in October 1905 for \$351, then vacated for safety reasons.

As early as 1903, Polk County tried to build a new courthouse, but a levy failed in November of that year.

County . . . . . Polk  
Organized . . . . . Jan. 5, 1835  
Named After . . . James K. Polk  
County Seat . . . Bolivar

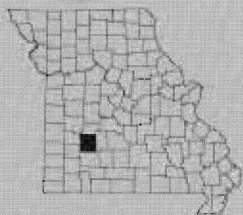




Fig. 2. Polk County Courthouse, 1906-. Architect: Robert G. Kirsch (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

Two years later, to finance a new courthouse, the electorate authorized bonds, which were sold in September 1905. Four or five plans were submitted for the court's consideration. The court selected the plan of Robert G. Kirsch in October. The following month Atlas Construction Co., St. Louis, received the general contract for \$41,950. The design was the same Kirsch used in three other Missouri counties: Adair, 1898; Carroll, 1901; and Vernon, 1906. Polk and Vernon courthouses were the last of the Romanesque designs to be built in the state. Cornerstone ceremonies for the Polk County courthouse, which is still in use, took place on May 24, 1906; the dedication was held on November 25, 1907 (Fig. 2).

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

##### Books

*History of Hickory, Polk, Cedar, Dade and Barton Counties.*  
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*Old Settlers Reunion.* 1909.

##### Public Documents

County Court Record, vols. A and Q.  
County Court Minute Book, vol. 1.

##### Newspapers

*Bolivar Free Press.* Oct. 22, Nov. 5, 12, 1903; Sept. 28, Oct. 5, Nov. 2, 9, 16, 1905; Jan. 11, Mar. 8, 26, May 24, 1906; Nov. 21, 28, 1907.  
*Bolivar Herald.* Feb. 28, 1918; Mar. 4, July 22, 1937; Feb. 19, 1976.

##### Manuscript Collections

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