

# ST. CLAIR COUNTY

First courts in St. Clair County met in homes before a courthouse was built in 1842. Various references in the County Court Record indicate the two-story building had a parapet, tin roof, plank floor and was built on the public square, which was fenced. Parapets, small extensions of a wall above the roof line, were unusual features found on few early Missouri courthouses.

This structure is apparently the one that was burned in September 1861 by Gen. James Lane. One account claims that Lane's raid only partially destroyed the courthouse; by some accounts it was rebuilt and used until November 1864, when it was again burned in Civil War activity.

In June 1866 voters approved appropriation of \$15,000 for building a new courthouse. William O. Mead acted as superintendent and advertised for proposals. A. G. Clarke, assisted by Thomas Sutherland, was paid \$20 for making a plan for the courthouse.

A newspaper announcement calling for proposals for building the courthouse stated that the builder would be permitted to use the old bricks which were still on the site. Specifications called for the ground floor to be of brick laid in cement, as in the previous courthouse. The 44-foot-square structure was to be built upon the foundation of the previous building. Crossing halls were originally planned with exterior doors, but later windows were substituted. On the main facade, facing Second St., a porch had two stairways leading to the second story. Four two-story brick pillars supported the roofs covering the porches. Plans also called for a 16-foot shuttered cupola, which could be used as a bell tower. There was a five-foot cornice; caps and sills

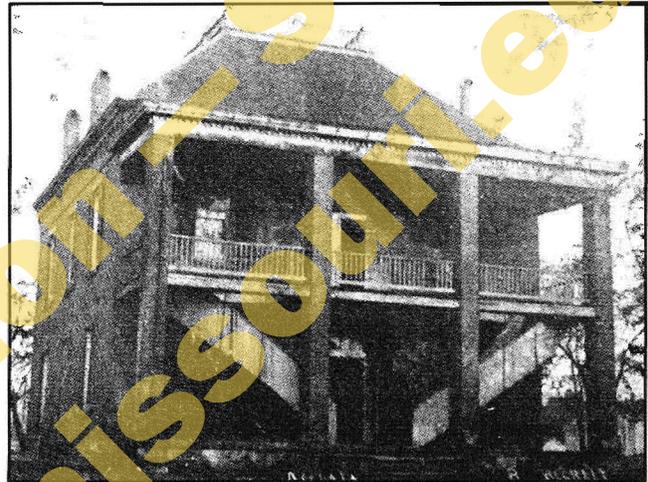


Fig. 1. St. Clair County Courthouse, 1866-1908. (From: *Ozarks Mountaineer*, October 1956)

of the doors and windows were to be of cut stone. Pine would be used for doors as well as for shutters, which would cover the windows.

The contractors, Hicks and Brown, completed their work and turned the building over to the county on Dec. 4, 1867. However, the county commissioner deducted \$200 due to unacceptable work. Cost of the courthouse was about \$15,000. No early photographs are known; a late 19th century illustration shows the courthouse with the cupola missing. (Fig. 1).

In 1880 the building was insured for \$3,000, and by 1890 the safety of the building was questioned, although it continued in use for another 18 years. In spite of the courthouse's condition, in December 1905 voters rejected a proposal to build a new courthouse. Some county offices leased space in another building on the square; it was not until the Circuit Court judge refused to hold court in the courthouse that it was vacated in 1908. Still the building was not razed. Instead, a small addition was made on the east, permitting some county offices to continue using the courthouse.

In spite of the acute need, several years passed before the County Court selected the architect of the 20th century courthouse. The court finally se-

County . . . . . St. Clair  
Organized . . . . . Jan. 29, 1841  
Named After . . . Gen. Arthur St.  
                          Clair of the  
                          Revolution  
County Seat . . . Osceola



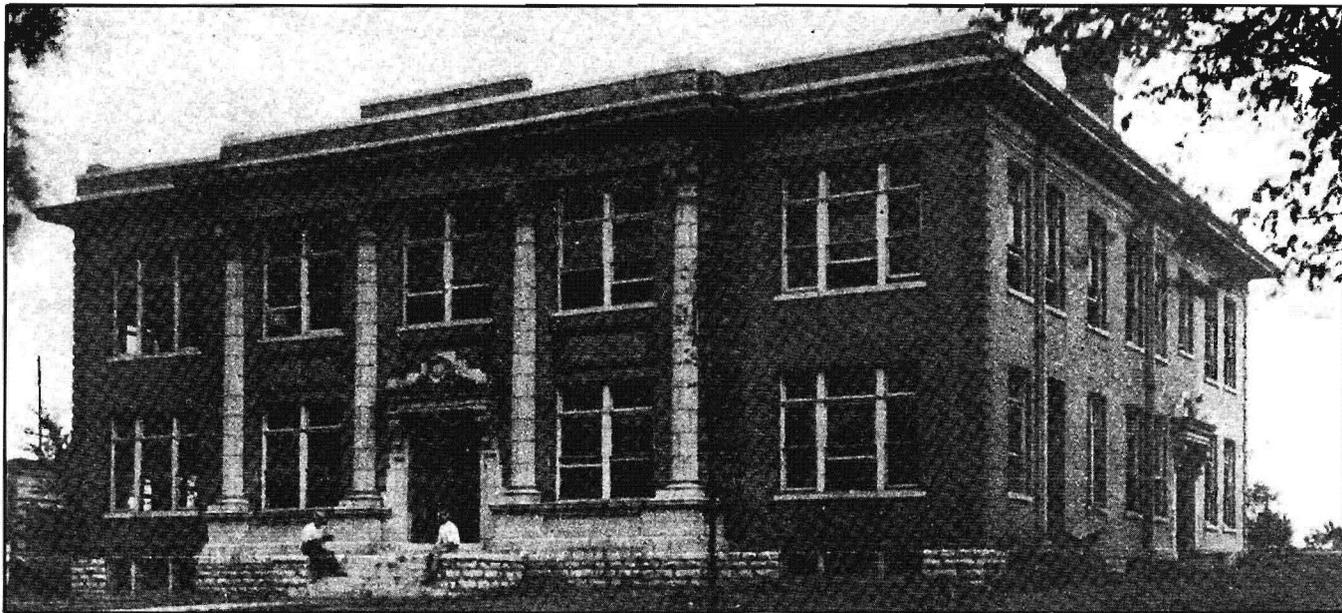


Fig. 2. St. Clair County Courthouse, 1916-. Architect: Clifton B. Sloan (Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

lected Clifton B. Sloan of Kansas City, who presented his plans in May 1916. Razing of the old building began the same month, but apparently the east extension was incorporated in the new building. At the time, the construction was referred to as a further addition.

The court received nine bids after offering prospective contractors four alternative propositions to bid on. According to the *Appleton City Journal*, the proposals were so complicated that the average citizen could understand only the one designated "A." Proposal A provided for destruction of the old building, excavation for a basement, and construction of new walls and roof. The court accepted a bid on proposal A of \$12,500 from D.M. Wall.

The principal entry would face north with others on the east and west. Work ceased when the roof was in place, marking the end of stage one. Unfortunately, construction did not resume due to lack of funds. The financial bind stemmed from forty years earlier when the county had gone deeply into debt on an unsuccessful railroad venture. Now that the county appeared solvent, heirs of the original lenders filed suit demanding payment on the old debt. Their legal action succeeded in halting construction of the new courthouse. Parts of the incompleated building were used for county business, but the quarters were cramped and inconvenient. The unfinished state of the building left it liable to possible damage, and the court did allocate \$1,500 in 1917 for draining the basement and glazing the windows. A further limitation was imposed because of World War I and the order from the State Council of Defense that restricted building. Finally, voters acknowledged the railroad indebtedness and passed a bond issue in September 1918 to settle with the claimants.

Construction resumed on the courthouse project when bids were received in June 1919 and again in February 1920 after suitable appropriations had been made. The second-floor courtroom was dedicated September 9, 1920, but other finishing work continued into 1923. By January of that year, costs amounted to about \$52,500. The prolonged period of construction, done in stages with many separate contracts, and the intervening legal problem make a complicated history. Constructed of yellow brick and white stone trim, the building continues in use today (Fig. 2).

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