

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

STE. GENEVIEVE COUNTY

*Marian M. Ohman
Coordinator, Art History Programs*

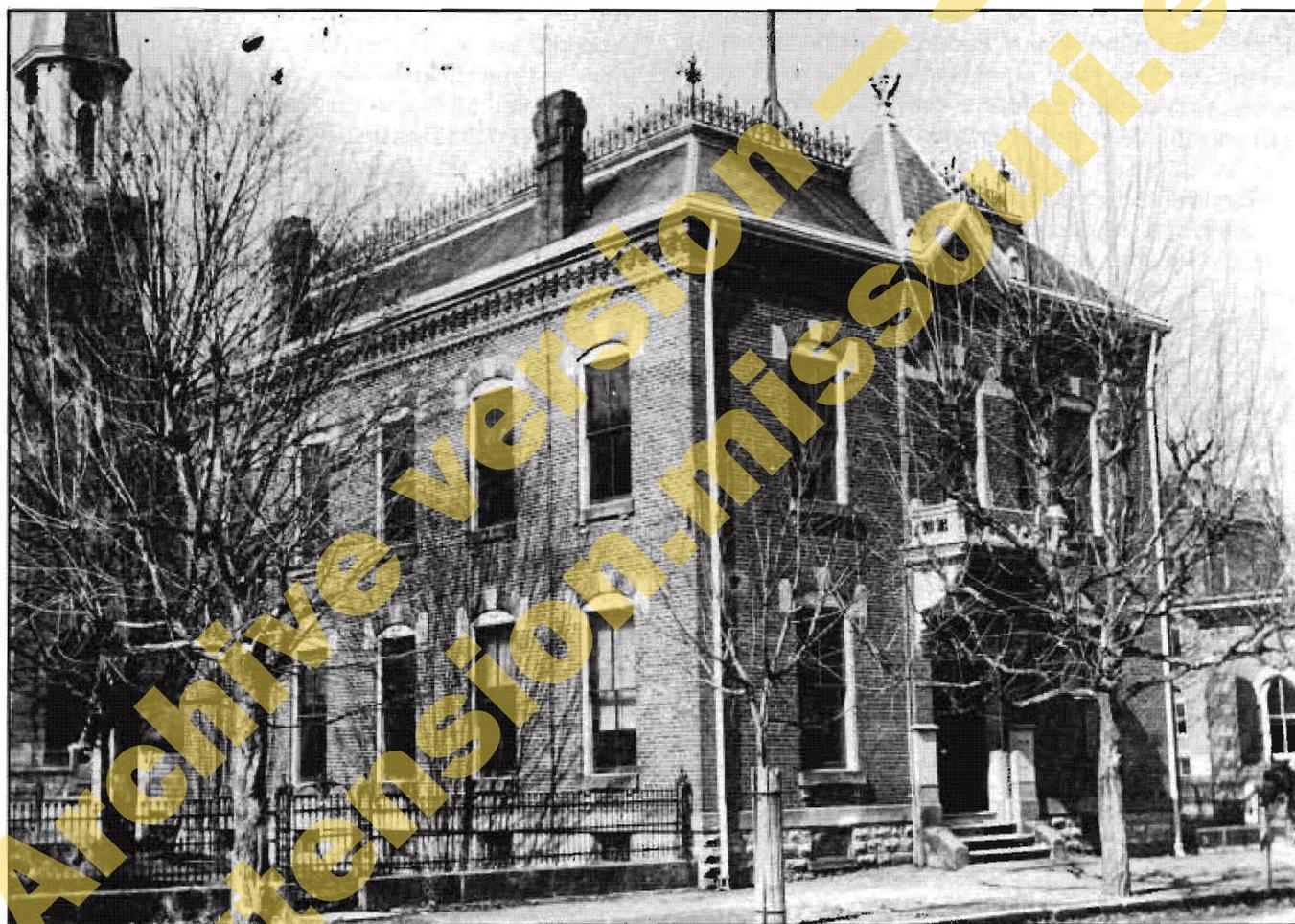
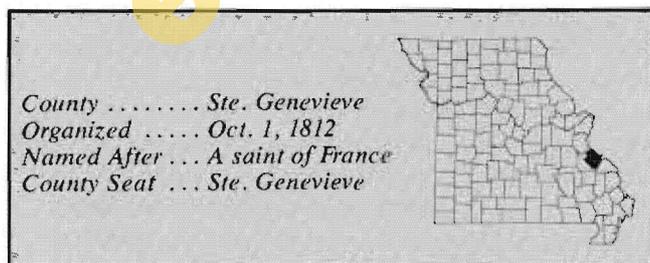


Fig. 1. Ste. Genevieve County Courthouse, 1885-. Architect: Jerome B. Legg (From: Vera Okenfuss collection)



Early courts in Ste. Genevieve County met in homes. A tax levy in 1821 enabled construction on the first courthouse to begin. During 1821-22, while construction was underway, courts continued meeting in the home of Henry Dodge, who was commissioner of the courthouse. The county paid more than \$1,000 to contractors Loper and McCullough in February 1823, but so many entries in available records relate to con-

struction costs, it is difficult to determine the actual final cost. Interior finishing continued into 1826.

Surprisingly, no known photographs exist, although the building stood until the 1880s. A few references in the County Court records and descriptions of authorized repairs indicate it was a two-story, brick building with the courtroom on the first floor and three rooms and a gallery upstairs. The cupola had glass windows and was topped by a gilded ball and weathervane. Shutters and blinds were green; trim was white. The plan proved to be inconvenient, however, and interior remodeling changed the room and stair arrangement during 1853 and again in 1855.

Military personnel occupied the building during the Civil War. After the war, in 1865, the court appropriated more than \$1,600 for repairs. In July 1843 the court appropriated funds to build an 18-by-23-foot clerk's office. The County Court Record provides a careful description of the building and indicates the site was to be aligned with the front of the courthouse, but 30 feet to the north. The court later rescinded the order.

After 32 years the plan revived. Construction of the fireproof clerk's office began in 1875 on the northeast corner of the square facing Merchant Street and aligned with the courthouse, near the originally proposed site. At the same time, the county built a jail on the southeast corner of the square.

The court had appropriated \$5,000 for the jail January 28, 1875, and accepted the proposal of John S. Whitlock, a local builder-architect, paying him \$125 for the plans and specifications. Whitlock acted as superintendent for both the jail and clerk's office. Peter J. Pauley and Bros. contracted for the jail construction.

In April 1875 the court appropriated \$2,500 for the clerk's office. About a month later Joseph B. Jennings

contracted a low bid of \$2,500 for the fireproof clerk's building. Plans for both buildings originally called for brick trim, but in May 1875 white sandstone quoins (dressed stones at the corners of a building) and door and window moldings were substituted.

The court received the jail September 23, 1875; on November 25 two county officials moved into the new fireproof building. Both the jail and the clerk's office still stand flanking the courthouse, but are now used for different purposes.

In May 1884 a grand jury found the courthouse, built in the 1820s, dilapidated. After involved planning and legal maneuvering, the court started building a new courthouse in 1885 under the deliberately misleading designation of "repairing." In March 1885 the court accepted a design from Jerome B. Legg, requesting plans and specifications before April 1, 1885. The court appropriated \$5,884.60 on May 16 for building costs. Legg supervised construction of the 36-by-48-foot brick building with Ste. Genevieve sandstone trim, built in part on foundations of the previous courthouse (Fig. 1). Albert A. Boyer contracted the building. Final costs reached almost \$8,000 by the time the building was completed in the fall of 1886.

Originally, five offices and a hall occupied the first floor, and a 40-foot-square courtroom occupied the second floor with an 11-by-16-foot jury room in the north corner. This courthouse is very similar to the one Legg designed for St. Francois County at the same time.

In 1915 the McCarthy Construction Co. built a rear extension planned by architect Robert G. Kirsch. The court appropriated \$11,000 in November 1914 for the addition to the courthouse that still houses Ste. Genevieve County offices.

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