

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

ADAIR COUNTY

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Tradition says Adair County's first courts met in a schoolhouse two miles south of Kirksville. The first courthouse, which cost \$1,000, dates from 1843. It was a low, one-story, brick temporary building, located on a lot across the street from the square. John B. Earhart was the builder, and John D. Callison, a carpenter. Caleb Barnett was superintendent. The first court held there met July 3, 1843.

The square was reserved for the permanent courthouse. The court ordered the first permanent building in February 1852 and initially appropriated \$2,200. William H. Parcells was appointed superintendent and was sent to Knox County, just east of Adair County, to get the plan for its recently completed building at Edina. Adair County then adapted the foursquare design and built it on the public square (Fig. 1). On March 8, 1852, the contract was awarded to Galyon and Douglass, who completed the work in 1853. The first floor contained offices; a few additional rooms and the courtroom were on the second floor.

Fire destroyed this courthouse April 12, 1865, and the county remained without a courthouse for 30 years. For many of these years, the public square was known as the "Park." An illustration from the atlas of 1876 shows a portion of the square filled with a geometric pattern of trees. The third and present Adair County courthouse dates from the turn of the century.

As Adair Countians contemplated a new courthouse, some proposed a different location where only one main facade would be necessary. This would reduce construction costs considerably and leave the square for a public park. But, in April 1896 the people voted to put the building on the square.

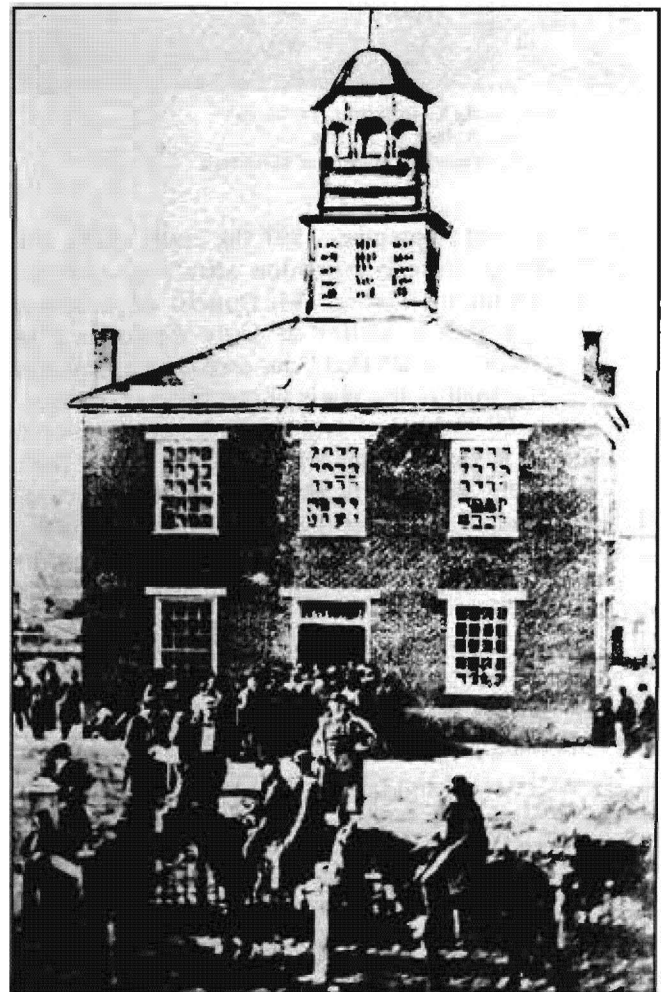
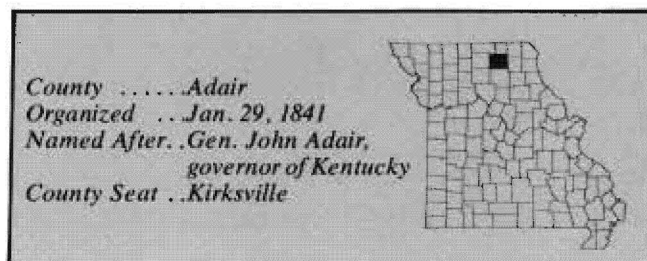


Fig. 1. Adair County Courthouse, 1852-1865.
(From: *History of Adair County.*)



Several bond issues failed before one inspired the majority of voters, on August 3, 1897, to finance \$50,000 for building a replacement. Notices placed in local newspapers by the county judges illustrated the Johnson County courthouse, with the enticement that Adair County could have a comparable building for



Fig. 2. Adair County Courthouse, 1897-.
 Architect: Robert G. Kirsch.
 (Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

\$50,000. During September 1897 the court chose the winning design from competition attracting nine architects, including George McDonald of Johnson County and Frank Miller of Cole County. The *Kirksville Journal* noted that "our own county was not badly represented in the plans of our young architect, Mr. George W. Sublette," and the *Kirksville Democrat* published J. B. Legg's plan, which was ultimately built in Gasconade, Mississippi and St. Charles counties. However, judges of the court selected the design of R. G. Kirsch and Co. of Milwaukee (Fig. 2). Kirsch was to receive 2½ percent of the building cost, estimated to be \$47,000.

Firms from Denver, Milwaukee, Chicago, Omaha and Kirksville prepared alternate bids for building the

courthouse, based upon the selection of building stone. Apparently, the first preference had been red portage stone, but Ohio blue sandstone became the final choice. Sealed proposals were accepted until late in October 1897. A Quincy, Illinois, firm, Anderson and Menke, submitted the low bid of \$46,695, which the court accepted November 6, 1897. C. C. Anderson was from Kirksville, F. W. Menke from Quincy.

Adair County's courthouse was to measure 112 feet, 10 inches by 85 feet, and was to rise to a height of 139 feet. The foundation, of concrete and Quincy limestone, was laid in hydraulic cement; the outer walls were of sandstone, and stone-arched entrances rested on granite columns. Granolithic and tile floors were supported by a steel and concrete foundation. Metal stairways had birch handrails. There was a copper cornice and a slate roof. All construction was fireproof; there were six fireproof vaults. The building was lighted by electricity, heated by steam, and featured "sanitary sewage," a technological improvement much appreciated by those familiar with the privy on the square.

In spite of earlier rain and the threat of continued bad weather, cornerstone ceremonies for the Adair County courthouse, held May 2, 1898, attracted a crowd estimated at 15,000.

Three other counties contracted with architect Kirsch to build courthouses, using the same plan as Adair County, with roof variations on the corner pavilions and minor tower changes. Carroll County's building dates from 1901, and construction began in Polk and Vernon counties during 1906.

After being without a courthouse for so many years, Adair County had felt the sting of ridicule from her sister counties. Finally, when county officials occupied the building March 31, 1899, Adair County could boast about having the best courthouse in the northeast part of the state. This courthouse is now included in the National Register of Historic Places.

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