

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

BARTON COUNTY

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Lamar, county seat of Barton County, was laid out in 1856 by Allen Petty on property given to the county by Elisha Peters. The exceptional size of the square, 400 feet, has been attributed to the influence of George E. Ward, a leader in establishing the pioneer village of Lamar. The idea for the unusually large square size was believed to have come from Ward's earlier experiences on the frontiers of Spanish settlements. The town of Lamar reportedly was named after Ward's school friend Mirabeau Lamar, a military hero in Texas.

Barton County has had four courthouses, two temporary and two permanent. Since county records were destroyed in a Civil War incident in November 1862, there is no documentary evidence for the first courthouse. When the *History of Hickory, Polk, Cedar, Dade and Barton Counties* was written in 1889, apparently some remembered the location of the original site, across the street from the square on the north side.

The Story of Barton County also credits Ward for financing the first temporary building. Lumber for the building came from Ward's sawmill. It has been reported as a two-story building, 60 by 30 feet.

In 1860 a second courthouse, made of brick and designed for permanent use, was built on the 400-foot square. *The Story of Barton County* claims it was a two-story brick building in the center of the square. Destruction came during the Civil War, in November 1862, by fire. In 1866 the sheriff was ordered to offer the remaining foundation at public sale to the highest bidder. Samuel Cones purchased it November 5, 1866 for \$255.

County officials called for a temporary courthouse to be built on the west side of the square and requested

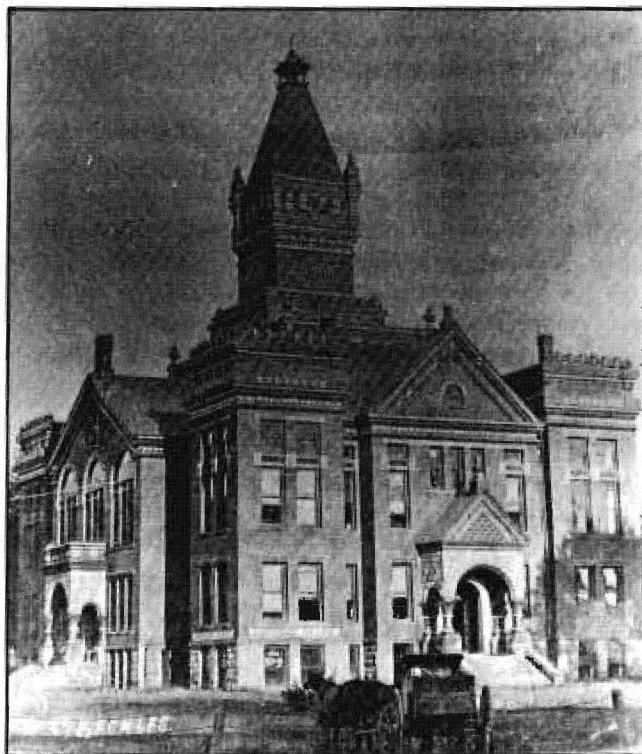


Fig. 1. Barton County Courthouse, 1888-.
Architect: W.R. Parsons and Sons
(From: *Souvenir of Barton County, Missouri*, 1900)

Samuel Cones, A. H. Gibbs and J. C. Gaston to provide specifications. The county clerk recorded a description of the building: 34 by 20 feet, two stories, the lower 10 feet high, the upper 8 feet, with a board partition separating the upper story. Weatherboarding covered the exterior. Specifications called for a bannistered interior stairway and three panel doors hung with good lock and key.

The clerk's office received bids until February 10, 1866. Charles Van Pelt offered low bid on the contract. Cost was approximately \$5,000. The court received the completed building August 9, 1866. Apparently this courthouse continued in use until replaced by the next

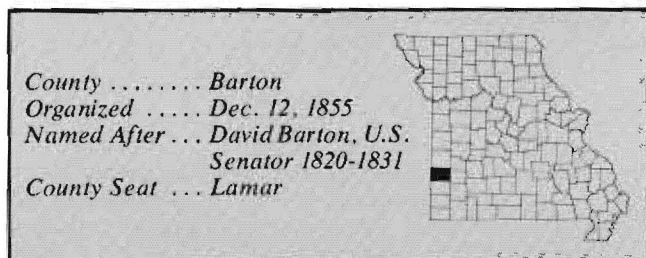




Fig. 2. Barton County Courthouse, 1888-, after roof alteration. (From: *The Story of Barton County*)

permanent building. At that time it was sold, moved and diverted to other uses.

An election in 1882 gave voters the option for a new courthouse, but it was not until November 1887 that a proposal passed. W. R. Parsons and Son, Topeka, Kansas, provided the plans; Morrison Brothers of Lamar agreed to construct the building for \$32,500 (Fig. 1). Building materials for the 80-by-120-foot courthouse were Barton County stone and St. Louis red brick. The abundant use of native stone and white trim contrasted sharply with the red brick. This contrast along with the small prickly patterns around the tower and roof line animated the building's appearance. The architect varied the window grouping and canopy design on adjacent sides of the building. The *Lamar Democrat* printed all the specifications June 7, 1888.

During the 20th century workers removed the clock tower and replaced the corner tower parapets with pyramidal roofs (Fig. 2). Although these design changes have altered its appearance, this same building, built in the late 1880s, still functions as the Barton County courthouse.

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