

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

DADE COUNTY

Marian M. Ohman
Coordinator, Art History Programs

The log cabin residence of William Penn on Pennsylvania Prairie provided the location for the first courts of Dade County, but the permanent county seat was to be located within four miles of the center of the county. The first courthouse, built in Greenfield in June 1842, according to probate records, was a 1½-story, frame building with courtroom on the first floor. R. S. Jacobs and Joseph Griggs contracted the building for \$800-\$900. The court abandoned the structure about the time the second courthouse was built.

Dozier C. Gill built the second courthouse on the public square in 1850, a brick, two-story building that cost about \$7,500. Transverse halls separated the first floor into four office rooms; the courtroom, with small adjoining rooms, occupied the second floor. The courthouse was destroyed in the Civil War, October 6, 1863.

The third courthouse, completed in December of 1868 by contractor Francis M. Wilson, was also a two-story brick building, costing about \$10,000 (Fig. 1). The court appropriated the money in July 1867. An east-west hall divided the first floor into three offices on the north side and two on the south. The courtroom and jury rooms were on the second floor. A grand jury condemned the building in February 1925; it was razed the following August.

In 1921 a grand jury had reported the old courthouse in deplorable condition; they recommended a new one at that time and called for the court to select an architect and schedule an election. The court chose St. Louis architects Fred C. Bonsack and Harvey J. Pearce. Pearce brought plans of Franklin County to show the court. When he learned of the proposed budget, he

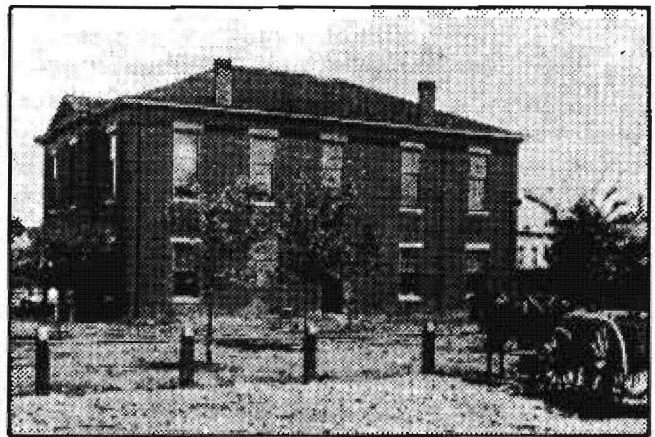
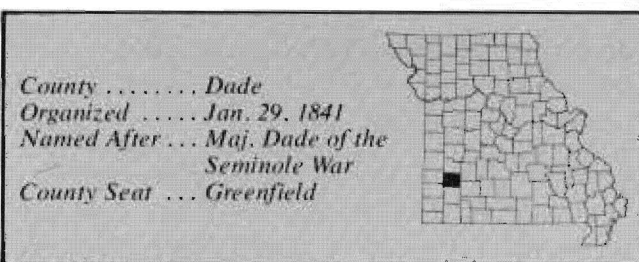


Fig. 1. Dade County Courthouse, 1868-1925.
(From: *Souvenir Program, 125th Anniversary, 1966*).

offered to revise the plans for a smaller building and simplify the design to reduce cost. This modified version, of brick and stone, was presented to the voters, but the \$100,000 bond figure recommended by the grand jury and the court met defeat at the polls January 31, 1922.

During the depression one of the state relief organizations encouraged Dade County to submit a courthouse proposal. The earlier Bonsack and Pearce plans were revived. An election was called for January 1934, and the presiding judge again contacted the architects' firm. County residents first rejected an \$85,000 figure, but subsequently indicated their support for the project by approving a \$75,000 bond issue. County officials anticipated a supplement of \$36,100 from the Work Projects Administration, but when approved by the federal government in July 1934, it was for \$110,100, far above what they had expected. With this windfall the less expensive modified version of Franklin County was not necessary. Dade County's courthouse resembles the Franklin County courthouse built in 1921-23.

The contract was let on October 11 to C. F. Rinehart, St. Louis, for \$87,527. Greenfield stone was



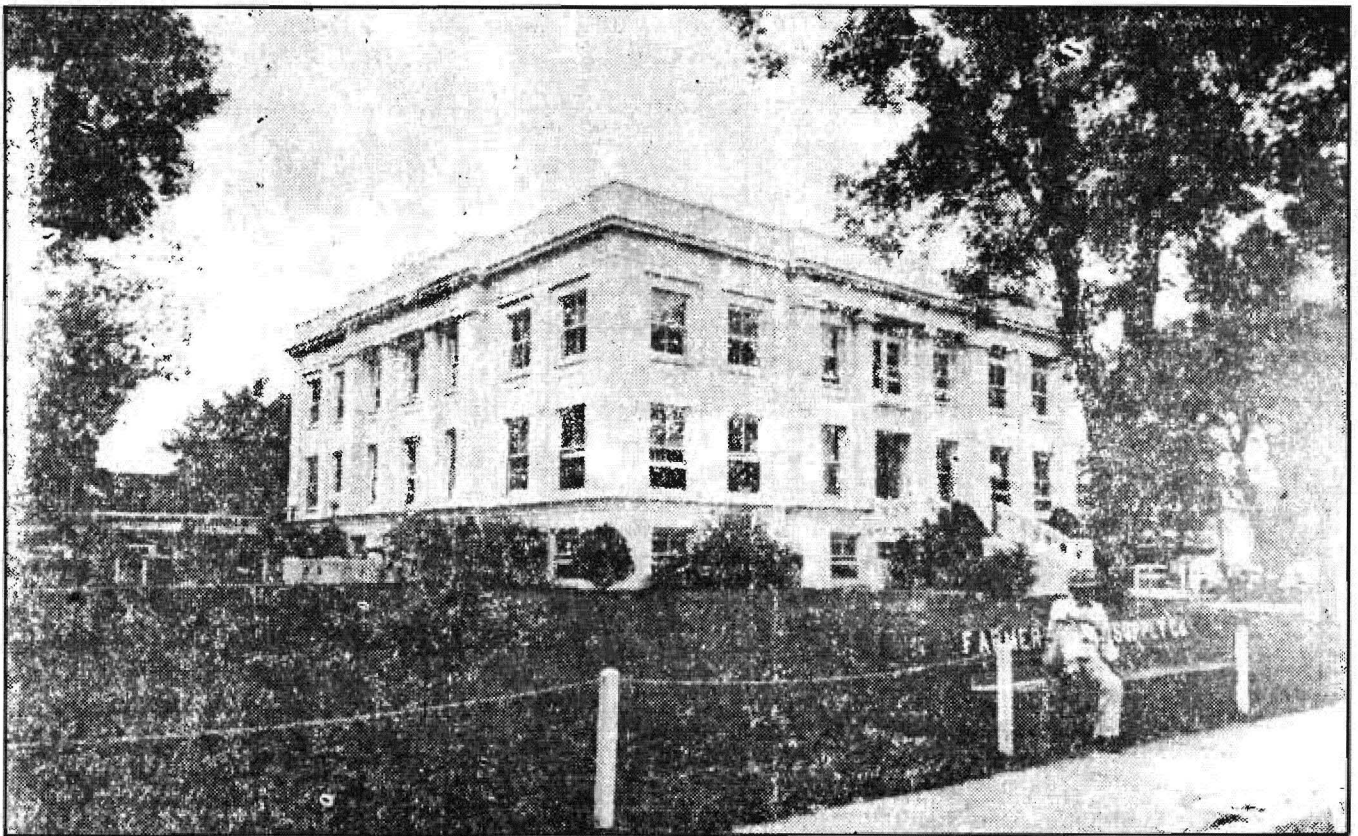


Fig. 2. Dade County Courthouse, 1934-. Architects: Bonsack and Pearce (Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

x originally specified, but the local quarry was unable to comply, so Carthage stone was the alternate choice. Labor problems with stone cutters and imported skilled laborers caused delays, and the building was not completed until late in 1935. The three-story building, 70 by 70 feet, has the courtroom, which seats 250, on the

third floor. Cornerstone day was March 29, 1935. The county offices moved into their new quarters in December 1935; the court formally accepted the completed building January 18, 1936 (Fig. 2). Approximate total expenditure came to about \$135,000.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Souvenir Program, 125th Anniversary.* Dade County: Quasqui-Centennial Association, 1966.
200th Anniversary 1776-1976 Souvenir Booklet. Greenfield: Dade County Bicentennial Committee, 1976.
History of Hickory, Polk, Cedar, Dade and Barton Counties. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1889.
 States, Aaron D. and A. J. Young. *History of Dade County and Its People.* Carthage: Pioneer Historical Company, 1917.

Newspapers

- Greenfield Vedette.* Dec. 8, 22, 1921; Jan. 5, 12, 19, Feb. 2, 1922;

- Nov. 30, Dec. 7, 14, 1933; Jan. 4, 11, Feb. 1, April 5, July 5, Aug. 16, Sep. 20, 27, Oct. 18, Nov. 22, 1934; March 7, 21, April 4, May 23, Aug. 15, Dec. 19, 1935.

Manuscript Collections

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