

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

GREENE COUNTY

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Courts in Greene County met first in the home of John P. Campbell. He donated 50 acres to the county, and proceeds from the sale of the lots provided revenue for public buildings. Orders in the court record suggest facilities for a courtroom were installed in his home.

Instructions to build a courthouse on the square came on November 28, 1836. Sidney Ingram, superintendent, presented the plan for a brick, two-story, 40-by-36-foot building on rock foundation. A flat roof was first contemplated, but later changed to a hip roof. The court appropriated \$3,250 for this building.

A description of the anticipated building is in the County Court Record, Book A. In addition to the roof change, a brick partition wall order was later rescinded, and new orders pertaining to stairs were made. No known illustrations exist, but a 1910 description in the *Springfield Daily Republican* called it a modest brick structure, plastered or cemented on the outside and marked to imitate cut stone. This same account referred to a pretentious central dome and four entrances to crossing halls.

An order issued in January 1859 to sell the building and have it removed apparently was never carried out. Civil War prisoners were confined in the building in 1861. Also restrained in the courthouse was a deranged local man, who set a fire that destroyed the building October 28, 1861.

A site off the square was selected for the second courthouse, which was begun in 1858. Commissioners recommended purchase of a \$3,000 lot on the northwest corner of the public square at College Street; the court appropriated \$40,000 for the building.

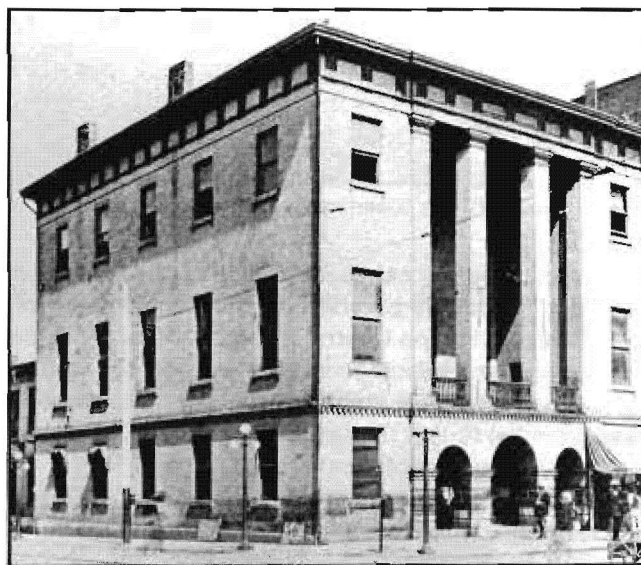


Fig. 1. Greene County Courthouse, 1859-1914.
(From: *Past and Present of Greene County*, 1915)

By April 1861 three rooms were finished and clerks moved into the new quarters. The courtroom was on the second floor. This was one of the few three-story buildings in southwest Missouri; the design is unusual for Missouri courthouses of this period, but the architect is not known.

The court paid Josiah Leedy, one of three commissioners, \$163.25 for plans and specifications of the nearly square building featuring columns and classical details. Pillars at the base were of "cotton" rock (Fig. 1). Leedy then submitted the low bid of \$36,000 for construction. Acute financial circumstances and the Civil War prevented Leedy from fulfilling the contract. The courthouse acquired military significance during that tumultuous period, but miraculously escaped destruction. Repaired after the war, it continued in use as a courthouse until 1914.

County Greene
Organized Jan. 2, 1833
Named After ... Gen. Nathaniel
Greene of the
Revolution
County Seat ... Springfield



An active community developed north of Springfield, and for a number of years the two towns had

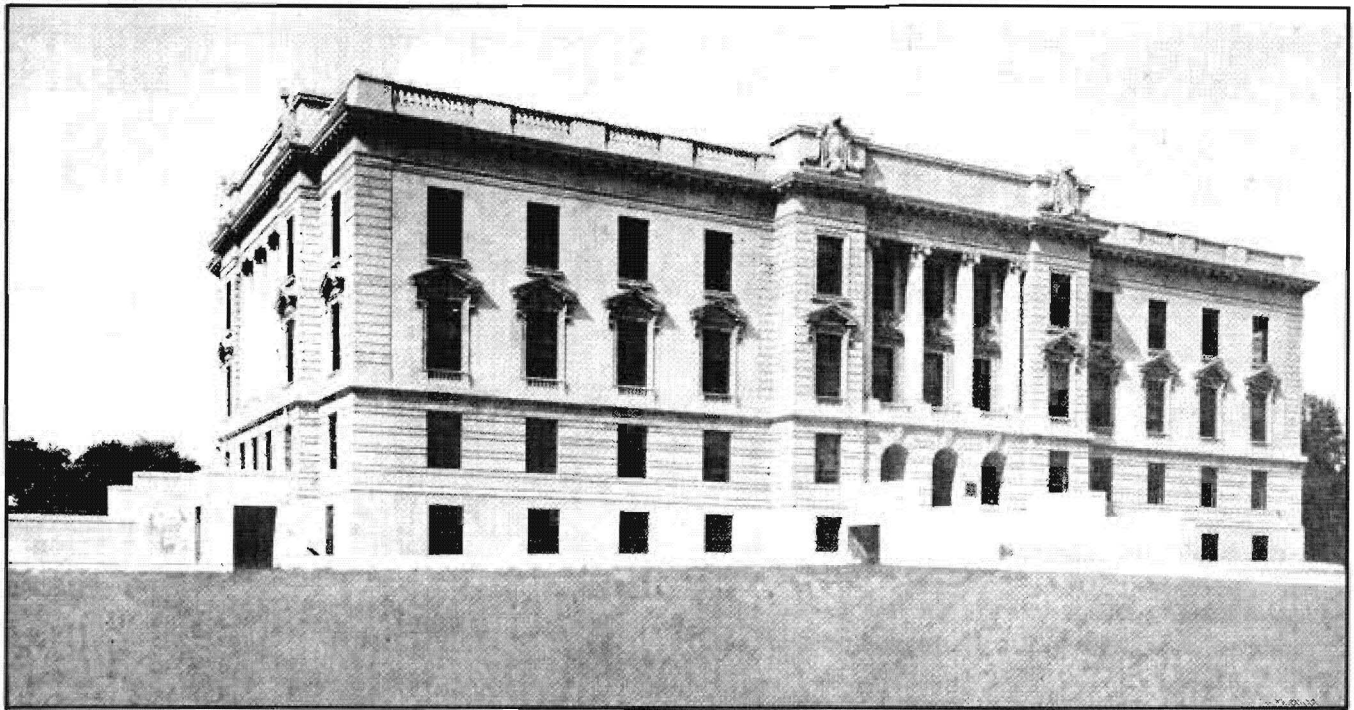


Fig. 2. Greene County Courthouse, 1910-. Architect: A.N. Torbitt of Miller, Opel and Torbitt (Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

separate corporate existence. They became united in 1877 under one city government. For the 20th century courthouse, a site on Central Street, north of the previous square, was selected and purchased by the County Court commissioner in February 1908. The decision was intended to link the two developments but instead became the subject of great controversy.

The campaign for a new courthouse started a year later. From competing architects the court selected the plan of A. N. Torbitt, of Miller, Opel and Torbitt, a Jefferson City firm which may have had a Springfield office. The announcement came as something of a surprise, for there was speculation that Reed and Heckenlively, a Springfield firm, would receive the commission. Other contenders included George E. McDonald and P. H. Weathers. Both were responsible for several Missouri courthouses. McDonald designed courthouses for Johnson, Andrew, Lawrence and Bates counties. Weathers did Cape Girardeau, Daviess and Stoddard counties. Out-of-state architects came from Texas and Alabama.

The design had an optional dome, but for financial reasons, the court decided against it, saving an estimated \$25,000 (Fig. 2). Built of Greene County Phoenix stone, the building measured about 100 by 200 feet. The first stage of construction called for the shell of the building; expensive interior work was completed later, after a \$150,000 bond issue was passed in April 1911. The court estimated final costs to be about \$200,000.

The first contract was awarded the J. E. Gibson

Construction Co. of Tulsa, Oklahoma, for \$81,749, but later assigned to Hiram Lloyd Co. of St. Louis. Construction began in April 1910. Cornerstone ceremonies were held July 16, 1910. County offices moved into the new facilities in March 1912, although work continued until the building was completed in 1915.

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- Greene County Court Record Book A.

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