

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

WEBSTER COUNTY

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Webster County, organized in 1855, contained areas previously located in Greene and Wright Counties. Sixty acres of land were donated for the county seat. The land was divided into building lots by July 1856 and became Marshfield.

In November 1856 the court appropriated \$1,000 and authorized construction of a courthouse on the east side of the square. James M. Allen was appointed superintendent.

The rectangular building measured 20 by 40 feet with the narrow side facing the square. Its two stories were framed with oak and built on a rock foundation. The walls were painted white, windows shuttered, and an outdoor staircase ascended the building's south side. John C. Andrews, contractor, completed the courthouse during August 1857. It was destroyed by fire in 1863 in a Civil War incident.

In 1860 the County Court envisioned a grand courthouse in the center of the square and appropriated \$28,000, but the war interrupted the plan. Activity resumed in March 1868 when the court appropriated \$18,000 and gave a contract to Dr. E. Hovey for \$17,531.40. Hovey completed the building in January 1870. The large, two-story, brick courthouse had a hip roof and round arched windows, with a string course marking division of the two stories (Fig. 1).

The second story was damaged by a tornado on April 18, 1880. R. P. Goodall and Frank A. Bradshaw from Laclede received the contract for repair work June 8, 1880, and added a cupola above the entry (Fig. 2).

In the 20th century numerous complaints were made about the deplorable condition of the building. But it was not until an engineering firm from Springfield

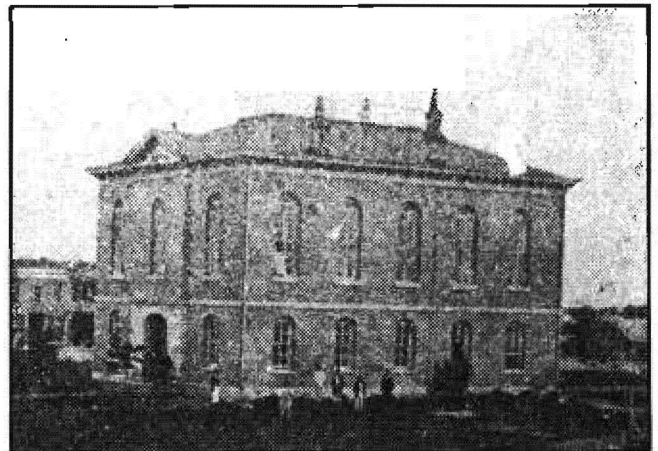


Fig. 1. Webster County Courthouse, 1868-1939.
Architect/Contractor: E. Hovey
(From: *History of Webster County, 1855 to 1955*, ca. 1955)

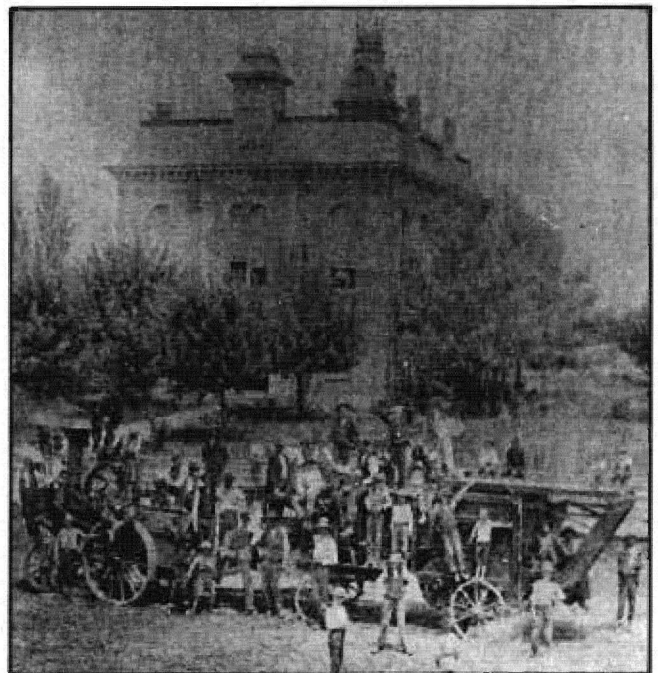


Fig. 2. Webster County Courthouse, after repair and remodeling in 1880.
(Courtesy: Martha McGrath)

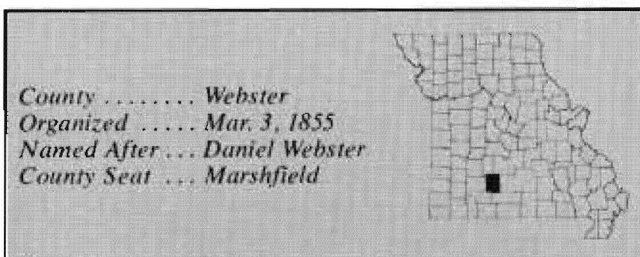




Fig. 3. Webster County Courthouse, 1939-. Architect: Earl Hawkins (Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri, photo by Massie, Missouri Resources Division)

made an alarming report on the building's condition in February 1930 that the county vacated the offices of the clerk and County Court and closed the courtroom. Others apparently continued using this building until 1939 when it was razed as construction began on the present courthouse. Brick from the old building was used in constructing interior walls of the present courthouse.

Preliminaries were begun in 1935 for a new courthouse. E. R. Sanford, architect from Springfield, drew

plans, but problems arose, and the project was cancelled. In 1938 a bond issue carried, and the court accepted the plans of another Springfield architect, Earl Hawkins, in October 1938 (Fig. 3). Work Projects Administration approval of the plans came in June 1939. Carthage stone was selected for the building material. Total costs of Webster County's present courthouse amounted to about \$150,000; final work was completed late in 1941.

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