

# MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

## AUDRAIN COUNTY

Marian M. Ohman  
Coordinator, Art History Programs

When Audrain County was organized in December 1836, officials selected Mexico as the county seat. Two months later commissioners were appointed to build a temporary, one-story, 18-by-36-foot, hewn-log courthouse on the south side of the square. It was to be partitioned into two rooms, one 22 feet long. The order called for a brick chimney, two outside doors, four windows and a shingled roof. The County Court Record, vol. A, has a detailed description. The building was completed July 10, 1837.

Officials ordered this first courthouse sold while the second was being constructed. The *Atlas* of 1877 noted the building was still standing, and being used as a bakery and confectionery.

In November 1838 construction began on the second courthouse, a two-story, brick building located in the center of the square (Fig. 1). William White was the superintendent, later replaced by M. Walton, who completed the work in November 1840. The contract for the brick work went to Judge James E. Fenton; Norvell Harison (sic) was contractor.

The courtroom was on the first floor; on the second floor were three rooms for offices which occasionally were rented for lodge rooms or used for other purposes. The sale of lots from county-owned property at the county seat provided enough money to cover the \$1,600 building costs. During the Civil War it was used as a barracks and sustained major damage. For the next four years the county had no courthouse building.

In May 1868, before deciding on new courthouse plans, commissioners went to Paris, Missouri, to examine Monroe County's courthouse. Impressed with what they saw, the commissioners chose a similar de-

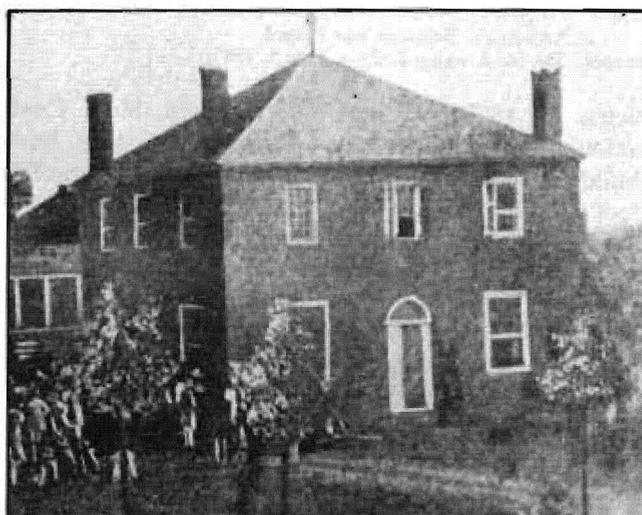
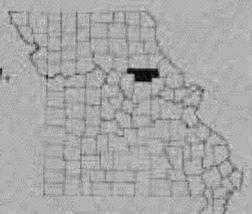


Fig. 1. Audrain County Courthouse, 1838-1860s.  
(Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)



Fig. 2. Audrain County Courthouse, 1868-1949.  
(From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

County . . . . . Audrain  
Organized . . . . . Dec. 17, 1836  
Named After . . . James S. Audrain,  
Missouri  
representative or  
Col. Charles H.  
Audrain  
County Seat . . . Mexico



sign for Audrain County (Fig. 2).

The court appropriated \$50,000 and appointed John M. Gordon superintendent, who was later replaced by E. P. Cunningham. The contracting firm for the project was Terrell and Hays, Macon City, Missouri. Work

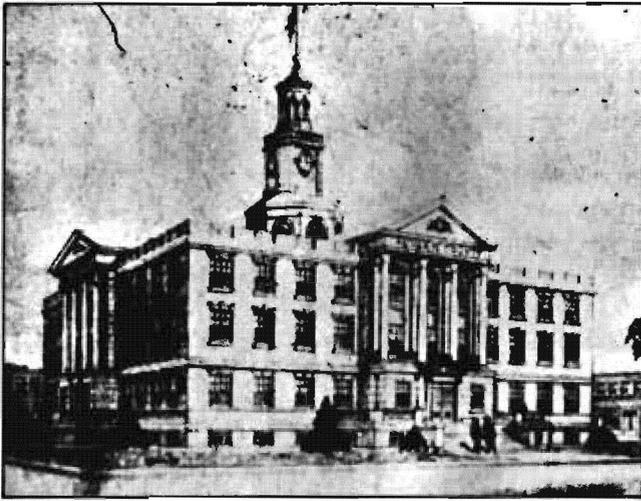


Fig. 3. Proposed Audrain County Courthouse, 1947.  
Architects: Bonsack and Pearce  
(From: *Mexico Evening Ledger*, June 5, 1947)

began in 1868 and was completed in 1869. Costs amounted to about \$43,000. It was a two-story, brick building, measuring 102 by 60 feet at the base and 40 feet tall. It contained 10 rooms with the courtroom on the second floor.

In 1938 a Public Works Administration engineer spoke with a civic club in Mexico and tried to persuade them to take advantage of the government's offer of matching 45 percent of courthouse costs. Accompanying him was a Fulton firm that presented a drawing of a traditional design.

No action was taken until 1947 when the court considered a design from the St. Louis firm, Bonsack and Pearce (Fig. 3). The county had voted \$500,000 in bonds to build this courthouse, but since all bids exceeded the appropriation, the project was temporarily dropped.

Later, the court requested Bonsack and Pearce to revise the plans. Revision consisted of stripping the building of its historical detail, leaving the plan essentially the same (Fig. 4). Again the court solicited bids; this time costs came within an acceptable range.

In May 1950 John Epple and Sons, Columbia, Missouri, contracted to build the new courthouse for \$527,300. The contractors completed their work in the fall of 1951, and the courthouse was dedicated October 9 of that year.



Fig. 4. Audrain County Courthouse, 1951-. Architects: Bonsack and Pearce (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- History of Audrain County*. St. Louis: National Historical Company, 1884.  
Schooley, Herschel. *Centennial History of Audrain County*. Mexico: The McIntyre Publishing Co., 1937.

### Public Documents

- Audrain County Court Record, vol. A.

### Newspapers

- Mexico Evening Ledger*, June 5, July 1, 1947; Feb. 17, 1949; April 12, May 9, 10, Oct. 6, 9, 10, 11, 1951.

- Mexico Ledger*, March 30, 1976.

### Manuscript Collections

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

### Atlases

- Illustrated Historical Atlas of Audrain County*. Philadelphia: Edwards Brothers, 1877.