

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

CALDWELL COUNTY

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Except for a few probate records, all Caldwell County records were lost in an 1860 fire that destroyed the courthouse. The *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Caldwell County*, 1876, provides the earliest history.

After county organization in 1836, Far West, a community created by Mormons, served as Caldwell's county seat until 1842. A school was moved from the southwest part of town to the center of the square for the courthouse.

A shifting population favored a more central location and chose Kingston the second county seat. In Kingston a log building served as the first courthouse. The court may have authorized construction in 1843, or the courthouse may have been an existing building used by the early courts. This 1½-story structure stood on the south side of Main St. opposite the square. The *History of Caldwell and Livingston Counties*, 1886, described it as not very attractive.

Caldwell County built its second courthouse in either 1847 or 1854. The *Atlas* of 1876 says 1847; the *History* of 1886 mentions both dates and identifies Hawkins Green as the builder. Both sources describe it as a two-story, brick building, on the square facing south. The upper story remained unfinished; offices and courtroom were on the first floor. Fire consumed most county records when suspected arsonists set the courthouse ablaze April 19, 1860.

In 1860, for their third courthouse, the County Court awarded the contract to builders J. A. Crump and George A. Kice of Lexington and appropriated \$20,000. The court specified the building be completed by September 1, 1861. This temple-type building re-

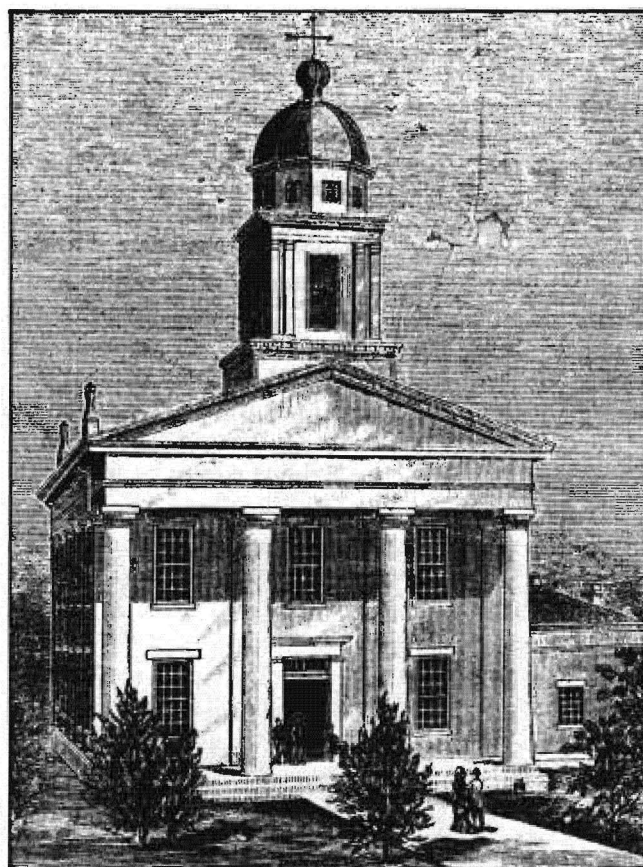


Fig. 1. Caldwell County Courthouse, 1860-1896.
(From: *Kingston Times*, Dec. 5, 1890.)

sembles the Lafayette County courthouse of 1847 in Lexington and the 1856 Ray County courthouse in Richmond (Fig. 1). Contractors Crump and Kice were responsible for construction of all three. On November 28, 1896, fire once again consumed the Caldwell County courthouse. The *Hamiltonian Farmer's Advocate* described the building as a large, commodious, two-story, brick with "an old colonial portico in front . . . much admired for its antique and quaint architecture."

At this point Hamilton contended for the county seat, but the site at Kingston withstood the challenge.

County Caldwell
Organized Dec. 29, 1836
Named After . . . Capt. Matthew
Caldwell, a
Kentucky Indian
fighter.
County Seat . . . Kingston

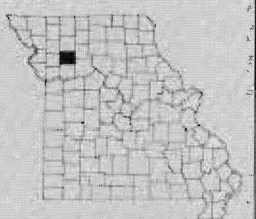




Fig. 2. Caldwell County Courthouse, 1898.
Architect: L. Grant Middaugh
(From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

The court proceeded with plans for the courthouse of 1898. The cost was not to exceed \$26,000. Bonds for an indebtedness of \$18,000 were passed on March 5, 1898. Several architects competed, among them William Schrage, architect of courthouses for Howard, Morgan and Ripley counties, whose plans were described as the most elaborate; Homer H. Carr, St. Joseph; and William Garver, who presented a corner tower design. The court selected the proposal of Kansas City architect L. Grant Middaugh. Court officials awarded the building contract to Stanberry Pressed Brick Co. for \$24,827 in May 1898; the building was to be completed

December 1, 1898. J. W. Harper, presiding judge, acted as superintendent of construction.

There are two entries which face south and east on the 74-by-69-foot, pressed-brick building. Stairways on each side of the main south entrance lead to the second story. The Circuit Court room is in the northwest part of the second story.

Cornerstone ceremonies took place September 2, 1898; the crowd was estimated at 2,000. This courthouse continues in use today and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

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