

# MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

## CAPE GIRARDEAU COUNTY

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It was first thought that Cape Girardeau would be the county seat of Cape Girardeau County. But because of a legal question concerning the title to the land donated to the county, commissioners chose not to build on the Cape Girardeau site. Instead they bought 50 acres in nearby Jackson and located the county seat there.

Volumes A and B of Cape Girardeau County Court records are reported missing, so there is no official confirmation of the earliest account of the Cape Girardeau courthouse in Jackson. Louis Houck's *History of Missouri*, 1908, identified the first courthouse at Jackson as a log structure, but this may have been one of the court's temporary quarters; Goodspeed's *History of Southeast Missouri*, 1888, described the first courthouse as a "barn-like" structure built in 1818 by John Davis for \$2,450. After the 1818 building outlived its usefulness, the court ordered it sold and specified that it be removed in April 1839.

Next, the court ordered a 45-foot-square, two-story, brick and stone building with cupola in 1837 and directed that it be built on the most suitable part of the public square at the discretion of the commissioners. The initial \$3,000 the court borrowed from the road and canal fund; later, an additional \$2,000 was appropriated.

Missouri historian Louis Houck saw the building in 1869 and described it as old and neglected. He recalled that the courtroom was on the second floor and the clerk's office on the first. This courthouse was destroyed by fire July 18, 1870. No known photographs exist.

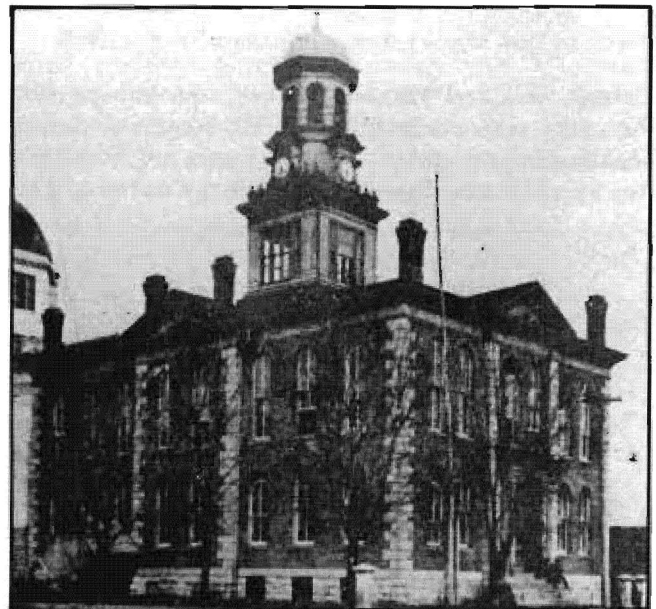


Fig. 1. Cape Girardeau County Courthouse at Jackson, 1870-1908, photo ca. 1908.

Architect: E. D. Baldwin

(From: *Jackson, Missouri, Souvenir Historical Program*, 1965)

E. D. Baldwin of St. Louis served as architect of the next courthouse. The court accepted his plans November 18, 1870. The building contract was awarded Joseph Lansmann. The cost came to \$25,000. The court stipulated no wood should be used on the floors or stairs. The two-story, brick and stone building with cupola was accepted by the court April 17, 1872 (Fig. 1). The building was south of the present courthouse. It was razed to make way for the 1908 courthouse.

The county bought additional land north of the 1870 courthouse site to enlarge the square and provide space for a larger courthouse. Among those submitting proposals for the court's consideration were Jerome Legg, architect of the nearby Mississippi County courthouse and the 1885 remodeled Cape Girardeau Court of Common Pleas; J. B. Blackwood from Cape Girardeau; and Robert Kirsch, architect of recent Adair,

County . . . . .	Cape Girardeau	
Organized . . . . .	Oct. 1, 1812	
Named After . . .	Ensign Sieur Girardeau, French officer who developed trading post on site of Cape Girardeau	
County Seat . . .	Jackson	

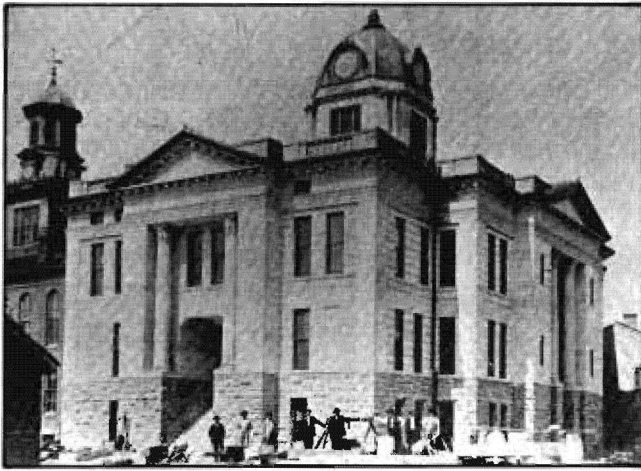


Fig. 2. Cape Girardeau County Courthouse at Jackson, 1908-. Old courthouse (Fig. 1) visible on left.  
 Architect: P.H. Weathers  
 (From: *Jackson, Missouri, Souvenir Historical Program*, 1965)

Carroll, Polk and Vernon counties' courthouses. But the court selected architect P. H. Weathers' design because it was fireproof; the others were not. Weathers was a prolific courthouse architect in the midwest. The

plan he presented Cape Girardeau County was not specifically designed for Jackson, so he adapted it to suit the local situation.

Bids were opened December 18, 1905. Low bidder for the contract was M. T. Lewman and Co., Louisville, Kentucky. The original bid of about \$66,000 was based upon the assumed use of Bedford stone for the 81-by-108-foot building that would be 90 feet high, but the people preferred locally quarried stone, which raised the price about \$3,000. The site of the old and the new courthouse was on the same square, so as construction proceeded, county officials conducted business in the 1870 courthouse until the new one was finished and dedicated in August 1908 (Fig. 2).

The Circuit Court room on the second floor occupies most of the east half of the floor. Daviess County has a courthouse of the same design, built by Weathers in 1906-08 and Stoddard County, adjacent to Cape Girardeau, remodeled in 1909 using Weathers' same design, but with brick as the principal material. Costs on the Cape Girardeau courthouse came to about \$125,000.

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