

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

CASS COUNTY

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First called Van Buren in 1835, this county changed its name to Cass in 1849.

Although the clerk recorded specific instructions for building a courthouse in April 1837 and identified the superintendent, this order was rescinded at the May 1837 meeting, and the court appointed another superintendent, John Cook. No additional entries clarify the order, but the County Court Record does note that court was held at the courthouse in Harrisonville on February 5, 1838.

Specifications called for a 1½-story, two-room, weatherboarded building. One room was 18 feet square, and the other 14 by 18 feet. Two stone or brick fireplaces were to be in each end, with the tops of the chimneys completed with sticks and good lime mortar. The floor was to be well laid so it would not rock, shake or rattle.

Some speculate the building was never erected. Others assume it was. No location was identified, but Allen Glenn wrote in 1917 that he believed it was a log courthouse off the square.

On February 14, 1843, the court appointed Charles Sims superintendent to prepare and submit a plan with cost estimates not to exceed \$3,000 for a permanent courthouse. This suggests that the previous courthouse was considered temporary. Sims submitted plans which the court approved in March 1843 and specified a completion date on or before September 1, 1844. Contractors were Henry Baker, John Fife and George Rice. The two-story, brick building occupied the public square, which was enclosed by an iron fence (Fig. 1).

An order issued by the court in May 1860 for building a new \$15,000 courthouse caused concerned citi-



Fig. 1. Cass County Courthouse, 1843-1896.
(Courtesy: Cass County Historical Society)

zens to sign a petition protesting such action because of depressed financial conditions. They encouraged the court to reconsider the order. Disregarding this protest, the court proceeded to contract for manufacturing the brick.

War erupted and all thought of building was dismissed. Soldiers quartered their horses in the courthouse during the war, and at the conclusion of hostilities, the court declared the building unfit for occupancy. In 1865 sale of the 300,000 unused bricks that had been manufactured five years earlier for the planned courthouse provided funds for repairing the 1843-44 building, which served Cass County until the end of the century.

A petition presented to the court in November 1895 asked the court to develop plans and specifications for a \$45,000 courthouse. W. C. Root, an architect from Kansas City, drew the plans for Cass County's third courthouse, which was built in 1897 (Fig. 2).

Thomas Wilson contracted for the building in December 1895 for about \$40,000. Citizens paid \$45,000

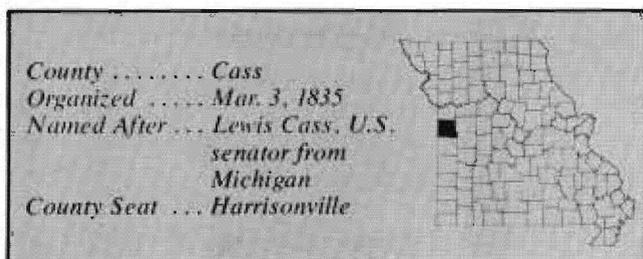




Fig. 2. Cass County Courthouse, 1897-. Architect: W.C. Root (From: W.P.A., Historical Records Survey)

for the building by direct taxation in two years, which they had authorized in an election March 14, 1896. W. B. Harrison superintended construction.

The three-story, yellow brick courthouse measured 93 by 78 feet. Dominating the facade is the off-center tall clock tower. Cornerstone ceremonies for Cass County's present courthouse took place April 10, 1897.

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