

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

FRANKLIN COUNTY

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Franklin County has had four courthouses. Newport (also called Campbellton in 1854 and Dundee in 1857), served as Franklin's county seat from date of organization in 1818 until 1826. Newport was the site of the first courthouse.

The \$1,950 contract for a brick, two-story courthouse in Newport was awarded to James McDonald in December 1819. The court gave McDonald a promissory note, and when the court could not meet the obligation, McDonald sued. The case was carried to the Missouri Supreme Court, where McDonald was awarded \$3,432.25 plus costs. As part of the settlement the court awarded him the public square. His heirs later deeded it back to the county.

Final cost of the courthouse amounted to about \$3,700. The court received this building July 13, 1820, and it continued in use as a courthouse until 1827. By Clark Brown's account of the history of the courthouse, it was razed early in the 20th century; the Work Projects Administration report claimed it was standing in the 1930s.

Because of the inconvenient river site, the legislature acted upon a citizens' petition for removal of the county seat to within three miles of the center of the county. Court was to continue in Newport until the courthouse in the new county seat was completed. The county seat moved from Newport to Union in 1827.

A log building in Union, built by Ambrose Ranson, was used by the county from June 1827 until November 1828, while construction on the courthouse took place (Fig. 1).

The second courthouse built in Union was on the

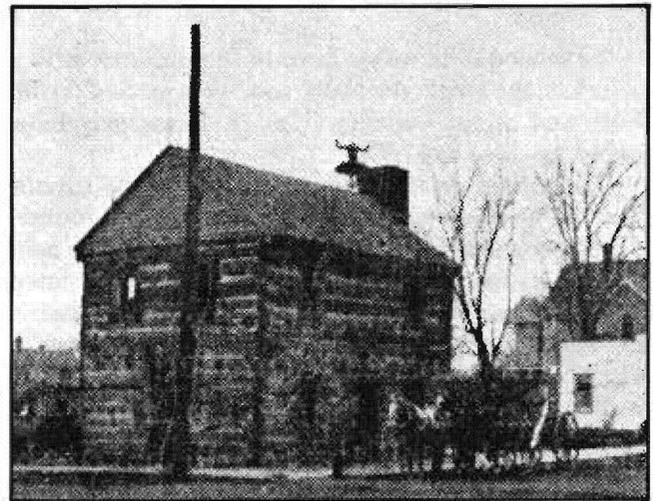


Fig. 1. Franklin County Courthouse, 1827-1828.
(Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

square; it was a one-story, brick building with one room on the south and three on the north. The court received the courthouse February 5, 1827. No official record of the cost has been found, but an 1877 history indicated \$844.79, the figure which has been used since. Tradition claimed it was a log building; Goodspeed's *History*, 1888, calls it a log courthouse; but Clark Brown's deed evidence for a brick building is convincing.

By the 1840s the courthouse was in poor condition, and while there was interest in building a new one, there was also agitation to move the county seat to Washington. But the county seat remained at Union; the one-story, brick courthouse was used until 1849.

The court appropriated \$5,000 on November 18, 1847, for a courthouse. Henry H. Wright completed construction in May 1849, then sued the court to receive \$50 compensation for the use of his plans and specifications. Wright did similar courthouses for other counties: St. Francois, 1848; Washington, 1849; and Iron, 1858.

The building measured 45 by 60 feet; the courtroom

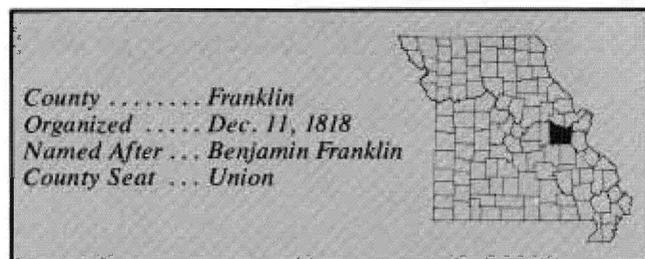




Fig. 2. Franklin County Courthouse, 1847-1922.
Architect: Henry H. Wright
(From: *Centennial Biographical Directory of Franklin County, Missouri*, 1925)

on the second floor was to have 16-foot ceilings, with a gallery on the south; the stairs, too, were located on the south end of the building (Fig. 2). Costs may have finally mounted to \$7,720.

The gallery on the entire south end of the Circuit Court room was later closed and made into two rooms. Serious cracking occurred in 1868. In addition to general repairs authorized at that time, the court ordered the cupola removed and a new roof; a 34-foot addition was made on the south. Costs came to \$5,000 - \$6,000. This addition needed more than \$4,000 worth of repairs in 1885. A west wing and vaults were begun in 1891 and completed in February 1892 at a cost of \$6,604.75.

At a public meeting March 9, 1921, citizens agreed that the building was not worth the estimated \$30,000

repair; the 1847 courthouse was razed in February 1922.

Voters authorized construction on the 20th century courthouse in August 1921 in a special election. The court accepted the plans of a St. Louis firm, Bonsack and Pearce, November 16, 1921 (Fig. 3). Sealed bids for construction were received March 13, 1922, and the court accepted George H. Gassmann's bid of nearly \$155,250. Cornerstone ceremonies took place in September 1922.

The three-story, 90-foot-square building with four similar facades is built of reinforced concrete with Carthage and Bedford facing stone. Total costs amounted to more than \$200,000. The court received the building in July 1923, and a dedication was held the following month.

In 1975 a second courtroom for the second division of Circuit Court was created in a \$42,550 remodeling project, financed by federal revenue sharing funds.

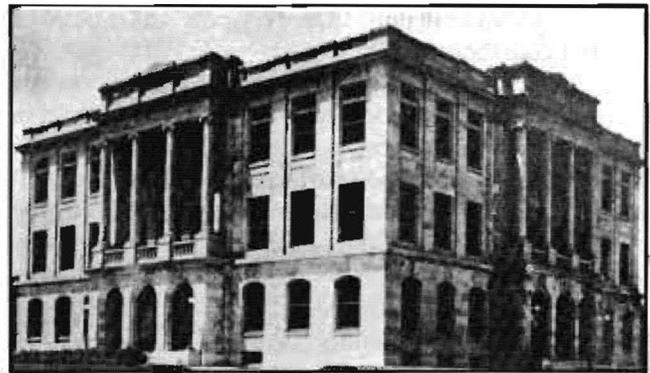


Fig. 3. Franklin County Courthouse, 1922-.
Architect: Norman Howard of the firm Bonsack and Pearce
(Courtesy: Western Historical Manuscripts Collection)

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