

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

HARRISON COUNTY

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An order issued by the Harrison County Court on June 14, 1845, commissioned John S. Allen to procure plans and superintend the construction of a courthouse in Bethany, on a site northeast of the public square.

The County Court Record described the new courthouse as a 24-by-20-foot frame, 1½-story building, with the lower story 9 feet and the upper story 5 feet. There were to be two windows in the upper story, seven in the lower, all to have 12 panes. The specifications did not mention a door. Presumably this was left to the discretion of the builder.

Elkana Grover contracted to build for \$194. In December 1857, as a new courthouse was being constructed on the square, the court offered this building for sale; Charles J. Blackburn bought it for \$500.40. The building continued in private use until razed in 1881. The material was then reused in another building constructed on the same site.

In February 1856 the court appropriated \$8,000 for the second courthouse, which was constructed on the square. William G. Lewis superintended the building; the contract was let to Asbury Allen and Allen S. Meek for \$9,732. They made the brick in 1856 and began construction in 1857. It was two stories and measured 65 by 40 feet. A hall divided the building lengthwise on the first floor, with four rooms on the south, three on the north. The courtroom and jury rooms were on the second floor. Fire destroyed the building January 7, 1874.

Immediately the court appointed Charles J. Blackburn to get plans and superintend construction of the replacement; W. Angelo Powell, St. Joseph, has been identified as architect (Figs. 1 and 2). The court appropriated \$9,000 on January 22, 1874; citizens donated



Fig. 1. Harrison County Courthouse 1874-1939, front view.
Architect: W. Angelo Powell
(From: *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Nov. 1, 1925)

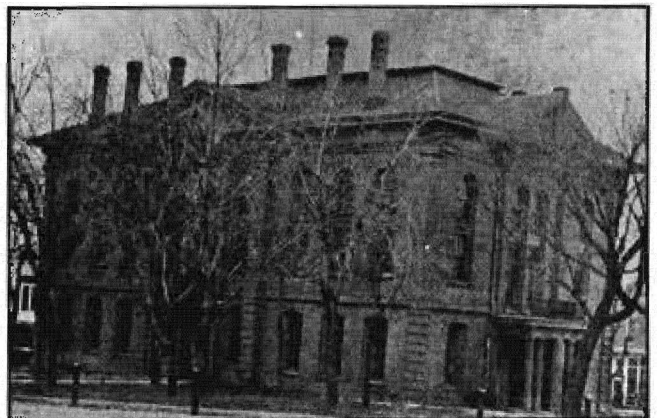
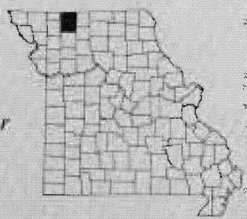


Fig. 2. Harrison County Courthouse, 1874-1939, side view.
(From: *Standard Atlas of Harrison County, Missouri*, 1917)

County Harrison
Organized Feb. 14, 1845
Named After . . . Albert G.
Harrison, member
of Congress
County Seat . . . Bethany



\$3,000 to the fund.

Benton Edwards and Isaac Hayes of Macon were awarded the contract for the two-story, brick, 80-by-45-

foot building, which they began in May 1874. The court received the completed courthouse in November 1874. Part of the existing walls of the old courthouse may have been incorporated in the new building; all possible material was reused.

This courthouse was more spacious than the previous one, but it was based upon a similar plan that placed offices on the first floor and the Circuit Court room on the second. After the turn of the century, a grand jury reported the courthouse inadequate and unsafe, but it was not until 1939 that Harrison County got a new courthouse.

There had been several attempts to move the county seat to a more central location: In 1870, 1874 and 1880, voters defeated proposals to move to Lorraine; in 1892 and 1912 Ridgeway was the losing contender.

The Kansas City firm of Keene and Simpson worked with Harrison County Court officials preparing plans for the 1938-40 Work Projects Administration funded courthouse (Fig. 3). Supervising architect was William L. Perkins from Chariton, Iowa. Bonds in the amount of \$90,000 were voted in October 1938. The courthouse committee carefully examined other courthouses. They visited Princeton, Unionville, Chillicothe, Lineus, Marshall and Neosho. A government engineer sent plans of DeKalb County for their consideration. The final plan called for an 87-by-83-foot building with full basement, assembly room and some offices on the first floor; on the second floor were the Circuit Court room and additional offices. The third floor contained jails for men and women and living quarters for the sheriff.

The court awarded the \$124,000 contract to Thomas H. Dawson of Kansas City in February 1939.



Fig. 3. Harrison County Courthouse, 1939-.
Architects: Keene and Simpson
(From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

Cornerstone ceremonies on August 11 used the same trowel which had been used for the 1874 ceremony. This trowel had come to America from Holland 200 years before.

Problems in construction delayed the completion date. Dawson's bid, \$11,000 below the others, had raised a question about the accuracy of his figure at the time. Midway through the project seven superintendents had already been in charge. The architects were summoned because the building inspector found the contractors had not adhered to the blueprints and specifications.

Finally the building was ready for occupancy in March 1940. Landscaping plans included no large trees, but called for smaller shrubbery and more than 3,000 bulbs. Honeycombed in the lawn was a copper sprinkling system; floodlighting illuminated the building at night.

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