

# MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

## HOWELL COUNTY

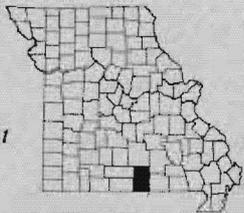
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Fig. 1. Howell County Courthouse, 1882-1933. Architect: Henry H. Hohenschild (Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

**H**owell County organized in 1857, but all records were destroyed in an 1866 fire. An 1876 account

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|---------------------|--|
| County . . . . .    | Howell   |
| Organized . . . . . | March 2, 1857  |
| Named After . . .   | Howell Valley,<br>where James<br>Howell made first<br>settlement |
| County Seat . . .   | West Plains  |



described a log cabin one mile east of West Plains where the first Circuit Court met. A small, wooden courthouse built on the square in West Plains in 1859 was damaged in the Civil War during 1862. In the fall of 1863, guerillas burned West Plains, devastating the community; not one person remained. Three years later, the county reorganized.

T. E. Britton built the second courthouse in West Plains in 1869, a small, three-room, frame building, about 24 by 30 feet. The county appropriated \$1,200 and paid Britton \$755.50 for building the courthouse. The



Fig. 2. Howell County Courthouse, 1935-.  
Architect: Earl Hawkins  
(From: *West Plains Journal*, June 17, 1937, courthouse dedication issue)

building, located south of the square, still stood in 1885 and was used as rental property.

A \$15,000 appropriation voted for in November 1882 financed the third courthouse for Howell County. At one time the court considered placing the courthouse away from the square, but they finally opted for the center site. Architect Henry H. Hohenschild was only 19 when he designed this courthouse. He received \$200 for his plans and specifications (Fig. 1). Hohenschild practiced for many years; among his courthouse designs are those of 11 or 12 Missouri counties.

The three-story, brick building had four similar facades, with the principal entrance receiving some additional embellishment at the ground level. The building measured about 65 by 65 feet and cost \$16,600. The courtroom was on the second floor; the third floor was to be finished by the Mount Zion lodge in a manner similar to the rest of the building. G. W. Goodlander, Fort Scott, Kansas, contracted the building. Cornerstone ceremonies took place on July 4, 1883; the court accepted the completed building January 14, 1884. An explosion in the West Plains Halstead block caused extensive damage April 19, 1928, and the building was condemned and abandoned before being razed in 1933.

In June 1935 county officials considered accepting the government's offer for help in constructing a new courthouse. The committee moved with haste when they heard federal assistance might not be available much longer. Alternate sites to the small square were seriously considered before the court decided to keep the same location.

Six years earlier the court had accepted plans from Springfield architect Earl Hawkins for a new courthouse. However, it was not until November 8, 1935, that voters approved a \$50,000 bond issue, which was matched by a federal grant of \$45,000, making construction of a courthouse possible. On October 12, 1935, the court again turned to Hawkins as architect for the 82-foot-square, three-story, Carthage-stone building. It is not known whether or not the court used the same plans. L. H. Britton was the contractor. Final costs amounted to about \$107,000 (Fig. 2).

Boy Scouts conducted tours through the building, lecturing on the construction during the week of dedication in June 1937. An aerial view shows the courthouse in the center of a circular pattern (Fig. 3). In this city plan with streets entering at the center of the block, the traffic flow around the square eventually cut away the corners, creating this unusual shape.



Fig. 3. An aerial view of courthouse.  
(From: *Map of West Plains*)

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