

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

LAWRENCE COUNTY

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Fig. 1. Lawrence County Courthouse, ca. 1846-1855.
(From: *Lawrence County, Missouri, History, 1845-1970.*)



Fig. 2. Lawrence County Courthouse, 1853-1895.
(From: *Lawrence County, Missouri, History, 1845-1970.*)

The first courthouse of Lawrence County, a frame, two-story, 18-by-30-foot building, was constructed in 1846 and continued in use for many years (Fig. 1). Initially, the county appropriated \$400, later adding \$200. Final costs were probably \$700. Matlock and Sanford (also appears as Sanders or Saunders), of Springfield, contracted the building. After 1854 or 1855 when it was no longer useful as a courthouse, investors moved the building to the north side of the square, where over the years its doors opened to shops for millinery, carpentry, blacksmithing and wagon repair. Later, it was converted to apartments and finally was razed about 1916-18.

At the January term of the County Court in 1853, the court awarded a contract for a new courthouse. This

building served Lawrence County for more than 40 years until gutted by fire at the end of the century. Originally planned as a two-story building, an agreement with a local lodge resulted in the addition of a third story. This brick, three-story structure with stone foundation, sills and lintels measured 50 by 60 feet. Stephen M. Walcott, of Newton County, completed the courthouse in May 1855 for about \$7,000 (Fig. 2).

Improvements made in 1869-70 included putting on a new tin roof, painting the cornice and landscaping. The third-story Masonic Hall was finished at the same time. A commission in 1895 reported the building unsafe. In June, after the fire, it was sold for \$225 and removed from the square.

At an election held June 1, 1900, Lawrence County authorized a \$50,000 indebtedness to build a new courthouse. The townspeople were so elated when the proposition passed they built a temporary stand in the park for the band to play *Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight*.

The court selected George McDonald's plan. A newspaper illustration of the proposed courthouse

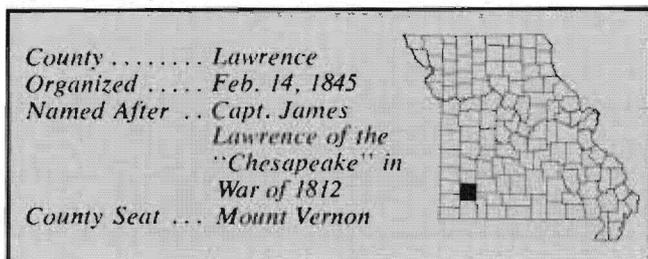




Fig. 3. Proposed 1900 Lawrence County Courthouse.
Architect: George McDonald
(From: *Mount Vernon Fountain and Journal*, May 24, 1900.)

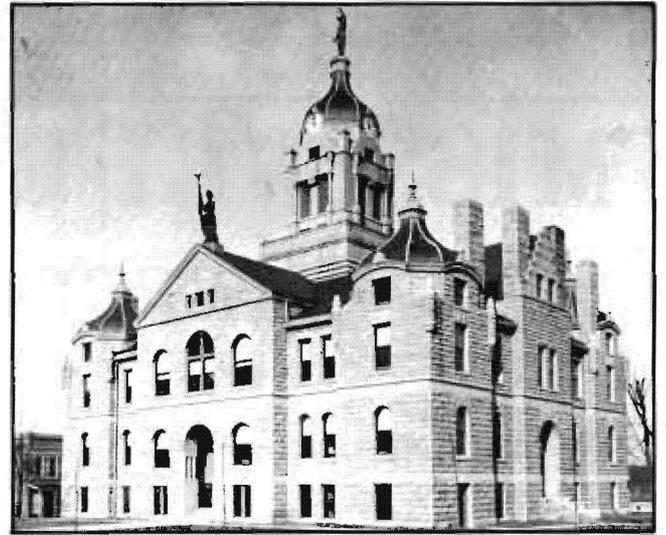


Fig. 4. Lawrence County Courthouse, 1900-.
(Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)



Fig. 5. 1900 courthouse facing Main Street. (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

shows pier-supported porches on three sides, which were apparently eliminated before construction (Fig. 3). The contract was first let in July 1900 to J. D. Armstrong of Chicago for \$48,875. After he forfeited the bond, T. A. Miller, of Aurora, Missouri, received the contract for the 84-by-104-by-82-foot-tall, stone building on November 28, 1900.

The unusual inscription on the stone, "Be sure your sins will find you out," is from *Numbers 32:23*. A year after construction began the building was complete (Figs. 4 and 5). Architect McDonald designed similar courthouses for Johnson County, 1896; Andrew County, 1898; and Bates County, 1901.

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