

# MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

## RANDOLPH COUNTY

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Four landholders in Randolph County, their land identified by A, B, C and D in Figure 1, each donated a 12½-acre triangle from adjoining corners of their properties to provide land for a county seat, later to be called Huntsville. The courthouse was built in the center of the public square, the precise meeting point of the four parcels of land. The street layout aligned with the square plan.

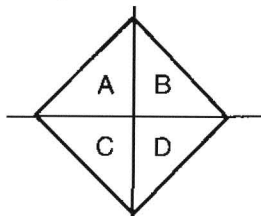


Fig. 1.

After Randolph County organized in 1829, the first courts met in homes. Two years later preparations were underway for building the first courthouse. On June 13, 1831, the court let the contract for a brick, two-story, square courthouse. William Lindsey has been identified as superintendent, and Henry B. Owens as builder of the \$2,400 building. The courtroom was on the first floor, and three rooms were on the second floor. As preparations began for the next, larger building, the court ordered the first courthouse razed in either 1858 or 1859.

The next courthouse, a two-story, brick building, contracted for in October 1858, occupied three times the space of the first courthouse, but stood on the same site (Fig. 2). The contractor was Henry Austin. Austin also made the brick. The outside walls were of pressed brick, harder and smoother than others commonly used. Receipts from the sale of lots and general funds financed the \$15,000 project.

Laura Balthis, author of an early historical account of Randolph County, credits Austin with building both

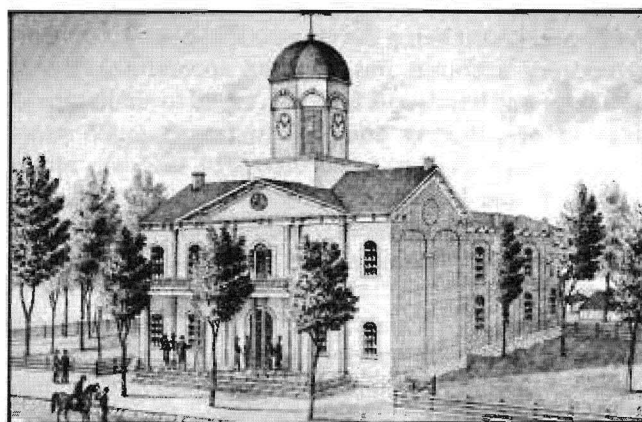
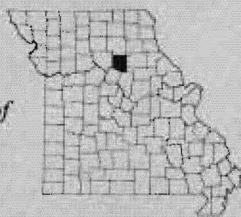


Fig. 2. Randolph County Courthouse, 1858-1882, remodeled 1877.  
Builder: Henry Austin  
(From: *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Randolph County, Missouri*, 1876)



Fig. 3. Randolph County Courthouse, after 1877 remodeling.  
Architect of remodeling: C.B. Clarke  
(From: Jason Wright collection)

County . . . . . Randolph  
Organized . . . . . Jan. 22, 1829  
Named After . . . John Randolph of  
Virginia  
County Seat . . . Huntsville



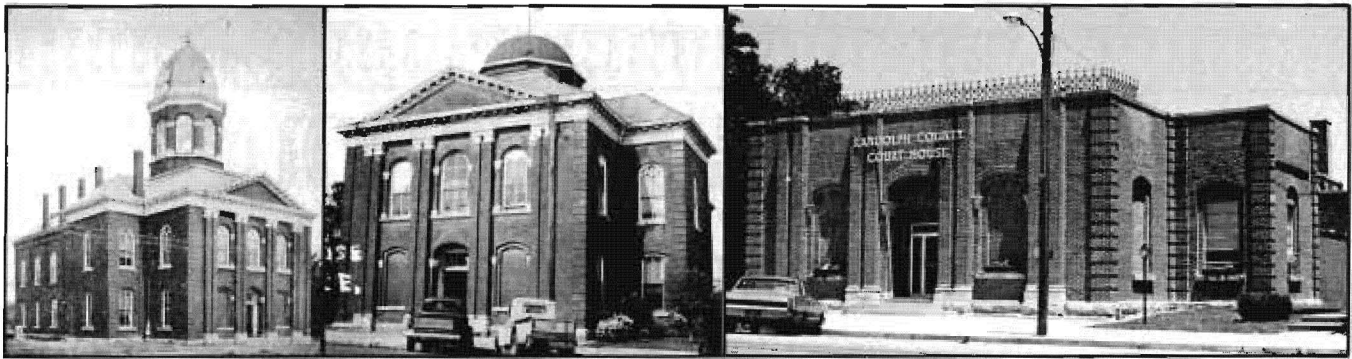


Fig. 4. Randolph County Courthouse, 1882-, left; Architect: James McGrath (From: *Standard Atlas of Randolph County*, 1910). Center, after tower removal (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection). Right, after remodeling, photo 1973.

the first and second courthouses. Austin, born in 1809, came to Huntsville in 1829 at age 20 and might have participated in construction of the first courthouse, but perhaps without being the responsible contractor. Contemporary accounts describe the second courthouse as a large and handsome building, equal to similar buildings in neighboring counties that cost much more. Montgomery County's courthouse of 1865 was almost identical, and Lincoln County's of 1869, very similar, both the work of Gustave Bachmann. A plank fence enclosed the courthouse, and by 1860, a clock was in the tower.

In March 1876 voters soundly defeated a proposal to build a \$25,000 new courthouse, even though a committee had reported the old building unsafe. The court decided not to risk submitting an unpopular proposal to the voters, since some wanted to move the county seat to Moberly. Instead, the court appropriated \$10,000 and proceeded with remodeling plans prepared by architect C. B. Clarke, St. Louis (Fig. 3).

Clarke's design added the towered extension across the rear and the complex roof arrangement, which begins at the top of the second story windows of Austin's 1858-60 building. The porch is the same with single columns at each end and two pairs in the middle, but the railing above the porch is missing in Fig. 3. Clarke enlarged the second-story door, which opened onto the balcony, to the cornice line, approximating the first-story door in size and shape. Clarke eliminated the small stone cap on the narrow strip separating the decorative brick arches on the side of the front. These caps probably served as Clarke's reference for the additional caps on the vertical brick strips that appear along the side of the building. Clarke's remodeling design was one of the most extraordinary in Missouri. Sandison and Murray, from Huntsville, contracted the work for \$9,979 in June 1876; the court received the building April 9, 1877.

**A**ugust 12, 1882, fire, which began in the second story between the two towers, consumed the courthouse. A witness reported seeing from a nearby vantage point, a figure fleeing through the doorway. Some

suspected arson since rivalry was intense between Moberly and Huntsville for the site of the county seat.

In 1882 a majority voted to move the county seat to Moberly, but they did not constitute the necessary two-thirds majority. The County Court began the procedure for building the third courthouse in Huntsville in December 1883.

James McGrath, a St. Louis architect, provided the plan for a two-story, brick building that would cost about \$35,000 (Fig. 4). The court awarded the building contract to J. M. Hammett, W. T. Rutherford and Co. The 104-by-46-foot building contained 11 rooms. Offices occupied the first floor; iron stairways flanking a central entry led to the second floor and the Circuit Court room, which measured 42 by 25 feet. Contractors completed the building in April 1884. As part of a Work Projects Administration project, workers installed central heating in 1937. Although this continues to be the official courthouse of Randolph County, the original design has been lost through several remodelings and a fire in July 1955.

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