

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

RIPLEY COUNTY

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Fig. 1. Ripley County Courthouse, 1898-. Architect: William F. Schrage (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

Early Ripley County boundaries included nearly one-fifth of the state. As new counties acquired independent status, Ripley County shrank to its present size in March 1859. The legislature legally fixed the boundary April 1, 1872.

County Ripley
Organized Jan. 5, 1833
Named After . . . Gen. Eleazar W.
Ripley of the
War of 1812
County Seat . . . Doniphan



Commissioners selected a 50-acre site, donated by George Lee and his wife, for the county seat. At Lee's suggestion, they named the town Doniphan.

The first courthouse, a log structure, was built there in 1848. Civil War activities devastated Doniphan, and the courthouse was burned. Court sessions then were held in homes for six years.

In 1871 county citizens voted \$10,000 in bonds to build their second courthouse, this one of brick. No illustrations are known to exist. Campbell's *Gazetteer* of 1874 described it as substantial. Fire destroyed this building, too, on January 1, 1898.

William F. Schrage, Kansas City architect, designed the third courthouse, which was built in 1898-99



Fig. 2. Tambourine players pose on the steps of the Ripley County Courthouse. This group, directed by Mrs. Marion Hudson, performed in Ripley County early in the 20th century. (From: Mrs. Margaret Shemwell collection)

(Figs. 1, 2). Judge McManus was appointed superintendent, and John M. Anderson contracted the building. The two-story courthouse, built of local brick, measured 128 by 95 feet at the base and 30 feet high. On July 30, 1898, Ripley County authorized \$20,000 in bonds to pay for the courthouse and jail. By 1899 the courthouse was completed.

Schrage also designed similar courthouses for Morgan, Laclede and Howard counties. Laclede's courthouse was destroyed by fire; Morgan's has lost part of its tower; and Howard's was seriously damaged by fire in the 1970s, but was repaired. The three related court-

houses, which were built a few years earlier than Ripley County's, all featured a central tower.

During the 1930s a Work Projects Administration project repaired storm and tornado damage, but until the 1970s the Ripley County courthouse remained without central heating or a regular maintenance program. Extensive remodeling began in 1976. Ripley County contributed \$80,000 for the project; the remainder of the \$325,000 cost came from an Economic Development Administration grant. This building, which still functions as the Ripley County courthouse, has been included in the National Register of Historic Places.

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