

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

WORTH COUNTY

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Fig. 1. Worth County Courthouse, 1866-1897. (From: *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Worth County*, 1877)

In 1861 Worth County was organized, the last of Missouri's 114 counties. During the 19th century, Worth County had three courthouses. From 1861-1863, Smithton, also called Worthville, was the seat of justice, but after a petition requested removal to a central location, the county seat was moved to Grant City.

County Worth
Organized Feb. 8, 1861
Named After . . . Gen. William
Worth of the
Florida and
Mexican Wars
County Seat . . . Grant City



County officials appropriated \$600 in September 1863 for a 20-by-40-foot, two-story courthouse. Built on the northeast corner of the square, the courthouse was used for the July 1864 session of court. Fire destroyed this building in February 1866.

The court appropriated \$1,000 for the next courthouse, which was to be built on the square. The frame, two-story building, superintended and apparently planned by John F. Mason, measured 40 by 32 feet (Fig. 1). County offices were on the first floor, the courtroom above.

By 1882 this building was considered unsatisfactory. The 1882 *History of Gentry and Worth Counties* reported that the courthouse was gloomy, dingy, poorly lit and inadequately ventilated. The writer advocated

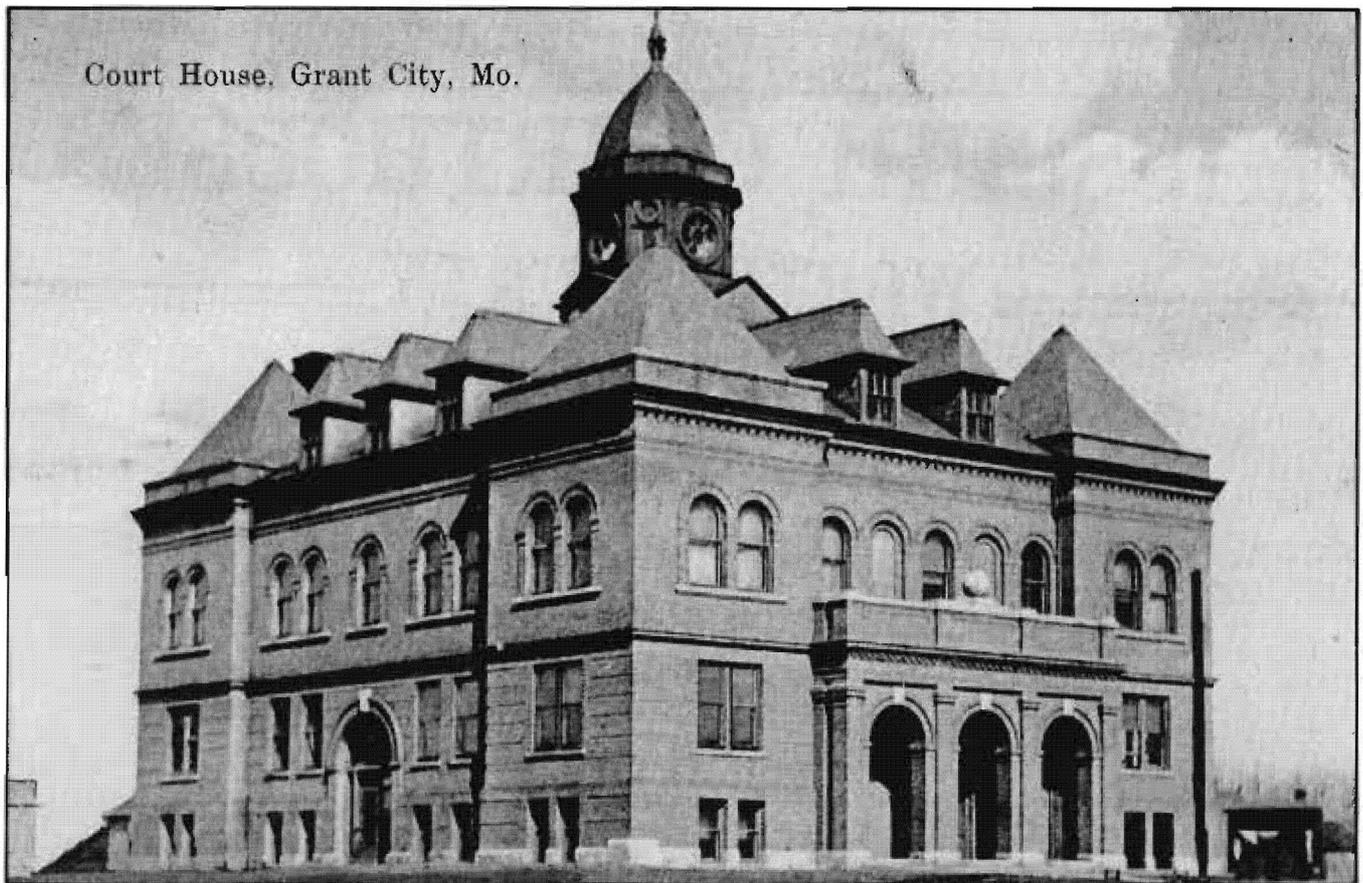


Fig. 2. Worth County Courthouse, 1898-. Architects: Orff and Guilber (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd Collection)

building a new courthouse, which would enhance the county seat, reflecting the "genius, enterprise and generosity of her people." It was not until 1897 that Worth County citizens authorized \$25,000 to be issued in bonds for building a courthouse. Nine architects submitted designs. The court chose the plans of architects Fremont C. Orff and Ernest F. Guilbert, of Minneapolis, in October 1897. Their design called for a two-story building of hard brick with stone trim, measuring 71 by 80 feet. The center tower was to rise over 100 feet. Four entries were planned, one from each side of the square. The court awarded the building contract to Stansberry Press Brick Co. for \$19,360. Heating and plumbing contracts amounted to \$1,929 (Fig. 2).

During February 1899 county officials moved to the new courthouse, and in April, the Grant City Bar sponsored a social event to raise money for furnishing the courtroom.

More than 80 years later, although still used, the courthouse is deteriorating, and there are no funds for maintenance. In November 1979 the county was in

desperate financial condition, and after county voters repeatedly rejected proposed tax increases, Worth County officials closed the courthouse. They moved back in May 1980 with limited services of water and lights only. Worth County, with a rural population, is the smallest of Missouri's counties, and will continue to face difficulties supporting a county government.

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