

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

McDONALD COUNTY

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When McDonald County was created in 1849, two communities, Rutledge and Maryville (which was later named Pineville), competed fiercely for the county seat. An 1850 confrontation in Rutledge resulted in death to three participants. About six years later a log courthouse, reportedly built in Rutledge, was demolished in one of the acts of hostility that continued to occur between the antagonistic factions.

From the time of organization in 1849 until winter of 1857, McDonald County operated with two courthouses and two sets of officials. The General Assembly appointed commissioners to select the legal county seat. They settled the matter by relocating the county seat at Pineville.

The first courthouse in Pineville, a one-story, frame building, built in 1858-59, measured 30 feet square and stood at the corner of Third and Main.

The next courthouse, a two-story, brick house built in 1861, was located on the city square site in Pineville. The Freemasons planned a third-story addition to this courthouse for their lodge room. Whether or not the third story was ever built remains a matter of conjecture, but J. A. Sturges, an attorney who came to McDonald County in 1881 and interviewed old-time residents of Pineville for his history, maintains it was built. Bushwackers burned the courthouse in 1863, destroying most records.

In November 1866 the court appointed a representative to rent rooms for county use and to sell the bricks and bats from the old courthouse. Roman Malach, a local historian, noted a payment of \$25 made to Z. P. Cogswell for making plans and specifications for the



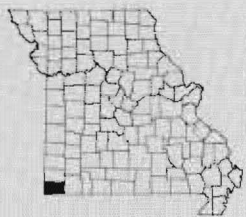
Fig. 1. McDonald County Courthouse, 1870-1978.
(From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

new courthouse, begun in 1869. In December of the same year the court accepted the low bid of \$4,949.50 from contractors Willis R. Cox and Zachariah Smith. Construction began in 1870 on a two-story, brick building measuring approximately 42 by 48 feet (Fig. 1). The court accepted the building in June 1871. Sturges claimed the old courthouse was on the same plan; another source, *1849-1949, 100 Years of History and Progress*, maintained that part of the 1861 building was in the 1870 building.

In 1905 the court made a \$1,500 appropriation for an addition on the east to provide vaults; in 1943 the building was stuccoed and painted white. The courtroom was paneled, the ceiling lowered, and the room was rewired with new light fixtures in 1969.

The County Court bought a \$10,000 lot north of the city square for the 20th century courthouse in 1977. Hood-Rich, architects and consulting engineers from Springfield, designed the one-story, 72-by-84-foot, masonry building. R. E. Smith Construction, Joplin, received the building contract in December 1977.

County McDonald
Organized March 3, 1849
Named After . . . Alexander
McDonald,
Revolutionary
soldier and
congressman
County Seat . . . Pineville



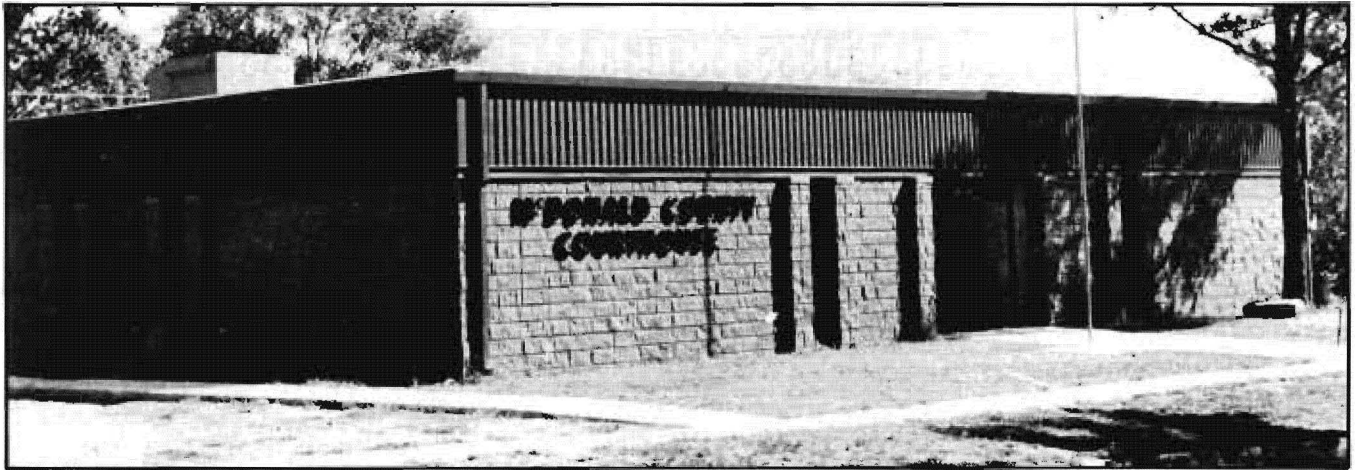


Fig. 2. McDonald County Courthouse, 1977-. Architects: Hood-Rich, architects and consulting engineers. (Courtesy: *McDonald County News-Gazette*)

Ground breaking took place December 21, 1977 (Fig. 2). The amount of space, 5,500 square feet, was about the same as in the old courthouse.

The Local Public Works Capital Development and Investment Act of 1977, as amended by the Public Works Employment Act of 1977, under the U.S. Department of Commerce, provided a grant of \$145,000. Local contributions of about \$20,000 completed the funds.

Dedication and open house were planned for July 1978 to coincide with Jesse James Days, when a festival air reigns throughout the town, with street dancing, music, a brush arbor wedding and a showing of the film *Jesse James*. In 1938 Twentieth Century Fox brought Tyrone Power, Randolph Scott and Henry Fonda to Pineville and the 1870 courthouse to shoot the Missouri epic. The occasion has been celebrated ever since. As one resident said, "It's the greatest thing that ever happened in McDonald County." The old courthouse, immortalized in the film, was leased for possible commercial development in 1980.

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