

# MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

## MERCER COUNTY

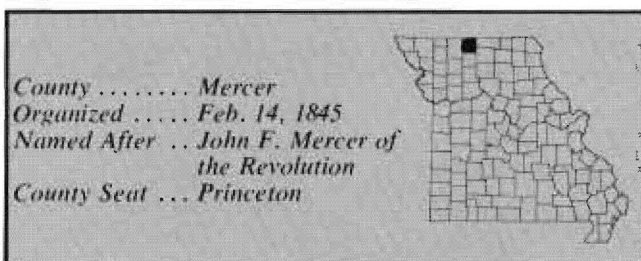
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Fig. 1. Mercer County Courthouse, 1858-1898.  
(From: postcard, Virginia Boits collection)

**M**ercer County bought 40 acres from the U.S. government for the county seat and sold lots, using the money for public buildings. The first courthouse, built in 1847 east of the public square, was a two-story, log structure, measuring 24 feet square.

The second courthouse, built in 1858 in the center of the square, was a brick building, which cost about \$8,000. H. B. Nesbitt was the builder (Fig. 1). Exterior



stairs were probably added later. If a separate or enclosed stairway were not provided, office workers were disrupted while court was in session. Fire destroyed the building March 24, 1898. For several years Mercer County considered building a courthouse. In 1907 a Scotland County, Missouri, newspaper illustrated one of Mercer County's contemplated designs (Fig. 2). Officials had been planning a new courthouse for Scotland County and considered what other counties were doing.

After half a dozen rejected bond issues, courthouse advocates mustered their strengths and succeeded in passing by a four to one ratio a bond issue for \$75,000 in October 1911. More than 16 architects sought the commission; R. W. Van Trump and Rae Sanneman of Kansas City were awarded the contract.

After the fire in 1898, the county had sold the square to the city for a park, so a new site was necessary. Princeton residents donated \$4,000 for a lot close to the square.

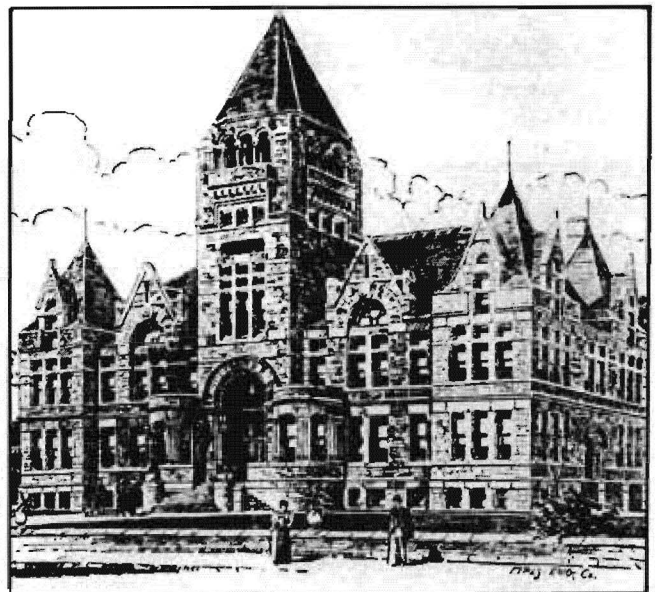


Fig. 2. Proposed Courthouse for Mercer County.  
(From: *Memphis Reveille*, February 28, 1907)

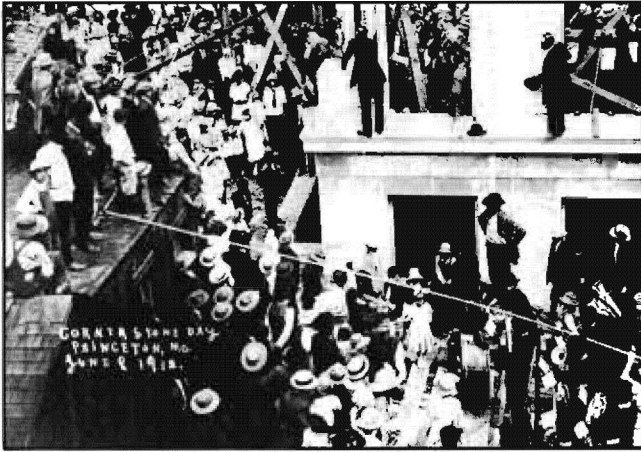


Fig. 3. Cornerstone ceremony, June 8, 1912.  
(Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

J. E. Anderson of Kansas City was low bidder for the contract with \$70,500. Construction was to be completed March 1, 1913, or he was to pay \$10 a day penalty. Cornerstone ceremonies took place June 8, 1912, attracting a very large crowd (Fig. 3). The event inspired some merchants to hold Cornerstone Day sales. The dedication took place in April 1913, again with an overflowing crowd.

The stone building is 65 by 90 feet and two stories plus basement (Fig. 4). A large courtroom is on the third floor, and an assembly room for 300 is on the first floor. Final cost for the courthouse came to more than \$76,000; furnishings amounted to almost \$5,000.

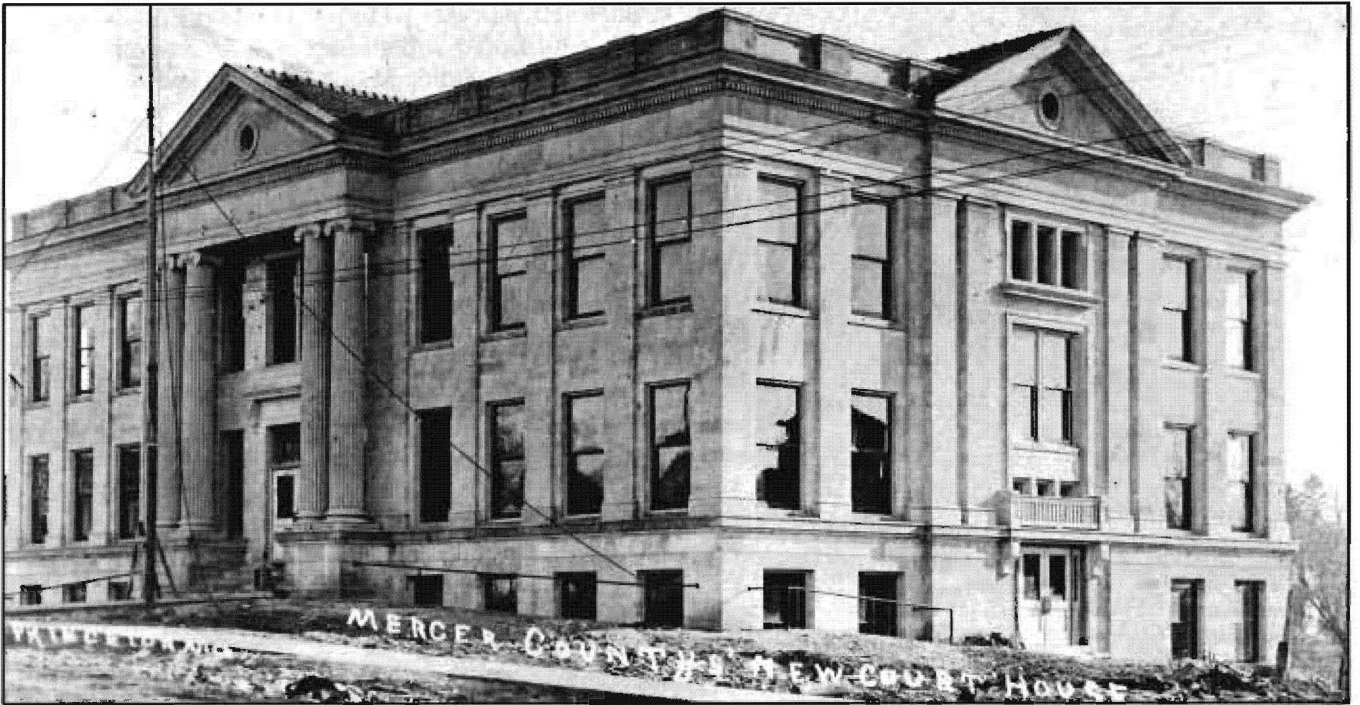


Fig. 4. Mercer County Courthouse. 1912-. Architects: Richard W. Van Trump and Rae Sanneman (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)

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