

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

OZARK COUNTY

Marian M. Ohman
Coordinator, Art History Programs

Ozark County was first established in 1841. It adopted the name Decatur in 1843-45, then reverted back to Ozark. Ozark County's early courthouses have a complicated history, characteristic of those counties scarred by fires and Civil War activity.

When the area of Ozark County included what is now Douglas County, commissioners selected Rockbridge as the county seat. Shortly after 1841 they erected a courthouse which continued in use until destroyed by fire in 1858 or 1859. After Douglas County became established in 1857, Rockbridge no longer remained in a central location. Commissioners secured a 60-acre tract in Gainesville and designated it the county seat. The court moved there in March 1860.

The second courthouse was built in Gainesville, but was destroyed by fire sometime before February 1864. Circuit Court records indicate that court could not safely be conducted in Gainesville, so it met at the Spring Creek schoolhouse. Court continued meeting there until the fall of 1865, when they rented, and apparently finally purchased, temporary quarters until a courthouse could be built. Several attempts to plan a courthouse or begin construction failed. Although the court ordered the sale of the building used as the courthouse on November 3, 1869, it was not until August 8, 1871, that the court authorized the commissioner to advertise for bids to let the contract; however, the court rescinded the order the following day.

Finally, the court appropriated \$2,000 for construction of a courthouse on August 6, 1873 (Fig. 1). R. P. Ellison superintended the construction done by contractor W. J. Piland, who bid \$1,825.28. The two-story,

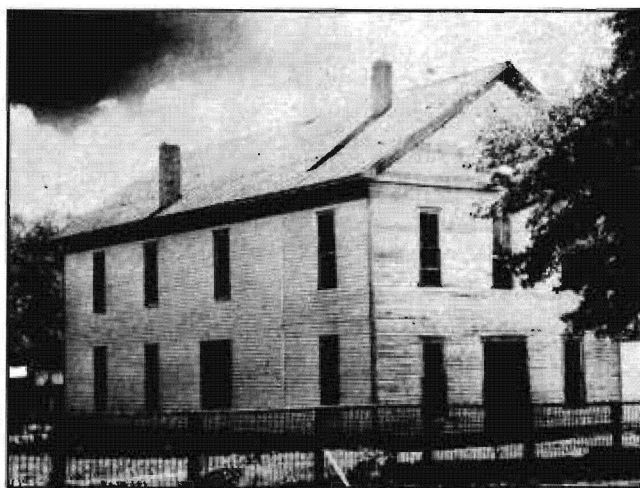


Fig. 1. Ozark County Courthouse. 1873-1934.
(Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

frame building continued in use as Ozark County's courthouse until destroyed by fire November 28, 1934.

The court then purchased the old Christian Church building in 1935 for \$4,200. This, too, fell to fire in January 1937. After this, county offices rented space in various buildings around the square.

Encouraged by possible assistance from the federal government, voters approved a \$20,000 bond issue by a ten to one margin in September 1938, as a 55 percent shared cost of the Work Projects Administration project. Earl Hawkins, of Springfield, drew plans, but when bids were received, they all exceeded the \$35,000 limit. Hawkins revised the plans, and in March 1939, the contract was awarded to James Douglas for \$34,950. Final costs were near \$43,000 when the courthouse was completed in November 1939 (Fig. 2). Final government inspection was in June 1940. Hawkins drew plans for other southern Missouri courthouses: Laclede County, 1924; Howell County, 1936; and Webster and Oregon counties, 1939, all of which are still in use.

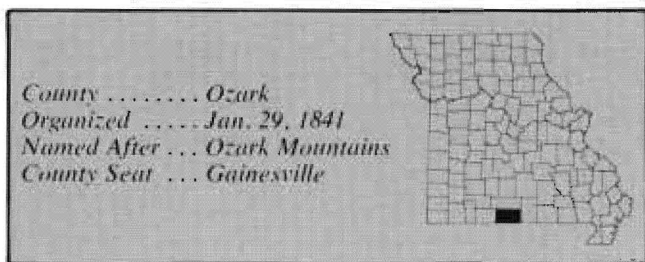




Fig. 2. Ozark County Courthouse, 1939-. Architect: Earl Hawkins (Courtesy: State Historical Society of Missouri)

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