

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

PHELPS COUNTY

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In 1857 Phelps County commissioners were instructed to find the most suitable location for the county seat on the survey line of a branch of the Pacific Railroad without regard for the geographical center of the county. Edmund W. Bishop, who was anxious to develop a town, offered 50 acres if the commissioners would locate the county seat on his property. Although opposition surfaced, the commissioners accepted Bishop's offer, and the legislature concurred. The first courts convened in private homes or the railroad office. Orders to build the first courthouse came October 17, 1859, to the county clerk, F. M. Lenox. This temporary building continued in use until completion of the permanent courthouse.

During August 1859 E. W. Bishop was appointed superintendent of the courthouse. The court appropriated \$8,000 for construction of the 45-by-65-foot, brick building, and the contract was awarded to P. J. Lynch and Andrew Malcolm. The court accepted the nearly completed building in June 1863, but deducted \$2,000 from the contract price of \$7,975 for unsatisfactory workmanship (Figs. 1 and 2). The sand-mud brick for the courthouse has been reported as the first brick made in Rolla.

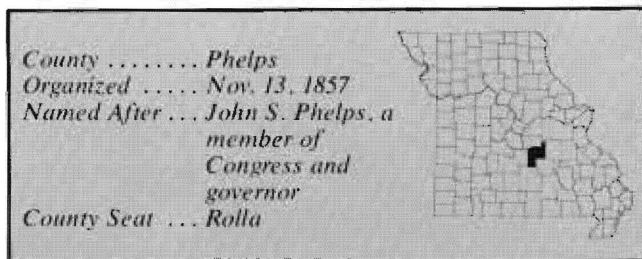
At the outbreak of the Civil War, Rolla was recognized as a southern stronghold, but June 14, 1861, the Confederate flag was taken down. Union troops took possession of the courthouse and used it for their base of operation. The courthouse was also used as a quartermaster store and hospital. Fig. 2 shows how the courthouse dominated the Rolla skyline during this time.



Fig. 1. Phelps County Courthouse, 1859-
(From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection)



Fig. 2. Photo of Rolla near the time of the Civil War showing dominance of the courthouse.
(From: *Our Centennial Book*, 1957)



Vault wings were added after 1881, the jail was added in 1912, and the cupola was removed in the 1940s. Clair V. Mann, Phelps County educator and historian, documented Phelps County's unsuccessful 20th century attempts to build a new courthouse.

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