

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

PLATTE COUNTY

Marian M. Ohman
Coordinator, Art History Programs

After the court had been meeting in homes and rental property, Platte County paid \$100 for a double log structure to use as a courthouse in February 1840. The court used this building for nearly two years until the first permanent courthouse was completed. Construction for the permanent courthouse had been ordered in May 1840. W. M. Paxton, in *Annals of Platte County*, claims that Demetrius A. Sutton (1795-1848), an experienced architect, drew the plans and prepared the specifications for the 50-foot-square brick courthouse. For this service the court paid him \$10. He also served on the courthouse building committee.

Sutton, a native of Fayette County, Kentucky, gained the respect of his Platte County associates, who considered him intelligent, well read, agreeable and talented. In addition to providing the plan and design of the courthouse, he may have been responsible for the drawing found in the clerk's office (Fig. 1).

The two-story building, completed by the November 1841 court term, faced south. On the first floor, a center hall led to the courtroom on the north. Two 18-foot-square offices on either side of the hall faced south. The second story repeated the arrangement.

Religious leaders conducted services in the large meeting hall above the courtroom, where seats were reserved by subscription. The courthouse had a hipped roof, covered with tin and topped by a cupola with ball and spire. Medlin and Anderson did the stone work, David Hunt, the brick work, and four carpenters finished the wood work. By August 1842 contractors completed the courthouse, and proud Platte Countians held a celebration ball. Contributions from religious organizations and subscriptions partially funded the building.

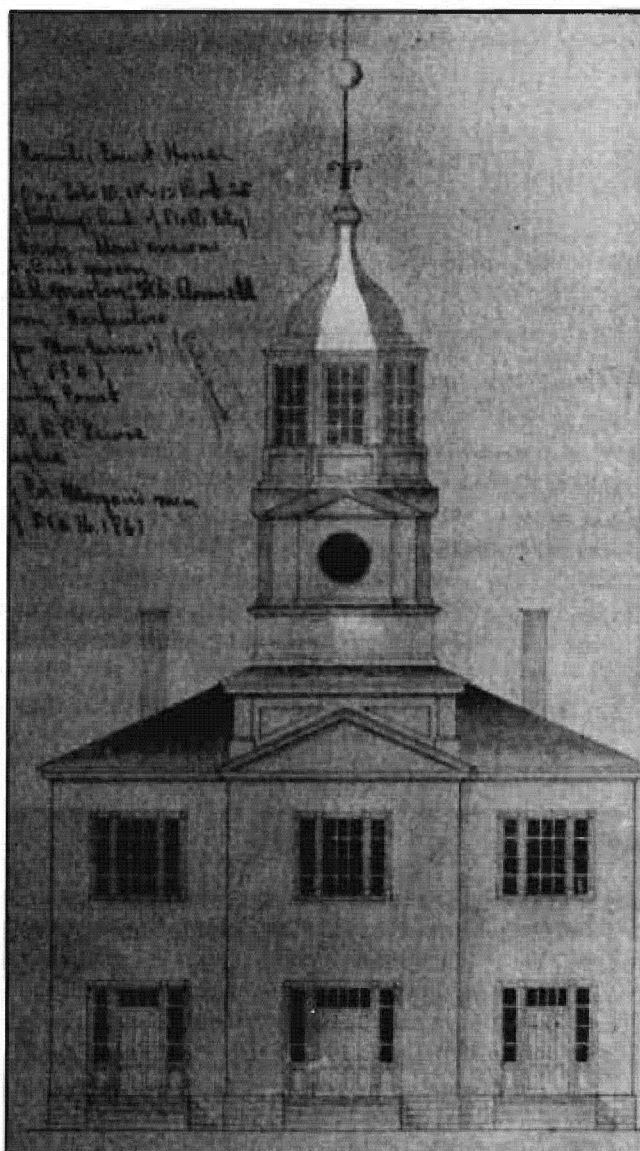
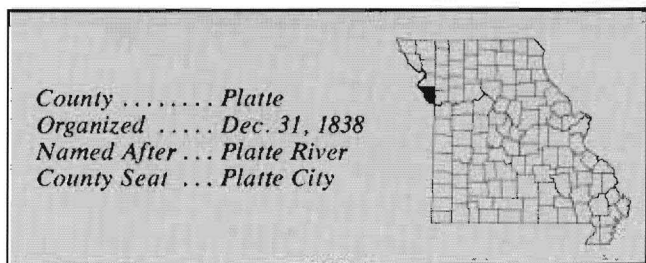


Fig. 1. Platte County Courthouse, 1840-1861.
Architect: Demetrius A. Sutton
(From: Joan Cox collection)

The 1876 Atlas estimated the cost at \$15,000. In December 1861 the building was destroyed by Civil War activity.



County Platte
Organized Dec. 31, 1838
Named After . . . Platte River
County Seat . . . Platte City



Fig. 2. Platte County Courthouse, 1866-. Architect: Peter McDuff (From: W.P.A., Historical Records Survey)

In September 1864 the court made the first appropriation of \$40,000 to begin a new courthouse; they accepted the plans of Peter McDuff and awarded the building contract to J. A. McGonigle for \$88,500. McDuff, born in 1813, immigrated from Scotland. He had designed courthouses for Clinton County in 1858 and Clay County in 1859. He identified himself as a carpenter in the 1850 census, but earned the reputation in northwest Missouri as a superior draftsman and contractor. For this new courthouse, the court bought the lot where the Platte County courthouse still stands.

Cornerstone ceremonies took place on June 20, 1866, and by May 1867 the two-story, soft red brick building was completed (Fig. 2). It originally measured 80 by 100 feet.

The building faces south and features a triple-arched entry in the center pavilion. The black and white square flagstones on the foyer floor have been a particular source of pride. Several additions have been made through the years to this building that continues to serve as Platte County's courthouse.

After many years of discussion concerning the fate of the courthouse, preservation of the building now

seems assured. It is a fine and rare example of Missouri architecture from the 1860s and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Platte County was fortunate in having two unusually talented men contribute to its 19th century architectural heritage.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- History of Clay and Platte Counties, Missouri.* St. Louis: National Historical Company, 1885.
 Paxton, W. M. *Annals of Platte County, Missouri.* Kansas City: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing, 1897. Reprinted Cape Girardeau: Ramfre Press, 1960.
Platte County Centennial Fair Souvenir Book, 1963.

Newspapers

- Platte County, Missouri, Supplement to the Weston Chronicle,* vol. 58 no. 27, 1929.

Atlases

- An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Platte County, Missouri.* Philadelphia: Edwards Brothers, 1877.
Standard Atlas of Platte County. Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle and Co., 1907.

Manuscript Collections

- Work Projects Administration, Historical Records Survey, Missouri, 1935-1942, Platte County. Located in Joint Collection: University of Missouri, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Columbia and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts.