

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

ST. LOUIS COUNTY

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Figs. 1-4. St. Louis County Courthouse, St. Louis. Left, 1826-ca. 1832. Architects: Morton and Laveille (From: "A Physical History of the Old Courthouse"). Center-left, proposed courthouse, 1839. Architect: Henry Singleton (From: *The United States Illustrated*, ca. 1854, drawing attributed to George Barnett). Center-right, during construction, ca. 1851 (Courtesy: Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis). Right, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, photo 1977.

Boundaries of St. Louis County were established by the Territorial Legislature in 1813. Early courts occupied a succession of temporary meeting places.

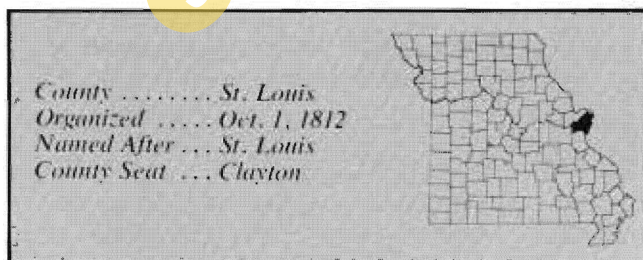
After statehood in 1821, the Legislature approved an act providing for construction of a courthouse and jail, and appointed five commissioners to select a proper site within the town of St. Louis. They accepted a donation from Auguste Chouteau and J. B. C. Lucas. In 1825 the court made the initial appropriation of \$7,000 for the building and a year later added \$8,000. The County Court judges asked the courthouse commissioner to contact George Morton (1790-1865) and Joseph Laveille (1785-1842), immigrants to Missouri who established their St. Louis firm during the 1820s. The judges asked them to submit two or three courthouse plans for the court's consideration. In May 1826 the court approved the plans and a cost estimate of

\$12,000 (Fig. 1). Morton and Laveille contracted the construction, which began immediately.

Alexander Stuart, the first commissioner, resigned, and the court appointed Henry S. Geyer, superintendent. The two-story building measured 60 feet square with a 20-by-40-foot semicircular projection. Rounded steps led to the front portico facing Fourth Street. A cupola offered a commanding view. Costs amounted to \$14,416 when the building was completed about 1830. It contained courtrooms on each floor, jury rooms on the second floor and offices on the first.

The need for additional space prompted the court to call for plans and estimates of a building or buildings to be erected on the square in September 1838. Prospective builders and contractors had the option of submitting plans for additions to the existing courthouse or designing a new structure. In March of the following year the court requested plans in conformity to a sketch prepared by Henry Singleton (Fig. 2). In July 1839 the court accepted the plan Singleton submitted. Cornerstone ceremonies took place October 21, 1839.

The building contained about 15,000 square feet. The principal section was 183 by 64 feet. Porticoes projected 12 feet, supported by limestone columns. The main



floor was divided into two courtrooms and four offices. The rotunda, 60 feet in diameter, rose 130 feet, had three galleries, and was surmounted by a heavy dome. A photograph of 1851 shows construction in progress around the existing brick building of 1826 (Fig. 3). After disagreements with the court, Singleton was dismissed and replaced by William Twombly.

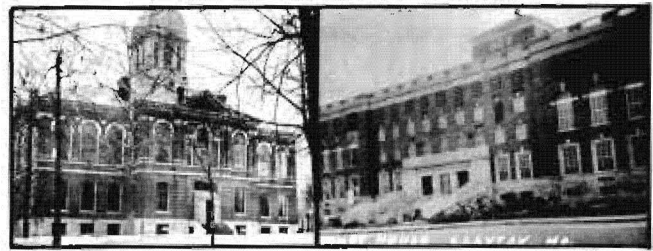
In 1851 Robert S. Mitchell, a St. Louis architect, submitted an altered plan for completing the building. The present courthouse largely reflects his work. Demolition of the 1826 brick courthouse was completed in 1852.

Mitchell continued working on the project until 1857, when he resigned. Subsequent architects included Thomas D. P. Lanham, William Rumbold and Thomas W. Walsh. The present appearance of the building dates from 1862 (Fig. 4).

In 1876 the city of St. Louis separated from the county; the city used the courthouse until 1930. The property was deeded to the U.S. government in 1937; subsequently it became a part of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.

After the separation of the city of St. Louis from the county, the seat of justice moved about eight miles west where first courts met in temporary quarters. County commissioners accepted a site of 104 acres donated by Ralph Clayton and M. F. Hanley in the wooded, undeveloped area that became Clayton. Even when the cornerstone ceremony took place May 9, 1878, the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* reported the courthouse was represented only by an unsightly hole in the center of a forest.

A resolution in January 1878 provided funds from the sale of county land for building the courthouse. Plans for the courthouse, which county architect F. A. Renick prepared, were contracted by the firm Rude and Luke (Fig. 5). The courthouse measured about 110 by 205 feet and contained 17 rooms and two courtrooms. Costs came to approximately \$38,000. County officials



Figs. 5,6. St. Louis County Courthouse, Clayton. Left, 1878, portions incorporated into 1949 project. Architect: F. A. Renick (From: *History of St. Louis County*, 1911). Right, 1949, incorporated into 1968 complex. Architect: Preston Bradshaw (From: postcard, Trenton Boyd collection).

occupied their new quarters during December 1878, only seven months after the cornerstone was laid. The court authorized a 110-by-69-foot addition April 19, 1912, which extended on the south and cost \$75,000.

Between 1925 and 1945 St. Louis County voters defeated six courthouse elections, the last in May 1945 for a \$4,250,000 complex; given the alternative for a \$2,000,000 courthouse in December of the same year, voters gave their approval. Preston Bradshaw, a St. Louis architect, prepared a plan for a four-story, red brick building with white stone trim. A judge asked for a design complementing that of the recently completed city hall and post office. Construction was contracted by H. D. Deal and Co. for \$1,155,415. The building was completed in December 1949, five months ahead of schedule (Fig. 6).

March 28, 1950, St. Louis voters approved a charter permitting home rule for St. Louis County, replacing the three-member County Court with a seven-member council and a county supervisor as the county's chief administrative office.

By the 1960s county government had become so vast a single building concept was replaced by a county government complex designed by the St. Louis firm, Murphy, Downey, Wofford and Richman. Voters approved a bond issue in 1967. Construction began in November 1968 and was completed in late 1971. The cost was \$18,602,266.

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