

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Audrain County Courthouse

other names/site number Audrain County Memorial Courthouse

2. Location

street & number 101 N. Jefferson Street n/a not for publication

city or town Mexico n/a vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Audrain code 007 zip code 65265

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local



JUNE 05, 2012

Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles, Deputy SHPO

Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register

other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Audrain County Courthouse

Audrain, MO

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	district
0	0	site
0	0	structure
4	2	object
5	2	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY

REVIVALS/Neo-Classical Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: concrete

walls: brick

stone

roof: not visible

other:

Audrain County Courthouse
Name of Property

Audrain, MO
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Politics/Government

Architecture

Period of Significance

1951-1962

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bonsack and Pearce, architects/Epple

Construction, builder

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Audrain County Courthouse
Name of Property

Audrain, MO
County and State

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>596500</u>	<u>4336310</u>	3	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Debbie Sheals

organization Historic Preservation Consultant date March 16, 2012

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:**
 - A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
 - A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Photographs.**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain, Missouri

Summary: The Audrain County Courthouse, at 101 N. Jefferson Street in Mexico, Audrain County, Missouri was completed in 1951. It occupies a full city block in downtown Mexico, and is surrounded by open lawns and mature trees. The building is three stories tall, with a flat roof and a solid cubic form. It has streamlined Neo-Classical Revival styling. Each exterior wall features classically inspired ornament constructed of pale stone that contrasts with the dark brick walls. The north wall has a wide entrance bay with a central entrance and a high bank of windows that light the main courtroom inside. The other three exterior walls are nearly identical, with central entrance bays that include monumental engaged columns and ornamental stone door surrounds. The interior of the building is highly intact and in good condition. It features a three story rotunda that is lined with balconies and lit by a large art glass skylight. Original interior finishes of note include terrazzo flooring, marble wainscoting, and wood and glass office entry doors. The courthouse is the only building on the property. The site includes six objects: a flagpole, (1951) a miniature replica of the Statue of Liberty, (1959) a memorial water fountain ca. 1920s), the headstone of a prominent early citizen (pre-1959), and two war memorials (post 1970, 2000). The flagpole, water fountain and headstone are included in the construction drawings for the building, and the Statue of Liberty replica was added in 1959. The two newer objects are war memorials that the water are typical elements for courthouse sites, and therefore do not detract from the integrity of the property. The overall resource count is therefore one contributing building, four contributing objects and two non-contributing objects. The courthouse is highly intact and in good condition. The property looks and functions very much as it did when the courthouse was put into service in 1951.

Elaboration:

The courthouse is located in the historic commercial core of Mexico. The large square lot is the original courthouse square; it housed two other courthouses before this one was built in 1951.¹ The streets surrounding the square are lined with one and two story commercial buildings, most of which were built in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. The lot is at street level on all except the northwest corner of the property, where it slopes down a few feet. Wide sidewalks circle the lot and the building, and run straight out to the street from the center of each wall.

¹ This is the fourth Audrain County Courthouse; the first was built in 1837 on a lot south of the square.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain, Missouri

As is common for county courthouses, the site includes a number of memorial objects. Each corner of the lot contains at least one memorial or small statue. At the southeast corner is a drinking fountain fashioned from a massive block of red granite, onto which have been attached individual drinking fountains. (See photo 4.) The drinking fountain is older than the courthouse; money for its construction was bequeathed to the city by Major Frederick Whitcomb, who died in 1920, and it was installed on the courthouse lawn not long after. The following words are inscribed into a smooth section of the otherwise rough granite block: "FREDERICK WHITCOMB FOUNTAIN. 'Now those drink, that never drank before, and those that drank, drink the more'." The water fountain is a contributing object.

Another stone monument is set close to the northeast corner of the building. It is a gray marble marker commemorating John Bingle Morris, a prominent Audrain County pioneer who died in 1875. The marker was shown on the site plan that was prepared for the construction project, and appears to have been in place on the lawn of the former courthouse. At the southwest corner of the property is a 7-1/2 foot replica of the Statue of Liberty, set upon a star shaped brick base. The statue was installed on Independence Day of 1959, by the Boy Scouts of Audrain County.² All three of those objects are contributing resources.

The northwest corner of the lot contains two war memorials and a flag pole. The flag pole was installed when the present building was constructed, and the memorials are modern additions. Each war memorial consists of a polished black granite marker set into a paved alcove. One commemorates service members of several wars, beginning with WWI. The other is the Missouri Exercise Tiger Army and Navy Anchor Memorial, placed in 2000. The Anchor Memorial includes a large anchor. The flag pole is a contributing object; the memorials are non-contributing objects.

The three story courthouse building was clearly designed to be seen from all sides. Each exterior wall has the same level of architectural detailing, and three for the four walls are nearly identical. The south, east and west walls each have a low stone water table, and a stylized entablature that runs along the top of the second floor windows. The entablature has a narrow projecting cornice, a brick frieze, and a small stone bottom band. The friezes are ornamented with small, widely spaced square stone panels.

Each of those three walls has a projecting central entrance bay that features square engaged columns topped by a wide stone cornice. The face of

² "Liberty Statue Dedication to Mark Start of Independence Day Holiday," Mexico Evening Ledger, July 1, 1959, p. 1.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain, Missouri

each cornice is inscribed with the words “MEMORIAL COURT HOUSE.” (See photo 6.) There are four square engaged columns in each entrance bay. The fluted columns have very simple stylized capitals and bases. The lower faces of the center columns are covered with wide stone door surrounds. Each surround is topped with a stylized stone pediment fashioned from an octagonal clock that is flanked by scrollwork. The word “JUSTITIA” is inscribed into the stone above each door.³ The doorways are fully intact, with newer metal doors and surrounds.

The first and second floor windows are in recessed panels that are bordered with soldier and sailor brick courses. The second floor windows have large keystones, and all of the windows below the cornice have smooth stone sills. The area above the cornice is more simply detailed. The third floor windows have no keystones or ornamental sills, and the tops of the walls are finished with low-profile stone coping. All of the window openings are original and fully intact; they are filled with newer 1/1 windows that are similar to the originals. (See figure 6.)

The north wall has some of the same detailing as the other parts of the building, but differs in that the center entrance bay there is much larger. The bay projects more, and it is wider and a few feet taller than rest of the building. (See photo 1.) The courtroom is located on this side of the building, as indicated by the large bank of windows on the second and third floors of the entrance bay. Those windows are separated by fluted pilasters that match the engaged columns of the other bays. The columns are topped by a wide stone cornice that is inscribed with the words “AUDRAIN COUNTY MEMORIAL COURT HOUSE.” The lower section of the north entrance bay contains a central doorway with a stone surround that matches those on the other walls, including a clock and the word JUSTITIA. That doorway is flanked by brick walls and evenly spaced windows. The windows are detailed to match the second floor windows on the main part of the building, with limestone keystones and ornamental brick surrounds.

The interior of the courthouse is largely intact, and many of the rooms are still used as they were when the building was put into service in 1951. The interior is dominated by a large open rotunda that extends from the first floor to the third. (See figures 1-5.) The octagonal rotunda is ringed by balconies at the second and third floors, and topped by a large art glass skylight. The octagonal theme is continued in the patterns of the terrazzo flooring of the first floor, which echo the lines of the skylight above. (See photos 7 and 13.) A

³ *Justitia* is the Roman goddess of Justice.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain, Missouri

custom octagonal bench in the center of the rotunda completes the composition. Although the basement level is not open to the rotunda, it features a central lobby that is the same size and shape as the first floor rotunda.

Each of the exterior doors accesses a hallway that leads to the rotunda. The south hall, which is the widest, contains an original open stairway, as well as an elevator that was installed in late 2011 and early 2012. There was originally a flight of stairs along each side of that hall. The elevator, which was ADA mandated, replaced the one on the west.

Almost all of the rooms in the building open to the rotunda. The ground floor houses offices for the Recorder, Assessor, Collector and County Clerk and Commissioners. (All except the Assessor occupy their original offices.) The second floor houses the Circuit Courtroom, a two story space on the north end of the second and third floors, as well as the Probate Court and various offices.

On the third floor are original jury rooms, a large suite for the Prosecuting Attorney's office, and several smaller offices. Basement rooms include a large original community room, as well as restrooms and vaults for record storage. The community room, which was designed to seat 250, is 30 feet by 60 feet, with a 10 foot by 30 foot stage at one end.

The original courtrooms are largely intact. The main circuit courtroom on the second floor has seen very few changes; original features include wood wainscoting around the perimeter walls, the judge's bench, the jury box and a large color seal of Missouri that hangs on the wall behind the judge's bench. The original bench seats and lawyer's tables are also still in service. The original county courtroom, now used by the county commissioners, is also largely intact.

Most of the public spaces of the courthouse retain all or most of their original finishes. The south stairs and all of the balconies on the rotunda have original iron railings with slim square balusters offset by stylized inset medallions that feature a letter "A" (for Audrain) set into a large oval. (See photos 7 and 8.) Almost all of the original woodwork, as well as the glass and wood doors of the office entrances, is also intact.

Original finishes in the public spaces include stone wainscoting and ornamental terrazzo floors. The plaster walls of the rotunda and adjacent hallways all have gray stone wainscoting with dark green marble base trim. The terrazzo flooring incorporates the colors of the wainscot and base trim, and the first floor rotunda and hall floors also have bands of dark yellow and dull pink. Most of the terrazzo is roughly the same color as the walls, with darker greenish bands at the base of most walls and around the stairs and balconies.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain, Missouri

On the first floor, the dark bands are also edged with yellow, and the rotunda floor has narrow bands of yellow and pink.

Interior changes have been minimal. A newer metal gate was added to the second floor balcony to enhance control of prisoners being escorted into the courtroom. Most of the offices have newer finishes, including carpet or tile flooring and some suspended ceilings. Overall, the courthouse and grounds look and function much as they have for the past half century. The building is highly intact and in very good condition; it shows every sign of being able to serve Audrain County for decades to come.

National Register of Historic Places
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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

Summary: The Audrain County Courthouse, 101 N. Jefferson Street, in Mexico, Audrain County, Missouri, has been the seat of government for Audrain County since its completion in 1951. The building also continues in its original role as a war memorial. It offers a very late, simplified example of Neo-Classical Revival architecture. It is locally significant under National Criteria A and C, in the areas of Politics/Government and Architecture. The construction of the building culminated a 12 year effort to replace the county's third courthouse, which was built in 1868. Although a bond issue to supply funds for the building was approved in 1946, construction costs proved to be higher than initial estimates and it took the county and their architects several years to develop a practical and acceptable design for the new building. The courthouse was designed by the St. Louis architectural firm of Bonsack and Pearce. The building is one of four Missouri county courthouses designed by Bonsack and Pearce, who specialized in civic and educational architecture, and worked throughout the state. The period of significance for the building runs from its completion in 1951 to 1962, the arbitrary fifty year cut-off point. It is highly intact and in very good condition.

Elaboration: Audrain County was first organized by the state legislature in 1830. It was named in honor of recently deceased Senator James H. Audrain, who had died while in office. The bill that established the county stipulated that the area needed to gain enough residents to merit representation before it would be further recognized. That occurred within a few years, and in December of 1836, the legislature passed a new act that recognized the county. The legislature also appointed commissioners from adjacent counties to set up the county government, and instructed them to meet in the town of Mexico by June, 1837.⁴

Mexico was platted in April 1836, by Robert C. Mansfield and James H. Smith. According to a later historical account, they "gave the town the name of Mexico, in recognition of the growing controversy between Mexico and the United States concerning the independence of Texas."⁵ They appear to have platted the town with the idea that it would become the county seat, and they made it known that they would donate land for public use should that be the case. (They also established the town of Paris to serve as the county seat for Monroe County during this same time period.) The first county court met at a

⁴ Walter Williams, A History of Northeast Missouri, Vol. 1, (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Co, 1913) pp. 184-187.

⁵ Ibid, p. 186.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

house in Mexico, and the town was chosen as the Audrain County seat. The court made the decision “in consideration of the donation of certain lots and blocks to the county...block twenty-five was set aside for the courthouse square.”⁶ That property has been the courthouse square ever since.

The first county courthouse was not built on that lot, however. The first Audrain County courthouse was a two-room log building that was erected just across the street from the new county square in 1837. The log building, which measured 18 x 36 feet, included one room that was 22 feet long to serve as the courtroom and a general gathering place.⁷ It was noted in 1917 that the log building “not only served as a courthouse, but for all public meetings, religious worship, etc., for some years.”⁸

The new county prospered, and within a year the court authorized construction of a brick courthouse. (The log building had always been intended to serve only as a temporary courthouse.) The brick building was completed in 1840, and the log building was sold and put into private service.⁹ The second courthouse was a two-story brick foursquare building, placed in the center of the courthouse square. The courtroom was on the first floor and the second floor had offices and rooms sometimes used for lodge meetings. It was heavily damaged during the Civil War, when it was used as a barracks for Union troops.¹⁰

After the Civil War, county officials began making plans to replace the damaged courthouse. As was the custom, they visited other cities to learn options and seek inspiration. In 1868, they traveled to nearby Paris, Missouri to see the recently completed Monroe County courthouse. They liked that building so much that they hired its builder, Birt Edwards, to draw plans for a nearly identical structure to be built in Mexico.¹¹ Mr. Edwards did not get the construction contract, however; that went to Terrell and Hays of Macon.¹² That construction project came in under budget. The county spent just \$43,000 of the \$50,000 allotted for the new ten-room building. (See figure 6.) That third

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Marian M. Ohman, Encyclopedia of Missouri Courthouses, (Columbia: University of Missouri-Columbia, Extension Division, 1981) np.

⁸ Williams, p. 193.

⁹ The log building housed various businesses until the late 1880s or early 1890s, when it was replaced with a brick commercial building, per Williams, 193.

¹⁰ Ohman, Encyclopedia, np.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Old Building and Monroe’s Were Twins.” Mexico Evening Ledger 6 Oct. 1951, Memorial Courthouse Ed., p. 12.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

courthouse was widely popular and well-built; it was in service from 1868 to 1950.

The third courthouse was so popular, in fact, that citizens rebuffed efforts to replace it when the county was offered a substantial government grant for a new building in 1938. In 1938 the PWA (Public Works Administration) began encouraging local officials to apply for a matching grant to fund the construction of a new courthouse. The PWA would supply 45% of the construction costs, up to \$135,000, as long as the county passed a bond issue to fund the remainder of the cost. When the bond issue was put to a vote in 1938, it was soundly defeated, with a nearly 2-1 vote against the issue. (A vote of 2-1 in favor was required for passage.)¹³

Several factors may have contributed to that defeat, not the least of which was a very short public information campaign for the bond issue. Representatives of the PWA spoke to the local Kiwanis Club in early August 1938, and a month later the county announced that a vote would be held on the bond issue in just two weeks. A front page article in the Mexico Evening Ledger that announced the results of the vote listed a variety of reasons the issue did not pass, including some anti-government sentiments that could have been written in the 21st century:

Sentiment for the familiar building was evidenced in conversation and several open letters published in the Ledger...others consider the present building in sufficiently good condition to repair; while many opposed adding to their taxes, even though the government was donating the \$135,000. Some read into the vote criticism of the federal government in its continuance of the lending program which they felt 'will have to be paid back someday—maybe not by us but by our children and grandchildren'.¹⁴

County officials accepted the defeat, but apparently did not completely give up on the idea of replacing the old courthouse. In 1945, perhaps encouraged by a stronger economy, as well as the increasingly poor condition of the 1860s building, civic leaders revisited the idea of a new courthouse. Accounts of that second effort show a much more deliberate process. The county hired architects to do preliminary design work, appointed a large committee to consider possible designs, and gave more public notice of their

¹³ "Audrain Rejects \$165,000 Court House Bond Issue by a 2 to 1 Vote Tuesday," Mexico Weekly Ledger, 29 Sept. 1938, p. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

intentions. They also appear to have gained the support of the editor of the Mexico Evening Ledger; newspaper accounts of the process were decidedly in favor of the proposition, especially if the new building used traditional architectural styling.

In October, 1945, assisted by a loan from the Federal Works Agency, the county began working with an architect to develop preliminary courthouse plans.¹⁵ They engaged the St. Louis architectural firm of Bonsack and Pearce, who were later described in the local paper as “well known in this area where they have served as architects for many buildings, including the Mexico Savings Bank building.”¹⁶ The firm of Bonsack and Pearce was founded in 1921 by Frederick C. Bonsack III and Harvey J. Pearce. Both men had a solid background in architecture when they joined forces. Harvey Pearce had served as a draftsman with Eames and Young, and later worked in the office of Harry Hohenschield, who was the Missouri state architect for many years.¹⁷ Pearce would have learned about courthouse design while working for Hohenschield, who designed 11 Missouri county courthouses in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁸

Frederick C. Bonsack III learned his trade from his father. Frederick C. Bonsack Jr., began his career in the office of Jerome B. Legg, another architect with experience designing Missouri county courthouses.¹⁹ Frederick Bonsack Jr. developed a successful practice in St. Louis in the late 1800s, and designed several large buildings in the city before his death in 1917. Frederick Bonsack III worked in his father’s firm before going into the Navy in WWI, and joined forces with Pearce in 1921. The firm became Pearce and Pearce after Bonsack’s death in 1953, and later Pearce Corporation.²⁰

Although Bonsack and Pearce were based in St. Louis, they worked throughout the state, with a specialty in industrial, educational and government buildings. (See Appendix I for a partial project list.) By the time

¹⁵ “July 1 Set As Date For Bids On New Courthouse,” Mexico Evening Ledger, 5 June 1947, p. 1, and Audrain County Court Record Book M, p. 32, and Book N, p. 176.

¹⁶ “Bond Issue of \$500,000 Asked For County Memorial Building,” Mexico Evening Ledger, 14 Feb. 1946, p. 1.

¹⁷ Toft, Carolyn. “Frederick C. Bonsack, AIA (1859-1917).”

http://www.landmarks-stl.org/architects/bio/frederick_c_bonsack_aia_1859_1917/ accessed 2/27/2012.

¹⁸ Ohman, History of Missouri Counties, p. 123.

¹⁹ Ibid, 124. Legg designed 14 Missouri courthouses between 1885 and 1906.

²⁰ Carolyn Toft, “Frederick C. Bonsack, AIA (1859-1917),”

http://www.landmarks-stl.org/architects/bio/frederick_c_bonsack_aia_1859_1917/ accessed 2/27/2012.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

they were hired for the Audrain County project, they had a solid track record that included work on numerous public and private buildings in the mid-Missouri region. They were also experienced with courthouse design; three Missouri courthouses had already been built from their plans.²¹

Both of the principals were involved in the project. Frederick C. Bonsack, III was the point of contact with local officials and Harvey J. Pearce was involved in production of the construction documents. Richard L. Pearce, (relationship to Harvey J. unknown) did much of the actual drafting for the project, and all of the construction documents bear his seal.²²

Bonsack began working with the county on October 2, 1945, and by the end of the same year, proponents had gathered enough support to submit a petition to the county asking “that plans for a new courthouse be submitted to the people.”²³ In January 1946, the county court appointed a 20 member committee to work with the architects on plans for a proposed courthouse that could be presented for a special bond issue. The committee included residents of towns throughout the county, which no doubt boosted countywide support and communication.

The architects were apparently given explicit instructions about what the new Audrain County courthouse was to look like. A 1946 newspaper article about the bond issue indicates that promoters wanted to capitalize on the popularity of the 1860s courthouse by ensuring that its replacement would be of a comparable design. One article noted that “in 1938 there was a no-vote on a bond issue to build a new courthouse. By even 1938, it was more than obvious that the present structure was hopelessly dangerous and inefficient...and beloved for its stately colonial charm. It is this traditional beauty and charm which the architects were specifically directed to incorporate into the proposed 1946 building.”²⁴ Another article noted that the new design would “follow the colonial motif so widely popular in Audrain County rather than the less desirable modernistic design.”²⁵

The reference to “modernistic design” was no doubt directed at the many courthouses that had been built in Missouri in the 1930s with the help of the

²¹ Franklin County (1923), St. Francois County (1926), and Dade County (1932, from 1920s plans.)

²² The original construction drawings are on file with the Audrain County Clerk, Mexico, MO.

²³ “Court Names Group to Help Plan Courthouse,” Mexico Weekly Ledger, 10 Jan 1946: 1.

²⁴ “Date Set For Bond Issue Vote On New Memorial Courthouse.” Mexico Evening Ledger. 21 Feb. 1946, p. 1.

²⁵ “Bond Issue of \$500,000 Asked For County Memorial Building,” Mexico Evening Ledger, 14 Feb. 1946, p. 1.

National Register of Historic Places
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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

PWA and the WPA (Works Progress Administration.) Those federal programs, which were formed to stimulate the economy and provide jobs during the Great Depression, helped 19 of Missouri's 114 counties erect courthouses between 1930 and 1941.²⁶ PWA and WPA courthouses of the state typically featured clean lines and horizontal massing popular in contemporary architecture of the time. Building shapes were compact, and ornamentation generally featured Art Deco or extremely stylized classical motifs. Audrain County residents would have been familiar with at least one such building. The WPA courthouse closest to Mexico was located just a few miles south, in Callaway County. That building was completed in 1938 and is still in use. (See figure 8.)

Bonsack and Pearce followed the instructions of the Audrain County planning committee, and turned to the past for inspiration when he designed the proposed new courthouse. The preliminary design for the new courthouse shows a Neo-Classical Revival style building much more typical of early 20th century courthouses than any that had been built in the state in the previous 15 years. The design repeated many of the architectural elements of the 1860s building, including prominent triangular pediments on each elevation, and a tall central clock tower and cupola. (See figure 9.)

By the time Bonsack and Pearce were drawing the plans for the Audrain County Courthouse, the Neo-Classical Revival movement in architecture was decades old. As described by Fred Kniffen, buildings of the Neo-Classical Revival "are generally larger than those of the nineteenth-century Greek Revival and always simpler in effect than those of Beaux-Arts Classicism."²⁷ The Neo-Classical Revival movement began in the 1890s and became widely popular by the mid 1910s. It was particularly popular for large public buildings until the 1930s and 40s when cleaner lines and less direct Classical allusions began to find favor.²⁸ The planning committee was apparently pleased with the Neo-Classical design that the architects presented to them. A few weeks later, the court received another petition, this time asking that a \$500,000 bond issue be presented to the voters to fund a "New Memorial County Court House."²⁹

That article marks one of the first times the proposed new building was referred to as a memorial. After a long description of why the timing was good

²⁶ Ohman, History of Missouri Counties, p. 85.

²⁷ Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles, (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1996) p. 170.

²⁸ Alan Gowans, Styles and Types of North American Architecture, (New York: HarperColins, 1993) pp. 244-150.

²⁹ "Bond Issue of \$500,000 Asked For County Memorial Building," Mexico Evening Ledger, 14 Feb. 1946, p. 1.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

(the old courthouse was falling down and interest rates were low) as well as assurance that the new building would have “colonial” styling, the article concluded with a note about the memorial function: “Above all else, this building will serve to commemorate the sacrifices not only of those who gave their lives but also the service of the hundreds and thousands of young men and women in the preservation of the traditions on which Audrain County was established.”³⁰

Although there were some government grants available for memorial buildings in the early 20th century, the memorial label in Audrain County does not appear to have been tied to any specific funding. Although organizers were no doubt aware that a memorial designation would bolster public support for the project, it is also likely that they saw the project as a fitting way to honor county service members. As courthouse historian Marian Ohman observed, county courthouses are monumental by nature. “Courthouses are often the most significant architectural monuments in small counties and form the centerpiece of virtually every Missouri county seat.”³¹

Finally, in late March, 1946, Audrain County voters narrowly approved a \$500,000 bond issue to fund a new building. Just under a year later, Bonsack and Pearce had completed construction drawings, and the county was ready to call for bids. The request for bids was announced in a long article on the front page of the local paper, which included Bonsack and Pearce’s drawing of the proposed new building. (Figure 9.) The county court had approved plans presented by Bonsack, who encouraged them to call for bids. He claimed to have heard from interested contractors, and was quoted in the paper as saying “The only way to tell is to call for the bids.”³²

Bonsack was apparently referring to expected costs in that statement. There may have been some expectation that the bids could come in above budget. The plans and specifications included several alternates that could be used to reduce costs, including elimination of the tall central tower and the use of less expensive interior finishes.³³ Unfortunately for the county, the alternates did not go far enough to address cost issues. A few weeks later the local paper reported bad news for the county: “Too High to Even Submit, Bidders Inform Court.”³⁴ Although several contractors had considered the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Marian M. Ohman, “PWA and WPA Courthouses in Missouri,” Missouri Historical Review. Vol. 96, No. 2, 2002, p. 102.

³² “July 1 Set As Date For Bids On New Courthouse,” Mexico Evening Ledger, 5 June 1947: 1.

³³ Bonsack and Perce, Specifications for the building, on file with the Audrain County Clerk.

³⁴ Ibid.

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project, all declined to bid on the job, saying there was no way the building shown in the plans could be built for the \$500,000 approved by voters. They encouraged the county to either reduce the scope of the project or raise more money for construction. Presiding Judge C. M. Fox didn't see either of those as being a viable option. "We have a duty to build a courthouse. We don't want to reduce the size of it and we have no way of raising more money."³⁵ The bidders sympathized, but saw no solution. "You're between the devil and the deep blue sea," one of the construction men told the court. "If you can't increase the funds, nor reduce the building, you're in a terrible fix."³⁶

Bonsack did not offer much in the way of options, noting that construction costs had leveled off and he did not expect prices to fall for at least a few years. It is unclear if the firm had a poor grasp of expected costs, or if the county chose to ignore their advice during the planning process. (Since the architects were the professionals in charge, the former seems more likely.)

The county apparently put things on hold for a while to see if they could get favorable bids at a future date. A newspaper article published a year and a half later shows that the project was still stalled. The county had been working with the architects since the first set of plans failed to draw a bid, but apparently made few substantive changes. Bonsack was quoted as saying that expected costs had risen to \$850,000, and that was without the central clock tower. His suggestion for moving the project along was a bit simplistic: "we suggest that it might be well to submit an additional bond to the voters this spring."³⁷

The county court, no doubt remembering how difficult it had been to get the first bond issue passed, finally began paring down the scope of the project. It appears that they chose practicality over sentiment during that process. The revised plans yielded a building that has the size and features they had originally requested, with a more streamlined exterior and relatively simple interior finishes.

The architects did not simply peel away ornamental features for the new design, however. The revised detailing appears to have been carefully considered, and at least partially influenced by the mid-century modern styling that had by then been used on county courthouses and other public buildings for nearly two decades. Although the building is roughly the same size and

³⁵ "Offer No Bids At Courthouse Letting Today," Mexico Evening Ledger, 1 July 1947, p. 1.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Court Checks On Courthouse Construction," Mexico Evening Ledger, 17 Feb. 1949, p. 1.

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shape as originally planned, the exterior design has cleaner lines and more horizontal massing. (See figures 6 and 9.)

The original design included a high basement and a small cornice at the first floor, which together acted as a visual base for the uninterrupted expanse of the upper floors. That vertical emphasis was continued by the triangular pediments of the entrance porticos, which projected up above the rooflines, as well as the slender central clock tower and cupola.

The revised design has a more horizontal emphasis that makes the building look wider and more massive. The cornice at the top of the second floor makes the lower two stories read as the bulk of the building, while the third floor looks more like a parapet than an additional story. The revised entrance porticos are also lower, with heavy square columns topped by horizontal entablatures instead of soaring pediments. The designers were able to maintain a reference to the popular clock tower and cupola, if not the actual structure. Each doorway into the building is topped by a clock in an octagonal stone frame, and the central space that would have been lit by the windows of the cupola now features an art glass skylight. (See figure 10.)

The revised plans apparently addressed the expected cost overruns, and the court finally received bids they could afford. In 1950, four years after the bond issue was passed, and more than a decade after the project was first discussed, construction began. The Columbia-based Epple Construction Company was awarded the contract for the project, which ended up totaling \$600,000. It is not clear where the extra \$100,000 came from, but there were no more bond issues. The county may have financed the extra with payments from its operating funds.

The new building was completed in October, 1951 and dedicated with all the pomp and ceremony one would expect. The elaborate grand opening celebration included a parade, tours of the building and speeches by numerous dignitaries. Gold Star parents were given a place of honor in the audience for the dedication addresses, which paid special homage to the fallen soldiers honored by the buildings construction. Brigadier General Richard M. Tindall was a featured speaker, as were representatives from the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the United Spanish War Veterans.³⁸

The civic element of the new building was also celebrated. Supreme Court Justice Frank Hollingworth gave a long speech commemorating the completion of the project. As a long time Audrain County Circuit Court Judge, he was aware of how long it had taken to get the project completed. He noted

³⁸ "Open Courthouse as County Memorial," Mexico Evening Ledger, 10 Oct. 1951, p. 1.

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that “For twenty five years I have dreamed of a new courthouse in Audrain County. Today, that dream is realized.”³⁹

Traditionalists must have come to terms with the revised designs, as the local paper had nothing but glowing praise for the new building. A special “Courthouse Edition” of the Mexico Evening Ledger included detailed descriptions of everything from how many tons of steel were used (135), to the number of “wiring outlets” (772). That edition also described locations of offices and other rooms in great detail, an account that shows the patterns of use for the building have changed very little since those descriptions were written in 1951.

The circuit courtroom is still in use and even retains many original finishes as well as some furniture. No major county offices have left the building, and few have even changed rooms in the past 60 years. The only notable change of location is for the Assessor’s Office, which started in the southeast corner of the second floor and is now in the southwest corner of the first floor. (Many of the offices are actually in the same corner of the 1951 building that they occupied in the 1860s building.) The courthouse still houses almost all of the offices related to county government. It clearly reflects its long use as the seat of Audrain County government and as a memorial to Audrain County citizens who gave their lives in military service.

³⁹ “Complete Text of Speech by Judge Hollingworth,” Mexico Evening Ledger, 10 Oct. 1951, p. 11.

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Appendix. Partial List of Buildings Designed by Bonsack and Pearce

(By date of completion, where known)

1923 Franklin County Courthouse, Norman Howard of Bonsack and Pearce

1926 St. Francois County Courthouse, Norman Howard of Bonsack and Pearce

1927 Chillicothe City Hall, Chillicothe, Bonsack and Pearce

1929 Presser Hall, Ohio Northern University, (1926-1929) Bonsack & Pearce

1930 Masonic Temple, Kirksville, Bonsack and Pearce

1934 Dade County Courthouse, Bonsack and Pearce

1936 Ste. Genevieve High School, Ste. Genevieve, Bonsack and Pearce

1937 Daily Express Building, Kirksville, Bonsack & Pearce (built from 1930-1937)

1937 Washington School, Monroe City, Bonsack and Pearce

1937 Monroe City Elementary School, Monroe City, Bonsack and Pearce

1937 Addition to J. Milton Turner School, Kirkwood, Bonsack and Pearce

1938 Osage Hills School, Kirkwood, Bonsack and Pearce (Plus additions in 1944,
1951)

1950 Expansion of Central School, De Soto, F. C. Bonsack III, Bonsack and Pearce

1951 Audrain County Courthouse, Mexico, F. C. Bonsack III, Bonsack and Pearce

(built from plans begun in 1945.)

Mexico Savings Bank, Mexico, Bonsack and Pearce (Before 1946)

First Baptist Church, Fulton nd

Kingshighway Methodist Church, St. Louis, nd

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Audrain County Courthouse
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SOURCES

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"Bond Issue of \$500,000 Asked For County Memorial Building." Mexico Evening Ledger. 14 Feb. 1946, p. 1.

Bonsack and Pearce Inc. "Courthouse, Audrain County, Mexico, Missouri." Construction documents on file with the Audrain County Clerk, March 15, 1950.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

Verbal Boundary Description

A full city block in Mexico Missouri, bounded by West Monroe Street on the north, North Jefferson Street on the east, West Jackson Street on the south, and North Washington Street on the west.

Boundary Justification

The current boundaries encompass all of the land currently and historically associated with the building.

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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

Photo Log

Name of Property:	Audrain County Courthouse
City or Vicinity:	Mexico
County:	Audrain
State:	Missouri
Name of Photographer:	Debbie Sheals
Date of Photographs:	May 26, 2011
Location of Original Digital Files:	29 S. Ninth St. #204 Columbia, MO 65201
Number of Photographs:	15

List of Photographs

See Figures 1-4 for indications of camera angles.

1. North wall.
2. Northwest corner, with memorials.
3. Southwest corner, with Statue of Liberty.
4. Southeast corner, with water fountain.
5. Northeast corner, with headstone.
6. Detail, east entrance.
7. First floor looking north.
8. Second floor, looking south to first floor.
9. Second Floor, courtroom.
10. Rotunda, Third floor, looking east.
11. Third floor, Prosecuting Attorney's Office.
12. Upper rotunda, looking west.
13. First floor, from upper rotunda.
14. South stair and rotunda railing detail, from third floor.
15. Lower level, west hallway.

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Figures.

1. Site Plan.
2. Basement Plan.
3. First Floor Plan.
4. Second Floor Plan.
5. Third Floor Plan.
6. 1950s Postcard Views of the Courthouse.
7. Photo of the third county courthouse, taken in the 1940s.
8. WPA County Courthouses in Missouri.
9. Proposed design, drawn by Bonsack and Pearce.
10. Original Construction Drawings by Bonsack and Pearce, March 15, 1950, excerpts from Sheet 3.
11. 1950 Sanborn Map, showing the current building.

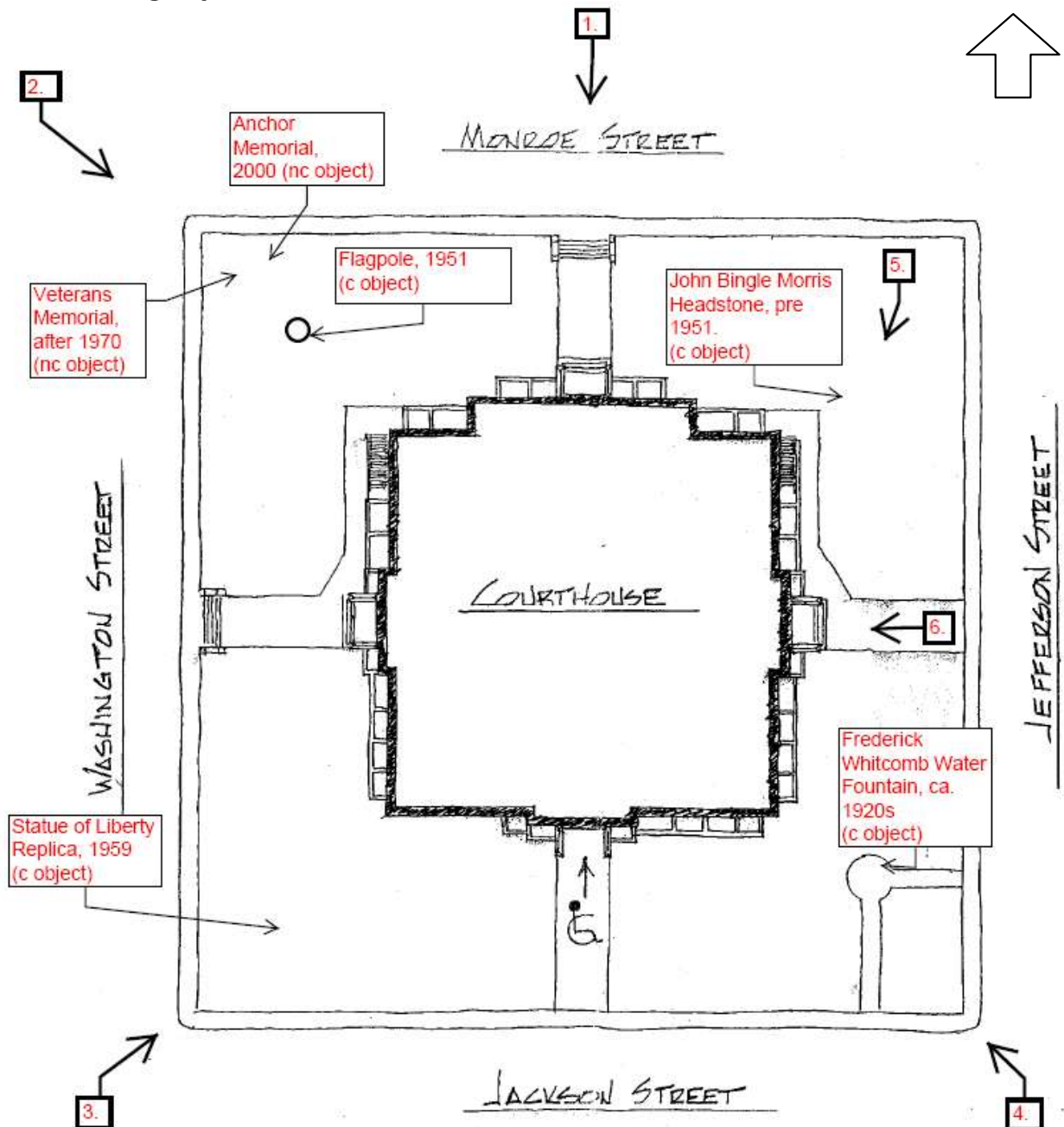
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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

Figure 1. Site Plan, with photo key for exterior photos.
Plans by Michael P. Kettlekamp, Architect, Hannibal, MO.

Resource Count: 1 contributing building, 4 contributing objects, 2 non-contributing objects.

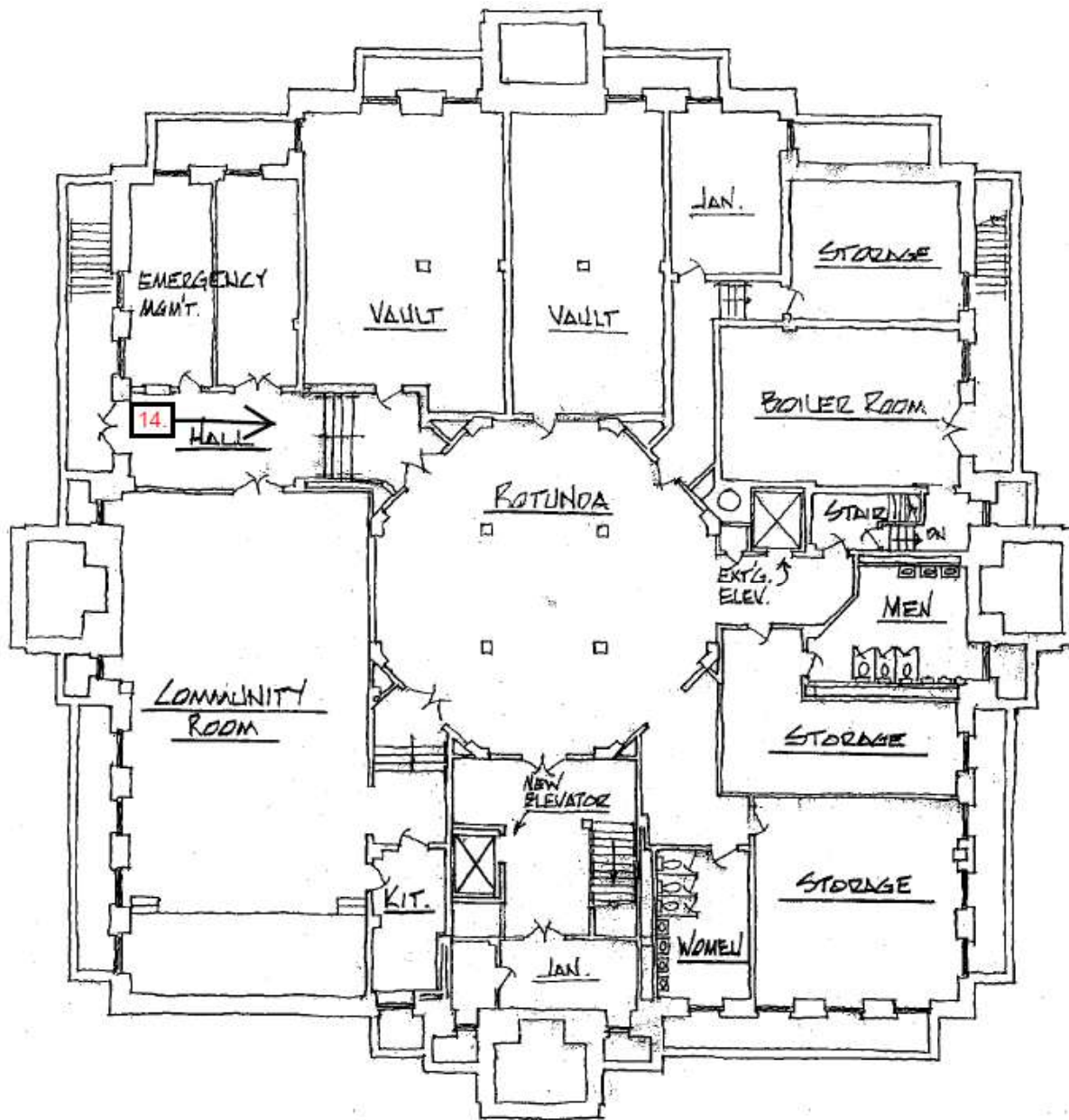


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Audrain County, Missouri

Figure 2. Basement Level Plan, with photo key.
Plans by Michael P. Kettlekamp, Architect, Hannibal, MO.

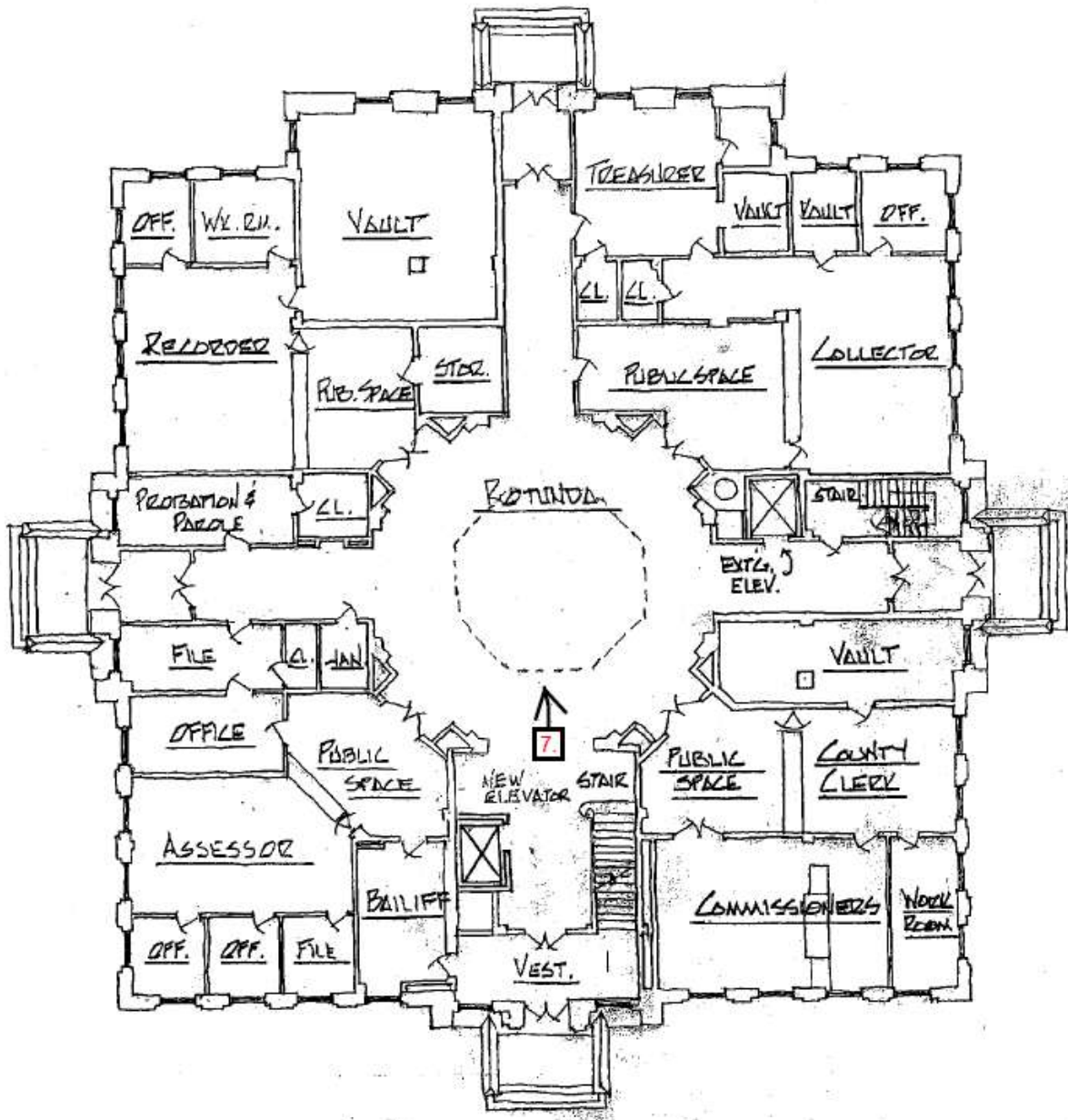


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Figure 3. First Floor Plan, with photo key.
Plans by Michael P. Kettlekamp, Architect, Hannibal, MO.

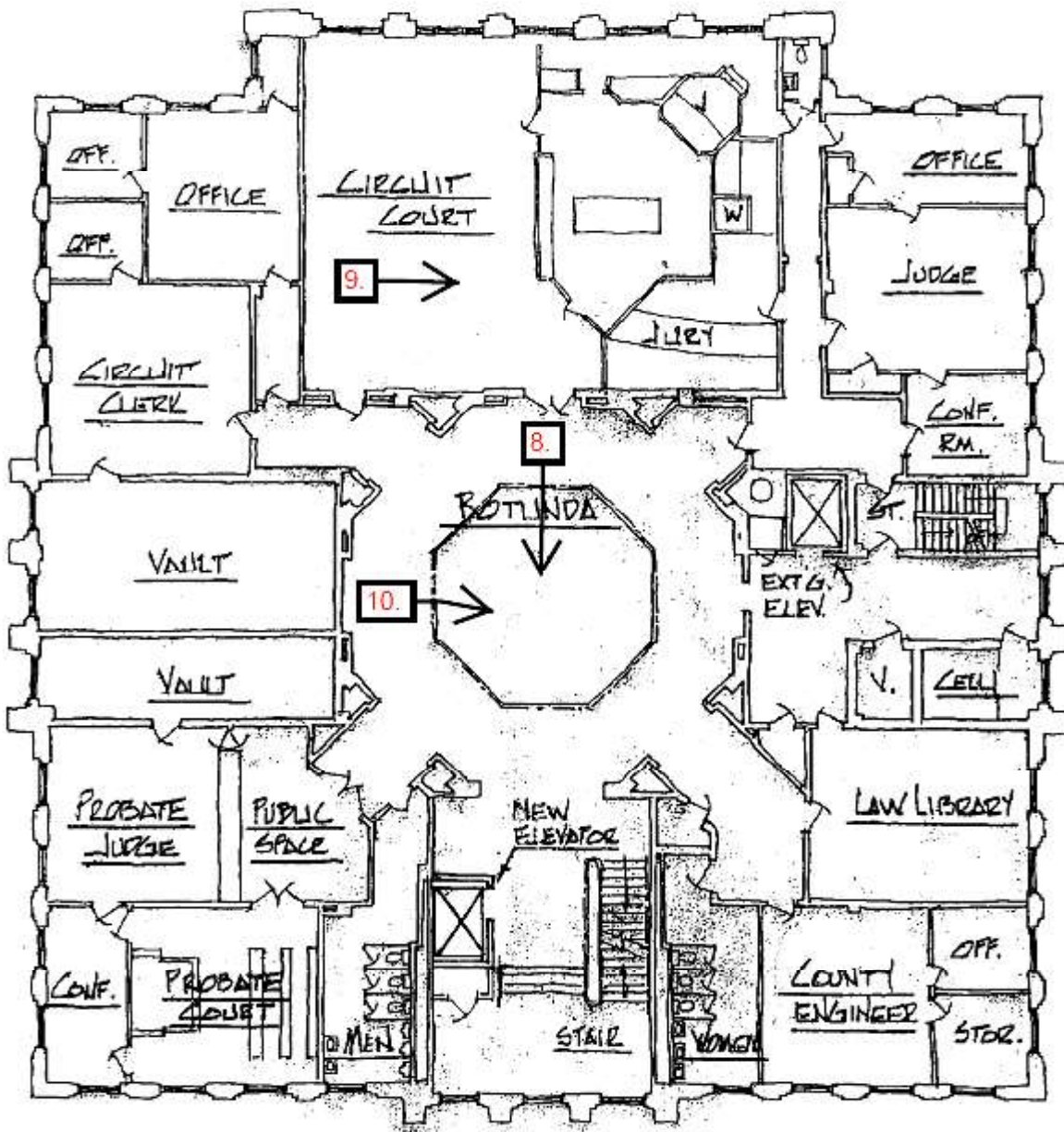


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Audrain County, Missouri

Figure 4. Second Floor Plan, with photo key.
Plans by Michael P. Kettlekamp, Architect, Hannibal, MO.

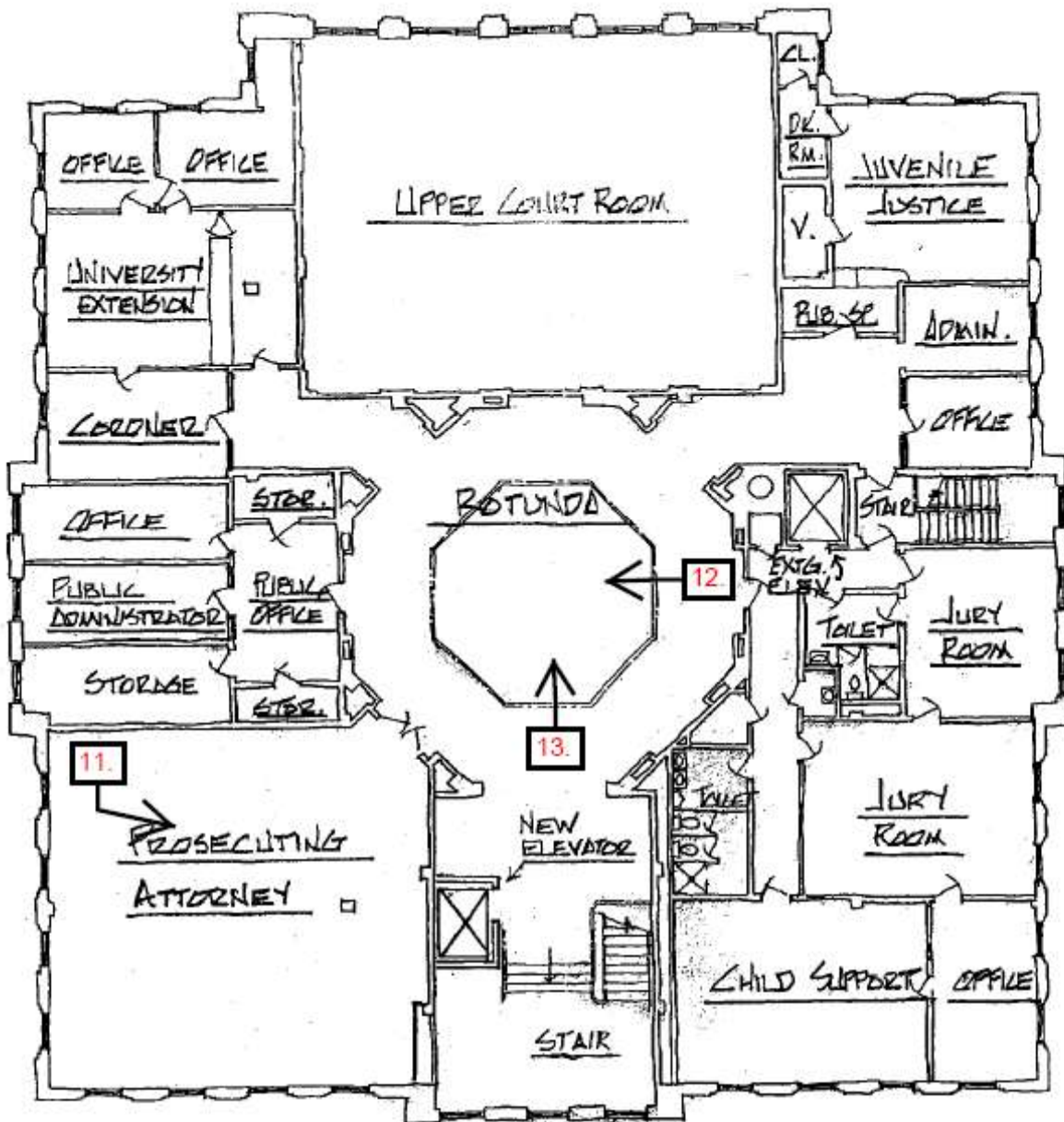


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Audrain County Courthouse
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Figure 5. Third Floor Plan, with photo key.
Plans by Michael P. Kettlekamp, Architect, Hannibal, MO.



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Audrain County Courthouse
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Figure 6. Postcard Views of the Current Courthouse, ca. 1950s. The top card has a postmark date of 1955; the bottom image is from an undated card. (Cards on file with Debbie Sheals.)



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Figure 7. The 1860s Courthouse, photo taken in the 1940s.
From: Mexico Chamber of Commerce, "Mexico Photo Tour."
<http://www.mexico-chamber.org/Gallery.aspx?PID=20> Accessed 3-2-2012



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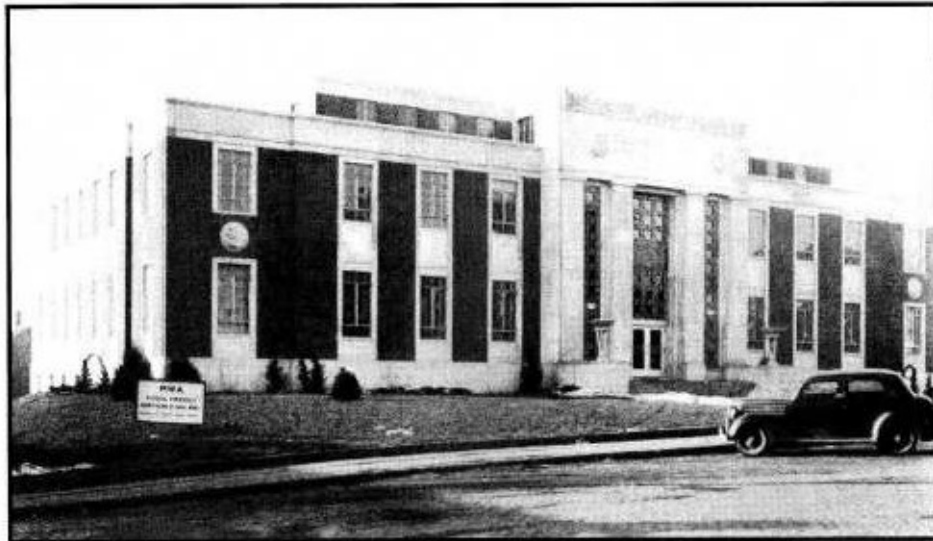
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Audrain County Courthouse
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Figure 8. WPA Courthouses in Missouri, both completed in 1938.

Top: Callaway County. Bottom: DeKalb County.

From Marian M. Ohman, "PWA and WPA Courthouses in Missouri." Missouri Historical Review.
Vol. 96, No. 2, 2002.



Courtesy Trenton Boyd

State Historical Society of Missouri

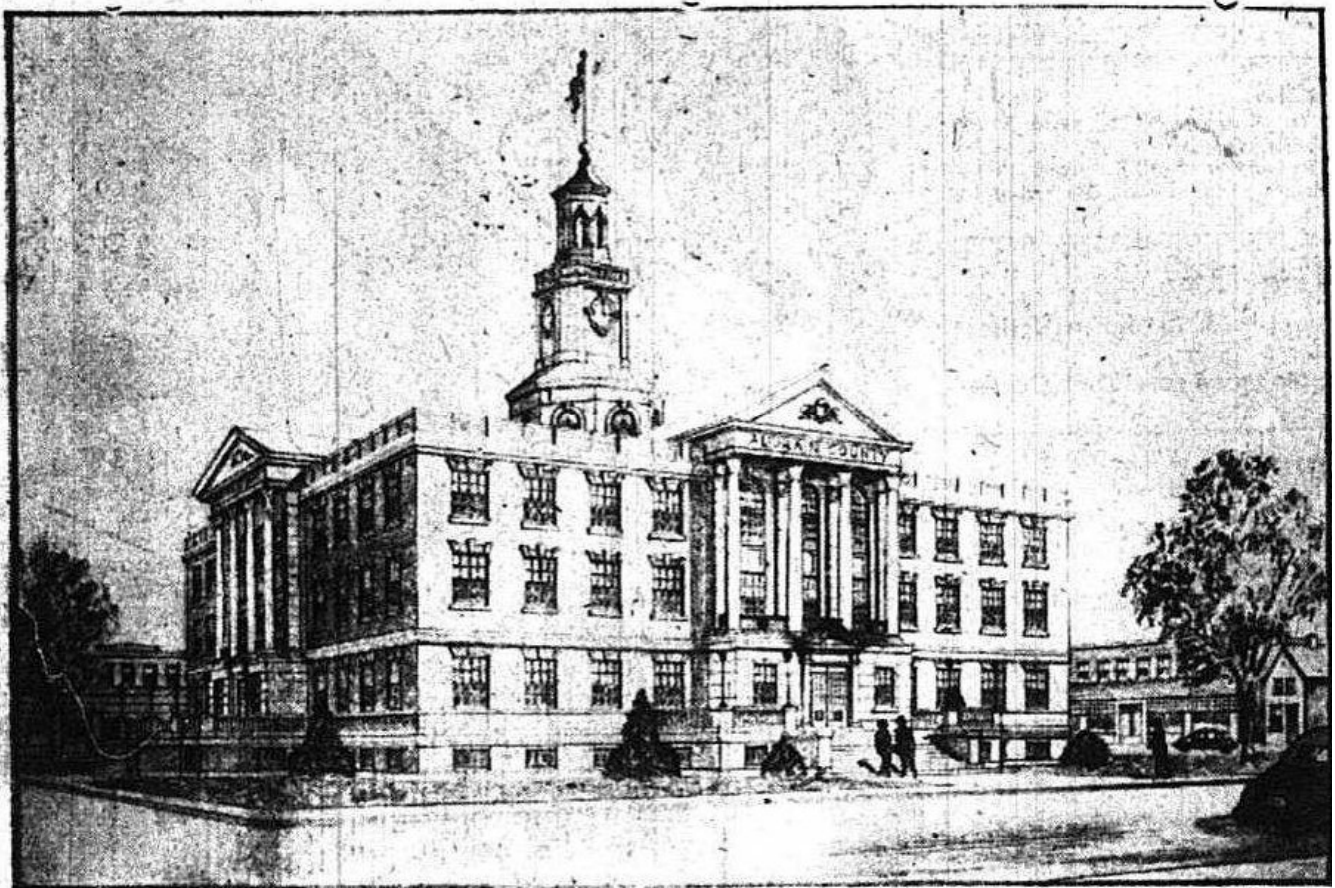


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Figure 9. Proposed Design for the Audrain County Courthouse, prepared by
Bonsack and Pearce, ca. 1946.
From: "July 1 Set As Date For Bids On New Courthouse." Mexico Evening Ledger. 5 June
1947: 1.

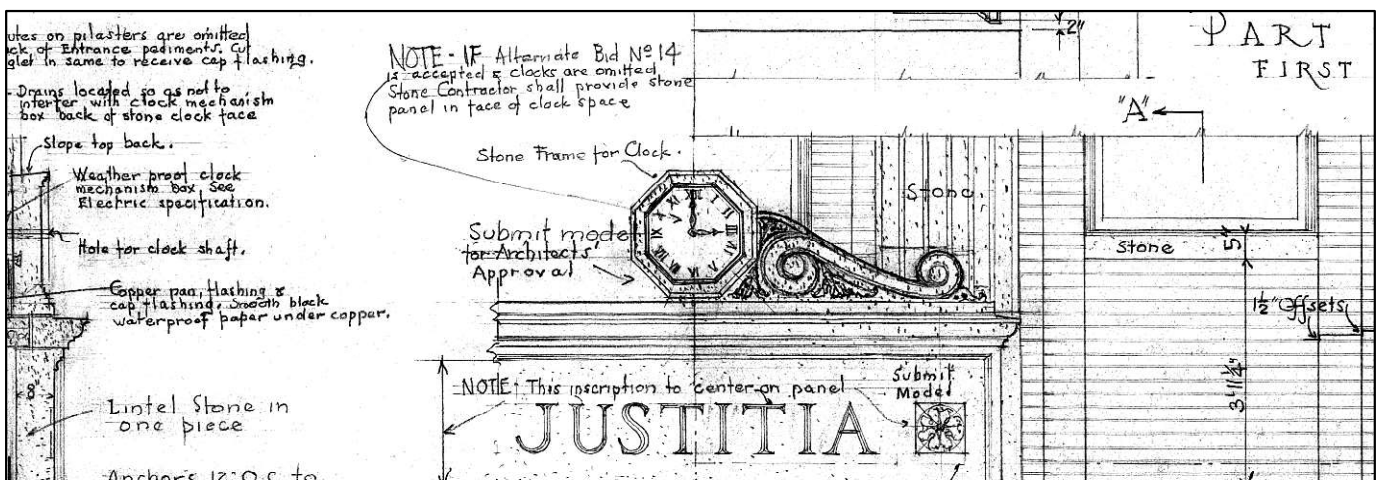
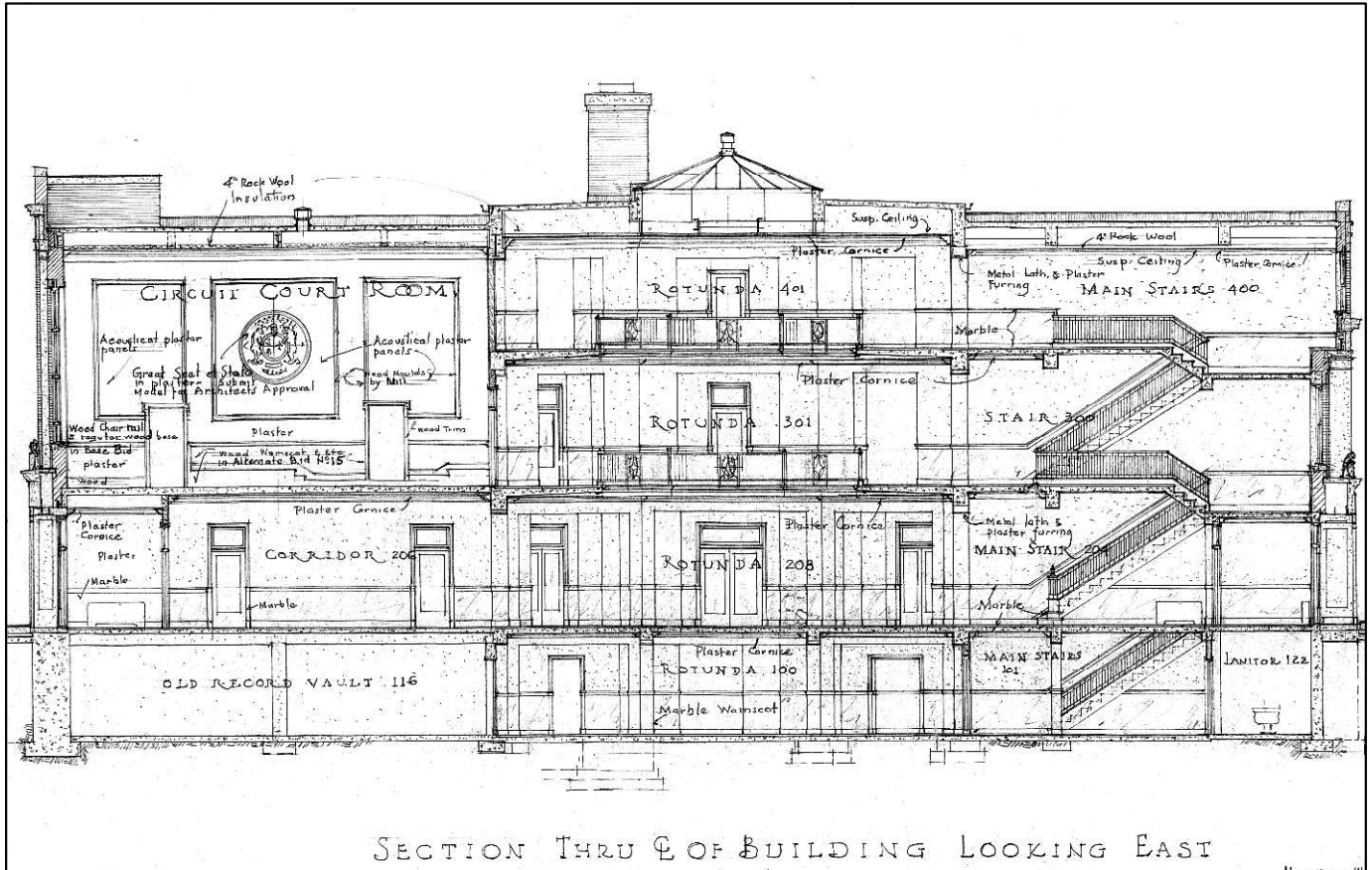


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Audrain County Courthouse
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Figure 10. Excerpts from the Original Construction Drawings by Bonsack and Pearce, March 15, 1950. Top—cross section; bottom, clock detail.

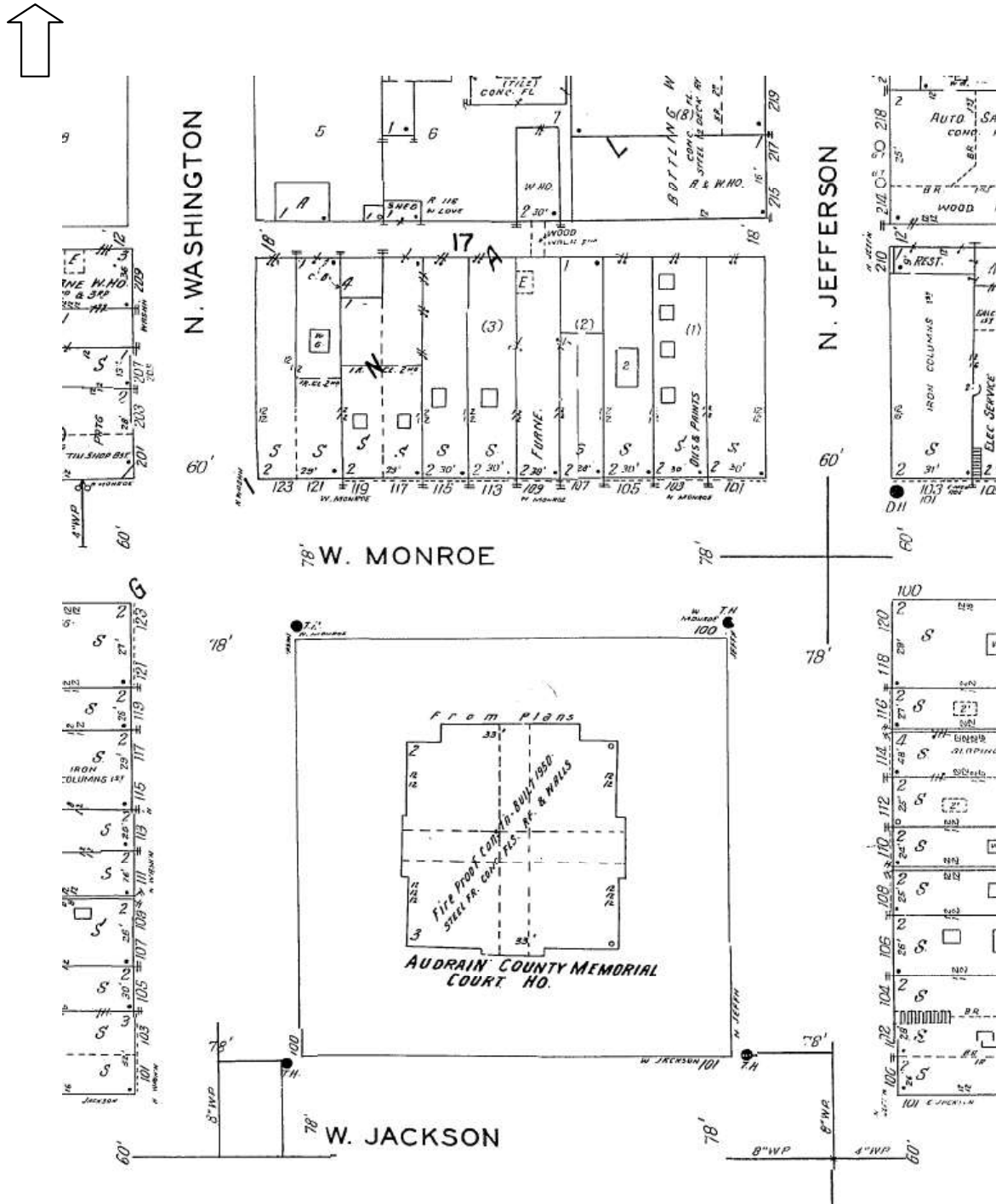


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Audrain County Courthouse
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Figure 11. 1950 Sanborn Map of Square and the New Courthouse.

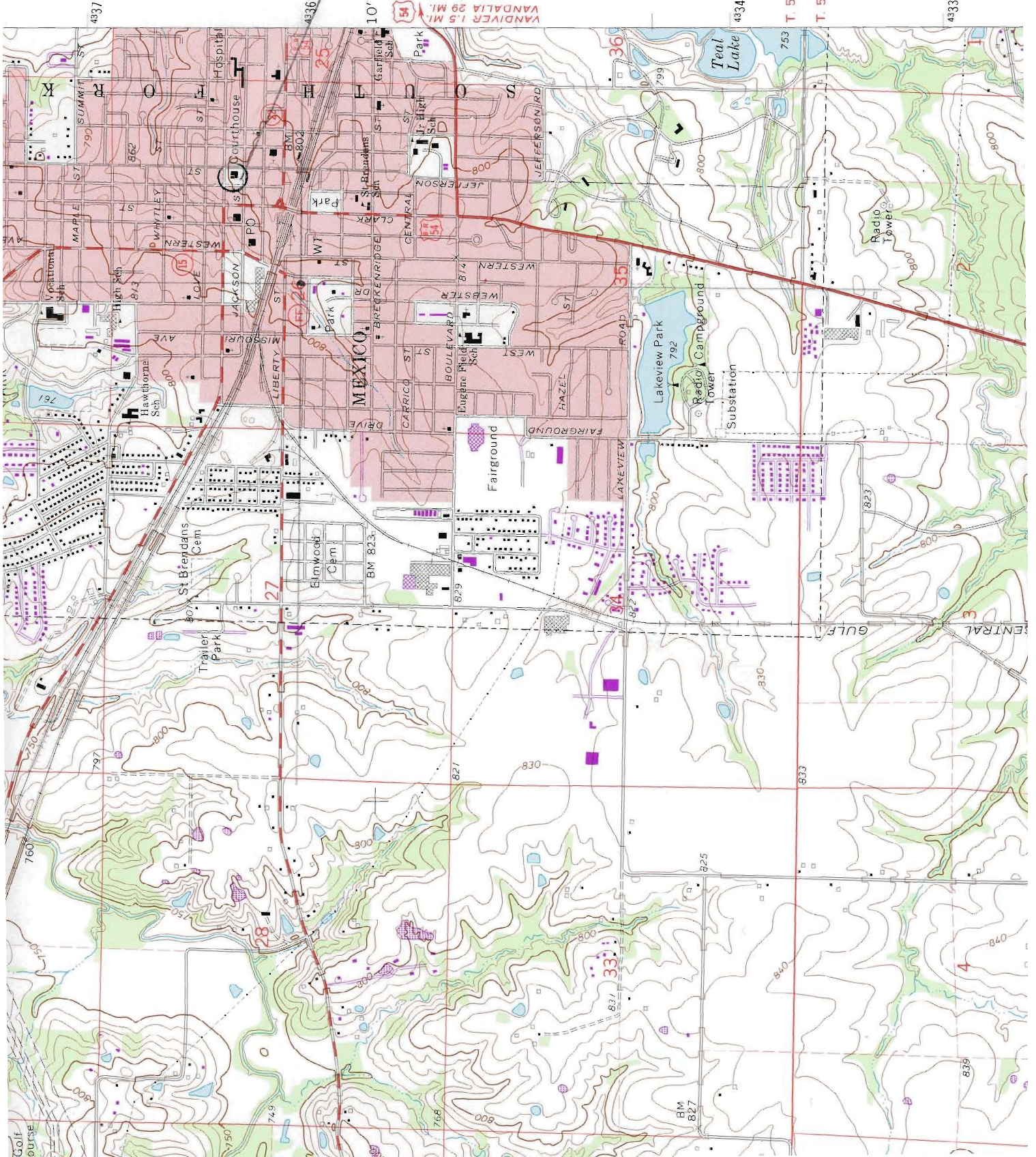


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Audrain County Courthouse
Audrain County, Missouri

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