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 IRMA SHOFFER
 Clerk of the Court
 Jackson County, Ark.

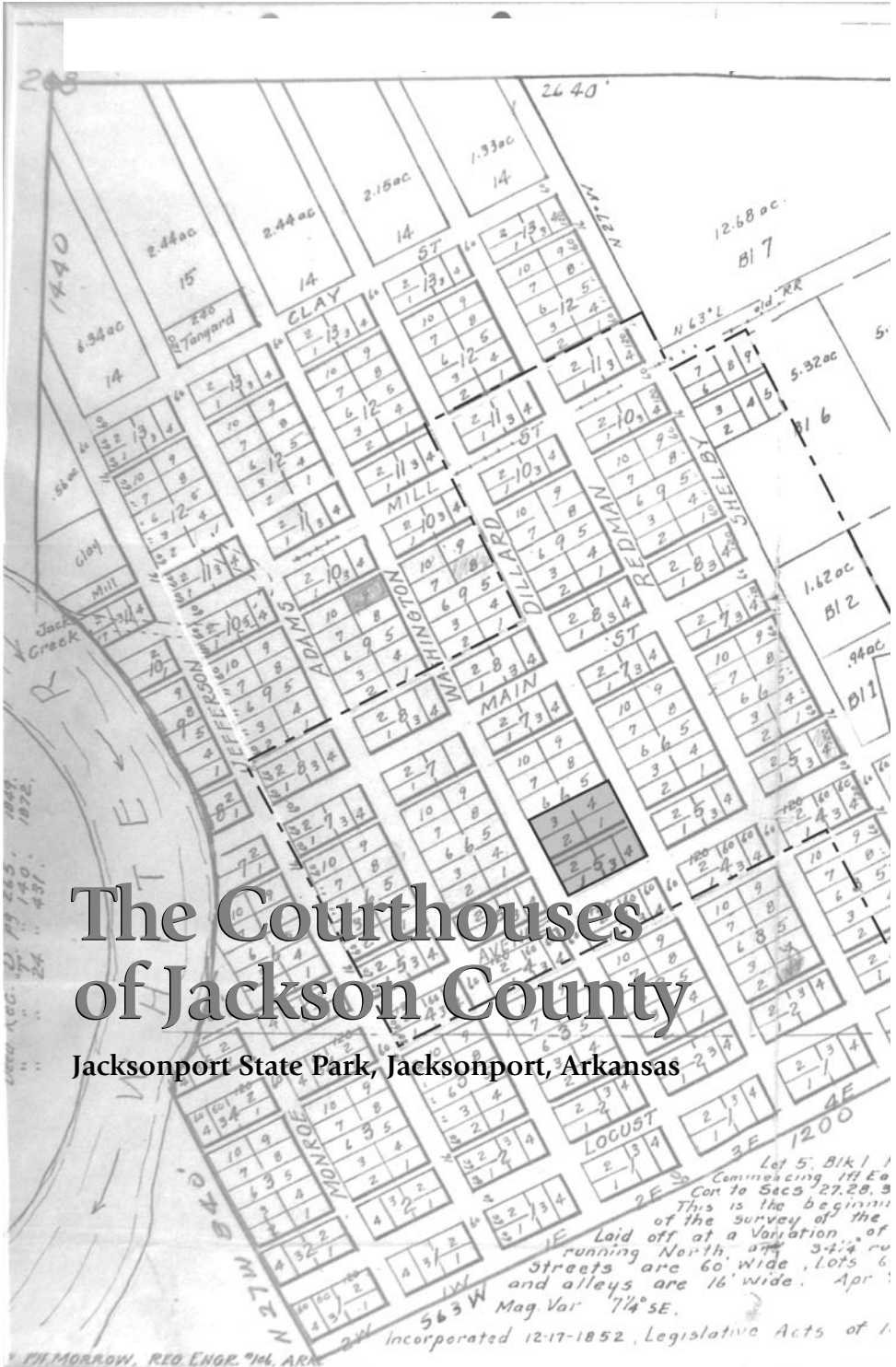


The Courthouses of Jackson County

Jacksonport State Park, Jacksonport, Arkansas

**JACKSONPORT,
 ARKANSAS**

Let 5, Blk 1 Range 5E.
 Commencing 1/4 East of
 Cor to Secs 27, 28, 33 & 34, 12-3,
 This is the beginning corner
 of the survey of the Town,
 Laid off at a Variation of 55 3/4°
 running North, and 3 1/4 running East.
 Lots are 60 wide, Lots 60 x 120.
 Alleys are 16 wide. Apr 9, 1872.
 7 1/4 SE.
 1852, Legislative Acts of 1852, pg 244.



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*Jacksonport State Park would like to thank the Jackson County Historical Society
for their assistance in producing this publication.*

*Notice: To preserve scenic beauty and the ecology, fences and warning signs have not been
installed in some park locations. Caution and supervision of your children are required while
visiting these areas.*



The Courthouses of Jackson County, Arkansas,

have varied histories. Jackson County was created in November of 1829, and for the first three years of the county's existence there was no official county courthouse. All county business was conducted in the home of one of its residents, Thomas Wideman. In 1832, a small wooden courthouse was built in Litchfield, the new county seat. However, due to the growing importance of river trade, the county seat was moved to the port town of Elizabeth seven years later in 1839. In Elizabeth a two-story Georgian court-

*Jacksonport Town Plat, 1872
(Jacksonport State Park and Jackson County Historical Society collection copy)*



The Courthouses of Jackson County, Arkansas



Detail showing courthouse, from 1872 Jacksonport Town Plat (Jacksonport State Park and Jackson County Historical Society collection copy)

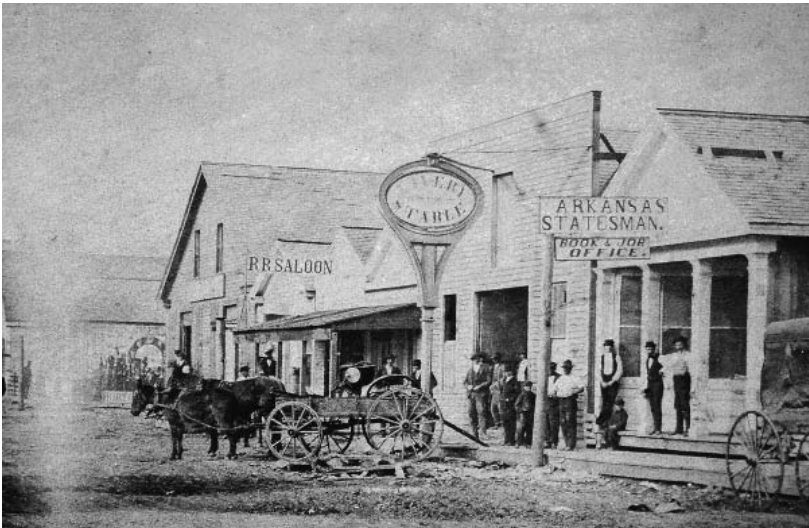
house was constructed of brick in 1842. Construction costs for the new courthouse totaled \$12,000. The building's proximity to the river, however, ultimately brought about its downfall. A devastating flood in 1844 severely undercut the riverbank, washing away half of the town. Proposals were made to move the county seat, and in 1852 Augusta became the new county seat.¹ This only lasted for one year; in July of 1853 the county seat was again moved. The new county seat was Jacksonport, a town located two miles upstream from Elizabeth, at the confluence of the Black and White Rivers.² Jacksonport, which had been founded by Thomas Todd Tunstall about 1834, was a busy port where steamboats from New Orleans,

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St. Louis, and Memphis transferred their cargo to smaller boats, which were better able to navigate the shallower waters of the upper Black and White Rivers.

In 1854, William W. Tunstall deeded eight lots in the town of Jacksonport to the county for use as a public square. A motion was made in 1855 during the August term of the court to build a courthouse, but it was defeated by a unanimous vote.³ On January 17, 1857, a petition was presented requesting a special tax be levied for the building of a courthouse.⁴ In 1861, a tax of one-quarter of one percent was levied and the revenues were placed into a fund for the construction of a new courthouse.⁵ However, in October 1861, the money from this fund was distributed to vol-

Jacksonport Street Scene, circa 1870s (Jacksonport State Park and Jackson County Historical Society collection photo)



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unteers in the Confederate Army and their families to help feed and clothe them.⁶ Throughout this period of having no official courthouse, court was held in large buildings or warehouses, which were rented. A one-story wooden residence served as offices for the county clerk. Payments of rent are noted in the county records, "Court rooms were rented in the Ellenburg Building, owned by Lackington R. Clay at \$300 per annum."⁷

A motion to build a courthouse was finally passed in August of 1868.⁸ The court appointed Harrison Dwinal, Jerry Green, and W.K. Patterson, Esquires, as commissioners to furnish plans and specifications.⁹ The sheriff, Riley Kinman, was ordered to place advertisements in local and regional newspapers calling for bids to be received until January 1, 1869.¹⁰ The deadline was later extended to the thirteenth of January.¹¹ At three o'clock on January thirteenth the contract for building the courthouse was awarded to Thomas Cox and John A. Schnabel, who was an engineer and served as a colonel in the Confederate Army.¹²

It is ordered by the court that the contract for the court house heretofore made, be and the same hereby awarded to J.A. Schnabel and Thomas Cox for the sum of \$27,760.00, they being the lowest and best



Colonel John A. Schnabel, builder of the Jacksonport Courthouse (Jacksonport State Park and Jackson County Historical Society collection photo)

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*bidders therefore and having entered into bond in the sum of \$55,520.00.*¹³

ARCHITECTURE

During the reign of Napoleon III (1852–1870) a new and distinct form of building was lining the streets of Paris as a result of a construction campaign by the emperor. Known as the Mansard style, its most distinctive feature was the sloped and steep edges of the roof. This form of architecture was also known as Second Empire named after the Bonapartist reign of Napoleon III.

The style was introduced to America soon after the Paris Exhibition in 1855. The functionality of the design allowed for the use of a full upper story of attic space. The style was immensely popular for new construction as well as for the remodeling of older dwellings.

The Northeasterners and Midwesterners were very keen on this new architectural form and many buildings were constructed in these areas applying this new style. In the South there are very few buildings that made use of this form. Bracketed cornice board, double doors with glass panels, paired windows, porthole dormer, eyebrow-like elements, cast iron lintels, and tall chimneys while all very pleasing to see are very expensive to build.

Brick used in the construction of the courthouse was made in a Jack-



Distinctive architectural features of the Jacksonport Courthouse include an arch theme in the cast-iron lintels and fanlight above the doors and windows and in the window alcoves. (Photos by Jay Miller, ADPT)



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sonport brick kiln owned by Schnabel.¹⁴ In May 1869, Schnabel proposed to the court that the foundations be raised two feet at an extra cost of \$3,890.¹⁵ The proposal was approved, and the work was to be completed by September 1, 1869.

Construction on the courthouse began. Early in 1871, the committee of inspectors, comprising associate justices C.S. Dudley, J.E. Wilmans, Green Brandenburg, Williamson Davis, S.A. McFadden, B.F. Sutherland, and Elijah C. Branch, presented their findings:

*...with but a few exceptions of soft brick in the inside wall, which the committee does not think will be any material injury to said building, that the work has been completed in accordance with the contract and specifications in a substantial and workmanlike manner, so far as it has progressed.*¹⁶

Construction continued through to April 17, 1871, when it was stopped for lack of funds; it resumed on July 24, 1871.¹⁷ The building was completed on December 24, 1872. According to payments found in court records, the total cost of the courthouse was \$40,412.47.¹⁸

The Jacksonport Courthouse enjoyed usage beyond typical courthouse functions. Not only did the courthouse serve as the civic center for the community, but it also was a place for political speeches and community functions. The Grand Fair was held

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there in 1873, and many Mardi Gras balls were hosted in the courtroom.

Jacksonport Herald newspaper,
March 5, 1881:

*As has been the custom for several years past, Mardi Gras day was duly celebrated by the citizens of our town... Shortly after dark the crowd continued to assemble at the court house which had been tastefully arranged for the occasion, and the dancing commenced and fun and frolic reigned supreme until the wee a.m. hours.*¹⁹

The courthouse also functioned as a place of safety and refuge for Jacksonport residents during the frequent overflows of the White River.²⁰

After the fire destroyed many of the homes and businesses along Jefferson Street in 1888, a movement began for a fireproof vault to be added to the courthouse in order to protect

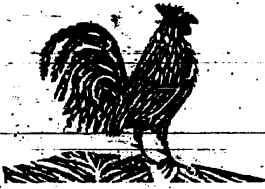
This cartoon drawn by Charles Hite depicts the struggle of moving the county seat to Newport. The tall man is Lancelot Minor who is in favor of moving it to Newport and the short man is Joe Bell, seeking to keep it in Jacksonport. Circa 1889 (Jacksonport State Park and Jackson County Historical Society collection artifact)

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Article from the Jacksonport Herald, November 11, 1882, about election results of moving the county seat to Newport.

JACKSONPORT, ARK

County Seat Election Returns.



This is our county seat rooster. We do not pride' ourself so much on his beauty as on his good qualities. He has been engaged in a fight with those Newport roosters for some time, and has his plumage somewhat disarranged, but is still able to crow, while his adversaries are very sick, and will hardly show themselves this week. The following figures will show what our bird is crowing so justly about.

Barren Township.	
Against Removal	71
For Removal	4
Village Township.	
Against Removal	19
For Removal	8
Richwoods Township.	
Against Removal	15
For Removal	1
Breckinridge Township.	
Against Removal	42
For Removal	32
Union Township.	
Against Removal	39
For Removal	345
Jefferson Township.	
Against Removal	198
For Removal	6
Cow Lake Township.	
Against Removal	7
For Removal	3
Cache Township.	
Against Removal (Barren's Chapel)	91
For Removal	15
Against Removal (McCall's Residence)	9
For Removal	13
Bird Township.	
Against Removal (Tuckerinn)	100
For Removal	18
Against Removal (Swift)	18
For Removal	44
Against Removal (Eggs)	59
For Removal	71
Total vote cast For Removal	511
Total vote cast Against Removal	518
Majority Against Removal	
By 7 votes	

important county documents. The vault addition was designed by Frank Doswell, a lawyer, and it was completed in 1888 by the original contractor, John A. Schnabel.²¹

The same year of the courthouse's completion, 1872, the people of Jacksonport were approached by the Cairo and Fulton Railroad (later named the Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad and then the Missouri Pacific Railroad), regarding the laying of tracks in the town. The railroad offered the extension of the tracks through the town, a sidetrack, and a depot in exchange for \$25,000. But due to their great confidence in steamboats and the commercial importance of Jacksonport, the people of Jacksonport declined, believing that the railroad would eventually be compelled to lay track in Jacksonport without being paid.^{22 23}

This rejection led to the downfall of Jacksonport. It was years later that a track was laid to Jacksonport by the White & Black River Valley Railway. It was too late as Newport, a small community six miles down river, had prospered from the railroad. With the railroad's entry into Newport came increased business. Citizens of Jacksonport gradually began moving to Newport, and the county seat was voted to be moved to Newport in 1891, where it still remains. The citi-

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zens of Jacksonport were reluctant to accept this fact, and they continued to conduct court in the Jacksonport courthouse for a period of time after the move, including sentencing the convicted persons to death and then enacting those sentences.²⁴

The courthouse building had various uses in later years. The building was used as a school for a period from 1896 until 1903.²⁵ In 1905 it was used as a cotton gin.

In December 1910 it was transformed into a county home also known as the "Jackson County Hospital" (Jackson County Poor House) for the sick, orphaned, poor, and aged. The building served this function for the next forty years with many changes being made to the building during this time period. During the 1999 restoration architects discovered evidence that a second staircase existed in the front of the courthouse. It was apparent that this original second staircase had been taken out to make room for two additional rooms to be used during the building's tenure as the Jackson County Hospital.

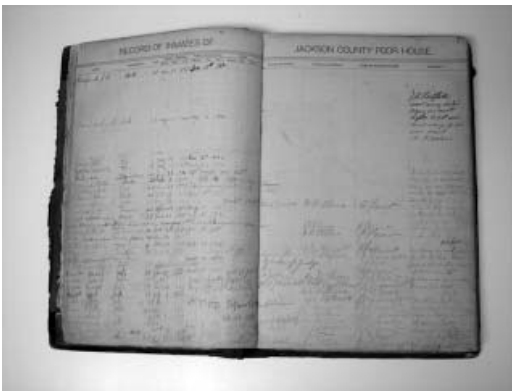
Above: Jackson County Courthouse, Newport, Arkansas circa 1900

Below: Jacksonport Courthouse used in 1905 as a cotton gin

(Jacksonport State Park and Jackson County Historical Society collection photos)



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Above: Courthouse used as the Jackson County Hospital, 1909–1953 (Jacksonport State Park collection photo)

Below: Jackson County Hospital register (Jacksonport State Park collection)

The courtroom itself was subdivided into eight bedrooms with a central hallway and the walls of these rooms did not reach the ceiling of the courtroom. These rooms were all used to house citizens who had fallen on hard times. The county hospital was moved to another location and from 1953 until around 1955 the building functioned as a grain storage facility.²⁶

EXCERPTS FROM THE JACKSON COUNTY HOSPITAL REGISTER:

- *Sam Monroe had Pelegra*

and became despondent and told Mrs. Pearly Mae she would never see him any more and left after night and a search was made for him and he could not be found he tld (told) Mike Hogan he was going to jump in White River. Left on November 11, 1917.

—A. J. Grant, Superintendent

- *Hospital Later—*

Sam Monroe was found in White River December 6, 1917. The coroner jury decided he took his own life by drowned.

—A. J. Grant, Superintendent

- *Miss Ruby Inez Mathews came to Jacksonport October 1, 1945 and was*

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kissed by Paul Jeffery for the first time, Sunday night the 14th of Oct.

"You know I thank I like that Jeffery."

• *U. A. Staggs age 58, wasnt allowed to lay in bed with shoes on, sent to aslum. (c. 1931) —C. W. Ford, Superintendent*

• *Ada Hedsick, age 34, was used to porter house steaks for breakfast she said she couldn't eat butter biscutts mol. An coffee for breakfast. (c. 1912) —J. C. Cochran, Superintendent*

Last entry and superintendent.

Earnest C. Dyke took charge July 21, 1953.

Below: Jacksonport Courthouse, circa 1950 (Jacksonport State Park and Jackson County Historical Society collection photos)



In 1954 the county judge sold the courthouse to R.D. Wilmans, Jr., Rex McCuistion, and Harrison Bennett for \$1,700.²⁷ They intended to use the building for grain storage and housing for itinerant Mexican laborers, but Jacksonport citizens objected. The building was then abandoned.



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Above: Jacksonport Courthouse, circa 1953

Below: Abandoned, circa 1961 (Jacksonport State Park and Jackson County Historical Society collection photos)



In 1961, through the inspiration and leadership of Lady Elizabeth Luker, a descendant of Thomas Todd Tunstall, the Jackson County Historical Society was formed with the intent of purchasing and restoring the building. The Courthouse, purchased by the Society in 1962, had deteriorated greatly during the years of abandonment. Windows were broken, doors carried away, and window sills removed to be sold for scrap iron.

Restoration of the courthouse occurred in 1963, and upon restoration the building functioned as a museum housing historical items of Jackson County. In 1965,



The Courthouses of Jackson County, Arkansas



*Above:
Jacksonport
courthouse after
the Jackson
County
Historical
Society
restoration circa
1965*



*Below:
Jacksonport
Courthouse,
circa 1972
(Jacksonport
State Park and
Jackson County
Historical
Society
collection
photos)*

legislative action transferred ownership of the courthouse to the Department of Parks and Tourism in order to establish Jacksonport State Park.

On March 1, 1997, an F-4 tornado one-half mile wide struck the town of Jacksonport. The tornado caused damage to the courthouse, including the destruction of several windows and doors, removal of parts of the roof of the building, large

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amounts of water damage, and the movement of the east exterior wall. Because of all of the damage, the court-



house had to undergo extensive renovation.

These renovations included installing a staircase to replicate the staircase described in the original documents of the courthouse and putting in a new floor modeled after how the original would have appeared. New exhibits for the museum were constructed to present Jacksonport history. In a sense, the tornado served as a catalyst for true historical investigation and restoration, which began in 1997.



Then on May 14, 2002, the courthouse museum had its grand re-opening. Attendees for the re-opening included Governor Mike Huckabee, Executive Director of Parks and Tourism Richard Davies, and Arkansas State Parks Director Greg Butts.



Damage to Jacksonport Courthouse from March 1, 1997, tornado (Photos by Mark Ballard)

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Top: Jacksonport Courthouse fully restored, June 2002

Below, left: Governor Mike Huckabee addresses the crowd at the Courthouse Grand Re-opening ceremony, May 14, 2002.

Right: At the restored courthouse volunteers in period costume portray life at Jacksonport during its heyday

(Photos by A.C. Haralson, ADPT)



The Courthouses of Jackson County, Arkansas

Timeline: Jackson County Courthouses

- 1829 Jackson County created.
- 1832 First Jackson County Courthouse, a wood frame structure, built in Litchfield, Arkansas.
- 1833 Thomas Todd Tunstall, one of the first steamboat pilots to venture up the White River, bought land and established the town of Jacksonport.
- 1839 County seat moved to Elizabeth.
- 1842 New load-bearing masonry courthouse constructed in Elizabeth. Brick was Georgian style and the building cost \$12,000.
- 1844 Flood in Elizabeth washed away large portion of the town.
- 1852 County seat moved to Augusta. **December 17:** Jacksonport incorporated.
- 1853 **July:** The county seat moved to Jacksonport.
- 1854 William W. Tunstall donates eight lots to Jacksonport for a public square.
- 1855 **August 27:** Motion made to build courthouse; motion denied unanimously.
- 1857 Petition circulated for the building of courthouse.
- 1861 **April 8:** 1/4 of one cent tax levied for purpose of building courthouse; however the Civil War started and the tax money was used as a relief fund during the war.
- 1868 **August 24:** Motion to build courthouse in Jacksonport finally passes.
- 1869 **January 13:** John Schnabel and Thomas Cox awarded bid for construction.
- May 27:** Schnabel proposes raising foundations two feet at cost of \$3,890; proposal approved.
- 1870 Thomas Cox requests release from contract; release granted.
- 1871 **April 17:** work stops due to lack of funds.
- 1872 Jacksonport approached by Cairo and Fulton Railroad regarding the railroad running a spur into the town. Jacksonport refused the railroad. **December 24:** Construction completed on Jacksonport Courthouse. Total estimated costs on the building range from \$40,412.47 (figure obtained from payments found in court records; these do not necessarily match the figures in the treasurer's records) to \$80,000.
- 1881 First election to move the county seat to Newport; measure is defeated.
- 1887 **January 26:** Decision made to build vault off of the county clerk's office for \$2000 (*County Record Book H*, Page 176). **October 10:** Frank Doswell chosen to design courthouse addition (*County Record Book H*, Page 196).
- 1888 **June 23:** Schnabel paid for vault construction (*County Record Book H*, Pages 333–334). **October:** Doswell paid \$125

The Courthouses of Jackson County, Arkansas

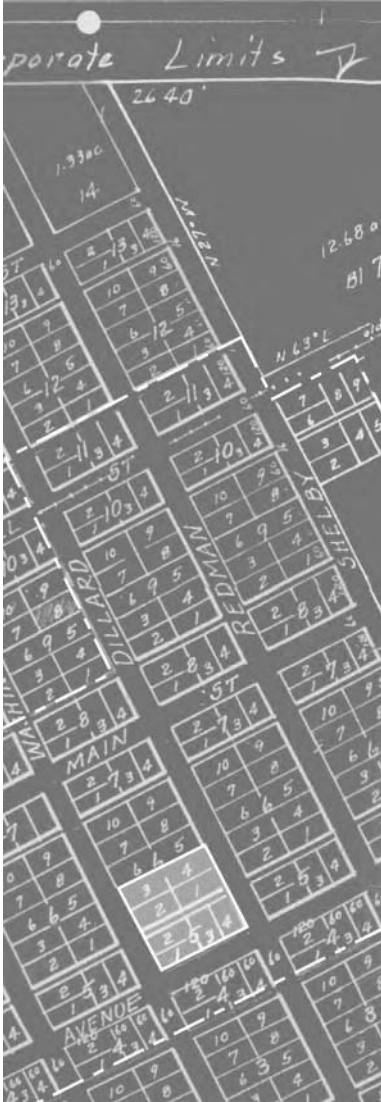
- for vault plans and specifications.
- 1891 Second election to move the county seat to Newport; measure passes.
- 1892 County seat moved to Newport because of shifting population due to railroad.
- 1895 Courthouse building used as school for 7 years.
- 1903 Building vacated for two years.
- 1905 Building used as cotton gin.
- 1910 Building transformed to County Hospital for sick, aged, poor, and orphaned. Used in this capacity for 43 years.
- 1950s Storm damages cupola; cupola removed (date of cupola's removal is widely disputed).
- 1953 County Hospital (Poor House) moved to Newport, Arkansas.
- 1954–55 Courthouse building used by area farmers to store grain.
- 1954 County judge sells building to R.D. Wilmans, Jr., Rex McCuiston, and Harrison Bennett for \$1,700.
- 1955 Building vacated for seven years, 1955–1962.
- 1962 Jackson County Historical Society purchases building with intent of restoration.
- 1963 Courthouse building opens as a museum.
- 1965 Courthouse transferred to Department of Parks and Tourism to establish Jacksonport State Park.
- 1970 Courthouse placed on National Register of Historic Places.
- 1997 **March 1:** Tornado hits Jacksonport, severely damaging the Jacksonport Courthouse Museum.
- 1997–98 Steelman, Connell & Moseley Architects plan a 1.5-million-dollar restoration.
- 1999–2001 Contractor, Jim Wood Company, restores Jacksonport Courthouse.
- 2001 Malone Displays, Inc. installs new museum exhibits in the Jacksonport Courthouse Museum.
- 2002 **May 14:** Governor Mike Huckabee speaks at grand re-opening ceremony of the Jacksonport Courthouse Museum.

The Courthouses of Jackson County, Arkansas

Bibliography

ENDNOTES:

- 1 *County Court Record Book 'A'*, page 199, entry dated April 12, 1852.
- 2 *County Court Record Book 'A'*, page 257, entry dated July 12, 1853.
- 3 *County Court Record Book 'A'*, page 395, entry dated August 27, 1855.
- 4 *County Court Record Book 'A'*, page 489, entry dated January 17, 1857.
- 5 *County Court Record Book 'All'*, page 191, entry dated April 8, 1861.
- 6 *County Court Record Book 'All'*, page 216, entry dated October 14, 1861.
- 7 *County Court Record Book 'B'*, page 134, entry dated October 15, 1868.
- 8 *County Court Record Book 'B'*, page 127, entry dated August 24, 1868.
- 9 *County Court Record Book 'B'*, page 132, entry dated September 1, 1868.
- 10 *County Court Record Book 'B'*, page 144, entry dated November 18, 1868.
- 11 *County Court Record Book 'B'*, page 152, entry dated January 13, 1868.
- 12 "John A. Schnabel: Builder of Jacksonport Courthouse," Lady Elizabeth Luker, January 1969.
- 13 *County Court Record Book 'B'*, page 152, entry dated January 13, 1869.
- 14 "John A. Schnabel: Builder of Jacksonport Courthouse," Lady Elizabeth Luker, January 1969, page 7.
- 15 *County Court Record Book 'B'*, page 176, entry dated May 27, 1869.
- 16 *County Court Record Book 'B'*, page 357, entry dated February 3, 1871.
- 17 *County Court Record Book 'B'*, pages 383 & 398, entries dated April 7, 1871 and July 24, 1871.
- 18 From notes of Lady Elizabeth Luker from county records, January 1969. There are other cost estimates for the construction of the building. The Jacksonport State Park Date History timeline estimates total construction costs as being \$50,000. A *Rural Arkansas* article dated June 1962 states building costs as being \$80,000. Yet another article, this one by Lady Elizabeth Luker written in March 1975 for a publication of the Arkansas Association of County Judges estimates \$70,000 for building costs, "including furnishings."
- 19 *The Jacksonport Herald*, March 5, 1881.
- 20 "The Jacksonport Courthouse," Lady Elizabeth Luker, March 1975.
- 21 Controversy exists as to the exact date of the fire. Two sources (handwritten notes entitled "Jacksonport Court House Museum" and a timeline entitled "Jacksonport State Park Date History" shows the fire occurring in 1888. However, Lady Elizabeth Luker's "The Old Courthouse at Jacksonport" dates the fire as 1882.
- 22 "A River Town: Jacksonport," Elizabeth Gregg Patterson, found in the Jackson County Historical Society's publication *The Stream of History*, page 7.
"Jacksonport, Arkansas: Then and Now," internship project of Claudia Reese, page 4. Also Jacksonport State Park Date History timeline.
- 23 "Jacksonport, Arkansas: Its Rise and Decline," masters thesis of Mabel West. May 1950. Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas.
- 24 Multiple sources of Lady Elizabeth Luker's tell of this story. Among them, her "Courthouses of Jackson County, Arkansas," and "Old Courthouse at Jacksonport" (page 15).
- 25 "The Old Courthouse at Jacksonport," Lady Elizabeth Luker. Also Jacksonport State Park Date History timeline.
- 26 The end date of the hospital's tenancy is debated. Handwritten notes entitled "Jacksonport Court House Museum" and Claudia Reese's project both show the hospital being housed in the courthouse through "the late 1940s," and place grain storage in the building through 1955. However, all of Lady Elizabeth's pieces have the hospital located in the courthouse through 1953. The Jacksonport State Park Date History timeline has the hospital moving in 1949, when grain storage begins.
- 27 *A Survey of the Articles in the Jacksonport Courthouse Museum, Carriage House, and Steamboat*, Lady Elizabeth Luker, Newport, AR, 1990.



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