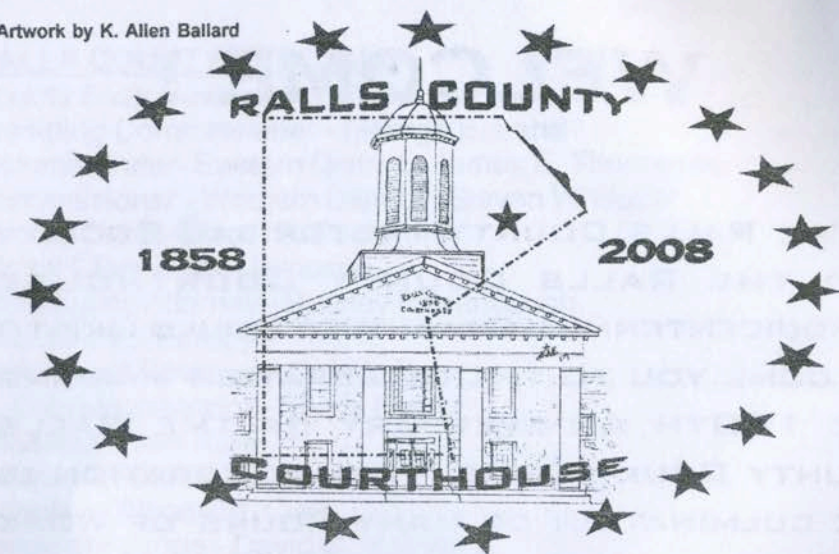


**RALLS COUNTY  
COURTHOUSE  
SESQUICENTENNIAL**



*Ralls County*  
SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION  
*Ralls County Courthouse*

**JULY 22-27, 2008**



### Construction of the Ralls County Court House

In July of 2008 the citizens of Ralls County will host their friends and neighbors from near and far with a week-long gala of history, music, food and fun.

The centerpiece of the celebration is the 150-year-old Ralls County Court House, set on a stately lawn among twisted locust trees. Though not the oldest court house in Missouri, it is the oldest functioning court house. Business is done in a number of county offices and court is still held in the upstairs court room.

Built as an example of Greek Revival architecture with four Tuscan columns, it stands as a classic reminder of law and democracy in day-to-day county business transactions.

There were no "city engineers" called in to build the court house, but rather a committee of local men who saw the need for a new seat of government and set about meeting that need. These men used designs from two out-of-date handbooks, *Principals of Carpentry*, published by an English engineer in 1820, and *Modern Builders' Guide*, written by Minard Lefever and distributed by a New York architect in 1833. Whether by fate or a whim of patriotism, the design chosen made the Ralls County Court House a smaller version of the central part of Thomas Jefferson's old capitol building in Richmond; its belfry an almost exact copy of the cupola on the steeple of Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia. Whispers of Jefferson's favored Athenian democracy were traced in the portico and its columns and in the simple interior design.

The design may have come from ancient Greece, but the stone for the building was native limestone rather than marble. Quarried east of New London, the limestone was cut and fitted by hand at the building site. The thick walls have withstood 150 years and, God willing, will stand 150 more.

This court house was the third erected in Ralls County which was formally organized in 1820. In July of 1857 it was "...ordered by the court that a new court house be built upon the public square in the town of New London."

Chapel Carstarphen was appointed building supervisor by the court and \$8,000.00 was appropriated to build the new court house. Carstarphen was born in March of 1799 in Kentucky and came to Missouri in 1819. Carstarphen was the building superintendent for the completion of the second courthouse built in 1835. Records show that he owned a large number of slaves and that some of them were highly trained in the building trades. It is believed that those skilled slaves helped with the construction of the courthouse, having helped cut stone, fire brick and carve wood trim for various homes in Ralls County. He had served as county sheriff, collector, county judge and as a representative in the state legislature. Carstarphen moved to Oakwood shortly after resigning as building supervisor in April of 1858. He died in July of 1876 and is buried in Providence Cemetery in Withers Mill in Marion County.

Frances Kidwell was awarded the contract to build the building proper for \$16,400.00. The contract for finishing the court room was awarded to Kemper Shumate. Others involved in the construction were Edward Dowling and Joseph Evans who did the stone cutting and fitting, Patrick Crowley who worked on the masonry, Hanceford Brown who made the iron work, grills for the windows, many of the locks, supports and who did other blacksmithing, and James D. Caldwell who furnished the lime.

After Carstarphen resigned as building supervisor, he was replaced with William Fagan who lasted six months. On hand for the start of the construction, Fagin continued to work on the court house after his short stint as building superintendent. A giant of a man, he had been born in 1813 in Kentucky and was a stone mason by trade.

According to specifications, the stones were to have hammered faces and the remaining five sides could be sawn. The building's foundation is three-feet wide and anchored three feet in the ground around the perimeter. The first floor hall walls were constructed with foundations underneath, thirty-three inches into the ground and forty-two inches wide. A footing of five-feet-square and three feet in the ground is under each column on the front portico.

The four chimneys each have an air intake on the ground level to guarantee a good draw. The large fireplaces in some of the offices, once used for heating, still attest to the blend of beauty and practicality. The hand-hewn woodwork is still painted white as it was originally. Three staircases lead to the upper-story court room where Judge David C. Mobley currently hears cases for the Tenth Judicial Circuit.

Kemper Shumate, who already worked as a carpenter on the court house construction, was then appointed building supervisor, and it is he who gets the credit for completing the building. The portico itself is 12' by 54' and the building 54' x 60' on a 55' x 73' foundation. The hall walls and the vault walls are 13" thick. The floor joists on both floors are 2 1/2" x 12" oak planks and the ceiling joists are 2" x 8" pine.

Shumate was a self-proclaimed jack-of-all-trades. In New London he made furniture and coffins, did blacksmithing and barbering and also worked as a gunsmith. According to county records, Shumate is credited with the beautiful interior of the court house. One of his finest pieces of work is the carved walnut trim of the windows in the court room.

Shumate, a native of Virginia, was born in Elkurn December 25, 1821. He died in Shelbina on Christmas Day in 1902 at the age of eighty-one. His descendants held a family reunion when the court house was rededicated in 1958.

Moving into the new court house was a gradual process. As a room was finished, a county official moved his office to the new facility. Shumate's report tells us that in November 1858 the masonry was complete except for the stone floors in the vaults and the window sills. Even though the carpentry wasn't finished, the building was occupied and business continued.

Shumate also got the contract for finishing the court room. Eugene Dix, who was appointed to supervise Shumate, drew the plans and specifications for the judge's stand, seats, lawyers' bar and tables. An extra \$10.00 above his plastering contract was given to Samuel Caldwell to put an extra hard finish on all the plaster in the court room.

In July of 1860, Shumate was still working around daily court house business dealings, fitting bookcases and pigeonholes in the vaults. In August Shumate fixed the sashes and shutters to the vault windows. Plastering of the downstairs office ceilings and inside the vaults was completed in August by William E. Harris. By December Shumate had completed the desks in the clerk's office.

As the country and county grew in the early twentieth century, it became apparent that the court house would need to expand in order to accommodate the growing web of governmental agencies. In 1908 a push was made by the city of Center to tear down the court house and build a new one. Citing the overgrown lawn, chipped pillars and peeling paint throughout the structure, spokesmen suggested the county build a new court house in Center.

After some deliberation, often conducted with heated words and barbed innuendos, tempers cooled and the county judges decided to repair the court house and restore it to its original state. Fifty years of architectural and area history had made the stately, if shabby, edifice worthy of restoration. In 1972 that early appraisal was validated when the Ralls County Court House was added to the National Register of Historic Sites.

The population continued to grow and businesses continued to thrive as the century progressed. In 1934 Harry S. Truman, then a candidate for the U.S. Senate, visited the court house and met with Democratic leaders to plan his campaign. Truman stood on the court house lawn and shook hands with many of the citizens who had gathered there.

Daily transactions in the court house offices reflected this growth and in 1936 two wings were added. Each was designed to complement the design and construction of the original structure. The cornerstone was laid July 31, 1936. Arthur Hogg drew up the plans and supervised the building of the annex. J.C. Derigo was the stone mason contractor and Bud Newhouse was the stone mason for the WPA project.

A county-wide Court House Centennial celebration was held in July, 1958. Ministers from the area opened the celebration with a Union Vesper Service in the Circuit Court Room on Sunday evening. Exhibits, booths and displays were open to the public on Monday. The court house was an open museum for the week-long festivities. Displays included costumes reflecting the different decades, lamps, dolls, quilts, books, and trophies from the various area fairs. The health department had a display of foods and cook books from the past century. Also displayed were health remedies including smelling salts and old medical books. A tent filled with antique agricultural equipment was pitched on the lawn. Nearby were pieces of horse-drawn equipment, horse and oxen yokes and hand tools.

There were several parades and seven Centennial Queens: Janice Morawitz, Center Township; Donna Lou Boling, Clay Township; Donna Rae Carr, Salt River Township; Sandra Karen Nicholas, Saverton Township; Ann Long, Saline Township; Betty Lou Stout, Spencer Township; and Karen Jones, Jasper Township. The ladies rode in all the parades and strolled the grounds. There were two fashion shows with costumes representing the early frontier settlement through the present day 1958. Dance styles were demonstrated in "A Century of Dance Styles."

The court house was rededicated on July 26 after a long morning parade and an afternoon children's parade. The parade entries were very like the ones seen in parades today, fifty years later. They included floats featuring ladies' clubs and civic organizations, informal groups, mules and horses, bands, tractors, antique and modern cars and individuals walking the route dressed in costume and waving flags. The cannon that is positioned on the front lawn was a gift from Sherwood Gann and Edward G. Behrens of New London in honor of Ralls County war veterans. The cannon, a model 1905, three-inch U.S. field piece, was placed on the lawn October 6, 1979.

In 2006 renovation was done to the wiring and plumbing in the court house. New lighting added a luminescence that didn't detract from the timeless aura of the high ceilings in the offices and hallways. Rooms were painted and floors sanded and redone. Windows were replaced with those that were more energy efficient. Most of the original furnishings were kept. Perhaps the best example of the blend of "old time atmosphere" and modern renovations is seen in the court room. Here the white pew-style benches still stand vigil to the proceedings, but now shine with an ethereal glow. Twelve wide-bottomed wooden chairs line two rows in the jury box. The heavy lawyers' tables facing the judge's stand are massive with scarred tops and pillar legs. The wiring for the clerk's computer is cleverly disguised as it snakes up the wall and along the doorway. Even the monitor is discreet; compact and flat, it virtually loses itself in the heavy wood and somber portraits that line the walls.

The court house today is still as stately as it ever was, a stone reflection of the values and commitment shared by Ralls County citizens over the generations. Recently the University Extension Office directed efforts to lay commemorative bricks along the sidewalk from the south side of the court house to the front portico. Members from the county's six 4H clubs sold the bricks to help finance various beautification projects. Members have planted flowerbeds on the front lawn and added shrubs and flowering plants along the front of the court house.

The locust trees that once filled the lawn have been reduced by wind and time. In May and June of 2008, nine trees were taken out. They had been damaged by multiple lightning strikes and were in danger of breaking and falling over. RCEC employees cut and removed those trees and planted new trees on the lawn. Before the workers were finished, a huge locust on the north side of the court house was blown down in a storm and also had to be removed. Now all stands in readiness for the upcoming celebration. A careful melding of the old and the new. Time and technology demand adaptation, but the Ralls County Court House is testament that you can have the best of both the past and the future.

Information for this article was provided from resources provided by Ron Leake and the Ralls County Historical Society.

# Daniel Ralls

By Carolyn Trower

When the first session of the Missouri General Assembly opened on September 18, 1820, in St. Louis, events were set in motion for both a new county and a local legend to be born.

Daniel Ralls, a farmer who lived four miles west of New London, along with James Johnson, were the area's first representatives to the state legislature. They represented Pike County, which had recently been formed from the territorial St. Charles County.

Ralls and Johnson answered roll call on September 18 and voted in the election of House officers. The House Journal shows that Ralls was appointed to a committee on claims. Along with Johnson he was also appointed to a special committee to determine if a new county should be carved from the large Pike County.

Of prime importance during this session was the election of Missouri's first two United States Senators. Six men were in the running for the two seats, but the real contest centered on only three, David Barton, Thomas Hart Benton and Judge John B. C. Lucas.

Barton, the chairman of Missouri's first Constitutional Convention, was popular enough to easily win the necessary 27 votes. The real drama comes into play because of the long animosity between Benton and Lucas. Both from St. Louis, Benton was a young politician and newspaper editor and Lucas was a powerful Land Commissioner. Early in his career, Benton had engaged in a heated political disagreement with Lucas' son, Charles. So intense was this disagreement that two duels between the young men resulted. Public record does not say just what the disagreement was about, but both duels took place on Bloody Island in the Mississippi River. Lucas was wounded in the first duel. He recovered but a second duel was set, again no recorded reason is given as to why. When the two men turned and fired, Benton's pistol ball lodged firmly and fatally in young Lucas' heart and he died there on the ground of Bloody Island.

It was this tragic and bitter background that surrounded Benton and Lucas as they vied for the coveted senate seat.

Although Benton was endorsed by Barton and seemed the likely winner, one more vote was needed to cinch the 27 vote majority of the 52 legislators. One fierce opponent, Marie Phillippe Leduc of St. Louis, was wooed by Benton's supporters. His vote, coupled with that of Daniel Ralls, would send Benton on his way to the nation's capitol.

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Records do not say what illness struck Ralls at this time, but it was noted that he lay gravely ill while Benton's supporters continued to meet with Leduc. Ralls' colleagues worked feverishly to get the vote called before Ralls' eminent death. Leduc finally agreed to back Benton on September 30 and the vote was set for October 2.

## Daniel Ralls (contd.)

The legislature met that Monday morning at the Missouri Hotel. Jesse B. Boone, son of the famed Daniel Boone, put Benton's name in nomination. According to records, Ralls lay deathly ill in a room above the meeting room. Here record and legend blur. It is recorded in the House Journal that Daniel Ralls did indeed cast votes for Barton and Benton. Stories differ on some of the details, but agree that although he was very sick and faint of voice, when his name was called, he answered, "Barton and Benton." His was the 27th vote for Benton. One account told that four strong black men carried Ralls, on his sickbed, into the legislative meeting room and returned him to his room after the votes had been tallied.

There are no more voting records for Ralls in subsequent Assembly business throughout October. On October 31, James Johnson announced to the Assembly that Daniel Ralls had died at the home of his friend, Thomas Hart Benton. The House resolved to attend the funeral in a body. A 30-day period of mourning was decreed during which all members wore black crepe arm bands.

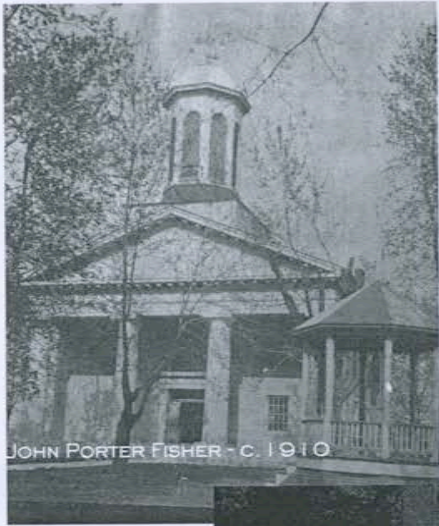
In early November a bill was discussed concerning the creation of a new county from Pike County. A statement was read that asked for the county to be made and that it be named in honor of Daniel Ralls. A week later, the Senate concurred and "...on November 9, 1820, the Act establishing the County of Ralls was concurred in by the House." Governor Alexander McNair signed the bill on November 14.

Today Daniel Ralls' legacy can perhaps be viewed as testament to the power of one vote. Ralls' vote sent Benton to the nation's capitol as one of Missouri's first two senators. Benton became one of Missouri's most famous representatives in Washington and served in the Senate for 30 years. He became nationally known with his colleagues, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and John C. Calhoun during the country's turbulent early years.

And so Ralls County has a story about its creation and its namesake, but where to lay the wreath? When his oldest son, John W. Ralls, received news of his father's death and went to St. Louis, he could find no one to show him where his father had been buried. One account states that the St. Louis Enquirer, a newspaper owned by Benton, printed Ralls' obituary and a poem written in tribute to him. Another says that young Ralls could find no written account of either funeral or burial.

Genealogy records show that Daniel Ralls was born in 1785 in Prince William County, Virginia, and died on October 20, 1820, in St. Louis. He married Mary Stone and they had five children, John W. Ralls, George William Ralls, Keziah Susan Ralls, Nathaniel Pope Ralls, and Nancy Ralls, all born in Kentucky. Daniel Ralls moved his family to Missouri in 1817, first settling in St. Louis then on a farm west of New London. He was elected to represent Pike County in the General Assembly on August 4, 1820.

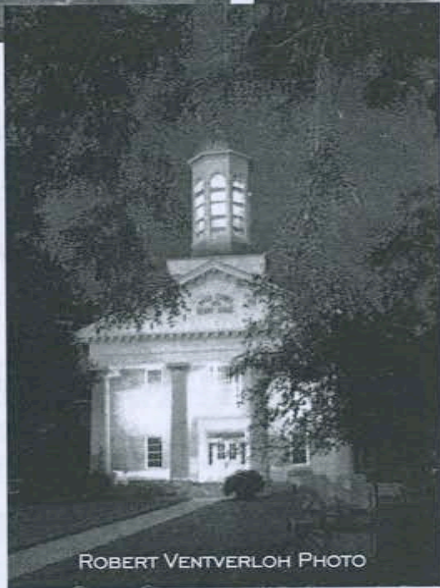
After that public and personal accounts are piecemeal, representative of the days of quill pens and hand-set type. What remains today are several versions of one man's dedication and resolve to do right by his friend and by his community. Details are fuzzy, but the name is there, on the maps and in the plat books. Ralls County, created in November of 1820, named for Daniel Ralls, citizen of New London.



JOHN PORTER FISHER - C. 1910

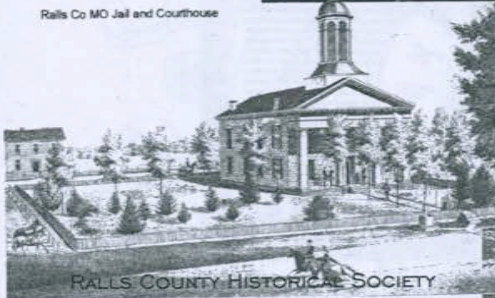


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Ralls Co MO Jail and Courthouse



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