

CHRONICLES OF THE COUNTY

**Featured:
The Birth of Greene
County 1833**

**Murder in the Stacks:
The Christmas Murder
of Byron Mason**

**Featured Office
Holder:
Sarah Gibson**



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our mission

- To collect, organize, and maintain official and historical county records.
- To maintain suitable facilities for the retention and preservation of county records.
- To provide statutorily retained records as requested to county offices and the general public.
- To provide professional and knowledgeable records management services.
- To facilitate programs, resources, and outreach activities to increase public awareness about the value of the public records we preserve.

our vision

To be a leading archival repository and research center in Missouri for county and regional history.



A *Closer* LOOK



04 FROM THE DESK OF THE
COUNTY COMMISSIONER

05 **FEATURED CHRONICLE**
FROM FRONTIER TO
FRAMEWORK:
THE BIRTH OF GREENE
COUNTY IN 1833

14 **FEATURED OFFICE HOLDER**
SARAH GIBSON: GREENE
COUNTY'S FIRST FEMALE
OFFICE HOLDER

12 **FROSTED CHRONICLES**
1912 WINTER STORM

16 **MURDER IN THE STACKS**
THE CHRISTMAS MURDER OF
BYRON MASON

20 **PEOPLE OF THE OZARKS**
JONATHAN FAIRBANKS:
FATHER OF SPRINGFIELD
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

22 **FROM THE REFERENCE DESK**
SPEAKER SERIES AND
RESOURCES



From the desk of the COUNTY COMMISSIONER

History can be a great teacher if we will but be good students. It calls to us from hallowed hallways of august buildings erected by our ancestors to provide that we, as they did, can both determine our own destiny and find justice therein. It tutors us from its pages in ways that we can yet enlarge the franchise in a nation still working to form a more perfect union and still pledging itself to liberty and justice for all as we approach 250 years of independence.

History reminds us from archives of yesteryear that the government closest to the people is generally the most responsive to the people, and so our strength and better decisions usually flow from its deliberations. It instructs us concerning the ways in which to grow a caring community and warns us of the ways we could unwittingly scatter one. It pays to be good students.

As we embark on the new year, let's consider for a moment all that the coming commemorations of 2026 have to teach us and remind us. We will gather several times to honor the memory of moments that gave rise to the birth of our "new nation conceived in liberty and

dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," as President Abraham Lincoln later described it.

In early March, we will host one of only a few traveling exhibits from the Smithsonian commemorating America's semiquincentennial – 250th birthday. We find this honor fitting as we are named for Major General Nathanael Greene, who had a reputation as General George Washington's most trusted and talented officer during the Revolutionary War for Independence.

In April, we will gather to remember the 251st anniversary of the "shot heard 'round the world" and the Battles of Lexington and Concord, which ignited the Revolution in 1775. With the help of the Sons of the American Revolution, Ozark Mountain Chapter, we will unveil and dedicate a plaque in the Historic Courthouse rotunda honoring the Revolutionary War veterans buried in Greene County.

In June, we will host our annual Flag Day patriotic celebration recalling our various flags of battle and remembering the iterations of the Stars and Stripes. In July, we will gather to celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence and to give thanks for all those who pledged "to each other [their] Lives, [their] Fortunes and [their] sacred Honor," so that we might live free. And finally in August, we will host our annual commemoration of Nathanael Greene's birthday (August 7, 1742) in the courthouse rotunda.

We invite you to join us at any or all of these events and to share in the wonder of all that history might teach us about our ancestors, our nation, and ourselves. We can learn together from one of the best teachers how to be even better citizens of "one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

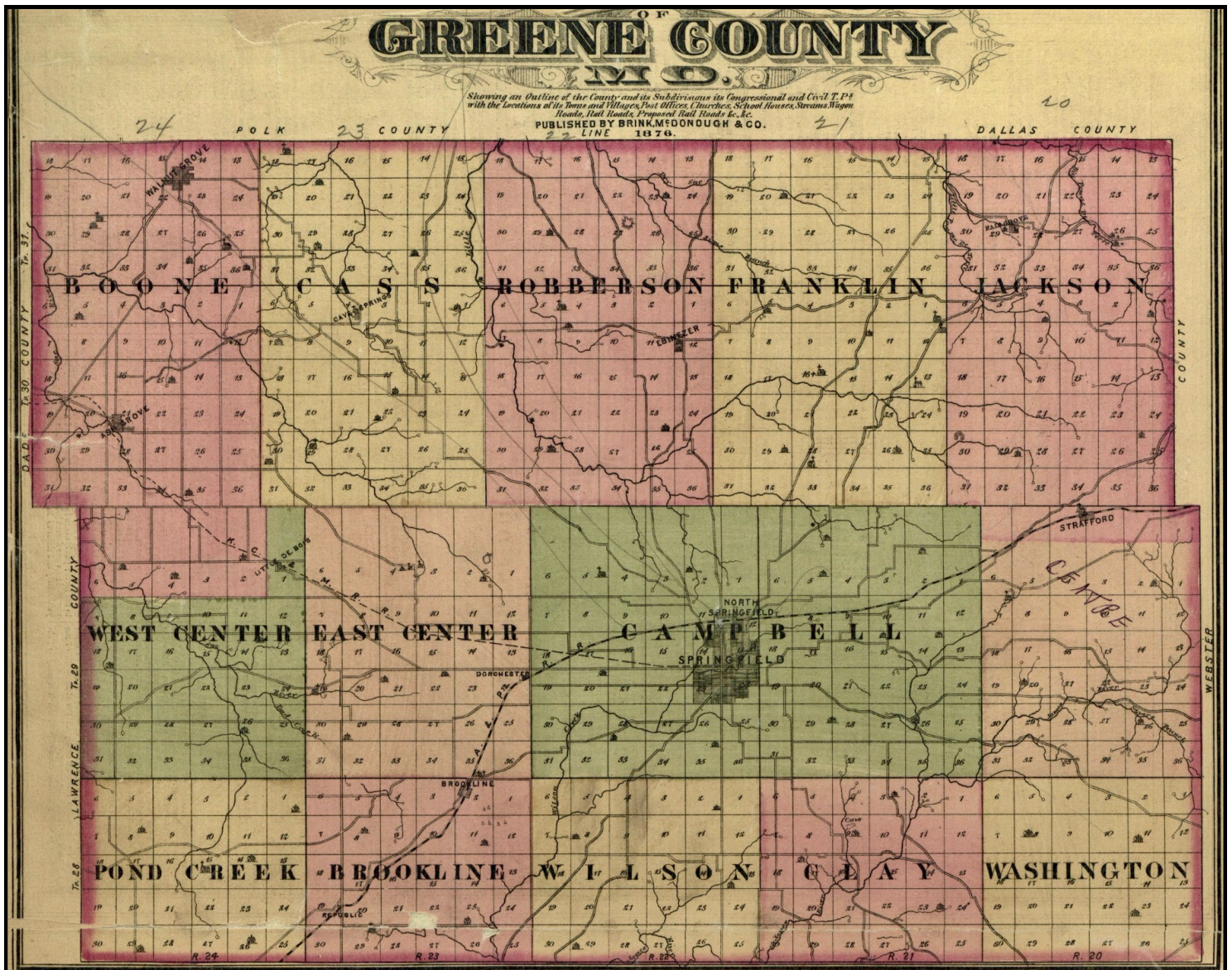
On behalf of the employees, officeholders, judges, commissioners, and communities of Greene County, thank you for the opportunity to serve you.



Bob Dejon

From Frontier to Framework

THE BIRTH OF GREENE COUNTY IN 1833



1876 Township Map of Greene County

As we prepare to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States, we are reminded that in just seven years, Greene County will celebrate its bicentennial on January 2, 2033! With that in mind, let's take a look at the county's formation and the first year

of county organization. On December 7, 1832, a bill was introduced in the House of Representatives in Jefferson City "to organize the County of Greene." The new county would be named after Nathanael Greene, a Revolutionary War soldier.

THIS WAS THE FIRST STEP IN THE PROCESS THAT CREATED GREENE COUNTY.

Later that month, on December 17, the bill was again under discussion, and amendments were added. It was read a third time the next day and passed; then, went to the Senate. On December 19, the Senate read the bill; a Mr. Merry wanted to send it to committee, but the move was rejected, and the bill was tabled.

On Wednesday, December 26, "On motion of Mr. Hensley, the bill from the House of Representatives, entitled, 'An act to organize Greene County,' was taken up, and read a third time and passed" the Senate.

The bill went back to the House for concurrence, which took place the following day. "The amendments made by the Senate to the engrossed bill from the House of Representatives entitled 'An act to organize the county of Greene,' were on motion of Mr. Weaver, read and concurred in." [1]

On Wednesday, January 2, 1833, "Mr. Reeves, from the joint committee on enrolled bills, reported that said committee did" present to Governor Daniel Dunklin for approval "an act to organize Greene County." Governor Dunklin signed the bill, and Greene County was officially organized, taking land from Crawford County.

January 2 was a busy day in the organization of Greene County. On that same day, the boundaries of Greene County were established, as well as designating a location to hold county

court, when it would be held, establish how elections would be held and determine how "justices of the count court and sheriff" would be "elected and commissioned."

An election was scheduled for the first Monday in February 1833 to choose "three fit and proper persons to compose the county court... and one fit and proper person to act as sheriff." The men would then be commissioned by the governor and hold office until the next general election. The results of that election would be sent "directly to the governor," who would then issue the commissions to those elected. The county court had the authority to designate the location of county and circuit courts.

And with that, Greene County could begin the process of governing itself.

The first day of county court was held at the home of John P. Campbell on March 11, 1833.[2]



Nathanael Greene - Courtesy of the National Park Service

Motion of Mr. O'Neal, the House resolved itself into a committee of the whole on the orders of the day, Mr. Nash in the chair, and took under consideration the "bill to organize the county of Greene;" also the "bill to organize the county of Platte," and after some time spent therein, rose and reported the same with amendments; also the committee had under consideration the "memorial to Congress on the condemned lands," and reported the same without amendment.

The question being on concurring in the report of the committee, the same was concurred in.

On motion it was ordered that the "bill to organize the county of Greene," with the amendments, and the "bill to organize the county of Platte," with the amendments, and also the "memorial to Congress on the subject of the condemned lands," be severally engrossed and read a third time to-morrow.

And then the House adjourned.

Jeremiah N. Sloan, Samuel Martin, and James Dollison were the county court judges, John D. Shannon was sheriff, and Campbell was court clerk. Martin was appointed "president" of the court for a six-month term.[3]

Now that the county court members were selected, the details of setting up a county could begin. They started by organizing townships and voting locations. The first township formed in Greene County was Spring River Township; the home of Samuel Bogard was appointed as the location for elections in that township. Jesse Blackman, Moore Gibson, and John Williams were appointed election judges for the township.[4]

Next, Jackson Township was organized; the home of Ezekiel M. Campbell (brother of John P. Campbell) was appointed as the location for elections. William H. Duncan was appointed justice of the peace. The third township was Osage; the home of William Brinegar was appointed as the location for elections. Christopher Elmore and John Rippatoe were appointed justices of the peace.

There is no mention of the formation of Campbell Township in the County Court Record Book, but the boundaries were established during the March term. Andrew Taylor, Richard C. Martin, and Larkin Payne were appointed justices of the peace.

White River Township was also established, as was Oliver Township. Samuel Garner was appointed justice of the peace of White River Township and Thomas B. Arnett for Oliver Township. Elections in White River Township would be held at "Felches old place on the north side of the White River." Edward Mooney, John H. Glover, and one Newsom were appointed election judges. Richard Tankesley, Lunsford Owen, and Augustine Friend were appointed election judges for Oliver Township.

One more township called Mooney was formed. The home of John Mooney was set as the location for elections; election judges were Richard Saye, Aaron Ruyle, and John West. Two days later, Richard Saye was removed as election judge of Mooney Township and replaced by James Smith.

After the townships were organized, the court appointed four county office holders: Achilles Burnett as county collector, Junius T. Campbell (brother of John P. Campbell) as county treasurer, Samuel Scroggins as county surveyor, and Richard C. Martin as county assessor.

After only two days in the position, Burnett resigned as County Collector; Payne replaced him temporarily. Burnett chose to oversee the work of establishing roads in Campbell township and having the St. Louis Road straightened.

Roads for the new county were a necessity, and the county court ordered the establishment of several roads during the March term. A highway leading from Springfield to the junction of the Little North Fork of the White River was commissioned but was later amended to end at the "mouth of Swan Creek" rather than the Little North Fork. The road from Springfield to Delaware Town, then to Fayetteville, Arkansas, was declared a public highway in Greene County, as was the road from Springfield to 25-Mile Prairie, which was towards Boonville.[5]

In other business, for a two-dollar fee, Abraham Bledsoe was "authorized and licensed" to operate a ferry across the Osage River. Commissioners were appointed to establish a public highway from Bledsoe's Ferry on the Osage River to Brinegar's Ferry on the Pomme de Terre River, then to 25-Mile Prairie.

March 14 was the last day of county court for the March term. The judges had established: seven townships, planned roads and road improvements, appointed county office holders and justices of the peace, and assigned election locations, as well as election judges, all in the span of four days.

The second county court term opened on June 10, with John P. Campbell's home again appointed the location for holding court. This time, court only lasted three days, ending on June 12.

Junius T. Campbell resigned as county treasurer, and John Fulbright was appointed in his stead. Payne resigned as county collector, and former Sheriff Shannon replaced him.

Boundaries were established for Sugar Creek Township. The home of Suddeth Meek was appointed as the election location, with George Joy, Samuel Watson, and Isaac Williams appointed election judges. Samuel Vaughn was appointed justice of the peace for the township.

Jesse F. Royalston was appointed justice of the peace for Osage Township, and Elmore was in charge of roads. Nathan Barnes was appointed constable for White River Township; Glover, Joseph Philibert, and Peter Graham appointed justices of the peace. The home of Lantsford Oliver was appointed the location for elections in Oliver Township.

The boundaries of Jackson, Campbell, and Mooney Townships were extended.

More roads were ordered— John Graham, John Roberts, and Elmore were appointed overseers of the road from Bledsoe's Ferry to 20-Mile Prairie; Vaughn was charged to "lay off road districts and apportion lands" in Sugar Creek Township; Robert Patterson, Jeremiah Pierson, and Alexander Younger were appointed to oversee the St. Louis Road; Samuel Leslie and Bennett Robberson were appointed overseers of the Boonville Road; James Wilson was appointed overseer of the road from Springfield to Arkansas; Daniel B. Miller, Gabriel A. Shelton, and Andrew Taylor

AN ACT to organize Greene county.*

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Boundaries of Greene county defined. | |
| 2 Justices of the county court and sheriff to be elected and commissioned. | courts. |
| 3 County court to designate place of holding | 4 County courts when held. |
| | 5 Election how conducted—returns to be made to governor. |

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Missouri, [as follows:]

1. All that part of territory lying south of the township line between townships thirty-four and thirty-five, extending in a direct line due west from the point where the said township line crosses the main Niangua river, to the western boundary of the State, and south and west of the county of Crawford, which is not included in the limits of any county, and which was attached to the said county of Crawford, by joint resolution of the general assembly of the State of Missouri, approved on the eighteenth day of January, eighteen hundred and thirty-one, be and the same is hereby organized into a separate and distinct county, to be called and known by the name of Greene county, in honor of Nathaniel Greene of the Revolution.

2. The qualified voters residing within the limits of the said county, shall meet at the place at present appointed by law for holding elections, on the first Monday

*Repealed R. L. 1835, p. 384, sec. 33.

were commissioners for a road from Springfield to St. Louis; Joseph Weaver, Peter Apperson, Joseph Rountree, Daniel D. Berry, and Stephen Fisher were appointed "commissioners to view, lay out, and mark [the] road [with] the nearest and best way and to the greatest ease and convenience to the inhabitants and as little may be to the prejudice of any person or persons" from Springfield to 25-Mile Prairie.

Chesley Cannefax, John Sturdevant, John Fulbright, Barton Warren, and John Taylor were appointed captain of patrols.[6]

County court issued Rountree the first grocery license in Greene County; he paid a \$5 state tax fee. E. W. Wallis paid \$7.50 to open a "business and trade of a grocery."

Daniel E. Miller was appointed to superintend the construction of a bar in the courtroom,

located in Campbell's cabin.

In between county court terms, the first circuit court term was held in August when the first murder indictment occurred, just seven months after the county was officially organized. On July 4, 1833, John Patterson, James Patterson, and James Cornelius allegedly hit William Fitzhugh on the head with a board, giving him a five-inch gash. Fitzhugh died a few days later, on July 10, and in August, the grand jury indicted all three men for murder.

Greene County Sheriff Shannon attempted to arrest the men but could not locate them anywhere in the county. Finally, in October 1834, Cornelius was apprehended by Sheriff Chesley Cannefax. (Benjamin Goodrich had recently been elected sheriff, but died before taking office. Cannefax received a temporary

appointment in his place in August 1834.) The Pattersons were never found.

Circuit Judge Charles H. Allen ordered Greene County coroner Roberts to find "a sufficient guard, not exceeding three persons for the safe keeping of [Cornelius] until he is otherwise discharged by due course of law." Court records dated February 12, 1835, show that Henry Fulbright, John Bracken, and John Edwards were owed money for guarding Cornelius.

Witnesses were summoned from Morgan, Pulaski, Howard, and Greene County to testify during the December circuit court term. Although numerous witnesses were subpoenaed, many were not located. Cornelius pleaded not guilty, and the case was continued until April 1835.

Unfortunately, there is no extant witness testimony or trial records. The last record of the charge against Cornelius is an April 1835 entry, which simply states that the case would not be "further prosecute[d] and the defendant was ordered discharged."

The third county court term was held on September 9 - 12, 1833. Martin continued as president of the court. It was a quiet court term; most decisions were for paying accounts due, including that of Martin B. Brine, who was owed \$4.50 for building the judges' bench in the courthouse.

The first day of court included reports from road commissioners and new road overseer appointments. Robert Patterson, Pierson, and John Fulbright were appointed to the St. Louis Road.

The State of Missouri
To the Sheriff of Greene County Greeting:
We Command you to take John Patterson, James Patterson
And James Cornelius, And them safely keep so that you have
their Bodies before the Judge of our Green Circuit Court on
the first day of our next term of said Court which Commences
on the 9th day of December next to Answer unto our said State
of and concerning a certain Crime of ~~Murder~~ whereunto
he stands Indicted before our said Court - And have you
them then this Court
Witness Charles P Bullock Clerk of our said
Court at Springfield this 15th day of August
in the Year of our Lord Eighteen hundred and
Thirty Three and of the Independance of the
United States the fifty Eighth and of this State
the Thirtieth -
Chas P Bullock Clerk of the
Green Circuit Court

John Robards resigned as overseer of roads in Osage Township, and George Alexander replaced him.

The following day, Alexander Rauger replaced John Fulbright as road overseer.

At the behest of John Lock, Sugar Creek Township boundaries were extended “northward to the head of Crane Creek, thence down Crane Creek to James Renfroe’s thence a southwardly direction to Jenkin’s cabin on Flat Creek, thence in a southwest direction till it intersects with the line running from the peddler’s cabin to White River.” Reports from county surveyors were submitted, and Payne resigned as justice of the peace for Campbell Township.

THE FINAL COUNTY COURT TERM OF 1833 WAS THE LONGEST, HELD FROM DECEMBER 9 THROUGH 13.

However, this court session was even quieter than the September term. The county judges remained the same; Shannon was still the sheriff; and John P. Campbell remained in the position of county court clerk.

Only one more township was established, that of Elk River. Elections would be held at the home of Solomon Forester. Abraham Testament, Robert Lauderdale, and Finias Williams were appointed election judges.

Daniel D. Berry, who would eventually be the

largest land owner in the county, was appointed Justice of the peace of Campbell Township. Due to the resignation of John Fulbright, Berry was also appointed County Treasurer temporarily, “until a successor could be found.”

Samuel Cartley, Bennett Robertson, James Bird, John Slagle, Joseph Montgomery, and James Able were appointed overseers of a road leading from Springfield toward Boonville. Payne, John Pettijohn, John Allen, George Yoakum, and Nathaniel Kimberling were commissioned to review and continue work on a road from Springfield “by way of Delaware Town to the Arkansas line.” The boundary of Osage Township was extended, and William Henry was appointed its justice of the peace. Richard Saye was appointed to lay roads in Mooney Township.

More grocers were opened—William Jamison and Burnett both paid a semi-annual tax of \$5 and \$10 to the state, and \$2.50 and \$5 to the county, respectively, for a grocer’s license.

December 13 was the last day of county court for the month and for the year. In only 10 months of existence, Greene County had established nine townships, began work on several roads, and appointed (and reappointed) several office holders.

- 1 Joseph Weaver, representative from Crawford County.
- 2 County court is now known as county commission.
- 3 President of the court is now known as the presiding commissioner.
- 4 Greene County originally comprised much of southwest Missouri. Of the townships formed in 1833, only Jackson and Campbell remain a part of Greene County.
- 5 Delaware Town is now located in Christian County.
- 6 Captain of patrols was an early form of law enforcement in which a group of white men monitored slaves. According to Marlin Barber, historian and Missouri State University history instructor, “it was not just enslaved people. They also patrolled and monitored the communities and lives of free Black Americans as well.”

FROSTED CHRONICLES



Winter Storm

Snowiest on Record

The winter storm of 1912 brought record-breaking snowfall to Greene County, marking the snowiest season in the county's history.

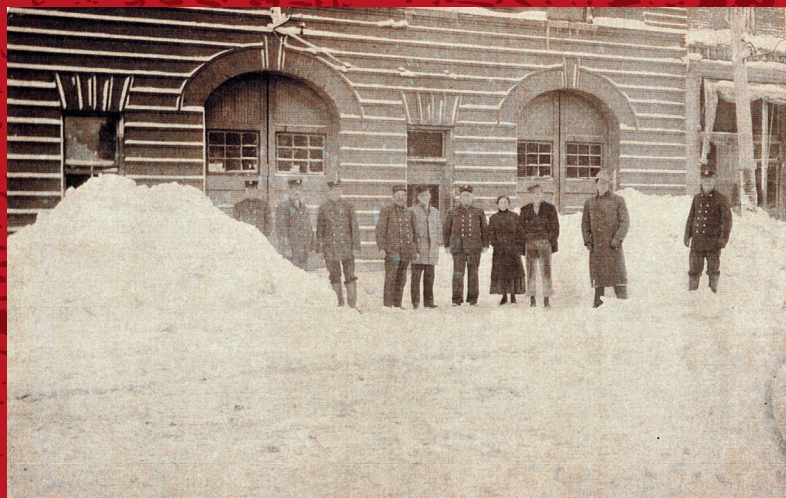
Between November 1911 and March 1912, Springfield received a total of 54.3 inches of snow.

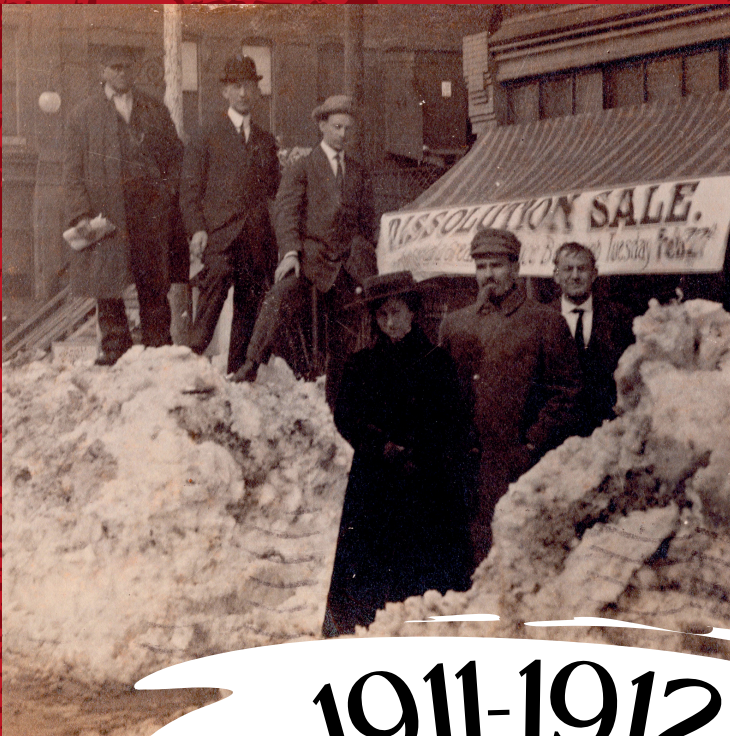
The heaviest accumulation occurred between February 19 and 22, when 20 inches fell over three days—a record-setting total for that time.

This storm was part of a broader weather pattern that affected much of Missouri, with many areas across the state receiving over 50 inches of snow.

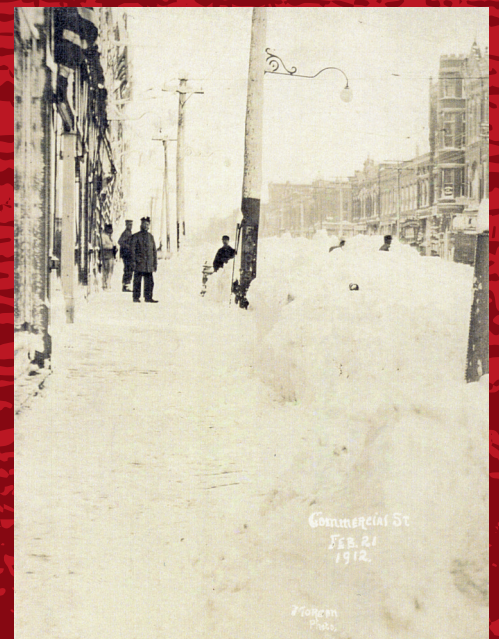
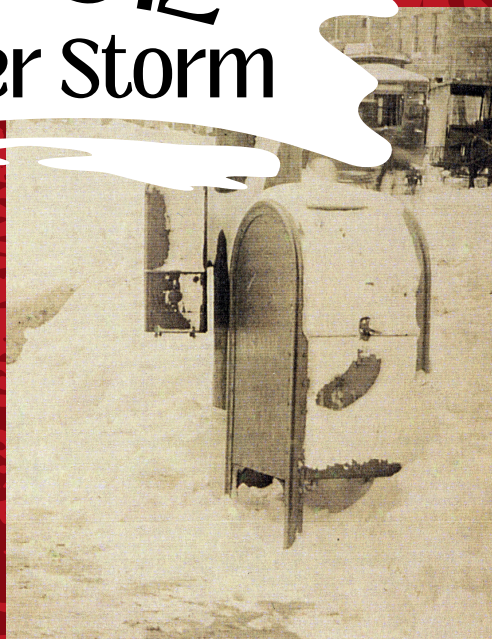
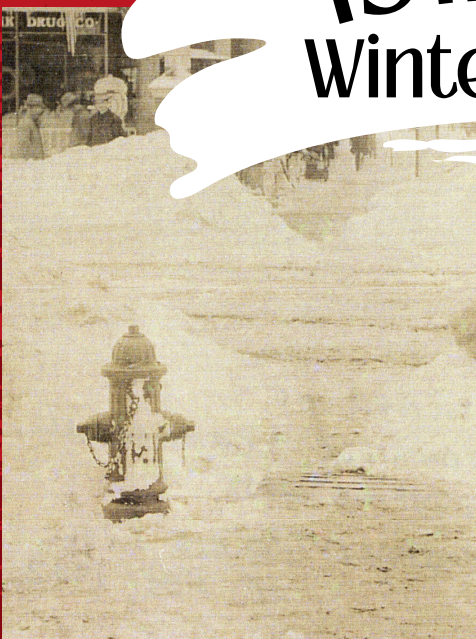
Despite this historic season, the largest single-day snowfall in Greene County occurred on March 24-25, 2013, when 17.4 inches fell within 24 hours.

All winter photos taken along Commercial Street
Courtesy of the Piland Collection,
Greene County Archives





1911-1912 Winter Storm



FEATURED OFFICE HOLDER



Sarah Gibson

Sarah E. Gibson got her start in county politics when her brother, County Collector Charles M. Gibson, appointed her as one of two deputy collectors when he took office in March 1919.[1] She continued in that position until at least 1923.

In 1928, Gibson made a remarkable decision – she chose to run for the office of county treasurer. During the August primary, she was not expected to win the Republican nomination against her opponent, L. M. Spangler. But she

did beat Spangler, and her name would be on the November ballot.

That November, Gibson won, beating the incumbent, Charles C. Cox, by almost 2,000 votes to become the first female office holder in Greene County history. The *Springfield Daily News* reported that a “G.O.P. landslide puts first woman into county office....” It was expected that Gibson would appoint a woman as her deputy, “thus giving the feminine sex complete sway over the office.”

SAM A. MOORE
ASSOCIATE JUDGE, 1ST DISTRICT



CARL R. JOHNSON
COUNTY CLERK

R. A. YOUNG
PRESIDING JUDGE

JOHN W. NICHOLSON
ASSOCIATE JUDGE, 2ND DISTRICT



Springfield, Mo.

Ordered by the Court that Sarah E. Gibson
be issued her Commission as
County Treasurer and that her
Salary for the office shall be

Gibson did appoint a woman, Mary Marks. Marks supported Gibson during her campaign and previously worked as a clerk for the county surveyor's office and the county clerk.

After about a year and a half on the job, a *Springfield Press* editorial announced that Gibson had proven "that a woman can be a good official, and at the same time charming." The following month, Lucille Morris (later, Lucille Morris Upton) wrote an article about Gibson in the *Springfield News Leader* reminding readers that at the time of her election, "there were some who frankly were dubious about" Gibson's ability to adequately fulfill the role of county treasurer. Morris stated that Gibson had:

“
DEMONSTRATED
THAT WOMEN MAY BE
VERY EXCELLENT
OFFICE HOLDERS
INDEED.
”

Lucille Morris

Meanwhile, Gibson was not at all surprised that she could do the job well, as she "always had accomplished what she set out to do."

Gibson was up for re-election in 1932, and her friends helped with her campaign. She did little campaigning for herself, being too busy tending to the "duties of her office." Gibson again won the Republican nomination and almost had to run against another woman; Ollie F. Turner,

Democrat, lost the nomination to fellow Democrat Paul Oliver by just over 300 votes. Gibson was again the only female nominee. In November, Gibson won by a nose, edging out Oliver by only 72 votes.[2] It was the closest race in the county. She reappointed Marks as her deputy.

Shortly after Gibson began her second term, a bill was introduced in the state legislature to abolish the office of county treasurer and transfer those duties to the county collector. The bill was presented by Greene County representatives John L. Warren and Fred McGhee. It was estimated that the merge could save the county \$6,000 each year. If passed, the bill would not affect Gibson's current term but would make her unemployed when her term expired. By March, the bill had passed the house and senate. If signed by Governor Park, the county collector would become the ex-officio treasurer as of December 31, 1936.

The bill became law, and Gibson worked her last day on December 31, 1936. Her deputy clerk, Marks, was retained by County Collector Jesse E. Smith to "continue the functions of the treasurer's office." The county saved the \$3,000 of Gibson's salary, while Marks received a \$200 increase for an annual salary of \$1,800.

After being unemployed for a few days into the new year, Gibson actually returned to work. During the end of year hustle and bustle of tax collecting, Smith forgot to get bonded as treasurer. Legally, he could not serve as treasurer until bonded, so Gibson had to return. She held her position for an additional 20 days.

By February, the fate of the office of county treasurer was again in question. A bill repealing the statute that ended the office was in the hands of the state legislature. Several people in Greene County were positioning themselves for

a run for the office, but Gibson was not among them. The bill eventually passed, and it would be up to the new Governor, Lloyd Stark, to make the appointments. Stark thought it was a bad idea for the same office to "collect and act as custodian of public funds." The bill passed but would not take effect until September.

One of the hopeful candidates was Turner, who failed in her attempt for office in 1932. However, there was one man, Kirk Baxter, who wanted the position, and public sentiment was that he would get the appointment.

Public sentiment was correct – in September, Baxter was appointed treasurer. He retained Marks as an assistant, at least temporarily.

In December, Baxter appointed Guy S. Woodside, a road district commissioner, as his deputy clerk.

The position was up for election in 1938. Gibson's friend and former deputy, Marks, "filed for the Republican nomination." She was beaten by John Russell in the August primary. In November, Russell lost to Baxter, who held the position until 1944.

Gibson never ran for office again. She died in August 1950 at the age of 79.

[1] Charles M. Gibson was county clerk from 1919 – 1922.

[2] Oliver had recently been arrested and charged with jury tampering, possibly costing him the job.



TO THE HONORABLE COUNTY COURT:

I herewith appoint Mrs. Mary Marks as Deputy County Treasurer
for the ensuing term of Office.

COUNTY TREASURER

Snah E Gibson

MURDER IN THE STACKS

*then and there by force of the gun powder
aforesaid by him the said Charles Layton shot
off and discharged in manner and form as
aforesaid then and there unlawfully wilfully
feloniously deliberately premeditatedly on purpose
and of his malice aforethought did strike pen-
etrate and wound him the said Byron Mason
in and upon the left breast near the left*

THE CHRISTMAS MURDER OF



Byron Mason



On Christmas night, 1876, Charles Layton and Byron Mason both attended a party at the home of John Mills on St. Louis Street. Layton got drunk and apparently attacked Mason upstairs. Other partygoers broke up the fight, but Layton followed Mason downstairs, warning him to leave the party. Layton then "suddenly drew a pistol from his pocket and fired," hitting Mason in the chest. He was dead within a couple of minutes.

Layton was immediately jailed. County Coroner Anthony Fisher held the inquest the following day. The preliminary hearing was scheduled for Tuesday before Justice of the Peace Charles L. Dalrymple.[1] John O'Day was Layton's defense attorney. Thirty-two witnesses testified, most of them for the state, but still no known motive for the murder. No one knew of any ill will between the two men, nor did they hear any conversation

Witnesses for the State

Matilda Mills

J. V. Galbraith

Hardy Mills

J. P. Conroy

Wm Hightower

W. F. Weldon

Patrick Hays

G. J. Weldon

Patrick Boulton

Wesley Gott

W. D. Snow

L. E. Jones

Dorthula Dyer

Lina Dyer

Henry Thackeray

Emily Grisham

John Mills

R. G. Williams

John Sprague

John Thornhill

J. B. Lefft

F. E. Rofs

between them that may have led to the altercation and death of Mason. The whole event "took place within a few minutes," taking everyone by surprise.

While Layton was jailed without bail, a special grand jury was called to hear the case. The grand jury indicted him for first-degree murder on January 23, 1877, for "willfully, feloniously, deliberately, premeditatedly, on purpose and of his malice aforethought," shooting Mason to death. He pled not guilty and was granted a continuance in order to prepare for trial.

Part of his preparation apparently included attempting to break out of jail. Along with two other prisoners, Layton cut a hole in the jail floor "nearly large enough for a man to pass through." Sheriff Andrew J. Potter became suspicious of their behavior and had their cells searched. The hole was repaired, but Potter never discovered how the prisoners had dug the hole.

On May 22, Layton petitioned for a change of venue; his request was denied. Finally, in January 1878, he was tried for murder. He withdrew his guilty plea to the first-degree murder charge and confessed to murder in the second degree. He was sentenced to life in prison.

Layton did not spend the rest of his life in prison. Governor Crittenden commuted his sentence to ten years, and with the three-fourths rule, he was released from prison in July 1885. He returned to Springfield, and in August of that year, he was fined \$20 for disturbing the peace.[2]

[1] Dalrymple was the father of Lottie Dalrymple who was a probate clerk from 1907-1910, as noted in our Autumn issue.

[2] The three fourths rule allowed prisoners who had served three fourths of their sentence in an "orderly and peaceable manner" to be released from prison as if they had served the entire sentence.

PEOPLE OF THE OZARKS

Jonathan Fairbanks

Father of Springfield Public Schools



By Kylee May

As a reference archivist at the Greene County Archives and Records Center and per-course faculty at Missouri State University, she thrives on connecting people with the past—whether through teaching, researching, or writing. With a Master of Arts in U.S. and World History from Missouri State University and a Bachelor of Science in Journalism from the University of Missouri, Kylee combines scholarly expertise with a genuine passion for making history accessible and exciting.



Jonathan Fairbanks cared for over 13,000 students and 124 school districts in 1896. By this time, he had been superintendent of Springfield Public Schools since 1875 and Greene County School Commissioner for the past 18 years. Fairbanks would continue to serve as superintendent until his death, totaling 42 years of service.

He is known as the father of the Springfield Public School system, not just because of its growth, but also the founding principles he established. However, that is not all. He taught the senior class throughout his tenure, as well as serving on the Springfield Public School Board for four years, during which he was president

for two years. Moreover, he served on the Springfield City Council in 1871 before being elected mayor of Springfield in 1872.

After teaching and serving as superintendent in Ohio, friend and future business partner, John C. Wilber, invited Fairbanks to Springfield. In November 1866, he moved his family here and started a sawmill and lumber business. However, the company failed after the 1873 panic. Fairbanks was on his way out of town in 1874 when John McGregor, president of the school board, asked him to take the position of superintendent; the school board had

struggled to fill the role in previous years.

When Fairbanks became superintendent of Springfield Public Schools in 1875, the district served about 1,200 students in just two schools—one for white students and one for students of color. By the time of his death, 42 years later, enrollment had grown to nearly 8,500 students across 20 public schools throughout Springfield. Voters re-elected him repeatedly with little opposition. According to the biographical sketch from 1914 in “Past and Present of Greene County, Missouri,” his re-elections “became a mere matter of formality.”

Fairbanks made visiting every school a weekly task. The students came to know whose horse and buggy pulled up to their school and who the man was who walked down their halls wearing a frock coat and a stove-pipe hat. A couple of his initial endeavors included replacing the textbook provider with one that supplied free textbooks to students unable to afford them, as well as accommodating those who lived farther away that might not make it to school on time.

Fairbanks’ position on discipline is often noted because of his unusual practices at the time. He did not believe in corporal punishment but preferred to bring his students in and have a conversation with them. Fairbanks was quoted once as saying, “Teachers should assume as far as possible that there are no bad pupils. Boys and girls will do the best they know how. ... They often do wrong when they think they are doing right. ... There is not nearly leniency enough in the world.”

William Carrington, State Superintendent of Schools and the State Normal School’s first president (now, MSU), claimed in a tribute to Fairbanks published in the *Springfield Leader and Press*:

“HIS DESIRE THAT EVERY CHILD SHOULD HAVE THE BEST WAS A PASSION. HE BELIEVED AND PRACTICED THE DOCTRINE OF FITTING EDUCATION TO THE CHILD.”

William Carrington

Two of his notable accomplishments were the construction of the Lincoln School for African Americans in 1884 and the Senior High School, now known as Central High School, in 1893. He would see to the Senior High’s expansion in 1907 and 1914. In 1931, the school board nearly renamed it Fairbanks Memorial High School when his son, James, sold parts of his land to the Springfield Public Schools.

Builders constructed the second Lincoln School building in 1931 on land owned by Fairbanks, near his home on Sycamore Avenue (now, Sherman Avenue). That building, now called Lincoln Hall, still stands today as part of the Ozark Technical College campus. Crews relocated the house to 1001 E. Brower Street (now, Bob Parker Boulevard), but the Ozark Technical College razed it in 1997 during campus expansion. The Springfield Public School District honored him by naming an elementary school after him in 1906, which remained open until 2007. The Fairbanks

Building was restored and now serves as both office space and a community resource.

Many African Americans considered Fairbanks a friend as he fought for equality in the allocation of resources and schools for both colored and white students. The school board built Douglas Elementary School for colored students in 1893 at Fairbanks' insistence. In 1906, he and his home were a safe place for African Americans after the lynching on the eve of Easter in the town square. The African-American Heritage Trail committee dedicated its first marker to Silver Springs Park, which opened in 1918, one year after Fairbanks' death. They located the park on a portion of Fairbanks' land. During segregation, it was the only public park available to black residents.

In 1913, Fairbanks assumed the position of assistant superintendent, with William W. Thomas by his side, a role he held until his death on September 29, 1917. On the day of his funeral, two days later, the school district

canceled all classes, and Mayor James J. Gideon ordered flags fly at half-mast and businesses to close during his service. The graduating class of 1918 had the option to purchase an oil painting of Fairbanks or a large bust of then-President Woodrow Wilson, and they chose the former.

Community leaders proposed a memorial immediately after his death, but they postponed the memorial due to World War I fundraising campaigns; thieves nearly stole the raised funds when they ransacked Fairbanks Elementary School for a war fund. A bank failure in the mid-1920s stalled fundraising for the memorial again, and organizers put the memorial on hold after the stock market crash. The community finally erected the memorial at Senior High (now Central High School) on August 24, 1932, consisting of a bronze tablet with a full-length portrait on a 10-foot-high granite shaft. Central High School continues to honor Fairbanks today by displaying the same memorial plaque.

Courtesy of the Piland Collection, Greene County Archives



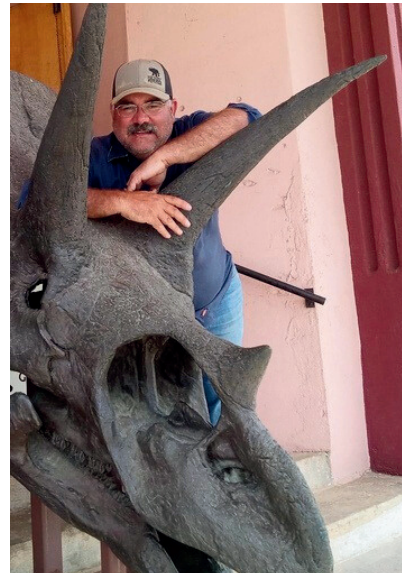
The Greene County Archives Foundation Speaker Series

Matt Forir is the Greene County geologist and director of the Missouri Institute of Natural Science, but his true passion is digging for dinosaurs, something he has been doing since he was 18 years old. His interest in fossils started at age 3, and thanks to a chance meeting with a paleontologist at the age of 16, Matt decided to build Missouri's first natural history museum. Today, Matt runs that very museum he dreamed of building as a kid, and it contains every fossil he ever collected.



Presents:
Digging Dinosaurs:

**When Giants
Roamed the Earth**



Matt Forir, Greene County Geologist

Thursday, January 29, 2026

Speaker begins at 6:30 PM

Schweitzer Brentwood Branch Library

2214 S Brentwood Blvd, Springfield, MO 65804

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