2014 County Info

400 E. Main
Savannah, MO 64485
816-324-3511

JAIL 60-beds
SIZE 435 square miles

Sheriff Bryan L. Atkins
2009–Present

Fortune Teller, Murderers, Thieves All in Day's Work For County Sheriff

Andrew County was officially established on January 29, 1841 from the Platte Purchase and was named after Andrew Jackson Davis, a prominent citizen of both St. Louis and Savannah, Missouri. Savannah, chosen to be the county seat, is one of the few in Missouri that chose not to use the entire public square for county business.

Soon after the county was established, the court appropriated $600 for a wood and stone courthouse to be built. The court met for the first time in the courthouse Nov. 15, 1841.

It was obvious that with a sheriff to uphold the law and courts in place to try offenders, a jail would be needed. In August 1841, the court offered to award $5 to anyone who could present to the court the best and cheapest plans for a jail to be constructed of stone, wood and iron on the public square. Although few details are available about the selec-

Andrew County Courthouse, 1845-1898.

tion process, records show a plan was chosen and by May 1842, a jail was completed.

The perpetrators of one of Andrew County's first murders spent little time there. A young man by the name of Hedrick, who moved to the county a short time earlier, brought $500 to invest in land as soon as it was open for settlement. After choosing a suitable site, he staked his claim and constructed a small log cabin. As the story goes, when the young man "of exemplary habits" didn't attend church on Sunday and wasn't seen for several days, townspeople visited his cabin and found blood stains on the floor. As a search party was organized, a fortune teller showed up to unravel the mystery of Hedrick's disappearance — down to the details of how the murder was committed by eight local men. At about the same time, a robbery was committed at a trading post; a dropped shoe led to the robbers' identities and warrants were issued for their arrest. It was learned that the "fortune teller" was a ploy to ward off suspicion. The group was arrested for the murder but they managed to escape before justice could be carried out.

In the meantime, the first courthouse building was deemed a "primitive structure and poorly adapted to public use." The court ordered a new courthouse to be built and "finished in a workmanlike manner." The completed product was accepted by the court on December 17, 1845 at a cost of $6,280 dollars and, in its day, was considered to be one of the finest and best temples of justice in the northwest.

As the years passed, the first jail building also proved to be ill-equipped to incarcerate Andrew County's criminals. For several years, they were shipped off to the Buchanan County Jail. Then in August 1866, a new jail and jailer's residence was built on the west side of the courthouse. The two-sto-

ry, 34-foot-square jail, was to be constructed of stone with 2-foot-thick walls, a 5-foot-deep foundation and eight cells. The jailer's residence was to be 36-feet-by-34-feet with walls of brick. However, as with many "best-laid plans," revisions were made to the design during the construction process. When it was finally completed and accepted by the court on November 19, 1867 — at a cost of $22,400 dollars — the facility also housed the offices of circuit and county clerks, collector, treasurer, prosecuting attorney and probate judge.

The year 1867 also brought one of the most daring attempts at open robbery ever known in Northwest Missouri. It was committed by the notorious outlaw Melvin Bond. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, he and his gang boldly rode up to the front of the Savings Bank in Savannah, dismounted, strode into the bank, revolvers drawn, and demanded of the cashier, Judge J. McLain, "his money or his life." McLain responded by grabbing his own revolver and firing a shot into Bond's arm. Bond fired back, striking the judge in the shoulder. Though bleeding profusely, the judge chased the crooks from the bank where they hastily mounted their horses and high-tailed it out of town. Judge McLain's injury was serious and resulted in the amputation of his arm. However, he got the last laugh when he was called to identify Bond during a court trial where the thief was tried and convicted for another robbery. McLain was the last to bid the doomed man good-bye on the scaffold where he was hanged.

In 1873, Sheriff Amos Owen found himself on the wrong side of the law when Andrew County claimed he failed in his duties as sheriff and county collector. According to the Missouri Supreme Court Historical Database, the defendant collected delinquent taxes in the amount of $14,125.77 and charged a 10-percent late fee. When Sheriff Owen's term was up, he refused to give the county the $1,412.57, saying he was due this amount for his troubles. The court ruled in favor of the county and ordered Owen to pay up.

Fifty years of use took its toll on the courthouse. In 1899 it was razed and a new courthouse was built in its place. The $48,000 cost was raised from a 27-cent direct tax approved

Andrew County Jail, taken in 1979.

in August 1898. After opening, all county government offices that were in the jail building moved into the new courthouse and the sheriff's office moved into the jail building. That courthouse continues to serve the public today.

In 1906, Andrew County officials opened a new jail at Fourth and Market streets, just south of the square. Sheriff Robert Gamble moved his office and jail into this new building, considered "state of the art" for the time. This facility continued to operate as the county jail and the sheriff's residence until the early 1970s. Sheriff Reid Miller was the last to live at the jail. A few years later, the sheriff's living quarters were remodeled as offices and holding cells for female inmates. This building, which still stands today, operated as the county jail for 106 years.

In October 2012, Andrew County opened its fourth sheriff's office and jail at 400 East Main Street. The high-tech, state-of-the-art, 18,000 square-foot facility, which also contains the 911 emergency center, houses 60 inmates. Sheriff Bryan Atkins and his staff are dedicated to protecting and serving its citizens and communities, and providing the highest degree of law enforcement, while earning the public's trust through integrity, respect, character, and commitment to their job. ★

Sources: *History of Andrew and De Kalb Counties, Missouri: From Earliest Time to the Present*; the Andrew County Museum and Historical Society; the University of Missouri Extension; *Andrew County A Rural Way of Life*.

Former Sheriffs	
N. Gary Howard	1993–2009
Sheriff Loren J. Kier	1986–1993
Sheriff N. Gary Howard	1981–1986
Sheriff Reid Miller	1969–1981
Sheriff Paul Howard	1967–1969
Sheriff Dean Boyles	1961–1967
Sheriff Carl E. Field	1953–1961
Sheriff George R. Gibbins	1945–1953
Sheriff Fred Keller	1941–1945
Sheriff Henry Bruns	1937–1941
Sheriff Jess Maxwell	1933–1937
Sheriff Harold J. Holt	1929–1933
Sheriff F. M. Carter	1925–1929
Sheriff Everett P. Evenns	1921–1925
Sheriff Thomas G. Walker	1917–1921
Sheriff Frank M. Carter	1913–1917
Sheriff William R. Hurst	1909–1913
Sheriff Robert H. Gamble	1905–1909
Sheriff Lyman Holcomb	1901–1905
Sheriff Henry C. Cottrill	1897–1901
Sheriff Benjamin F. Kelley	1893–1897
Sheriff James M. Berry	1891–1893
Sheriff A.C. Trapp	1889–1891
Sheriff John W. Crank	1885–1889
Sheriff John Lincoln	1881–1885
Sheriff W. S. Starr	1879–1881
Sheriff L. D. Caster	1875–1879
Sheriff Pembroke Mercer	1871–1875
Sheriff Julius A. Sanders	1867–1871
Sheriff Robert Conover	1863–1867
Sheriff David C. Stotts	1859–1863
Sheriff Amos F. Owen	1855–1859
Sheriff Edward Russell	1853–1855
Sheriff W.K. Roberts	1851–1853
Sheriff Charles Niel	1849–1851
Sheriff Allen Crook	1847–1849
Sheriff Elias Hughes	1845–1847
Sheriff A.G. Clark	1843–1845
Sheriff Ezekiel W. Smith	1841–1843