



## ST. FRANCOIS COUNTY

# Professionalism, Commitment Marks History of Law Enforcement

### 2014 COUNTY INFO

1550 Doubet Rd.  
Farmington, MO 63640  
573-756-3252

**JAIL** 168-beds  
**SIZE** 452 square miles



**Sheriff Daniel R. Bullock**  
1993–Present

**S**t. Francois County, one of Missouri's oldest counties, was created on December 19, 1821 from parts of Jefferson, St. Genevieve and Washington counties. Michael Hart was the first St. Francois County Sheriff, serving until 1823. Like sheriffs following him until 1876, Hart was also the county tax collector.

In September 1822, D. Murphy donated 53 acres of land, the current town of Farmington, for establishment of a county seat. In 1824, a double-log jail and brick courthouse were built. In 1850, the first courthouse was torn down and replaced with a



The aftermath of the Feb. 6, 1932 St. Francois County Jail break.

larger version. The next year, an inmate set the jail on fire and came close to going up in flames himself.

By 1870, the county was ready for a substantial jail upgrade. The county appropriated \$11,000 -quite a substantial amount for the time. Built of limestone and brick, it included piped heating and six flush toilets. The cells and offices were on the first floor and the second floor provided quarters for the sheriff.

The jail was substantial enough to withstand a huge blast that was part of an escape attempt on February 6, 1932. Inmate Joe Downs had gotten nine sticks of dynamite slipped to him through the bars of his cell and placed them around the window frame. The explosion blew a 14-pound piece of the building two blocks onto the roof of the high school.

Downs and six others made a run for it through the hole and headed for the fence that surrounded the jail. Sheriff Roy Presnell and Deputy Dewey May came out of the building and ordered the fleeing prisoners to stop, then opened fire. Joe's son, Woodrow, was killed and John Vranic was wounded. The other five escaped over the fence but were later recaptured.

The county grew quickly through the early years. From the 1840s, lead and iron mining brought thousands of new people to St. Francois County and with them, constant work for law officers. Native American Indians still lived in the area for a time and occasional conflict between them and settlers added to the sheriff's workload.

After the Civil War, the area was still relatively untamed and the history of St. Francois County sheriffs reflects that. Sheriff Thomas S. McMullin was elected in 1877 and went about the business of law enforcement, eventually being involved in an historic event — the county's only legal hanging.

Driving a wagon and team, Robert Ferguson left his Kan-

sas home with his 5-year-old son and \$350 to visit relatives in Illinois. Around Sedalia he was joined by Charles Hardin, who was driving a span of horses and also headed east. While they were camped three miles southeast of Iron Mountain in St. Francois County, Hardin crushed Ferguson's skull with a stick, killing him. He took the boy, the money and four horses, eventually making his way by train to Kentucky where he was captured and returned to Farmington. Sheriff McMullin oversaw Hardin's hanging on January 23, 1880 before a crowd estimated at 5,000.

St. Francois County experienced a second tragic death when Sheriff McMullin was shot and killed by a drunk on September 1, 1880. He was succeeded by Sheriff John B. Benham who was shot and killed on December 18, 1880 while making an arrest. Being sheriff was a no feet-on-the-desk job in frontier Missouri.

The county gained a reputation for lawlessness as the centuries changed. The Dooley-Harris Feud heated up with a shootout that killed two men and wounded four more, one of which later died of his wounds. The shootout occurred at a 1900 picnic, to which the Dooleys had come armed. The feud continued with an incident on a train in 1902, where Bill Dooley shot and killed Bill Harris by shooting him behind the ear from 10 feet away. Bill Dooley was found to be of unsound mind by the court and died in a state mental ward in 1907.

By the 1920s, crime in St. Francois County had become less personal and more organized. The changing times and proximity to St. Louis brought illegal whisky and gambling to the county. Sheriffs John G. Hunt and H.B. 'Bud' Watts spent the decade making raids on saloons and trying to control the making of whisky in the hills of St. Francois County. The bootleggers were not above retaliation on lawmen. Deputy Sheriff Sam Doss was shot and killed by moonshiners on August 16, 1926 while standing next to his wife. Bart Walker and Wesley Bossel were eventually caught and sent to jail for the murder by Sheriff Roy E. Presnell in 1929.

But tragedy and change occurred earlier that year in the sheriff's office, proving that domestic disputes are some of the most



The St. Francois County Jail, completed in October 1996.

dangerous situations law enforcers face. In September 1929 Sheriff London and deputies, John T. Smith and George Sutherland, went to a home south of Farmington, where Charles Kassabaum had allegedly attacked his father and brother-in-law. Told that Kassabaum was armed with a shotgun, Sheriff London nevertheless attempted to convince him to surrender. But Kassabaum stepped out of the house and killed London with a blast from the shotgun. He was in turn killed by the deputies.

A 1930 incident probably led to new procedures for searching prisoners. Sheriff Presnell was in the back seat of an automobile with two men being taken to prison in Jefferson City when one, Walter Gurley, pulled a gun on the sheriff. Presnell was able to get it away from him, and a hacksaw blade was found on Gurley in a subsequent search.

In the modern era, Sheriff Dan Bullock led the crusade for a new jail. The resulting state-of-the-art detention facility will hold an inmate population of 188. Interestingly, it was constructed to include the old State Hospital dairy barn, built by Works Progress Administration workers in 1938. A second law-enforcement sales tax passed in 1995 to allow an expansion of sheriff's office staff that now includes 56 deputies.

For nearly two centuries the sheriffs of St. Francois County have served and protected their community. Too many have paid the ultimate price for their service. The dedication and fortitude of the sheriffs and deputies from 1821 until today are a testimony to their professionalism and commitment to a better society. ★

Sources: *Daily Journal*; *Lead Belt News*; *Farmington News*; *Farmington Press*; *St. Louis Post Dispatch*; [www.ancestorhunt.com](http://www.ancestorhunt.com).

## FORMER SHERIFFS

Sheriff Jack D. Cade .....	1988–1992
Sheriff Kenneth E. Buckley .....	1980–1988
Sheriff James D. Hickman .....	1976–1980
Sheriff Kenneth E. Buckley .....	1964–1976
Sheriff Leslie "Buck" Jones .....	1963–1964
Sheriff Lloyd Pinkston .....	1963
Sheriff Clay H. Mullins .....	1952–1963
Sheriff Dewey Smallen .....	1948–1952
Sheriff Herman Heck .....	1944–1948
Sheriff Arthur "Bing" Miller .....	1940–1944
Sheriff A.A. Bayles .....	1936–1940
Sheriff Roy E. Presnell .....	1929–1936
Sheriff John T. Smith .....	1929
Sheriff William London .....	1929
Sheriff H.B. "Bud" Watts .....	1925–1929
Sheriff John G. Hunt .....	1921–1925
Sheriff Charles H. Adams .....	1917–1921
Sheriff Joseph C. Williams .....	1913–1917
Sheriff William London .....	1909–1913
Sheriff James J. Croke .....	1905–1909
Sheriff Henderson M. Murphy .....	1903–1905
Sheriff Jefferson D. Highley .....	1899–1903
Sheriff William B. Rariden .....	1895–1899
Sheriff Joseph H. Perkins .....	1891–1895
Sheriff Mark L. Creegan .....	1889–1891
Sheriff Peter A. Benham .....	1885–1889
Sheriff Zachariah P. Cole .....	1880–1885
Sheriff John B. Benham .....	1880
Sheriff Laken D. Walker .....	1880
Sheriff Thomas S. McMullin .....	1877–1880
Sheriff John B. Highley .....	1875–1877
Sheriff Laken D. Walker .....	1871–1875
Sheriff Franklin Murphy .....	1867–1871
Sheriff Rufus Alexander .....	1865–1866
Sheriff J.L. Resinger .....	1865
Sheriff Thomas S. McMullin .....	1861–1864
Sheriff F.B. Matkin .....	1859–1860
Sheriff Elisha Matkin .....	1855–1858
Sheriff Elisha Arnold .....	1851–1854
Sheriff Samuel S. Boyce .....	1849–1850
Sheriff Edwin C. Sebastian .....	1847–1848
Sheriff Charles Meyer .....	1843–1846
Sheriff Milton P. Cayce .....	1841–1842
Sheriff Ebenezer H. Hibbits .....	1839–1840
Sheriff Andrew K. Harris .....	1836–1838
Sheriff Henry Hunt .....	1835–1836
Sheriff Isaac Mitchell Jr. ....	1833–1834
Sheriff John Kennedy .....	1832–1833
Sheriff John Cornel .....	1831–1832
Sheriff Thomas Madison .....	1829–1830
Sheriff John Corbin Alexander .....	1827–1828
Sheriff Charles Hart .....	1825–1826
Sheriff James Matkin .....	1824–1825
Sheriff Michael Hart .....	1822–1823