

**HENRY SINGLETON:  
A FORGOTTEN ARCHITECT'S  
LIFE AND FAMILY**

by Esley Hamilton

Henry Singleton is familiar to all lovers of St. Louis architecture as the original architect of the Old Courthouse. His name is cited in every book on these subjects, and his work on the building is well documented by surviving primary records. He was appointed in July of 1839 and resigned under pressure in January of 1842. About the rest of his life, however, virtually nothing has been written. In the biographical dictionary Henry and Elsie Withey published in 1956, his dates are given in this way: "(?)."

An inquiry from Portsmouth, Virginia has brought this problem into focus. Margaret Windley, the historian of the Monumental United Methodist Church there, reports that Henry Singleton designed a building for her congregation in 1831. At that time, it was called the Dinwiddie Street Methodist Church. Completed in 1832, it survived until 1864, when it burned to the ground, leaving no known illustrations. (Although that catastrophe occurred during the Civil War, when Portsmouth was occupied by Union troops, it is thought that the fire started as the result of a defective flue. The present church on the same site was designed in 1873 by Albert L. West and completed in 1876.)

A search of records here and in Virginia has uncovered the basic facts of Henry Singleton's life and career for the first time. It turns out that Kirkwood historians have long recognized him as a prominent figure in the early years of that community, but because he had changed his profession, nobody recognized Kirkwood's Henry Singleton as the architect.

According to a distinguished Greek Revival monument standing in Oak Hill Cemetery, Henry Singleton was born in Norfolk, Virginia on April 28, 1793 and departed this life on December 24, 1863. His obituary in the *Missouri Republican*, December 27, 1863, reports that he died in Kirkwood in his 72<sup>nd</sup> year, but these dates on the tombstone indicate that he had celebrated only his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and was in his 71<sup>st</sup> year.

Henry was one of the six children of John and Sarah Singleton of Norfolk. When Sarah died in 1820 in her 52<sup>nd</sup> year, the *American Beacon*, the Norfolk newspaper (May 9, 1820), reported that she had been for many years a zealous member of the Methodist Church. Henry's siblings included James D. Singleton, who died in 1827, and a sister who became the mother of John Singleton Millson (1808-1874), the U. S. congressman representing Norfolk from 1849 to 1861.



The Singleton Monument in Oak Hill Cemetery, Kirkwood

The *American Beacon* reported on April 13, 1816, that Henry had married Mary Ann Reynolds the previous Wednesday (which would have been April 10), and that she was "the eldest daughter of Mr. R. Reynolds, Merchant, all of this place." Henry and Mary Ann had eight children, according to their grandson, John Brant Single-

ton. Seven are known to have lived in St. Louis; Mary Louisa died at the age of five in 1831, before they moved here.

Henry's career as an architect can be traced to 1822, when he designed the First Presbyterian Church of Portsmouth on Middle Street. Portsmouth is right next to Norfolk in the Hampton Roads region of Tidewater Virginia; the Singletons seem to have lived there after their marriage. The building was destroyed by fire in 1872. Henry had served in 1818 as the first superintendent of a joint Sunday School organized by First Presbyterian and Dinwiddie Street Methodist. In 1824 he designed a temporary triumphal arch to honor General Lafayette on his visit to. (The French hero of the American Revolution also came to St. Louis during that same visit). In 1827, Henry designed the new Masonic Hall for Portsmouth Naval Lodge No. 100. In 1828, he was superintendent for construction of the coffer damming needed for the Gosport Dry Dock, a facility of what is now known as the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, although located in Portsmouth.

The Virginia papers also reported Henry's civic activities. In 1827, he was elected one of twelve managers of the Portsmouth Savings Fund Society. He was part of a committee in 1829 that met with President Andrew Jackson to invite him to visit Portsmouth. Mary Ann Singleton joined the First Presbyterian Church of Portsmouth in 1824, and Henry joined her there in 1829. By the following year, he had been named an elder. He was appointed to the committee to purchase a new fire engine and served on the executive committee of the Friends of Temperance.

In spite of their apparently successful life, the Singletons moved to St. Louis about 1835. Henry's name appears in the city's second city directory published the next year, 1836 (the first was in 1820). Singleton & Forster, architects, are listed at 79 South 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Forster should be Foster, for Joseph Foster, the master carpenter who was Singleton's brother-in-law.

The Singleton monument in Oak Hill records that Mary Ann Singleton "departed this life February 20<sup>th</sup> 1836 in the 39<sup>th</sup> year of her age. She was an affectionate wife, a faithful and tender mother, a warm friend, and a devoted Christian."

In 1838, H. Singleton, builder, resided at 43 North 6<sup>th</sup> Street. That same year he joined other members of First Presbyterian Church in founding Second Presbyterian. The next year, he bought property on the west side of North 8<sup>th</sup> Street, 64 feet 5 inches south of the corner of St. Charles Street, where the back part of the Mayfair Hotel is now (Book O<sup>2</sup>, page 446; Book W<sup>3</sup>, page 93). He had moved to that location at least by 1840, when he was

listed as "architect of the new courthouse." He sold the property in 1856 for \$10,000 to William Greenleaf Eliot, the founder of the Church of the Messiah (Unitarian) and of Washington University (Book 172, page 188). Eliot had already moved to Beaumont and Locust in Stoddard's Addition so probably bought the 8<sup>th</sup> Street property as an investment.

It is well known that the contract for the courthouse was taken away from Singleton early in 1842. Green's directories continue to list him as architect and builder in 1845 and "architect, &c" in 1847. But by 1848, he had a new job description, port warden. This was an appointed position of the city government. Singleton remained in jobs associated with river traffic for the rest of his life, sometimes called boat inspector, steamboat hull inspector, and similar variants. In 1857 his office was in the U.S. Custom House.

He was also involved in the development of Singleton Street, which runs between 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets, north of Papin and south of Gratiot. This is apparently the tract of 5.54 acres one mile southwest of the courthouse that he bought from E. McCormick in 1840 (Book L<sup>2</sup>, page 444). Singleton seems to have worked with John J. Murdoch and Charles K. Dickson (1816-1871) on this development between 1849 and 1853. The *Pictorial Atlas of St. Louis* published in 1874 shows the results as a row of rather substantial houses with ample space between them. (Today both sides of the street are given over to fenced parking lots.) Murdoch and Dickson had established an auction and commission business about 1838, and their interests gradually expanded to include railroads, banks, river salvage ("wrecking companies"), and real estate. Dickson served as president of the corporation which promoted the Eads Bridge.

Henry Singleton's second wife was named Marsena, although he spelled it Marcena in his will. At the time of her death in 1888, she was said to be 76 years old, so she would have been born about 1812, nine or ten years after Henry. She is probably the Mrs. Martha Robb who was married to a Henry Singleton in November, 1840 by Artemus Bullard, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church (Marriage Book 2, page 268). Marsena didn't transfer from First Presbyterian to Second until November 11, 1843. According to Henry's grandson, Marsena had a daughter 17 years old at the time of her marriage to Henry.

The Pacific Railroad opened as far as Franklin County in 1853, and the town of Kirkwood was laid out within a week of the first train. Henry and Marsena were apparently among the first to move there, already being listed there in the 1854 city directory. Since Henry's profession would have required easy access to the riverfront,

they must have had confidence in the passenger service offered by the new railroad line. On September 24, 1854, they became founding members of the First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood, transferring their memberships from Second Presbyterian of St. Louis. Henry was one of the first elders of the church, and one may speculate that he designed the “plain brick church” erected at the southeast corner of Adams and Kirkwood Road on land deeded by the Kirkwood Association on January 13, 1857 (Book 241, page 134; Dahl, p. 30).



*Singleton House, 218 Dickson, Kirkwood*

The Singletons assembled a tract of 27 acres just outside the original town, north of Argonne and east of Woodlawn. It is called Singleton Subdivision on early maps but was not officially platted. The Singletons named Dickson Avenue, which runs through their property, for Henry’s associate Charles K. Dickson, who was described in Hyde & Conard as “one of his day who gave a great impetus to suburban development.”

Two houses still standing on the Singleton property can be associated with them. The house at 218 Dickson (at the southeast corner of Adams) was specifically designated as the Singleton Homestead in Marsena’s 1888 will, and this is the house referred to in Presbyterian church histories as the place where the congregation worshipped before they had their own building. By tradition, lumber for the house arrived on the first train. The house’s original appearance can still be discerned behind later alterations.



*Singleton House, 306 North Woodlawn, Kirkwood*

The house at 306 North Woodlawn Avenue, an official Kirkwood Historic Landmark, is also a Singleton property. It was the home of Henry’s son John and his wife Melissa, and several sources refer to the property as to be kept in Melissa’s name. The present appearance of the house, however, seems to postdate Henry’s time.

According to John Brant Singleton, Henry and Marsena had seven children, but if true, none seems to have survived. The seven surviving children from his first marriage, however, can be identified from the 1850 census and Henry’s will:

- The eldest son, William Reynolds, was 33 in 1850. In 1846, he married Emma Augusta Reed, the daughter of George Reed of Portsmouth.
- Mary was 25 in 1850.
- John Henry was 22. His birth was recorded by the First Presbyterian Church of Portsmouth on December 26, 1828. Apparently in 1850 he had already married Melissa L., who was also living in the household, age 18.
- Benjamin Reynolds was 19. He married Mary Jane Williams in 1855 (Marriage Book 7, page 306).
- Horace L. was 17.
- Sarah, an older daughter, had married Edward Holden in 1845 (Marriage Book 3, page 202).
- Ann Eliza, another daughter, married William H. Smith. She has not been found in the 1850 census or the marriage index but may have remained in the Norfolk, where Henry wrote to her in 1861.

As southerners, the Singletons were slave owners. The 1840 census notes that they owned a woman between the ages of 24 and 26, and in 1860, they owned a man age 22 and a woman age 20. No slaves are listed in 1850, but three unrelated women from Germany were in the household: Eliza Kemper, age 19, Matilda Stein, age 17, and Eliza Smith age 19. In 1860, even with two slaves, the Singletons also had a man named only Frank, age 20, a laborer from Germany, and Augustus C. Ward, age 11, from Ireland, while John’s separate household included Margaret Barons, age 28, from England and William Ruford, age 20, from Germany.

An unusual situation at the beginning of the Civil War resulted in the preservation of a group of Singleton family letters at the Missouri Historical Society, the most intimate look we have of the family. Henry was removed from the local board of the U.S. Inspectors of Steamers on February 17, 1862. In those days before Civil Service, abrupt dismissals were common, but in this case, more than ten months salary was also withheld. Singleton feared that reports of disloyalty had been made against him, since he was a Southerner with family still in Virginia, and he appealed to Salmon Chase, Secretary of the Treasury and also to Hamilton R. Gamble, Missouri’s

governor. To demonstrate the anti-war sentiments prevalent in his family, he sent Gamble a selection of family correspondence going back to 1858, and these letters have survived in the Gamble Papers, although now scattered through the collection by date.

They do corroborate his contention. On March 15, 1858, Henry's nephew, John S. Millson wrote from Congress, "I concur fully with you in your desire to put a stop to the agitation in Kansas." A letter from January, 1861 urges Millson, then in the last weeks of his term, "Save the Union." To his daughter Ann Eliza Smith in Norfolk, Henry writes that February, "Our heart sickens at the very thought of disunion." Son Benjamin, working at the Navy Yard, wrote in March, "I am one of those that cannot be made to believe that any circumstances could justify the South that she must go out of the Union." But as secession took place and warfare erupted, by August, Henry wrote to Horace, "Your cousin John Millson, one of her favorite sons a few months since, dare not open his lips in his native city, as also your brothers William and Ben thrown out of employment because of their Union feelings. I love my state above all other states for what has done, but this last act I cannot approve."

Henry Singleton's sons seem to have varied but unsettled careers. Two of them were at least part-time architects. William R. in the 1845 city directory was listed as a civil engineer, living with Henry on 8<sup>th</sup> Street. He is credited by Virginia historians as the designer of the old Norfolk County Courthouse in Portsmouth, a Greek Revival building with a Doric portico. If he was, he must have hurried back east, because the dates of this building are 1845-1846. The building at 420 High Street is now the Arts Center of the Portsmouth Museums. William was also involved in the design of the Norfolk City Hall, beginning in 1847, although Thomas U. Walter also played a role, whether to provide only the dome or to supplant Singleton's design entirely is unclear. That building is now the General Douglas MacArthur Memorial, a major landmark. William was in Portsmouth in 1856, when he was elected corresponding secretary for the newly formed Young Men's Christian Association. At the outbreak of the war, he was in the civil engineer's office at the Navy Yard, and in 1867 he was again named constructing engineer there. He returned to St. Louis in the late 1870s and formed a firm of patent solicitors with others of his family, but its life was brief.

John H. and Benjamin opened the Pacific Foundry in 1853 or 1854. John was still operating it in the 1860s and living with his wife and children in Kirkwood near his parents. In the 1866 city directory, John is listed as an agent for Henry B. Brant, and his son born in 1856 was named John Brant Singleton. It was John H. who purchased the lot in Oak Hill Cemetery, and many of the

infant children buried there (at least eight in all) apparently belonged to him. Among his sons, William S. died in 1882 at the age of 22, and Clement in 1915 at the age of 61, while John Brant Singleton lived until 1950 and became a source of information about the family, as noted above.



*Norfolk City Hall, 421 East City Hall Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia, 1847-1850, William R. Singleton and Thomas U. Walter. HABS VA, 65-NORF, 10-1*

Benjamin returned to St. Louis after the war and is listed as an architect in the 1866 city directory, in partnership with Charles E. Cassell. He served as an engineer for the waterworks in 1871 and as an architect in the city engineer's office from 1872 through 1876. From 1889 to 1892 he was superintendent of construction for the Board of Education, and thereafter he worked from time to time as a draftsman for the Missouri Trust Company. Frequently changing addresses, he remained in city directories until his death in 1916 at the age of 84.

Horace studied at Princeton University, became a Presbyterian minister, and at the outbreak of the war was serving the congregation in Chillicothe, Missouri. Apparently he later moved to Maryland. Sarah Singleton Holden died by 1861, leaving a son named for his father, Edward Holden (St. Louis City Probate, File #6616).

The Irish boy Augustus C. Ward was apparently adopted by Marsena and is referred to as Augustus C. Singleton in her will. She left him a lot on Jefferson east of Dickson. All her other heirs in 1888 were grandchildren: Clement, Henry, and John B. (sons of John H.), Ralph H., Joseph F., and Laura W.



Monument to Major John Saunders, Hospital Point, Portsmouth Naval Hospital, Virginia, designed by John Haviland, c. 1830. HABS VA, 65-PORTM, 2-4

Oak Hill Cemetery was founded in 1868 as Oak Ridge Cemetery, too late for Henry and certainly too late for his first wife Mary Ann. Grandson John B. Singleton remembered his father moving bodies and a monument from the churchyard of Des Peres Presbyterian Church on Geyer Road. That church was founded in 1834, early enough, but its location would have been remote from anybody living in St Louis, as Henry Singleton continued to do for nearly two decades after Mary Ann's death. On the other hand, the Greek Revival monument that marks the plot would have been old-fashioned in 1868 but chimes perfectly with the style preferred by Henry in his architectural prime, or for that matter his son William. It appears to be a close copy of the Saunders Monument on Hospital Point in Portsmouth, designed by Philadelphia architect John Haviland about the same time that he was building the Portsmouth Naval Hospital, 1827-1833. As the most important building in that region, the hospital would have been known to Henry Singleton, and he may have been involved with its construction.

Henry lived until 1863, but he was already feeling his age in 1861, when he wrote to his sister, "We are fast passing off, closing our pilgrimage, ere long we will join those who have gone before, in singing anthems of praise in a blessed eternity."

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## HENRY SINGLETON'S ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY IN ST. LOUIS

by David J. Simmons

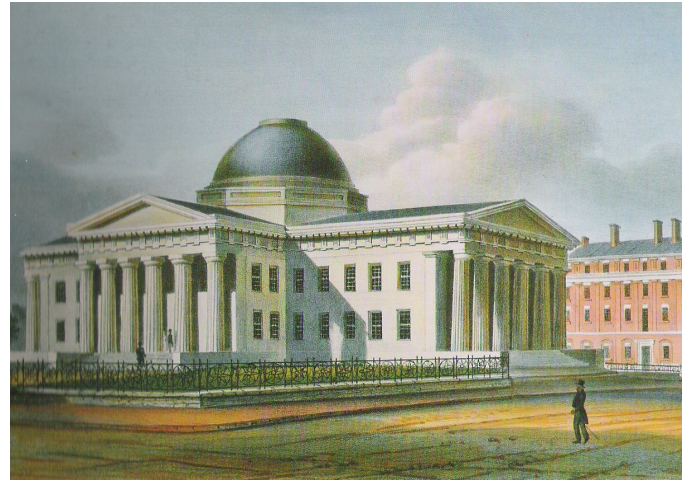
As the original architect of the second St. Louis County Courthouse, Henry Singleton shaped its Greek Revival heritage and awakened the St. Louis community to the need for government buildings with an illustrious stature and adequate accommodations. In addition, he supplied the county with its first jail conceived from contemporary ideas to serve current requirements and future demands. His buildings envisioned the aspirations of tomorrow – dictated by the community's explosive growth. During his two and a half years of architectural service to the county administrative court, he experienced a panorama of difficulties resulting from unreliable contractors, constant changes in plans and materials, unproductive court interference, rumors predicated on false accusations, and political rivalries. Eventually these conflicts resulted in his dismissal from court employment, but they in no way diminish his important contribution to St. Louis architecture prior to the Civil War. Political intrigue and inuendo continued to plague St. Louis architects undertaking

government building projects at every level throughout the nineteenth century as Singleton's successors quickly learned.

Prior to his St. Louis experience, Henry Singleton enjoyed a successful architectural career in the Portsmouth-Norfolk, Virginia area. In 1824 he commemorated the visit of General Lafayette with a magnificent memorial arch. At the behest of the Masonic Lodge No. 100, he completed a new lodge hall in 1827. A year later he built a cofferdam at the United States Naval Yard in the Portsmouth area. Between 1831 and 1833 he worked on the Dinwiddie Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Portsmouth. During the next two years he expanded the dock facilities at the U. S. Naval Yard and aided in the construction of an addition to the U. S. Marine Hospital nearby. Then at the age of 42 Singleton suddenly relocated to St. Louis. Joseph Foster, master carpenter and Singleton's brother-in-law, accompanied him on this trek in the fall of 1835. Upon their arrival, they established the architectural firm of Singleton and Foster. They advertised their professional skills in the *Missouri Argus*, November 5, 1835. Besides the usual building and drafting services they promised to construct bridges, dams, aqueducts, and docks. On August 29, 1837, Singleton submitted a plan to the county court for a lattice bridge spanning the River Des Peres. The court rejected the project on the basis of its high cost. A year later, Joseph Foster completed repairs at the first county courthouse.

Completed in 1828 at a cost of \$15,000 under the direction of architects Morton and Laveille, the first county courthouse occupied the east side of the square bounded by Fourth, Broadway, Market and Chestnut. It contained nine rooms on two floors, but only one of these spaces could accommodate courtroom activities. Within a decade the population of St. Louis tripled and the need for additional courtroom space became critical. On June 1, 1838, the county administrative court placed an advertisement in the local newspapers seeking proposals for a two-story courthouse to face Fifth Street, with measurements of 132 feet long and 30 feet deep. In response, the court received several proposals, but none of them pleased the judges. On September 7, the court placed a second advertisement in local newspapers addressed to local contractors and builders requesting plans for a fire-proof building of two floors with basement to be built on Courthouse Square. The building was to feature four main rooms – two 20 feet square, and two 20 by 30 feet. To encourage participation, the court offered a first prize of \$100 and a second prize of \$75. Once again the court rejected all the submitted plans but decided to award first prize to Peter Brooks and second prize to Henry Spence. In desperation, the court then empowered Peter Ferguson to find a suitable courthouse plan of sufficient size to provide for current and future court needs. Ferguson knew

Henry Singleton and asked him to prepare a series of preliminary sketches for a large and imposing new courthouse. Singleton's sketches received a favorable response from the court on March 28, 1839. Working with the court, Singleton then completed the courthouse plans in three months. The court adopted them on July 8 and appointed him architect and construction supervisor.



*An ideal view of the Court House, from John W. Reps, John Caspar Wild: Painter and Printmaker of Nineteenth-Century Urban America (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2006), p. 61. This picture depicts an ideal Courthouse based on architect Henry Singleton's design of 1839. Singleton left the project early in 1842, and the east wing (to the right in the picture) didn't replace the 1828 courthouse until 1851. It was then built six bays deep instead of the five shown here. The south wing (to the left) and the north wing were built in the 1850s to designs of Robert S. Mitchell as large office blocks instead of classical porticoes. The dome was built on a different, higher drum and then replaced in the 1860s by the present taller iron dome by William Rumbold. As completed, the Courthouse was more impressive than the state capitol of Missouri or any of the surrounding states, and we can thank the National Park Service that we are still able to enjoy it today.*

Singleton's courthouse design possessed three important advantages. Its Greek temple presence evoked a sense of democratic principle and symbolized the authority of the county to govern in the name of its residents. Its presence demanded respect for and compliance with the law. Covering most of a city block, its large size enabled county government to house an expanding judicial system well into the future. If at some point the court needed more space, his plan could be adjusted to accommodate expansion of the north and south wings. Most important, his design allowed the court to construct the building in sections as need arose and funds became available. The original courthouse could remain intact and operational until most of the new building was complete. The first phase represented about 70% of the cross-shaped project. It called

for the construction of the west wing, and central rotunda with two short wing extensions on the north and south.

The Singleton courthouse rotated around a central rotunda. The larger east and west wings, equipped with outside entrances, housed the county judicial system. The shorter north and south wings offered direct entrance into the rotunda, a public gathering place. Placed on the top of a tall octagon shaped drum, the dome in the shape of an inverted bowl crowned the rotunda 130 feet above the ground. On the highest point of the copper clad dome, an observation deck could accommodate a hundred visitors. Expressed in the Greek Revival style, the design focused on the Doric columned porticos located on all four wings. Construction was substantially of brick, with limestone veneered fronts and trim. Construction framing utilized a substantial amount of long white pine from Wisconsin. Cast iron fluted portico columns and wood door frames, window sills, porticos and entablatures completed the exterior finish. Later in construction, stone replaced these items of cast iron and wood. The interior assigned space to four large permanent courtrooms and two convertible courtrooms. These convertible rooms doubled as large clerk rooms when not being used by the Probate Court or County Criminal Court. Four jury rooms, two grand jury rooms, a law library, and counsel and client hall filled most of the area on the first and second floors. In addition, Singleton located the sheriff's office and five safety cells in this area. The basement had two fuel rooms, two rooms for prisoners waiting trial, and four rooms for jurors and witnesses.

To facilitate, scrutinize, and monitor construction contracts for Phase One, Singleton engaged his former partner Joseph Foster, who now worked independently as a finish carpenter. With court permission, Singleton approved several construction contracts for the new project in August 1839, and excavation of the site commenced the following month. On October 21 of the same year the administrative court laid the cornerstone for the new courthouse.

Almost from the start of construction Singleton encountered several ongoing problems. Workers building the courthouse constantly complained about their ten-hour workdays and their low wages. Both the brick and stone contractors found it difficult to fulfill the requirements of their contracts. John Goodfellow, stone contractor, presented a special challenge to Singleton's patience. He usually delivered stone after the due date, in quantities less than promised, and he charged excessive prices for stone of inferior quality. When Singleton attempted to terminate Goodfellow's contract, the

court intervened and refused to give their consent. Outraged, Singleton thought about leaving the project but persevered, finally convincing the court to terminate Goodfellow in the fall of 1840. At the same time, John O'Fallon offered the court the use of his north St. Louis limestone quarry for an annual lease of \$250, provided that the court quarry the stone and deliver it to the building site. The court agreed and placed the control of the operation under Singleton, who appointed his brother-in-law to supervise it. Quarry operations started on November 18, 1840, producing a large amount of superior grade limestone at a very reasonable price. Because of its abundance and low cost, the court, at the behest of Singleton, decided to expand the use of stone in the exterior construction of the building. They converted the porticos, entablatures, window sills, and door frames to stone, which increased building costs and lengthened the construction time. The stone-veneered front remained unaltered. At the close of 1842 the court changed the cast iron columns to stone.

Interior arrangement of the west wing constantly changed at the whim of every politician who saw the plans, resulting in construction delays.

Finances were another source of disruption. The court struggled to raise funds for the project. They collected tolls on county roads, charged license fees for dram shops, and taxed wealthy landowners, but these sources didn't produce revenue fast enough for the project. Judges attempted to coerce project contractors to take as partial payment for their services in court scrip, unsecured promissory notes bearing interest redeemable in the future. When this failed, the judges asked contractors to accept partial payment in the form of loan instruments, with the money to be paid back by the court at a fixed interest rate and redemption date. As a last resort, the court obtained loans from wealthy individuals, usually at 10% interest annually.

In spite of finance problems, the courthouse construction progressed rapidly in 1841. That summer the court determined to build a new county jail at Sixth and Chestnut. The old jail, built in 1819, was a remnant of a simpler age, totally inadequate for the growing community. Singleton furnished the plan for the new jail, and the court designated him architect of the project in June. Construction started in August. The Singleton jail measured 40 by 60 feet and had four stories and a basement. The limestone exterior had walls three feet thick resting on a concrete and stone foundation four feet thick. Jail windows were six feet tall and three feet wide on the exterior, but only nine inches wide on the interior. Jail construction depended on interior arched brick support walls and galvanized iron roof laid over wood rafters and planking. A furnace room, fumigating room, and toilets were located

in the basement, while the office, jailor's room, processing area, and holding cells occupied the first floor. The three upper floors were arranged around a centrally placed vestibule 13 feet wide and 54 feet long, containing connecting staircases and a series of open wells eight feet apart. These wells, each four feet wide and eight feet long, ran down the center of the room and admitted light and ventilating air from a skylight in the roof. Each of these floors contained 12 cells – six on the left of the vestibule and six on the right. Each cell measured 7 by 8 feet. Adding the cells on the first floor, the jail had a total of between 40 and 43 cells. Singleton estimated the cost of the jail to be \$30,000.

The question of Singleton's compensation for architectural services to the court did not arise until December 1840. In his year-end report, Singleton listed his compensation for previous projects similar in nature to range between \$2,400 and \$3,000 annually. He reminded the judges that local architects charged between 7% and 10% of building costs for their remuneration. After careful deliberation, the court fixed Singleton's recompense at 7% of one group of building costs and 5% of another group, working out to be slightly more than \$3,000 annually. Some judges felt this sum to be excessive. One judge, James Purdy, himself a frame carpenter contractor, believed that Singleton had overstayed his usefulness to the court. Someone else could be employed to supervise the courthouse and jail projects at a substantial saving to the court.

By the close of September 1841, Singleton had spent \$85,537 on the construction of the new courthouse project. In the process, courthouse workers had laid 700,000 bricks and had cut and laid 25,000 feet of stone. Quarry workers had mined 8,000 perches of limestone. Singleton had completed the walls of the west wing of the courthouse and was awaiting the installation of the roof. Walls of the rotunda were rising rapidly.

In spite of these achievements, the court seemed to lack enthusiasm for Singleton's performance. During the summer of 1841, Judge Purdy had inaugurated a campaign to oust him. Malicious rumors attempted to impugn Singleton's integrity and to diminish his achievement. One such accused him and friends of draining the county treasury of its funds; when they finished the courthouse, it was said, the treasury would be empty.

A second rumor alleged that Singleton had used county funds to speculate in land deals, earning himself a profit of \$2,000. With court approval, the story went, he was concealing his indiscretion through extravagant accounting. In November 1841 the court ordered an audit of Singleton's financial records by an outside private accounting firm. After examining his books, they reported that

he had committed no impropriety in the handling of county finances.

During the fall of this year, Judge Purdy met privately with Singleton and tried to convince him to resign. Purdy falsely claimed that other court justices questioned his job performance and wanted to terminate his service. Singleton prepared a written resignation but never submitted it. In another incident, Mr. Pagando, one of Singleton's workers, charged him with pocketing his salary, but an examination of court records revealed this to be false.



*Old City Jail, Chestnut and 6<sup>th</sup> Street, photo by Emil Boehl, c. 1870. From Charles van Ravenswaay, Saint Louis, an Informal History of the City and Its People, 1764-1865 (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1991), p. 339.*

Under siege, Singleton reacted boldly by seeking additional funds to accelerate the courthouse construction. When Judge Walton received his request, the court became frightened. The court didn't have the funds to sustain a new construction initiative. Rather they needed to slash costs drastically to remain solvent. On January 15, 1842, the court dismissed Singleton as a cost-cutting measure. While he had received an annual salary of \$3,000, William Twombly, his successor, would earn only \$1,200. Additional court savings came from closing the limestone quarry and reducing the work force at the courthouse construction site in April 1842.

After six months of negotiation and dispute, the court fixed Singleton's compensation package at \$8,546. Of this amount, the court awarded \$500 to Joseph Foster, \$225 to Mr. Sheppard, Singleton's clerk, and \$156 for the Pagando claim, leaving Singleton with \$7,665. Following his departure from the project, Singleton esti-



mated the total cost of the courthouse project to be \$180,000, of which \$100,000 had already been spent.

Twombly's tenure with the court lasted from his appointment on February 3, 1842 to his termination on November 1, 1842. At the behest of the court, Twombly revised the jail plan, seeking to reduce its cost. He removed the top floor and reduced the number of cells to 24. But by the time the court completed the jail in December 1843, its cost had soared above \$40,000, or \$10,000 more than Singleton had estimated. Local newspapers asked the court about the promised savings from the jail construction. The building turned out to be smaller in size, contain less prisoner space, and cost more; any savings had evaporated.

A more serious challenge to the credibility of Twombly and the judges came from a major scandal involving the quality of iron work at the new jail. On April 11, 1842, the firm of Christian Pullis obtained the contract for iron work for the jail for 10 ½ cents a pound. Examining the Pullis iron work at the jail in July 1842, a local iron dealer named John McMurray found it to be inferior in material, workmanship, and installation. Twombly, a friend of Pullis, had already determined that at least some of this iron work did meet contract requirements. McMurray wrote a story condemning the jail's iron work and submitted it to the *Evening Gazette*, which refused to print it. The owner of that newspaper had a longstanding friendship with Pullis. McMurray next approached the *People's Organ*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in St. Louis, and they agreed to publish the story under the pseudonym of "Vulcan," the Roman god of fire and metal work. When the *People's Organ* published the story on July 19, the enraged Pullis called it slander. The county prosecutor filed suit against the newspaper owners, charging them with defaming Pullis's character and damaging his business reputation. The trial, held before Judge Manning, opened on July 30 and ran for three days. Under the careful guidance of Henry Geyer, the defense paraded a series of witnesses who testified to the accuracy of McMurray's assessment of the ironwork at the jail. The case went to the jury on August 1, and after only three minutes of deliberation they returned and pronounced the publishers not guilty. Freedom of the press emerged the victor. County administrative judges compelled Pullis to repair or replace the iron work at the jail. Later another iron deal would take over the work.

After the departure of Twombly, Justice Purdy assumed control of both projects. Except for the approaches, the courthouse exterior was complete by June 1843. A short time later, George I. Barnett, then of the firm Barnett, Brewster, and Hart, furnished plans for

the courthouse rotunda, which Singleton had not produced. Barnett's rotunda featured a limestone paved floor more than three inches thick, three galleries above, and an oculus emitting light at the center of the domed ceiling. Four Ste. Genevieve limestone columns, 15 feet high and 22 inches in diameter, each cut from a solid piece of stone, supported the first gallery, which extended out 8 feet farther than the upper galleries. White oak Doric columns held the second and third galleries in place. A cast iron spiral staircase in the rotunda connected all levels. Staircase and balconies used iron railings. Toward the close of 1844 the courthouse interior approached completion. Finishing touches would continue through 1845. Joseph Foster, contractor for the courthouse's finished carpentry, worked on this project from 1842 to the spring of 1846. The court paid him \$42,400. This unfinished courthouse represented a county investment of between \$225,000 and \$250,000. On Washington's Birthday 1845, the courthouse rotunda admitted the general populace for the first time. Thousands of local residents celebrated the occasion with the usual political harangues.



*The Court House under construction in 1851, from a daguerrotype by Thomas Easterly. From van Ravenswaay, p. 326. The 1824 courthouse by Laveille & Morton was still standing on the right, and the original facade of the south wing (now an interior wall) remained as Singleton intended it to receive a Doric pediment and portico.*

After his departure from the court, Singleton continued his St. Louis architectural career for seven years. Written historical record does not enumerate his achievements during this period. In his mid-fifties, Singleton abandoned the uncertainties of architecture and found stable employment at the St. Louis Port Authority inspecting steamboats.

When the court finished the first phase of courthouse construction, all that remained to complete the Single-

ton plan was to add the porticoes to the north and south wings and to build the east wing at an estimated cost of \$150,000. Having exhausted its financial resources, though, the court waited seven years before resuming courthouse construction, now under the supervision of architect Robert S. Mitchell. He worked on the east wing and expanded the north and south wings, altering Singleton's original plan and elevating construction costs toward one million dollars. On September 22, 1859, the court appointed architect William Rumbold to conclude the project and to design and erect the new courthouse dome, pushing the total building cost past a million dollars by the time it was completed in 1862.

The design ideas realized by Singleton and his successors Robert S. Mitchell and William Rumbold resulted in a courthouse that marries Greek Revival and Italian Renaissance elements, attractive but not a masterpiece of architecture. If the county had built Singleton's Greek Revival temple of government as he intended, we would be looking at a masterpiece, but history dictated otherwise. Mitchell's north and south additions diminished the temple's effectiveness and Rumbold's dome obliterated it. Although the courthouse does not reflect the purity of his design, Singleton's achievement remains a cause for celebration.

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# News Letter

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