

County History

Early History

Modern-day Jackson County was the site of the first military outpost in the Louisiana Territory. Fort Osage, which was built in 1808 under the direction of General William Clark, co-commander of the Lewis and Clark expedition.



Jackson County Courthouse located in downtown Kansas City, MO.

On December 15, 1826, the Missouri State Legislature authorized the "County of Jackson," named after the seventh president of the United States of America, Andrew Jackson. Two years later, the first courthouse was built in Independence by Daniel P. Lewis for \$150.

In 1836 the first permanent, brick Jackson County Courthouse was erected on Independence Square in Independence, the County Seat. That building, now commonly known as the "Truman Courthouse" has since undergone five major remodels.

Harry S. Truman

In 1926, Harry S. Truman was elected Presiding Judge of Jackson County and was instrumental in voter approval of a major bond issue that made possible the adoption of a County "Ten Year Plan." The plan called for a new courthouse in downtown Kansas City plus remodeling of the Independence Courthouse, a juvenile center, improvements at the Jackson County home, and modernization of roads and bridges. This was the start of Harry Truman's political career where he went on to become a United States Senator, and then later became the 33rd President of the United States of America.

President Harry Truman left a decorating legacy behind him beyond bricks and mortar. In fact, his design savvy helped make Kansas City become known as the nation's top 10 city for art deco buildings. Truman traveled the country at his own expense to locate a design for the courthouse, which he found in Louisiana. The Jackson County Courthouse in downtown Kansas City still stands tall and remains a well-known landmark.

Expansion of the courthouse in Independence was dedicated in September of 1933. Construction of the downtown courthouse began in July of 1933 and was dedicated in 1934, the same year that Truman left county government to become a U.S. Senator.

Jackson Countians then – as now – owe Truman much gratitude for his vision and successful execution of a multitude of decision that kept Jackson County at the forefront of forward-thinking county planning, civic up-building, good government, and welfare and healthcare issues. County Court minutes are full of details that tell the story of how Jackson County survived (and in some instances thrived) during the Great Depression of the 1930s.



Statue of Harry S. Truman at the Historic Jackson County Truman Courthouse.



County History

Governance

In 1970, the voters of the county adopted a Constitutional Home Rule Charter which established the Executive position and the County Legislature. Both the County Executive and the members of the County Legislature are elected by the voters to govern Jackson County. The Constitutional Home Rule Charter provides for a separation of the legislative and executive functions. The County Executive oversees the day-to-day operations of the county government and has the power to appoint administrative officers and directors to head up various departments, the power to veto legislation, and the responsibility to operate and effective, efficient County Government. The nine-member County Legislature is given broad legislative power. They introduce and enact all county resolutions and ordinances. Other elected county officials of Jackson County are the Sheriff and the Prosecutor.



The County Legislature in session.

This charter form of county government provides the opportunity for the citizens of Jackson County to make changes in the County rather than in the State Capitol. On August 3, 2010, County voters approved a revised County Charter that focused on ethical reforms and called for an automatic Charter review every 10 years. The revised Charter took effect August 23, 2010. On November 6, 2018, County voters again approved a variety of amendments to this County Charter.

