

RESEARCHED BY JUSTIN WATKINS

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Edna McElhiney Olson, *Historical Saint Charles, Missouri* (St. Charles, MO: Olson, 1967), 32

This was the site of the old historic and famous hostelry called the Saint Charles House. It was built in 1849. This building was so badly damaged by the terrible hurricane [tornado] on 26 February 1876 that it was condemned as unsafe and was torn down.

On the site of the old hostelry, the Rechtern and Becker building was built in 1883 for their store. It was the largest store here at that time. Next it was used as the Saint Charles Stay Co. MFG's of Shoe Trimmings.

In 1922, the building was purchased by R. M. Thomson, the owner of the *Banner-News*. The building was torn down in 1966 for the restoration program of the Missouri First State Capitol

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The First State Capitol of Missouri

Edna McElhiney Olson, *Historical Saint Charles, Missouri* (St. Charles, MO: Olson, 1967), 33-34

One of the most outstanding historic buildings in Saint Charles is the First State Capitol of Missouri. These structures were erected by two brothers, Ruluff and Charles Peck. They were early prominent and influential merchants and the building was used as their residence and store building. It was known as "Peck's Row." It was actually three buildings under one saddleback roof. To the south was an arched driveway which led to the ferry and the river. The second floor housed the first Masonic Lodge organized in 1818. The third building was built Chancey Shepard and rooms on the second floor were used as the governor's office and committee rooms.

The bitterly fought slavery question was settled in the "Missouri Compromise" of 1820. The combined efforts of Col. Benjamin Emmons, Hiram Baber [not "Babler" as Olson spells it], and Daniel Morgan Boone at the 1820 Constitutional Convention at St. Louis led to the convention's approval to house the First State Capitol in Saint Charles. The city fathers established a "Town Board of Trustees" and guaranteed that the State would be furnished a seat of government "free of expenses to the State." The guarantors were to pay to Ruluff Peck the sum of \$100/yr for the use of the second floor. The arches in the walls of the second floor were opened to form the "Great Assembly Hall."

The Legislators attended the sessions coming on horseback, and wearing fur coats, coonskin caps and leather moccasins. The most outstanding member was Governor Alexander McNair, who was attired in a beaver hat and frock coat. Local residents and tavern keepers offered to house and board the members at a rate of \$2.50/wk. Many members were too poor to pay even this modest fee at a time when eggs sold at 5¢ per dozen, whiskey at 12 ¢ per quart, and pork at 1 ¢ per pound. The

legislators were possessed among other things with very good appetites and local civic minded citizens suffered losses in supplying board and room.

The County Court ordered the Sheriff to transport all equipment and appurtenances of the County Court to the two rooms occupied by the Masonic Lodge in Peck's Row in May 1821, thereby including the State Capitol and the Court House under one roof.

Many historic events took place during the time the First Missouri State Capitol was located in Saint Charles from 1821 to 1826. The famous Solemn Public Act was passed on which depended Missouri's admission to the Union. During the session of 6 November 1821, Governor McNair officially informed the legislature that Missouri had finally been admitted to the Union. Another important law passed was the State Banking Law of Missouri. The General Assembly entered into a very bitter debate over the removal of the Capitol to Jefferson City. On 21 January 1826, the doors of the first legislature closed.

The guarantors of the nominal yearly rental defaulted and a record in the Circuit Clerk's office that a judgment was awarded the Peck brothers against guarantors in 1824. In June 1829, after the removal of the State Capitol to Jefferson City, the State Auditor's office issued payment to Ruluff Peck the amount of \$247.50 for "the use of his house for the General Assembly" for ninety days at the rate of \$2.50/day.

The First State Capitol buildings were purchased in January 1961 for the State by the late Governor James T. Blair, Jr. The Missouri Park Board is now restoring the buildings. These buildings are a monument to the hardy pioneers of a new frontier. The old hand-made bricks are an ever present reminder of the trials and tribulations encountered in the establishment of the State of Missouri. Every public spirited citizen should look upon this building as a shrine, the foundation and heritage of the early pioneers of a new frontier.

(Edna McElhiney Olson was Archivist for the St. Charles County Historical Society during the 1960's. She searched records of the people of early St. Charles and its historical buildings. Now out of print, her 'blue book' of St. Charles early structures is among the treasures in the Historical Society archives and many personal libraries.

Edna wrote and published stories of the people and events, and though some stories might be considered to have some 'glamour added', they are all interesting and reflect the character of the people and the events of the period. Edna Olson loved St. Charles: she inspired others to continue researching and collecting records and more is now known about many of the buildings and events about which she wrote. Her work still serves as a reference in the continuing research into St. Charles long and proud history.)