In 1804 there were just five districts in Upper Louisiana. After the territory of the Louisiana Purchase was acquired, William Henry Harrison was placed in charge of the area that is today Missouri. He reorganized the territory into five counties that the Spanish had earlier grouped: St. Charles, Ste. Genevieve, St. Louis, Cape Girardeau, and New Madrid.

The northernmost county, St. Charles, was named for St. Charles Borromeo, an Italian cardinal. This area was designated between the Missouri River and the Mississippi River. Its oldest settlement was St. Charles, founded in 1780 by a hunter named Louis Blanchette. He was also commonly known as Blanchette le Chasseur (Blanchette, the hunter).

Ste. Genevieve County was established between the Meremac River on the north and Apple Creek on the south. It was named for the French Saint Genevieve who was the Patroness of Paris. The county housed the city of Ste. Genevieve which was very important in the making of Missouri’s history. It was the first permanent white settlement established in Missouri. The town itself had been moved from its original site and established on higher ground three miles farther up the Mississippi River.

St. Louis County was named for St. Louis, the patron saint of the King Louis XV of France. The oldest and largest settlement in this county was St. Louis, founded in 1764. The county was located between the Missouri River on the north and the Meramec on the south and indefinitely to the west. The America settlers at this time tended to settle their homesteads along these rivers.

The name Cape Girardeau was derived from a man, Girardot, who lived in this area and traded with the Indians. Because of their knowledge of Girardot, the river men gave the name Girardeau to this area. It is situated between Apple Creek on the north and Twappity Bottom on the south.

New Madrid was named for Madrid, Spain, by the Spanish authorities who had settled there. Its first settlement was called L’Anse a La Graise (a cove of fat or grease), due to the abundance of game in the area. It was established on a bend of the Mississippi River where the town of New Madrid stands today. This county is south of Cape Girardeau County as far as the mouth of the St. Francois River—presently Helena, Arkansas.

In 1812, following the changes in the territory, Congress raised this area to a second-class status and named it the Territory of Missouri, making it more distinguished and recognized. In this same year, the Territorial Legislature, set up by Congress, divided the area into seven counties: the original five set up by William Henry Harrison, plus Washington County, part of Ste. Genevieve County around Potosi, and what is now Arkansas became a part of New Madrid County.

The period between 1815 to 1837 was one of the great changes in Missouri in regards to the making of counties. In 1815 Lawrence County was established. This county owes its name to Captain James Lawrence, commander in the War of 1812. When Captain Lawrence was wounded and dying, he cried out, “Don’t give up the ship!” Lawrence County was abolished in 1815, making room for 18 counties to be created.

In 1816 the “mother county,” Howard County was born. Howard County was so-named because 31 counties were formed.

This picture shows Township 62 North, Range 15 West, also known as Kirkville, which was selected as the seat of Adair County in 1841.
This map shows part of the townships and ranges of Adair County.

from parts of its land and borders. Among those founded in the northeast area were Putnam, Schuyler, Scotland, Clark, Lewis, Marion, Knox, Shelby, Linn, Sullivan, Macon, and Adair. Seven of these counties were named after Revolutionary War Generals, one was named after a North Carolina congressman, one after a Kentucky governor, another after a state senator, and two were named after Lewis and Clark, known for their early explorations of our country.

A neighboring county, Macon County, was established in 1837. It was named for Nathaniel Macon, a United States senator from North Carolina. He was admired for the undying faith he had in the ability of the people to govern themselves. His favorite saying was, “If left alone they will always do what is right!”

Adair County was formed in 1841. It came from the Missouri Territory that was divided into Howard County and then attached to Chariton County. This action was formally adopted in the Eleventh General Assembly of 1841 as:

“Beginning at a point in the middle of range thirteen, on the township line dividing the townships sixty and sixty-one; thence, west, on said township line, to the range line dividing ranges seventeen and eighteen; thence, north, on said range line, to a point three miles north of the township line dividing townships sixty-three and sixty-four; thence, east, on a line parallel to said township line, to the centre of township sixty-four, in range thirteen, thence, south, to the place of the beginning, is hereby created a separate and distinct county, to be called and known by the name of the county of Adair.”

To simplify this passage, a township is 36 square miles. Each direction consists of six square miles. Each section is one square mile made up of 640 acres. All townships lying north and south are known as ranges. These forms are used to show longitude and latitude.

Adair County was named after John Adair who was born in Chester County, South Carolina, in 1759. During his life, Adair served his state, Kentucky, to the best of his ability. He served in the Revolutionary Army and was Brigadier General for the Kentucky State Militia. Adair was described by many
as having a "military and civil character," Politics was his next step. John Adair was the State Senator of Kentucky from 1805 to 1806, governor from 1820 to 1824, and served in Congress from 1831 to 1833. John Adair died at Harrodsburg, Kentucky, on May 19, 1840. Immigrants from Kentucky and many people of Missouri did not want the memory of John Adair to be forgotten. Thanks to their combined efforts and determination, Adair County was named in his honor in 1841.

By Andrea Vorkink
and
Denny Smoyer

---

**County Trivia**

- The Louisiana Purchase was made in 1803.
- There are 640 square miles in a township.
- Seven counties were named after Revolutionary War Generals.