

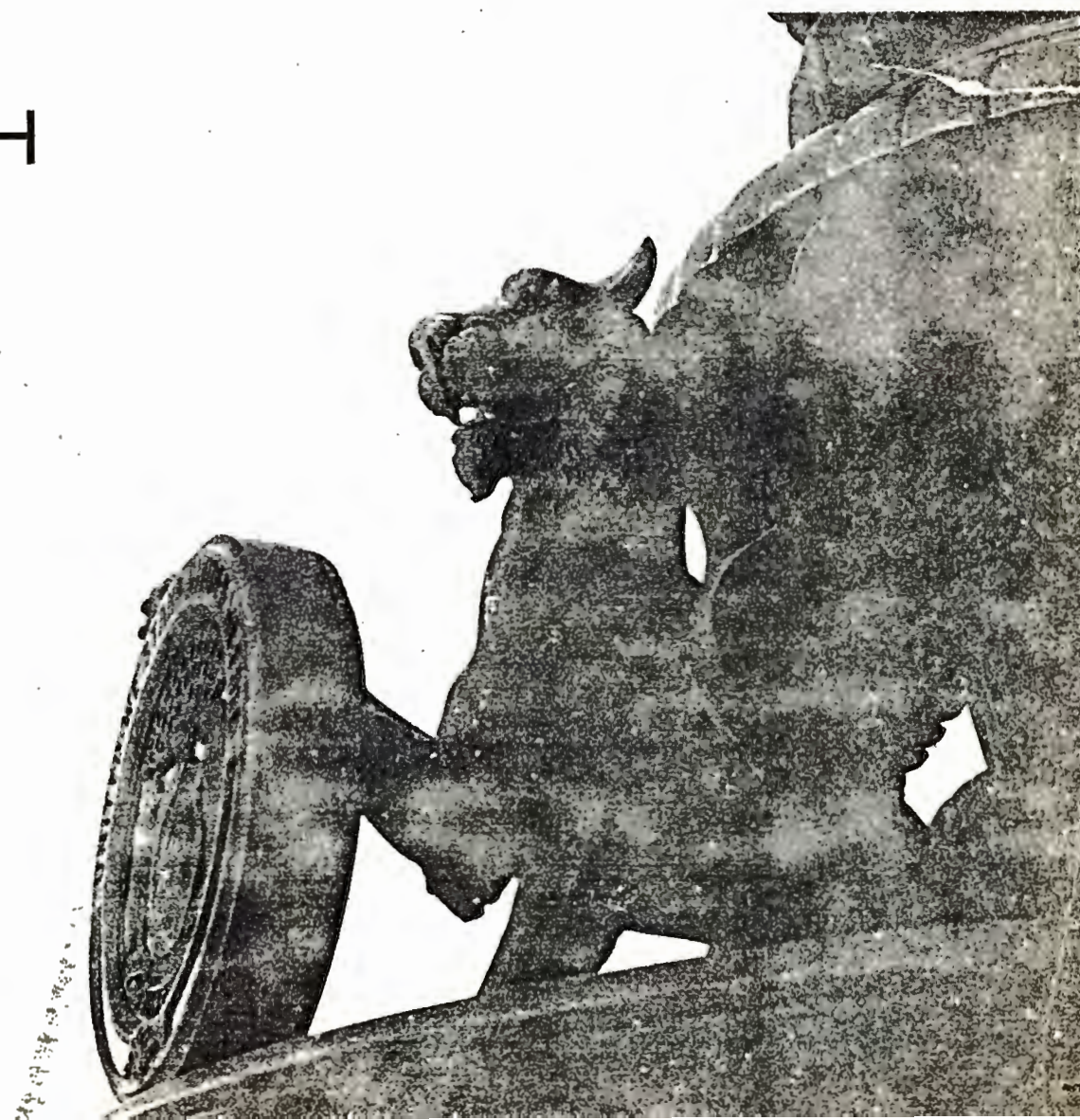
RE: Counties and Special Districts

The GOVERNMENT of MISSOURI

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Chapter 16

COUNTIES AND SPECIAL DISTRICTS

As was pointed out earlier, the people of each state have complete control over the state's internal affairs. Only when a national interest or the interests of other states or the nationally guaranteed rights of individuals are affected does the federal government have the right to intervene in what would otherwise be a state matter. As long as the problem is one of merely state concern, the people of the state through their own constitution and laws have supreme authority over it.

Much of the power to regulate internal affairs, however, actually is delegated to locally elected governments—the governments of counties, cities, townships, and various kinds of districts. These local units have no inherent or reserved powers of their own, but only such as are granted to them by the state constitution and laws. People sometimes imagine that because local officials are elected therefore the voters completely determine the forms and policies of local government. The actual situation is one where the state sets up both the basic frameworks of government available to the local units and also the conditions governing local choice and implementation; the people in the local units simply fill in the details with appropriate actions and ordinances, being allowed more or less discretion depending on size of population and other factors.

The various local government units in Missouri, as of January 1967, were reported by the federal census bureau to total 2917, giving Missouri at that time a rank of 11th among the states in number of local governments. Missouri ranked 6th in municipalities, 9th in school districts, and 11th in special districts other than school districts. Missouri's 444 road districts constitute 57.4% of all road districts in the nation, and are more than four times as many as those in second place Oregon. Only Texas and Kansas have more flood control districts than Missouri. The previous census of governments, as of January 1962, showed Missouri in 10th place with a total of 3742 local government units. Most of the decrease over the five-year period was due to the reorganization of school districts, which dropped in number from 1649 to 870. The 1967 listing was as follows:

Counties	114
Municipalities (including villages)	856
Townships	343
School districts	870
Road districts	444
Library districts	52
Drainage districts	99
Fire-protection districts	31
Housing authorities	17
Flood control	55
Water supply districts	19
Health districts	6
Hospital districts	5
Sewerage districts	4
Other single-function districts	1
Bi-State Development District	1
	Total 2917

The above list is by no means complete. It does not include many subordinate agencies and areas that possess certain governmental characteristics but are not classified as government units, such as land clearance for redevelopment authorities, soil conservation districts, forest cropland districts, regional zoning and planning councils, and many others. It is apparently not possible to compile a complete list, but an additional 700 could probably be discovered without much difficulty.

While the various governmental units have been created to answer specific needs as deemed best at the time the enabling legislation was passed, some of the special units, as in the township and road district categories, have become antiquated or inefficient or are having an effect different from what was originally intended. This chapter and the next will discuss counties, townships, and municipalities.

COUNTIES. There are 114 counties in the state, plus the City of St. Louis which under the Constitution does have county status but is without an organized county government. The counties differ a great deal in area and population. Except for St. Louis City, Schuyler County is the smallest (306 square miles), and Texas County the largest (1183). In population, the census of 1970 showed Worth County as the smallest (3359) and St. Louis County the largest (951,671). Second to St. Louis County was Jackson County with a population of 654,178.

By terms of the Constitution (Article VI, Section 3) two or more counties may consolidate if a majority vote in each of the affected counties approves. As in practically all other states, no such consolidation has yet taken place, nor is one likely owing to the strength of local sentiment, established business interests at the county seats, and the vested interests of many officeholders.

The Constitution also provides (Article VI, Section 14) that by majority popular vote "any contiguous counties, not exceeding ten, may join in performing any common function or service, including the purchase, construction and maintenance of hospitals, almshouses, road machinery and any other county property, and by separate vote may join in the common employment of any county officer or employee common to each of the counties". There is here much promise of flexibility and increased efficiency for the counties, but to date not much use has been made of the provision. Earliest fruit may come in the St. Louis area, where transit, fire protection, police, and other common problems are continually emphasizing the possibilities latent in formal cooperation between city and county. In 1959 the Connecticut legislature took the courageous step of voting to abolish the county as a governmental unit, but the county in New England has not performed as extensive functions there as it does in the Midwest. Consolidation has long been advocated by persons interested in governmental economy and efficiency, but in Missouri, except for occasional interest in the remote possibility of merging St. Louis City and St. Louis County, there is no realistic prospect whatever of county consolidation under the terms of the Constitution.

Table 16.1. MISSOURI COUNTIES CLASSIFIED

Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV
Jackson St. Louis (County)	Boone Buchanan Cape Girardeau Cass Clay Cole Franklin Greene Jasper Jefferson St. Charles	96 counties not named in the other three classes	Carter Hickory Ozark Ripley Shannon