

**“The Court House Buildings and Jail of
Cottonwood County” ***

in

HISTORY

of

**Cottonwood and Watonwan
Counties**

Minnesota

THEIR PEOPLE, INDUSTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

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Genealogical Records of Many of the Old Families**

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COURT HOUSE BUILDINGS.

The first mention made in the records of the county of providing a court house was made at the March meeting in 1883, in a motion made by M. T. DeWolf. H. M. Goss and Joel Clark were appointed a committee, to report at the next meeting with plans and specifications for a court house not to exceed in cost three thousand dollars, and said committee was to also report on the feasibility of building at once. On March 16, 1883, on motion, it was resolved to build a court house as soon "as it can be practically done at a cost not in excess of three thousand dollars."

On another motion, the plans and specifications by J. Clark for the court house, which was to be thirty-six by fifty feet, were adopted. The building was to be two stories high. John Clark was appointed building committee, with full power to act in every particular, as his judgment might dictate, and that it should be erected as soon as it could be. The commissioners were at that time John Clark, C. Mead, T. Ellison, M. T. DeWolf and H. M. Goss. This court house really cost \$2,916.62. It had been opposed by the farmers, who felt too poor to think of paying for a court house. The county had long been renting of Mr. Klock his building, which was also used for school room purposes, and when court time came school had to be dismissed, for the teachers had no other room; however, their pay as teacher went on just the same as though they were teaching.

County Commissioner Clark was appointed a committee to lease or rent the hall or court room for dances, shows and was to get seven dollars a night and three dollars for free lectures. It was resolved to tender the use of the court house to the county agricultural society for fair purposes free of charge. The village of Windom was given free use of an extra room in the court house by furnishing the same. The court house was insured for \$2,500 at a \$2.25 per hundred rate for five years. On motion, Windom village was granted the right to put their calaboose on the southwest corner of the court house square, where the park and jail now stand. The old court house now serves as a barn in Lakeside township. [103]

OTHER LOCATIONS FOR COUNTY OFFICES.

The following is the chain of places at which the county seat of gov-

ernment has been held at one time or another: First, the offices were held up the river at Big Bend, at private houses. Second, the offices, at least a part of them, were kept in the “Billy Wilson” small frame store building that stood on the east lot of the present Foss Mercantile building property. This had been erected by Mr. Wilson for a store, but finding it too small, he erected a second building, then leased the first one to the county for its offices. Third, the county commissioners leased of Harvey Klock a two-story frame building, about thirty by forty feet in size. It stood on lots 14 and 15, of block 19, original plat of the village of Windom, and was later used as a residence and then as a drug store by Nels Quevli. It then was occupied as a hardware store by George Miller and the present Earl Marshall & Son hardware store occupies the same lot. The railroad company sold this lot originally to David Patten and he, in turn, to Harvey Klock, who erected the building above referred to. The lot was purchased by Klock for one hundred dollars in 1872. At first the village school was kept on the first floor and the court house offices above.

The first court house built by the county—the one erected in 1883, above mentioned—served well its purpose until the present magnificent temple of justice was provided in 1905.

In November, 1893, the county board ordered steel shelving for the old court house, the same to cost \$267.

The question of a new court house was agitated and finally, on October 13, 1903, the county board of commissioners decided, by resolution, to construct a new building on block No. 13, and not on the old county grounds, where the jail now stands. The citizens of Windom were very anxious to have the new court house erected down in the business portion of the city, so, on January 5, 1904, the county authorities exchanged the old court house square in block No. 23, for the present court house square in block No. 13. The city of Windom owned the block and simply exchanged it for the grounds contained in block 23, except that the county reserved eighty feet, including the ground where the jail was built and where it still stands.

In 1904 the county sold bonds to the amount of fifty thousand dollars to the First National Bank of St. Paul, the bonds to draw four per cent.

interest. Later, it was found necessary to float thirty-five thousand dollars more in bonds with which to finish paying for the court house, making the [104] cost of the structure about eighty-five thousand dollars, besides the grading and other exterior improvements about the public square.

A contract was awarded to J. B. Nelson & Company, of Mankato, to build the structure for \$59,949.00, the contract being dated March 22, 1904. Thomas Walsh, of Albert Lea, was employed by the county as superintendent of construction. The record shows that August 11, 1905, the building was completed and the last payment made to contractors Nelson & Company and to the architects, Omeyer & Thori.

On April 25, 1906, the commissioners let the contract for grading the grounds about the court house to J. G. Redding, at his bid price of \$5,200. On October 29, 1907, the commissioners resolved to designate the east side of the court house as its front.

Concerning the material, the architecture and dedication of this, Cottonwood's present court house, it may be added that the building is one of the best planned and constructed in southern Minnesota. Its cornerstone was laid, with ceremonies, on July 12, 1901, at one o'clock in the afternoon, under direction of the Masonic fraternity. Senator Clapp made the oration. Judge Brown, who had served as judge fourteen years, also spoke. There was a picnic dinner, a ball game and excellent music. The cornerstone bears the following inscription: "Commissioners, David Ewert, Daniel C. Davis, Whalon Seeley, Peter Wiens, Engbert Heggerstrom, John A. Brown, auditor; David A. Stewart, attorney." The box in the stone contained a copy of the Bible, Masonic papers, a copy of each local county newspaper, a history of the county by D. A. Stuart, lists of county and village officials.

On November 3, 1905, the new court house was dedicated, in the midst of a large assembly, Governor Johnson uttering the dedicatory words in a masterly manner. The entire structure cost one hundred thousand dollars, including all interior finishings, with the marble wainscoating, beautifully decorated dome and court room.

COUNTY JAIL.

In July, 1891, it was resolved at a meeting of the county commissioners to provide the county with a suitable jail and sheriff's house, but the matter dragged along until January 6, 1898, when it was again ordered that plans and specifications for a jail and sheriff's residence, said jail to have a separate cell for women prisoners, be procured. They were submitted to and accepted by the commissioners at a later date. The specifications called for Kasota [105] pink stone and Menominee sand-moulded brick as the material from which the main building should be constructed. Fred C. Molander was awarded the contract for doing the structural work for \$5,875. The cell work was let to an Ohio firm at \$2,147; the heating plant cost \$445 and was let to Pond & Hasey Company. H. M. Goss was appointed as superintendent of construction of this building, which is the one still standing at the south side of the park overlooking the Des Moines river, which flows just beneath the abrupt bluff at that point.

The county leased one cell in the new jail to the village of Windom at fifty dollars per year, and the village was to keep the bedding, etc., in a good and sanitary condition. ■



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