

**“Court Houses and Jails of Nicollet County”\***

in

**HISTORY**

OF

**Nicollet and LeSueur Counties  
Minnesota**

THEIR PEOPLE, INDUSTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

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**HON. WILLIAM G. GRESHAM**  
Editor-in-Chief

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**With Biographical Sketches of Representative Citizens and  
Genealogical Records of Many of the Old Families**

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\* MLHP editor: This article appeared on pages 89-91 of the first volume of this two volume history of Nicollet and LeSueur Counties. Though reformatted, the chapter is complete. The author’s spelling and punctuation have not been changed.

## COURT HOUSE HISTORY.

Nicollet county, with a history reaching back sixty-three years, has only had but two court houses, an exceptional record. For a short period after the organization of this county, court was held and other county business was transacted at Traverse des Sioux, near where the seat of justice was located, and a private hall and other small buildings served the county officials, generally being the officer's own residences. The first term of court was held in a hall belonging to the missionary, Rev. Stephen Riggs, with Judge A. G. Chatfield presiding, October, 1853. George Spencer's building was rented in the county commissioners, for a time, at one dollar per day.

After the county seat had been removed from Traverse to St. Peter, in the winter of 1858-59, the St. Peter Company and citizens donated to the county the large frame structure which had been erected for the state capitol by the town site company, who had every reason (in their own minds) to believe that Minnesota's state house would be located there. This building stood on Minnesota avenue and was about where stands the present Johnson's clothing factory, north of the Nicollet House one block.

This building served Nicollet county for court house purposes, until 1881, when the present red

brick court house was completed. The first official action taken toward the building of the present building, a very handsome structure in its day, was at the January session of 1880. Work was commenced in the spring of that year, and the building was completed in July, 1881. It has a stone basement, while the superstructure is built of a home-made brick. The building is sixty-seven by ninety feet, the walls are two feet in thickness. It was built of all home materials, so far as possible, its trimmings being of the famous limestone found in great quantities in sight of the structure. Its cost was—all told—about \$32,000. After more than a third of a century it stands a monument to the thoroughness of its builders and to the good business judgment of the taxpayers and county officials under whose administration it was erected. Some modern improvements have been added, as to heating, lighting, etc., making it good for many years to come, barring any unforeseen accident.

## THE JAILS OF THE COUNTY.

In every community there is at times need of a safe place in which to confine the unruly, disorderly and criminal portion of its people. In this respect Nicollet county has been no better nor worse than her sister counties. Prisoners must be cared for and given fair trials for crimes they have, or are supposed to

have committed against the peace and dignity of the state in which located. Law-abiding men and women would not be safe without such places. Here the first jail was located at Traverse, the pioneer county seat. It was really only a stone basement, with a frame building above its walls, and this was used by George H. Raught and family for a residence; later, for some claim he had against the county, it was transferred to him.

The second jail was built at St. Peter just after the seat of justice had been located there. This cost two thousand dollars and was a sawed building. It was not frequently used. Two Indians who were imprisoned therein burned their way to freedom through its wooden walls, and a white man, charged with some crime, escaped in a like manner. On January 8, 1870, a committee consisting of Benjamin Rogers and William G. Hayden, was appointed to select a site for a new jail and to procure the necessary plans and specifications from which to provide a new jail. March 12, following, Charles Wetherell, H. C. Hanson and William G. Hayden were appointed a committee to adopt plans and specifications and were authorized to contract for the erection of a jail, the expense of which was not to exceed five thousand dollars. A contract was entered into and a building erected in every way suitable, but which cost much more than the original plans called for. In 1874 iron cells were put in, at an expense of five thousand dollars more. This building, with all improve-

ments therein, cost Nicollet county in round figures about sixteen thousand dollars. It still stands in the western part of the city, a monument of early days.

The present beautiful pressed brick jail and sheriff's residence, standing next south from the court house, was erected in 1907, at a cost of forty thousand dollars. ■



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