

THE PIPESTONE COUNTY COURT HOUSE *

From the date of organization until early in the year 1902 Pipestone county was without a court house. It will be remembered that at the second meeting of the board of county commissioners, February 20, 1879, the county authorities accepted from P. E. Sweet two blocks of land for court house purposes, which were, however, not destined to be used for such purposes for over twenty years.¹ The land was broken and shade trees were set out, and later the property was leased.

Decidedly primitive were the accommodations afforded the county officers for the transaction of business in the early days. For two years the county auditor's office was a 10x12 feet shack, and the other officers conducted the business at their respective homes. The Pipestone County Star on September 19, 1879, thus bewailed the lack of a court house:

What kind of a way is it for a county like Pipestone to have its books and papers all over the village? The recorder [register of deeds] has the record books at his house; the county attorney, ditto; the treasurer, the same; and the auditor, well, he would, have to keep a team to bring his books and papers from his house in the morning and take them home in the evening, and as a consequence they are left in the little shanty called an office, where they are apt to be destroyed most any night. We should have a place for our officers, where the records can be kept in safety.

In the spring of 1881 the rooms over C. H. Bennett's pioneer frame

* This article appeared originally on pages 299-300 of Arthur P. Rose's *An Illustrated History of the Counties of Rock and Pipestone Minnesota* (Luverne: Northern History Pub. Co., 1911). It is complete, though reformatted. Footnotes have been renumbered, and the title added by the MLHP.

¹ Owing to a technicality in the original transfer there was a cloud on the title to the block until 1888, when it was removed by decree of Judge Perkins, of the district court.

building were rented, and there a part of the county officials had their offices for three years. In May 26, 1883, a petition was presented to the county board, signed by C. C. Goodnow and others, asking the county lawmaking body to build a court house out of the public funds. The official record of the resultant action was as follows: "Prayers of the petitioners rejected for he following reasons, that there are no funds in the treasury for that purpose." In June, 1884, the upper story of Commerce block was rented for county purposes, and for many years the auditor, treasurer, register of deeds, superintendent of schools, sheriff, clerk of court, judge, probate and attorney had offices in that building, while the court was held in a little back room, far from suitable but the best to be had.

For many years before a court house was actually built the question was agitated. In 1885 a bill passed the legislature, giving the commissioners of Pipestone county authority to submit the question of issuing \$40,000 bonds for county buildings, but no further action was taken. During the panic stricken days, in the spring of 1894, the matter of a court house became a live issue. In May a petition bearing many signatures, of which nearly 250 were those of farmers, was presented to the commissioners, asking that body to call a special election on the question of issuing \$40,000 bonds for the erection of a court house and jail. On the fifteenth that month the board took favorable action and named Tuesday, June 26, election day.

The election was not held. Within a short time another petition, numerously signed, asked that the board withdraw the call for the election, and to decide the matter a special meeting of the county board was called for June 23. The friends of the measure, in the meantime, were not idle. June 19 another petition was circulated, asking that the county board do not withdraw the call, but that the call have this amendment: "All work on said building must be done by residents of Pipestone county." At the meeting the recall was decided on, and the matter was not brought to a vote. Times were extremely hard, and public sentiment was undoubtedly against the bond issue.²

² "Petition of citizens filed, asking the board of county commissioners to bond the county for \$40,000 or \$50,000 and loan same to the citizens of the county; On motion said petition was laid on the table."—Commissioners' Journal, June 23, 1894.

In February, 1896, the offices of auditor, treasurer, register of deeds and sheriff were established in the newly constructed county building built of red pipestone building stone, being moved from the Commerce block. These offices were maintained in the jail until the court house was erected several years later. The arrangement was not entirely satisfactory.³

For several years prior to the work of building the court house, funds for the purpose were raised by direct taxation, and the board which convened in January, 1899, decided to take the initial step. They examined the court houses in several of the neighboring counties and had plans drawn, but nothing further was accomplished until early the following year. On January 3, 1900, the contract for the foundation of the building was let to Hadwick & McKnight on a bid of \$8567. The contract for the erection of the superstructure was let November 27, 1900, to C. H. Peltier on a bid of \$45,175, and was resumed the next spring.

The county authorities had undertaken work without the necessary funds to complete and furnish the building, which was constructed of Pipestone red building stone, and for the purpose of raising the money they called a special election for September 12, 1901, to vote on the question of issuing bonds to the amount of \$20,000. The work of the county board⁴ was indorsed at the polls, the several precincts voting as follows:

	For Bonds	Against Bonds
Aetna	6	6
Altona	10	6
Burke	10	21
Eden	24	3
Elmer	11	7
Edgerton	10	36
Fountain Prairie	1	6

³ "For a jail, our jail building is the finest in this part of the state, but for a court house it is not a success."—Pipestone County Star, June 9, 1899.

⁴ The commissioners under whose supervision the court house was erected were Nelson Minet, L. R. Ober, William Doms, J. P. Rolan and J. C. Jonas.

Grange	17	2
Gray	5	10
Holland	21	3
Jasper	26	4
Osborne	8	28
Pipestone	275	25
Rock	7	2
Ruthton	18	24
Sweet	5	8
Trosky	9	3
Troy	8	4
Woodstock	28	8
TOTAL	499	206

The court house was completed during winter of 1901-02 and was occupied for the first time by the county office in January, 1902. ■



Posted MLHP: June 15, 2010.