

“ WASECA COUNTY COURTHOUSE AND JAIL ” *

IN

CHILD'S HISTORY

OF

WASECA COUNTY,
MINNESOTA.

*From Its First Settlement in 1854
to the Close of the Year 1904.
A Record of Fifty Years.*

THE STORY OF THE PIONEERS

By JAMES E. CHILD.

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*Let me speak to the yet unknowing world
how these things came about.”—Shakespeare.*

* MLHP: The following are excerpts from pages 214-215, 225-226, 250, 329, 332, 470-472, and 484 of this history of Waseca County. They have been reformatted. Childs punctuation has not been changed. The title has been added by the MLHP.

WASECA COUNTY COURTHOUSE AND JAIL

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DESTRUCTIVE FIRE AT WILTON.

On the 3d day of April, 1869, as if to aid the rapid decline of the doomed village of Wilton, then the county seat, a disastrous fire occurred. The fire originated, it was thought, either from the stove pipe, which led from the jail stove to the chimney, or was set fire by a prisoner, named Shea. The fire was not discovered until about eight o'clock, when it had reached the roof and spread far and wide on the inside, between the roof and ceiling over the adjoining court room. Heroic work was done to save the building, while men, women and children, with much presence of mind, worked bravely in saving the books, papers, records and furniture of the county offices. The venerable old court house soon fell in, and Mr. Henry J. Meyer's building, which contained LaDow's Hall, J. H. Wightman's stock of hardware, Powers & LaDow's library, and G. A. LaDow's household effects next fell a prey to the devouring flames. Hall's saloon next met its doom and in the space of an hour and a half the whole block was but a mass of smouldering ruins. Each building was insured for \$200, which did not cover a tenth part of the loss. The people of Wilton cared for those made homeless and the county commissioners met April 12, to arrange for county offices—the county offices being temporarily located in the wagon shop of B. Bundsho. The prisoner Shea, who was serving time for robbing a drunken man in Waseca, was rescued without serious harm, although he was terribly scared.

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THE THEN NEW COURT HOUSE.

The contract for building the court house was let to Marble & Dresser of Owatonna early in the spring, and the management of the business, at the election of May 3th [1870], was somewhat in issue. Wm. Everett and S. B. Williams were elected trustees, who, with H. P. Norton, elected in 1869, constituted the board of trustees for the ensuing year. At the first meeting of the trustees, after election, it was "Resolved, that the bonds of the

village, (to be) issued for the building of county buildings, be issued so as to be payable, one thousand dollars in three years, and one thousand dollars in each year thereafter until the whole \$5,000 shall become payable, and that they be issued in denominations of not more than \$1,000, nor less than \$100 each.” The same day the board issued “Bond No. 1” due three years after date, for \$1,000, bearing interest at 12 per cent. Bond No. 2, for \$500, due four years from date, and bond No. 3 for \$500, due in five years, with coupons attached, were issued to Marble & Dresser, of Owatonna, who had entered into contract to construct the court house for \$5,000. But before the bonds were delivered, Bond No. 1 was surrendered or rescinded and bonds numbered 4 and 5, for \$500 each, were issued in lieu thereof, May 10, 1870. At the same time, bonds numbered 6 and 7, for \$500 each, were issued to the same persons. On July 1, the third installment of bonds was issued—the same being bonds numbered 8 and 9 for \$500 each. On July 12, the court house being completed, the last two bonds were issued, the same being for \$500 each, and due in seven years from the date thereof.

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COURT HOUSE ON FIRE.

On Sunday morning, March 10, [1872] Auditor Cronkhite discovered that the floor of the court room was on fire. He aroused the people and the fire was soon extinguished. The court room had been occupied the Saturday before and the fire originated from the stove. The damage amounted to about fifty dollars.

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COUNTY JAIL BUILDING.

For several years the county commissioners, under the wise counsel of Auditor Cronkhite, had been creating a fund for the building of a jail, and on the 20th of March, 1878, the contract for building the same was let to W. B. Craig & Co., their bid being \$9,333. Conrad, Bohn & Co. bid \$9,445. The contract required the completion of the building on or before the first of the following October.

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NEW JAIL BROKEN.

Scarcely had the new jail been completed when the four inmates came very near making their escape. They cut off one of the bars with a common, steel table-knife, unlocked the scuttle door leading into the attic with an old key, went into the attic and knocked a hole through the brick wall, on the north side, close to the cornice. Sheriff Keeley's attention was attracted by the noise, and he and Jailor Long proceeded to drive the culprits back into their cells. Evidently the jail was not burglar proof.

* * *

PROPOSITION TO BUILD COURTHOUSE.

The following figures show the vote of March 12, 1896, upon the proposition to build a new courthouse at Waseca.

	Yes.	No.
New Richland, town.....	22	64
New Richland, village.....	42	68
Byron.....	28	51
Vivian.....	54	24
Otisco.....	38	115
Wilton.....	48	48
Freedom.....	28	107
Woodville.....	77	26
Waseca, First ward.....	229	8
Waseca, Second ward.....	178	9
Waseca, Third ward.....	160	8
St. Mary.....	46	65
Alton.....	11	114
Blooming Grove.....	34	45
Iosco.....	33	92
Janesville, First precinct.....	101	31
Janesville, Second precinct.....	22	62
Totals.....	1,146	937
Majority.....	209	

At the meeting of the county board April 23, after a very lengthy and

laborious examination of the eleven plans submitted, the commissioners accepted the plan submitted by architects Orff & Joralemon, of Minneapolis, the cost of the building not to exceed \$35,000. It is 68x91½ feet in size, two stories high with a stone basement. It fronts on Second street, is built of St. Louis mottled brick, and is heated by steam. The first floor is fire-proof. The tower and dome are one hundred feet high and furnish a flue look-out over the city and surrounding country.

After ordering the publication of advertisements for bids for constructing the proposed building, the board adjourned.

At the May meeting, the board proceeded to open the proposals for erecting the new courthouse. The bids, twenty-one in number, ranged from \$48,000, made by Keefe Bros., of Waseca, to \$34,765.96, made by J. D. Carroll, of St. Paul Park; the latter bid was accepted.

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At the board meeting of May 18, 1896, the contract for furnishing the heating apparatus for the new courthouse was awarded to Pond, Hasey & Co., of Minneapolis, for \$2,150. W. F. Porter & Co., of St. Paul, also had in a bid at \$2,325.

In the afternoon, the board ordered the purchase of sixty feet front of the Priest land, adjoining the courthouse grounds, and appropriated \$2,500 to be paid upon receipt of proper conveyance of land.

...

The erection of the courthouse progressed slowly during the year 1896. The contractor finally failed entirely, and the American Surety Company, his bondsmen were compelled to take charge of the building and complete it. Great credit is due to the board of county commissioners and to Hon. A. J. Lohren, then county auditor, for this very complete edifice. It is of much credit to the county. The American Surety Company and Hon. S. P. Child, its state agent, are also entitled to credit for honestly carrying out the contract.

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THE NEW COURTHOUSE.

The new courthouse was completed about the 1st of August, 1897, and was formally dedicated, Sept. 23. The following account is from the columns of the Waseca County Herald:

“The recent completion of our grand, new courthouse, with its nicely graded grounds and pleasant surroundings, calls to mind the courthouse history of this county, which may be of some Interest to the present generation.

“The county of Waseca was organized by act of the territorial legislature, dated Feb. 27, 1857. By that act the voters of the county were authorized to hold an election on the first Monday of June, 1857, to choose the county seat and elect county officers. Three villages, Wilton, St. Mary and Empire, were candidates for the county seat, and Wilton won. Strange as it may seem, nothing is left of these ‘ancient towns’ except the lands upon which they were built.

“The first courthouse was a store building, about 24 feet wide, 60 feet long, and two stories high. The record of its purchase reads as follows:

““At the session of the board of county supervisors, Oct. 12, 1859, M. S. Gove, H. G. Mosher, and J. W. La Paul were appointed to a committee to purchase the store building owned by Thos. L. Paige, In the village of Wilton, for a courthouse, with the county certificates of tax sales of land’s sold in 1858, and bid in by the county—the amount of said purchase, not to exceed \$700. E. A. Rice, register of deeds, was ordered to assign the certificates upon receiving deed.’

“The same year of the purchase of the courthouse, a jail, costing about \$500, was built adjoining it on the north end. This was also burned by the same fire that consumed the courthouse.

“The records were nearly or quite all saved, and the county officers took temporary quarters in the wagon shop of Bernard Bundschu. The county board at that time consisted of R. F. Stevens, John S. McKune, Robert Earl, Wm. Byron, and John Buckhout. They met in special session April 15, 1869, and finally purchased the John C.

Hunter building for \$500, to be paid from the insurance money on the old building. This was the second courthouse, worth much less than the first, but serving, the purpose after a fashion, until the pending court seat conflict should be permanently settled.

“Waseca had been platted in 1867, and was already a large and thriving town. That it would eventually secure the county seat was inevitable.

“At the next session of the legislature, February, 1870, an act was passed authorizing the village of Waseca to issue bonds in the sum of \$5,000, the proceeds to be used in the building of a new courthouse for the county of Waseca, upon the removal of the county seat to Waseca. The people of Waseca voted in March to issue the bonds and before fall the then new courthouse was completed.

“This courthouse, removed the spring, was a fine brick structure, 40x50 feet on the ground, and two stories high. The lower floor divided into four offices, and the second floor was used as room. At that time, 1870, it was one of the best and most commodious courthouses in Southern Minnesota. The building was for years poorly cared for by the county board and left to decay.

“The history of the present new and elegant courthouse, just completed is current history, fresh in the minds of our people. It is 74 feet north and south by 92 feet east and west. The tower is 100 feet high, with a flag staff 30 feet in length. Its total cost, including land, furniture, burglar-proof safes, etc., as reported by Auditor Lohren, is \$55,833.07. In all its appointments it is most ample and complete. The vaults are large and roomy, and most roomy, and most of them well lighted. The county offices are on the first floor, the second floor being devoted to the court room, jury rooms and judge’s private room.

“Though there are more costly courthouses in the state, it is believed that there is not one of its size so complete and ample in its arrangements. ■

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