

“The Court Houses of Watonwan County” *

in

HISTORY

of

**Cottonwood and Watonwan
Counties**

Minnesota

THEIR PEOPLE, INDUSTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

JOHN A. BROWN

Editor-in-Chief

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

VOLUME I

ILLUSTRATED

1916

**B. F. BOWEN & COMPANY, Inc.
Indianapolis, Indiana**

* **MLHP: This article appeared first on pages 399-403 of the first volume of this two volume history of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties. It has been reformatted. The breakdown of the voting in the county villages and townships voted on the court house bond issue in 1892 and 1895 has been eliminated. The author’s spelling and punctuation have not been changed. Page breaks have been added.**

HISTORY OF THE COURT HOUSES.

The first court house in Watonwan county was located in the village of Madelia, on the lot just east of the Mutual Insurance building. The building was a frame structure and rather pretentious for that time. The local attorneys had their offices in this building. Fire destroyed this building. No sooner had the building burned than the citizens of Madelia were planning for another, because already they had fears lest in the near future the question of removal might come up. Joseph Flanders came to the rescue and built the brick building, now occupied by C. J. Eide, Lodes' Ideal Restaurant, McGovern's electrical shop and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, to be used for court house purposes. The text of the lease given by Mr. Flanders to the county commissioners is here produced in part: "I do hereby certify that on the 14th day of October, 1873, J. Flanders and Mary, his wife, made and executed and delivered to the commissioners of Watonwan county, Minnesota, a lease, in due and proper form wherein and whereby the said Flanders and wife conveyed to said commissioners and to their successors in office for the use of said county, the following described premises: One room on the lower floor of the brick building, now owned by said lessors and situated on lot 5, in block 3, in Flanders' Addition, town of Madelia, together with fireproof vault adjacent to and connected with [400] said room also the main hall in second story of said building, together with approaches, fixtures and privileges thereunto belonging, or in any wise appertaining; to have and to hold the same unto the said commissioners and their successors in office for and during the full term of ten (10) years for and after the first day of November, 1873, or so long as the same may be needed for county purposes, not exceeding said term of ten years."

An editorial that appeared in the Madelia Times, 1875, says: "One of the evidences of the dictatorial spirit with which J. Flanders attempts to run this county, subservient to his arbitrary will, is evidenced by the manner in which he put the county offices out of possession of the rooms, whose use belongs to the county, and to no one else, for county purposes under a lease of ten years, or so long as it may be needed for said purposes, by the county seat remaining at this place. It is a shame and a disgrace that our county officers should be even asked to vacate the apartments provided for them by the said lease, which was accepted by the county board and put on record, and be moved into another room, which is not

well lighted, to suit the caprice of one dictating official, simply that he may use the room which rightfully belongs to the county, to accomplish selfish ends. Still worse than this, however, a part of the officers were not even requested to move, but without being consulted and in their absence, their desks, books and papers were removed.”

THE PRESENT COURT HOUSE.

On February 2, 1891, the first mention in the records of the county, concerning a new court house was made when the following resolution was passed by the county board:

“Whereas, the building now used as a court house is inadequate and unsuitable for the transaction of the county’s business and the safe keeping of the county records; Therefore, Resolved, by the board of county commissioners of Watonwan county, Minnesota, that by virtue of the power conferred upon us by sections 86 and 110, chapter 8, of the General Assembly of 1878, we proceed to build a new court house for said Watonwan county.

“Resolved, that our members in the Legislature are hereby requested to secure the passage of a law authorizing the issue of bonds of said county in the sum of thirty thousand dollars for the purpose of building a new court house. The question of such bonds to be submitted to a vote of the qualified electors of said county at the annual election of the towns and villages [401] to be held March 10th, 1891. The first of said bonds to become due five years after its issue and to be paid at the rate of three thousand dollars per annum until all said bonds are paid off.”

The county commissioners in 1895 were as follow: Messrs. Crowley, Busser, Lindley, Swanson and Melheim. On March 4, 1895, this board of commissioners advertised for bids for the sale of thirty thousand dollars worth of county bonds for the erection of the new court house and ordered bonds, the same inserted in the newspapers, said bids to be opened on April 5, that year.

At the April session of the board in 1895, the following resolution was passed: Resolved, that we issue bonds as commissioners of Watonwan

county in the sum of thirty thousand dollars, bearing five per cent. interest, payable as follows: Ten thousand dollars, five years from date of issue; ten thousand, ten years from date of issue; and ten thousand, fifteen years from date of issue. Bonds to be issued in denominations of one thousand dollars each and for the purpose of erecting and finishing a court house for the said county of Watonwan, Minnesota, under authority of chapter 476, of the special laws of the state of Minnesota, for the year 1891.

The board then proceeded to open and consider bids, as secured for the purchase of thirty thousand dollars in court house bonds, to be issued July 1895. Bids came in from all quarters of the country, as will be seen by the list of bidders given: Marion Lewis & Company, Chicago, \$30,463; W. J. Hayes & Son, Cleveland, Ohio, \$29,705; Campbell, Wild & Company, Anderson, Indiana, \$30,000; E. W. Peet & Company, St. Paul, \$30,000; Z. T. Lewis, Dayton, Ohio, \$30,325; Seymour Barto & Company, New York City, \$30,431.51; George H. Marsh, Mankato, Minnesota, \$10,210, for the fifteen-year bonds, \$10,150 for the ten-year bonds; Farson Leach & Company, Chicago, \$30,150; Farmers' and Merchants' Savings Bank, Minneapolis, \$31,261; J. D. Cleghorn & Company, Minneapolis, \$30,947; N. W. Harris & Company, Chicago, \$30,790; First National Bank, St. Paul, \$30,000; First National Bank, Chicago, \$30,790; Trobridge & Company, Chicago, \$30,456. The board accepted the bid of the Farmers' and Merchants' Bank of Minneapolis, at \$31,261. They then began the erection of the new court house, as presented by fifteen or more architects and building firms.

April 16, 1895—The board met again to go over the plans and hear [402] from various architects their explanation of specifications. They continued meeting and adjourning until April 19, when it was moved and carried unanimously that the plans and specifications of H. C. Gerlock, of Mankato, be accepted, and that he be engaged to draw complete plans and specifications for the new court house. About this date the commissioners selected five banks in the county as depositories for the county's funds.

May 22, 1895—Bids for building the court house opened. There were five firms from Mankato, one at St. James, seven from St. Paul and Minnesota, one from Blue Earth City, one from Stillwater. These fifteen bids

ranged from \$30,700 to \$43,700.

May 23, 1895—Resolved, That we, as the board of county commissioners of Watonwan county, do and hereby accept the bid of Klemschmidt Brothers, of Mankato, Minnesota, in the sum of \$30,700, for the erection and construction of the new court house to be erected in the village of St. James, according to plans and specifications prepared by H. C. Gerlock, architect. The same day the county commissioners viewed the nineteen bids for furnishing the steam-heating plant, and finally selected the bid of the Pond and Hasey Company, of Minneapolis, which firm agreed to execute the work for the sum of \$2,390. At the same session the board instructed the county auditor to notify different manufacturers that contracts would be let for the vault and steel work of the court house to be built, and that the bids would be viewed at the July session of the board, at St. James.

July 11, 1895—The board of commissioners let the contract for vaults to the new court house. They had four bidders and accepted the one made by the Specialty Manufacturing Company, of Rochester, New York, in the sum of \$1,218.65, and this was to include all metal and steel fixtures, as per plans and specifications submitted. The bids for all office furniture and fixtures were opened from many companies. The board of commissioners took the bid at \$2,029 of a Minneapolis firm, known as the Office and School Furniture Company. Thus far the contracts let for the building and fixtures amounted to \$36,337, and early in 1896 the commissioners provided electric lights for the court house at an expense of \$500.

VOTE ON COURT HOUSE BOND ISSUE IN 1892.

When the people of this county voted for the issuing of bonds with which to erect a new court house in 1892, the sentiment was against such measure, as is seen by the following vote in the several townships: [403]

. . . [the vote was 396 For, and 516 Against] . . .

COURT HOUSE BOND ISSUE, 1895.

By townships the vote on the bond issue which resulted in the erection of

the present magnificent temple of justice, was as follows, the same being voted on at the March election, 1895:

. . . [Majority for the bonds was 222] . . .

THE JAIL

Formerly this county used the city jail for keeping its few prisoners in, but when the present court house was built a few cells or steel cages were constructed in the basement of the building, for county jail purposes, but long ago this arrangement was declared unsanitary and by the authorities condemned, since which time this has not been used, but prisoners have been taken to Mankato for safe keeping, until tried. It is thought now that the county commissioners made a mistake when building the present court house that they did not seek to purchase some of the adjoining property on which a suitable jail and sheriff's house could have been erected at some later date. Now the property is materially advanced in value. ■



Posted MLHP: March 3, 2011.