

## The Court Houses and Jails of Clay County \*

### CHAPTER IV.

#### ORGANIZATION AND COUNTY GOVERNMENT.

Counties, like states and nations, must have their own local governments and officers elected by the people of such county to look to the best interests of the same. Here in Clay county it has, from almost the earliest day in the county's history, been the custom to retain good and efficient office-holders in such position for a longer term than has been the custom in many other parts of the commonwealth.

Moorhead was designated as the seat of justice for Clay county and it has never had the usual "county-seat war," but still retains the county seat. The date when it was thus fixed as the county seat was June 1, 1872. The first building for county use was a two-story, twenty by thirty feet frame structure, located where the Bielder-Robertson lumber offices were subsequently located. Court was held up stairs and the first story was used for the accommodation of the county officers, except the county attorney, who held his office at his residence. Later, this building was sold to Doctor Davis for a residence and the little one-story, long, brick building now standing near the Andrew Hole residence was built by the county. The jail nearby was burned and with it a prisoner, who was locked in his cell at the time and could not escape. The present court house was erected in 1882.

#### PRESENT COURT HOUSE AND JAIL.

The following details of the building of the court house still in service were looked up and verified by records of the county commissioners, by the present auditor, Mr. Haughlum, the first year of his holding office and may be relied upon as correct:

September, 1882—The county board accepted the donation of court house and jail grounds at the hands of John Bergquist.

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\* Excerpts from John Turner & C. K. Semling eds., 1 *History of Clay and Norman Counties, Minnesota* 74-5, 81-5 (B. F. Bowen & Co., 1918).

September 20, 1882—The contract was let for the foundation of the court house and jail to J. L. Bjorkquist; he receiving for the foundation of the court house, \$9,705, and for that of the jail, \$3,845.

February 6, 1883—The contract was awarded for erecting the four steel cells or cages and the jail work to Pully brothers, St. Louis, for \$13,000.

February 28, 1883—The contract was awarded for building the court house and jail superstructures to John Seeger, as follow: Court house, \$27,662, and for the jail, \$7,638.

April 2, 1883—Bids were opened and the contract was awarded to the Diebold Safe Company for five vault doors, at \$525.

July 2, 1883—The contract for making the court house and jail sewers was let to Englund & Nelson, at \$1,600.

July 23, 1883—A contract was let for the construction of the steam-heating plant to heat both jail and court house buildings. The work was let to E. F. Osborne, at \$4,900.

April 2 and September 3, 1883—Keese & Fiske, architects, were allowed, for superintending the construction of the court house and jail, \$1,620.

May 10, 1887—The Pully Jail Company was allowed \$1,829.90, for jail fixtures.

October 14, 1889—The county commissioners decided to heat the county buildings with stoves.

February 14, 1900—A contract was awarded to H. E. Merritt, for \$1,610, to build an addition to the offices of the treasurer, register of deeds and auditor, the same including vaults.

July 13, 1908—A contract was let for building a room for a new heating plant in the court house to W. H. Merritt, at \$943.

July 13, 1908—A contract was awarded to install a heating plant in

the court house to McMillan & Wagner, the amount paid them being \$2,284. This made the total cost of the county buildings, \$77,161.90. Besides the above, was the considerable additional expense of painting, etc.

The commissioners in the spring of 1917 decided to build an addition to the north side of the court house to provide more rooms for the three offices situated on that side of the building and to give greater and much-needed vault room. The contract was let in May to N. N. Melvey on a bid of \$11,135; the plumbing and heating and wiring to be installed by the Moorhead Plumbing and Heating Company, at \$2,268.

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#### PLANS FOR A COMMON JAIL.

February 3, 1874—. . . . On motion it was ordered that a common jail for the county of Clay be erected at Moorhead, according to plans and specifications prepared by Horace De Camp to be filed not later than February 26, 1874.

February 26, 1874—. . . The jail bids were also opened at this meeting and were as follow: William Leverett, \$2,435; L. B. Parker, \$2,350; G. O. Perkins, \$1,974. The contract was awarded to Mr. Parker.

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January 24, 1875—The old jail was sold on bids to S. G. Comstock for \$31.62. . . .

#### SALE OF OLD COURT HOUSE.

April 5, 1878—The old court house was sold, on bids, to James Dougherty for two hundred and seventy-five dollars and bids were received for the construction of a one-story brick building for county offices; the new buildings to be twenty-five by fifty feet. Bids were: Lamb brothers, \$2,136; Crossett & Rodgers, \$2,200; Gregory Cash, \$2,723. But a remonstrance was presented by the people from various townships asking that the matter be deferred till another meeting of the commissioners. A vote was called for and stood: For

building, Glasgow and Bruns; against, Barnes. The building project went forward and Messrs. Barnes and Bruns were appointed as a committee on construction and contract letting.

The commissioners visited the old county jail and reported as follows: "We found neither sheriff or any or jailer was in or about the building while we were there. The outer door was open. On walking in we found three prisoners enjoying themselves playing cards. The door to the room was secured only by a common padlock, which could be reached without much trouble by the prisoners through the opening in the door. In the jailor's apartments on the second floor was a prisoner charged with murder. Not even a padlock was in the way of her escape. The entire building was in bad order and showed gross neglect on the part of those in charge of it; therefore, be it

"Resolved, That the sheriff be requested either to see at once that the jail is put in order and that it and the prisoners therein are cared for as the law directs, or if unable or unwilling to do so, to tender his resignation. (Signed) H. A. Bruns, chairman of the board of county commissioners."

January 7, 1879—. . . Bids were sent out for the purchase of the county's wood, and the offer was \$3.50 for green wood and \$5 for dry.

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#### PROTEST AGAINST NEW COURT HOUSE.

May 31, 1881—A petition was presented and read from Hawley, Parke, Glyndon, Moland, Kragnes, Eglon, Elmwood and Tansem towns praying that there be no further increase in taxes for the erection of a court house, at present; the petitioners believing it wiser to add to the buildings already owned by the county. Then came in H. A. Bruns, on behalf of the city of Moorhead, presenting a proposition from that body for the purchase of the present court house grounds, offering therefor \$7,500 and a suitable block of twenty-four lots for a new site for county buildings, valued at a low estimate, at \$5,000 more.

June 7, 1881—. . . . The matter of accepting the Moorhead offer for

the court house grounds came up before the members of the board of county commissioners and a vote was taken, the Moorhead proposition being lost by a vote of two to one.

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January 3, 1882—. . . Bids were also opened for furnishing the court house wood. Fifty cords were purchased at \$4.90 a cord, from H. Fordon, the wood to be green body wood.

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#### PLANS FOR NEW COURT HOUSE ACCEPTED.

September 1, 1882—Architect Fisk appeared and presented plans and specifications for the proposed court house, which were accepted. The land on which the present court house stands was donated to the county by John Bergquist, and is situated in two blocks in the southeast corner of lot 3, section 5, township 139, range 48. ■



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