

“ DOUGLAS COUNTY COURT HOUSE AND JAIL ” *

IN

HISTORY

OF

**Douglas and Grant Counties
Minnesota**

THEIR PEOPLE INDUSTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

CONSTANT LARSON

Editor-in-Chief

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

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FIRST COURT HOUSE OWNED BY THE COUNTY.

The little frame building on Main street continued to be used more or less exclusively for public business for nine years, but very early the county fathers realized that in time the county would need a real court house, and with wise foresight began negotiations for ground for a public building. On May 26, 1871, the board conferred with W. E. Hicks to secure a piece of land in the townsite of Alexandria for a public square on which to erect county buildings. Mr. Hicks agreed to give the county a bond for a deed if the commissioners, on behalf of the county, would bind themselves to commence the erection of county buildings within three years and complete them in six years. The commissioners were unable to give any such assurance and the project was abandoned for the time being.

On March 27, 1875, Theresa T. Hicks, widow of W. E. Hicks, agreed to give the county a bond for a deed to block 34, in the original townsite of Alexandria, if the county would erect a court house costing not less than \$ 10,000 on or before January 1, 1880. This amount was decided to be more than the county could afford for a building and Mrs. Hicks was persuaded to give the land to the county on condition that a court house costing not less than three thousand five hundred dollars would be built before January 1. 1878. The county commissioners at that time were A. H. Taylor, K. C. Rustad, Robert Angus, Ole Amundson and M. J. Gordon. On April 6, 1876, they accepted the plans of J. N. Herder, for a building forty by fifty-four feet. The contract was awarded to Raymond & Owen, of St. Cloud, who agreed to build the court house for three thousand four hundred and forty-seven dollars.

J. N. Herder, L. K. Aaker and A. J. Arnes were appointed as a committee to superintend the construction of the building. This court house was completed and accepted on August 15, 1876. It was a two-story frame building, with five office rooms on the first floor and a court room upstairs. A fire-proof vault, nine by twelve feet, was built at the rear of the court house, by Stephen King, at a cost of six hundred and seventy dollars. When the officials moved into this building in the fall of 1876 the counts business had increased to such an extent that the principal

officers devoted all of their time to their official duties. For almost twenty years this building served for county purposes, when it was replaced by a modern structure which provided not only larger working space but what was even more important, safety vaults for the storage of the many valuable records of the county.

PRESENT COUNTY COURT HOUSE.

Back in the eighties when Theodore Bordsen was a county auditor he was largely instrumental in establishing a fund for a new court house. This fund accumulated through the years and finally grew to sufficient proportions to enable the county to erect a new building without issuing a single dollar's worth of bonds. On July 11, 1893, the board of county commissioners appointed a committee consisting of Fred von Baumbach, L. J. Brown, James H. White, John B. Cowing and James Quinn, to procure and select plans and specifications for a new court house. The plans of Buechner & Jacobson were accepted on October 10, 1893, and on January 3, 1894, the general contract was awarded to Hinckley & Powers, who agreed to put the building under roof during 1894, for \$26,037.43. Many of the common brick for this building were furnished by parties in this county, namely: J. A. McKay, of Alexandria; Norton & Berg, of Evansville, and Gilbert Bracken, of Ida. The facing brick were brought from St. Paul.

Auditor Fred von Baumbach and Commissioner James H. White were appointed as a committee to superintend the construction of the building. At the time this new court house was erected the county was suffering from a serious industrial depression; cost of material and labor was at a low figure and easily secured, and it was principally for this reason that Douglas county was able to erect her present handsome court house, including heating, lighting, plumbing and vault fixtures, for the sum of \$35,000.

The building was completed and accepted in the fall of 1895. It is a two-story brick structure, the facing being of pressed brick and the trimmings of Kasota sandstone. There are eight offices on the first floor and five offices and the court room on the second floor. Fire-proof vaults are

provided for the safe storage of official records. A basement extends under the entire building, providing space for the heating system, work shop and storage.

FIRST COUNTY JAIL.

On June 27, 1867, the board of county commissioners voted to authorize the county attorney and George B. Cowing to fit up a suitable building to be used as a county jail. On January, 1868, the county auditor was instructed to ask Charles A. Gilman, then the state senator from this district, to procure the passage of an act authorizing the county to issue bonds for the purpose of building a jail. However, nothing definite resulted from these various projects, and for about two years after the organization of the county prisoners were detained wherever the sheriff saw fit. On May 30, 1868, a committee consisting of F. B. Van Hosen, J. H. Van Dyke and George C. Whitcomb was appointed to get proposals and make an estimate on the cost of building a jail twelve by fourteen feet, to be built of oak timber, with walls, floor and ceiling six inches thick. The contract for a building of that description was let on June 30, 1868, and it was completed in September, of that year, at a cost of three hundred and fifty dollars.

This first jail building was located on the rear of the lot back of the court house on Main street. Some slight alterations and improvements were made to it at various times, but it was never more than the old-fashioned "calaboose" common in those days. After the county officials had moved to the new frame court house in 1876, the little oak jail was sold to R. Wegener for twenty-five dollars.

BRICK JAIL BUILT ON THE COUNTY GROUNDS.

Plans for a new brick jail drawn by H. L. Sage were accepted by the county board on February 3, 1880. Bids were received on February, 1880, and the lowest was that of J. N. Herder, who offered to put up the building for \$8,640. As this was more than the county could afford to spend for a jail all bids were rejected and the board advertised for plans of a jail of eight cells to cost more than \$6,000. New plans of H. L. Sage

were accepted and the building contract was awarded to John Aiton for \$6,250.

This brick jail was built due east of the frame court house, twenty-five feet west of E street. Surveyor John Abercrombie determined the proper grade. After the construction was started the contractor was allowed two hundred dollars extra to make the wall one foot higher all around. The building was completed in the fall of 1880, and accepted by the county, but it was not long, however, until the county officials realized that it was a very unsatisfactory jail building. It was mostly underground, dark and damp, and while it probably would have been considered a very proper prison in the Middle Ages, it did not meet the humanitarian ideals of the present day.

After it had been made to serve as a county jail for a number of years the county grand juries began to condemn it as an unfit place in which to confine prisoners. The building was dark, damp and unhealthful, afforded no proper accommodations for female prisoners, was dangerous in case of fire and too small for the county needs. In 1899 the state board of corrections and charities finally and formally condemned the jail, and on July 18, 1899, the board of county commissioners voted to erect a new jail and sheriff's residence. The board at that time consisted of Anton H. Strom, John F. Landeen, J. H. White, Michael Hickey and Roland Bentson.

PRESENT JAIL AND SHERIFF'S RESIDENCE.

On February 9, 1900, the county board accepted plans for a new jail which had been approved by the state board of corrections and charities, and on March 22, 1900, the contract for its erection was let to Aiton Brothers, for \$8,916 The contractor was to pay \$400 for the material in the old jail and remove the same from the court house grounds. The contract for heating and ventilating was awarded to T. M. Maguire, for \$930, the contract for the plumbing was given to John M. Bailey for \$620, and the steel cell work to the Diebold Safe and Lock Company, for \$4,280. The building was completed and accepted by the county on December 3, 1900.

It is a two-story brick building, with sandstone trimmings, of architectural design to harmonize with the court house, and stands a short distance southeast of the last mentioned building. Comfortable quarters for the sheriff and family are provided in the front part of the building, and ample provision is made in the rear for the accommodation of the few persons in Douglas county who need be detained under law. The building has every modern convenience. ■



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