

“ GRANT COUNTY COURT HOUSE” *

IN

HISTORY

OF

Douglas and Grant Counties

Minnesota

THEIR PEOPLE INDUSTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

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Editor-in-Chief

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

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FIRST COUNTY COURT HOUSE.

As related in the minutes of the board meeting held on April 12, 1873, Mr. Melby attempted to locate the county seat at Pomme de Terre, then a small trading post in the center of a considerable settlement in the northeastern part of the county. Mr. Frogner wished to locate it at Herman, but yielded to the argument of Mr. Sanford that it should be located at a more central point. They accordingly voted to establish the county seat on section 8, township 129, range 42, and a part of the homestead of Knud O. Laastuen was secured for the purpose. At that time the village of Elbow Lake was not yet started, and the neighborhood was but sparsely settled. The location of the county seat, however, soon attracted business and professional men to this point and the village was established.

The homestead of Henry F. Sanford was situated just south of the lake on section 17, across from the location of the county seat. After the election held on November 3, 1874, Mr. Sanford's cabin became the office of the auditor and treasurer, the other officers maintaining their places of business at their respective homes. The need of a suitable building for the county officers was soon realized, and on May 18, 1875, a petition signed by one hundred and three legal voters of the county was presented to the board of commissioners, asking that five hundred dollars be appropriated to build a court house at Elbow Lake. Hope was still entertained in some other parts of the county that the county seat might yet be located in their neighborhood, so a counter petition was presented to the board, signed by one hundred and fifty-nine legal voters, praying the county commissioners not to build a court house that year.

Several other unsuccessful efforts were made to induce the commissioners to put up a county building at Elbow Lake, but it was not until two years later, on December 8, 1877, that the board decided to build a court house at Elbow Lake and appropriated five hundred dollars for that purpose. On December 20, of that year, a contract was let to A. C. Earsley to erect a building twenty-four by thirty feet, for which he was to be paid five hundred dollars in county warrants, to bear interest at the rate of ten per cent. Later the plans for the finishing of the building were somewhat altered and enlarged, and H. H. Wilson, of Alexandria, was given a contract to complete the building for seven hundred and

twenty-five dollars. This building was approved and occupied by the county officers on November 1, 1878.

The first county building stood on a lot just west of the present court house. It was a two-story structure, with four rooms and a hall on the first floor and one room on the second floor used as a court room. An outside stairway gave access to the upper story. This building served for the needs of the county offices until 1884, when it was remodelled and enlarged; the stairway was placed inside, and a small additional tract of ground purchased from Mr. Laastuen adjoining it on the north. In the meantime, however, there occurred an exciting contest for the county seat, which is well remembered by many of the older settlers still living in this county.

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PRESENT COURT HOUSE.

The rapid development of Grant county during the early nineties, and the consequent increase in the county business, necessitated larger quarters than the county building at that time afforded. Many of the public records were in danger of destruction for want of fire-proof storage places, and rooms were needed for the county attorney and the judge of probate. In order to raise money for a new court house the county commissioners, in 1899, decided upon a plan which would relieve the county from any bond debt. They proposed to make a slight increase in the tax levy and keep the revenue from this source in a separate fund to be used for a new building. Succeeding boards all approved of this plan and in seven years over thirty-six thousand dollars was raised in this manner. In the fall of 1904, the commissioners advertised for plans for a new court house and, after careful inspection, those submitted by Bell & Detweiler, of Minneapolis, were selected.

The most desirable location for the new building was the slight knoll just east of the old court house, occupied by the residence of Knud O. Laastuen. After considerable negotiations this site was secured by the commissioners, mainly through the generosity of public spirited citizens who organized the "Elbow Lake Improvement Company," secured title to the tract and conveyed it to the county. In this manner the present beautiful site of five acres, on an eminence at the head of Central

avenue and extending back to the shore of Worm lake, was obtained for the erection of the building of which Grant county may well be proud.

The contract for the construction of the building was let to the Prince Construction Company, of Minneapolis, who agreed to erect the building of Portwing brown stone for \$60,202, including the heating and plumbing equipment. E. A. Durkee, a member of the company, was the superintendent of construction. Work was begun in the spring of 1905 and the finished building was inspected and accepted on April 6, 1906. The interior decorations were painted by Oden J. Oyen, of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Electric fixtures and lamps, metal furniture and office desks and chairs of the most modern style and construction were secured. E. J. Scofield, then serving as county attorney, was the first official to occupy an office in the new court house, moving into it on May 21, 1906. Sheriff Thompson and Clerk of Court Johnson occupied their offices in the new building on the succeeding day, and the other officers followed as soon as their rooms were completed. The new court house was formally dedicated with fitting exercises on July 23, 1906.

This building consists of three stories, and is equipped with the latest appliances in heating, lighting and ventilation. On the second floor are the offices of the auditor, treasurer, commissioners, register of deeds and clerk of the court. In the basement, which really is the first floor of the building, are the offices of the judge of probate, sheriff, superintendent of schools, highway engineer, agricultural agent and custodian. The third floor is occupied by the court room, county attorney and jury rooms. Ample fire-proof storage vaults are provided for the care of all county records. A beautiful lawn surrounds the building and a grove of small oaks serves as a background on the border of the nearby lake.

Grant county has never found it necessary to build a jail; one room in the court house fitted up with two small steel cells being all the equipment the county possesses for the detention of prisoners. Neither has the county a poor farm; the township officers looking after any dependents in their respective townships and non-residents being cared for through the proper county officials. The county has never had a bonded debt.■

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