

**“ HISTORY OF THE MORRISON COUNTY  
COURT HOUSE AND JAIL” \***

in

**HISTORY**

OF

**Morrison and Todd Counties  
Minnesota**

**THEIR PEOPLE, INDUSTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS**

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BY

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

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\* MLHP editor: The following appeared on pages 74-76 of the first volume of this joint history of Morrison and Todd Counties. Though reformatted, the it is complete.

## **COURT HOUSE HISTORY.**

Unlike many other counties in Minnesota, Morrison county has never had any difficulty over locating its county seat. The act providing for organization of the county also stipulated that Little Falls should be the seat of justice, and it has never been removed. At the first meeting of the board of county commissioners, in May, 1856, they divided the county into three separate voting precincts, Little Falls, Swan River and Platte River. At the November meeting, that year, the commissioners voted to pay William Sturgis eight thousand dollars, to erect a court house, and on the 24th of the same month bonds were issued and delivered to said Sturgis. These bonds were eight in number, each calling for the sum of one thousand dollars, the first falling due in three years, and each subsequent year one fell due. The rate of interest was twelve per cent. per annum. Sturgis proceeded to erect the court house and, after having it roofed and enclosed, but far from completion, failed, leaving the structure in an unfinished condition. He had disposed of the bonds to a banker in Washington, D. C., who demanded payment as the bonds became due, but was refused by the county commissioners, because the building had not been completed as called for in the contract. The matter engaged the attention of commissioners and the courts for a number of years, and finally, in July, 1869, a compromise was effected by which, under the administration of Commissioners William Butler, William Harrison and Richard L. Trask, the old bonds were taken up and new ones issued to the amount of eight thousand dollars, bearing seven per cent, one thousand dollars falling due each year until all should be paid for. It was in this manner that the first court house in this county was secured and paid for. It was a frame structure, which stood on the site of the present temple of justice. When the new building was to be built, the old frame building was moved to another place and now stands facing the south on First avenue south, nearly opposite the Buckman hotel, a little to the east. It was a well-constructed building, for now, after all these eventful years and exposure to the elements, it is still in good repair and is used for private business enterprises. The front only has been changed; it had large columns in front when used as a court house, but this has been changed and the old portico has been enclosed, giving more floor space within the building. It is now owned by the Maurin estate.

### **THE PRESENT COURT HOUSE.**

About 1890 it was found wise and necessary, in order to preserve the county records and furnish a place in keeping with the growth of the county, to erect a new, larger and more satisfactory place in which the county officers and courts could be accommodated in the performance of their several duties. Consequently the county bonded itself in the sum of forty thousand dollars, issuing bonds running as long as thirty years and none payable within ten years. They drew five per cent per annum and were, by bidding, struck off to the First National Bank of Little Falls at forty thousand one hundred and six dollars, on July 14, 1890. In July, 1891, another set of bonds were issued for fifteen thousand dollars, with which to furnish and equip the new court house, and its

various offices, making the total cost of the present structure about sixty-five thousand dollars. The county commissioners, at the time of the letting of the contract for this building, were, John Stumpf, Peter Medved, N. Gravel and Dennis Sheedy.

In July, 1898, the commissioners ordered a United States flag to be erected on the court house and appointed a committee to procure a suitable staff and flag, which provision was soon carried out and "Old Glory" was unfurled to the breeze.

In October; 1891, the court house was first lighted by electric lights, the contract being that the county should pay the sum of three hundred dollars per year for lighting both the court house and county jail.

This court house is an ornament to the county and a monument to the wisdom and good sense of the officers and taxpayers of Morrison county. It is a yellow brick structure, with a tall tower surmounting the superstructure, in which there is soon to be placed a handsome clock, the same having been provided for in the will of the late Josiah Page, who left for such purpose the sum of two thousand dollars.

The court house has ample rooms for all the officials and a spacious court room and jury rooms. It is both heated and lighted by modern methods—steam and electricity.

#### COUNTY JAIL HISTORY.

The first regular jail in Morrison county was the one situated on the public square, built of square timbers; it was sixteen by twenty-four feet, two stories high. It still stands opposite the court house, being clapboarded, however.

The present jail is situated on the southeast corner of the court house square. It is a yellow brick building, erected in 1888, at a cost of seven thousand five hundred: dollars (original contracts) and was improved in 1897 by the addition of three new steel cages, which were thought to be safe as against the escape of prisoners. However, several prisoners have been able to make good their escape since then. For various reasons, the building has been condemned by general public opinion and will doubtless ere long be replaced by a more attractive and up-to-date building. Prior to the building of the old log or timber jail mentioned, all prisoners were kept at St. Cloud, or guarded at Little Falls by the sheriff. ■

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