

“History of the Steele County Court House and Jail” *

IN

HISTORY OF
RICE AND
STEELE COUNTIES
MINNESOTA

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MLHP: the following appeared on pages 848-850 of the first volume of this joint history of Rice and Steele Counties. Though reformatted, it is complete.

CHAPTER XV

COUNTY BUILDINGS

Property Owned by the County—Lot Purchased for Court House — Cost and Description — Steele County jail — Old Building Erected in the Seventies—Modern Structure Completed in 1903—County Alms House—Buildings and Farm.

Steele county has three county institutions—the court house and the jail at Owatonna and the county farm. The court house and the jail are substantially and economically built, and are pleasing to the eye at the same time that they serve their purpose of utility. The alms house, where the deserving poor are cared for, is also conducted along modern lines, and in a creditable manner.

STEELE COUNTY COURT HOUSE

The Steele county court house affords a splendid illustration of the enterprising and progressive spirit of the citizens of this county. No other county in the state can boast of a similar building that more nearly fills the needs of the community.

From and even before the time of the purchase of the site from Marvin A. Daley, September 30, 1881, it was felt by all the leading citizens that the county should have a building for its official business worthy of its sound financial standing. Nothing was done, however, until July 15, 1890, when the county commissioners made a levy of \$13,500 for the express purpose of building a court house. On December 2, 1890, plans were submitted by various architects, those of T. D. Allen, of Minneapolis, being accepted. Bids were received for the erection of the court house, in accordance with the specifications, from fifteen different firms, that of Leck & McLeod, of Minneapolis, for \$39,391, receiving the acceptance of the board, February 13, 1891. Work was commenced the following spring. The contract for the installing of a heating system, all the structure to be heated by a hot-water radiating system, with the exception of the court room, which was to be heated by a hot-air furnace, was let to Middlemist & Earle, the consideration being \$3,350. Clefton Brothers, of Owatonna, were awarded the plumbing contract—\$985—the same day, March 24, 1891.

The last session of the legislature had authorized the commissioners of Steele county to issue \$30,000 in bonds for the purpose of erecting a court house, and 5 per cent bonds to that amount were duly issued and sold at par to the Farmers and Mechanics' Savings Bank of Minneapolis, October 31, 1891. This \$30,000 was the total amount of the indebtedness incurred.

March 14, 1892, the court house was officially accepted by the commissioners, the building being found satisfactory in every way and in accordance with the contracts after a thorough examination.

The general style of the structure is Romanesque, being built of brick, faced with Austin faced brick and trimmed with Lake Superior brown stone. The rich brown color of the stone arches, caps, sills, cornices and trimmings contrast pleasingly with the deep red of the pressed brick, the latter being laid in red mortar. The entrances at each end of the building are in the form of Romanesque arches, flanked and supported by polished granite columns. Over the main door, at the north end, there is a niche supporting a group of three figures representing Mercy, Law and Justice. The main tower, located at the northwest corner of the building, is a beautiful piece of architecture, embellished with circular minarets and gables. It is provided with one of the finest tower clocks in the state, being furnished by the Howard Clock Company, of Chicago, at a cost of \$1,090. At the northeast corner is a circular tower, which rises just above the main roof, and is surmounted by a flagstaff. There is also another tower, square in form, situated at the southwest corner, in which are entrances. This tower rises one story above the main building. The roofs are covered with slate and all cornices are of metal. The large semi-circular windows on the east and west ends of the court room are of leaded glass in colors, with the state coat of arms worked in.

The interior of the building is admirably adapted for the various uses to which it is put, and is fitted and furnished in the most modern style throughout. The first floor is given to the offices of the different county officers, all being provided with a fireproof vault and steel shuttered windows. The second story contains one of the model court rooms of the state, also judge's chambers, jury rooms, consultation room and waiting rooms. The total cost of the building was \$53,500, exclusive of the \$5,000 expended for the site.

The beautifully kept grounds, set with cannons, flower beds and trees, add much to the dignified and stately appearance of the structure.

The county is deeply indebted to its loyal and faithful commissioners, during the year 1891, who made this court house possible, and through their careful supervision saved the community thousands of dollars. Especial credit is due Herman Schmidt, chairman. He was ably assisted by the other commissioners, Theodore Chambers, Frank Canton, Robert Crickmore and Fred Ahrens.

STEELE COUNTY JAIL

The building of the first Steele county jail dates back to the early sixties, when the county was yet in its pioneer days. With numerous changes and additions at the times progressed, this structure gave good service for many years, until about 1900, when the question of the building of a modern and up-to-date bastile began to be discussed, the old jail having met with the disapproval of the state authorities.

November 25, 1902, the first steps were taken, the county commissioners issuing \$10,000 in bonds for the erection of a new jail, shortly afterwards selling them at par to the local banks. A month or two later a contract was signed with the Pauly Jail Building & Manufacturing Company of St. Louis for the plans and furnishings of a strictly modern jail, not to exceed \$15,000 in cost. The plans were submitted, and February 17, 1903, the contract for the removal of the old building and the erection of the new structure was awarded to Hammel Brothers & Anderson, the consideration being \$3,238. Work was started the following spring, and the jail building itself concluded during the late summer of the same year, though the installation of the steel cells and other equipment by the Pauly company was not completed until some time later.

The total cost of this structure for the promotion of the peace and welfare of Steele county was something over \$15,000, every dollar being expended to the best possible advantage. Four double cells and three single, all representing the latest ideas in that class of construction, provide ample facilities for the accommodation of the opponents of law and order.

The commissioners of 1903, F. G. Schuman, chairman; M. H. Coggins, N.

O. Partridge, John Smith and C. H. Wilker, rendered invaluable service in protecting the interests of the taxpayers, and securing the erection of a model jail. ■

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