

# THE SWIFT COUNTY COURT HOUSE

Swift County was formed by the legislature on February 8, 1870. Six years later, the 18th Legislature authorized the county board to sell bonds in the amount of \$3,000 to finance the construction of a court house in Benson, the county seat. The legislation provided:

## CHAPTER LXIX.

### AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE THE COUNTY OF SWIFT TO ISSUE BONDS FOR THE PURPOSE OF BUILDING COURT HOUSE AND JAIL,

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Minnesota:*

SECTION 1. That the county commissioners of the county of Swift are hereby authorized to issue the bonds of said county to the amount of three thousand dollars, for the purpose of erecting county buildings at Benson, the county seat.

SEC. 2. Such bonds shall be issued, with coupons attached thereto, and of such denominations as the county commissioners shall determine, and shall bear interest at a rate not exceeding ten per cent. per annum, which said interest shall be payable annually, and the principal shall be payable within ten years from the date of said bonds, the rate of interest and the time of maturity of said bonds to be fixed by the commissioners of said county as they may determine, subject to the above limitations.

SEC. 3. Said bonds, and the interest coupons attached thereto, shall be signed by the chairman of the board of county commissioners, and countersigned by the auditor of said county, and said auditor shall keep a record of all bonds issued under the provisions of this act, giving numbers, dates and amounts, to whom issued and when payable.

SEC. 4. The board of commissioners of said county shall have authority to negotiate said bonds, as in their judgment shall be best for the interests of the county; *Provided*, Said bonds shall not be sold at less than par.

SEC. 5. The board of commissioners of said county shall, and they are hereby authorized and empowered to, levy an annual tax on the taxable-property of said county, over and above and in addition to all other taxes required by law to be levied, sufficient to pay the interest accruing on said bonds, and the principal of said bonds, as they shall mature, which taxes shall be levied and collected in the same manner as other taxes for county purposes are levied and collected; and no part

of such tax shall be appropriated for any purposes whatever, other than the payment of said bonds and the interest thereon.

SEC. 6. The proposition to issue said bonds shall be submitted to a vote of the electors of said county, at a special election to be called on the first day of May, A. D. (1876) eighteen hundred and seventy-six. The ballots shall have written or printed on them the following words, "For issue of bonds for building county buildings," or "Against building county buildings." Said vote shall be cast at said election in the same manner as votes cast for town officers, and if upon a canvass of said votes in the manner provided for the canvass of votes for county officers, a majority of said voters who shall have voted upon said proposition have voted in favor thereof, the issue of said bonds shall be lawful. The town clerks of the several towns in said county shall at the time of giving the notice of the said special election, at least ten days before said election, post notices in the same manner as provided for posting of notices for the annual town elections, fully setting forth the object of said election. *Provided*, That any neglect on the part of any town clerk to give such notice shall not invalidate said election, or prohibit the canvass of votes cast upon said question.

SEC. 7. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.

Approved March 2d, 1876.<sup>1</sup>

The county board acted promptly and signed a construction contract less than three months later. The building was completed that fall, according to Edward D. Neill's *History of the Minnesota Valley*, published in 1882:

When the question of building a suitable courthouse was agitated, it was decided to get permission from the legislature to issue bonds to the amount of \$3,000 for the purpose of erecting such building. This resulted in the passage of an act by the legislature, in the spring of 1876, giving authority for the issue of the bonds, provided the measure received the sanction of the people, at an election held for that purpose. The people voted a favor of the measure, and the bonds were accordingly issued, negotiated and sold at par in the following August. On June 21, 1876, a contract for building a court-house and jail was let to Messrs. A. G.

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<sup>1</sup> 1876 Special Laws, ch. 69, at p. 146. This measure probably did not differ much from earlier bond authorizations to other counties — except for the last proviso in Section 6. It seems likely that this odd clause was added because, over the years, bond elections in other counties had been challenged when town clerks in those counties failed to timely post notices of the election. The legislature must have learned from these experiences that it was necessary to protect or “save” the bond election in Swift County from being invalidated by some town clerks’ neglect of duty.

Desparious & Co., of St. Paul, for \$2,600, according to plans and specifications left in the county auditor's office. Subsequently a special agreement was entered into between the commissioners and the contractors for additional floors, etc., in the court-house according to agreement, the whole amounting to \$132. Subsequently, O. F. Bronnecke and K. P. Frovold were appointed a committee to contract for the erection of a small house on the court-house block. The court-house was finished and accepted by the commissioners in the following fall. A contract was made later, on May 11, 1877, with Peter Christopherson for the erection of vaults for the sum of \$590. This, however, was never carried out; but on July 17, 1878, a contract was entered into with him to construct a vault on the west side of the court-house to be eleven by seven by eight feet inside measure. He agreed to do the mason work for \$175. September 20, a contract was entered into with R. Stanley to furnish all the material and do the wood work on the vault for the sum of one hundred and thirty-five dollars.<sup>2</sup> ■



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<sup>2</sup> Edward D. Neill, *History of the Minnesota Valley, Including the Explorers and Pioneers of Minnesota* 956 (1882).