

“EARLY COURTHOUSES OF WINONA COUNTY” *

IN

THE HISTORY

OF

WINONA COUNTY

MINNESOTA

COMPILED BY
FRANKLYN CURTISS-WEDGE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ASSISTED BY
WILLIAM JAY WHIPPLE
Reviewer of Manuscripts

AND
A LARGE CORPS OF LOCAL CONTRIBUTORS

ILLUSTRATED

VOLUME I

CHICAGO
H. C. COOPER JR. & CO.
1913

* MLHP: this article consists of excerpts from pages 232-233 and 1041-1042 of the first volume of this *History of Winona County*. They have been reformatted. Spelling and punctuation are not changed. The title has been added by the MLHP.

EARLY COURTHOUSES OF WINONA COUNTY

Courthouse and Jail. As early as March 1, 1854, the county commissioners took action on the matter of securing county buildings by voting to purchase land for that purpose. The location selected was practically the present site of the courthouse and jail, it being voted to secure lots 3, 4, and 5, in block 19. July 8, 1856, J. S. Denman, then a member of the board, was authorized to build a county jail of logs 12 by 16, 12 feet high. In November, 1856, he was authorized to procure stone and timber for the erection of a county courthouse and jail. January 6, 1857, the plans were accepted. This matter was the subject of extensive investigation at a later date. It seems that the county had plenty of money in the treasury, but for some reason the county buildings were not erected. The recriminations which followed the affair are outside of the scope of this work. One incident in connection with the building has an important bearing on the present status of Winona, according to Dr. L. H. Bunnell. The Mississippi river in 1857 seemed to be changing its channel. Instead of following its present course, that unruly river, which already had abandoned its ancient channel through what is now Lake Winona, tried to plow its main channel north of Island No. 72, so called. The steamboat "Dr. Franklin," whose officers were none too friendly to Winona, began to follow the new course of the river north of the island, without passing the landings at Winona. Eventually, according to Dr. Bunnell, J. S. Denman began bringing stone from the Wisconsin bluffs for the erection of the new courthouse. On one of these trips, whether by accident or design has never been determined, the barge and a large load of stone were sunk at the entrance to the channel leading north of Island No. 72, and since then the steamboats have all passed the landings at Winona. According to the records, the contract was let to Mr. Denman in November, 1856, and cancelled in January, 1857. He was given a certain sum of money to requite him for the work which had been done when the contract was cancelled. This indemnity was the matter of bitter

correspondence in the newspapers for some time afterward. In the meantime, the county business was transacted in rented buildings. The officers usually had separate places of business, and the courts were held in halls. Various places were used for a jail, the long-term prisoners being sent to the jail at Wabasha. In 1859 the Bennett building, on Second street, was secured for county headquarters. This was long pointed out to newcomers as the original city hall. In 1862 county building was erected near the site of the present court house. It was first occupied in the fall of 1862. In 1871 the substantial jail, which is still standing, was erected.

On July 26, 1882, the initiatory steps were taken toward building the new courthouse by a resolution of the county board levying a tax of five-tenths of a mill for a courthouse sinking fund. The cost of the building, exclusive of the site, was about \$120,000. It was dedicated September 17, 1889.

In 1913 the county commissioners voted to erect a new jail on the corner of Washington and Fourth streets.

• • •

[pages1041-1042]

Reminiscences of the Court House.

From 1853 to 1859, each officer of the county performed his official duties and kept his records in his own office or home, except that in 1857 the county furnished an office for the register of deeds and sheriff in a small building on Front street, south of where the pumping station of the waterworks are now located. In 1859 the same officers were furnished rooms in a block three blocks farther down the river, in what was known as the Smith & Bennett Building, a three-story building facing the levee, near Lafayette streets. These officers shared the occupancy of that building with several branches of the city public schools.

The board of county commissioners, at their session of April 17, 1862; completed their negotiations for a court house site, having 'purchased from H. D. Huff the vacant lot, 60 by 140 feet, on the southeast corner of Third and Washington streets. This was lot 5, block 19, fronting toward the river. Propositions to sell lots or the site were made 'by several different persons, at prices ranging from \$400 to \$800. But the choice of the board lay between the lot above designated and one on the corner of Fourth and Lafayette streets. But there was some doubt as to the title to the lot on the corner of Fourth and Lafayette streets, so the one on the corner of Third and Washington streets was selected. The contract for building the court house was given to C. G. Maybury, for \$4,500. This building was completed and occupied in October, 1862. The jail occupied a part of the building. January 8, 1870, the county purchased from Mr. Huff lots 4, 6 and 7, and the west two-thirds of lot 3, in the same block. Lot 8 had also been purchased, giving the county a frontage of 160 feet on Third street and 180 feet on Fourth street. The jail was built in 1871.

July 26, 1882, the county commissioners took preliminary action in the building of a new court house. The plans of C. G. Maybury & Son were approved May 17, 1887. The contract was let to Munck & Lohse, September 22, 1887. Ground was broken September 28, 1887. The corner-stone was laid June 20, 1888. The dedication was observed September 16, 1889. The cost of the court house in round numbers was \$125,000. ■

—ŵ—

Posted MLHP: August 8, 2011;
expanded, September 26, 2016..