

Excerpts from
'Struggle for the County Seat
(Pottawatomie County, Kansas)

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MOVING THE COUNTY SEAT TO WESTMORELAND, 1882

St. George served as first county seat from 1857-61. After Kansas was admitted to the Union in 1861 an election was held to vote on a permanent county seat. Louisville won the election. In 1879 an election was held to relocate the county seat with Wamego besting Westmoreland. Law suits were filed, with the state supreme court hearing the case in July, 1882. In yet another election, September 19, 1882, a vote between those two gave Westmoreland the county seat.

In late October, Frank O'Daniel learned Sheriff Graham of St. Marys would be out of the County for a couple of days. So he had Elihue McMurray notify like-minded individuals to bring wagons to the Brush Creek Bridge on the Kenech farm to organize a midnight run to Louisville and retrieve the County safes and records.

The next day the County officials arrived in Westmoreland and began marking off portions of the Methodist Church, Congregational Church and part of a small hotel, Detro House, to use as County officers until a two-story 50' x 18' temporary courthouse could be built.

When Sheriff Graham returned he found his desk and chair were waiting for him in Westmoreland. Chapter 26, Section 9, of the 1868 Kansas Statutes read: "The County officers who are required by law to keep their offices at the county seat, shall within 20 days after said

proclamation, move all books, records, papers and furniture belonging to the County to the place therein named; and if any officer shall fail to remove in the time prescribed by this section, he or his sureties shall pay the county the sum of five dollars for each and every day of such failure, to be sued for and collected by the board of County Commissioners."

BUILDING THE COURTHOUSE, 1884

- 1884 Westmoreland Citizens' Building Association formed to facilitate construction of a \$10,000 courthouse. On January 14 County Commission granted permission to construct a stone courthouse on a donated block of land in Rachel Armer's Addition. The W. C. B. A. was tasked with designing the courthouse. (pg. 52)
- 1884 February 14: County Commission approved plans for a 60' x 70' two story courthouse of stone, to be quarried from nearby Mt. Ephraim. Contract to be let March 1, 1884. (pg. 52)
- 1884 The Onaga Journal reported that on April 29 a cornerstone was put in place at 2:00 p.m. by A. E. Landon, a Freemason. Several hundred spectators traipsed through the mud for the occasion as here were no sidewalks. (pg. 52)
- 1884 August 30: Josiah Comfort, president, and John Pfaff, secretary, of the Westmoreland Citizens' Building Association presented the new courthouse to the County Commission. (pg. 53)

The finished wood- framed structure had cut limestone for its exterior bearing walls, limestone masonry for the interior north-south corridor bearing walls, a rubble-stone foundation, and a partial crawl space beneath the first floor. (pg. 53)

The roof framing consisted of heavy timber trusses, that supported wood purlins, which were 10' high and spaced at 10' apart on center, and spanned the 60' between the east and west walls. (pg. 54)

1884 September 1, County Commission ordered that the County officers move their offices and all paper, books and records belonging to the County into the new courthouse on that date. (pg. 54)

POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY COURTHOUSE, 1884 – 2017

Since its construction in 1884, the Pottawatomie County Courthouse remains the second oldest in continuous use, with the Chase County Courthouse in Cottonwood Falls being the oldest.

The 1884 Courthouse has survived: (pg. 81)

- Excavation (25' x 45' basement to install a heating plant).
- Five additions.
- An attic fire December 1, 1927, due to a defective furnace flue, which charred huge roof beams, burned a hole in the wood-framed roof, and caused extensive damage. A large turnbuckle screw and plate system was installed in east to west walls to stabilize the structure.
- Several broken water lines.

- Various upgrades and renovations.
- Temporary structures attached to it. (All removed currently.)

Additions to the 1884 Courthouse: (pg. 81-82)

- 1897 Lack of vault space (land records were reportedly being stored out in the open). Two story 22 ½ x 29' hip-roofed stone addition was made to the **northeast** side for \$2,253.
- 1928 March: Two-story 19' x 32' addition to the South front side between windows in the Treasurer's and Register of Deeds' Offices, for \$12,149.
- This served as a new entrance with bathrooms (male and female either side) on the main floor and a Jury Room with bathrooms (male and female either side) on the second floor.
- 19?? First story vault on southwest side, unknown date.
- 1929 May: Second story vault constructed on top of existing vault on southwest side (hoping it would keep water from leaking through the concrete ceiling and damaging records in the main floor vault below).
- 1976 October: Two-story 24' x 32' (\$25,000) addition to the **southeast** side to provide room for the County Assessor on the first floor and chamber for the District County Judge and meeting space on the second floor.

- 1999 April: Install a heating and cooling system for the courtrooms, replacing window units that were less efficient and noisy.
- County Commissioners accepted the low bid of \$145,867 from Francis Construction of Rossville, Kansas.
- 2005 Electrical wiring improved, central air conditioning provided for the Courtroom.
- To resolve problems with the chair lift on the stairway two options were considered: Replace chair lift for \$43,000, or install an elevator \$260,000.
 - Instead, County Commissioners changed service providers for the chair lift, resulting in better maintenance and fewer problems.

POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY JAIL, Late 1800's

The original Pottawatomie County Jail was 20' x 32' x 11', a rock structure with two cells and a corridor. Each cell was 7' high, 6' wide, 6 ½' deep and contained four bunks (pg. 83). Cost was \$819.00. This structure still stands, albeit neglected, today.

A new Jail facility, designed to accommodate 8 prisoners, was built in 1970, added onto in 1982 and could house 17 prisoners (pg. 84), but has since been razed.