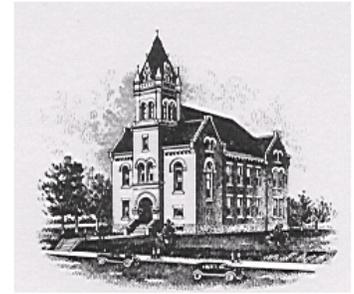


## Kanabec County Courthouse History



Organized in 1859, Kanabec County had no courthouse building until 17 years later. The county auditor was the lumber company clerk with very little official business to transact. At one time during that period, the County Treasurer was an ox teamster who gave very little, if any, attention to his official duties. The 1870 census gave the county a total white population of only 53. Hersey, Staples and Hall's Stillwater lumber firm and leading timber operator in the county, naturally dominated the county's limited public business. The county's headquarters was a single room in a stopping place operated by George L. Staples at Millet Rapids on Snake River.

In the early 1870's, there started an influx of homesteaders into the southern part of the county and a demand developed for a county building. In 1876, the Hersey-Bean lumber company erected a one room county office building, 16x30 feet in size, which the county board agreed to rent for \$50.00 a year. It was built of hewed square timbers and located at Millet Rapids. A large safe was bought to house county records. To save room, the safe set partly outside the building, the door opening into the room. A protective covering was built over it. The same safe is still in daily use today by the County Auditor/Treasurer.

Until 1871, Kanabec County was attached to Chisago County for judicial purposes and then to Pine County until 1881. At that time, Kanabec was detached and organized. The first and only court term at Brunswick, Kanabec's county seat at the time, was held in 1882.

In the general election of 1882, the county seat was voted to be moved to the new village of Mora by a vote of 166 for and 2 against. The old courthouse was sold to Walter Peterson of Quamba, who moved it across the river and used it as a farm home. In later years it was occupied by the Frank Overaker family and later dismantled.

At its January meeting in 1883, the county board rented temporary quarters in Mora for county officials, pending the erection of a courthouse. At its first meeting in March 1883, the present courthouse site was purchased, the consideration being \$100.00 for the entire block.

The following May a contract was awarded to S.E. Tallman and John L. Spence for building a new court house and jail, the contract being \$4,200.00. A separate contract for jail cells was to cost \$3,500.00.

M.R. Kent, county attorney, considered the cost too high and took an appeal to district court. The outcome was that the cells were removed from the new jail and others substituted to cost \$1,300.00. The courthouse and jail were wooden structures.

Eleven years later, the courthouse burned. Citizens were anxious to build a solid brick, fireproof building after the March fire. About a month later, on April 10, 1894, an architect from Buechner and Jacobson of St. Paul presented plans for a new courthouse to the county commissioners. Bids came in ranging from \$9,267.50 to \$13,792.00. The county having only \$8,000 available and unwilling to borrow money during hard economic times directed the architects to modify the

building plans to reduce costs. Charles Skoglund won the subsequent contract with a bid of \$6,200.

The court house, erected in 1894, had become so congested by 1937, that the county board decided to enlarge it by building an addition to the east end. W.P.A. labor was used which substantially reduced the cost to the county. The total cost was approximately \$25,000.00, the county's share being \$17,000.00. The courthouse then totaled about 15,000 square feet in size.

A blocky extension on the south reaching half way up the old building contains two modern stories. Though it was built with the same buff-colored brick, it was a modern building with no effort made to blend it in with the original building. The addition was designed by Fred Wemlinger of St. Cloud and was completed in 1974 at a cost of \$219,628.

By the 1990s it was obvious that county buildings were in need of update and expansion. County offices and courts were housed in a now aging courthouse, the County Attorney's office was in a old, ramshackle house and the Family Service Agency was down the street in a bigger old, ramshackle house. None of the buildings were handicapped accessible, all were too small and had numerous safety issues.

The Kanabec County Board of Commissioners first constructed a low cost, 20,000 square foot building (the Public Service Building) on property adjacent to the Highway Department at a cost of \$1,762,663 to house the Family Service Agency, Public Health and Extension. With that project complete in 1997, the county turned its full attention to the courthouse.

A plan was developed to move all courthouse activities to a new site about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile away and convert the historic courthouse to other activities, but the public rose up and demanded that the historic building be preserved as the county courthouse. New plans were developed and by a large margin, a 6.9 million dollar bond was passed by public vote to renovate and expand the existing building. By the end of 1998, the courthouse was vacated and renovation began.

The old 20,000 square foot building was gutted and a 40,000 square foot extension was constructed on the east side at a total cost of \$7,291,639. The resulting building was faithful to the original Romanesque Revival style. Even the 1973 addition was modified to be more sympathetic to the original building. In June of 2000, the courthouse reopened for business.