

City Government Led By Its Citizens

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The founders of Vermillion's city form of government faced many of the same responsibilities being met by the governing body today.

Key to them all was making sure that Vermillion was a safe and enjoyable community.

In 1873, the City had developed to the point that the community felt it was time to create official ordinances to govern the health and safety of the community.

They chose to create a "Board of Trustees" who then drafted the original 11 ordinances.

In an attempt to make Vermillion safer they:

- Made gambling illegal both in public and in private homes
- Declared it unlawful for any person to sell or dispose of "indecent or lewd book, picture or other thing."
- Racing of horses or mules was outlawed in city limits.
- The shooting of guns or fire crackers.
- The carrying of concealed weapons.
- Loitering for five days without any legal occupation or means of support.

Other ordinances prohibited prostitution, dealt with animal control, fire safety and assessing fees and taxes to support the city government.

The current form of city government was adopted in 1966.

The City of Vermillion operates under the Council-Manager form of municipal government.

This form combines the strong political leadership of elected officials with the strong managerial experience of an appointed manager. All power and authority to set policy rests with an elected governing body, which includes a mayor and members of the City Council. The governing body in turn hires a nonpartisan manager who has very broad authority to run the organization.

According to the City's website, "The Council-Manager form promotes effective management within a transparent, responsive, and accountable structure. Since its establishment, the Council-Manager form has become the most popular structure of local government in the United States. The form is also widely used throughout the world. The Mayor and City Council represent the community and develop the long-range vision for the future of Vermillion. They establish policies

that affect the overall operation of the community and are responsive to residents' needs and wishes."

The governing body is made up of nine members. Eight City Council members are elected from four wards, with two members representing each ward. The Mayor is elected at-large and presides over City Council meetings. The mayor may vote on all matters coming before the governing body.

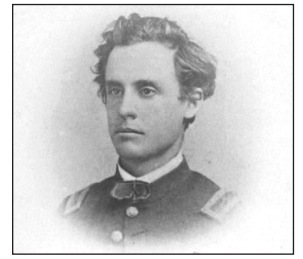
With the consent of the City Council, the Mayor appoints individuals to serve on the Library Board and Planning Commission.

The Library Board oversees the operations of the Vermillion Public Library and appoints a Library Director. All services and programs provided by the library are overseen by the board.

The Planning Commission is charged with overseeing the long-range planning of the community, including zoning issues, subdivisions and formulation of the Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Commission serves a vital role in recommending major policy changes to the governing body for the development of the community.

MAYORS OF VERMILLION

1877-1878: John L. Jolley
 1878-1885: Dr. Frank N. Burdick
 1885-1886: John L. Jolley
 1886-1887: Dr. Frank N. Burdick
 1887-1889: Silas W. Kidder
 1889-1889: Silas N. Palmer
 1889-1890: Jesse Burchard
 1890-1892: Dr. Frank N. Burdick
 1892-1896: Andrew E. Lee
 1896-1898: L.T. Swezey
 1898-1898: Dr. Frederick W. Cox
 1898-1899: J.A. Carson
 1899-1900: Dr. Frederick W. Cox
 1900-1903: Halvor E. Hansen
 1903-1904: W.C. Bryant
 1904-1911: Henry L. Ferry
 1911-1913: George Kempker
 1913-1916: Charles E. Prentis
 1916-1918: Richard F. Lyons
 1918-1921: William H. Beede
 1921-1923: Martin L. Thompson
 1923-1932: Dr. Carl Viers
 1932-1934: P.F. Cavanaugh
 1934-1942: Dan E. Sullivan
 1942-1947: R.D. Thompson
 1947-1948: H.W. Frankendorf
 1948-1949: Henry A. Benson
 1949-1951: W.H. Jarmuth
 1951-1952: Hugh F. Lee
 1952-1954: Ralph H. Leer
 1954-1956: W.H. Jarmuth
 1956-1960: Robert F. Patterson
 1960-1962: Ralph H. Leer



John L. Jolley, first mayor of Vermillion

1962-1974: John T. Barstow
 1974-1976: Charles L. Amant
 1976-1980: Lester J. Parry
 1980-1982: Charles Woodman
 1982-1988: Merle L. Offerdahl
 1988-1992: Betty J. Lynn
 1992-1994: Grant A. Sammelson
 1994-2001: William J. Radigan
 2001-2004: Roger L. Kozak
 2004-2010: Daniel D. Christopherson
 2010-present: John E. Powell

CITY MANAGERS

1966-1970: Michael G. Miller
 1970-1973: Charles Kent Mc-Clain
 1974-1983: Carl D. Weinaug
 1983-1989: James W. Antonen
 1989-2002: Jeff Pederson
 2002-2004: James Patrick
 2005-Present: John C. Prescott

Court

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county clerk was "...about as cheap as could have been built....". On September 6, 1881, citizens of Vermillion offered to provide land and money toward the construction of a county courthouse. Four different proposals were presented for different locations and differing amounts of money which would be provided by the city residents.

On September 8th the Clay County Commissioners decided that if the city would provide lots 8, 9 and 10 and part of lot 11 of Block 27 of the Original Town site of Vermillion and \$800 toward the construction of a county office building, that the county would contribute \$2,000 towards the construction costs. These lots were located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Court Street and Kidder Street (where the post office is now located).

On October 6, 1881, the county commissioners awarded a contract to George A. Porter for the construction of the courthouse at a cost of \$2,800. The new county courthouse, on Court Street (hence the name), was erected during the winter of 1881-1882.

On May 20, 1882, the county commissioners inspected the new building and accepted it as they were satisfied that it was completed in accordance with the contract. The new wood frame courthouse structure on Court Street was constructed at a cost of \$4,000, including \$2,000 which was appropriated by the county commissioners, and the balance was raised by public subscription.

Certainly due in part to the rapidity of its construction, within thirty years, the 1882 courthouse was showing its age. By the turn of the century, the courthouse was in terrible condition. As indicated in the June 9, 1910 edition of the *Dakota Republican*, Clay County had "...scrimped along for a decade of years with an old rattle trap, wooden shell building for a courthouse...".

In September of 1906 a group of citizens presented the county commissioners with a petition asking that a new courthouse be built because the county records were unsafe in the existing building. An election on the proposal was held on November 6, 1906 and it was defeated by a vote of 796 in favor of the courthouse to 975 against. Some of the opponents objected to the proposal to pay for the new courthouse through a special tax levy while others in the northern part of the county opposed the construction of another courthouse in Vermillion because they wanted the county seat moved to a more central location in the county.

On April 6, 1910, another petition, this signed by 330 voters, was presented to the county commissioners asking that a 3 mil tax levy be imposed for four years to create a sinking fund for the construction of a new courthouse. The petition pointed out that the existing courthouse was inadequate for the needs of the county both in capacity and in security for the county records in case of fire. The petitioners also represented that the existing courthouse would soon require costly repairs

and additions to meet the growing demands.

In response, the county commissioners set an election for June 7, 1910, on the issue of whether to construct a new courthouse. At the election on June 7, 1910, the proposal for a new courthouse passed by a vote of 851 in favor of building a new courthouse to 657 votes against.

On September 6, 1910, the county commissioners made the decision to assess \$15,300 in taxes for the year 1910 for the courthouse building fund.

In October the county commissioners began considering possible sites for the new courthouse and initially considered two possible sites: the Chandler House Hotel site with four lots and the buildings, (the present location of the Old National Guard Armory) which was available for \$6,000 and the Catholic Convent grounds (the Southwest corner of the intersection of Kidder and Austin Streets) which was available for \$9,500, but no decision was made at that time.

On January 26, 1911, the commissioners again considered possible locations for the new courthouse and decided to advertise for sites with anyone who was interested in selling their property to submit proposals by February 6, 1911.

By the meeting on February 6, 1911, the commissioners had received 16 different proposals for locating the courthouse.

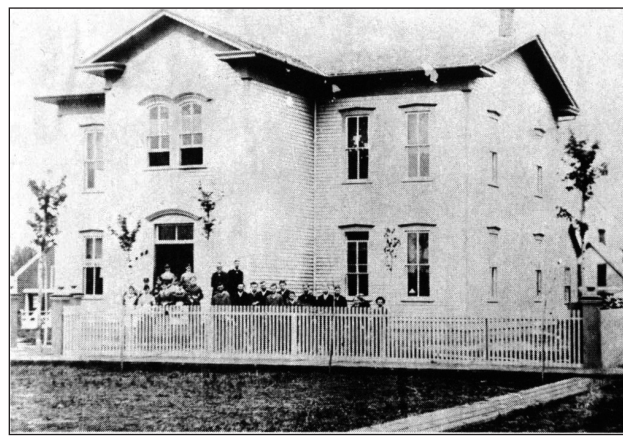
Former Mayor and Congressman John L. Jolley proposed to sell his property in Block 37 to the county for whatever three "fair men" valued it at. Congressman Jolley also submitted a proposal whereby the county would acquire the lots but the Congressman and his wife would retain possession of their home, in Block 37 during their lifetimes.

On March 8, 1911, the county commissioners decided to build on Block 37 of Snyder's addition to the City of Vermillion. Block 37 was owned by John L. Jolley (Northeast quarter) A.H. Whittemore (Northwest quarter), Mrs. O'Connor (Southwest quarter) and Mrs. Schafer (Southeast quarter) and that the total purchase price would be approximately \$12,500.

On June 9, 1911, Architect Lloyd D. Willis of Omaha appeared at the commissioner's meeting and showed them sketches and plans for the courthouse and, according to the minutes of the meeting, the commissioners spent the "forenoon" considering his plans. The next day, June 10, 1911, various other architects appeared and offered to furnish plans for the courthouse. Willis, the low bidder, was selected.

On June 21, 1911, a formal resolution was passed to build a new courthouse. The votes were 2 in favor and 1 against. Voting in favor of building a new courthouse were commissioners T.O. Ellison and Iver A. Iverson and voting against building a courthouse was G. W. Richardson, the chairman of the commissioners.

On October 3, 1911, the commissioners opened the bids for construction of the new courthouse. According to *The Dakota Republican*, the architect told their reporter that the bids came in below his expectations. Fourteen bidders submitted bids on the construction contract.



COURTESY PHOTOS: ARTHUR RUSCH

The second of three courthouses in Clay County history was located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Kidder Street and Court Street (where the Post Office is located now.) Pictured in front are members of the first class of the University of South Dakota.

On October 4, the county commissioners decided to accept the low bid of Hintz & Malloy. The county also agreed to hire P.E. Henzie as the construction superintendent for \$5 per day.

There was a festive laying of the cornerstone for the new courthouse on June 8, 1912, which was conducted by the Vermillion Masonic Lodge. The celebration included a parade to the courthouse site, and speeches by various dignitaries. According to *The Dakota Republican*, over 2000 people attended the cornerstone laying and that it was "...one of the most notable events of Masonic history in Vermillion."

During the construction, on November 4, 1912, an accident occurred in which some support props slipped and concrete which had been poured but which had not yet dried sufficiently, dropped to the third floor. The *Vermillion Plain Talk* estimated that some twenty tons of concrete and tile fell, carrying three workmen with it. The paper reported that only one of the workmen was bruised but that the workmen were all pretty badly scared but thankful to escape with their lives. The paper also commented that the strength of the courthouse was shown by the fact that the fall of twenty tons of concrete and brick wasn't enough to even jar the rest of the building.

On February 24, 1913, Civil War veterans who were members of the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) Miner Post #8 presented the commissioners with a sixteen foot silk flag for use at the new courthouse and on the same date the commissioners interviewed 17 applicants for janitor and selected John Bergman who had offered to work for \$40 per month.

With the new courthouse nearing completion, on April 1, 1913 the county commissioners accepted a petition to sell the old courthouse and jail on Court Street and on April 17, 1913, they inspected the new courthouse with the architect and found it complete and in accordance with the plans and specifications.

On April 22, 1913, the county commissioners resolved that the county officers should move into the new building and that after that date, the new courthouse building would officially be the Clay County Courthouse. The first meeting of the county commissioners in the new courthouse was held on May 6, 1913.

A dedication ceremony for the new courthouse was held on Thursday June 19th, 1913. The dedication was conducted by the Odd

Fellows Lodges of Vermillion and Wakonda. The main speaker at the dedication was Odd Fellows Grand Master S.E. Wilson and speeches were also given by pioneer settlers of Clay County, John Norin, Ellis White, John Bruyer, John Jolley and M.D. Thompson.

The Clay County Courthouse is a rectangular, three-story, "Bedford" yellow-stone building, with a central skylight, which has now been covered to save energy. The building is constructed

in a Neo-Classical style.

The front and sides are symmetrical with three bays on each facade, of which the center bay projects slightly forward. There is a highly decorated pediment on the central bay of the front and on each side. The building consists of two stories above a raised basement. The basement area creates the appearance of a podium upon which the upper stories rest. The basement level is of rusticated "Kettle River" stone which flares outward while the upper two floors are of vertically ribbed dressed stone.

Between the first and second floors is a projecting belt course of stone. The center bay on the front facade, which projects forward creating the appearance of a portico, has a recessed front entrance on the ground level. On the second and third floor is a large window flanked on each side by ionic columns running the length of the second and third floors. The windows on the side bays are plain with no adornment.

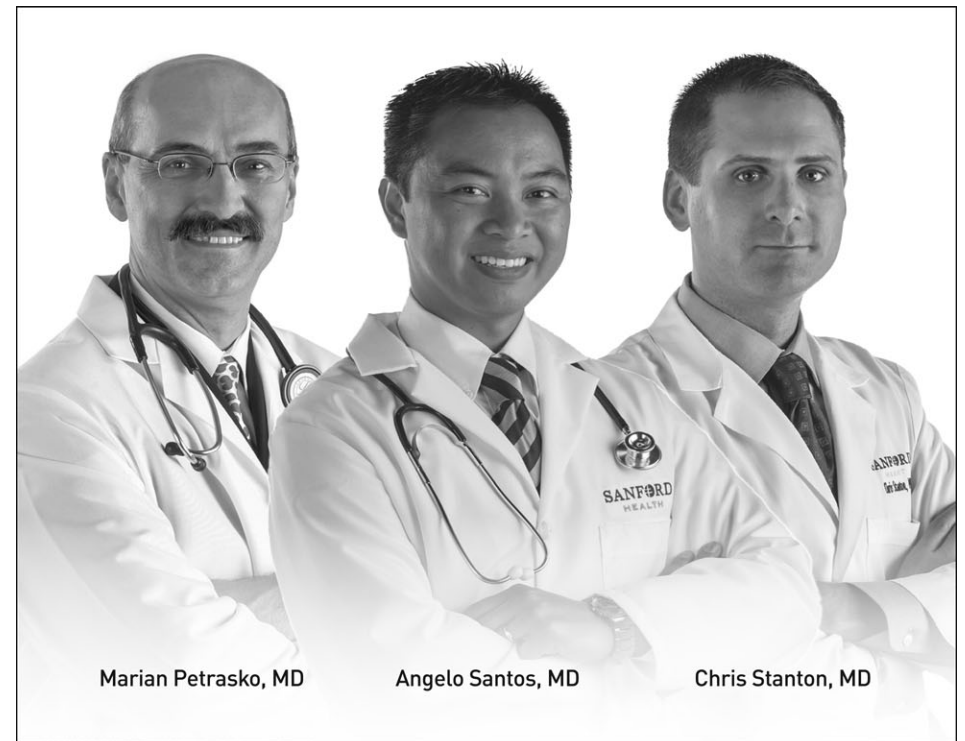
The stairs to the front entrance rise between projecting low, stone walls with lamp standards on either side. The building is topped with a heavy overhanging

cornice with dentil moldings and a parapet. The building is raised above street level by a sandstone wall on the front and sides at the sidewalks.

The courthouse was designed by Lloyd Willis, an architect from Omaha. It was built by Hintz & Malloy, contractors from Aberdeen, the plumbing and heating was done by P.F. Cavanaugh, a local contractor from Vermillion and the electrical work was done by Brookman & Barrett, also of Vermillion. The wood furniture in the Courthouse was provided by Brown & Sanger of Sioux Falls, the jail equipment was furnished by Stewart Iron Works of Cincinnati, the electric light fixtures came from the Chicago Gas & Electric Fixture Manufacturing Co of Chicago and the metal vault equipment was furnished by the Steel Fixture Manufacturing Co. of Topeka, Kansas.

The Clay County Courthouse was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 (#83003005).

Major improvements which have been made to the courthouse since its construction include the installation of the elevator in 1966, the rear vestibule in 1982, and the attached Public Safety Center in 1989.



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