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Old courthouse

A November election in 1905 to determine whether or not Thomas County should build a court house passed by a close 3 vote margin, 380 in favor, and 377 against. But it was enough that an architect was hired at a fee of \$1,624.

The contract to build the three story brick building was let for a cost of \$41,705. After adding \$3,638 for wiring and \$1,350 for steelwork, the building cost totaled a whopping \$46,693, or about half of a medium priced home in Thomas County today.

The cornerstone, in the northwest corner of the building, was laid on November 17, 1906 with over 300 people in attendance.

The building is a Romanesque Revival style, 3-story red brick structure with a square bell tower.

Native stone was used for the steps, balconies, columns, arches and trim. Work on the inside is hard yellow pine floors and the stairs are built of red oak.

Seven fireplaces were put in, as well as six metal vaults. The brick used for the inside layer of the walls and the partitions were made by Crosby and crew, a Colby brick maker.

The exterior walls and partitions are Coffeyville 2 type brick. Most of the work on the building was done with horsepower. The brick and mortar were pulled up to the scaffold with one old horse.

An August 15, 1907 issue of the *Colby Free Press* published the following account: "The county commissioners met yesterday to buy the new clock for the courthouse. We understand that the order was given to the Seth Thomas people and the clock is to cost twelve hundred dollars. It will be warranted for a term of ten years and is to be first class in every respect. The striking gong will weigh about one thousand pounds and an be heard

for some distance. The subscription for the clock amounts to six hundred dollars and the money for the sale of the old courthouse will augment this sum five hundred more and this will nearly be enough to pay for the clock." Commissioner, Jim Earnist was credited with raising the \$600 to pay for the clock.

Although a move-in date, or dedication date is not noted, Blanche Jasperson recalled that the courthouse was mostly incomplete when her wedding ceremony to Nalce Jasperson was held in the new courthouse on Nov. 27, 1907, the first wedding in the new courthouse.

It was said that when completed, the Thomas County courthouse would be the finest building west of Salina.

Over the last 100 years, plus, the courthouse has seen many changes. One of the features which made it unique, was the 18 foot tin ceiling. The ceiling has been lowered and the tin consequently covered up, to reduce the echo of the proceedings in the courtroom.

As a significant symbol of the history of the county, the center front of the sidewalk in front of the courthouse was selected as the site to erect the statue, *Spirit of the Prairie*, a bronze sculpture by Charles Norton, Leoti, during the county's Centennial celebration in 1985.

The cornerstone that was laid in 1906, was cut open on June 1, 1985, as a centennial project revealing a capsule. On June 15, the capsule was opened and it's contents were removed and placed before a large audience. Copies were made of the contents and then returned to the capsule and it was replaced in the cornerstone. Mementos from the 1985 centennial celebration were placed in a new capsule which was then placed in the base of the statue in October, 1987.

County

Prior to 1879, the part of Kansas known as Thomas County was native grass known as buffalo grass, buffalo, antelope, wild horses and was designated as "Indian Country."

An original post office was established in 1882, and was near the geographical center of Thomas County. There soon became a need to build a town to provide the many newly arriving settlers with lumber and provisions.

The determining factor to where the town site should be was that it needed to be near railroad land; it should have a slope for drainage, and there should be the availability of water.

The site chosen to fit the criteria was three miles north of the original post office and was secured from the railroad in March of 1885.

J.R. Colby secured a patent to establish the town. He was one of the oldest settlers, and by profession, was a land assessor, boarding house owner and "sometimes" preacher. He had 10 children.

A Town Charter came from the office of the

Secretary of State in April of 1885.

On March 12, 1885, the first newspaper, The Thomas County Cat was published. Through many owners and publishers, it is known today as the *Colby Free Press*. And that same year, Mike Donelan was recognized as the first Colby merchant when he established a general merchandise store at 5th and Franklin.

In October of 1885, Governor Martin declared the county organized with Colby as the temporary county seat. The census showed there to be 1900 residents.

Thomas County was named for Major General Thomas, and five of the townships were named for Kansas soldiers killed under his command at Chickamauga during the Civil War. Colby has a street the bears the name, Chickamauga.

Colby was incorporated in 1886, and the first court house was built at 615 N. Court where it still stands as a residence. The present courthouse, which is still in use, was built