

CHARLES MIX COUNTY COURTHOUSE



Location: 400 Main St., Lake Andes, SD 57356

Date: Constructed in 1917-1918 (the cornerstone was laid on August 24, 1917).

Architect: William L. Steele, of Sioux City, Iowa

Description: The Charles Mix County Courthouse is a three-story building of concrete clad with an unusual 11 1/2 by 1 3/4 inch brick. It is the only courthouse in South Dakota constructed in the Prairie School style. The facade is symmetrical with three projecting bays on the front. The center bay on the front projects forward and extends to the roof line, while the two flanking bays project forward to a lesser extent and do not reach the roof line. This creates the appearance of irregular massed blocks grouped around a massive core block. The rear and sides are flat and there is a concrete foundation which extends to just above the sill height of the first floor windows. The thin pilasters, which separate the windows, rise from this foundation and are topped with terra cotta capitals. Above the third floor windows on the front and back is a band of light colored stone or concrete. On the sides and center bay on the front, the third floor windows are higher. Each of the third floor window bays is topped with projecting terra cotta cornices with a floral design. The center bay on the front facade has a projecting vestibule which enters the courthouse midway between the first and second floors. The vestibule is surrounded by decorative terra cotta panels. Each of the roof levels is hidden behind parapets which are topped with a light-colored coping below which is a course of alternating recessed soldier bricks. The interior has low ceilings and exotic woodwork, stained glass windows, including a stained glass dome, and elegant panels and friezes.ⁱ William Steele, the architect who designed it, had worked for Louis Sullivan. He was also one of the architects for the Woodbury County, Iowa courthouse which is similar in appearance. The courthouse was built by the A.M. Wold Construction Co. of Brookings at a cost of \$119,000.

History: The 1862 territorial legislature established Charles Mix County, which was named after Charles Mix, who has been variously described as an Army Captain who was killed on active duty, or an early Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who assisted in negotiating the Treaty of 1858 which established the Yankton Sioux Reservation.ⁱⁱ However, the present boundaries were not established until 1873. The first county seat was established at Papineau, a trading



post on the Missouri River which was run by Cuthbert DuCharme, who was also known as Papineau.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1869 the county was reorganized and Platte Creek was selected as the county seat, but in 1875, President Grant withdrew this entire area from public settlement. In 1879 the area was reopened for settlement, and in the election of November, 1879, Wheeler was selected as the county seat. A two-story, wood-frame courthouse with an open bell tower or cupola was built there in 1881 at a cost of \$2,000, which served the county as its courthouse for thirty-seven years.^{iv} The town of Wheeler now lies underneath the waters of Lake Francis Case approximately 4 miles south of Platte. Geddes attempted to obtain the county seat in elections in 1900, 1904 and 1908. Later Lake Andes and Wagner also attempted to obtain the county seat, with Lake Andes finally prevailing at an election in 1916. In December of 1916, a bond issue was passed for the construction of the present courthouse in Lake Andes.

ⁱ United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Charles Mix County Courthouse (September 1, 1992) and Carolyn Torma, Building Diversity: A Photographic Survey of South Dakota Architecture, 1913-1940, South Dakota Historical Journal 19, (1989), page 186-188.

ⁱⁱ SL 1862, ch 18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gnirk, Epic of the Great Exodus, (1985) page 5.

^{iv} Id. at page 6.