

CLAY COUNTY COURTHOUSE



Location: 211 West Main St., Vermillion, SD 57069

Date: Constructed in 1912-1913.

Architect: Lloyd D. Willis of Omaha, Nebraska.

Description: The Clay County Courthouse consists of a rectangular, three-story, sandstone building with a central skylight which has now been covered over. The building is constructed in a Neo-Classical style. The front and sides are symmetrical with three bays, with the center bay projecting 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, which creates the appearance of a podium upon which the upper stories rest, is of rusticated stone which flares outward, while the upper two floors are constructed of vertically ribbed dressed stone. Between the first and second floors is a projecting belt course of stone. The center bay on the facade, which projects forward creating the appearance of a portico, has a recessed front entrance on the ground level. On the second and third floors is a large window flanked on each side by 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 stone 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.¹ The architect for the building was Lloyd Willis of Omaha and the general contractor was Hintz & Malloy of Aberdeen. It cost \$95,000 to

erect. In 1989, a public safety building was added to the northwest corner of the existing building.

History: Clay County was established by the first territorial legislature held in Yankton in March of 1862.ⁱⁱ Due to dissension between the Clay County legislators, no county seat was selected at that session and it was not until 1863 that Vermillion was designated as the county seat.ⁱⁱⁱ Until 1876, the county officers utilized rented space in various locations in Vermillion and a building in the 100 block of Broadway was designated as the courthouse. In January of 1875, a fire destroyed the offices and records of the probate judge and county treasurer and all of the county money (about \$2,700), leading to an effort to build a courthouse. The 1876 effort failed due to opposition from the central and northern parts of the county. In 1882, following the flood, another effort was made to construct a courthouse. Lots were purchased for the courthouse at the northeastern corner of the intersection of Court and Kidder streets, where the Post Office now stands, and a wood frame structure was constructed at a cost of \$3,150, including \$2,000 which was appropriated by the commissioners, and the balance was raised by public subscription. The first classes of the University of South Dakota were held in that building.^{iv} By the turn of the century, the old wooden courthouse was in terrible condition. A bond issue to replace it at a cost of \$60,000 was defeated in 1906. However, a second bond issue election in June of 1910 succeeded and construction of the present building was begun in June of 1912 and completed in April of 1913.^v

ⁱ United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Clay County Courthouse (April 27, 1983).

ⁱⁱ SL 1862, ch 13, § 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Herbert S. Schell, History of Clay County, South Dakota, (1976), page 19.

^{iv} Id. at pages 64-65.

^v Id. at pages 185-186.