

DOUGLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE



Location: 706 Braddock, Armour SD 57313

Date: Constructed in 1926-1927 (dedicated February 24, 1928).

Architect: Perkins & McWayne of Sioux Falls, SD.

Description: The Douglas County Courthouse is a rectangular, three-story, reddish-brown brick building with decorative elements of Bedford limestone on the cornice line and facade. It is constructed in a simplified Neo-Classical style. The facade and sides are symmetrical with three bays on the front. The center bay projects forward. The ground floor, which creates the appearance of a podium upon which the upper two stories rest, has a rusticated appearance with deeply scored joints in the brick and stone. The second and third floors are smooth brick. Between the first and second floors is a projecting belt course of stone. The center bay on the front facade has an entrance on the ground floor topped with an entablature with decorative molding and a cartouche. On the second and third floors, the front center bay has four engaged Ionic columns running the length of the second and third floors, with a vertical row of windows between each of them. The three, round, arched, openings between the columns each have two sets of windows, and keystones and modillion work in the top section. The third floor windows on the two flanking bays have a decorative top surround with voussouirs as keystones. The entire building is topped with an overhanging cornice with dentil moldings and a parapet. The interior is decorated with marble.ⁱ Perkins & McWayne of Sioux Falls, who also designed the Codington, Haakon, and Jerauld County Courthouses, were the architects on the project, and Gray Construction Co. was the general contractor. The building was built at a cost of \$89,000.ⁱⁱ

History: Douglas County was established by the territorial legislature in 1873 and was first organized in February of 1881ⁱⁱⁱ when an individual named Walter Brown presented Governor Ordway with a petition for organization purportedly signed by 50 legal voters of the area. It later turned out that the signatures were fictitious or forged. Ordway appointed Brown and two others as the first county commissioners. They established the county seat at Brownsdale and issued \$30,000 of county warrants, which were accepted at face value by various banks. Brown and his friends paid themselves \$10,000 for a little shack to serve as the courthouse, and additional sums for bridges and road surveys.^{iv} Other settlers were suspicious of what was going on, and with the assistance of Robert Dollard, who later became South Dakota's first Attorney General, attempted to get Governor Ordway to remove the "Brownsdale gang", but Ordway refused. In 1882, a Grand Jury indicted Brown, but he fled and Dollard and his men seized all of the public records, some of which they later burned.^v A new petition for organization was then prepared and submitted to the U.S. Attorney at Yankton who advised the governor to reorganize the county and appoint a new board of county commissioners, which was done in July of 1882. The county seat was then established at Huston, about 3 miles northeast of the present town of Armour. When a county wide election was held later, Douglas City and Grand View also competed for the county seat and Grand View won the election.^{vi} Four years later, the railroad announced that they would establish a new terminal town named Armour, so most of the businesses and residents in Grand View moved to Armour, even moving many of the buildings.^{vii} In 1889, Armour obtained the necessary signatures and submitted the question of moving the county seat to a vote, but there was still hope the railroad would be extended to Grand View and they were able to muster the votes from the western part of the county to defeat the effort.^{viii} By 1894, the hard economic times made it clear that no additional railroads were likely to be built and Armour tried again. Armour also promised to build a courthouse if the county seat was moved. This time they were successful and the county seat was moved in Armour in November of 1894. In 1895, the town honored its promise and built a courthouse for the county on donated land at a cost of \$6,000.^{ix} In 1902, another small brick building was constructed to provide offices for the County Auditor and Clerk of Courts to comply with the law which required those offices be located in fireproof buildings. That building is presently the Douglas County Museum.^x Those buildings continued as the county courthouse until 1928 when they had grown too small, and the present four-story building was constructed.

ⁱ Historic Sites of South Dakota: A Guidebook, (1980) page 65 and United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Douglas County Courthouse (August, 1976).

ⁱⁱ Carolyn Torma, Building Diversity: A Photographic Survey of South Dakota Architecture, 1913-1940, South Dakota Historical Journal, page 170 and 1983 response by Douglas County Auditor to S.D. Historic Preservation Office questionnaire

ⁱⁱⁱ SL 1872-1873, ch 17, § 3.

^{iv} Robert Karolevitz, Douglas County, the Little Giant, 1983, pages 13-14.

^v Id. at pages 15-19.

^{vi} Id. at pages 19-21. Supposedly, Governor Ordway favored Huston, so Dollard, who was still angry over the Brownsdale affair, provided sufficient beer, in support of Grand View, to "win friends and influence people."

^{vii} Robert Karolevitz, Douglas County, the Little Giant, 1983, page 51-55.

^{viii} Id. at page 75.

^{ix} Id. at pages 77-79.

^x Douglas County Museum and Country School, a pamphlet published by the Douglas County Historical Society.