

# UNION COUNTY COURTHOUSE



**Location:** 209 East Main, Elk Point, SD 57025

**Date:** Constructed in 1977-78. (dedicated October 7, 1978)

**Architect:** Fritzel, Kroeger, Griffin & Berg of Sioux Falls, SD.

**Description:** The Union County Courthouse is a one-story rectangular building of deeply scored pre-cast concrete panels constructed in a modern style. The front facade has a central core with an entryway, and large glass windows topped with a raised roof area containing clerestory windows. Projecting from the windows in an upward barrel shape is a decorative area of wood. In front of the window area is a small courtyard containing decorative items salvaged from the 1898 courthouse and old style triple globe lights. On either side of the central core is a bay which projects forward. The right hand, or eastern bay, contains a slightly recessed central panel with two window areas. The left hand, or western bay, contains a slightly recessed central panel with a deeply recessed doorway. The building is topped with a plain, darker colored cornice. The interior features a large mounted elk head and several murals preserved from the earlier courthouse. The building was constructed in 1977-78 at a cost of \$975,000 by Wiltgen Construction Co. of LeMars, Iowa.<sup>i</sup>

**History:** The area now making up Union County was originally established as Cole County in 1862, with the county seat established at Victoria. In 1864, the territorial legislature renamed it Union County in sympathy for the Northern side in the Civil War and changed the boundaries. The county seat was established at Richland.<sup>ii</sup> In April of 1865, the voters moved the county seat to Elk Point, and in 1867, the site where the present courthouse sits was deeded to the county by the first citizen of Elk Point, Eli Wixson. There was already a two-story, frame building on the site which served as the courthouse. In 1879, that building was moved to the middle of the block and extensive improvements were made.<sup>iii</sup> When the second courthouse was constructed on that site in 1898, the original courthouse was moved

and is still in use as a residence at 407 Washington St. in Elk Point.<sup>iv</sup> The 1898 Courthouse was a three and a half story sandstone structure with a decorative cornice and towers. It served the county until 1976 when the masonry walls began shifting. Several large cornice stones fell onto the front steps and the ceiling of the courtroom collapsed. Due to safety concerns, that courthouse was demolished in 1977 and replaced with the present structure.<sup>v</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Quasquicentennial - Elk Point, South Dakota: 1859-1984, page 83-84.

<sup>ii</sup> SL 1863-1864, ch 14, § 1.

<sup>iii</sup> Elk Point Centennial Committee, A Century in Review, 1859-1959 (1959) pages 35-36.

<sup>iv</sup> Quasquicentennial - Elk Point, South Dakota: 1859-1984, Page 12.

<sup>v</sup> Id., pages 83-84.