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County created in 1859



(Editor's note: This is the 27th in a series of "then and now" articles on places and things of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK in 1986. Much of the information has appeared in past editions of The Kansan.)

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

Wyandotte County was created by the Kansas Territorial Legislature on Jan. 29, 1859.

The first election of county commissioners and officials was Feb. 22, 1859. Rooms were rented at 3rd Street and Nebraska for county offices. The first term of court was held in rented space in the Lipman Meyer Warehouse in the Levee Block.

After the city of Wyandotte was made the county seat in the November 1859 election, a site for a permanent courthouse was sought. County officials purchased a general merchandise store at 328 Nebraska from Isaiah Walker who was a partner with Thomas J. Barker in the business. The county paid \$1,800 for the property "with frame building therein" in 1860.

The frame building later proved inadequate for the county's needs and a better place to keep the records was desired. Several different locations were either rented or leased for the offices.

On May 9, 1862 a site for a more imposing courthouse was purchased on the northwest corner of 7th Street and Minnesota Avenue (where the Board of Public Utilities Building now stands), north to State Avenue. Hiram M. Northrup sold the land for \$6,000. E.S.W. Draught, a local contractor, built the courthouse at a cost of \$50,000.

It was a two-story brick structure, with a tower. It was completed, furnished and accepted June 22, 1883. This courthouse served Wyandotte County for 44 years -- from 1883 to 1927.

As the county grew so did the need for a larger courthouse. In the election of 1916, it was voted to erect a new courthouse and bonds were voted to pay for it. The state attorney general enjoined the issuance of the bonds because it exceeded the bond limit. However,

the Legislature of 1923 authorized the commissioners to acquire a site for the courthouse on the west side of 7th Street between Anne Avenue and Barnett.

The corner-stone was set Aug. [9?], 1926. The building is built of Bedford Stone. Six Doric columns 48 feet tall adorn the front of the building, with symbolic designs in the capstone.

A bronze tablet in the lobby is inscribed:

This Building Erected
A.D. 1926
Board of County Commissioners
Samuel Clarke, Chairman
Peter H. Kramer
Dave Espenlaub
J.H Brady, County Counselor
Advisory Committee: P.W. Goebel,
Fred Robertson, C.C. Nesselroade,
Henry Meade, J.A. Clancy, W.T. Mauder
Architects - Wight & Wight, Kansas City, Mo.
Contractor - Swenson Construction Co., Kansas City, Mo.

On the north side of the building is the seal of the State of Kansas. Inscribed:

"The Gateway of Kansas."
"We Stand for Loyalty - Wisdom - Justice and Equality."

On the south side of the entrance is the United States Seal and the Eagle. Inscribed:

"One Country - One Constitution - One Flag."
"Liberty and Union Now and Forever One and Inseparable." (Webster)

The "Million Dollar Courthouse" was dedicated July 12, 1927. In the account of the dedication, *The Kansan* reported, in part, "With patriotic speeches and old fashioned tunes, the citizenry of Wyandotte County, Just before sundown last night, dedicated the magnificent \$1,000,000 courthouse, its symbol of justice and architectural triumph... The flag raising ceremony followed and the 13-gun salute. The flags were presented by the Burnside Post of the Grand Army of the Republic and its auxiliary and the American Legion Posts in Wyandotte County."

Wyandotte County Court House Annex

The Wyandotte County Home, 9400 State Avenue, was built in 1930 as a home for old people and the indigent of the county. Under new guidelines for state licensing of such homes, some very costly improvements would have been needed and, because of this, county commissioners decided to close the home and convert it into a branch courthouse.

In June 1972 the 99 residents were transferred to licensed nursing homes. The home for the elderly and indigent became the Wyandotte County Courthouse Annex and several county offices and services were moved there in the transition that year.