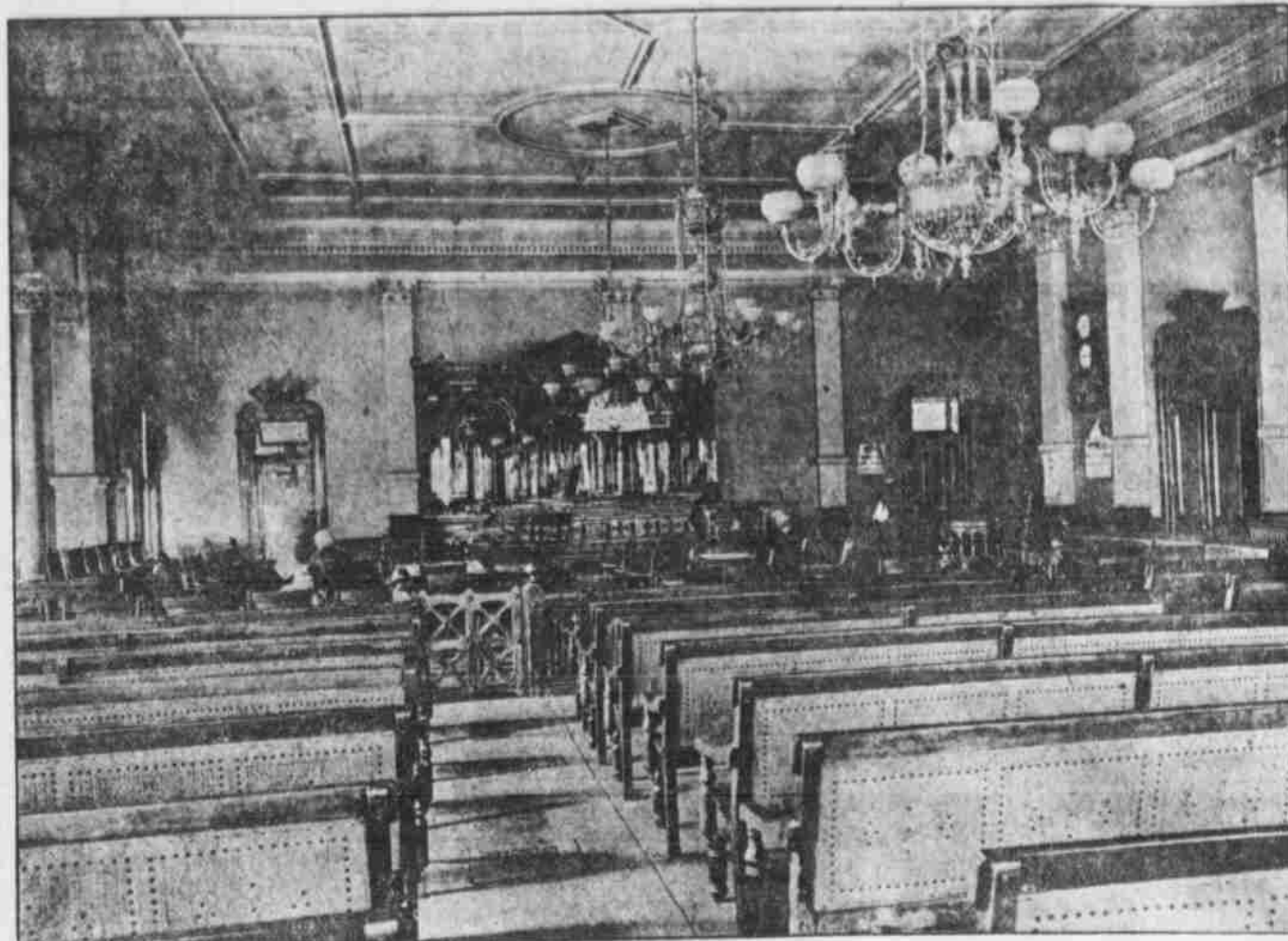
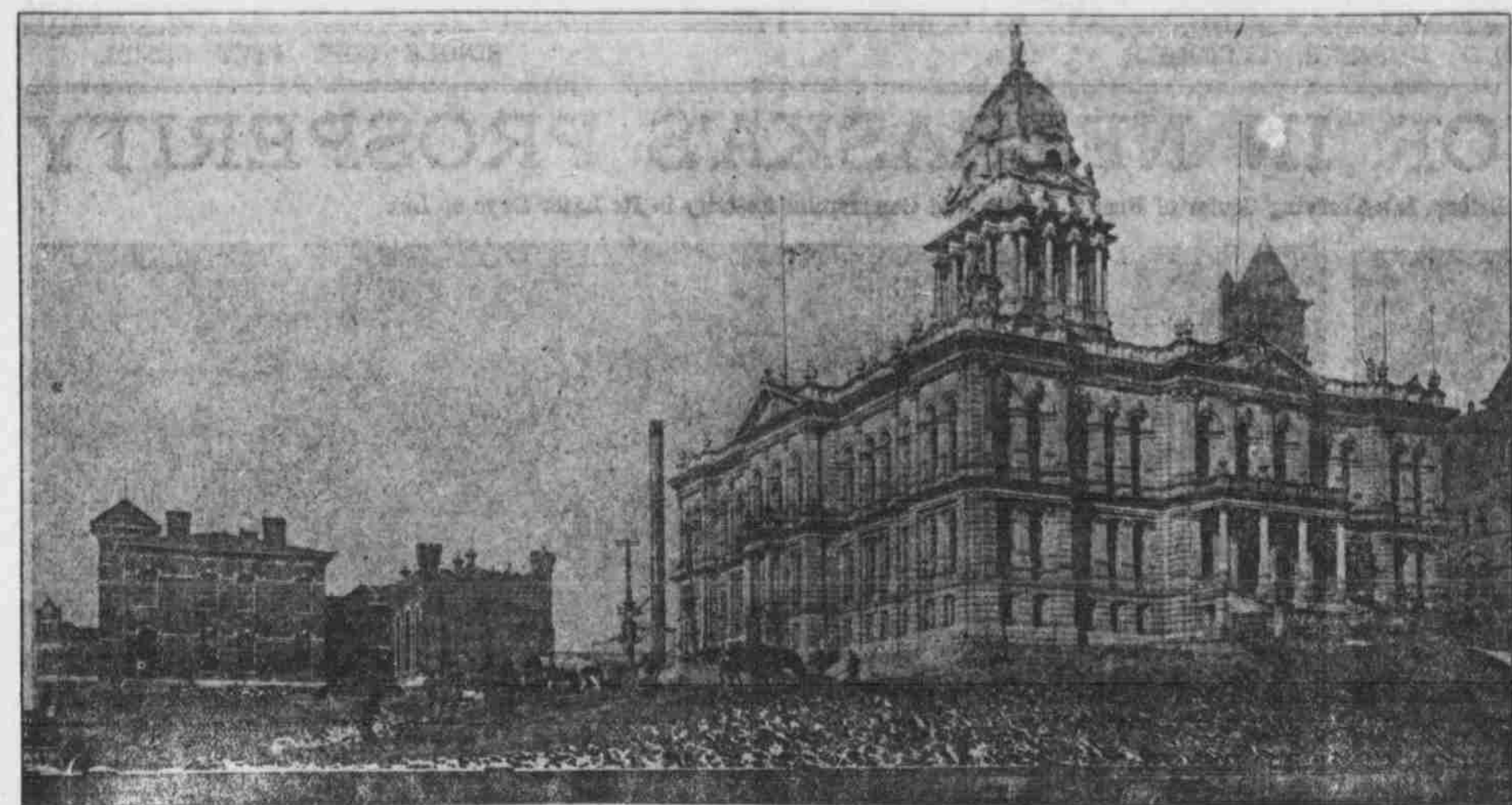


Story of the Douglas County Court House and Jail, Soon to Vanish



DOUGLAS COUNTY COURT HOUSE AND JAIL, WHICH WILL BE REMOVED TO MAKE ROOM FOR A MORE COMMODIOUS AND MODERN BUILDING.

COURT ROOM NO. 1, WHERE CRIMINAL COURT SITS, AND WHERE MANY FAMOUS TRIALS HAVE BEEN HELD.

THE Douglas county court house, which is shortly to give way to a magnificent modern million dollar structure, was determined on at a meeting of the Board of County Commissioners on September 11, 1886, when it was unanimously voted by that board to direct the issuance of a proclamation calling for an election to vote \$125,000 and not to exceed \$150,000 bonds for the construction of the present edifice. The members of the board of county commissioners were Frederick Drexel, Frank W. Corlies and Benjamin P. Knight, with John R. Manchester as county clerk.

The bonds were to be dated January 1, 1881, to run for twenty years at 6 per cent interest per annum, and not more than 15 per cent of the levy to be made in any one year on the principal, provided always that in no event should bonds be issued to a greater amount than 10 per cent of the assessed valuation of all taxable property of Douglas county, and what the bonds should be redeemable at the option of the county board.

The election on the bond proposition took place November 3, 1880, and the proposition was declared carried. The board of commissioners met on November 9, 1880, and at once directed the county clerk to advertise for proposals for the purchase of the \$125,000 bonds, the entire amount of the bonds to be delivered on January 1, 1881.

The conditions in the proposals were that no levy should be made to pay any part of the principal of the bonds until after the expiration of ten years and that interest should be only paid on and after the date of the sale of the same. The bonds were to be delivered on January 1, 1881, and \$50,000 July 1, 1881, and \$50,000 January 1, 1882.

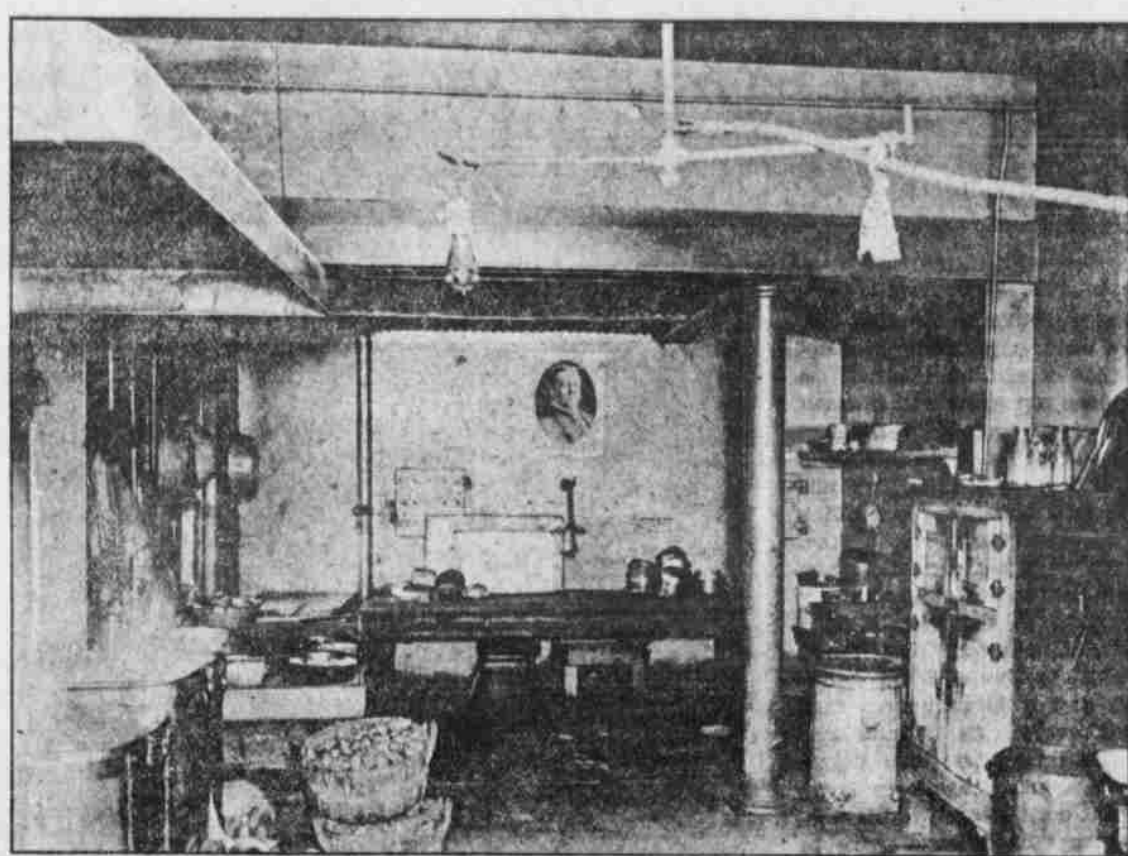
The bonds were sold on December 27, 1880, the purchaser being Ezra Millard of Omaha, at the rate of, for the \$25,000 bonds to be delivered January 1, 1881, at \$25.28125; the \$50,000 to be delivered on July 1, 1881, at \$50.6250; and the \$50,000 to be delivered January 1, 1882, at \$50.4750. Mr. Millard put up a bond of \$25,000 as a guarantee. Other bidders for the bonds represented New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Chicago financiers, but Mr. Millard's proposition was considered the best and was accepted.

The bonds having been successfully floated, the remainder of the winter was devoted by the board to the consideration of plans for the new structure, which was intended to make it the handsomest and most spacious court house in the entire west. Architects were invited to submit plans, and other propositions came from best architects from every quarter of the country. Finally, after much parley and repeated adjournments of the board, on April 6, 1881, the plans of Architect E. E. Meyers of Detroit, Mich., were accepted by the county board and the contract was awarded to him. He executed the requisite bond for the faithful performance of his work. The contract for building the new structure was let to John F. Coats of Omaha, and the work on excavating for laying the foundations was begun in May.

The brick used in the structure and in the county jail were hauled on the ground where the Patterson block now stands at Seventeenth and Farnam streets. It was further proposed that the brick from the old court house at the corner of Sixteenth and Farnam streets should be also utilized in the new structures. The jail building was built first, and during its building the same questions regarding the cells for the new jail were thrashed over and over again as prevails in this later 1908. The question then was whether the cells in the old jail should or could be used in the new. There is no record at present available to tell just how the controversy was settled.

The new court house was to be built of Berea stone, and others were transported from the Buckeye state, the first big shipment of its stony product to the soil of the transmississippi country. At the time of the building of the court house the grade level of Farnam, Harney, Seventeenth and Eighteenth streets was from fifteen to twenty feet higher than the present grade, and while the new building occupied a commanding and attractive site, it was then the most conspicuous landmark of Omaha, with the single exception of the high school building.

The excavating and laying of the foundations took up a greater part of the building season of 1881, and it was not until in October, 1882, that the cornerstone was finally laid. This interesting ceremony took place on the afternoon of October 25, 1882, and was one of the most brilliant and elaborate functions occurring in Omaha up to that time. The day was made a holiday and all Omaha was decked in gala attire, with bunting floating from all the business blocks. The ceremonies were conducted under the auspices of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Nebraska, of which George W. Linsinger was then grand master. The day was extremely chilly and raw, but the ardor and enthusiasm of the good people of Omaha and Douglas county was at fever heat.



IN THE COUNTY JAIL KITCHEN.

comprehensive idea of what the beautiful finished product would be. The afternoon program contemplated an elaborate procession, which began forming in front of Masonic temple, at Sixteenth street and Capitol avenue. The procession started promptly at 2 o'clock and paraded the principal streets, marching south from point of starting to Douglas on Sixteenth, east on Douglas to Ninth, south on Ninth to Farnam and west on Farnam to Court House square. The procession was made up of a number of brilliantly uniformed orders and societies, and the line was resplendent with American, Irish and Danish national flags and society emblems and banners. The procession was formed in this manner:

- Grand Marshal Frank E. Moores.
- City Marshal and Deputies and Pistolet of Sixteen Police.
- Ancient Order of Hibernians, Division No. 1 (fifty strong).
- Cigar Makers (thirty).
- Danish Society (100).
- Danish Brotherhood (fifty).
- Omaha Turnverein (fifty).
- Mayor James E. Boyd and Hon. A. J. Poppleton, orator of the day, in carriage.
- Concordia Society (twenty).
- Omaha Glee Club (twenty).
- Board of County Commissioners.
- Architect Meyers and County Officials.
- Old Settlers Association.
- Union Pacific Band.
- Mount Calvary Commandery, Knights Templar of St. Isidore (fifty).
- Master Masons, St. John's Lodge No. 25.
- Covered Lodge No. 11.
- Capitol Lodge No. 2.
- (Total, 100).
- Grand Commandery, Knights Templar.
- Grand Masonic Lodge of Nebraska.

The procession extended from Ninth street

half way up to the Farnam street hill leading to the court house block, and was fully half a mile in length. The program at the court house was begun as soon as the officials and grand lodge officers had reached the places assigned them on the temporary platform from which the ceremonies were to take place. As soon as all were in their places there came a blast of trumpets announcing that the proceedings were on.

Architect Meyers read the invitation which had been extended to the Masonic fraternity to lay the corner stone. Grand Master George W. Linsinger replied to the invitation. Prayer was then given by the masonic grand chaplain. Then came a song by the Omaha Glee club. The grand treasurer then presented the basket to the grand secretary and read a list of its contents, the same to be placed in its proper receptacle in the corner stone. The Glee club followed with a song. The laying and placing of the stone was then performed by Grand Master Linsinger, who tested it by the implements of Masonry. The stone was then consecrated by being anointed with corn, wine and oil, after which the implements of operative Masonry were delivered into the hands of Architect Meyers.

The ceremonies concluded with the ode, "America," which the entire assembly joined after which the customary donation of coins gathered by collection from among the assembly was placed on the stone for the benefit of the workmen employed on the building. The address of Andrew J.

Poppleton followed. He began his address with a reference to the Louisiana purchase of 1803, stating that from that period up to 1854, Nebraska was known as the Indian country and had been untouched by civilization. He alluded to the blighting financial panic of 1857, and stated that it was during this period that Douglas county had its birth. The first boundaries of the county extended from the mouth of the Platte river northward along the Missouri river to a point one mile north of Omaha, westward along the line of Washington county twenty miles, thence ten miles south more or less to the Platte river, thence east to place of beginning. These limits then included the whole of Sarpy county or as it was then known as Sarpy precinct, so it will thus be seen that the northern boundary was not farther north than Sulphur Springs. Fort Omaha was then situated in Washington county, the northern limits of Omaha being at that time at Burt street. February 12, 1855, a bill was passed in the territorial legislature fixing the boundaries of Omaha county, as it was then sought to name the new county, but the friends of "Douglas" county were insistent and the name of Douglas county was preserved. Sarpy precinct was segregated from Douglas county after an animated discussion on February 7, 1857, and the county seat established at Bellevue, which closed a long and bitter controversy between the two sections.

The first court of record in this district, the first judicial district of Nebraska, was opened in the Mission house at Bellevue by



INTERIOR OF MAIN CORRIDOR IN COUNTY JAIL.

Fenner Ferguson, chief justice of the territory, with Eli K. Doyle as marshal. Little or no business was transacted. The next district court was held in the "only brick building in Omaha." This building was used by the legislative assembly, and was situated on lot 7, block 124, on Ninth street, between Farnam and Douglas streets. This building was subsequently used as Union Pacific headquarters until that company moved to its present quarters in the old Herndon hotel, in the fall of 1869.

Court was afterwards held in the Pioneer block. Up to that time the judges presiding were Fenner Ferguson, Augustus Hart, William Pitt, Kellogg, William Kellog, George B. Lake, James W. Savare and James Neville. The county then had a population of 40,000. John C. Cowin was county attorney at the time of the laying of the cornerstone, October 25, 1882, and Frederick Drexel, Benjamin P. Knight and F. W. Coates, county commissioners. The inscription on the cornerstone is as follows: "Erected 1882. Frederick Drexel, Frank W. Corlies, Benjamin P. Knight, commissioners. E. E. Meyers, architect. D. L. Shane, superintendent."

"Laid by the Masonic fraternity, G. W. Linsinger, G. M. of Masons, Oct. 25, 1882. "John F. Coats, builder."

The cornerstone is laid at the northeast corner of the structure, facing the corner of Seventeenth and Farnam streets.

While the conditions provided in voting the bonds, limited the amount of such

bonds to \$125,000 and not to exceed \$150,000 bonds, only \$125,000 were originally issued. When the building was about completed in 1885, the grade of the surrounding streets had been lowered very materially and it became necessary to build a retaining wall about the court house square. Additional bonds to the amount of \$25,000 were then issued to build this wall, thus bringing the limit of bonds up to the authorized maximum of \$150,000. Only a small proportion of the principal of the original bonds have ever been paid.

Following the removal of the courts to the Pioneer block in 1869, the matter of the erection of a court house was agitated and the first court house owned by Douglas county was a two-story brick, built at the corner of Sixteenth and Farnam, where the Paxton block now stands, and here the affairs were conducted until the completion and dedication of the new structure in 1885.

Dedication of the Court House.

The formal dedication of the court house took place in the rotunda of the new structure the night of May 23, 1885. An elaborate program of the evening's ceremonies had been printed, upon which was stated in bold letters: "Dedicated May 23, 1885. Cost, \$204,151.00." The ceremonies brought together the beauty and chivalry of Omaha and Douglas county, the splendid building being magnificently decorated and illuminated for the occasion. The formal proceedings began with the presentation of the completed building to the county commissioners by Architect E. E. Meyers. The

presentation address on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners of the structure to the court and people of the county was made by John C. Cowin, county attorney. Judge Eleazar Wakeley accepted the dedication on behalf of the district court of Douglas county in an eloquent address. Judge J. W. Savare accepted the building on behalf of the people, and Judge John M. Thurston followed with an address, reciting the history of the old court house and the events leading up to the erection of the present structure. J. M. Woolworth delivered an eloquent address upon "The Past Jurisprudence of Douglas County," and he was followed by John I. Redick with a reminiscent address upon the "Bar of Douglas County." The sentiment of "The Bar of the Future Douglas County" was expressed in an eloquent address by Arthur C. Wakeley. This concluded the formal speech making.

The county commissioners in office at the time of the dedication were Richard O'Keefe, chairman; F. W. Corlies and George B. Timme. The bar committee in charge of the arrangements consisted of E. E. B. Kennedy, W. J. Connel, E. W. Simler and W. A. Redick, with G. W. Ambrose as chairman and master of ceremonies of the dedication proceedings. Resolutions were adopted expressing the thanks of the commissioners and the people of Douglas county for the able and honest manner in which the building had been constructed by Architect E. E. Meyers, and Builder John F. Coats. The closing act of the program was the presentation of a gold-headed cane to D. L. Shane, superintendent of construction, by the Board of County Commissioners. The presentation address was delivered by Commissioner O'Keefe.

Many sensational trials have been held in the old court house, some of which have engaged national attention and which have employed the best legal talent in the state. These include the John W. Lauer case, the Ed Neal murder trial, the Beecher murder trial, the Cudahy kidnaping or Pat Crowe case and others of less importance, including the Davis case just concluded.

The first of these big trials was John W. Lauer case. On the night of November 21, 1885, John W. Lauer, a prominent citizen of Omaha, and with his wife, moving in the exclusive social circles of the city, shot and killed his wife as she stood at the foot of their bed, under the presumption, as he alleged, that she was a burglar. So many peculiar circumstances surrounded the killing of Mrs. Lauer that Lauer was arrested on the charge of murder and his preliminary hearing was held before Police Judge E. M. Sternberg the following day, and his bond was first fixed at \$10,000, but he was subsequently remanded to jail without bail. Mrs. Lauer was formerly Miss Sallie Goetschins, a niece of the Liers of Omaha. She was but 22 years of age when she became the wife of John W. Lauer in May, 1882. From the very outset of their married life domestic differences arose and Mrs. Lauer was driven from her home. Through the intercession of friends a reconciliation was effected between the two and Mrs. Lauer returned to her home and husband in 1884 and continued living with him until the tragedy which ended her life. Up to 9 p. m. the evening of the tragedy, Mr. and Mrs. Lauer were out riding and returned home much fatigued. Lauer said that some time early in the morning he was awakened by a noise in the next apartment, a dining room, and saw the dim outline of a face. He supposed it to be that of a burglar and, not instantly, killing the person, whom a moment later he discovered to be his young wife. Her sister, then living with the Lauers, came running into the room and Lauer exclaimed to her: "Oh, Minerva, I thought I was shooting at a burglar and have killed Sallie!"

The trial of Lauer began on March 8, 1886, and continued for eleven days, when, on March 19, 1886, the jury came in with a verdict of guilty of manslaughter. Lee S. Estelle was the prosecuting attorney and was assisted in the trial of the case by John C. Cowin. John M. Thurston was attorney for the defense, assisted by Judge Savare. Judge Neville presided at the trial of the case. William Coburn was sheriff. The trial created the most intense excitement, and during its entire proceeding the court room was crowded with spectators. Owing to the social standing of the parties many of the witnesses were among Omaha's most prominent citizens, as were many of the spectators. Lauer subsequently secured a new trial and was adjudged not guilty. This new trial took place the following year, and the verdict of acquittal was rendered March 12, 1887, just one year later than his conviction of manslaughter. The verdict was received by the public with many expressions of disapproval.

Another sensational case of about this period was that of the state against Loyd L. Smith, charged with the fraudulent transfer of property, embracing a large department store Smith had established on Douglas street between Twelfth and Thirteenth streets. Smith was arrested on June 2, 1885, and was held under \$10,000 bonds. The case never came to trial, as Smith afterwards compromised with his creditors and the case was nolle. Smith made good all his alleged debts and died a few years ago in New York, a reputed millionaire.

Ranking only second in importance to the

College Freshmen at the National Corn Show

ONE of the most interesting features of the National Corn show at Omaha was the demonstration work of the freshman students from the Iowa Agricultural college. Grizzled farmers who stopped with a tolerant grin to hear what the boys had to say, found their ears attracted to an expression of open mouthed interest before the talk was half completed.

The mysteries of the testing box were explained and the advantage of this method of testing seed corn over the old way of burying a few kernels in an old tin can on the back porch was made clear. When the layer of sawdust was pulled back and the squares of mouldy, dead kernels disclosed among the vigorous sprouts of the good grains, like the sheep among the goats, it did not take much argument to convince the farmers that the careful use of the testing box would do much to increase the stand. The point that the boys hammered in the hardest was that each of these moldy kernels meant one ear less at husking time, and a consequent reduction of the profits.

"It beats the goose that laid the golden eggs," one of the spectators remarked, "no more tin can testing for me."

While this was going on, another of the boys was showing how the planter plates could be filed and tested so as to drop three, and only three, kernels to each hill. Others were giving talks on cultivating corn and showing by the use of illustrated charts why the old way of tearing up the ground to a depth of four or five inches was so injurious to the crop. The part of the corn plant that really does the business, the roots, was graphically illustrated and the mutilating action of a long shovel shown.

Still others were lecturing on harvesting corn, and discussing the points of merit in the different harvesting machines and the advantages of cutting up the corn and using it for fodder and silage. From this point the work was

taken up by others, who gave practical talks on feeding corn and corn products. If any farmer who stopped to listen to the I. S. C. boys had an idea that a bug was a bug, and that so long as they didn't bother him personally he was willing to let them alone, he had his eyes suddenly opened. All kinds of insects, from the tiny corn root worm to the slippery white grub, were pictured and the story of their lives interestingly told. Here the farmer learned that the wire

worms levied a tax of ten bushels per acre on the corn crop on his lower forty, or that he was paying a still heavier bounty to the root worms that were sapping the life from the corn on that old field that was too good corn land to ever be put into anything else.

It was with a vastly heightened respect for agricultural colleges and agricultural college education that farmers and corn growers turned away when dinner time came. They learned that the study of corn

roots is there regarded as more important than the study of cube root, and that live stock and live plants are given preference over dead languages.

As for the eighteen boys in the squad, the trip to Omaha was the crowning moment in their lives—so far. Under the ceaseless coaching of Mr. Saxauer, and the contagious enthusiasm of Professor Crossley, they have worked day and night, almost, in the keen competition to make "the Corn show squad." They talked about corn

at meal time, between classes and at almost every other time. Whenever two of them met an earnest conversation on corn was at once started. They dreamed about corn at night, and woke up in the morning enumerating the advantages of a testing box. Even the 100 or more who failed to make the squad were amply repaid in an increased knowledge of corn for all the time they put in, and by knowing the way to greater honor will be open to them in competition next year.



Top Row, from Left to Right—H. C. Cosgriff, Cedar County; James Knickerbocker, A. L. Smith, Creston; R. W. Cassidy, Whiting; Phil Shearer, Marshalltown. Middle Row—William Buckland, Ames; L. E. Thomas Elvaaton, Ill.; Theodore Saxauer, Coaseh; Fred H. Long, Marsa; W. C. Hassell, Cedar Rapids; Joe Naylor, Clear Lake. Bottom Row—J. E. Neil, Long Grove; C. S. Cathcart, Lehighville; J. F. Gilman, Dixon; Don C. Welty, Chicago; G. V. Gansseff, Polk County; Melvin McGrew, Emerson.

(Continued on Page Four)