

SEVIER COUNTY'S COURT HOUSE

By J.A. Sharp

Sevier County's court house, with its imposing tower and clock, was the fifth in the long history of the County, and it replaced the old court house that stood in the town square. It was built near the turn of the last century at an unbelievable low cost, based on present day high building costs.

Court minutes of January 9, 1895 show that the court voted on that date to build the new court house "on the new site," and Chairman J. R. Houk appointed the following committee to contact builders and architects: G.L. Zirkle, Robert Irwin, P. Maples, T.D.W. McMahan and A. T. Marshall. The next court, April 2, 1895, voted to issue bonds "not to exceed \$20,000., after hearing the committee's report that the cost would be between \$20,000 and \$25,000.

On May 6, 1895, the committee made majority and minority reports regarding architectural plans. The majority of Zirkle, Maples and Irwin recommended plans of Bowman Brothers, Knoxville architects, but the minority of McMahan and Marshall favored the plans of McDonald Brothers, architects of Louisville, Kentucky; the court accepted the minority report "with steam heater left out, but clock and Seats included."

However, this Sevier County court proved its foresight, and perhaps looked forward to the day of Andrew Hays and Sevierville's modern water system, by voting that the "basement...be so arranged and constructed that a 'Steam Heater' may be put in the building any time the county may see proper."

Later another modern convenience, a "water closet," was postponed until sufficient water could be provided to "keep it clean." But on July 7, 1896 the court attempted to solve the water problem by voting to "Erect a Wind Mill as a power to supply the Court House with sufficient water." The outcome of this wind mill is unknown to this writer.

On July 31, 1895, the building committee of A.T. Marshall, G. L. Zirkle and T.W.D. McMahan let the bid to one C.W. Brown for \$17,850. Work was started soon afterwards and was completed November 10, 1896, when the supervising architect, McDonald, accepted the building.

Some changes in plans were made, at increased costs, while the building was under construction. For instance, instead of using "Ruble Masonery," in the foundation, it was decided to use "first class cut stone masonry." Also the first story's height was increased by two feet; nine inch brick walls were increased to thirteen inches; and inside wood work was to be finished in "bright pine lumber with hard oil finish" instead of paint.

The large cut lime stone blocks, used in the foundation, were obtained from the John McCown place, where the Lambert Quarry is located today, and the blocks were hauled to the court house site by horse drawn wagons.

Because of the revised plans and the necessity of buying fixtures for the new court house, the court, on October 5, 1896 issued \$3000.00 in interest bearing warrants. Total receipts from the sale of bonds and warrants and the \$300.00, obtained for the old court house amounted to \$22,341.43. And in January, 1897, the building committee reported

to total expenditures of \$21,041.93.

But the last figure did not include \$655.45, still due the Seth Thomas Clock Company for the court house clock. Total cost of the clock was \$1353.45, plus \$42.55 freight on same.

It has been said that Brown, the contractor, lost so much money on the job that he was forced into bankruptcy. The court may have shown some concern about this when it voted in January, 1896, to sell the old court house to Brown for \$300.00, subject to its removal. At the same time offers of \$700.00 from Dr. Z.D. Massey and J.R. Houk for the old court house and grounds (square) were refused.