

Our Landmark Courthouse

Wayne's first courthouse burned on July 4, 1884. The day's celebrations ended at midnight when a fire broke out in the court house. Two men had been shackled to the floor of the Sheriff's office for over-indulgence at the celebration, and it seemed likely that they had set fire to the building.

In 1899, on the site of donated property in the town of Wayne, Nebraska, a substantial red brick courthouse was constructed in the Norman Chateau style for a cost of \$32,000. Work on the structure was begun on the building August 3, 1899, and was completed on December 28, 1899.

The firm of Orff & Guilbert of Minneapolis, Minnesota provided the architectural plan. The building rests on a raised stone foundation, and is constructed of Omaha pressed brick with Lake Superior red stone trim. The walls are eighteen inches thick and are made of solid brick. The roof, originally slate, features large dormers pierced by Palladian windows. Three arches, arched windows, and red stone columns decorate the south entrance porch. Above the porch was an iron rail.

The square eighty-foot tower is the dominant visual feature of the courthouse. Windows are of a variety of sizes, and the east and west side of the building each has a bank of bay windows. The eight-sided roof is adorned with four conical corner turrets built of specially made curved brick.

On the interior, the floors were originally finished in oak and hard maple with the exception of the great hall floor that was covered in dark red and white tile. Much of the original wainscoting and balustrades remain intact.

A solid copper tablet bearing the names of all Wayne County youths in service was placed in the courthouse in 1923. The tablet weighs 800 pounds. At the upper corners are the dates, 1914 and 1918. Also at the top are these words, "This tablet is dedicated to the brave men of Wayne County, Nebraska, who answered their country's call in the World war." The roll of honor follows, as does a list of those who lost their lives.

The Wayne County Courthouse was added to the National Register of Historic Buildings in 1979. It is one of the last examples of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture remaining in Nebraska. An elevator was installed in 1998 for the most-welcomed convenience of all those visiting and working in the three-storied structure.