
SUBJECT: COUNTY HISTORY

ADOPTED DATE: DECEMBER 12, 2002

PAGE 1 OF 2

Cass County was created in 1873 and named for George W. Cass, president of the Northern Pacific Railway Company. The territorial legislature authorized the governor, John A. Burbank, to appoint county commissioners of Cass County. He appointed Fargo's first settler Newton Whitman, W. H. Leverett, and Jacob Lowell. The board first met on October 27, 1873 at Whitman's blacksmith shop near Front Street (Main Avenue) bridge in Fargo. The commissioners elected Mr. Whitman as the commission's first chairman. They appointed a register of deeds and a judge of probate. Tenure on the commission was brief during the early days of Cass County, trouble over taxes was a major problem. One of the first official acts of the 1873 board was to institute a system to obtain revenue by charging retail liquor dealers \$100 a year for a license, peddlers \$20, auctioneers \$15, and retail merchants \$50.

The first instrument filed for record in the office of the register of deeds was the Fargo town plot on January 2, 1874. The first election held in the county took place on February 14, 1874, when the question of bonding for the purpose of erecting county buildings was presented. There was one precinct in the county and 179 votes were cast. In the summer of 1874, two elections were held and a total of \$15,000 was spent on "completing and furnishing" the courthouse. The building was completed that fall and served as both courthouse and jail. The site was several blocks east of the current courthouse.

The Cass County Courthouse is the third building to be used by the county on the present site. The second courthouse was destroyed by fire in 1904 and was replaced by the existing classical-style building. It finally opened for business on July 31, 1906. The interior decoration for the building was awarded to the North Dakota Decorating Company, founded in 1902 by Herman Boerth and two others. The company sold wallpaper, paint, glass, and did interior decoration for churches, theaters, private homes and other buildings across the state. The firm later became Boerth Frame and Mirror, owned by Boerth's son, Walter.

One question always asked concerns the background of the nine paintings on the dome depicting the four seasons and the various arts and sciences. These paintings were the work of Herman Boerth and a Milwaukee artist known only as G. Peter.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Population: The 2000 census was 123,138. The primary growth of Cass County was centered around the urban cities of Fargo and West Fargo. These two urban cities represent nearly 85% of the county's total population.

Geography: Cass County is 1,765 square miles. It is approximately 42 miles square. The county seat and largest city in the county and state is Fargo. Cass County is situated on a fertile level plain which was once the bottom of a glacial lake, Lake Agassiz. Almost every acre is tillable except for stretches along the rivers. Cass County is located in the Red River Valley, known for its significant agricultural productivity.

GENERAL ORGANIZATION

Constitution: The state constitution lists elected officials of the county and provides a commission type of county government, with a board of three or five commissioners. Proposed changes in county government may be initiated by the county commissioners or by a petition signed by 15% of the number of those voting for governor in the last election. Any changes must be approved by the voters.