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FERGUS FALLS DAILY JOURNAL

The Story of Old Otter Tail City And Fergus Falls

HISTORY - O.T. Co.

A bulletin issued by the Minnesota State Historical Society this week has this bit of information regarding Otter Tail County History:

The romance of a vanished city is woven in to the history of the establishment of Otter Tail county's government.

When the Minnesota legislature created Otter Tail county in 1858, Otter Tail City was named the temporary county seat even though it was only a hamlet of five log cabins situated at the head of Otter Tail Lake. By 1860, according to the census, the county had 240 people, and the thriving little city had three stores, a land office, and a hotel.

In 1862 many citizens of Otter Tail county fled from the enraged Indians during the Sioux uprising. After the scare was over, the people slowly returned, but it was not until 1868 that the first county officers were appointed. The only official building the county ever constructed in Otter Tail City was a stout log jail. No courthouse was built there, and the people met in their homes in various parts of the county.

"Otter Tail City's doom was sealed by one of its citizens, Thomas Cathcart, who refused to sell any of his large land holdings as right of way for the Northern Pacific railroad, planned to go through the village. In view of his opposition, the railroad went instead to Fergus Falls, and during the next year, 1872, the county seat was moved there. All county property was transported from Otter Tail City to Fergus Falls in one wagon. The jail was taken apart log by log, and the logs were then floated down the Otter Tail River to Fergus Falls. where they were reassembled. Many citizens of Otter Tail City also moved, and within a few years no trace remained of the once thriving and hopeful settlement."