

How Washburn stole the county seat from Bayfield—Part 2

While the transfer of the county seat to Washburn had been legally sanctioned by Governor Peck's proclamation of November 29 1892, there remained the practical matter of moving the county records to Washburn, for as long as they remained at the Bayfield Courthouse the legal authority to change the county seat meant little. The Washburn conspirators, flushed with their legal victory and determined not to be outmaneuvered by the Bayfield people in the final inning of the game, fulfilled their vow to play "hard ball." To nullify a temporary injunction secured by Bayfield, prohibiting the removal of the records, the county clerk, on whom the injunction was to be served, hid in the brewery until it had expired. On December 2 1892, two groups of Washburn men traveled to Bayfield, one group with eight wagons on back roads and a second group by train. While the second group, pretending that they had come as an expression of goodwill, entertained the county officials and

others in a tavern, the first group arrived at the courthouse about 4:00PM. Detaining anyone who might spread the alarm, they loaded the county records, office furniture, and even the courthouse clock into the wagons, then



returned to Washburn. The arrival of the wagons at the Town Hall in Washburn precipitated a wild celebration. The Scandinavian Band played music, bonfires were lit along Bayfield Street, a cannon boomed salutes, and people danced in the streets, while the more sedate leaders of the successful campaign retired to the Town Hall for a banquet and congratulatory speeches.

The county offices

remained in the Town Hall pending the remodeling of the Pioneer School as a courthouse. But now the deceptive arguments of the county seat change committee regarding the suitability of the school for a courthouse were exposed. In December 1892 the county board approved funds to remodel the school, but after further investigation concluded that it was entirely unsuited to serve as a courthouse and should be torn down, and a new courthouse constructed in its place. Since no bids were received to demolish the building, it was moved to the southwest corner of First Avenue East and Sixth Street. There it remained in use for as a school, and then as the courthouse annex, until torn down in 1943. The cornerstone of the new courthouse was laid October 19 1894, and the building was accepted by the county board in November 1895. It was constructed in the monumental Neo-classical architectural style at a total cost of \$40,000, substantially more than the remodel-

ing of the Bayfield courthouse would have cost.

The people of Bayfield were understandably bitter about losing the county seat to the underhanded and fraudulent methods of the county seat committee, while Washburn people were rather smug and certainly not apologetic about their victory. The county board did make a gesture of reconciliation by returning the courthouse clock to Bayfield. Goodwill eventually prevailed, and in later years the rivalry between the two cities was expressed by friendly, if vigorous, athletic competition between the two high schools.

In 1968 the county board decided to demolish the courthouse and replace it with a modern building, but reversed its decision because of citizen opposition to destroying this symbol of Washburn's history. The former courthouse in Bayfield is now the headquarters of the Apostle Island National Lakeshore.