



THE CHEYENNE County Courthouse in St. Francis.

A grant could restore steps

A former St. Francis resident was at the commissioners' meeting on Wednesday to talk about writing a grant for the front courthouse steps. Before he left, the comment "this is a win-win deal" was heard several times and the commissioners were in favor of seeing what could be done.

Greg Kite, former resident of St. Francis now living in Wichita where he practices law, told the commissioners that the Cheyenne County Courthouse is unique and has been carefully maintained throughout the years.

"It is a beautiful show piece," he said. "The building appears much the same as when constructed in 1924. It has excellent integrity and over all appearance. The commissioners have done a fabulous jobs (of keeping it up) for years and years."

When Mr. Kite read about the replacing of the courthouse steps and then the trouble that followed when they were determined to not be up to city code, he contacted Terry Miller, county clerk, about a grant which would replace them to their original state.

The president of the Sedgwick Historical Society, Mr. Kite said the competition is stiff, noting that last year, out of 65 applicants, only 17 were funded. However, because of the county's geographic location (far from Sedgwick County and other eastern historical sites), he felt there was a very good chance that the county could be eligible for a grant up to \$90,000 (the county paying only 20 percent of the actual cost).

"Fifty-percent of the grants awarded by the state are owned by county and local governments," he said. "Then they like to spread the money around."

The first application will be waived but the next application will need to be made by March 1, only a month away.

The grant recipients would be decided on May 12. If the county receives the grant, they would be required to start in June and the project would need to be completed by August 2008.

Ray Lee, commissioner, asked if the courthouse steps were going back to the original steps, how will the people replacing them know just what the steps were built out of.

Mr. Kite said he was sure that the original steps were limestone because when the courthouse was built, that was the material being used. Some of the steps which were torn out earlier, were still up at the county shop and Mr. Kite would look at them. If he can get pieces from them, he will be able to talk to experts who can tell what kind of limestone and where it came from. "Most people would like to see these (buildings) originally restore."

Building featured

The Cheyenne County Courthouse has been featured in the Kansas Preservation newsletter put out by the Kansas State Historical Society. It is a well-kept, beautiful structure which has a long history. However, there were two other county courthouses before this building was erected in 1924. The following information was taken from the Cheyenne County History Book and newsletter.

In July 1888, a petition to organize the city of St. Francis as a city of third class was rejected because it was not in legal form. Also, in July, the board entered into an agreement to purchase the courthouse building in Bird City for \$2,827.

Feb. 26, 1889, brought the final election for the permanent location of the county seat and soon afterwards, plans were made to construct a courthouse in St. Francis. The building was 40-by 60-feet by 20-feet high. The contract was let to Kincaid Eaton for \$2,465.

By October 1889, the finishing touches were made and the courthouse was ready. This building stood where the band shell now stands in the park east of the courthouse.

The courthouse in Bird City was boarded up in January 1891. At a later date, it was used as the county poorhouse. The old courthouse was to be auctioned in April 1893, but it is not known what happened as in July 1894, it was being used as a poorhouse.

The end of World War I and a re-

turn to prosperity ushered in a wave of new courthouse construction in Kansas. During this period, the classical idiom became more streamlined as courthouses began to grow in size in response to increased economic activity and administrative functions.

The restrained classical references such as the designs for the Cheyenne County Courthouse, reflect the flurring of the "City Beautiful Movement."

On May 8, 1924, the cornerstone for the new courthouse was laid. Robert Good, state Business manager, spoke on good citizenship and more than 2,500 residents were present for the occasion.

The old courthouse was built by the citizens of St. Francis in 1889 for the sum of \$2,460. The cost of the new courthouse was \$163,921.

The architect for the courthouse was Thomas Williamson and Company and he designed the building in the Classical Revival style.

The courthouse was dedicated July 7, 1925. It was a huge success with nearly 5,000 people coming to enjoy the festivities.

Mayor N.A. Ketchum had charge of the affair. Delegates were present from Goodland and Sherman County, Rawlins and Decatur counties. Attorney General C.B. Griffith and Judge Simmons made inspiring addresses. The Benkelman Band, Bird City Chorus and Robert J. Taylor entertained the crowd with their music.

Mr. Kite said. "This building is so well maintained and it is our duty to maintain the authenticity."

Justin Barrett, county attorney, asked if \$90,000 would cover the cost of the job?

Mr. Kite said this is one of the questions that he needs to find out. He said that he will need to get three firm bids from contractors experienced in restoring.

Troy Porter, who had installed the concrete steps, had earlier agreed to remove them but, Mr. Kite was hesitant to have them removed until the grant had been received and until the contractor's bidding on the project had a chance to look at the steps.

The other important part of the getting the grant is being able to submit letters of support from the commissioners, Chamber, Historical Society, Cheyenne County Development, and other organizations and individuals.

The question was asked, "what if we don't want to put the steps back the way they were?"

Mr. Kite said that the Kansas State Historical Society is willing to pay to have it work. The Society could take away the Historical Society's status.

Mr. Kite said that he would be honored if the commissioners would allow him to apply for the grant. He will do it for no cost because he is a hometown boy and he wants to do it for the city and county as well as seeing the courthouse steps restored.

Stan and Janet Carman, representing the Cheyenne County Historical Society, made the comment that people coming from out-of-town think the courthouse is a beautiful building and sometimes, people living in the county don't realize just what the county has.

Those present for the courthouse steps issue were: Scott Schultz, St. Francis Mayor; Troy Porter, contractor; Dave Flemming, county road and bridge supervisor; Mr. and Mrs. Carman.

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