

## Colby City Hall Report, 1930's-1950's by Diane Hiltabidle

*Anthropology Service Learning Project (5/10/00)*

Diane did a Service Learning project that was over the history of the Colby City Hall. Probably about 99.9% of her research was spent reading microfilm of early newspapers. The first article talked about plans for a City Hall building in the June 13, 1934 issue of the Colby Free Press-Tribune.

The mayor of Colby at that time, W.G. Shafer, announced his plan to build a City Hall building by Fike Park. He wanted the City Hall to house the library, fire department, and keeper's quarters. The article talked about a representative gathering held at the City Council meeting to discuss the plans for building the Hall and to decide if the public was in favor of the idea. The townspeople were for it, so the building of the Hall went ahead.

The City Hall building materials were constructed from a stone quarry in Logan County on the Smoky Hill River south of Monument.

Work was begun on the City Hall on July 10, 1935. This was the start of construction on the basement of the Hall. The workers were part of the WPA (Works Progress Administration) Program. Federal funds were used to help pay for the building of the City Hall.

The building of the City Hall wasn't the only WPA project going on in the area during the mid-late 1930's. The Colby City Hall project did employ the most men-58-compared to the other projects being done.

The stone had been laid up to the water level by December 25, 1935. By April 1936, the tile roof had been completed and the outside was almost done. In May, more grant money was provided so the project could continue and be finished.

The Library opened its doors on the first floor of the City Hall on September 2, 1936. It moved from its two rooms in the Connelly Building.

Construction work was halted on September 23, 1936, after all the funds had been used up. This happened with about two weeks of work left. There had been a mix-up between the WPA offices in Hays and the finance office in Salina. Fortunately, a few calls were made and the city got some more federal aid money to finish the building.

Besides the City Library, the building also housed the city office, fire department, living quarters for a caretaker and fire engine driver, voting booths, an Administration room, council room, general office, women's club, the American Legion and

Legion Auxiliary, police department, and fire proof vaults that held various city records like births.

The final figures show that the building cost a little over \$23,000. The federal government allotted \$15,094.50 for the project. Of this amount \$10,766.13 went for labor; \$2409.50 for supervision; and \$1888.58 for the rental of trucks. The whole building took nearly ten months to be completed. The city moved in in September and October of 1936.

The rooms that were used the most were the Auxiliary rooms in the basement of the City Hall. The police room was the location of the first ward election during city elections. According to Diane, the Auxiliary rooms were used the most. The Business and Professional Woman's club met there often. The Red Cross had their meeting there a lot.

Occasionally special courses or district organizations met there-milk consumers and dairy men in April 1939; luncheons-Thomas County Council of Women's Clubs; dances sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary. During WWII, the Colby Civilian Defense Council held their meetings in these rooms; used by the Red Cross as a sewing room and for nutrition demonstrations during WWII. The rooms were also opened whenever troops stayed overnight here during WWII.

More offices moved in during the 40's and WWII. The District Works Progress Administration office was moved back to Colby to the City Hall from Norton on April 3, 1940. Later in July of 1940, an army recruiting office moved in. It also housed the Selective Service Board-men went to register there and various military recruiting officers were there from time to time (Navy, WACS, WAVES, etc.).

The City Hall was one of the collection sites for aluminum during WWII-Boy Scouts aluminum pick-up drives. Pancake feeds, soup suppers, and dinners were held in the basement-Auxiliary rooms.

In the 1960's the Library moved to its present location at Fourth Street and School Avenue. The City Council uses the former library space.

In 1976, the Colby City Police Department moved to the new Law Enforcement Center and Jail south of the Thomas County Courthouse. The Fire Department uses the former Police rooms.

(Linda Davis-Stephens, Editorial Note: Diane Hiltabidle did a remarkable job of volunteering to read microfilm for hours and days to gather news about the City Hall. Linda entered her penciled class report into the computer with minimal editorial changes to keep the tone of her original work.)

## City Hall

In 1936, under the wing of Mayor Shafer, Colby City Hall was built at the southwest corner of Fike Park. Some trees had to be removed, a reluctant move for some citizens who were then trying to outlast the dry and dusty decade of the Depression. Large trees in the southwest corner of Fike Park were cut down to build the City Hall. One of the trees was a large maple. People then had been planting 1000 miles of windbreak trees after the dry, dusty years. The belief was that trees create water. (CFPT 9/12/34, CFPT 7/3/35)

In order to excavate the basement for the City Hall,

A big gun had to be moved to construct the City Hall. The building had to be 35 feet from the curb. (CFPT 4/24/35)

The purpose of building a City Hall was to bring scattered public meeting and other clubs together in one building. (CFPT 11/24/35) The American Legion paid for basement costs with agreement to use for 99-year lease.

Colby City Hall as originally planned may have included bricked corner pillars that would have blended its stone structure with local patterns of architecture. (CFPT 9/12/34) The Foster Lumber Company architects of Kansas City prepared the design of the building. (Ibid.)

Foster Lumber Company agreed to furnish manufactured building materials at a rate the city paid for office rent and other public operations (CFPT 12/5/34 & 3/13/35)

Brick corners in the initial plan were not actually built into the structure.

Suit and Blanchard, architects of Garden City, visited Colby, surveyed the land and suggested plans for the building. The library was planned to be 20x50 feet. The police judge would have a room. The fire truck would be housed in the rear of the building in a 20x40 feet area with two storage rooms for light and water supplies. (CFPT 4/24/35)

The City Hall was begun as a KERC project. The WPA partially funded the completion of the City Hall. Smoky Hill limestone from a quarry south of Monument was used for the City Hall. A stone cutting crew from Gove, Kansas brought their saw to the quarry site to work on the City Hall stone.

The invention of a power saw for cutting stone at the quarry by a pair of Gove boys has speeded up the work of getting material for the Colby city hall. They simply rigged up a circular saw, treated the teeth with Stellite and saw away at a great rate. The outfit is equipped with gauges and clamps so stone can be sawed evenly of the required width. Already the boys have a great deal of stone cut and it awaits only the trucks to haul it from the quarry south of Monument to Colby. The city saved some expense by hiring this equipment, even if it did not give so much employment as the old, laborious hand method. (CFPT 7/31/35, p.1)

Down on the Smoky Hill river where Alderman John M. Kiser is supervising the work of a crew of men uncovering a rock quarry comes word that the stone sawing is almost underway. A big machine has been hired to saw the rock as it is uncovered in the quarry and the men will pick it out of the quarry all ready for use. In the meantime the crew working on the basement is getting quite a hole dug in the ground and a shipment of cement has been received for making the basement walls. (school basement? CFPT 7/17/35)

At one point, stonework, had to be redone and workmanship improved. Even as the work progressed, funding was cut but restored.

“The total cost of the project will be \$26,605.65 of which the sponsor will furnish \$12,629.15 and the WPA will furnish \$13,876.50.” (CFPT 7/29/36)

Eventually the City Hall was completed and City offices moved in from the Warden Block. (CFPT 8/26/36) The Colby Library moved to City Hall from the Connelly Building. The fire engine was moved to the City Hall Fire Department garage. One fire truck had been destroyed when a business garage it was housed in burned.

The police department maintained offices in the City Hall until 1976 when it moved to the newly constructed Jail and Law enforcement Center south of the County Courthouse.

The American Legion funded construction of the basement in City Hall with a 99-year lease agreement for its use, which is still holds. Other civic groups and voting occurred in the City Hall.

Although slightly modified in the 1990's at the entrance to accommodate a handicap accessible elevator, the structural integrity of the original building is good in front. Behind the stone building other office walls were built of fake stone and materials that may significantly alter the historic integrity of the building with low budget materials and workmanship.

### **Colby City Hall Description:**

The West exterior facade remains original except for the foyer where an Elevator was added. The elevator modified the entrance. The large windows of the original entrance still allow natural light to fill the interior stairway.

Ground floor windows were bricked on the west and no longer open. On the North the fire department engine garage is still used.

The South wall runs along an alley up to the Basement stairway and Fire Department Office door. An additional office floor was added to 1st floor with rock-like materials. The effect on historic integrity needs to further researched.

Some deterioration is visible on the southwest, outside cornerstone where some flaking off is occurring. The foundation is good. The walls are intact. The roof is sealed, no leakage visible. Of the original architectural elements the original arch of the main entry still shows carved words and date.

The Basement windows on the east are enclosed by the addition. The facade has much of its integrity intact. The rear of building looks modernized without regard for original materials but with simulated materials and for cost considerations.

The feeling is business-like, but congenial and accommodating in the City Offices. The atmosphere is clean, open, bright and fresh.

Friendly firemen have maintained good public relations. The bike repair area is a reminder of the many generations that the Colby Fire Department has served not just in emergencies but in good will activities. The Fire Department is in excellent condition for community service.

Wooden Venetian blinds draw attention to the original windows still visible on the Basement's north wall. The American Legion area is old but not musty. It is like stepping back in time walking amongst old furnishings and seeing old ceiling. The dead deer mount on a support pillar gives the place a symbolic look of the rugged, frontier individualism typical of the local community character.

### **Civic Pride in Local Heritage**

In 1936, Colby supported a Public Library that had moved from two small rooms in the Connelly Building to the City Hall. (CFPT

8/26/36) Continued civic awareness for heritage preservation extended to the built environment under topics of local heritage and history.

In the 1960's, the Public Library moved from the City Hall to be housed in the same building with the Thomas County Historical Society. Twenty years later the Historical Society moved to its present location on South Franklin with the Prairie Museum of Art and History. The Public Library remains at its location on West Fourth Street.

The Colby City Hall stands on its original location as a local landmark. Present generations no longer linger in the Hall with library books and children's stories. City planning and dreams of prosperity are still part of local decisions for parks, recreation, fire protection and basic civic services.