

“Ex-Capitol Nourished an Infant Ottawa”
The Legend of Minneola, Part II
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When the hopes of Minneola, the short-lived capital of Kansas, began to fade in the early 1860's, many of its buildings were taken down and moved elsewhere. One of those structures was the town's major edifice—the legislative hall.

Although built expressly for the territorial government in 1858, the hall had echoed with the arguments of legislators for just one 24-hour session before fate moved the seat of government elsewhere.

In the spring of 1864, however, the seldom-used facility was given a second chance. Twelve miles to the southeast the infant town of Ottawa was surveyed and platted in March of that year. Once the stakes had been driven into the sod to mark out Main Street, businessmen were able to erect their commercial establishments.

Town father Asa Lathrop was one such man, and he negotiated to have the Minneola capitol building taken apart and reconstructed on the new Ottawa town site. This apparently was accomplished in April 1864.

The structure was a sizable one. Approximately 30 by 60 feet, the building was two stories tall, had two chimneys and numerous large windows evenly spaced for good lighting.

It was re-erected, running north and south, on the northeast corner of Second and Main, where the old Peoples National Bank building stands today.

At that location, the old Minneola capitol played a major role in the development of Ottawa.

It opened with Holt's dry goods store, the first in town, occupying the bottom floor along with several offices. Upstairs was what was called Lathrop's Hall, which served as the public meeting place of every group and concern in town.

It was, in effect, the central core or bud from which the infant town grew.

The first church in Ottawa, known today as First Baptist, was founded in Lathrop's Hall in May 1864. The hall therefore reverberated with the “golden voice” of Ottawa's leading town father—the notorious Rev. Isaac S. Kalloch.

Other organizations were founded there and met on a regular basis, such as the Good Templars, Grand Army of the Republic, and other social groups.

Benefits, musicals, and lectures made Lathrop's Hall the arts and entertainment center of the frontier town. In addition, the regular sessions of the district court were held there for several years.

The versatile facility also witnessed the creation of Ottawa's first school. By adding a large blackboard and a few desks to the long tables already in place, the hall was prepared for “reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic.”

Miss Mary Ward, the only teacher, was not prepared for what confronted her that first day of school, however.

“To my great surprise there were 100 pupils enrolled, ranging in age from five years to that of the school m'am,” she later recalled. Several were refugees from the South as the Civil War was still raging.

After those initial years in Ottawa, the old Minneola capitol was largely used as a store and dance hall until it was converted by the Wilkerson brothers into a hotel.

In 1871 the building was moved to the east and placed alongside the alley, where the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce office is today. There it continued to operate as a hotel until the 1880s when it was turned into a restaurant. And by 1893, it was serving as a furniture store.

Sometime in the mid-90's the old structure was moved again. This time it was placed out on Beech Street and reduced to a lowly carpenter shop. From there, the historic building disappeared, reportedly the victim of a fire on some unknown date.

If it still existed, the old building from Minneola would surely be the most historically-significant structure in Ottawa . . . one that witnessed Ottawa's birth, one that was a focal point in the city's early development.

And before that, it had that one brief and glorious moment as the capitol building of Kansas.