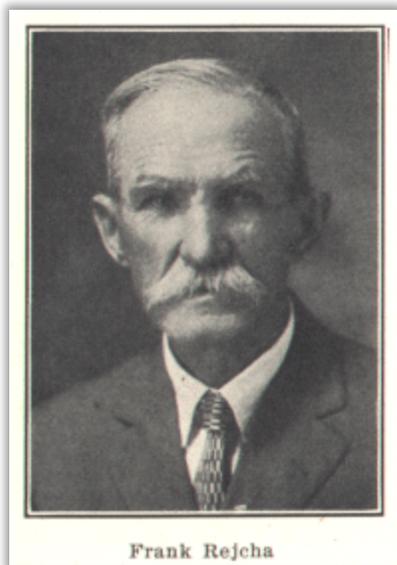


# A History of the Removal of the County Seat from Pleasant Hill to Wilber



*June 1, 1928 by Frank Rejcha* - When I was a kid of 20 years of age, I was working as a tenant for ten dollars per month for Frank Jelinek in 1877 and for Vaclav Shestak in 1878 on Big Blue Valley, and that year was war like rumor about removing the Saline County seat from Pleasant Hill to Wilber or Crete, as Pleasant Hill had no railway connection, and the election held November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1877 had favored the change, and Wilber with Crete became rivals in the contest. But now the election was claimed by those opposed to removal to be absolutely void and of no effect for the following reasons.

That the petition asking for relocation was not signed by resident electors equal in number to three fifths of all the votes cast in the county at the last general election. That some names were forged, and others were non-residents, and those that had not resided in the state long enough to be electors. A petition asking for a temporary injunction restraining the Board of County Commissioners, Peter J. Carl, Adam Bucher, and Vencil Vilda, from moving any of the books, records, office furniture, etc. from the town of Pleasant Hill was offered by William S. Ellis, Isaac Wickware and others asking that upon final hearing a perpetual injunction was granted December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1877 by the Honorable Judge S. B. Pound of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District. Notice was then given that on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1878, the defendant would move the

Honorable A. J. Weaver from Falls City, father of present candidate for governor of the first Judicial District, to dissolve the injunction allowed December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1877 for the following reasons:

1. The petition does not state facts sufficient to constitute cause of action,
2. The Judge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District had no jurisdiction or authority to allow said injunction,
3. Said injunction was allowed on a legal holiday.

On the day named it was moved to dissolve the injunction. The judge stated that a decision on the motion would be made by him at his chambers at Falls City on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of January 1878. It was confidently expected by those favoring Wilber that the injunction would be dissolved upon the date named. It was said that Henry Clark as agent of the defendant commissioners was present at the time specified at Falls City. The expected relief, however, was not granted.

Judge Weaver continued the injunction, leaving the previous action in force until further ordered. Tobias Castor was the chief manipulator of the defendants, and on Sunday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1878, a large gathering of men had assembled in Kovarik's Hall 5 miles north of Wilber and had agreed to meet the following day at Pleasant Hill January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1878, prepared to move the county property to Wilber.

They expected to do this immediately following receipt of news of the dissolution of the injunction before any further action could be had in the courts. I was there and remember well the confusion which prevailed at the gathering. The people had met for the purpose of moving the county property but did not wish to do so unlawfully. They were anxious to learn the result of the decision to be rendered at Falls City. The county officials, some of them at least, objected to the removal of the property and the men doubted the propriety of moving it without proper authority. Some of the men were very furious trying to load up some of the court house property but the sheriff objected. After awhile, S.S. Alley volunteered to go to Dorchester to get the required message from Falls City which should read that corn was 26 cents a bushel. I don't know if he was as far as Dorchester, but I remember seeing him as he approached the court house on a white horse, after being absent for a while, waving a paper and shouting "Hurrah for Wilber. It's alright boys."

A rush was then made for the court house and the men started to throw the furniture out the windows but the sheriff stopped that and gave order that everything must be carefully handled. Then the spokesman said, "Well boys load the stuff on the wagon." Immediately, the men commenced to load the movables at hand, and no one was allowed to leave until all was loaded and orders were given to start off. When all was loaded, some were still afraid to start for Wilber fearing active opposition from Crete.

After discussing the matter, Robert White and James Pike volunteered to go as an advance guard to see if the road was clear. At the time the wagons stood all in one row ready to start off, and I went and counted them and I counted ninety-three, and the last five were empty. White and Pike went as far as the bridge crossing Turkey Creek, but meeting with no opposition. James Pike returned and Robert White remained to hold the fort or to report if occasion required. All of this took time and it was evening when all was loaded and ready to move toward Wilber.

Just as we were ready to start off for Wilber, it was learned that someone unscrewed the burs from the wagon on which the treasurer's safe was loaded. They soon got another three and half inch wagon and transloaded the safe and hooked on two heavy pair of mules and then proceeded toward Wilber. You ought to see the long train of ninety-three wagons with score of lanterns blinking along the way. Oh, it was a great sight and when we came to the town limits of Wilber we were met by Pasek's brass band and escorted to town.

Upon the hill where the court house stands today, they displayed the fireworks made out of gun powder as there were no commercial fireworks those days. It was nearly midnight when we came to Wilber. Every house in town was lighted and signs in windows were displayed, "Welcome." All the people had rejoiced, all the saloons were opened all night and the brass band played all night till the next day noon. We unloaded our stuff at many different places and the following summer the court house was build at the cost of \$25,000.00. Now Crete people became very sore at Wilber and reproach that Wilber stole the court house which really belonged to Crete. This however still left the legality of the act unsettled. At a term of the District Court, held at Pleasant Hill January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1878, the county commissioners appeared in answer to a motion to show cause why an attachment should not be issued against them for violating the injunction issued in the case. They were ordered to show cause at the next term of court, on the first day thereof, why they should not be adjudged guilty of contempt for violating the order of injunction.

On the same day a motion for injunction was filed in District Court against the county commissioners for holding their offices or keeping the official books, records, paper of said office at any other place except at Pleasant Hill until further orders from the court, and that they restore and return to Pleasant Hill, forthwith, their said offices, etc.

On the same day came the defendant and demur to the petition saying the facts stated are not sufficient to constitute a cause of action in favor of said plaintiffs and against said defendants. The demurer was finally sustained, the injunction dissolved and the cause of Wilber vindicated.

But that did not end the trouble between the two rival cities. Crete was very sore toward Wilber. And there were always some instigators who kept prejudice against Wilber alive, which lasted half a century. They were determined to have the court house by all means.

In 1920, Crete called for an election on the court house location and made a house to house canvass throughout the whole county, but failed to get three-fifths vote required by law. In 1925 were trying to gain it by legislation. The bill was written by Robert Hastings and introduced by Fred W. Ball expressly for Saline County, that only common majority be required to decide on the court house location. But the Wilberites were on guard. A few went to Lincoln to tell the legislators the meaning of the bill which was then defeated.

The court house building was built out of soft brick and after fifty years of its life was nearly crumbling. Finally it was condemned by the state fire marshal to be dangerous for occupation. But Crete was bitterly against building a new one in Wilber, always hoped to wrestle it from Wilber some way.

Finally the Crete Rotary Club took the matter in their hands and offered to our leading man of Wilber to forget the difficulties and build a new court house in Wilber in order to save the county records. Election was then held to vote the bonds to build the court house within Wilber, which was carried by a large majority. The court house was then built in 1928.