

Heritage Notes

for 11-5-13

City Hall Number Three

The 20 year electric franchise of the Vermillion Milling Company would run out in 1915, and prior to that there was much discussion about the City purchasing the plant, located on the corner of Center and National Streets, from the Brookman Brothers. They offered to sell the plant, poles, wires, meters, etc. to the City for \$15,000. An appraiser had placed the theoretical value at \$19,671 for the entire set up.

There were two definite sides to the issue of the purchase of the electric plant by the City. One claimed that the price was fair and reasonable and the other contended that the plant was “a pile of junk” and claimed the City should start from scratch and build new.

An open meeting was held at the courthouse prior to the election scheduled for January 22, 1915, at which both sides presented their arguments. Former Mayor George Kempker presided at the meeting and W.R. Cleland served as secretary. Attorney C.J. Gunderson argued in favor of the purchase and ex-Governor Andrew E. Lee headed the opposition. The debate was hot and heavy, but there was no violence.

The voters approved the purchase and the City assumed control of the building and the electric utility on the corner of Center and National Streets in 1915.

Sometime prior to 1920, the decision was made to add onto the power plant building and move the City Hall operations to that location. The addition was designed to fit exclusively with the power plant and included a fire station and City Hall operations. The move to the new location for City Hall number 3 was completed on Thanksgiving weekend of 1920. The power plant remained there until 1931, when it was relocated to Chestnut Street below the bluff.