

### A Brief History of the Mount Vernon City Hall.

At the turn of the century the city of Mount Vernon was growing and prospering and the town council of the incorporated town of Mount Vernon, Iowa, decided to build a new town hall for the purpose of housing the council chambers, the housing of fire "implements and hose" and a "calaboose" or jail. The legal description was Lot 3, Block 6 of the original town of Mount Vernon, Iowa. After a resolution was placed upon a ballot for voter consideration and passed, the city then went out for bids to build the new town building. The city received 6 bids and the lowest bid was from J.W. Hopp Construction, which submitted a bid to erect the building in accordance with the plans and specifications for \$6,666. The notice of the election to build a town building was published on the 24th of February, 1916, and the election was held on April 4th, 1916. (See Attachment A) The city hall was completed towards the end of the calendar year 1916, as attested to by the original cornerstone which currently is on display at the History Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The History Center features the cornerstone and also turn of the century photographs of Mount Vernon under an exhibit entitled "Mount Vernon Through the Looking Glass" and will be there until November 1, 1997.

The building had a brick exterior wall with wood frame floor and roof support. Ceilings and walls were plaster. The floors were hardwood originally. On the upper floor there were 1291 square feet, on the main floor there was 3171 square feet, and in the basement garage and storage area, there were 3171 square feet. (See Attachment B) Originally the fire fighting apparatus, which consisted of a fire cart pulled by horses, was stored in the east side of the building which later became the police office. On the west side of the building the area in what was to become the front office was the original council chambers. In the back area on the main floor also, was the town hall area. This would become the city hall area after the fire of 1975. In the basement area on the east side was a street grader, which was originally pulled by a team of horses. At this point in time, the only paved streets were what is now First Street and 5th Avenue and also a portion of Second Avenue, which were paved with brick. All the rest of the streets were dirt and/or gravel. The city used cinders from Cornell College's heating plant to spread throughout the city with the use of the horse drawn grader. Later on the city would embark upon a street paving program.

In 1968 the new fire station, where it is currently located, was built, and the police department then had a "home" on the east side of the main floor of city hall. At that point in time, Bob Hess was the only police officer in Mount Vernon. A relative, John Hess, was Justice of the Peace and held court in Mount Vernon city hall until the fire of 1975.

### The Fire

In 1975, a fire swept through the north side of 1st Street West between 2nd Avenue and the new fire station. Destroyed was Walden's building, the American Legion building, the Strand