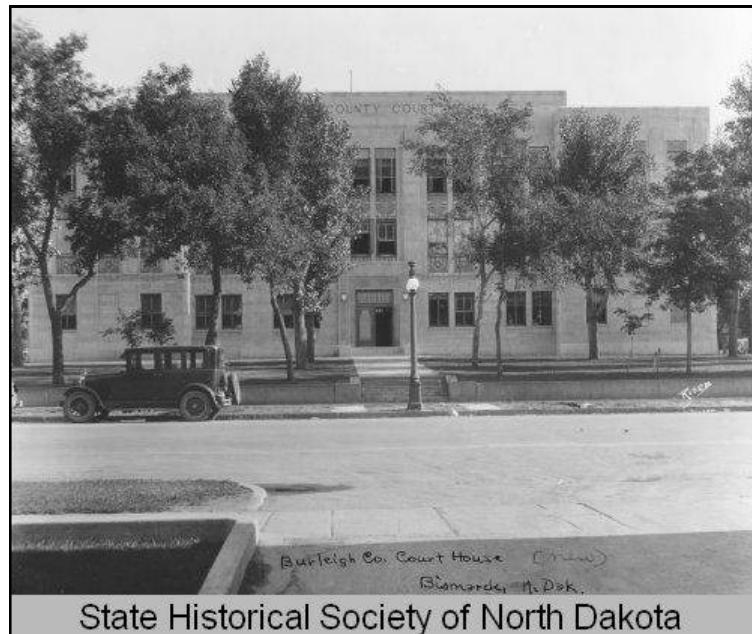


Booklet developed with input from:

Susan Wefald, Bismarck Resident
Mary H. Senger, Burleigh County Public Information Officer

Burleigh County Courthouse History



Source: [State Historical Society of North Dakota](#)

www.burleigh.gov

Welcome to the Burleigh County Courthouse,

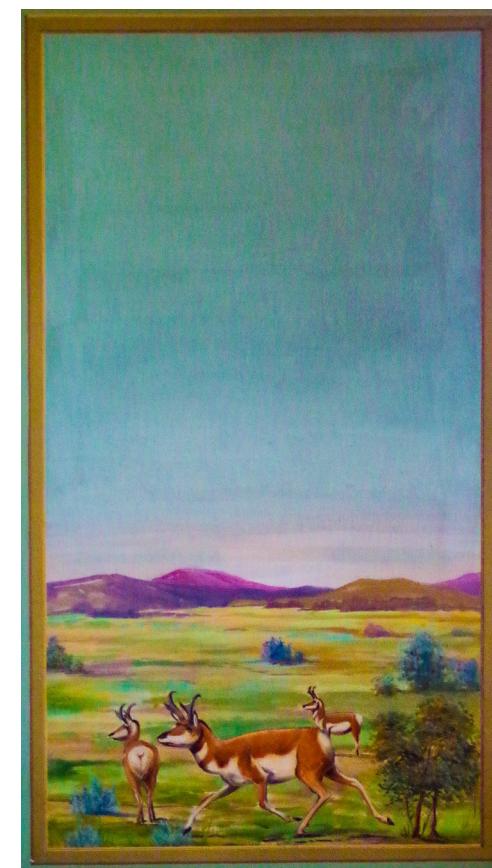
Many changes have been made to the Burleigh County Court-house since it was built in 1931; however, it remains one of the most beautiful courthouses in North Dakota. We have worked to preserve the special artwork in this building and understand its importance to the art history of our state. The Clell Gannon's murals at the courthouse, and eight smaller Gannon murals in the lobby, were restored in 2004.

In 1931, the people of Burleigh County were facing many problems, including severe drought, bank failures, plagues of grasshoppers, and poor farm prices. Jon E. Conrad, editor of The Bismarck Capital noted on July 24, 1931, "Erected at a time when times are admittedly hard, the new structure represents considerable sacrifice on the part of tax payers of the county. It also stands for a progressive spirit that has characterized the county and the city of Bismarck since its first organization years ago." The progressive spirit still guides our actions today as the courthouse adapts to changes and remodels.

The Burleigh County Courthouse is occupied with offices and courtrooms of the South Central Judicial District of North Dakota, Burleigh County State's Attorney, Juvenile Court, Small Claims Court, and the Bismarck Municipal Court. Other Burleigh County offices are located in the City/County Building (south of the courthouse) and in other locations around Bismarck and Burleigh County.

We hope the historical information provided in this pamphlet will enhance your visit to our beautiful Burleigh County Courthouse.

2018 Burleigh County Commissioners





Burleigh County Board of Commissioners

Actions in Regard to Building the Courthouse

February 7, 1930 The Commission chooses Ira L. Rush of Minot as the Architect for the proposed new court house.

March 18, 1930 The people of Burleigh County approve the issuance of \$250,000 of bonds, not to exceed 6% interest, to build a new court house, jail and residence for the jailor within the jail building.

July 28, 1930 Construction contract is awarded to Redlinger and Hanson Company, Wahpeton, ND

November 15, 1930 Commission appoints a committee of the County Auditor, Architect and Chair of the County Board of Commissioners to determine materials, patterns and designs for the new court house

July 1931 Commission sets dedication of new Burleigh County Court House for July 25, 1931

NEW BUILDING IS DESCRIBED FULLY BY GEORGE WILL

Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners

Writes Article for Capital

Written By George F. Will in 1931

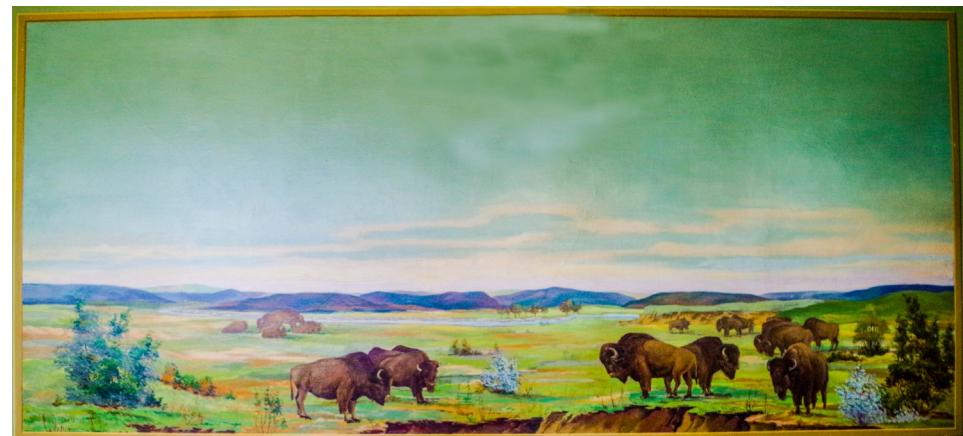
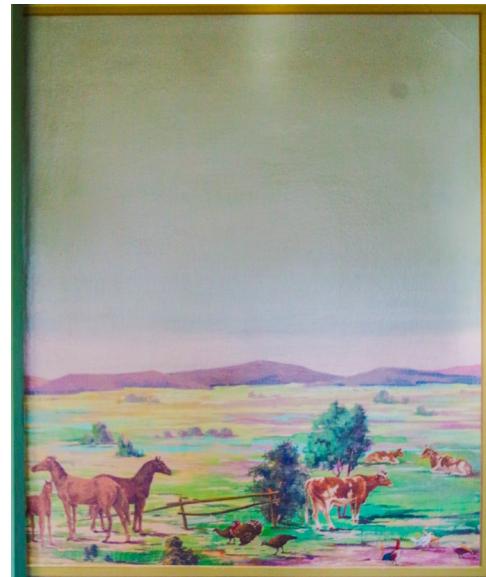
(Article appeared in *The Bismarck Capital*, July 24, 1931,
pages 1, 8)

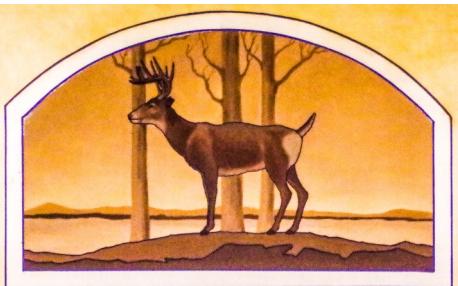
The new Burleigh county court house is finished, and it is worthwhile taking stock of what we have for our money. The chief aim, of course, has been to get a building primarily adapted to the business requirements of the county business administration. At the same time it is fitting that the seat of government of the county shall be beautiful and dignified, and the endeavor has been to combine the utilitarian with the beautiful without an undue expense for frills and furbelows.

Too often a public building is merely a model of dozens of other similar buildings all cut from the same pattern. In the new Burleigh county court house, the county commissioners have endeavored to achieve something distinctive, in detail at least, which shall definitely stamp it as belonging to Burleigh county.

Let us take the building floor by floor and examine it in detail both from a utilitarian and an artistic standpoint. Looking first at the exterior, we find a modernistic note predominating, plain almost to severity, but relieved by the decorative iron spandrels under the windows and by an unusually fine bronze door designed along lines in keeping with the building by Mr. George Blewett of the architect's office. The doorway itself possesses a graceful dignity. Carved in the stone lintel at the top is the Burleigh county seal designed by Clell Gannon and showing the stalk of corn and the steamboat on the Missouri river. The exterior of this building is entirely of grey Indiana limestone from the quarries at Bedford, Ind.

Entering through the vestibule, we arrive at one of the most distinctive features of the building. The walls are wainscotted with marble of an unusually handsome pattern, it being used also throughout the lobbies, stairways, halls and corridors.





In the vestibule above the marble wainscoting is a series of painting by the local artist, Clell G. Gannon, portraying outstanding events in the history of Burleigh county. These are executed with an understanding of pioneer life and a feeling for the subject, which makes them of unusual merit and quality, and their presence serves to give a distinctive and local character to the whole building. The series begins on the south wall, extends along the west, around the north and along the east ending on the south again east of the door. The first scene depicts the prairies of Burleigh county before man was present here. The next depicts the entrance of the famous French explorer, Varendrye and his party into a Mandan Indian earth lodge village in Burleigh county in 1738. Next follows a scene in a typical Dakota or Sioux village of skin tepees. A picture of a group of mounted Indians watching from the Burleigh county bluffs the boats of the Lewis and Clark expedition tailing up the Missouri follows. Then comes the trading scene with a small fur post depicted, such as was probably near the mouth of Apple Creek at one time. The first picture on the north wall shows a number of river steamboats tied up at the Bismarck landing with the original railroad bridge in the distance. In the narrow panel over the inner door Mr. Gannon has given a silhouette of a portion of Sibley's column on the march across Burleigh county. To the east of this we have the first Northern Pacific railroad train jolting across the Burleigh county prairies. It might be of interest to know that the information for the type of locomotive, color of cars and similar details were kindly furnished by the Northern Pacific Railway Co. In the northeast corner we have a picture of Bismarck in the seventies showing General Custer and a fellow officer with Custer's famous hounds at the corner of Main Avenue and Third Street. Following this we see both the famous stage coach and a part of a wagon train, typifying the Black Hills traffic, which was such an important element in Bismarck's life at one time. The next panel shows the beginning of agriculture with the pioneer farmer turning the first sod on his claim and an Indian presenting to him seed of the old Indian variety of corn, the type of corn that has brought so much fame to Burleigh county. The next picture is of the laying of the cornerstone of the state capitol building in Bismarck. This is one of the most detailed pictures in the room and it is extremely well done. Its making required an incredible amount of study of old photographs, drawings,

style sheets and historical records.

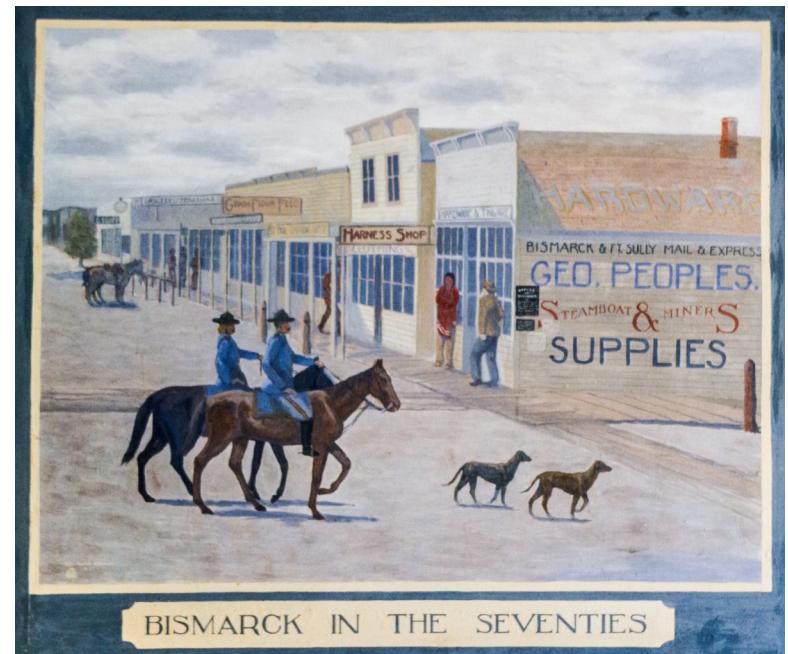
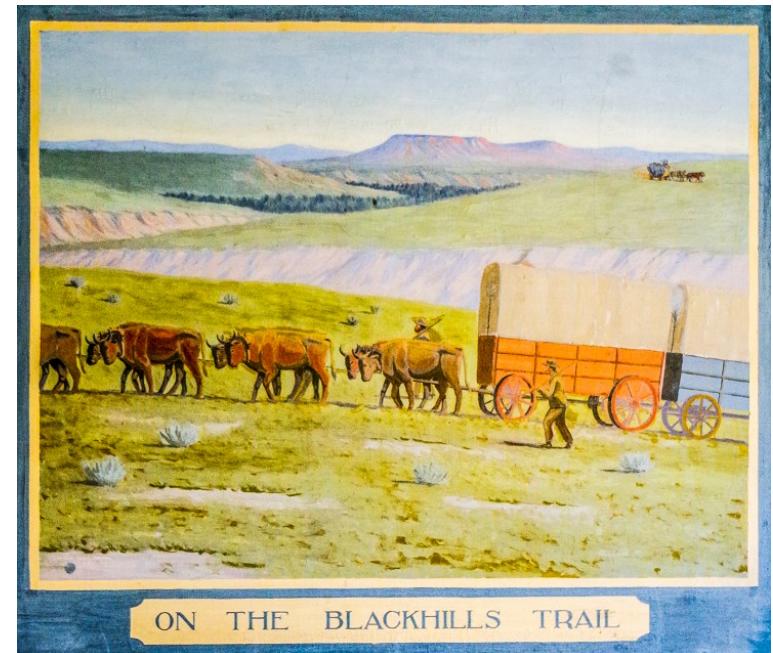
Through a second set of bronze doors we come into the first floor lobby. Here we find in the center of the terrazzo floor the image of a large buffalo bull skillfully worked out. The marble wainscot rises to a height of seven feet. Above it, the walls have been covered with various views which portray at intervals {5 words unreadable} Burleigh county birds and animals, the background and ceiling being a well worked out decorative scheme in which aluminum leaf forms the ground. The birds and animals were painted from sketches prepared by Mr. Gannon and represent the wild goose, the sand hill crane, the coyote, the grizzly bear, the buffalo, the antelope, the elk and the deer.

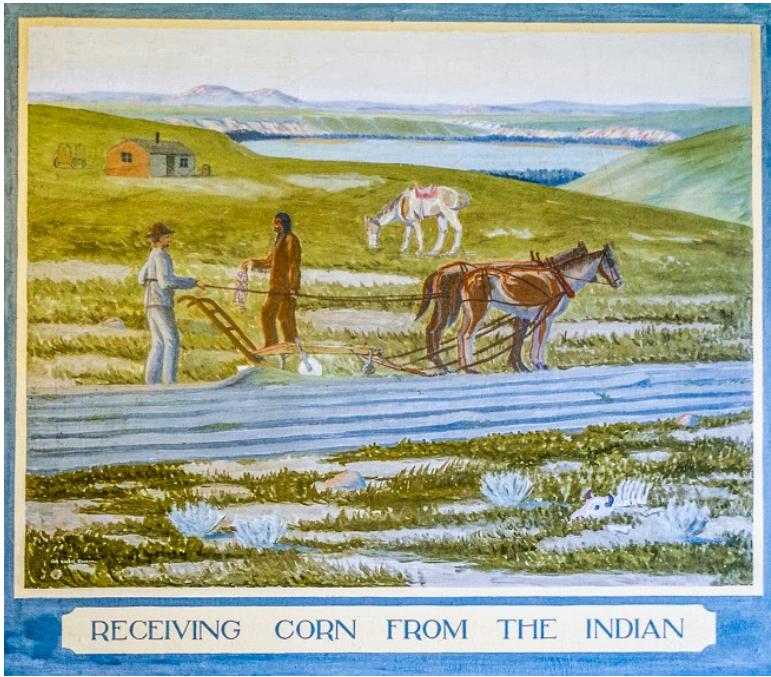
Opening from the lobby, we find the sheriff's quarters—a public office, a private office and a vault in the southeast corner, together with a large storage vault attached to the auditor's quarters on the floor above by a circular stairway and not opening onto the first floor.

In the northeast corner we find the quarters of the probate judge—a large public office, a private office and a vault.

On the west side of the lobby we find on the south the quarters of the county superintendent. These too consist of a public office, a small private office and adequate vault space. Along the west end of the building is a set of rooms consisting of a vault and two large offices with a small storeroom. These may be occupied by the division highway engineer. Just east of this suite and on the north is a single good-sized office unassigned. A toilet on either side of the stairway, a doorway to the north and a few storage spaces complete this floor.

The black drinking fountains lend a harmonious note in conjunction with the black marble base and border.





RECEIVING CORN FROM THE INDIAN



LAYING CORNER STONE TERRITORIAL CAPITOL 1883

On the east and west lobby walls, on either side of the lobby entrance are well designed bronze tablets. That on the west wall bears the names of the county commissioners and the architect. That on the east wall carries a little verse written by James W. Foley, North Dakota's and Burleigh county's own poet, expressly for the building.

The stairway which is on the north side is of an unusually beautiful and striking design: the turns are circular and are lined with the same marble used in the lobby and vestibule walls—a beautiful white and green combination perfectly matched in pattern. The steps are of terrazzo and the rail is one of the most artistic and beautiful features in the building. It was also designed by Mr. George Blewett. It is modernistic in style and uses the ear and stalk of corn as a motif, thus tying the building up with Burleigh county, once more in a distinctive way.

The second floor lobby is much the same as the lower one except for height. In the southeast corner is situated the auditor's quarters. These consist of a roomy public office, a private office and a large working vault where most of the employees will work. The public offices are all divided by a counter, the public space have terrazzo floors, the inner space floored with tile-tex tiles.

In the northeast corner of this floor is the county commissioners' room with a small private office opening off of it. The main room has an oak wainscot and an oak rail dividing the public space from the rest of the room. The walls are covered with soft murals which blend into the general scheme and illustrate various typical Burleigh county scenes past and present.

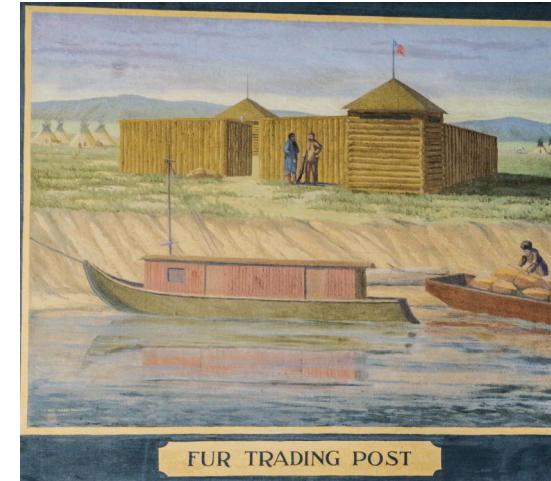
In the center of the south side is an office designed for the county surveyor consisting of a public and private office. West of it are the quarters of the county treasurer. These consist of a large public office with an even larger working vault to the west of it.

The northwest corner is devoted to the Register of Deeds with a large private office and a large working vault.

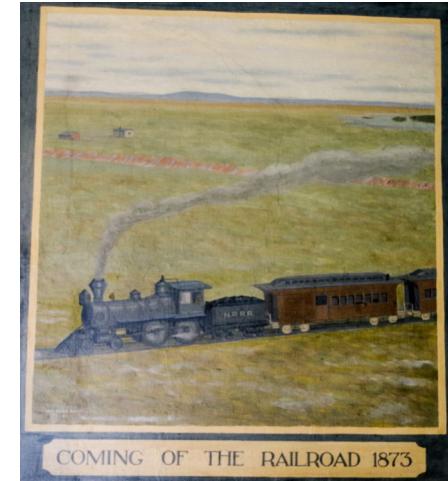
On this floor too, there is a toilet on either side of the stairway, at the north. The stairs continue to the third floor and end at the hall or corridor which here takes the place of a lobby. Immediately at the head of the stairs is the main entrance to the court room. This is a large room with high, beamed ceiling, walls and ceiling being decorated in a carefully worked out modern pattern of colors which in its harmony with the lighting, wood work and other decorative features gives a touch of elegance as well as dignity to a very beautiful room. A wainscot of walnut with the border at the top inlaid in several colors and in a pattern to match the decorative figures on the walls, rises to a height of about four feet and goes entirely around the room. The public benches are in the same wood with the same inlaid embellishments and the jury box, judge's bench, tables and other furniture are especially worked out in the same style.

West of the main court room and communicating with it, with the corridor and with the judge's private office is the judge's chambers. This is a large room designed and furnished in such a way as to be available for a secondary court room. To the north of it is a commodious private office for the judge, and a small private office for the stenographer. At the east end of the corridor and on the north are two offices for the state's attorney, a public and a private one. To the south and connecting both with the corridor and the court room are the quarters of the county clerk—a public office, a small private office, and an adequate vault. Along the north side of the corridor are two jury rooms of good size and well arranged.

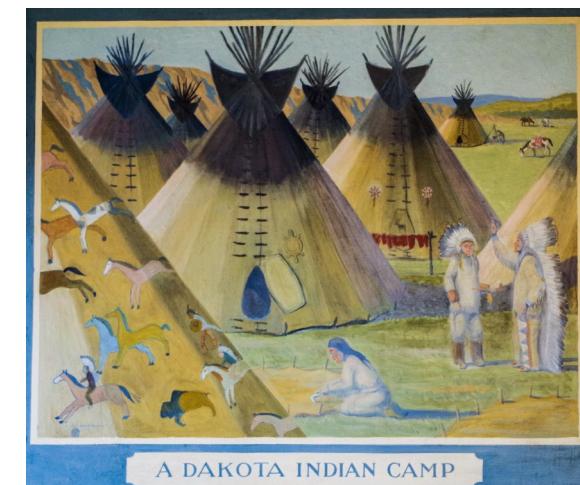
This completes a general view of the building. The light fixtures have all been selected and designed with special regard to the style of the building and are both beautiful and unusual.



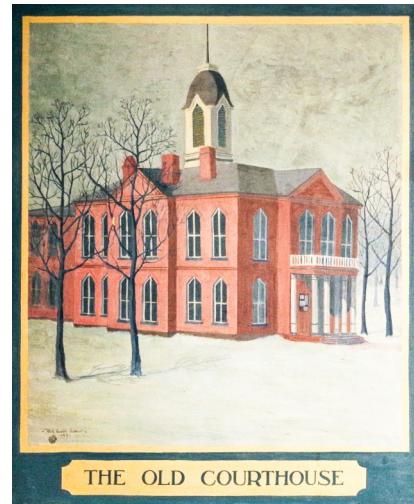
FUR TRADING POST



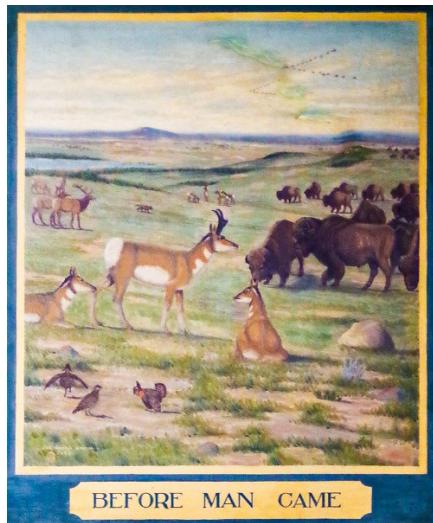
COMING OF THE RAILROAD 1873



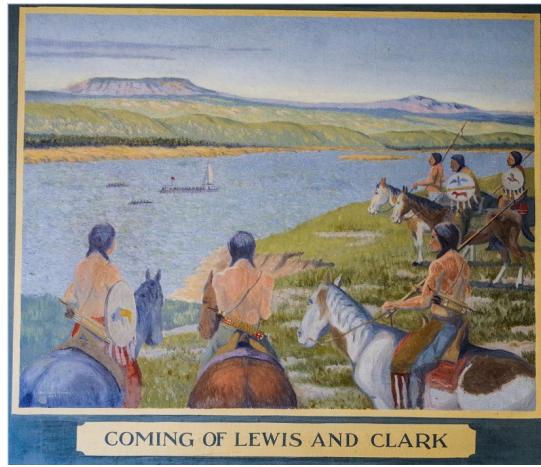
A DAKOTA INDIAN CAMP



THE OLD COURTHOUSE



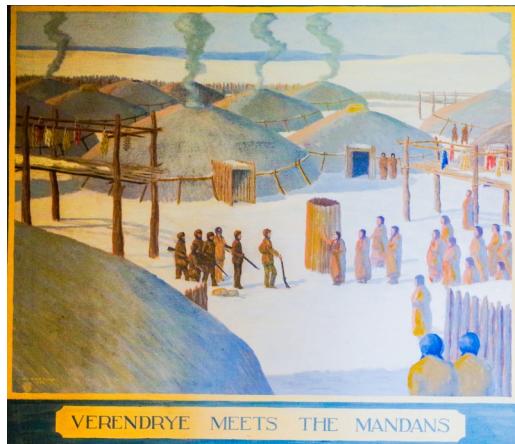
BEFORE MAN CAME



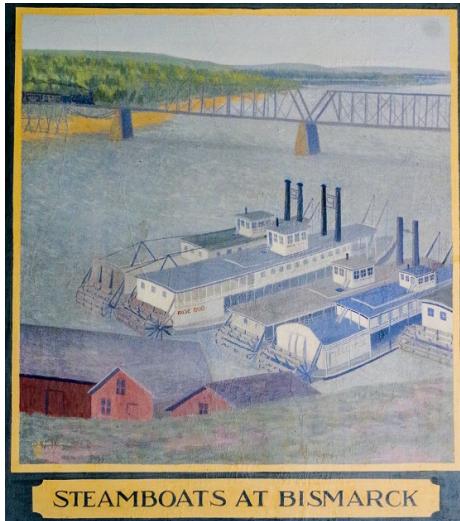
COMING OF LEWIS AND CLARK



THE SIBLEY CAMPAIGN 1863



VERENDRYE MEETS THE MANDANS



STEAMBOATS AT BISMARCK

The rooms all have ample access to daylight and very little artificial light will ever be needed in day time. Windows are equipped with Venetian blinds and a roll screen which works like a window shade.

The rooms have been furnished for the most part with steel furniture specially designed and selected for the building to give a maximum of convenient service.

It is to be hoped that every citizen of the county who possibly can do so will be present at the dedication and take the opportunity to inspect the new building. The aim has been to get a building entirely adequate for the business purpose to which it is to be devoted and at the same time beautiful with a beauty of a distinctly Burleigh county flavor.

Poem inscribed on a bronze tablet in the main lobby.

By James W. Foley,
Poet of North Dakota and Resident of Burleigh County

(Foley was regarded by many as the
unofficial Poet Laureate of North Dakota.)

Bronze Sculpture
Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté signed 1924,
***Le Halege DuBois, The Wood Hauler*, 60 inches.**
(In the courthouse vestibule)

French Canadian Artist, Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, painter, sculptor, and church decorator, was born in Quebec, Canada in 1869. He studied in France at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and at the Julian and Colarossi Academies. Although he first was a painter, around 1910 he started sculpting and created many pieces in bronze. However, in 1927 he became paralyzed and had to stop creating art. He died in 1937. He was a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.

This bronze sculpture was given to Burleigh County by Harry F. McLean, who also donated the bronze sculpture "The Pioneer Family," on the North Dakota state capitol grounds. McLean, the son of the first elected Mayor of Bismarck, was a construction engineer in the United States and Canada.

