

INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE SHERVEY
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BY DEAN OGG

Q: I'm talking with George Shervey of the Grant County Historical Society. We're going to be talking on the Court House contest of 1881 to 1882. George what brought about this contest can you tell us a little bit about it, who was involved in it, uh, maybe some of the reasonings behind it.

Well the way I understand it, uh, Herman was much more developed than Elbow Lake at that time, Herman had got railroad in 1871, and therefore had uh, many more merchants, they had an outlet for their farmers crop, and also like I said, they had many more merchants where their people could buy, ah the things that they needed. So for that reason Herman felt that the court house should be there. So they passed a, what you call it, a petition around to, have an election to see where the people wanted the court house to be. This of course was to be county wide. I don't know, I haven't heard how many signers they had on this petition but it was presented to the, I believe the State Legislature which I believe granted them their request, that they could have a, an election. So they did have their election, and the vote was in favor of Herman, as being the location of the Grant County Court House. But later it was the, somebody, discovered that uh, some people had voted that weren't legal residents of Grant County. And therefore uh, of course Elbow Lake naturally wanted the court house, and also some of the, from Asby and from that area felt that Herman was too far, to travel with either oxen or horse and buggy to do their official business. When the word got around that there was some illegal voters, that had voted in Herman, they hired some attorney, I believe the attorney was a, later Senator Cliff Nelson. And ah, so the court house fight was on. The...it was then ruled that this election was illegal and it was decided that the court house legally still belonged to Elbow Lake.

Q: Do you remember on what grounds or what was illegal about the election?

They discovered that Herman had in, had got some transients which were not citizens and also some young people that were not of legal voting age, that voted, and therefore, this election was illegal.

Q: Was there any other parts of the county that might have had something to do with the throwing the election off besides Herman and the vicinity of Herman? Do you recall right off hand if....

I, I can't right now, remember it's what, who else was involved in, _____
I, I'm only, imagine now that the residents in Herman vicinity would want the court house, there.

Q: Do you remember any of the people involved in the actual fight of the court case or was it community against community?

From what I can remember reading about it it seemed like it was community against community. The Herman residents naturally were very anxious to retain the court house in Herman. And, but, the out lying communities further away from Herman were the ones more anxious to have it in Elbow Lake. Although Elbow Lake hardly, didn't even have a railroad at that time, so Elbow Lake was not much of a business center.

Q: So we might say instead of Elbow Lake against Herman it was more like the northern part of the county against the southern part of the county?

From what I have read and studied that seemed to be the case, there were not too many residents Elbow Lake, or business places, to put up that much of a fight.

Q: Ah, was there any one particular person that we can pick out from the north part of the county that kind of spear headed this drive to get the court house in Elbow Lake, as the case may be in Herman?

I can't remember who that person was, I know, I read it, I can't remember his name.

Q: Was uh, Nute Nelson, was he from the area here when they hired him to be a attorney? Do you remember, or was he in some adjoining county?

He, I believe he was, If I remember wrong, I believed he lived in Douglas County.

Q: Do you remember any, was there any animosities, for example when the court house first got moved to Herman from Elbow Lake. Was it a smooth transision after the election. Did they let the people come in and get the files and safe and what ever it was and move the court house to Elbow Lake or was there a little uh, violence or disagreement?

Well there was, I don't know, I couldn't say there was too much of the violence, but I know there were some very hard feelings about it. And of course after they discovered that the election was illegal, they had some base to stand to fight it.

Q: How about the return of the court house from Herman to Elbow Lake?

I believe that was more of a fight than, than when it left, when the court house moved from Elbow Lake to Herman. Because of course Herman like I mentioned before did have business's establishments. And of course it was to their advantage to have the court house here which is the case in any city. The city that has the court house naturally gets the advantage of the other villages around because the people come there to do their official business.

Q: Now, I read in the paper that, that everybody came to Elbow Lake to pay their fines and that they went to the Herman Fair to spend their nickles? How true is this, is there still animosity between the communities now days, or how long did it last afterwards?

There seems to be some hard feelings from some of the people near Herman. But I think it's more or less now, of uh, more of a joke and jester than, than sincerity. I could come for it like this, years ago there used to be a _____ between Norwegians and Swedes. Now after they've lived together for a while and probably intermarried you don't here too much discussion about that and I think it's the same way now with the court house, and, and Elbow Lake I mean and Herman. We have good roads now and they jump in the car and it don't make to much difference whether they drive an extra 20 miles or not. But it really was an issue years ago, as far as people up in this area was concerned especially.

Q: When they moved this..the court house records back to Elbow Lake or even when they moved them to Herman. Was all this done in daylight or did it go secretly. Like you mentioned how was, there might been a little violence when they moved it back to Elbow Lake. Refall?

Well, I've uh, the Peter Ponrude Article, I've read his article on the c court house fight, that group from Elbow Lake organized a, or got a bunch of men together with wagons to go to Herman at night to break in and to retrieve the records. Herman was afraid of this but some way had heard that or discovered..found out which night the group from Elbow Lake was coming to get the records. So I believe they had left one man at the gaurd there. But he evidently wasn't aware of it until they were there and he was, and he was so out numbered that he didn't dare to interfere and some of the other men had left Herman to lay in ambush waiting for the group from Elbow Lake to come to get these records. And as I was told there was two bridges that crossed the Mustinka River between Elbow Lake and Herman and the group from Herman was guarding one bridge and it so happened that the group from Elbow Lake crossed the other bridge. So they missed them and the men then of course from Elbow Lake got the papers while there other men were guarding this one bridge.

Q: Then the actual case of the court house was settled by the court then and not the individual communities?

The court ruled that the court house belonged in Elbow Lake.

Q; Because of the illegal voting procedures followed in the voting?

That was it's determining factor.

Q: Well, thank you George. This has been Dean Ogg talking with George Shervy of the Historial Center.