

## Renovations will extend Gogebic Courthouse history

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BESSEMER — At 200 N. Moore St. in Bessemer, the Gogebic County Courthouse stands not only as a testimony to 19th Century architecture, but also as a point of pride in being a tangible reminder of the county's origin.

Construction of the courthouse — which is directly north of U.S. 2 — began in 1887, the same year that the Michigan Legislature established the county. The city of Bessemer also was created in that year.

Prior to that time, as explained on the Bessemer city website, Gogebic County was part of Ontonagon County, which had been established in 1852 on land continuing west to the Montreal River.

At that time, the site notes, “The Ontonagon County included two townships — Ontonagon and Pewabic. Pewabic included the present (Ontonagon County) townships of Carp Lake, Matchwood, Bergland, and all of present Gogebic County.”

The same source adds that, in 1887, “Bessemer was a wide open town with 50 saloons and with little regard for the law.”

As shown on a plaque displayed within the courthouse, the following men were members of the county's Board of Supervisors at that time: Joseph Sellwood of Bessemer Township, George F. Kelly of Ironwood Township, Alonzo L. Annes of Marenisco Township, John Hom of Wakefield Township and Myron H. Furgan of Watersmeet Township. David F. Foley was the county sheriff.

Creative politics played a strong role in how Bessemer came to be chosen that year as the county seat.

As described on the



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**IN THIS stock photo from 2023, the east side of the Gogebic County Courthouse is shown. Constructed between 1887 and 1888, the building was named a Michigan State Historic site in 1971 and then was listed within the National Register of Historic Places in 1981. The courthouse will receive new windows this year, along with masonry work and replacement of sidewalks.**

Bessemer website, “Bessemer and Ironwood called an election to see which city would be the county seat and also have the courthouse. Ironwood secured the support of the railroad workers and people in Watersmeet. When Bessemer pioneers Paul Rutiman Sr. and Joe Pecard found out about this, they plotted to change Iron-

wood's plan. Ironwood men traveling to Bessemer to vote were made drunk and the train did not stop at the voting site. Ironwood lost and Bessemer gained the county seat. This began a rivalry between the two cities that still has not ended even today.”

Moreover, because the designated courthouse site was a cemetery at that time,

bodies had to be moved to the new Hillcrest Cemetery before construction could begin.

It took until 1888 to finish the \$50,000 building, which was made with sandstone quarried from a mountain a half-mile away.

Charlton and Kuenzli was the architect, and Herman Gundlach and John Wahlman were the contrac-

tors.

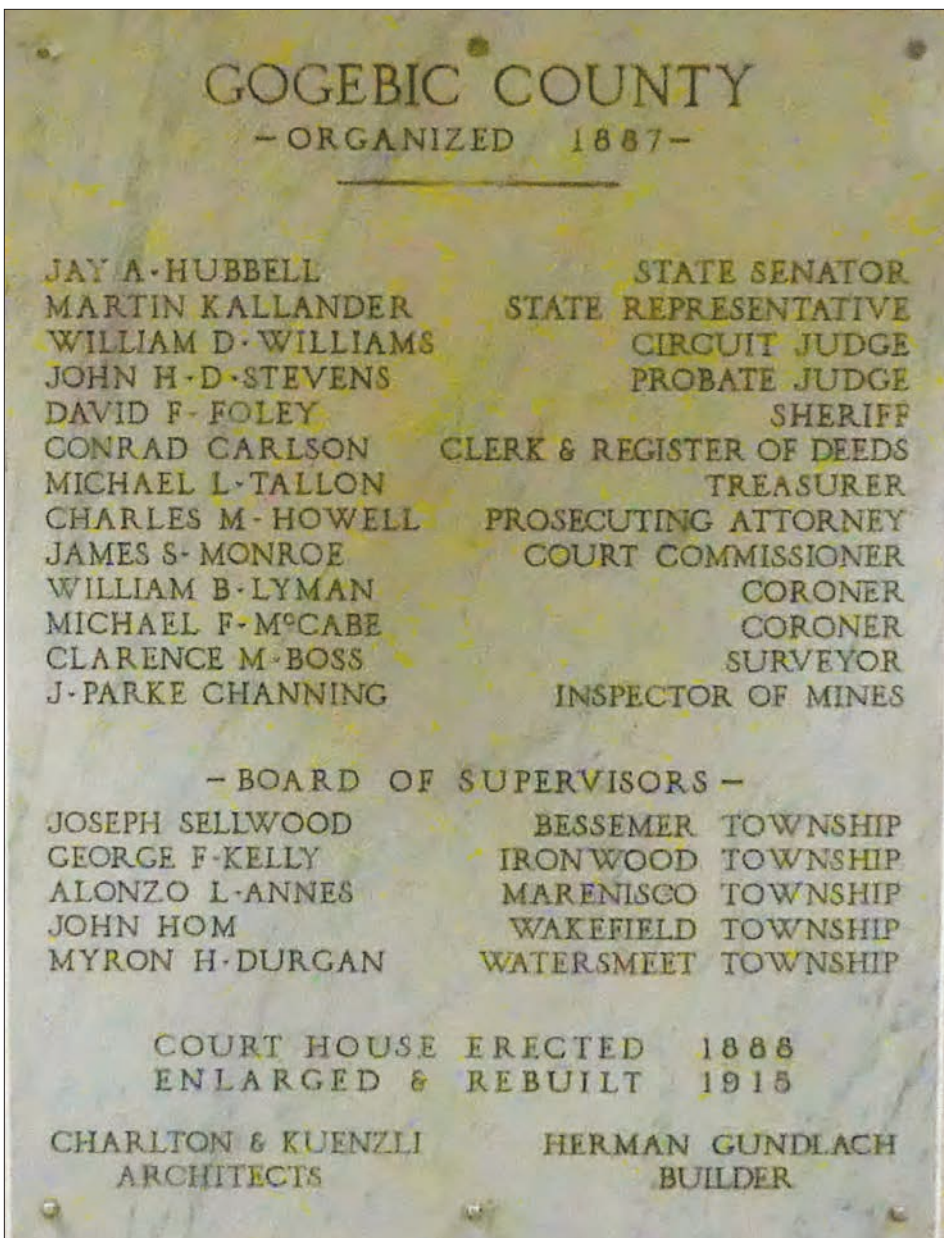
As shared in various historical accounts, the building has undergone many changes through the years.

An addition was added in 1915 under the direction of architect John Scott & Company of Detroit and contractor E.E. Grip.

In the 1940s, the building's original steeple and four gargoyles were

removed as they were viewed as subject to falling and thus hazardous. By the mid-20th century, the courthouse was declared a fallout shelter in case a disaster such as a nuclear attack occurred.

In 1971, the building was declared a Michigan

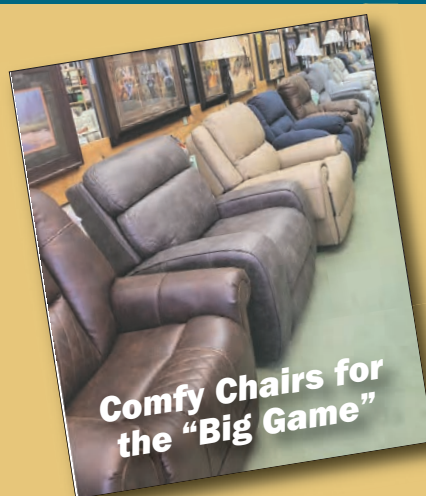


Globe photos

ON THE LANDING between the first and second floors of the Gogebic County Courthouse in Bessemer is this plaque that includes the names of local officials in charge as construction in 1887. Below, the courthouse is seen last week.



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P.J. Glisson/The Globe  
**ORNATE COLUMNS** like this one stand at the southside entry of the Gogebic County Courthouse in Bessemer.



P.J. Glisson/The Globe  
**A MURAL** is shown at the front of the Gogebic County Courthouse's Circuit courtroom on the second floor. The feminine figures in the image depict Law, Mercy and Justice.

## Gogebic

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 State Historic site.  
 Three years later, in 1974, the building underwent renovation, including the addition of what is now known as the annex, at a total cost of \$650,000. An elevator tower also was constructed. The architect that time was Architectural Resources Inc. and the contractor was P.J. Nickel Company.  
 By 1981, the courthouse had been listed within the National Register of Historic Places.

Ever since then, the structure has undergone continuing maintenance as needed, with nearly \$1 million of projects voted for approval last year.  
 Last year, the county's Board of Commissioners financed boiler work and radon remediation.  
 Urging "full restoration," the board's Economic Development and Capital Improvements Com-



P.J. Glisson/The Globe  
**INTRICATE DETAILS** such as these are featured on the east side of the Gogebic County Courthouse in Bessemer. Historical data notes that red Jacobsville sandstone was used for the building. Streaked in white, the rock was quarried from a mountain a half mile away.

mittee has lined up a number of projects for this year.  
 Those projects include the installation of new windows, along with masonry restoration and sidewalk

replacement. ADA-compliant entry door systems also are scheduled to be replaced.  
 County Administrator Juliane Giackino said that all of those projects are

expected to start in May.  
 County officials hope that the work will help to set up the courthouse for minimal maintenance over the next couple of decades.

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