First Government of Roane County Organized

History

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Eleven Justices of Roane County met at New California and organized the first government for the newly formed county.

Eleven Justices Of County Met At New California And Organized First Government For County

On the 7th day of April, 1856, there was a great stir in the town of New California as the eleven Justices of the Peace within the borders of the new county of Roane, all of whom held commissions from his excellency, the governor of the commonwealth, met for the purpose of setting up a county government in compliance with the act passed by the general assembly of Virginia on March 11, 1856. A provision of this legislation specified that the county court of the new county should be comprised of the the several justices.

Hardesty's History records, "The following justices of the peace were present and comprised the court, viz: Lemuel Crislip, James Riddle, Adam D. Hodam, Joseph B. Chilton, James Hively, John Hively, J. W. Cain, Willaim Gandee, David Sergent, Elijah Wees and Henry Nelson."

California (now Spencer) was without any public building; not even a school house or church being available for the meeting but this obstacle was easily over come by assembling at the home of M. Benson Armstrong. Each justice took the oath of office before John Greenleaved (Greenleaf) a justice for the county of Jackson, and the court was ready for organization.

By unanimous vote, John W. Cain was selected presiding justice or president of the court, and subsequent action resulted in selection of a "tipstaff" or crier, to serve until a sheriff could be duly elected and qualified; a county clerk, pro term, and an attorney for the commonwealth. Nominated for crier or tipstaff were Albert G. Ingram and John W. Spencer, and polling of the court members showed Lemuel Crislip, Henry Nelson, A. D. Hodam, Joseph B. Chilton, William Gandee and James Riddle supporting Ingram; James Hively,John Hively. David Sergent and Elijah Wees, voting for Spencer. Thus Ingrram was the victor and became the first man to serve in what was to be the office of sheriff of Roane county. J. M. McWhorter and Jon P. Thomasson were placed in nomination for the office of clerk and the vote of the court resulted in McWhrter's election. Subsequent action by the court resulted in the election of Andrew Waugh as the first attorney for the commonwealth (a parallel to our present prosecuting attorney.)

Albert G. Ingram qualified for his office by posting bond in the amount of $1,000 with Hugh Kyger and P. H. Thomasson as sureties.

Then came before the court, Andrew Waugh, of Roane county; attorney B. H. Smith of the Kanawha county bar; attorneys Robert S. Brown and Joseph Smith, of the Jackson county bar; and J. M. Kester, who presented their licenses and on their own motion were granted permission to practice law in the courts of Roane county.

Meeting the second day the record shows this entry: "The court then proceeded to make provisions for a house in which to hold the courts of this county until a court house can be built, and M. J. Thomasson, Esq., being present in court offers to furnish his house in California for that purpose at $75 per annum, and to fix up a comfortable and plain bar, with seats for the courts, and bar and juries, with suitable plain tables for court and bar, and clerk, with a desk for the books, all provided and arranged at his own expense, and to, have the same ready to be used at the next term of this court, to which proposition the court assents and agrees to receive the said house for the term of one year upon the terms aforesaid, and to provide for the pay therefore in the next county levy for this county.

"A. G. Ingram, John W. Spencer and Andrew Coteral (Cottrell) came into court qualified as constables 'as the law directs,' after which it was ' ordered that ' this court be adjourned to the first Monday in May next, then to meet at the house of M. J. Thomson (Thomasson) in the town of New California, ' and in compliance with this order the first county court convened ' on Roane county was dissolved."

Source: Times Record/Reporter; CENTENNIAL; Section 5 1856-1956; Roane Beginning; Spencer, W. Va.- October 11, 1956