

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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DOCUMENTS

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THE LEGISLATURE

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE.

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1865.

FORTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE.

HOUSE.

No. 50.

The undersigned, a minority of the Committee consisting of the delegation of the county of Somerset, to whom was referred the bill entitled "an act to change the shire town of the county of Somerset," have had the same under consideration, and ask leave to report, that the bill referred to in the report of the majority of the Committee, entitled "an act to change the place of holding the Supreme Judicial Courts in Somerset County, and to change the shire town of Somerset County," ought not to pass.

JOHN S. TENNEY,
TOBIAS CHURCHILL,
GEORGE GOWER.

Statement of facts having relation to the subject of sessions of the Supreme Judicial Court being holden at Skowhegan, and changing the shire of the county of Somerset.

The town of Norridgewock was made the shire town of the county of Somerset at the time the county of Somerset was incorporated, and has remained the only shire town thereof, till the present time. Buildings for the accommodation of all the courts, together with the jail, the dwelling house for the keeper of the jail, with the outbuildings connected therewith, were early prepared, and have since been replaced by others more permanent and expensive.

In the winter of 1858, a strong effort was made to change the shire town, by substituting Skowhegan for Norridgewock, the present Court House, the house for the keeper of the jail, the Probate Office, and other smaller buildings having been erected at dif-

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ferent times long before the year 1858. After a very full hearing before a committee of the Legislature, and a discussion of the question in the two houses, it was decided by the latter, that the change should not be made. One reason assigned for the expediency of the change, was that the county buildings were out of repair, and particularly that the jail was in such condition, that there was danger that the prisoners would escape therefrom. Subsequent to this unsuccessful attempt to change the shire town as aforesaid, the County Commissioners caused the jail to be entirely reconstructed in a very thorough manner, so that it is ample in size, convenient in its arrangement, and as a place of security for prisoners confined therein is equal to any, it is believed, in the State, though less expensive than several others in the State. The offices, prepared for the Clerk of the Courts, the Register of Deeds, and the Register of Probate, are each fitted up with convenient fire-proof depositories for the records, books and papers. The expenditures in these repairs and reconstructions since 1858 were not far from the sum of seven hundred dollars. In another brick building, besides the Court House, and the house for the jailer, situated near the Court House, is a convenient and large room for probate courts, having the vault therein, before named, in connection with the Register's office, and in the same building a large room for the grand juries, and lobbies. It is conceded on all hands that all the public buildings belonging to the county are in good repair and safe and convenient for the purposes intended. This was admitted at the hearing before the Committee at the hearing of the question at issue at the present session of the Legislature.

Another ground of the change asked for is that the hotel accommodations at the present time are insufficient for the wants of the public during the sessions of the Supreme Judicial Court. For a very long time two public houses, and till within a less time than one year, have been kept in the village near the Court House, admitted to be convenient and well kept, and sufficient for accommodation of the public at all times; and also several private boarding houses, against which no objection is suggested at the hearing or elsewhere. One of these public houses has been open since the year 1814. On the 21st day of February, 1864, the other of these public hotels was consumed by fire, but a large stable and out-buildings connected therewith were served. This hotel, before its

destruction, was owned by Charles A. Bates, who had recently been an officer in the army, and he came home with health much impaired, and he soon after removed to Bangor, having sold his stand to John W. Sawtelle, who removed the stable and a large shed, so as to leave more ample room for the house and grounds about it, to a place further in the rear of the house destroyed, and fully repaired the stable, and is now used as such. He also did considerable in preparing the grounds on which the old house stood, preparatory for the early erection of a new house for a hotel, and purchased an adjoining lot for the purpose of enlarging the former site and making it more convenient, and it is believed to be his purpose to build or have built, a house larger and more convenient than the one destroyed, such being his declared design. And if he prefers not to be at the whole expense, other persons with sufficient means are ready and willing to take part in the enterprise.

Witnesses six in number were examined before the Committee, called by those in favor of the change, and they stated that Skowhegan was nearer to their respective residences than Norridgewock, and that from conversation with persons living in the vicinity of each, they expressed the belief that these persons were in favor of the change at some time, and from five to ten years hence was mentioned as the time when they thought such persons would like to have the change effected, but the current of evidence on this point was, that they were unwilling at this time to incur the expense which must attend the change, short of the time mentioned.

Several witnesses, four or five in number, called by those opposed to the change, the respective residences of some living nearer Norridgewock than Showhegan, and some at a greater distance, did not favor the change, and they stated that such was the feeling in vicinity of their respective residences. Others stated that if the change could be made without material expense to the county, many people now opposed would not be dissatisfied. But most of the witnesses called by the opposers of the change, represented that the people near them were, though as far from Norridgewock as Showhegan, had no desire that a change should take place at all.

As a general thing, the persons called as witnesses favored the location nearest to themselves respectively ; but with some it was

otherwise. The expense of the change was the greatest objection to removal of those who lived nearer to Showhegan than Norridge-wock.

No petitions in favor of the removal, or remonstrances against it, were introduced before the Committee.

It appeared in evidence that land on which the jail and the house and other outbuildings for the accommodation of the keeper thereof, was to revert to the original grantor, or his heirs, if the jail should cease to be occupied for the custody of prisoners.

The distance between Showhegan and Norridge-wock is five miles, and only five miles.

JOHN S. TENNEY,
TOBIAS CHURCHILL,
GEORGE GOWER.

STATE OF MAINE.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, }
February 18, 1865. }

Presented by leave by Mr. CHURCHILL, from Somerset Delegation, and on his motion laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

HORACE STILSON, *Clerk.*