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County Seat Fights, Courthouses Featured in New State Historical Society Book

PIERRE, S.D. — “County Capitols: The Courthouses of South Dakota” by former circuit court judge Arthur L. Rusch, will be released at the South Dakota Festival of Books on Friday, Sept. 26, in Sioux Falls.

Rusch’s book details the history and architecture of the state’s current justice buildings and is the fifth volume in the Historic Preservation Series from the South Dakota State Historical Society.

“‘County Capitols’ is a fitting title for South Dakota’s 125th anniversary of statehood,” said Jay D. Vogt, director of the State Historical Society. “Filled with dozens of images, it is a wonderful resource for architects, historians and those interested in the building of South Dakota,”

Dreaming of great things for their communities, the pioneer town-builders who settled southern Dakota Territory took extreme measures to ensure that their communities would become commercial and industrial centers. One way to secure the survival of a town was to acquire the county seat.

Using county records, period newspapers and other resources, Rusch shows how the “courthouse fights” between rival communities turned into outright battles, including bidding wars and midnight forays to steal county records and even buildings. In an opening essay, Jason Haug outlines the development of these county capitols and their architectural styles over time.

“Arthur Rusch has written a significant book on the building of South Dakota’s 64 current courthouses and their predecessors,” says Nancy Tystad Koupal, director of the SDSHS Press. “In ‘County Capitols,’ he details how the development of these important buildings was a matter of three key factors: functionality, style and survival.”

Rusch, of Vermillion, received his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of South Dakota and served as a judge in South Dakota’s First Judicial Circuit for 17 years. An avid local historian, he has given numerous presentations and won awards for his work.

More information about Rusch’s participation in the South Dakota Festival of Books can be found by contacting the event’s sponsor, the South Dakota Humanities Council, at (605) 688-6113, or by visiting www.sdbookfestival.com.

Haug worked for the State Historical Society's Historic Preservation Office at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre for eight years, serving as director from 2007-2012. He currently lives in Willmar, Minn.

"County Capitols" will be available for \$29.95 plus shipping and tax and may be purchased from most bookstores or ordered directly from the SDSHS Press. Visit www.sdshspress.com, email orders@sdshspress.com or call (605) 773-6009. Pre-orders are currently being accepted.

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The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.