

# This Old Courthouse

The Official Newsletter of the Comal County Courthouse Restoration

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## Historic Tile found on a Courthouse Porch



The Comal County Courthouse originally featured encaustic floor tile on the exterior porches, corridors, and hallways on all three floors of the historic building. These geometric tiles were quite colorful and placed in interesting and artistic patterns. During the design of the restoration, the architect wasn't sure if any of the original porch tile remained intact. It appeared that the numerous renovations over the years had removed all of the porch tiles. During construction, RBR Superintendent, Michael Vita, crawled underneath a porch and caught a glimpse of antique tiles. He then directed his workers to saw-cut out a 6 inch layer of concrete to reveal the tile as shown in the image above. This was a great find!



Close-up of the 1898 original porch tile.



Superintendent Michael Vita finding tile under the porch.

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# Third Floor Existing Tile Preservation



Luckily, the third floor of the Courthouse retained the original floor tile. The architect was able to map the arrangement and coloration for the new tile to be installed on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors.



During the restoration process of the building, the tile on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor was removed to protect it.



Here the tile setters are packing the removed tile with foam in separate boxes.



The boxes include mapping to show where the tile was removed so that it can be returned to its proper location at the end of the restoration process.

## About this publication...

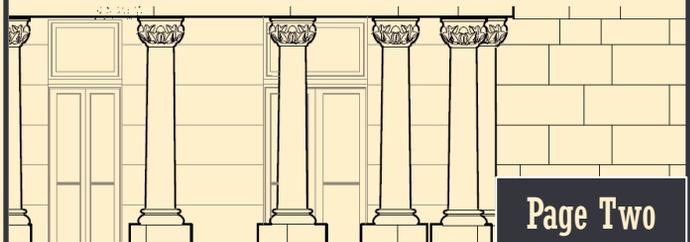
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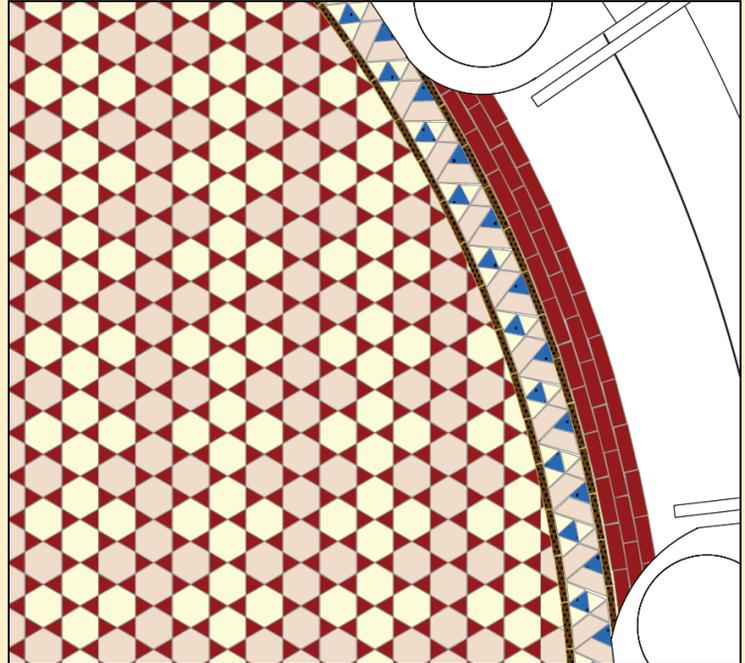


# How did the Porch tile design change?

When Tracy Hirshman of Volz & Associates, the project's architectural firm, was told of the tile discovery, she immediately hopped in her car and traveled to Comal County. At the site, she carefully mapped the entire layout of the original tile configuration. She noted that precise location and arrangement of each tile piece and developed a new plan for the contractor. The newly discovered layout revealed a significantly more complex and intricate tile design than was previously believed. The original courthouse builders included a colorful border treatment featuring white and bright blue components. The image below on the left shows the original replacement plan while the image on the right depicts Tracy's new design that replicates the original installation.



Originally proposed tile layout



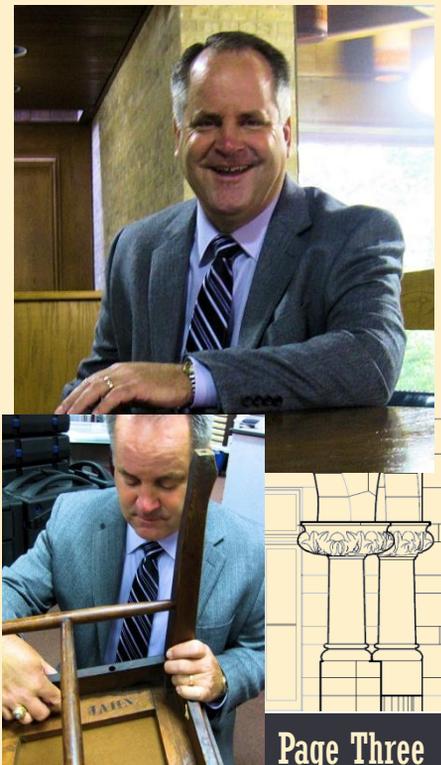
New tile layout replicating the original design

## Commissioner's Court Corner

Commissioner Scott Haag, Precinct No. 2

Scott Haag, Comal County Commissioner for Precinct 2 is very pleased to see the progress being made for the Comal County Courthouse Restoration. "It is a great thing for Comal County and the City of New Braunfels to bring back the historic content of our courthouse which we still work out of." Commissioner Haag has been involved in the restoration by encouraging Jan Kennady, who, according to the Commissioner, was one of the major "leaders of the project." He was also the inspiration behind the idea of setting up time lapse photography cameras to document the progress being made on the Courthouse Restoration. These two cameras are set up on top of the Commissioner's Court Building and are capturing each important milestone in the restoration effort. Haag hopes to create a 5 to 10 minute presentation using these photos once the restoration has been completed. More recently, the Commissioner has found an interest in the historic items that are being excavated from the courthouse basement, such as old bottles as well as original courthouse furniture.

A German furniture maker by the name of Jahn created many of the pieces that originally furnished the courthouse. "He stamped his name on the bottom of his furniture," said Haag. By knowing what name to look for, Haag and other County members involved with this project have been able to find many of Jahn's original pieces, including an original desk that was in a "auction pile" in the courthouse basement. Work is being made to gather all original Jahn pieces and restore them so that they can be "saved and put back in the courthouse and used once again."



## Meet the Project Architect

Tere O'Connell, Project Architect for the restoration of the Comal County Courthouse, has been in the architecture industry since the mid 1980s. In 1986 she graduated from the University of Texas at Austin and worked with the Texas Historical Commission until she joined Volz & Associates where she was made partner in 2005.

Tere has been working on the Courthouse Restoration since 2004. "We began the master planning process...which is a prerequisite for state grant funding." During the following years, construction documents were developed, however, the County did not qualify for the grant until two years later. "We started it back up again in late 2009 to successfully qualify for the grant in 2010," said O'Connell.

Working with Comal County will be Volz & Associates' 11th courthouse restoration project. Tere says it will be the "most comprehensive restoration". "It is definitely interesting, compelling, and exciting to be involved with such an important project."

Her duties as Project Architect include the design of the restoration, coordinating the five engineers on the design team, reviewing the work being done to the courthouse and the progress that is being made, and consulting with the Texas Historical Commission.

"Everything interests me about this project!," said O'Connell. She described the reconstruction of the original District Courtroom as "a wonderful challenge." Tere, along with other team members assigned to this project are working to find details of original design elements that, over the years, have been lost. Details such as original tile, paint color, courtroom furnishings, as well as the restoration of original windows, will all be recreated to completely restore the courthouse. She hopes that the people of Comal County will really enjoy the building once it is complete.



## A Glimpse Back In Time



This photograph shows Alfred R. Rothe, Comal County Tax Assessor, in 1926, sitting in one of the courthouse porches that had been remodeled into a Tax Assessor's Office. This was an important photograph for the design team because it provided the only evidence of the porch tile design, as seen in the inset. Fortunately, during construction, the actual tile was found, and the porches can now be restored to their original design and beauty.

