

# This Old Courthouse

November/December 2011

The Official Newsletter of the Comal County Courthouse Restoration

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## There's a lot of activity in the Attic



As part of the restoration process, the entire Courthouse is being upgraded with modern electrical, plumbing, heating/ventilating, communications, and fire suppression systems. The architect designed the restoration in such a way that all of the mechanical systems are located in either the attic or the basement. Here you see the ductwork and air handlers that are being placed in the attic. The attic was designed over 100 years ago, and the original builders could have never imagined the systems that are being fitted into the tight spaces. The contractor's skilled workers have been very creative in fabricating special ducts to fit into the confined attic space.



Amidst the ductwork, the fire suppression contractor is required to carefully route the fire sprinkler piping to provide coverage and not conflict with other systems.



RBR's Superintendent Michael Vita leads a meeting in the attic with various subcontractors.

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# Mock-ups of Work Components

Mock-ups are an important part of the restoration process. The architect requires the contractor to develop numerous mock-ups of different work processes. The contractor constructs a representative portion of the work for the review of the architect and the Texas Historic Commission. The mock-up allows the contractor to demonstrate and prove his ability to provide the quality of construction and appropriate workmanship required by the specifications. The architect and THC review and approve the mock-up, which then allows the contractor to proceed with the full-scale work. The Courthouse restoration project requires many specialized skills, such as stone masonry, plastering, wood finishing, hardware replication, window replication, and furniture replication. This review process ensures that suitable techniques have been used and that the end-product delivers the proper finish, correct colors, and the required durability needed for the long life of the Courthouse.



Here you see a stone mason preparing a stand-alone mock-up of a masonry wall featuring all of the various stone components necessary for the Comal County Courthouse Restoration. This mock-up features a CMU support structure, waterproofing, and a stone veneer complete with proper finishes and pointing.



Many of the spaces within the Courthouse feature wood floors. The area in the upper right is an existing wood floor treated with oil. The area on the left shows a section of replacement wood flooring.



The original Courthouse sported some bright colors. This is a paint mock-up showing the typical wall colors within the offices. You see a white wood chair rail and picture rail trim with different colors in between. The architect and the THC are currently reviewing these colors to make sure that the final paint selection for the Courthouse is appropriate.

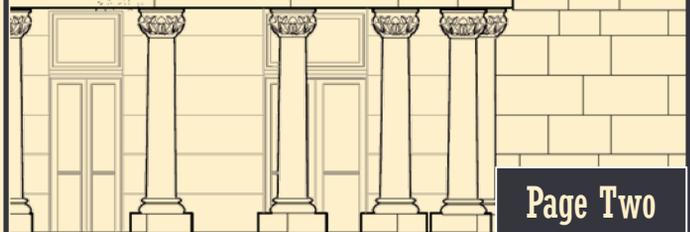
## About this publication...

Comal County publishes this newsletter monthly\* to provide information on the current status of the Comal County Courthouse restoration effort. Project funded in part by:

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\*normally



# Historic Furniture has been found all over the County

Part of the restoration process includes furnishing the Courtroom and other public spaces with pieces of authentic historic furniture or replicas. As the plans were developed for the restoration, very few pieces of original furniture were known to exist.

A few months ago, the County began visiting all of the various County offices in search of the original Courthouse furniture. Amazingly, the County was able to recover nearly 60 pieces. These items will be re-used in the public spaces and offices within the restored Courthouse. Some will be restored, and others will be used as they were found.



The three gentlemen shown in the B/W image below are sitting at this very same lawyer's table.

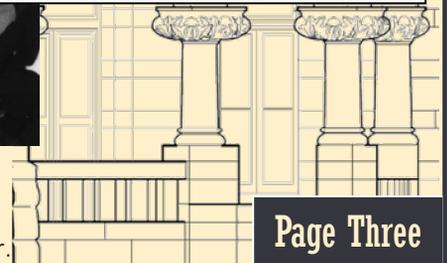


This is a remaining segment of the original bar from the District Courtroom.

## New Wallpaper for the Courtroom



In one of the very few photographs of the historic Comal County Courtroom, you can see that the room featured a wide wallpaper band encircling the room. Using this image, the architects were able to design and create a replica pattern, shown on the right. The contractor will give this design to a craftsman to make the replica wallpaper.



## Meet Volz's Senior Architectural Designer

Comal County is fortunate to have Tracy Hirschman working on our project. Tracy is a Senior Architectural Designer/Project Assistant with Volz & Assoc. and is involved in many facets of the Courthouse restoration. She is a native Texan and studied architectural design at the University of Texas. She has been employed with Volz since 1999. Tracy is involved in historic analyses such as the paint study to determine the original colors. Tracy said, "I truly enjoy performing historic paint analysis. I have the experience to turn up casein paint when investigating historic finishes. Casein is easily washed off, so it's often lost to the finish history. I am pleased that we found those lovely colors that were original to the Courthouse's opening day in 1898."

When asked about the significance of the Comal County Courthouse, Tracy said, "The craftsmanship is really noteworthy. It was great to discover much of the original historic material was re-used as the building changed. Finding as much as we have is truly a credit to the County, not just monetarily for this restoration, but it also reflects their deep-rooted appreciation for quality. It's really satisfying to work with a building that demonstrates what value means. We're seeing that over and over again in the history of this building."

Tracy continued, "In 1898 they were enthusiastic about the use of lively colors. It was during a very short period of time that wallpaper friezes of the size within the District Courtroom were produced. At the time, these colors had just recently arrived on the American scene. The Comal County Courthouse's 1898 period finishes allow us a glimpse of the building fashion during that very tiny window of time. It just screams that Comal County was a truly well-informed and trendy community."



The image above shows Tracy holding an original gate to the District Courtroom bar.

## A Glimpse Back In Time



During the excavation work in the basement, workers found this chisel. Holding the chisel to historic stone pieces in the original Courthouse shows that the teeth in the tool match exactly to the spacing of the chisel marks in the stone. One day, back in 1898, a stone mason dropped this chisel. It landed in the soil of the basement and has remained there until now. Tracy said, "This masonry chisel is a huge find; folks back then did NOT lose their tools. This tool is very, very special."

