

This Old Courthouse

The Official Newsletter of the Comal County Courthouse Restoration

October 2011

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The Courthouse is getting a new basement



As part of the restoration process, the Courthouse will get much more space in the basement. The Courthouse originally featured a very small basement area, with the majority of the space under the first floor being a 2-foot high dirt floor crawlspace. The image above shows how the original foundation was constructed. In 1898, the workers excavated the area for the foundation. Next, they poured unreinforced footings made of cement and large aggregate. On top of that, they built pyramid-shaped masonry footings. Finally, they built the masonry columns that provide the primary structural support for the entire building. The area was then backfilled with dirt to a point where the pyramid-shaped footings were buried, leaving only a small crawlspace. A few areas had been excavated over the years to make space for storage. Objects had been tossed into the crawlspace over the years, such as bottles, Ford Model-T tires, and floor tiles.



Workers excavating in a corridor



Here they dig underneath the 1898 foundation for the new underpinning.

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Extending the foundation underneath the original 1898 Courthouse

Conveyor for Dirt Removal

Threshold for a 1st Floor Doorway

New Basement Doorway Cutout

Top of Original Dirt Floor Crawlspace

1898 Masonry Foundation Beam

1898 Pyramidal Foundation Footing

1898 Unreinforced Concrete Footing

Bottom of 1898 Foundation

New Concrete Underpinning

Proposed Finished Basement Floor Elevation



About this publication...

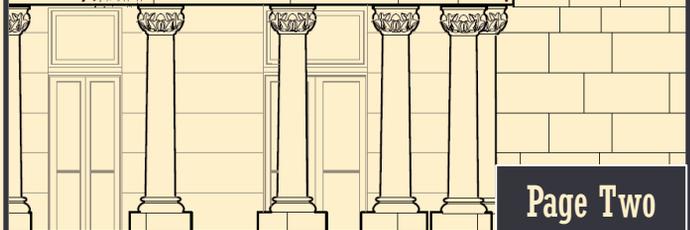
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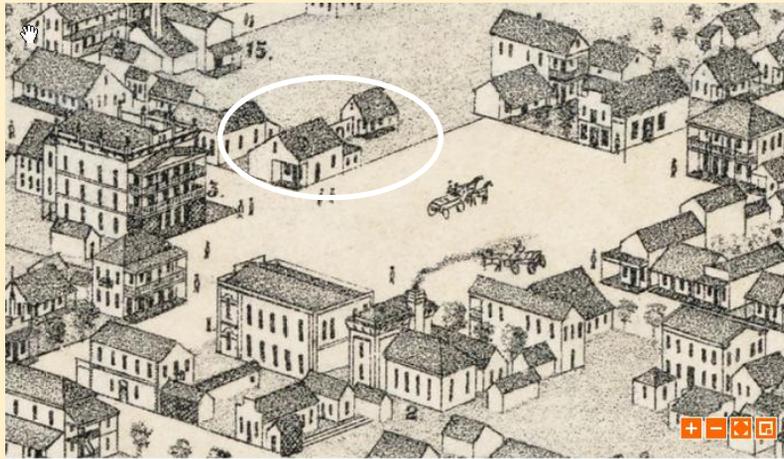
This exhibit shows the effort that goes into creating a new basement underneath the Courthouse. The contractor first has to remove an enormous amount of dirt to expose the existing foundation. Next, they excavate under the 1898 foundation and pour concrete to extend the foundation, approximately 3 feet deeper. Finally, a concrete basement floor will be poured.



An Unknown Water Well is Found

During the excavation for the removal of the Jail foundation, the contractor exposed the existence of a previously unknown water well. The worker immediately stopped work so that the project architect and representatives from the Texas Historic Commission could evaluate the significance of the feature. The THC sent an expert, Mark H. Denton of the Archeology Division, to evaluate the situation and give direction. Mark said, "The well appears to be primarily constructed of small, rough-cut limestone, and the upper structure of the well appears to be mortared. Lower components of most wells are, however, often not mortared so that the water from below-surface aquifers can seep into the structure." He said the well, which pre-dates the courthouse, had been dry for a long time, and needed to be filled in to prevent a cave-in and to preserve its structural integrity.

The 1881 Koch bird's-eye map of New Braunfels shows a building on the spot where the Courthouse was ultimately built, but no well.



Well as originally discovered by the excavator



Well being backfilled with flowable fill

Commissioners Court Corner

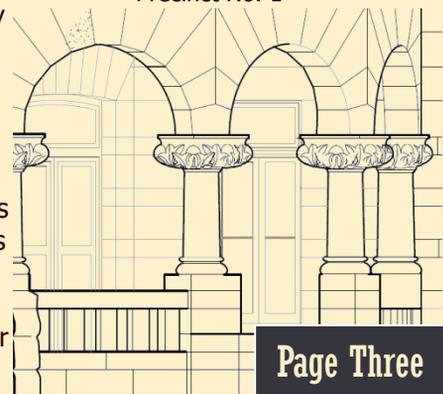


Commissioner Eccleston observes the restoration effort from the ongoing basement excavation area.

Donna Eccleston, Comal County Commissioner for Precinct 1, recently inspected the restoration work at the Courthouse. She climbed down into the basement and got a firsthand look at the excavation and foundation effort that is currently under way. She said, "This is truly exciting work. As the contractor digs, new items and design features are uncovered every day. History is being revealed right here before our eyes." She pointed out that the original craftsmen in 1898 were very precise and accurate in their work to lay the masonry used for the original foundation footings. The Commissioner went on to comment that she is happy that the project is currently on schedule and within budget. "I am truly looking forward to the day when the members of the Commissioners Court and others can move back into this fine historic building. The residents of Comal County will once again be able to meet and conduct County business in our great original Courthouse."



Commissioner Donna Eccleston
Precinct No. 1



Meet the Project Superintendent

Comal County is fortunate to have two full-time RBR project supervisors on the job right now. Rob Dooley began the project supervising the demolition work. RBR Superintendent Michael Vita has joined the team and will be responsible for the completion of the Courthouse restoration project. Michael is a native Texan. He has been employed with RBR for 15 years and has completed numerous construction projects, including the restoration of the historic Santa Fe Railroad Depot in Brownwood, Texas. Michael said, "The project is going well. I really enjoy working on historic structures. You find something new every day. This project is running smoothly. There has been a lot of demolition, a lot of dirt and dust. I am looking forward to completing the basement, resetting the various floors and beginning the interior restoration." Michael went on to say, "We are beginning the rebuilding and restoring now, and that is what I like best."



The image on the left shows Michael leading a scheduling meeting with several other RBR staff members. The schedule on this project is quite complex. Michael said, "There are a bunch of different trades and many special tasks that need to be done in the correct order. I have to be able to forecast out the timing of all of this work. The schedule we developed is big and complicated, but we needed it to keep the project running smoothly." One of Michael's primary tasks is to keep the masons, electricians, plumbers, HVAC installers, and others all working smoothly in the right place and at the right time.



A Glimpse Back In Time



There's the fountain...



Here is an image of two young lads sporting their white shirts and "Boater" hats on the Main Plaza. In the background is the Courthouse, in its original configuration, with hitching posts all around. The Courthouse still has its original slate roof. The slate was replaced with metal some years later. The Main Plaza Bandstand is in its place; therefore the picture must to have been taken sometime after 1905. We know this because the Bandstand was built by the City of New Braunfels with donations from the citizens, and was completed in July of 1905 for a total cost of \$560. One hundred years later, in 2005, the City of New Braunfels completely restored the Bandstand to honor its centennial.