

This Old Courthouse

September 2011

The Official Newsletter of the Comal County Courthouse Restoration

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Courthouse Annex gets a power switch-over



After all of the County employees went home for the weekend on Friday evening, September 9th, RBR Construction and their electrical subcontractor, Masters Electrical Services, got to work. Their job was to completely re-do the electrical service for the Comal County Annex Building and the Courthouse. The work involved cutting the power completely, installing NBU electrical underground service, connecting to a new transformer, and switching over the electrical service to a new control panel. Months of coordination came together that evening. The power was cut, NBU pulled a new underground service, and Masters began the tedious process of reconnecting 40 or so heavy-duty electrical conductors inside of a new concrete electrical manhole. The process went seamlessly and Masters completed their work long after the sun went down at 1:30 that Saturday morning. With the power restored, the Annex was back in business.



Master Electrical experts moving conduits.



NBU workman skillfully installing the new underground electrical service.

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The Night the Jail Came Down...



When all of the County employees had gone home on September 12th, RBR's demolition contractor, Robles Service Group, began the work to remove the remaining portion of the Jail structure. All of the electrical connections that served the Annex were housed in the basement of the Jail. The final demolition of the Jail was delayed until the electrical switch-over had been accomplished. RBR Construction wasted no time after the electrical switch-over. The Jail came down the following Monday night, only two days later. With all of the additions removed, the Courthouse is finally back to its original configuration. The restoration of the interior and exterior of the Courthouse continues...



The first step is to remove the brick and clay block infill areas.



With the infill areas cleared, the next step is to clip the columns and drop the floor.



Robles brought in the right men and equipment for the job.



After the building was down, the workers separated all of the steel for recycling and hauled off the broken masonry and concrete.

About this publication...

Comal County publishes this newsletter monthly to provide information on the current restoration effort of the Comal County Courthouse.

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Ever been to the Lee County Courthouse in Giddings, Texas?

Lee County's Courthouse in Giddings, Texas looks much like the Comal County Courthouse. The general design and floor plan of the two buildings are almost identical. This is because both buildings were designed by the same architect, J. Riely Gordon. The Lee County Courthouse was completed in 1897, one year before the Comal County Courthouse was completed. Lee's Courthouse features a brick exterior, while the Comal Courthouse is cut limestone. Both buildings feature a two-story District courtroom with an arched opening over the judge's bench and a sweeping balcony. The images below show the Lee County Courthouse. Note the arched structure in the image on the right. Comal County's Courthouse will have this arched structure in the District courtroom replaced as part of the restoration effort.



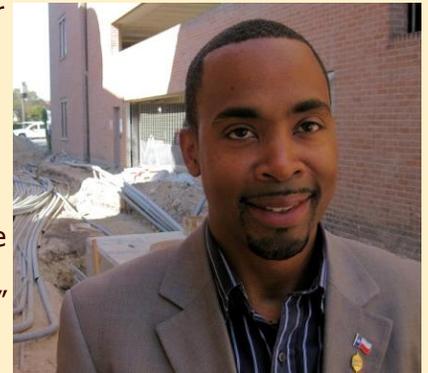
Lee County Courthouse in Giddings, Texas



In the Lee County District Courtroom, the balcony is currently covered due to some additional restoration work within the courtroom.

Commissioners Court Corner

Greg Parker, Comal County Commissioner for Precinct 3, is very pleased to see the smooth progress of the Comal County Courthouse Restoration. "This is a complex project, and I'm glad to see that the work is progressing smoothly," said Commissioner Parker. "The effort to complete the electrical switch-over for the Annex has been carried out well. We needed to minimize the disruption of our County work and avoid any inconvenience to the public. By scheduling the work to be completed after-hours and during the weekend, we were able to keep the County services operating with no down time, and the public was able to access County services without disruption. I'm impressed." The Commissioner went on to point out the significance of the restoration effort. He specifically likes the idea that the Courthouse is being restored to its original configuration and the fact that it will serve as a fully functioning office building for the Commissioners Court, public meetings, and voting.



Commissioner Greg Parker
Precinct No. 3



Meet the Texas Historical Commission Project Reviewer

Mark Cowan, Texas Historical Commission Project Reviewer, is the THC staff person assigned to the Comal County Courthouse Restoration Project. Mark was born and raised in Texas and received both his undergraduate and master's degrees from Texas A&M. Mark has worked for the THC for 10 years and been involved in the restoration of numerous Texas county courthouses, including Goliad, Dallas, Harris, Lee, Lavaca, DeWitt, and others. He says that the Comal County Courthouse Restoration is currently his favorite project.

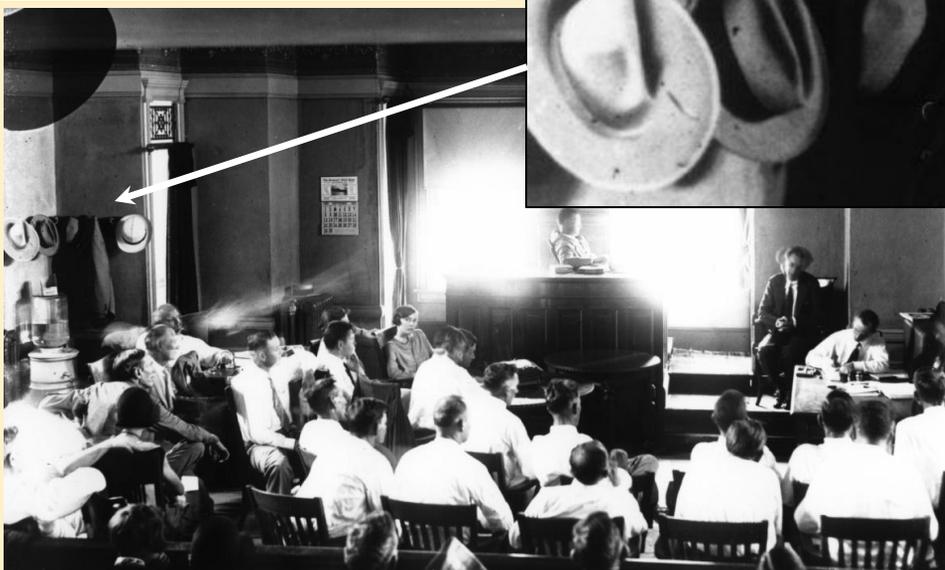
"The J. Riely Gordon courthouses are always special. Gordon selected fine materials for this project. For example, the use of native limestone on the exterior and colorful tile flooring on the porches and interior corridors shows that both Gordon and the County were interested in making a statement," said Mark. "Comal County wanted everyone to know that Comal County was a prosperous and thriving community. When people visited the courthouse in 1898, they experienced a beautiful building made of fine materials and quality craftsmanship."



Mark's job is to ensure the County properly preserves the existing historic components of the courthouse and adequately replicates missing or modified portions of the original building. For example, the County carefully "excavated" the existing wall and trim paints within the existing building to determine the original color scheme. Mark reviewed those paint determinations and approved the modern coatings that will replicate the original 1898 look. Mark said, "This is one of the great Texas county courthouses, and I look forward to its complete restoration."



A Glimpse Back In Time



The image above was taken during a criminal trial in 1926 at the Comal County Courthouse in the second floor District courtroom. The gentlemen in white shirts are the jurors, and Judge John Roberts is listening to testimony from a witness. The photo shows a number of hats on a hat rack mounted to the wall. The inset shows a detail of the hooks on the hat rack. Recently, while working in a portion of the basement, one of these original hooks was found lying in the dirt of the basement crawl space. Although this object is a bit corroded, the piece will serve to help replicate the castings for a new hat racks for the restored District courtroom.

