

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Project: **FBC Courthouse Renovation 2014**

Interview Date: 07/04/2014

Interviewers: Charles Kelly and Bruce Kelly

Transcriber: Bob Gaffney

Comments The history of the Fort Bend County Courthouse,  
401 Jackson Street, Richmond, Texas, and the  
renovation completed in January 2014

24 Pages



This oral history is copyrighted 2018, by the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. All Rights Reserved. For information contact: Fort Bend County Historical Commission, Attn: Chairman-Oral History Committee, 301 Jackson St., Richmond, TX, 77469.

### Terms and Conditions

These oral histories do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the County Historical Commission or Fort Bend County. This file may not be modified or changed in any way without the express written permission of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission.

This file may not be redistributed for profit.

Please do not 'hot link' to this file.

Please do not repost this file.



*Transcript*

Don Brady, Director, Fort Bend County Facilities Management & Planning from 2005-2014, oversaw the 2013 reconstruction of the Historic Courthouse at 401 Jackson Street in Richmond. He provides a tour of the way construction and repairs were made in the early years as compared to today's standards. The roof was replaced; repairs to the clock and dome were made; upgrade to the HVAC system, as well as repair to the Statute of Lady Liberty. Don provides photos and definitions of tools, equipment & construction.



*County Judge Robert Hebert presents the Texas Historical Commission Distinguished Service Award for accomplishments by the FBC Historical Commission in 2015 at FBC Commissioners Court. Charles Kelly, center, chairs the FBC Historical Committee. Don Brady, right, and Kelly are both volunteers serving on the committee. Photo courtesy of The Katy News*

KELLY: This was an audio recording taken of Mr. Brady as he led the interviewer on a room by room tour of the newly renovated Old Richmond Courthouse. Mr. Brady managed (supervised) the reconstruction. Judge Hebert continues the renovation discussion later in the interview.

BRADY: We are standing in what was the 3087th District Court. This court is now located in the Fort Bend County Justice Center on Eugene Heimann Circle. We saved this bench so at some point if we go through a complete restoration of this building, as opposed to the renovation we just conducted, we can reinstall it. The jury room and the Judge's Chambers were formerly located through that door (indicating).



*The original bench that was installed in the historic 240th District Courtroom and moved to the Fort Bend County Courthouse when a new bench was bought for the 240th.*

#### **At the Mechanical Room:**

These are the latest, state-of-the-art air conditioning units. There are very few of these installed today, even in Houston. They are highly efficient as they recirculate fluid, like a heat pump, but without using Freon in compressor units.

#### **On the Roof of the 1935 Addition:**

BRADY: We are standing on a brand new roofing system, which is also state-of-the-art. It is made up of a very tough, multi-layer foam material covered with epoxy and a non-slip surface. We tore off three roofing systems to get to this point.

The original roof was made of felt soaked with coal tar. It had failed and at some point in the past people installed a tin roof over the top of it. When even that roofing system failed, they installed wooden trusses and then put another roof over the top of it so there was a three-layered roof system installed over this area. The roof leak problem in this area was found at the point where the roof deck had sunk and cracked. We had to build supports underneath to support the roof deck. When we tore off the old roofs, we found that instead of fixing the problem, they just put another layer of roof over the area that had failed.

We now have a state-of-the-art roofing system that we've supported from the deck from below, having removed the old, failed roofing systems.

The equipment here on the roof catwalks feeds the mechanical systems, the fan coil units, below. We also installed a generator large enough to power this whole building in the event of a power failure. We could operate the courthouse as it is today without access to the electricity grid. We also took care to install these mechanical systems at roof elevations that would not alter the appearance of the courthouse from ground level.

### On the Roof of the 1909 Original Courthouse:

Clock: The bell's gantry support has been sandblasted and repainted. We took the foam system off that vertical armature that you see is now sleeved so that we have protected it from the weather. The armature goes inside the dome to the clock mechanism. On the hour and half-hour the armature swings the hammer to strike the bell.



*FBC Courthouse clock bell is mounted on the roof of the historic building and rings on the hour and half-hour.*

The roofing system above the atrium is brand new slate, specified to match the color and texture of the original tiles. Below that are several layers of protective sheeting. We are comfortable that there should be no difficulty with this roof leaking for another thirty to fifty years. We've also sealed the copper roof with solder. We found several bullet holes in the dome. When we got up into the dome we could see daylight, and that pointed us in the right direction to make the repairs.

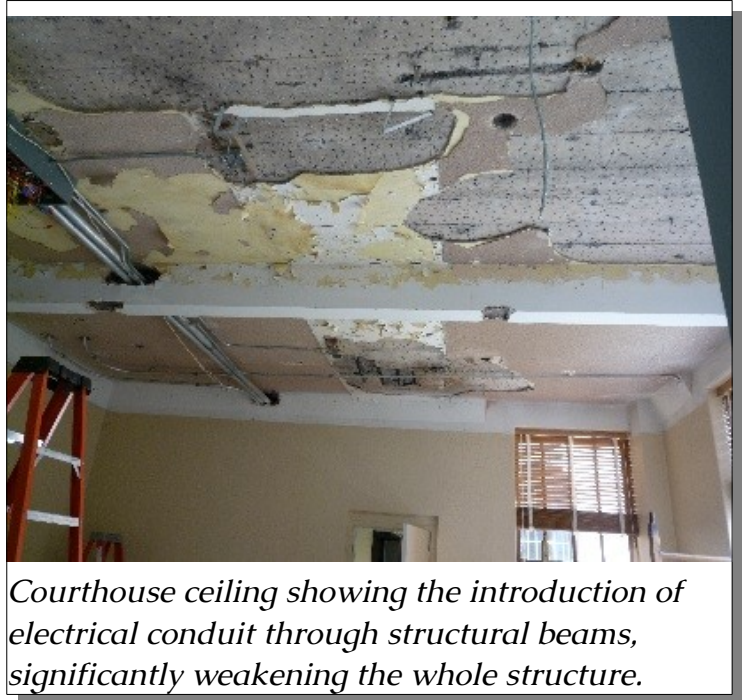
The clock faces are wood and have been resurfaced. The wood numerals on the clock face have been re-cut and repainted and the hands have been replaced. They were rotted and failing. The clock mechanism was sent to Southwestern Clock and Museum near Austin to be restored. It cost much more to repair it than it initially cost to buy: about \$16,000 to repair the clock mechanism.

Dome: The copper flashing around the base of the dome has been replaced. We've installed vents at the top of the apses on the sloped portion. Formerly they weren't installed so we've now relieved a lot of the heat that used to build up in the dome itself.

CREW: Tell us about the original ventilation and heating system

BRADY: Originally it was 'open a window' or 'put wood in a fireplace' as a fireplace originally heated the building. Over the years the system changed to a fuel oil, and then to a gas fired boiler with radiators.

When window A/C units were replaced by central air conditioning, a lot of the damage to the building resulted from the installation of air ducts. They ran conduit or duct work through a structural beam instead of going around the beam. That weakened the whole structure. We feel very fortunate to have conducted this rehab when we did. The building was in pretty bad shape. It wouldn't have been long before it would have been seriously damaged and much more expensive to repair.



*Courthouse ceiling showing the introduction of electrical conduit through structural beams, significantly weakening the whole structure.*

CREW: Is it true that the dome served as a flue?

BRADY: Yes. Some of the windows could be opened to allow a draft up from the first floor atrium through the second and third floors. At the top of the third story there is a series of skylight windows which we have restored. They could be opened to allow a draft through the dome.

The dome was essentially a big chimney. People in the offices below would open a window to create the draft up through the dome. The copper cladding over the dome is oxidized and has a patina that's very protective of the original copper sheeting that has been in place for the past hundred and five years. It's in very good shape.

**Statue of Lady Liberty:** About three years ago we repaired the statue of Lady Liberty and put new chains on her scale balance. We expect that she's going to last quite awhile. She is also acting as a lightning rod. You can see the wires running around the top of the parapet wall were added to protect the building. It had no lightning protection before.

Since she is the high point, we've attached some of the wires to the frame that supports her. So she'll be saved as well.



*Statue of Lady Liberty above the historic Fort Bend County courthouse dome and showing the clock.*

These steel channels that you see along the top of the parapet didn't formerly exist. It was just a brick wall and it was leaning so we installed those angles to support the wall. You can see some of the platform supports coming off of it. That seriously reinforces the parapet wall that had failed.

We also installed a copper cap to protect the masonry below. We coated the chimney that was formerly an active chimney. We now use the chimney as a chase for the utilities that run from one floor to the next.

The 1935 addition to the original Courthouse footprint was salvaged, but the 1952 additions were demolished.

Prior to the renovation, there was much damage to the inside of the original building that caused constant maintenance headaches, but we didn't know why. There were walls that turned moldy, decay and spall. The plaster was failing.

What we found when we got up here was that the original roof was coated with coal tar. In the heat, coal tar softens and flows. So, in time it flowed to the roof drains and plugged them off. The copper downspouts that you see were not just decorative, but they weren't functional because they were all plugged up with debris and coal tar.



*Rubble from the courthouse renovation. Much of the 1952 renovated coal tar roof softened in the heat and plugged drains on the roof. When rain water over-topped the flashing it drained into the building behind the parapet walls.*

When the rainwater couldn't drain off the roof and reached a certain depth it would over-top the flashing and drain into the building from behind the parapet walls. So we cleaned all of that out and installed overflow scuppers so that if the roof drains were ever to become plugged again, the flow would be to the outside of the building not inside. We've also installed the roofing foam system up the sides of the parapet walls so that we could get up to that level before there would be any contact with the masonry.

CREW: Pinch drain?

BRADY: Yes, as opposed to the three inches of drain width that was up there originally, we enlarged the roof drains. We get much more rapid runoff from the roof of the building than we had before and the drains don't so easily plug. You can see all the copper work. It was quite intricate.

We've just added copper sheeting to the top of the parapet wall though it isn't original it will serve to protect the building for a long time. Again, you can see more of the extensive lightning protection, insurance against the structure suffering the same fate of many old buildings.

**Inside the Dome:** Do you see the iron framework that establishes the dome's profile? Long leaf pine boards, over which the dome's exterior copper sheets are installed, cover that frame.

We rebuilt the ladder to the clock mechanism's platform. There used to be spacing in between ladder rungs of about two feet, which was very hazardous to climb. So we rebuilt the ladder and put a cage around it.

This is all original brickwork on the lower section of the dome. The riveted iron struts and supports above the brick portion are covered with long leaf pine staves and the copper sheeting is hammered and attached over that.



*Interior of the FBC courthouse dome showing the profile framework.*

This was the draft column that provided the ventilation. You can see the outline of a window below. We're not sure whether that was just a mistake or they changed their minds and bricked it up, because it happened in the past and we have no record of it. This is the original box that the clock mechanism came in. It's still here.

**Skylights:** We've installed protective sheets over the top of the skylights, which as I've mentioned before, we've restored. You can see the old style square bolts in the frames. This was all original. We now have functional panes. We replaced some of the glass, which was cracked, but otherwise this is essentially as it was to begin with.

We suspended these lights so that during the night we can still have illumination through the skylights. This is the access window you saw when we were out on the roof (pointing).

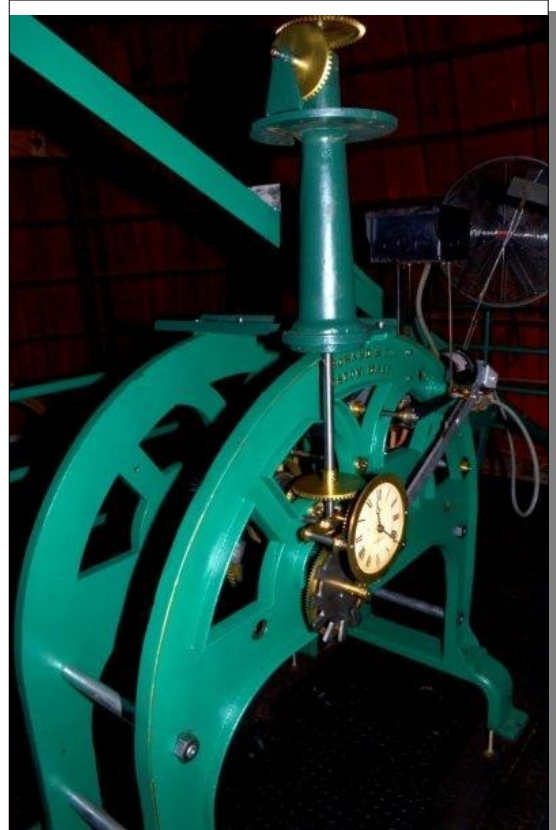
We're thinking of a way of providing access to the clock mechanism for the public and without modifying the way it was originally installed.

Originally, the clock was driven by weights, like a Grandfather Clock, and you can see some of the original hardware mounted on the opposing wall. It has some historical significance. We might mount a camera on the platform and display it in first floor of the rotunda so people can see the working mechanism. It is really quite a jewel to see. We have some pictures of what it looked like to begin with.

CREW: What would be cool is to have a camera on it all and have some way that it appears on the county website.

BRADY: Perhaps, if we could get it on the County's network, we could do that.

Rafters: You can see we're walking on a deck that formerly was just the rafters and insulation. All of this is new. The attic was very inaccessible. We had to walk from joist to joist to get around. You can see some of the supports for the brick above.



*Courthouse clock mechanism inside the dome.*

BRADY: A lot of the riveted beams are bolted together with old square bolts.

CREW: Are there any construction photos of the original project?

BRADY: About a thousand. We've seen some with guys perched in the windows and standing on the dome before it was completed. Everything up there is original construction but for those few boards that we replaced.

CREW: Would they go down to Wessendorff Lumber to buy wood?

BRADY: They may have. There would be no reason to haul it in from anywhere else. We haven't seen any markings. We did a real thorough job of looking at the beams so when we were finished we knew we had a sound structure.

**Electrical system:** There was no electrical up here to speak of at all. You can see all this new conduit. These are brand new ladder access entrances from the third floor. There was one rickety access not far from where this one is but we reframed it and installed new access points.

Years ago, to add lights on the third floor, they went up to the roof of that section, drilled a hole through the roof, and ran a conduit through the roof to the ceiling below. There were dozens of penetrations that didn't belong there, one for each light. It was just the easiest thing for them to do. The idea of making a roof penetration to install a light below is emblematic of what resulted in the condition this building was in.

In 1980 there was a previous restoration, which wasn't really a restoration. It was for convenience. It addressed cosmetics and usability, but it didn't address any of the structural issues or attempt to recreate the original aesthetic. This time we got underneath, including removing layers of paint to get to the original wall colors. We took ceilings down; we took walls out and got down to what the original building looked like, its shell. Then we built it back with updated infrastructure and a contemporary floor plan. Now we have a building that reflects the purpose for which it was originally planned, instead of being hole-punched for convenience.

**Basement:** That's one of the vaults. This is some of the residual paint. This had failed and we have photos of where it had spalled and crumbled. We've redone the windows and resealed them.

CREW: What's the date... Is this the 1909?

BRADY: This is 1909.

CREW: It looks like it has an exterior footing that holds the...

BRADY: It does. It's wider. The spread footing is much wider than the actual brick wall, which is wide by itself. So, yes, it goes as a pyramid. It hasn't moved in a hundred and five years. It's had less than an inch of settlement or deflection that we could find around the entire perimeter of the building.

CREW: Is the soil in Richmond pretty stable?

BRADY: No. But this was a good spot because it's built on pretty substantial sandy silt loam. It's not the expansive clay that you find elsewhere. This was an ideal spot to put it.

CREW: All the floors are reinforced concrete?

BRADY: Lightweight concrete. What you will find is about a one-inch square rebar.

Current Rebar is round with a pattern on it. These originally were the same material. They're steel but they're rolled steel. Then they would take a fly ash aggregate additive that they would throw into the concrete to make it lightweight.

These were some of the beams that I was talking about. Instead of bending around the beam, they just went right through so it had significantly weakened its intended support purpose.



*Basement ceiling showing conduit punched through structural beams and barred windows with bars.*

**Second Basement:** This is where public records were stored. The bars on the windows were to protect the records.

CREW: It's weathered pretty well, hasn't it?

BRADY: It has.

### **Exterior of the Building:**

CREW: That double dental work is rather impressive.

BRADY: It cost \$75,000 to initially build this building, of course that was 1908 dollars.

We think the prisoners were brought through here. There used to be a stairway that went up to the first floor. At the bottom of the elevator shaft you can see where the risers were coming up from down here. So this was originally a secured area and they used the vault doors as a means of securing it. They will restore these but we didn't have the funds to do it this time. They're pretty historical by themselves. Some of the big murals are upstairs.

CREW: Did you have to do anything to the foundation?



*Damaging paint was removed from the carved cornice using a special blasting media that wouldn't attack the stone.*



*It was probably painted earlier because it was hard to prevent water penetration and mold. The stone was then sealed.*

BRADY: It was all superficial. We reformed and matted the concrete ends of the foundation and fill, redid some of the brick.

CREW: So the foundation is solid?

BRADY: Very much so. In the other side I can show you some of the original supports for what had to have been boiler Soldier bricks standing upright and still horizontal.

The roof sections pitched rainwater to copper scuppers that connected to copper down-comers into cast collectors that likely emptied originally into a cistern, remnants of which were found on the west side of the building.

Subsequently, collected rainwater was directed to the street, but now we returned to the original design and collect the rainwater for irrigation purposes in an underground system near the Travis Building.

### **Exterior blond brick:**

The builders weren't too selective in sourcing and installing the exterior brick. You see how the brick is splotchy? The source of the brick, wherever they got it, contained significant variation in the color of kiln castings and moldings. You can see how the lower half is a little darker than the upper half. Whole sections are one color and then it seems to change at a different section. But it's "character."

We salvaged the brick from the demolished 1959 additions to fill in the gaps left after removing the wings, and to restore the water table.

CREW: Is there a Masonic cornerstone on this building?

BRADY: No.

**Basement #2:** These foundations used to support steam boilers, because they had radiators in the past. These were supports for some other heavy equipment. We're not sure what. You can see where that's cut off. All these panels are all new electrical. This building was a real disaster. A big portion of this had failed. This is part of the original floor. We left it just a dirt floor.

CREW: Is there a basement under all the building or just part?

BRADY: Just the parts that we've seen. That portion underneath the dome has been taken up with the elevator. There's nothing on the north side. More beams. You can see the grain. That's the crawlspace. There used to be records stored in there, too. You can see the bars that had been removed.

Behind that bricked up hole, way back in there, is a room which we think was a restroom for the blacks. They had a separate entrance. They would have to come in that door, come down the steps to use this restroom. It was back-filled at some point in the past but we've recorded it and taken photographs of it.

CREW: Was there an entrance in the front or was it on the side?

BRADY: It was on the west side of the building. I'll show you outside the judge's office where we think that was. This is more attic stock. Essentially this lower portion had been spalling and there was a lot of efflorescence, a lot of lime and a lot of leakage from the past. Records used to be stored here. The County Clerk would hand the guy interested in finding a record a key and he was on his own to come down here and rummage through boxes and boxes and boxes to find what he was looking for.



*Basement 2 included a separate bathroom used by blacks beyond where the brick wall was back-filled some time in the past.*

It was dank and damp and records were lost to moisture. That's now all upgraded, as you can tell from being here, we don't have that damp. There's dehumidification that we have installed as well as climate control.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read Fort Bend County Clerk Dianne Wilson's interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytx.gov/home/showdocument?id=36967>

CREW: It's not a hot day. I'm sure it does get hot down here but it's not bad.

BRADY: This is probably a cool place to be in the summertime. All those window wells have been excavated and restored. They had all failed. There was water leaking into the building through them. They're now sealed and repaired.

Under here is a crawlspace that we temporarily sealed up. This was the margin of the original building. This is the 1909 section and the 1935 addition extended that much.

This is the judge's office. There used to be a door here. We think there were stairs leading down into the basement from this point. It was subsequently sealed up. We had thought about opening it up again as an emergency egress for the judge but when we looked at the architectural details and the cost we left it like it is. We took the roof drains and we left them intact and worked around them to tie-in a new water line that serves the building. We think it was original to the 1909 building.

We're going green by collecting runoff from the roof from this building and the Travis Building, which goes to underground tanks. We use the runoff to irrigate the pedestrian plaza.

Front facade of building: You can see where we patched where it's been chipped. We matched it as well as we could. These column bases were in pretty sad shape. We remortared those. That's a metal ceiling, which we restored and then painted. The cornices are glazed terracotta. We cleaned the paint off, repaired it where needed, and then we reglazed it. It is the original color. You can see how close we matched it.

All of these columns were carved from quarry material as are all of the pieces the we see. The detail there was in pretty good shape. We just had to clean it up. We did a lot of mortar repair. Carved stone columns in water.

Those doors were redone. They're original doors but we replaced some of the panels because they were cracked, weathered, you could see daylight through them.

Here are portraits of the judge and the commissioners.

CREW: There's no time capsule or anything like that?

BRADY: Not that we've found.

Windows: The window frames are Long-Leaf Pine wood. It's original. We rebuilt them using the same type of wood. On the enclosure, which we filled up, those are new but they're exact duplicates. Then we changed the rope in the double hung windows and the weights where we need it, but that's all original. Some of the wood has been replaced in the restoration.

CREW: This isn't called brick veneer. What would you call...?

BRADY: It is brick, solid brick. It's not hollow-core brick or veneer. There's no holes formed down through the middle from casting. It's solid brick. When we took out the rotted mortar to tuck-point the brick, we found filed anchors that needed to be replaced, so we replaced them with stainless steel anchors that won't rust and decay. That's an unseen condition where we found a lot of structure on the exterior that had rotted away and needed to be replaced, especially with the windows and the way they're tied into the brick. We also used stainless steel anchors when we replaced the restored windows.

CREW: Has anybody tried to estimate the weight of the building?

BRADY: Not that I'm aware of. It would be eminently doable but tedious. I would think it's substantial. It is solid brick, not the wood framing and brick veneer used today.

CREW: I thought it was iron underneath or steel supporting it.

BRADY: No, just very thick brick walls with an exterior brick tied to the interior courses. Today's buildings are constructed with brick ties to interior framing made of wood or steel.

CREW: What a beautiful structure. I noticed they're redoing the Colorado County Courthouse. I was up in Columbus about a month ago and it looks like they're almost completing it. I think it's the same restorer that did yours. Is it?

BRADY: Yes. That's their stock-in-trade. That's what they do. The company's name is Phoenix Restoration and Construction, Ltd.

CREW: There's what, 268 courthouses in Texas? 250?

BRADY: I think they've done thirty of them, so far. Plus a lot of historical houses and buildings.

CREW: So they know what they're doing.

BRADY: They do. That was apparent the day we did the pre-bid walk-through. When the owner came he had some very specific questions. He made it very clear that he knew what he was doing.

For example, with the mechanical system being down, instead of the building and the plaster being attacked during the summer time, we wanted to get it done in the wintertime where we could provide some support heat and we didn't have all the humidity. You can fix a plaster wall and the building one hundred percent has been replastered, skimmed. That's a vanishing art too, employing guys who really know how to plaster. You see a pattern, a texture on the walls in the District Courtroom, Historical Courtroom.

CREW: Did you have to put the contract out for bid?

BRADY: Yes. With public money you have to request bids and he rose to the top.

When he did the original demolition that exposed some of these unseen conditions, it added another million dollars to the project cost immediately just to address the damage that had been covered up with suspended ceilings or dry walled over. On the one hand it was very disappointing but on the other we feel very fortunate to have gotten to it when we did. It is a very substantial building. It'll be here another hundred years and beyond.

KELLY: Judge Hebert continued the renovation discussion with a tour of the completed interior of the historic building.

HEBERT: We're in the County Attorney's conference room. It is a large, formal conference room for both Roy Cordes (County Attorney) and it is also available to my office if we have a need for it. We haven't had a need for it to date. We haven't had that many large formal conferences from the County Judge's office. You look around here and you will see the furniture is very nice, all wood. The law library furniture was brought over from the Travis Building. We have some pieces that are on loan. Judge Bud Childers donated the large file index on the wall in front of me. Bud's retiring so he may take it back when he leaves office but we have the privilege to use it right now and it fits in here very well.



*County Judge Robert Hebert continues the tour of the renovated Fort Bend County Courthouse.*

In front of us on camera, we have County Attorney Roy Cordes, County Engineer Richard Stolleis, and County Commissioner Precinct #3 Andy Meyers. They're in conference with a couple of Cordes' assistant county attorneys on a matter of importance to the county.

The paint in this building is all its original shades. These walls are yellow with cream. Now let's go over and look at the balcony off this room. This balcony is shortened up significantly. This wall we just passed through was put in as a common wall in 1935. Prior to 1935 this entire area back through the County Attorney's conference room was open as a balcony. In those days of full segregation, blacks observed the goings on from up here unless they were actually involved as a defendant or a plaintiff. In a trial, all parties were allowed down on the first floor. Fortunately those days are behind but we've left this balcony for effect. The architectural appearance of the courtroom remains intact. You have a good view down through the lights to the courtroom here. I've taken my oath of office in this courthouse three times now and I know many people who prefer to stand up here on the balcony and observe the going's on. It just sort of puts them above the fray, if you will.

As we look down you can see the entire area with the bar, bench and the jury area to the right. This is an integral part of this courthouse's history and we're glad we were able to preserve it. By the way, all of this, including the rotunda, was structurally reinforced to raise the strength of these facilities to a percentage above the original design. So this court house will be with us for many, many decades.

I'm now standing at the entrance to the receiving area for Commissioners Court, on the second floor. You see around the rotunda portraits of previous county judges and our flags. It is through this reception area that the public enters the Commissioners Courtroom.

We have two doors over to my left that look like the entrance but they're actually Exit Only. That's for courthouse security unfortunately. Our bailiffs, who are on duty when we convene Commissioners Court, must have entrance from one direction only. We can't have multiple entrances, so those doors are closed and a bailiff is stationed there to let no one in.

I'm now in the reception area for Commissioners Court. From the second floor it overlooks Jackson Street and the statue of Mirabeau Lamar. We have a sign-in table. We place our agendas and sign in sheets for those who want to speak to court on a matter on the agenda. We also have two benches here. This reception area is also used as a witness area for the historic courtroom, which is immediately to my right through a door. If you're appearing before that court as a witness then you would sit out here until you are called. We also use it as the public entry into Commissioners Court. It seems to work very well. Let's move into the courtroom now and take a look.



*FBC Commissioners Court consists of Commissioner Richard Morrison, Precinct #1, Commissioner Grady Prestage, Precinct #2, County Judge Robert Hebert, center, Commissioner Andy Meyers, Precinct #3, and Commissioner James Patterson, Precinct #4.*

We're in the Commissioners Courtroom now. We have partial suspended ceilings on one side of the building and no suspended ceiling in the area above me. The suspended ceilings hide the air handling equipment that was necessary to keep this room cool. This room will seat 88 people plus actual participants in a court meeting on the other side of the bench. This desk to the left of the bench that I'm sitting at is staffed by a representative of the County Attorney and a representative of the County Auditor, if not the Auditor. Next, across the center of the wall, we have the bench, which seats the five members of the court.

On the far side we have another desk very similar to this one at which sits the Budget Officer for the county, and the County Clerk, or her representative. The County Clerk is in charge of the audio/visual. We have extensive audio/visual capabilities in this room. We have two flat screen TVs, so any exhibits can be posted for the citizens to see. If we're having a presentation that has visual items we also have very small screens up here on the bench so we can observe the same thing that's on the large screen and not have to crane our necks, turn around, or turn our backs on the audience in order to view a presentation.

We originally had our American flags, which you see in the corner, the Texas flag and the Fort Bend County flag behind the window, just behind my chair. However, that space was a lot narrower than the same space over in the Travis Building.

In our first meeting, Commissioner Prestage was taking a signature sheet down to Commissioner Meyers and he almost broke his neck. So we moved the flags over to bracket this window and it seems to work very well.

We have a complete sound system in all of our courtrooms and we have TV cameras that you can see. There's one up above to my right at the window and one on the back wall in the corner by the American flag. We have a company that we contract with that streams all Commissioners Court meetings live to the community. You don't have to come here to attend a meeting. You can watch us live. We keep a two year inventory of all of our meetings available on the Internet at the Fort Bend County website. I know some of the media no longer actually come physically to the meetings. They watch it from their offices. They can always go back after a meeting and recapture and rerun an item if they want to hear exactly what was said. It makes it a little bit more efficient for them to write their articles on what the court is doing.

As I said, this room will hold 88 people. It'll actually hold about a hundred with standing room. The audience area is much bigger than we had in the Travis Building. The court area is slightly smaller but it works. The bench was configured the way it was, from an architectural viewpoint, as new construction representing what we knew of the old construction. None of this is original; it also was shortened up a little bit to comply with ADA requirements. There weren't any ADA requirements in 1909. There are today and we accommodated them as best we could.

Throughout the commissioners courtroom we have a chocolate brown trim below the waist panel down to the floor and yellow with cream on top. These, again, are original colors. They really blend together and, when you consider that we just see black and whites images from that era, it's amazing just how colorful they were in 1908 and 1909.

Now we'll go take a look at the Closed Session Room, which is occupied by the court when they meet in closed session. Watch your step, there's a triangle here. This is the 'Patterson Wedge'. Under ADA we have to have this opening. We don't have to have a ramp. We have to have an opening of these dimensions. So that's a temporary wedge in case Commissioner Patterson rolls back in his chair, we don't want him to drop off.

We've now moved into the Closed Session Conference Room for Commissioners Court. We normally recess our regular meetings and move here to talk about real estate, personnel issues, litigation that are discussed by law in closed session.

We have some very comfortable furniture in here. We used it to blend in with the ambiance of the building itself. Over here we have a credenza on loan from the George Foundation; a beautiful piece of furniture. We have some historical, old volumes. Over here to my right we have a sitting area.

The George Foundation provided the chair and the little love seat. The two wing back chairs were in my office for many, many years and they were recovered to match. So we didn't buy a lot of new furniture. We restored a lot of historical items that the George Foundation provided us on permanent loan but there weren't a lot of new acquisitions; just a very few pieces. One of the new pieces is the credenza that's against the wall with the TV monitor on it.

This is an electronics cabinet. We bought it to blend in with the furniture and show a traditional style. But it's full of all the electronics that allow the courtroom to work and take our meetings out on the Internet live. A company that we have on contract maintains and controls it all.

This room is also made available to commissioners when they need a quiet place to meet other than their offices. If they want to have a little conference or if they want to have a private meeting, this room is available to them. Other than that, they have no offices here. They have a drawer out on the bench that they can put a few items in, but their offices are in their precinct, which is appropriate.

This is a beautiful room with the natural colors of yellow and cream. It looks very nice. The carpet was put in here because this tile could not be salvaged. There was just so much of it damaged when electricity was brought into the building that it would look like a very poorly built patchwork quilt. So we put carpet down.

Before I leave, I want to point out this beautiful little bowl that was presented to us as a gift by my wife, who is a potter. She made this many years ago and donated it for display. It sat up on the seventh floor of the Travis Building for about ten years. We moved it over here after the remodel. I would be remiss if I didn't mention her little gift to dress up the County Judge's office. Now let's go look at the Historical Commission's offices.

We're on the second floor in the Fort Bend Historical Commission offices. The Historical Commission is a volunteer group that is actually authorized under state law. It's mandatory for counties to establish an historical commission for the purpose of investigating, researching, and preserving the history of the county. They carry out many, many important projects on a continuing basis, not the least of which is the identification of cemeteries in Fort Bend County.

Some of these cemeteries are of great historical value. But all of them hold very important value to folks like TXDOT (Texas Department of Transportation) and the County Engineer's office because when you run into a cemetery in the process of building a road, it changes the nature and direction of that road at great expense. The number located and surveyed is now up in the hundreds, with all their boundaries properly identified.

You see on the wall back here a series of Fort Bend County maps. These are historic maps of Fort Bend County that the historic commission received from the Texas Land Office. To my left is the Heritage Award that the commission gives each year to that individual or individuals that they think have made an outstanding contribution to Fort Bend County history. It's a very impressive ceremony. I urge you, if you're available when they're making that award, to go. It's an interesting group.

There's practically no limit to the number of people who can serve on the historical commission. If you would like to be a working member, let your county commissioner know, he will begin the process. I assure you there's always work to be done. It is a lot of work but a lot of it is fun, too.

The Historical Commission members do a great service to Fort Bend County. This is all workroom. The furniture belongs to the Commission. The pictures belong to the County. There's another work space that looks just about like this through the door back to the rear. This whole area is really expansion space for the County. We can locate the Historical Commission, really, wherever. We hope to keep them here for many, many years but as the county grows and goes through a million population, the County Attorney's office will grow, the County Judge's office will grow as more work is put on them due to the larger economy and the larger population. So the Historical Commission may ultimately move to another site but we will always provide them with a site for their offices. Right now, for the next several years, this will be the home of the Historical Commission. The room currently used by the Historical Commission was used by our District Courts for many years. All courts here moved to the new Justice Center when it opened.

In front of the historical courthouse there are a few items I'd like to mention. To the east side of the courthouse is the memorial to those who have fallen in the armed forces of the United States from Fort Bend County. It begins with the Spanish-American War and goes through Afghanistan and Iraq. It was enlarged awhile back. Unfortunately, we have had to add names on that monument in the last few years.

As we come around to the front of the building on Jackson Street, we see the large statue that most folks are familiar with; it's the statue of Mirabeau B. Lamar, a hero of San Jacinto, the second president of the Republic of Texas. He was considered by many the father of education in the state of Texas. While he was president, he put a bill through the legislature that allowed for free public education for all citizens of the Republic of Texas. That free education policy was continued once Texas became a state. At the beginning it was a very rudimentary education but it was certainly better than none. Folks learned to read and write and do math which was important to them at that time. Of course, we all know how it's grown into the school system we see today.

As we go on around the courthouse moving to the west, in the corner of the lot is this medium-sized oak tree. This is the Steven F. Austin Oak. The Sons of the Texas Republic planted it. They took seedlings from an oak tree that was located on a plantation in Brazoria County. It was at the home on this plantation in 1837 that Stephen F. Austin died. The tree was alive then, it was alive when they gathered the seeds. In the late 1880's they went around to counties in Texas and offered to plant a tree. We took a seedling here in Fort Bend County and you can see what it's grown into today as a memorial to Stephen F. Austin who brought the original 300 to Fort Bend County and surrounding areas.

Next as we go on around the building we have a plaque honoring Erastus "Deaf" Smith, Sam Houston's chief scout. He's most noted for burning the bridges to block the retreat of the Mexican Army after San Jacinto. He's less well known because he and a few others captured General Antonio López de Santa Anna. They didn't know they had Santa Anna but they brought him back into Houston's headquarters area. As he was passed in front of the Mexican troops, they all saluted and made other signs of respect to this Mexican private. Pretty quickly they realized they were dealing with Santa Anna and the history of Texas changed significantly from that point on. What people don't realize is Santa Anna had 1,200 men at San Jacinto but there were 3,000 more troops camped out in the Kendleton area in Fort Bend County. Had they moved forward and Santa Anna escaped and got to those troops, he would have far outnumbered the Texan Army and could very well have ultimately won the conflict. But with his capture, those Mexican troops went back across the San Bernard River and later returned to Mexico. The war ended right there and Texas became a republic.

"Deaf" Smith was a resident of Fort Bend County in his later life. He died here and is buried. The exact location of his grave is unknown. There are certain theories as to where he's buried but most of them are in improved land in the Richmond area. It's going to take some extensive research to locate the grave; if possible, so this is the most appropriate monument we have to "Deaf" Smith.

That concludes the tour. We're very pleased to have been able to show you the courthouse. It's beautiful. I thank the George Foundation for their \$2 million grant. I thank the citizens of Fort Bend County who voted the bonds to allow us to spend \$3.8 million in taxpayer money to restore this building. It's the public's building so we encourage you, if you have a chance, come by and take your own little tour.

Just make sure you let us know what your doing and don't go into any of the offices during working days because they get a little disturbed when I come through on these tours every now and then. I don't know what they'd do for the citizens but you can see a lot of it from the rotunda, from the oval, in the public rooms, in the Historical Commission rooms, etc. The Commissioners Court is always open unless we're in session and that's only on Tuesdays from 1 PM to about 3 PM. Feel free to visit the building. After all, it's your building.

Thank you very much.