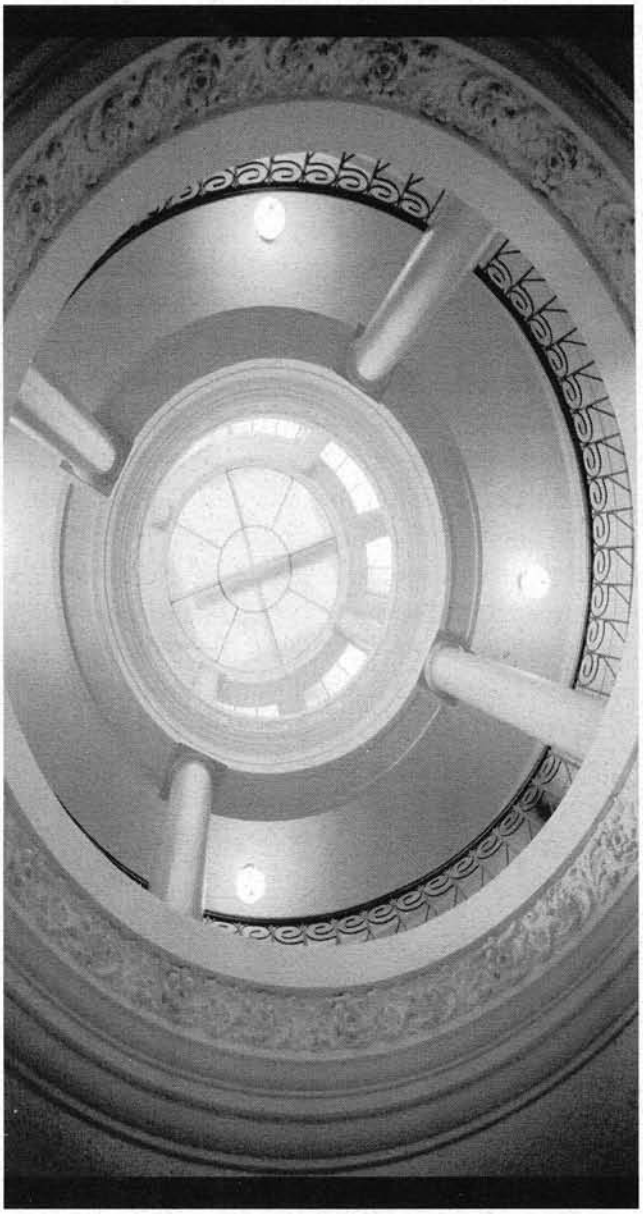
TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

AFTER THE RESTORATION —

Maintaining the Appearance of Your Historic Courthouse



For those counties that complete restoration projects under the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program of the Texas Historical Commission, there are usually mutual feelings that: all the planning, construction and minor inconveniences were worth the effort; the newly-restored courthouse is once again a symbol of pride, progress and justice for the people of the county; the courthouse is a centerpiece for county functions, downtown redevelopment and heritage tourism; and, historic preservation works.

Those involved also realize that preservation is a continual process, which each generation addresses and then passes along to the next. With that in mind, the question counties typically face is:

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

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The State Agency for Historic Preservation

The following recommendations answer that question and provide county officials, employees and the local citizenry with general guidance for preserving the quality and integrity of the recently restored building. These guidelines are not designed to serve as rigid rules but as reasonable considerations for sympathetically maintaining a landmark historic building. How to utilize these guidelines will be up to the county and its citizens, but there will be a common goal — to pass the building along in good condition for the continued use and enjoyment of future generations.

The recommendations are divided into five major topics:

- Artwork and Historic Displays
- Signage
- Decorations
- Daily Operations
- Electrical Considerations

If your county has a question about these or other considerations, please feel free to contact the Courthouse Team in the Division of Architecture at the Texas Historical Commission (THC) at 512/463-6094; courthouse@thc.state.tx.us.

ARTWORK AND HISTORIC DISPLAYS

Artwork

Architecture and craftsmanship should be the primary artistic focal points of a restored courthouse, and any artwork should be compatible and complementary in nature. Photographs and paintings of historic or artistic significance are appropriate in public areas and offices. All such artwork should be well-framed and properly labeled. Less is often more in such displays, so work to limit quantity, especially in public areas. If there is a museum in your county, work with the staff to locate historic photographs that will have appeal to and interest courthouse visitors. Scenes of county events, gatherings and institutions, for example, may contribute more to the visitor experience than a long line of former county officials. Care should be taken to use only copies of historic photographs, since originals can be severely damaged by exposure to light. Proper labeling provides some interpretation.

Take extreme care when hanging framed artwork on historic walls. Utilize existing reglets or picture moldings, and use only the appropriate hardware. Avoid attaching items to original plaster walls or to walls with historic finishes, such as those with faux painting designed to simulate stone. Unframed artwork should be discouraged since its installation is damaging to wall surfaces.

Historic Artifact Displays

Due to the sensitive nature of historic artifacts, the most appropriate place to display them is in a local museum where they can be monitored and protected from damaging elements and vandalism. You may want to consider a special exhibit in the museum to highlight the recent restoration, as well as the history of the courthouse. Courthouse displays should be in secure, locked cases with proper interpretive signage for courthouse visitors. Avoid using historic documents and photographs since light can result in permanent damage. Instead, check with the museum staff for proper ways of reproducing such items for display. Also, check with the local fire official before placing any furnishings in the corridors that may reduce the width of an emergency exit path.

SIGNAGE

Public Notices

Post legal notices in a central, locked glass case. If your courthouse is not equipped with one, a bulletin board is acceptable, as long as someone monitors it on a regular basis to remove clutter and outdated notices. Personal notices, such as items for sale or community event announcements, should be displayed in the break room.

Adhesive Tape
The use of adhesive tapes on all historic finishes should be discouraged. Clear tapes especially, can remove paint and leave a sticky residue. Even masking tape, if left on a surface over time, can be detrimental. If the use of tape cannot be avoided, drafting tape is preferred, and it should only be used in temporary situations.

Office and Directional Signs
All signage — building directories, room designations and directional signs — should be discreet and consistent with the restoration design and style. If the building originally used projecting signs or backpainted glass room labels, these may be used. Otherwise, new signs should be wall mounted and feature clear, simple lettering.

Bunting and Banners
In circumstances where bunting or banners will be temporarily displayed on the building, take care to secure them in a manner that will not be detrimental to the structure or its architectural elements. Only colorfast fabrics and materials should be used.

Exterior Signs
Ideally, the placement of signage on the courthouse grounds should be coordinated through one person. Where possible, signs should be free standing and not attached to the building.
In all cases, they should be kept to a minimum.

DECORATIONS

Plants
Plants should have drainage trays placed underneath them to prevent water damage to floor surfaces or furniture. They should also be maintained on a regular basis by pruning dead leaves and dusting. Vines can damage both the exterior and interior of buildings, since tendrils can attach to masonry and wood, encouraging water infiltration and causing additional damage when they are removed. Long, trailing vines of any type are discouraged.

Vines in this courthouse hallway stretch from the entry door to the office door and beyond.

Personal Pictures
Personal pictures should be discreet, confined to office spaces, and placed on furniture instead of walls. A good alternative to multiple picture frames is to use photos as screensavers or desktop backgrounds for computers.

Knickknacks
Personal items that might fall under the general category of knickknacks, mementos, toys or memorabilia, should be limited or discouraged if they detract from the overall design of an area. When determined acceptable, they should be discreet and confined to personal workspaces.

Rugs
When necessary, rugs should be appropriate in size, design and color for the spaces they occupy. Area rugs may be used under tables to muffle sounds but should not extend from wall to wall, covering historic floor furnishings. In an area with existing carpeting, they may not be warranted. The color, texture, and pattern of rugs like other furnishings, should not detract from the architectural character of the space. Neutral colors, carpets without patterns and selections that blend into the adjacent floor appearance are encouraged. Rugs should not be used in high traffic areas, where wear is accelerated and where they can be potential tripping hazards.

Wall Decorations
Most wall decorations, such as framed artwork and documents, should be relatively flush with the wall. Artifacts that protrude significantly from the wall and that are not in keeping with the overall décor, such as trophies, mounted animal heads and other displays, are discouraged.

DAILY OPERATIONS

Vending Machines, Microwave Ovens, Refrigerators
Courthouses should have designated break rooms separate from public spaces, and they should be used for such potentially obtrusive items as vending machines, microwave ovens, refrigerator areas, coffee machines and similar appliances. Work with your vending suppliers to identify more discreet appliances that are not oversized and overly lighted. They may have to be somewhat creative in supplying historic buildings, but relatively small, non-illuminated machines that dispense both drinks and snacks are available.

Vending machines detract from the historical integrity of interior spaces.

File Cabinets
If possible, file cabinets should be used for filing purposes only and not as bulletin boards, excess storage areas, cubicle walls and display tables. Use in-baskets for items to be filed, where appropriate, and limit the use of attachments such as paperwork, calendars, office humor and magnets.

Trash Cans
Provide an ample number of trash cans in the public spaces, but use receptacles that are appropriate to the interior style and design. Provide regular maintenance.

Electrical Appliances
Items such as clocks, radios and televisions should be restricted to private office areas, and they should be unobtrusive and minimal in size and design. Coffeepots should be kept in the break rooms.

Posted Materials
To avoid office clutter, limit displays of posted materials such as memos, phone number lists, calendars, "to do" lists, family artwork and photographs, office humor, menus, movie schedules, etc. Such items should never be attached to walls in any way, even temporarily. Adhesives

from notes and tapes can have residual effects on the walls and on painted surfaces. Use creative methods to provide quick access to such things as phone numbers and current memos, and utilize frames for pictures and artwork (see Decorations section for additional guidelines).

Gum and Tobacco
Remember the admonitions of your teachers. Those who chew gum or tobacco should be responsible for disposing of it in an acceptable manner. Gum can have an irreversible impact on such furnishings as carpeting.

Smoking should be prohibited inside the courthouse. Exterior smoking facilities are preferred, provided there are ample disposal receptacles and regular maintenance of the areas. Avoid smoking facilities near vents and doorways, where smoke can migrate inside the building.

Chair Floor Pads
Clear plastic floor pads, used under chairs to prevent floor damage, are preferred in office spaces, especially for carpeted areas or wood floors. They should be cleaned on a regular basis and replaced when they are broken or worn.

Courthouse Clutter
One of the most common problems facing all county courthouses is adequate space for storage. This can be properly addressed in a number of ways. First, with regard to records, all counties are required to file a retention schedule with the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSL). TSL staff can work with the county to develop helpful ways of addressing both storage and preservation needs for records. To be sure the county's schedule is properly filed and up to date, contact the State and Local Records Office of the TSL (512/454-2705; www.tsl.state.tx.us).

Second, where on-site storage is required, adequate file cabinets or boxes should be utilized, and they should be properly labeled and readily accessible. Periodic maintenance of storage areas is necessary to minimize dust accumulations, fire hazards and insect infestation. For details on proper archival storage especially, check with the TSL. Bulky items, such as furniture, equipment, signs and appliances, should be stored in off-site facilities.

Courthouse clutter limits space utilization and can be potentially hazardous.

Third, cleaning supplies should be safely and securely stored in the janitor's office or maintenance areas. Flammable supplies should remain in appropriately labeled and locked storage cabinets away from combustible furnishings and woodwork. Used paint should never be stored on site. Check with your local fire marshal or fire department for recommendations.

And lastly, avoid using open spaces such as attics, bell towers, crawlspaces and staircase closets for excess storage. If there is not an immediate or foreseeable use for an item, consider inventorying it for storage off-site.

ELECTRICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Compatible Task Lighting
Task lighting is a good alternative for general illumination in the work areas. It is defined as work-specific lighting and is generally supplied by table lamps. For a consistent look throughout

the courthouse work areas, lamps should be uniform in size and style, with simple designs and neutral shades that complement the interior furnishings and color scheme. Choose high-quality, sturdy lamps with heavy bases to ensure stability.

Space Heaters
Since space heaters can be a potential fire hazard, efforts should be made to restrict their use in the courthouse. If the mechanical system is not operating sufficiently in the work areas, check with your consultants for recommendations. Where the use of space heaters cannot be avoided, check with your local fire marshal to determine applicable fire safety codes.

Extension Cords
The upgrading of the courthouse electrical system during restoration should have provided sufficient outlets, thereby limiting the need for extension cords. If not, check with your consultants for alternative solutions. If the use of extension cords cannot be avoided in certain circumstances, they should be concealed without the use of tape, pins or staples. Placing cords under existing carpeting can be a fire hazard and should not be permitted. To protect computers and other office machinery, the use of power surge protectors is recommended.

Holiday Lights
Increasingly, light displays are becoming a common feature of holiday decorations. With attention to detail, the lighting of the courthouse may be achieved without harm to the building, but improper installations can lead to deterioration of the exterior and contribute to potential fire hazards.

Not all lighting projects have to be elaborate or extensive. Sometimes less is better, since the subtle use of lighting, greenery and other decorations can add to the holiday feeling without detracting from the building's architectural features.

When considering a decorating project, it is important for the county to contact the THC's Division of Architecture early in the planning process. Under the courthouse law, review by the THC is legally required. Although each situation is unique, we offer the following general recommendations:

- Decorate to minimize impact to the building, preferably with simple techniques in keeping with traditions characteristic of its style.
- Never drill into brick, stone or metal. Instead, when necessary, make attachments into the mortar using a metal hook or bolt that will not corrode or rust.
- When possible, string lights between hooks in the ground and gutters to prevent impact to historic materials. Consider decorating with temporary frames as an alternative to permanent changes.
- Wrap columns, railings or chimneys with either waterproof ribbons or lights. This provides extensive coverage with few points of attachment.
- Remove wiring and lights each season rather than leaving them up all year.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

After a courthouse has been restored, a completion report is written that details all the materials used and equipment installed during the restoration. The report discusses such areas as security, lighting, recommended thermostat settings, furnishings, air filters, paint selections and major mechanical systems. The report which is filed at the county courthouse and the THC Division of Architecture office, can serve as a great resource regarding the care and maintenance of the building, and should be consulted on a regular basis.

PROTECTING OUR COURTHOUSES

When planning to make changes to a courthouse, please keep the following protective measures in mind.

Courthouse Preservation Statute: Chapter 442 in the Texas Government Code
Section 442.008 HISTORIC COURTHOUSES.

(a) A county may not demolish, sell, lease, or damage the historical or architectural integrity of any building that serves or has served as a county courthouse without notifying the commission of the intended action at least six months before the date on which it acts.

(b) If the commission determines that a courthouse has historical significance worthy of preservation, the commission shall notify the commissioner's court of the county of that fact not later than the 30th day after the date on which the commission received notice from the county. A county may not demolish, sell, lease or damage the historical or architectural integrity or a courthouse before the 180th day after the date on which it received notice from the commission. The commission shall cooperate with any interested person during the 180-day period to preserve the historical integrity of the courthouse.

(c) A county may carry out ordinary maintenance of and repairs to a courthouse without notifying the commission.

Protective Easements:
All grants associated with the Texas Preservation Trust Fund and most funded under the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program include protective easements between the county and the state. Preservation easements are legal documents that ensure the long-term protection of the county's and state's investment.

If there are any questions about a county's compliance with these protective measures, please contact the Texas Historical Commission's Division of Architecture at 512/463-6094.

For additional information on the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program or other Texas Historical Commission programs , write to the THC, Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711, or call 512/463-6100. Also, visit www.thc.state.tx.us.

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