

Randall County Courthouse Restoration Inspires Texans to Ditch Demolition Plans

Out with the old, in with the new! For years, Randall County residents and other Texans embraced this unfortunate yet common attitude about the fate of their historic courthouses. However, much has changed in Texas, and particularly in this Panhandle community that was once hesitant to consider preservation as an option. Now, the imminent restoration of the courthouse to its 1909 appearance has not only sparked local pride for this building, but has also ignited a fire within the community to preserve other significant structures.

The Randall County Courthouse is a positive example of the domino effect that can often be associated with preservation. Initially, some Randall County commissioners felt it was more financially sound to demolish the historic structure than to restore it. However, community members such as Randall County Commissioner Skip Huskey saw the potential in this underappreciated structure.

"The courthouse is just the beginning," Huskey said. "By bringing the courthouse back to life, we've embarked on a project that has energized our community and will revitalize historic downtown Canyon."

He added, "This is far more than just the restoration of a building. It represents economic development, enhanced tourism, quality of life, preservation of a symbol of what our community stands for and education for our children. It accomplishes everything economic development corporations dream of."

Unfortunately, years of abuse had tarnished the community's feelings toward the building. North and south annexes were added onto the original 1909 edifice, which obscured the



The Randall County Courthouse, pictured in 1909 (top) and currently, will be spared the wrecking ball.

integrity of the building's Neo-Classical detailing. However, with some foresight and the help of the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, one of the unsightly annexes was the first element to be removed from the building, paving the way for a complete restoration of the stately structure.

The restoration of the Randall County Courthouse is the direct result of Randall County's participation in the THC's courthouse program. The THC oversees the program, which provides partial matching grants to Texas counties for the restoration of their historic county courthouses. Since its inception in 1999, the program has received \$145 million in grant funds, and additional

support is anticipated to ensure the continuation of this successful program. Courthouse restorations have generated 4,692 jobs throughout Texas, more than \$130 million in local income and more than \$177 million in gross state product.

The upbeat attitude of Randall County residents represents the sometimes-obscured sense of pride many communities maintain for their history. Although demolition may seem like an efficient option, preservationists believe their goals help boost local morale and can ignite a stagnant economy by sparking an interest in revitalizing downtowns with the support of local businesses.

"Randall County's decision to restore its historic courthouse was a step in the right direction," said Stan Graves, director of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. "By preserving and protecting the courthouses throughout Texas we not only save those structures, but often increase awareness and concern for the preservation of other important local landmarks."

Randall County, as well as numerous other counties throughout Texas that have chosen to restore their historic courthouses, is representative of a community that decided to embrace its historic past. Its residents hope their positive courthouse restoration experience will inspire others to breathe new life into these stately buildings that help to define the architectural landscape of Texas. ★

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