

October 30, 2009

To: Nancy Allen, President  
Coalition for the Historic Courthouse Cultural Center  
Jonathan Poston, SW Director  
National Trust For Historic Preservation  
Vanessa Norton McKuin, Exec. Director  
Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas  
Honorable Preston Scroggin  
Faulkner County Judge  
Honorable Jimmy Bryant, Faulkner County Quorum Court

RE: Visual Inspection, Faulkner County Courthouse

JAMESON Architects PA was contacted by Vanessa Norton McKuin, Director of HPA and Jonathan Poston of the Southwest Region Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation on behalf of CHCCC to conduct a visual survey of the Faulkner County Courthouse and to comment on the structural condition of the building and to note deficiencies or concerns. Ken Jones, PE, structural engineer, was retained to assist with the survey.

An electronic copy of the of the original construction documents was furnished to us, but was missing architectural Sheet #6, 1/2 of Sheets 8, 9, and 10, and Structural Sheet S-5. Generally, it appears the missing information deals with the 4<sup>th</sup> floor jail.

On October 6, 2009, at 9:30 AM Jameson and Jones were given a tour of the Faulkner County Courthouse by David Smith of the maintenance staff. It was a raining with thunderstorms in the area.

The roof was toured first. All three roof areas of the building were ponding some water from recent and current rain. The roof membranes appear serviceable and maintained. No active leaks were noted on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, although there was evidence of previous leaks in the form of paint and plaster damage. The parapet walls with limestone cap stones (masonry walls above the roof level) have had some repairs to cracked masonry joints, a common condition in historic buildings often caused by freeze/thaw cycles where exposed above the roof level.



*Main roof above the jail looking south.*



*View of north 3<sup>rd</sup> floor roof from the upper level.*



Old water damage on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor ceiling.



View of minor repairs to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor parapet wall.

The 4<sup>th</sup> floor jail was toured next. Most of the original jail cells and hardware remain, but is not in use at the current time except for storage. It was noted in some areas that current file storage could cause an overloaded condition. (One area in particular had 2 drawer file cabinets stacked on 4 drawer file cabinets, with more record books on top of that.) Other than concern for storage overloading the floor, no structural distress was noted. Although the structural design data was not available, it is assumed that the 4<sup>th</sup> floor was designed for a fairly light "residential" live load, plus the dead load of the structure itself. Therefore it is suitable for light storage only.



Record storage in the former jail at the 4<sup>th</sup> floor level.



The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, Ground level and exterior of the building were toured with no evidence of structural distress noted. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, the two story walls are well maintained with no significant cracking or deterioration of what appears to be original plaster. The original steel courtroom windows, while energy inefficient, remain in good condition.

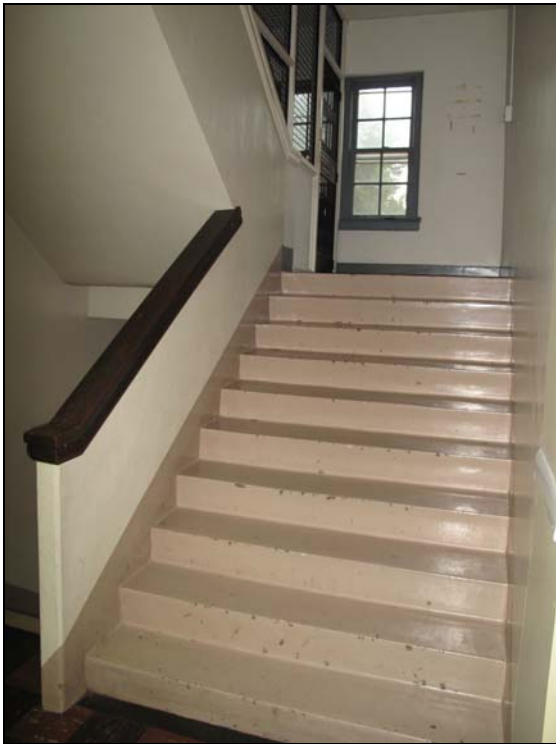


2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Courtroom



Original steel casement windows

On the 1<sup>st</sup> floor the Clerk's vaults are stressed from needing more space, but not from a structural standpoint. In the first floor hallway, original finishes including painted plaster, marble wainscot and ceramic tile floor are all in good condition, a testament to the selection quality and sustainability of original materials and construction 74 years ago. Also noted were original doors and transoms, wood trim and decorative plaster.



South stairway.



Original tile, marble wainscot, plaster and wood trim.

What was noted was a very significant amount of original fabric still in place since construction. Significant features noted include the ceramic tile floor, marble wainscot, original wood doors and trim, flat and decorative plasterwork, original wood and steel windows. All architectural elements have been well maintained and are in good serviceable condition. Although not every wall surface was inspected, no significant cracks were noted in the interior plaster.



1<sup>st</sup> Floor original file, marble wainscot and plaster work.



Clerk's office with original VAT floor tile and counter.



View of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor steel and concrete structure.



Front entrance foyer.



East elevation showing masonry detailing and limestone decorative elements.

We thanked David Smith for the behind the scenes tour and proceeded to look at the exterior of the building on our own. The brick and limestone trimmed exterior is in good condition, with no signs of stress noted. The masonry surfaces are in need of cleaning, particularly the projected limestone elements, and parapet walls likely need additional tuckpointing as well as reworking previous repairs to be more aesthetically pleasing. The concrete foundation wall below the 1<sup>st</sup> floor level exhibited no settlement cracks where it was not concealed by landscaping.



Detail of concrete foundation/basement wall in excellent condition.



View of east façade from the south 3<sup>rd</sup> story roof.



View of north elevation at north corner.



Detail of original limestone steps at east (front) entrance.



Limestone detailing at east (front) entrance.



East elevation detailing.

In conclusion, structurally speaking, the 74-year-old Faulkner County Courthouse was a well designed and very well constructed building. It has served the citizens of the County well thus far and, with normal and continued maintenance, is structurally capable of serving for decades to come.

Although beyond the scope of this visual survey, the Faulkner County Courthouse is in need of rehabilitation. It is understood that the mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems need updating, as well as possible alterations to address ADA requirements and the growing needs of the county government and courts system. However, it is possible, as evidenced by other rehabilitated courthouses around the state and nation, to update systems and accommodate modern needs while preserving significant spaces and historic building components such as original windows, doors, and finishes.

These consultants concur with recent essay titled "Can Historic Preservation Lead Us Out of the Recession" by James Kienle, FAIA:

"Despite the tired cry of "that old building is too expensive to save," I have seen very few buildings in my nearly 40 years of practice that would fit that description. "That old building" may not only be the greenest on the block, as is often said of late, but it may also be the most cost-effective opportunity to revitalize our communities in this time of uncertainty."

Respectfully submitted:

**JAMESON Architects PA**

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