



1898 Butts County Courthouse

An Historical Perspective, Analysis of Current
Condition & Future Needs

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August 2016

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1898 Butts County Courthouse

An Historical Perspective, Analysis of Current Condition & Future Needs

I. Historical Background of Courthouses in Butts County

The current Butts County Courthouse was constructed between 1897 and 1898 at the center of the downtown Jackson square, following an expansionist period in Georgia. Community leaders, seeking to show off civic pride, as well as to secure Butts County's place in the "New Georgia" that was unfolding in the twilight years of the 19th century, determined that the best way to show the



Butts County Courthouse 1911

world that the county had "arrived" was to erect a monumental courthouse at the heart of town. This was not unlike what was going on in other counties around the state for the same reasons, and during the two decades between 1880 and 1900, Georgia saw many of its 150+ counties replace the simple buildings that had suddenly been deemed "inadequate" in favor of these architectural jewels.

Three of Butts County's neighboring communities all replaced their previous court buildings with structures similar to our own during those two decades. These included Newton County in 1884, Monroe County in 1896, and Henry County in 1897. It is notable that the same architectural firm that would later design the Butts County courthouse, the venerable firm of Bruce and Morgan of Atlanta, designed both the Newton and Monroe courthouses. Other regional courthouses built within the same historical period include Walton County in 1883, Pike County in 1895, and Clayton in 1898. The other two counties surrounding Butts County at this time also had courthouses, however Jasper County did not build their current courthouse until 1908 and Spalding County until 1911. Lamar County did not exist at the time and was formed some 22 years after the Butts County Courthouse was constructed; consequently, they are still in their first courthouse, built in 1931.

The current Butts County courthouse is the third building to serve as a permanent courthouse building since the founding of the county in 1825. In 1827, the first courthouse was begun and substantially completed in 1828; however, the brick building was completely

destroyed by fire before it could be used. It was subsequently rebuilt that same year at a cost of \$10,540.00 (this equates to a value of \$6,710,000.00 in today's dollars using the value of skilled laborers to construct the project). This building was destroyed by fire also, on November 17, 1864, when General Sherman's army came through burning and pillaging everything in their path during the Civil War.

Following the ruin of war and the turbulence of reconstruction, a replacement courthouse was finally begun in 1872 and completed in 1873. This second courthouse cost considerably less than the first one did, but was sufficient for the next 24 years. Very little is known about the second courthouse and no photographs of either the first or second courthouse have ever surfaced. The 1873 courthouse was razed in 1897 to prepare for construction of the current building.

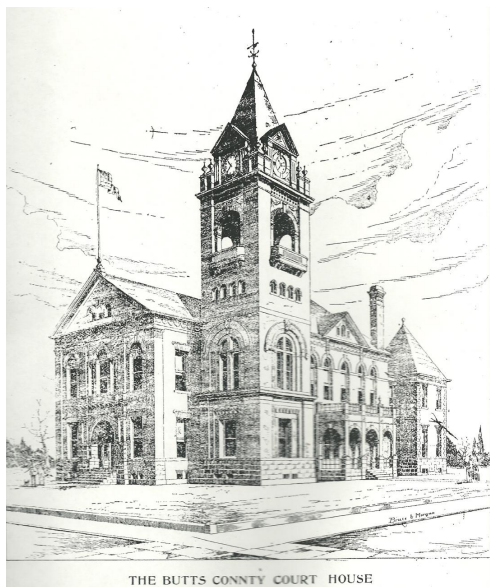
The current Butts County Courthouse was planned in 1897, following the recommendation by the Grand Jury that a new courthouse be built, not to exceed \$20,000.00 in cost. A building committee chaired by Judge J.F. Carmichael met with various architects and also travelled around the region to examine some of the examples already in place. The competitive movement being engaged in by many counties to outdo their peers was no exception in Butts County, and the Monroe County courthouse in particular was an impetus to the building committee to build something equally grand for Butts County.

Within Georgia, there were two very notable Atlanta architectural firms that were getting the lion's share of courthouse design business, and as a result, the state is covered with judicial buildings penned by one or the other of them today. These were the architectural firms of Golucke and Stewart and Bruce and Morgan. Courthouses of that period designed by (primarily) J.W. Golucke were often similar in styles and features to those of Bruce and Morgan, but his signature touch was often a very tall, centralized clock tower that, literally, towered over the main structure. Those designed by Bruce and Morgan more often featured a tower of less vertical prominence that might be centered or offset from the main structure such as our courthouse tower is.

Golucke designed 27 courthouses in Georgia, more than any other architect, but as he was self-trained in his trade versus professionally trained, he was lacking in a certain amount of engineering knowledge that would later plague a number of his buildings. This most often manifested itself in the form of structural deficiencies surrounding the tall and very heavy central towers in his buildings. Some have since required extensive reworking to provide the necessary level of structural strength necessary to support the weight of the towers and prevent collapse. A few counties even eventually removed their towers and replaced them with shorter, lighter versions to avoid the more costly option of adding new support

systems. The aesthetic results of this have varied depending on the skill of the builders, with some examples losing their symmetrical balance and appearing a bit odd afterwards.

Golucke designed the courthouses in both Henry County and Pike County, as well as the Locust Grove Institute that presently serves as their City Hall. While Henry County's tower remains in its original form, it underwent structural improvements to prevent potential failure of the structure years ago. The top half of Pike County's courthouse tower collapsed in a storm and was subsequently replaced with a short cupola that drastically altered the appearance of their building. Union County, in North Georgia, completed replaced their Golucke tower in a recent renovation, matching the appearance of the original but constructed of modern, high-strength materials.



Butts County was more fortunate in the choosing of Bruce and Morgan to design the current courthouse. The rendering that they submitted to Judge Carmichael and his committee in 1897 is shown at left (including misspelled "County"). Alexander Bruce and Thomas Morgan had the most successful architectural practice of their time and both were among the first in Georgia to promote professionally trained architects, both being so themselves. While they did not design as many courthouses in Georgia as Golucke did, they were noted for designing other types of public facilities such as college buildings, churches, libraries, and banks in addition to courthouses.

They designed such noted buildings as the "Tech Tower," the symbolic building of Georgia Tech, as well as Agnes Scott Hall and others in the Atlanta area. Butts County at one time could lay claim to four buildings designed by Bruce and Morgan, more than any other county its size in Georgia. These included the Wigwam Hotel at Indian Springs (1890), the Jackson Presbyterian Church (1897), the Carmichael House (1898), and the Courthouse (1898). A common denominator in the construction of the latter three properties is the name Carmichael, because members of this prominent 19th century Butts County family were heavily involved with the construction of all three buildings. Judge J.F. Carmichael chaired the courthouse committee while his brother John Carmichael built the Carmichael House. Both were on the building committee of the Jackson Presbyterian Church. These three

structures exist as of this writing. It is unfortunate that the Wigwam Hotel, which at the time was the largest wooden building in Georgia, burned in 1921.

The current courthouse was completed on September 22, 1898 at a total cost of \$25,080.00 (\$5,990,000.00 in 2016 dollars using the value of skilled laborers to construct the project) and has been in use for 118 years as a County Courthouse as of 2016. Since its construction, there have been no additions made to the original building to increase its size and the building presents itself today very much as it did in the 19th century, with only superficial changes in paint and revisions to the clocks on the tower. The original weather vane and north-side mounted flagpole are the only exterior features of the original no longer present. Both of these features are illustrated in the rendering on the preceding page.

II. Architectural Significance

The Butts County Courthouse was designed combining elements of the Romanesque Revival style of architecture with those of Colonial Revival and High Victorian Eclectic. The exterior of the building is constructed of brick with stone foundational structures.

Built on a cross plan, the building has a pyramidal capped bell tower on the south corner rising in four stages from the ground level, through an open belfry to four pedimented clock faces. The other three corners of the building are projecting pavilions that have quoins and steeply hipped roofs. The main façade projects forward from the core of the building and has a one-story entry porch emphasized by an oversized round arch and four colossal ionic pilasters. Directly over the porch is a Palladian window, framed by single round arched windows. All feature a decorative keystone. A gable with three small round arch windows completes the design scheme.

The side entrances have a one-story porch featuring triple round arch entrances, crowned by a balcony leading from the courtroom. These balconies were once accessible by two of ten arched windows, five on each side, that feature decorative keystones and small panes of stain glass that constitute a transom over each window. These have been sealed in modern times.

While sharing many architectural attributes with a number of other courthouses in the state, the unique and oftentimes defining feature of a county courthouse, this one included, is the clock tower. This tower, crafted of the same red brick as the rest of the courthouse, is capped

at the top with a square circumferential entablature of white painted tin. This entablature supports the decorative tower clock house.

Each of the four corners of the clock tower house features an identical set of decorative plinths, each of which is topped by an ornamental urn. On each side, set in between these plinths are classical pediments, supported by pilastered columns and housing one of the four clock faces. Rising above the four pediments is the pyramidal roof, which is clad in painted terracotta-style tiles and capped by a solid tin cap with a flat point. The flat point appears today to be decorative but in fact was previously the support base for a large weather vane that disappeared sometime early in the 20th century. The entire top of the tower from the entablature to the roof cap is constructed of wood and overlaid with formed tin sheathing which both protects the wooden substructure and adds tremendous visual appeal and durability to the tower clock housing.

The courtroom is a less elaborate adaptation of the one in Monroe County. The ceiling is of beaded boards laid in patterns rather than pressed metal. The apse behind the bench has a small stained glass window and an organic plaster frieze in the entablature. Cast iron columns with Corinthian capitals support the balcony. The litigation area is separated from the spectator section by a curved railing and a dark wooden dado alternated in plain and grooved strips encircles the room.

The main level entry hall, which is considered to be the first floor of the courthouse, features a marble floor laid out in decorative geometric patterns in alternating colors of white, gray and pink with a dark marble baseboard that is at least one foot in height. The main staircase, decoratively rendered from heart pine wood is located nearest to the south entrance while a narrower staircase of similar construction is located on the north side of the main hall. Individual offices as well as suites of offices occupy the main level of the courthouse. Two of these offices feature walk-in vaults for the storage of vital records. Each office originally contained a fireplace and hardwood floors throughout with the exception of the vaults, which feature concrete floors crafted from interlocking paving stones for maximum fire retardant capabilities. Today, all fireplaces in the courthouse are purely decorative and have actually been closed off. All of the offices were carpeted in the early 1980s but in the past few years, two of these offices have had the carpet removed and the hardwood floors beneath restored to their original beauty.

The interior spaces on both levels feature a number of architectural details that are unique and interesting. These include decorative support columns, the aforementioned marble floor, various arches and other decorative features, some of which have been covered up or altered by poorly executed “renovations” in the latter half of the 20th century. It is hoped

that a future restoration of the courthouse would uncover many of these details and allow them to add to the overall architectural uniqueness of this classical building.

Other interior materials are indigenous to the time and place in which the courthouse was built. Plaster lathe walls, heart pine decorative and functional features, marble quarried in Georgia and much of the original window glass remain intact.

The building also features a large basement with bathrooms, mechanical rooms, office spaces and storage spaces, although most of this space has now been abandoned due to condition concerns. The basement has its own separate exterior entrance, accessed by dual staircases. It is my belief from my studies of this building that prior to the installation of an elevator shaft sometime in the 1970s or 1980s that the basement entrance from the north side outside was the only way to access this part of the building. The building currently has a residential elevator and a metal staircase that allows access to the basement from inside the building but neither of these fixtures are in any way original to the building. Architecturally and aesthetically, the basement is unremarkable when compared to the rest of the building.

Finally, the building features a third floor that is accessed from a staircase behind the main courtroom bench area and just above the narrow staircase on the north side of the building. The third floor only occupies space above the rooms on the north side of the building's second-floor and by comparison is much smaller than the floors on the levels below. There is a large attic above the decorative ceiling of the courtroom that is accessible from a small doorway in one of the third floor offices. This particular room that accesses the attic appears to be completely original, including paint and plaster. The third floor, which is also on a par level with the courtroom balcony, is no longer used due to limited access and concerns over fire safety.

A small staircase on the north side of the building leads from the lobby of the main courtroom on the second level up to the balcony. The balcony is no longer accessible to the public due to the narrowness of the stairs. From the top of this staircase, a landing leads to a door that allows one to access the tower. This large room, without ornamentation or finished walls is completely original and showcases the construction materials used to build the courthouse. Ladders from this level, some of which are original wooden constructs, lead up into the clock room, which houses the original clockworks, manufactured by the Seth Thomas Clock Company. The clock, which was once powered by weights and chains, now has an electric driver motor but otherwise remains original. Maintaining or repairing the clock requires one to climb up through the tower to access it.

Overall, the courthouse is a substantial building of architectural uniqueness. The materials and craftsmanship used in its construction are of a different era and are not easily duplicated in the 21st century without considerable cost. Contributing to the architectural and historical significance of this building is its provenance, being the design of Bruce and Morgan. Their firm became widely acclaimed throughout the south for their architectural masterpieces in Georgia and the surrounding states, plus it is one of three different and unique architectural realizations designed by them in Jackson alone.

For 118 years this building has served as the centerpiece of our downtown Jackson Square and business district as well as the center for criminal and civil justice in Butts County. In 1980, it was granted recognition by the United States Department of the Interior by being added to the National Registry of Historic Places, so added because of its architectural uniqueness, age and association with Bruce and Morgan. While this designation is purely honorific and provides no protection to the building, it is still one of only a handful of buildings in Butts County to be so designated.

III. Years of Decline

While the Butts County Courthouse is still today a very beautiful and significant building, as well as a landmark and touchstone for the citizens of the county, it is not without a number of issues that need to be highlighted. This report will highlight the issues that are of the most concern and which will drive conversations about a future restoration of the building. Before we explore this, one should first think about the time in which the building came into being. It was dedicated to the citizens of Butts County on a day that saw horse drawn wagons and carriages travelling down the dusty, red dirt streets of downtown Jackson. Electricity and running water were still several years away. The building was larger and finer than anything else in the county, and court cases frequently drew citizens in to watch the judicial proceedings, providing hours of free entertainment to a citizenry that had very little else to capture their attention.

In those golden days of yesteryear, the county courthouse not only housed the court systems but also most every other function of county government. The courthouse was the repository of the records that chronicled the history of Butts County and her citizens, from birth, marriages, land sales, and death. For most of the first six decades that our courthouse was in use, it capably handled and housed everything that was required under the confines

of its own the roof. The addition of electrical lighting, running water and bathrooms, and telephones required modifications throughout the building to accommodate these services but this was accomplished as well.

As counties, which are political subdivisions of the state, continued to add additional services to citizens (or have those services forced upon them by the State) more personnel were required to carry out those services and these employees required places to perform their work. Butts County was no different and as things such as zoning and planning, ambulance and fire, elections and tax appraisal services began to be added, the courthouse began to show the inadequacies of being a 19th century design in a 20th century world.

By the 1970's, many of these buildings were now 70 to 80 years old but most small counties could not afford to build a new and modern courthouse. Renovation was a cheaper solution and for a lot of counties, modernization was desired. Unfortunately, people in the 1960's and 1970's were not yet aware of architectural significance and historic building preservation. Significant alterations to the look of a building were not as relevant to people then as they are today. A public building goes through many stages in its lifespan. First it is a "new building" as close to perfect as it will ever be. At some point, maybe when it hits 50 or 60 years old, it becomes just an "old building" that needs work and updating, but when it reaches a century, it suddenly is viewed as a giant link to our past or an architectural jewel and it gains prominence and becomes a "historical building" that everyone suddenly has an interest in preserving.

In many ways, our courthouse went through these same phases...first it was brand new and for many years, the pride of the county...then it became "that old courthouse" and people began to find ways to "modernize" it through various projects and renovations. In recent years, it became one of our most historic buildings and people now recognize it for the rare building that it is.

What we don't ever want to happen to buildings such as our courthouse is for it to become a "nonexistent building" meaning that it gets torn down or is destroyed by natural or manmade causes. Old courthouses have a bad way of ending up in ashes due to significant age and faulty electrical wiring, accidents or other causes of fire. Just in recent years, Hancock County lost their historic courthouse to a fire that consumed everything but the outer walls. Spalding County lost their 1911 courthouse to fire in 1981. Both fires have been attributed to electrical issues.

Over the past 40 years, our courthouse, like many others, has been the victim of underfunded or poorly planned renovation jobs that, while seemingly adequate at the time,

in reality have left the building in poorer condition than it would have been otherwise. Community and government leaders in the 60's and 70's sought to take a 19th century building and "modernize it" to make the building work better for the greater number of people who now worked in it.

During one such renovation in the 1970s, many of the beautiful light fixtures were removed and replaced with modern but ugly fluorescent lighting fixtures representative of the time. Hardwood floors were covered up by carpeting to make offices quieter and to help provide some insulation. Window mounted air conditioning units poked out of windows all over the building. While these additions probably made the building more comfortable for its occupants, aesthetically and otherwise, it did not really do much to improve the building.

Nearly all of the beautiful wooden interior doors, as well as all of the exterior wooden doors were removed and disposed of in favor of aluminum framed glass doors, much like the kind used in a store. The wooden doors were carried off to the county landfill and thrown away, viewed as antiquated and unnecessary in a modernized court building. Dropped, suspended ceilings were added throughout the office suites and main hallway, covering and hiding all of the high, beautiful beaded board ceilings in many areas except the main courtroom itself, which was left remarkably intact. Plaster walls in some rooms were covered up with cheap wood paneling such as one would have used to turn a basement room into a bonus room.

Over the life of the building, at least three complete electrical wiring systems would be added to the courthouse. The oldest one, consisting of cloth-wrapped wire, is still in place although disconnected. Working on electrical systems in the courthouse has proven difficult because of the many different wiring jobs inside of the walls.

A few good changes were made during the 1970's update. Utilizing an extra office space that was duplicated on three different levels of the building, the county was able to add a small residential-type elevator to the courthouse for disabled persons to use when needed. Although it would only hold one or two persons at a time, it did solve a problem for those not able ascend the staircases to the courtroom level or go down to the basement for whatever reason. This construction also allowed an interior staircase to be installed behind the elevator, providing interior access to the basement areas for the first time. A handicap access ramp was installed on the east side of the building and the tower clock faces, which had originally been black and required ugly exterior illumination at night were replaced by translucent white faces that could be lit from within the courthouse structure. Basement spaces were transformed from unfinished storage rooms to finished office spaces, allowing employees more work room, while other improvements did make the building more usable.

What the changes did not do was anything that preserved the beautiful interior spaces of the building. While the exterior of the courthouse was little changed, many of the interior spaces were drastically altered in favor of modernizing the space to 1970's modern. In hindsight, this was probably not the decade you wanted your historic courthouse to be representative of.

On a more positive note, in the 1990's the Board of Commissioners decided that steps needed to be taken to stabilize and protect the building, as well as improve the condition of the courthouse. Approaching its 100th anniversary, the Commissioners dedicated funds in the 1996 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) towards this endeavor and upon the successful passage of the SPLOST, they commissioned architect Rusty McCall and Associates to develop plans for this. Part of the process was to create a complete set of blueprints for the courthouse, something that had never been done before.

The renovation of the courthouse was to be done in two phases: exterior and interior. Scaffolding was erected and the exterior restoration of the courthouse included repointing all of the brickwork and cleaning it, replacing the roof with a new slate roof (the original slate roof for some reason had been removed decades earlier and replaced with a shingle roof; the new slate roof would correct that), stabilizing and sealing all windows, replacing damaged exterior trim, a complete overhaul of the clockworks, a new paint job and a restoration of all ornamental tin trim comprising the top of the clock tower. All of the exterior restoration work was completed in time for the centennial celebration of the courthouse, which saw the exterior looking as good as when the building was new.

Unfortunately, it was determined that restoring the interior of the courthouse to a similar condition as the exterior would be far more extensive and costly and there was not enough SPLOST funds allocated to accomplish this. Moreover, due to the known presence of asbestos and other factors that would be involved in a restoration, the building would have to be vacated for the duration of a restoration and there was no place to put the functions of the courthouse.

As the 20th century ended and the 21st century began, the courthouse now housed the following offices:

- Basement: Zoning & Planning, Building Maintenance (plus boiler room, electrical)
- First Floor: Probate Court, Elections, County Clerk, Commissioners, Tax Offices
- Second Floor: District Attorney, Superior Court and Judges of the Superior Court
- Third Floor: Law Library and Juvenile Court

Some space was reclaimed when the offices of the Tax Commissioner and Tax Appraiser were moved to quarters that had been secured across the street next to the Clerk of Court's Office. This large room was converted into a meeting room that could be used for Commissioner's meetings and other similar meetings so that the main courtroom did not have to be used. Space needs, however, remained at a premium until 2006, when the County opened the new Butts County Administration Building west of the downtown square. This relocated all of the non-judicial offices that had been in the courthouse and freed up space in the courthouse to allow those offices to spread out a bit more.

Since that time and as of the time of this writing, the following offices are now utilizing space within the courthouse:

- Basement: Abandoned due to conditions.
- First Floor: District Attorney, Public Defender, Probate Court and Sheriff's Office
- Second Floor: Juvenile Court and Juvenile Clerk, Superior Court and Judges
- Third Floor: Law Library (Currently closed due to access concerns)

IV: Current Conditions and Needs

As of this writing, the county courthouse is 118 years old and has been in continuous use as courthouse during that entire time. With only a very few exceptions, it has housed all sessions of the Superior Court during its existence, relocating those sessions only when there was a problem with the building. Since 2010, building problems have occurred with greater frequency and have often required substantial amounts of funding to correct deficiencies that have cropped up. This section will discuss and cover a number of concerns with the physical structure, internal components of the structure and some of the areas that need to be addressed.

- Physical Access-the courthouse has access from all four directions, north, south, east and west. Only the east entrance is accessible to the general public, mainly as a result of security concerns that arose following the Brian Nichols case that happened in Atlanta several years ago. The sheriff's office maintains a precinct office adjacent to this entrance so that they are able to monitor and provide security screening for all persons entering the building. The east entrance was chosen for the access point due to having a handicap access ramp, which had been constructed on that side many years earlier. The east entrance is the only entrance that is handicap accessible to the building, for both the public and any employees that may work in the building and need such access. The location of the building is not easily accessible to any of the surrounding parking spaces because of the distance of the building from said parking

spaces. Legal requirements in place today regarding the ability of disabled persons to be able to access government buildings and move around within them are one of the biggest challenges the 1898 courthouse faces.

- Exterior-Overall, the exterior of the building is in very good condition, mainly due to the major rehabilitation that was provided to the outside of the structure prior to its 1998 centennial. The type of materials used in the construction of most of the exterior of the building are virtually impervious to weather and other elements; however, all painted woodwork, including window trim, as well as the ornamental tin construction that makes up the top of the clock tower is frequently subject to more rapid deterioration due to weather and pigeon excrement. Generally, all painted surfaces of the exterior of the building have to be repainted about once every 10-12 years.
- Electrical System-As I have previously stated, there are serious concerns about the electrical system within the courthouse. When looking inside sections of the walls, it has been determined that the courthouse has been rewired at least three times in its history because each time the building was rewired, no one bothered to remove the previous wiring from the walls. The earliest wiring is cloth wrapped copper wire. We are not able to determine exactly when the building was last rewired but we are reasonably confident that it was before the 1980s. The electrical system, currently housed in the basement, has been described by knowledgeable persons as a “nightmare”. The building occasionally suffers brownouts due to insufficiency in the wiring system. When the building was last wired, there was no consideration given for future loads on the system, including multiple copiers, computers, printers, scanners and other modern technology that was not in use then. The additional burden of technology and equipment have placed demands on a wiring system that was never intended to handle those types of demands and many of the offices rely on individual window air-conditioning units, which draw some of the highest electrical use in the building.
- Climate Control Systems-The courthouse climate control systems are a hodgepodge of units consisting of all different types. Many of the offices rely on window air-conditioning units, while some offices have a type of central air-conditioning that mainly handles just their offices. The large courtroom on the second floor is the only part of the building that has a true central heating and air-conditioning unit controlled by thermostats; however, the design of this system is such that it frequently has to be shut off during court so that people can hear. Public spaces, where people circulate on the main floor during court, have no climate control at all. The building is very large with many pockets of varying temperatures due to the

types of climate system in place or lack of at all. Heating in the winter is somewhat more consistent due to radiant heating provided by a boiler but this kind of heat is much harder to regulate than modern heating systems. The boiler, which was original to the building, began to lose containment in 2016, resulting in fire shooting from the boiler and placing the building at risk. It was replaced at a cost of \$60,000.00, which was not budgeted for. Finally, the existing systems of individual air conditioners place heavy loads on a wiring system that is inadequate as it is. If an eventual renovation or restoration of the building is performed in the future, it is essential that a completely centralized heating and air-conditioning system as well as a modern wiring system capable of handling the load be installed as part of this restoration.

- Plumbing-When the courthouse was built, no water system was available in Jackson and did not become available until 1907. Bathrooms were added to the building at different times using existing spaces but are inadequate. There are only two bathrooms on the main level, one for employees and one for the public (women). The men's restroom was constructed in the basement of the building, which is currently not being used. A bathroom was constructed in existing office space on the second floor behind the courtroom but is in need of a complete overhaul. In the event of a reconstruction or renovation of the courthouse, the plumbing, much of which is nearly as old as the building itself, needs to be completely replaced. This also includes septic lines, which in the past have backed up and caused flooding issues in the basement.
- Floor-to-Floor Access-As part of the 1970's "remodel" an elevator was installed in the courthouse using existing spaces on three levels (basement, first and second floors). The elevator is functional today but it does not meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is a residential type elevator such as the type people install in homes and only allows for a maximum of two people to use it at a time-or one if the user is in a wheelchair. A larger, more efficient elevator needs to be installed to meet the mandates of the ADA. Additionally, the original staircases no longer meeting compliance standards due to the height of the railings. When the courthouse was built, people were generally shorter in stature and the rail heights were designed for people much shorter than most adults are today. The rail height of the rear staircase on the north side is used to bring prisoners to the courtroom. If anyone were to fall up against the rail, the rail is not high enough to prevent a person from toppling over the rail and falling to the first floor. There is only one staircase to the third floor offices and it is narrow and has the same rail height. If a person were on the third floor and the stairs became obstructed, there would be no way for that person to get out of the building other than to go out one of the windows, which is

three stories above grade. Because of these safety concerns, the third floor is currently closed. Finally, the stairs to the basement from the first floor were added in conjunction with the elevator installation. They are metal stairs, somewhat steep, and they shake when one goes up and down them. If a renovation were to be done it would be advisable to install proper stairs in place of these, as well as to raise the railings on the existing original staircases to make them safer. It would also be good to replace the steps themselves on the original staircases, which have become worn and grooved over time.

- Structural-The building was well constructed from the beginning and inspections over the years have shown that the building is structurally sound. Settling over the years has been normal but has resulted in damage to interior plaster lathe walls that need to be repairs or potentially replaced with drywall. Given the amount of electrical work that needs to be done, the latter may be the better option. One area of concern is that the building is supported by a very long wooden beam that runs the length of the building in the basement. According to reports by building maintenance personnel over the years, this large wooden beam has deteriorated and may potentially need to be replaced. This should be determined once a full assessment is performed. The tower was checked in 1998 and it was determined that the clock tower was 1 cm off from perfectly straight, which is remarkable in a building of its age.
- Asbestos-The building contains asbestos that would need to be abated and removed during any renovation performed on the interior. The material was liberally used once and there is no doubt that this would be one area requiring attention.
- Floors-The floors on the main level are constructed of marble in the public areas and hardwood in all offices. The hardwood floors have been covered up by carpet in all but two of the offices, which have seen their floors uncovered and restored. It would be hopeful that a future renovation would see all floors uncovered and the original hardwood restored. The first floor does not appear to have warping or sagging floors. The floor in the courtroom needs to be completed reconfigured for safety reasons. This raised floor in the spectator area was added later to accommodate theater seating and was built to allow a rise from front to back; however, the step down is considered dangerous and would need to be reconfigured. All upstairs offices have carpet covering the original wooden floors.
- Ceilings-All of the offices and public areas on the main level and most upstairs have suspended tile ceilings that were installed during the 1970s. These ceilings are covering up the beautiful beaded board ceilings underneath and should be completely removed if a renovation takes place. Aesthetically they are not harmonious with the

design of the building and detract from the beautiful interior spaces. Dated lighting units should also be looked at for a modern replacement that fits in with the look of the building.

- Space-Office space in the courthouse is finite and limited. Restoration of the building to a new but modern condition would reclaim some of the space such as the basement areas but the third floor space is likely off the table due to what would be required to make it more accessible. If it is intended to renovate this building with an eye towards using it in its current manner as a courthouse, then some other space options close to the courthouse are going to need to be considered.
- Other Issues-This report is not intended to be an exhaustive assessment of issues that are or may be wrong with the current courthouse but only to highlight some of the major concerns that are known and have weighed on the minds of county officials and, most recently Grand Jurors. It is highly likely that an in-depth analysis of this building, conducted by professionals, will reveal other issues of concern that will need to be addressed in any renovation plan. In other words, my assessment by no means should be the final statement on what *needs* to be done to stabilize and secure the future of the Butts County Courthouse. That it *be* stabilized and secured is the most important concern to me.

V. Conclusions

The Butts County Courthouse is a remarkable and architecturally unique building. It is one of the oldest county courthouses in the state that is still being used for its original purpose as a courthouse, and I imagine the building committee that worked so hard on this courthouse in 1897 probably never envisioned it would still be in daily use well over 100 years later. It is a testimony to their forward thinking, as well as to the resolve of the people of this county that such a building, so masterfully constructed, would grace our downtown square from the 19th century into the 21st.

The old saying “they don’t build them like this anymore” aptly applies to this building, more so than just about any other structure in this county. The building is a beautiful addition to our downtown area, one that could never be replaced. As well crafted and as architecturally unique as this building is, and to have stood the test of time for as long as it has, is a credit to its architects and the men who built it by hand. Few buildings built today are constructed for such endurance but despite how well built it was and is, this building needs help and a lot of it.

Concerns about wiring and electricity, fire hazards and safety, cosmetic issues, climate and water issues, space needs and the need to preserve it properly while keeping it functionally useful all come into play with this particular structure. Any renovation that is undertaken with this building needs to accomplish several different tasks on multiple fronts. First, it needs to ensure the preservation and the stability of the building itself. Second, it needs to undo damage that has been done to the building by improper and underfunded renovations of the past. Third, it needs to make the building completely functional in the 21st century while maintaining a harmonious balance with its architectural and aesthetic value. Fourth and finally, it needs to be properly maintained and cared for going forward from a restoration or renovation.

While there are some in this county who simply view the courthouse as a very old building that has lived past its useful lifespan, I see it as a gift that was given to us by our ancestors to keep and to care for and to pass it on to future generations. I am hopeful that this present generation will pass it on in better shape than we found it, restored and ready to push forward for another century. It is a proven fact of architecture and construction that when a building is constructed of quality materials and cared for properly, it can last for centuries. All one has to do is look at Great Britain and some of the other European nations and see examples of buildings that are over 500 years old and still in use today...buildings that were seeing daily use when our country was a wilderness.

Regardless of what the ultimate decision is towards a new courthouse or justice center or a continuation of using the existing one or a combination of both, the courthouse currently here does have concerns that should be addressed properly. A SPLOST would be the ideal way to accomplish this and finish the job begun by the County in 1998. I also think that this project would be favorable to many in the county who see the courthouse as the centerpiece of our community and a physical example of the unique history of Butts County. Thank you for your consideration and interest in this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Michael Brewer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

J. Michael Brewer

Director of Government Relations