

1844 Court House Drawings and Specs Found--about the discovery

Preservation projects can be propelled by unplanned events. In this case, the work of County Historian, Walt Gable, and Research Consultant, Tanya Lee Warren, have delivered a major "shot-in-the-arm" to our fledgling, attempts at discovering the source documentation of the Three Bear buildings.

All preservation projects have to fight their way through myth, and folklore that shields the essential truth needed to accurately achieve the restoration goals—we call this the discovery process. In this process, tracking people has the advantage of fairly accurate recording mechanisms- birth, death, church, military and government records. But building records are an entirely different.

While doing research in the County Archives on the Underground Railroad Ms. Tanya Lee Warren found the original drawings and specifications for the Court House in Ovid. Local folklore had them burned in some fire on Main Street.

Additionally, what makes the find of **151 year old documents** amazing is the knowledge that the County suffered through a "dual shire" period in which records, stoves, and furniture changed locations every three years—a mobile requirement well before mobile capability. Record misplacement, damage, and loss had to be enormous.

The contents of the envelope revealed four pencil drawings on a light card stock, which, detailed the outline of the floors, rooms, and elevation of the Court House without dimensions or specs. Because they were folded for over 70 years, the drawings are extremely fragile. They are various sizes ranging from 16 X17 to 13 X17.

This annotated November 14, 1844 version is the layout of the Court Room. Areas were identified and certain features were enhanced to explain the layout. All of the drawings were layouts of form, but they told much more.

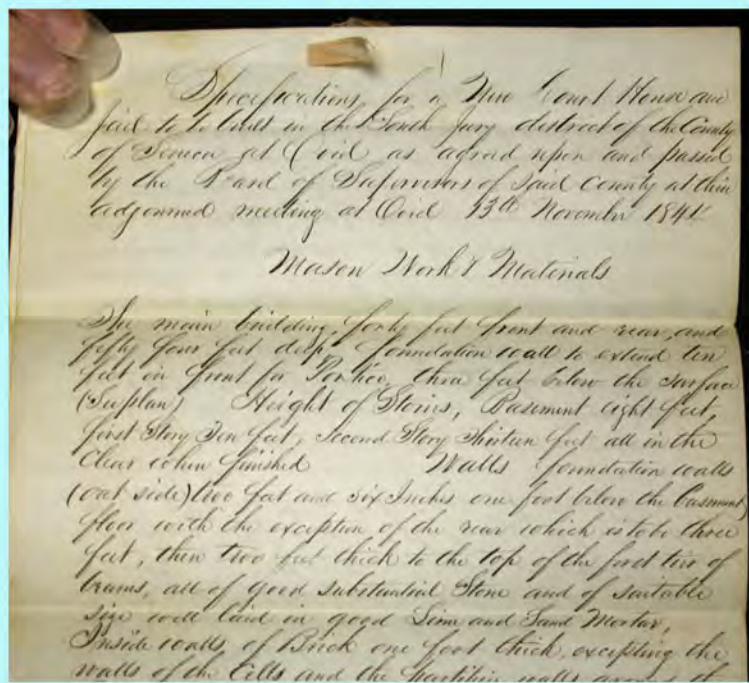
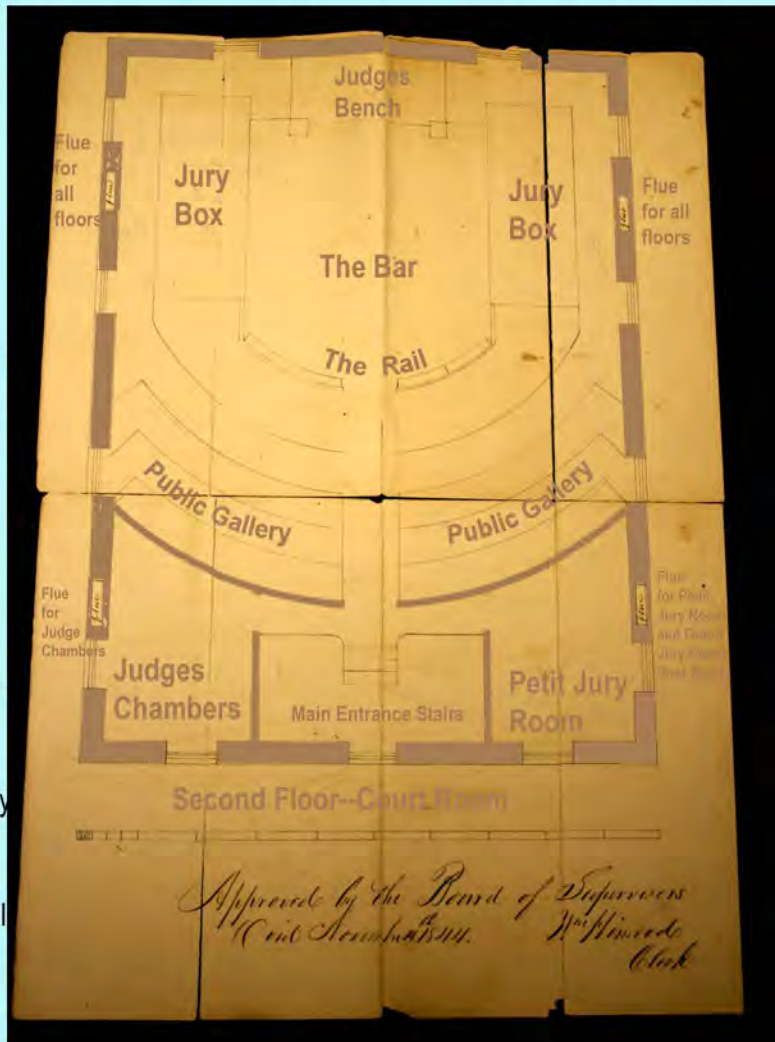
90 % of the Court House is original.

Modernizing renovations had a minimal affect the historic integrity of the building. The lack of lighting detail (electricity did not come to Ovid until 1922) or indoor plumbing is noticeable in the clean layouts. By this absence, the use of oil or kerosene lamps was clearly apparent. The identification of the location of the buried flues for the period symmetric four chimneys is evident.

Also in the envelope were 6 pages of written building specifications by William Himrod, County Clerk. The six page specification package was recorded on a green linen-like substrate which stood the test of time much better than the drawings. It is written in a very flowery penmanship style typical of the era. This written description of the building specification was folded and tied with a fading ribbon. The outside read:



In January 2006, Ms Warren found a No. 10 size envelope in the back of a Map drawer in the Seneca County Archives. "Plans & Specifications (1844) Court House & Jail at Ovid".



The material has been photographed and shared with a variety of preservation sources to aide in the analysis of the find. The Architect who did the Conditions Report and update (Bero Associates) has been contacted. The results have yielded some surprises which will be summarized in the next issue of the **Bear Hug**--this provides us with a better understanding of the original structure and materials used for the eventual restoration work on the Court house. So stay tuned for:

1844 Court House Drawings and Specs -- what did we learn

Dan Motill,
President