

Preservation experts record razing to use as cautionary tale

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A widening hole of the Seneca County Courthouse is exposed as wrecking crews tear away more of the 1884 Tiffin landmark.

TIFFIN -- Officials from two statewide preservation organizations were in Seneca County this week to see what they hope to prevent in other communities -- the demolition of a county courthouse.

"I'm here for Preservation Ohio taking photos and video to provide a cautionary tale for other counties," said Thomas Palmer, executive director of Preservation Ohio. "If this can happen in Tiffin, this can happen anywhere."

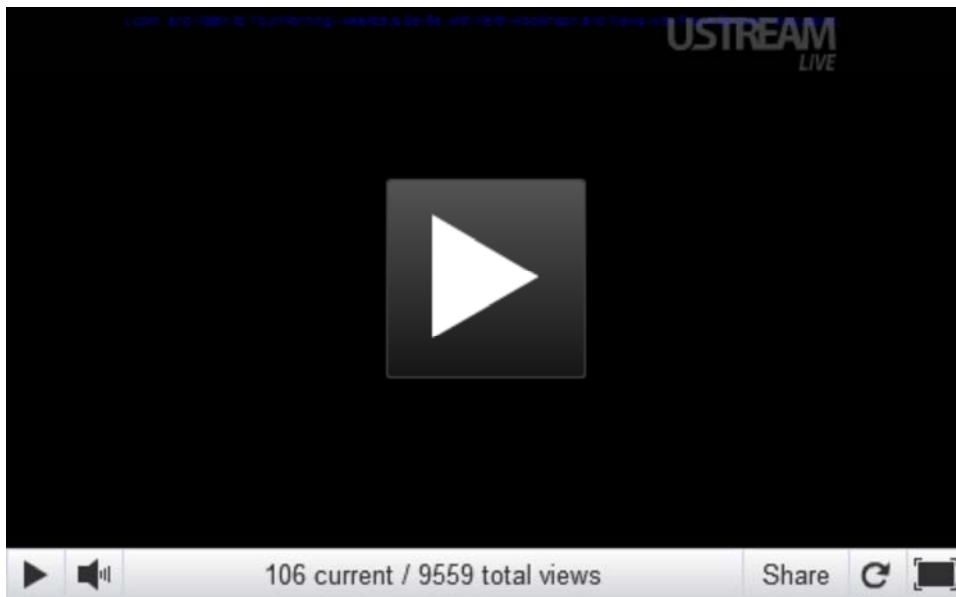
He said that "more than 80" of Ohio's 88 counties have preserved -- and most still use -- their historic courthouses. In many county seats, the courthouse is the grandest building in town, home to county government or at least to the courts and related offices.

Frank Quinn, associate director of revitalization for Heritage Ohio, also stopped in Tiffin Thursday to take pictures of the demolition, which began in earnest on Monday.

COVERAGE: [Seneca Courthouse](#)

GALLERY: [Seneca Courthouse Demolition](#)

(Live streaming video of Seneca courthouse demolition)



"I really hope we can use the demolition as an educational tool for other organizations, other communities," Mr. Quinn said.

"We want this to be the last time we're behind the game in having that dialogue with county commissioners before it comes to this," he said.

Both Heritage Ohio and Preservation Ohio sent letters to commissioners, attended meetings, hearings, and rallies in support of the courthouse, and worked behind the scenes to stop demolition, but in the end, it wasn't enough.

County commissioners, who were on track to raze the courthouse in 2007, changed their minds after a group calling itself the Seneca County Courthouse and Downtown Redevelopment Group convinced them that renovation -- financed through a combination of public and private dollars -- would be less expensive than tearing down the old courthouse and building a new one.

They changed their minds again last summer after the state legislature drastically reduced local government funding and commissioners said the county no longer could afford the nearly \$8 million plan to renovate the courthouse.

In November, commissioners voted 2-1 to hire B&B Wrecking and Excavating of Cleveland to demolish the building for \$373,000.

"I spent a lot of personal and professional time on this project and it's sort of like paying my respects in a way," Mr. Palmer said of his visit to Tiffin. "I just had to be here to see it with my own eyes.

"I've never seen something this big being demolished in my whole life," he added as he watched the excavators work. "That building was not built to come down easily."

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