



On July 28th 2009, the old Bath High School building reached another milestone in its long journey to be restored to its former glory, as Toby Tetterton of Tjs Custom Building contracted by the town of Bath in an action fully supported by the NC State Historic Preservation Office and Bath High School Preservation (BHSP), began to tear away at the 1966 kitchen addition to the 1920 era buildings. Unlike the main structure, the addition offered no historic architectural significance and not being included in recent stabilization and maintenance work performed on the main structure was badly deteriorated.

The demolition was completed over four days by Tetterton, who did a “flawless job...with no damage to the brick, of the main structure” says Peggy Daw, president of BHSP. “It was done professionally and with great care.”



The kitchen removal was the latest step in BHSP’s effort to oversee the school’s renovation into a community beacon that can serve the town and add to Bath’s historic presence.

The three main brick buildings that comprise the structure of the former Bath High School were constructed between 1918-1921, with the first classes attending in 1921. The last graduating class was in 1989.

Sections of the school were used until 2007, but the original building was left empty. Efforts to encourage new uses for the buildings by commercial developers proved fruitless. Over the years, the shuttered building deteriorated and became an eyesore.

According to a 2007 Feasibility Study, the school sits on approximately 2 acres of land, with frontage on NC 92, the principal route through the town of Bath. At 31,000 square feet, the school complex is easily the largest structure in what is considered Bath’s main business district. It’s also adjacent to Bath Visitor’s Center for North Carolina’s Bath State Historic Site, and is just a block away from the town’s historic Main Street. “Thus the school buildings are highly visible and significantly connected to both the historic and the commercial aspects of Bath,” the study concluded.

In addition to prime location, the building itself has equally high potential, as the complex is one of two early Twentieth Century masonry buildings in the largely colonial era National Register Bath Historic District.



In 2005, the school board made a decision to demolish the school. It

was then that the non-profit BHSP was formed and began the effort to save the school.

With a combination of loyal alumni and concerned residents, BHSP was able to persuade the school board to drop its plans of destroying the building and give ownership to the Town of Bath to decide how to handle the property. BHSP also sought and procured an individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places for the school.

Engineers and contractors were brought in to study the structures, recommend uses, and answer the fundamental question of whether the building could be saved. The answer was yes.

The 2007 Feasibility study also determined a number of possible uses, including:

- an expanded Visitor's Center with museum-quality traveling exhibits,
- larger quarters for the Bath branch of the Beaufort Hyde Martin Regional Library,
- a conference center and auditorium known as the Bath Assembly,
- and gallery space for exhibiting work by local and visiting artists.

"The 1918 wing that sits directly behind the recent removal of the old kitchen is a good candidate for professional office space and a medical presence," says Daw, "and several of the original options could operate out of the open space downstairs that once served as the cafeteria."

BHSP accomplished one of its major restoration projects with the help of Double Hung Windows, which specializes in the restoration of pre-1935 windows and doors, which has handled a number of window restoration projects across the state.

"Because most [windows and doors] are constructed of extremely stable original-growth, southern yellow pine, we find that historic fenestration remains as sound as the day they were made under all of that old paint. All they usually need is proper care every 30 years or so to keep them beautiful, functional, and performing to their maximum energy efficiency," says David Hoggard, owner of Double Hung Windows.

In 2007 and 2008, Hoggard and his team gently restored 28 windows on site and 32 windows in his shop, replacing broken panes, reglazing, scraping and painting, and essentially returned 60 heart pine windows total to their original condition.

In 2008, the roof was also repaired, as the BHSP continued to collect donations for the next step, restoring the façade after the kitchen removal.

David Hoggard will return in the immediate future to address the now exposed brick exterior wall where the kitchen once stood. He will reinstall doors and windows in the original openings that were closed in the process of constructing the kitchen addition..

"He is the best in the field," says Daw. "His team will work with local craftsmen, state historic professionals, and town officials to bring this facade's features back in keeping with the desires of our

community.”

And as the restorations continue, the school is looking more and more like the old black and white photos that used to only serve as a reminder of what a statuesque, impressive site the buildings were.

In the meantime, the BHSP is in talks with the town of Bath to purchase the three adjacent buildings built circa 1921 to better position the structures for grant funding. Daw foresees a solid relationship with the town of Bath. “We will work together to be good stewards and neighbors on this historic property,” says Daw.

When can visitors and residents of Bath expect to see the old High School in its restored splendor?

Considering the size of the buildings and the scope of the project, the answer is surprisingly sooner than one would think.

“We hope to have customizable space available for lease in [at least one] wing within the next two years. The strategic planning is underway,” says Daw. “We urge local contractors who would like to assist in this development stage to contact us . . . and we recommend that everyone take time to see what has been completed to this point and join us (as BHSP members).”

Membership information, and details of upcoming events can be found at the BHSP website, www.bhspreservation.org.

The BHSP continues to raise funds for the success of the restoration, including its biggest annual project, the auction on September 12th at the Ormond Amphitheater. The event is free and open to the public, with many items and services available for auction. All proceeds will go toward the restoration of the school.





