

## **Jail Stabilization a Rewarding Public-Private Partnership**

**January 18, 2018**

The Tar River Center for History and Culture Foundation, a non-profit corporation that supports the Tar River Center for History and Culture at Louisburg College, has completed its seventeen-month-long project to stabilize the exterior of the old Franklin County jail in downtown Louisburg. The effort brought together Franklin County, the Town of Louisburg, private donors, and talented local craftsmen to breathe new life into the historic structure.

Completed in 1875 and extensively renovated in 1924-25, the jail was utilized by the county until 1975. Later the Franklin County Historical Society used it as a museum, but in recent years the jail fell into disrepair. In early 2016, The TRCHC Foundation, through the leadership of Dr. Mark La Branche and board Chair Felix Allen, approached County Manager Angela Harris to request permission to stabilize the exterior of the building. The Franklin County Board of Commissioners agreed to lease the jail to the foundation for two years. The county pledged significant funding, with the understanding that additional funds would be supplied by the Town of Louisburg, individuals, and businesses.

The TRCHC Foundation agreed to replace the roof of the building, to reconstruct the front porch, and to replace the badly deteriorated metal windows. Work began in July 2016, when Fleet Benning oversaw the porch project. Using documentary photographs of the jail, he asked a local architect to develop plans for the porch and then supervised the carpenters who built it. Later that summer, the main roof and gutter system were replaced and the metal porch roof was installed.

Addressing the windows proved to be challenging but rewarding. A window restoration contractor in Greensboro reluctantly turned down the project and advised the foundation to find a local craftsman who could fabricate new ones. Early one morning I met Abe Kemp at the jail to find out whether he would be able to make the windows. He recommended Allen Tharrington Jr., who teaches welding at Vance-Granville Community College. At that very moment, Allen drove by on his way to work and Mr. Kemp flagged him down. Allen agreed to work on the project, and he later did a magnificent job of fabricating all fourteen windows.

He collaborated closely with Joseph Spivey, who agreed to remove the old windows and install the new ones. It was a complicated process. Once the old windows were removed, Johnny Aycock's painters cleaned and repainted the rusted window bars. The new window frames were transported to Henderson, where Perry Glass Company glazed them with old plate glass stored in the company's warehouse. Upon their return from Henderson, the windows were installed by Joseph Spivey. The upstairs windows were built in two sections and fastened together with clips because of their weight. Eugene Yarborough undertook repairs to several of the masonry window sills.

The foundation realized that the front and rear doors of the jail needed to be restored so that the building could be secured. Local craftsman Charles Toney volunteered his time to repair the front door, which had been vandalized. Pernell's Welding and Fabrication of Rocky Ford restored the heavy metal back door, which was badly warped and rusted. Brian Pernell removed the original lock so it could be taken to a locksmith for repair.

Carter's Lock and Key of Warren Plains agreed to tackle the project. Sam Carter not only repaired the lock but also made new keys for it. Thanks to him and Brian Pernell, for the first time in many years the rear door of the building can be secured.

Removal of the chain-link fence surrounding the jail completed the project. The Town of Louisburg donated the services of some of its staff members for this step. Their work greatly improved the appearance of the building.

The effort has been a successful public-private partnership. It could not have been completed without funding provided by Franklin County, the Town of Louisburg, and fourteen local individuals, organizations, and businesses. Listed in an ad elsewhere in this issue, they will be recognized also on a bronze plaque that will be installed inside the building. The members of the Tar River Center for History and Culture Foundation Board of Directors appreciate the opportunity to undertake this project and look forward to seeing this important landmark put to a productive use in the near future.