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COURTHOUSE COMES TO LIFE! Answering Questions for the Community

By Barbara Deas, CCCRA Secretary

Historic Courthouse, Historic Courthouse Square? CCCRA, Town of Hayesville, Clay County? You've seen articles in the paper about the courthouse leases, ownership, upcoming work and fundraising. Sifting through it all, you may be confused as to what is going on with our beautiful Historic Courthouse! Walk with us through this article as we alleviate confusion and get you excited about the bright future for this treasure of our town!

Current status – In December 2016, Clay County Communities Revitalization Association (CCCRA) signed a long-term lease with Clay County for the Historic Courthouse and Courthouse Square. This means CCCRA is the operating entity regarding events on the Square, reservations for use of the Square, repairs, renovations, preservation and restoration of the Courthouse Building. Then, once it is restored and occupied they will be responsible for its operation. In January 2017, a deed of transfer changed the ownership of the building and property from Clay County to the Town of Hayesville. The lease transferred with the change of ownership, with CCCRA remaining the operating entity responsible for the Courthouse Building and Square for the next 30 years.

How did we get to this point?

CCCRA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that was formed in 1998 by several local citizens to help stimulate economic growth, promote the assets, and preserve the heritage of Clay County. Over the years, CCCRA has developed three main focus areas. Cherokee Heritage in Clay County and Trails and Greenways (Jackrabbit Trail, Quanassee Path) are two of those and will be discussed in future articles. The longest-running goal has been to slow the deterioration of the Historic Clay County Courthouse and in recent years, to restore it to its former glory as a functioning community center in downtown Hayesville.

The Historic Courthouse, built in 1888, and the surrounding Square was the thriving center of Hayesville through the 20th century. While still operating as Clay County's Courthouse into the early 21st century, the Courthouse fell into disrepair. Starting in 1999, CCCRA obtained funds for improvements including renovating the building exterior, replacing lights on the Square, installing commemorative brick walks, planting trees and repairing the gazebo/bandstand. County business continued at the site until 2007, when the new County Government Building was constructed outside of downtown Hayesville. The Historic Courthouse Square continued as the heart of the community, while the Historic Courthouse sat vacant and continued to deteriorate.

Recognizing the cultural significance to the community and its continued use as a gathering place for festivals, concerts and other events, CCCRA continued to raise funds and apply for grants to preserve this grand old building. Through community fundraising and working with local governments, CCCRA successfully funded reworking the drainage around the building in June of 2015, which drained accumulated water away from the building and allowed the foundation to dry. In late 2015, a remediation firm prepared the interior for further work by remediating both the lead paint and the mold and mildew in the building. In 2016, the crumbling stairways were replaced, which was necessary before any work could

be considered in the upper floor of the building. Thanks to the fundraising efforts of CCCRA committees and donations from Clay County, the Town of Hayesville and various individuals, this work progressed successfully. During this time, CCCRA wrote several grant requests, seeking funds to continue the work before the deterioration got ahead of the money already raised. Through that process, it became apparent that CCCRA's success in obtaining grant money would hinge on having a formal lease of the property. Since CCCRA had long dedicated itself through volunteer hours and fundraising efforts to revive the courthouse, state legislation was reinstated that allowed the lease to become reality.

In the meantime, Clay County's focus and center of activity had moved away from the downtown area. In the interest of the ongoing work on the courthouse by CCCRA and in recognition of the revival efforts around the remainder of the downtown area by Historic Hayesville, Inc. (formerly Small Town Main Street), the Town of Hayesville agreed to accept the Courthouse property from the County. This would insure the continued preservation of the Historic Courthouse and the downtown area, showcasing our rich heritage for our residents, visitors and tourists.

What does the future hold?

CCCRA continues to secure funding for renovating the Courthouse through community fundraisers, generous donors, and new applications for grant funding. The recent generous commitment by Ron Beal, a former Clay County resident, will help scheduled work continue and allow the next project phases to proceed. It, plus the lease, should also help CCCRA achieve success with upcoming grant opportunities. In addition, CCCRA continues to enjoy the support of other local organizations. As an example, Historic Hayesville, Inc., headed by Deborah Nichols and Sandy Zimmerman, donated the ticket sales from last October's Steins and Wine Around the Square event to the CCCRA Courthouse Restoration Fund. They have already committed to the same for 2017, and will continue to support the Courthouse restoration through additional HHI fund-raising events going forward.

As the weather warms, you will see activity around the Courthouse as roofing and painting projects get underway. Stay tuned as the interior work progresses in phases. Once our preservation of this wonderful building is complete, the large upstairs space will be available to host meetings, musical and other community or family events. The main floor will contain retail space, offering another attractive shopping destination in our downtown area. The Square will continue to host the CCCRA Summer Concert Series, and any number of ongoing festivals and events.

CCCRA would like to thank everyone in advance for your continued support and generosity as we enter into this very active period of renovation and restoration. Please visit our website at cccra-nc.org. We encourage you to join our membership and the community on this exciting journey as we restore the shine to an extraordinary Clay County treasure!