Historic building gets touch-up



JOHN C. STEVENSON / Staff

Greg Shaffer of Midwest Maintenance of Piqua, Ohio, works from a bucket truck to remove loose bricks from one of the turrets atop the Pickens County Museum of Art and History Tuesday.

Workers securing museum

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No one wants to get hit in the head by a falling brick. Even if it was made by hand more than a hundred years ago, a brick falling from a couple of stories above is still something to worry about.

That's why workers have been clustered on and around the roof of the Pickens County Museum of Art and History for the past couple of weeks — stabilizing the bricks and mortar along the roof of the building which was constructed in 1902 to be the county's jail.

"Because the building is over 100 years old, a lot of the mortar is coming out and the bricks were beginning to get loose," said Steve Grant, Pickens County purchasing director. "We were afraid that someone would walk in the door and one of the bricks would fall off."

One of the most recognizable features of the building, the roof, clad in copper-colored tin and surrounded by gothic, crenellated turrets, gives the structure a castle-like appearance. But the heavy, iron bars on the windows hint at the building's original purpose.

"It's a beautiful building with its turrets and all the crenellation at the top of it," said Helen Hockwalt, museum curator. "The fact that it was not torn down and has become a site for the preservation of the history of the area, I think, is significant."

The building also currently sports a partial exoskeleton of scaffolding, a look that will probably remain throughout 2009, according to Hockwalt. Workers atop the scaffolding and in a bucket truck are removing the bricks, cleaning them and reusing them if possible. If not, the old bricks are replaced with newer bricks that closely match the originals, which were hand-made in Pickens County, Grant said.

The roof-stabilization project will cost around $70,000 and is being paid for with county funds, Grant said. A second phase of the project, including work to stabilize bricks in sections of the exterior walls, is planned, but the money wasn't available to do the work this year, "and we'll see about next year, too," he said.

Visitors to the museum, which remains open during renovations, needn't worry too much about bricks falling from the sky — or the roof.

"As far as the building itself, it's sound," Grant said. "It's just some of the brick around the top has aged, and some of the mortar had deteriorated. We just wanted to do this as a safety measure. This is stabilization."

WANT TO GO?

What: Pickens County Museum of Art and History
Where: 307 Johnson St., Pickens
Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays; 9 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Thursdays; and 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Saturdays.
Cost: Admission is free