

**PRESERVATIONISTS WANT TO SAVE
HISTORIC YORK INSTITUTE BUILDING**

Lindsay McReynolds
Herald-Citizen Staff

FENTRESS COUNTY -- From Highway 127, the old, dilapidated building that once held York Institute in Fentress County may not look like much.

Its broken out windows, missing bricks and trees growing from inside the building where the floors used to be certainly make the building look far different than those who attended it may remember.

"The first day I saw it, I was shocked," said Randy Williams, a historic preservation planner with the Upper Cumberland Development District.

But the condition of the building bothers Fentress County Executive John B. Mullinix even more so.

As a 1972 graduate of York Institute, Mullinix said the school is more than just an old building. To Mullinix, it represents the heart and soul of a man who worked so hard to bring education to his home county.

In 1926, World War I hero Sgt. Alvin C. York established the school in Fentress County so that children growing up there would have educational opportunities that he believed were denied to him.

Sgt. York raised startup money for the school through private funds as well as solicited money from the Tennessee State Legislature, and classes began in 1929.

The school was operated privately until 1937, when the Tennessee Department of Education assumed funding and control of the school, which continues to be the only state-operated high school in Tennessee.

When the building began to fall into disrepair, local officials asked the state for a new building, and in the 1980s, the original York Institute stopped being used as a school. Classes continued in a new building just a few feet away from the old one on the same property.

"When the state agreed to build a new school, they let the old one go," Williams said. "Just like any old building, when you let the roof go, water starts coming in, and before you know it, you've got the roof caving in."

But even in its severe state of disrepair, activity continues to bustle around the building. In addition to the operation of York Institute in a newer building next door, Roane State Community College operates some classes from a handful of portable buildings on the York Institute property across the street.

And various groups still use the front yard of the old school for photographs in front of the big block letters that spell out York Institute.

So a couple of years ago, Williams and Mullinix decided to do more than bemoan the condition of the building.

"He (Mullinix) called me a couple of years ago and said, 'The roof's collapsed. What can we do?'" Williams said.

The two began calling historic preservation specialists like Dr. Carroll Van West at Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation and met with Van West and representatives from other historic groups to discuss how to proceed in rehabilitating and preserving the York Institute.

And just a few days ago, members of the Tennessee Historical Commission and the Tennessee Department of Education met to discuss the future of the old building.

"At this point, basically, we don't know what's going to happen," Williams said. "Apparently the state is going to try to figure out some way to save the building. Although we don't know if it's going to be possible or not, a detailed, in-depth engineering study of the building needs to be done, to determine if it's economically feasible."

And although a lot remains to be seen as to what will happen to the old York Institute building, Williams seemed to think this week's meeting was a positive step towards preservation.

"This the first time a meeting was held with people who can do something about it," Williams said. "In our eyes, it's a huge step forward."

And for Mullinix, it's a step toward preserving something that represents one man's dream to educate his community.

"That school was his (Sgt. York's) heart and soul," said Mullinix, who believes that the school could once again be used for classroom space. "I really believe that. It's a living memorial that myself and countless others benefited from.

"I feel, if we could get the old building refurbished, it would be the crown jewel in state education," Mullinix said.

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Fentress County Executive John B. Mullinix, left, and Randy Williams, historic preservation planner with the Upper Cumberland Development District, take a look at the condition of the old York Institute building in Fentress County, TN.

Herald- Citizen Photos/Lindsay McReynolds.

ORIGINAL ALVIN C. YORK INSTITUTE TO BE TORN DOWN

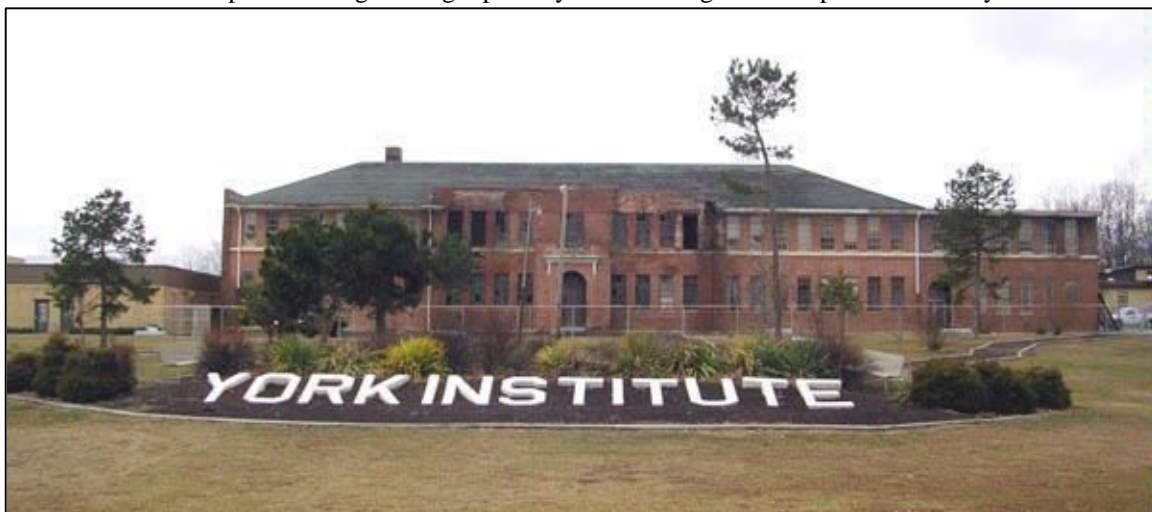
[Liz Engel](#)

Herald-Citizen Staff
Friday, Jan 11, 2008

A view of the front of the original York Institute building. Supporters of the old school have until Thursday to petition the state building commission to restore the building at a price tag of \$3.7 million. It will reportedly take \$3.6 million to tear down the school and rebuild at the site.

JAMESTOWN -- Backers of one of the most historic schools in Tennessee have only until Thursday to possibly stop the state building commission from tearing it down.

The original Alvin C. York Institute school building, located in Jamestown, has been closed off from students for more than 20 years, but now the state building commission is calling for its emergency demolition after a department engineering report says the building will collapse within two years.



The threat of demolition and the poor condition of the building is nothing new -- several windows are missing and portions of the roof are falling in -- but now the Sergeant York Foundation -- the non-profit group that works to promote and preserve Sgt. York's ideals -- has until Thursday to petition the building commission to restore it.

Michael Birdwell, member of the foundation and a York historian, said it would cost \$3.6 million to tear down the school and rebuild at the site, but it would take \$3.7 million to make necessary renovations. Birdwell also said he has identified a possible funding source that would assist with the renovations and would not require any new state funds.

"It's the most historical high school in the state of Tennessee, and they're going to tear it down," he said. "If we truly believe in what Alvin C. York did, we should restore the building. It seems to me that would be in everybody's best interest."

But the parents and school officials at the new building -- that sits just 9 feet away, and now dealing with traffic issues and unsightly views -- may not necessarily agree.

As of yesterday, the state has enforced a stricter 50-foot perimeter to be blocked off around the school with a fence -- blocking the main drive to the new school -- and school officials have scrambled adjusting the same traffic routes that have been used for decades.

Four of the current school's classrooms are now unusable, essentially displacing 500 of the school's 700 students, according to York Institute Superintendent Phil Brannon.

"I've got a teacher who had a classroom with a portable wall in it, and there was a weight room on the other side," Brannon said. "We moved the weights and put a math class in there. I had to move them somewhere."

But more than just the inconvenience, he said it is the lack of space that is calling him to move toward tearing the old building down.

"I've had several people tell me there's not a significant difference (in cost) between restoring it or tearing it down," Brannon said. "But the state is telling me that the building has to be landlocked -- I can't expand, and I'm in desperate need of a new cafeteria and kitchen. I'm in desperate need of some additional classrooms, and I don't have any direction to go. It's sitting there in the way."

"Even if they renovate it, I can never use that building because it's got mold issues -- it doesn't matter what they do, it will always have mold issues from the way it was constructed. I went to school in the old building, and I have the same memories. But I have 700 kids, about 100 faculty and staff, and a community (to worry about). It needs to come down."

York Institute has been a staple of Jamestown, located about 35 miles northeast of Monterey, since 1926. York -- arguably the state's most respected war hero and himself a poorly educated man -- wanted to establish a school in Fentress County so children growing up there would have the educational opportunities he never did.

The Sgt. York Foundation calls the school his "greatest personal achievement."

"Because of his vision, thousands of York Institute graduates went on to become leaders in communities," Birdwell wrote in the foundation's newsletter. "The foundation he helped dig, the walls he helped build remain solid, through bricks are falling from its facade. The building which should be a monument now sits as a derelict shell. We can save the symbol of its greatest 20th Century hero's life's work! Sgt. Alvin C. York, when asked, 'How do you want to be remembered?,' always replied, 'For improving education in Tennessee.'"

Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Friday, 11 January 2008, front page.

DECISION ON YORK INSTITUTE BUILDING DELAYED 120 DAYS

[Liz Engel](#)

Herald-Citizen Staff

Wednesday, Jan 23, 2008



George Edward York, middle, Alvin C. York's oldest living son, addresses the executive sub-committee of the state building commission yesterday afternoon. The sub-committee met to discuss the fate of York Institute, which some say should be demolished, and several York supporters attended the meeting to help save the building. Left is State Rep. John Mark Windle and on the right is Tennessee Tech professor and York historian Michael Birdwell. Herald-Citizen Photo/Liz Engel

NASHVILLE -- Chalk it up as a small victory for supporters of the original Alvin C. York Institute school building.

Facing possible demolition, the executive sub-committee of the State Building Commission voted yesterday to push back any decision regarding the school's fate for 120 days -- giving those involved until

May to raise the support and funds that may be necessary to save their school.

For over an hour, members of the committee heard pleas from more than half a dozen York supporters who filled a State Capitol meeting room to reconsider emergency demolition in favor of restoring the more than 80-year-old structure in Jamestown, and one of Tennessee's most historic schools.

Among those supporters was Alvin C. York's oldest living son, George Edward York, who said restoring the building was something his father would have wanted.

"This is something near and dear to me," George said. "I've heard repeatedly from the mouths of people that if Sgt. York was here, he'd say away with the building. They're completely wrong. He would never say that. In fact, if my dad was living, that building would have never been in the condition it's in."

George said at one time there had been strong community support to restore the building, some 20 years ago, but that effort died after the state refused to step in and help.

"If it hadn't been for my dad, Pall Mall would have been two words on a map," he said. "I've never talked like this in all my public speaking, I sound like I'm bragging, but because of who my dad was, there's revenue coming in there that would have restored the building a long time ago."

Other supporters -- including Tennessee Tech professors Michael Birdwell and Calvin Dickinson, Alvin C. York's great-granddaughter Angela York, State Reps. John Mark Windle and Henry Fincher and Fentress County Executive John B. Mullinix -- all made statements supporting the school's renovation for the purpose of history. Perhaps the most convincing came from Birdwell, who said York's single mission was to improve the education in Tennessee, especially in his native Fentress County, from which he himself was poorly educated.

"In the letters he writes home from the war, he makes it very clear he realized he was deficient in some ways. And he realized that an education is what set him apart," Birdwell said. "Other people were more articulate, they could read better, they knew more about the world."

Upon his return home from France in 1919, Birdwell said York hired a tutor and by 1925 had raised \$10,000 on his own to build his school.

"York helped dig the foundation for that school," Birdwell said. "York attended every graduation until 1954 when he had a stroke that left him debilitated. That school was his life. On two different occasions, he mortgaged his family's farm -- put his family in jeopardy -- to pay teacher's salaries. He bought the first two school buses out of his own pocket."

But the focus of the meeting continually shifted from York's legacy toward the funding needed for either restoration or demolition.

Costs for restoration are an estimated \$3.7 million, and the fact that the building commission has no control over the state funding makes the issue more complex.

"I think it needs to be made clear -- this building commission doesn't have the authority to procreate money," said Secretary of State Riley Darnell. "There's not \$4 million or \$3 million. Those dollars don't exist today. They may materialize, but understand we are limited in what we have the authority to do."

Mark Buchanan, the engineer that wrote the report saying the original school building was near collapse, said three cost estimates ranging from \$500,000 to \$3.7 million were prepared for three different scenarios. One was to repair the building and bring it up to current building codes, the other to tear the building down and build a similar one in its place and the third to demolish the building completely.

"It is possible the building would collapse," Buchanan said. "That's readily apparent if you look at the outside."

Buchanan said a short-term fix would be to shore -- or give support to -- the front portion of the building that is currently in the worst shape.

"In structural engineering terms and in construction terms, we think of shoring lasting maybe weeks or months. Not years," he said. "But it was explained to us, because of the budget and the process, it takes years to get from point A to point B. We are not comfortable with a temporary shoring scheme that has to maintain the place for years."

Instead, Buchanan said, the best immediate option would be to tear down the front wall and build it back to current standards -- an option that would give the building approximately two years.

But cost overruns for restoration are expected. Original figures said \$3.7 million was needed to tear the school down and rebuild at the site, but those figures could easily topple the \$4 million mark, considering the need for portable classrooms next year for displaced students at the current school and the need for a future expansion at York Institute -- while there was no argument the school needs extra space, the issue is currently being studied at length.

"We are in the process of having a master plan done to determine whether or not we need additional space," Darnell said, noting the plan should be ready in six months. "At the end of that process we will have some feel if additional space is necessary, and that decision has not yet been made."

And throughout the meeting, strong opinions repeatedly surfaced over who is ultimately at fault for letting the building reach its current state. Students haven't used the old school since the 1980s, and the issue of preservation or demolition has come up before.

"The first report on the structure of that building was in 1988, and the state's done nothing at all since then," Dickinson said. "The state is at fault for not restoring that building, I think it's the state's responsibility at this point."

But Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Dave Goetz disagreed.

"I understand your desire to support his legacy, but I haven't heard anything from the community about what you are willing to do to help," Goetz said. "Where were you 25 years ago? The community needs to step forward. You have put this on us, and I'm not sure that's fair."

"We've been paying for the operation of that high school since its inception. How much is that on an annual basis?" he continued, referring to the fact that York Institute is the only school in Tennessee owned by the state. "We were told this building is dangerous. And if there's some way to save it, and the community's willing to drive that, that's something I guess we can consider."

With that being said, State Treasurer Dale Sims made a motion to recommend a decision be deferred for a period of 120 days, contingent on the fact interested parties come together to discuss the school's best interest.

"Hopefully in 120 days the budget will be enacted, and we'll know the level of state funding available," Sims said. "One hundred and twenty days with the expressed purpose of allowing people to partner, allow the grant writing to take place, to allow Fentress County and others to determine how they can best play a role in this."

Planning for that is expected to begin immediately.

"Maybe over the last 20 years we can all agree we haven't focused on this," Sims said. "I think we now have a reason to focus."

DONATIONS STARTING TO ROLL IN FOR YORK INSTITUTE

[Liz Engel](#)

Herald-Citizen Staff

Tuesday, Jan 29, 2008

The state delayed a decision regarding the building's possible demolition last week, and a group in Jamestown has started collecting funds for its restoration. The group has set a goal of \$4.25 million, and just \$500 has been collected so far.

JAMESTOWN -- Donations and pledges are just starting to come in as collections for the restoration of the original Alvin C. York Institute school building have begun.

Headed by the Sgt. York Foundation -- a non-profit group dedicated to promoting the legacy of the War War I hero -- about \$500 has already been pledged and organizers are hoping to raise a total of \$4.25 million through their Web site for the cause.

"While this may seem like a substantial amount, if everyone who knows of Sgt. York's heroic deeds, his dedication to education, his commitment to God and country, donated \$5 we will easily reach our goal," the Web site, www.sgtyork.org, says.

The Sgt. York Foundation Web site tracks each donation toward the final goal, and the first pledge came from Fentress County Executive John B. Mullinix, a 1972 graduate of the school.

"I feel like it's very important that we try and save this building," Mullinix told the Herald-Citizen. "Not only from a historical aspect, but for also continuing education."

Mullinix said he hopes the old school building, once restored, could be used for classes for the local Roane State Community College campus. Students taking classes through Roane State are currently using portable classrooms.

"I'm not sure if the state would go along with that, and I don't know if anyone else agrees with me, but that is what I would like to see done," Mullinix said. "There's people that are opposed (to restoration) but when we explain what we're trying to do with Roane State, the people I've talked to are in support of that. There's still misinformation out there as to what we're trying to do. If we could renovate that and put Roane State in there, we'd have a winning combination."

Supporters for restoration of the school learned last week they have 120 days to raise support and funds as the executive sub-committee of the State Building Commission voted to delay a decision on the fate of the building. Recommendations have been made for demolition as the building is said to be near collapse.

For more information about the Foundation and how you can donate, visit www.sgtyork.org, e-mail sypf@sgtyork.org or call (931) 879-3657. Checks or money orders may also be mailed to: Save Y.A.I., P.O. Box 100, Suite 400, Pall Mall, TN 38577.

It was originally estimated restoration of the building would cost around \$3.7 million, but the state announced last week that cost overruns are expected.

Pledges will only be collected once the \$4.25 million goal is reached.

VETERANS RIDE, RALLY TO SAVE YORK SCHOOL BUILDING

[Liz Engel](#)

Herald-Citizen Staff

Saturday, May 10, 2008

Members of the Rolling Thunder motorcycle group rode through Cookeville on Saturday to pick up riders in support of the restoration of the original York Institute. The group went on to rally at the state capital. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea



JAMESTOWN -- Veterans statewide have now joined in the effort to save the original Alvin C. York Institute school building.

Staging a motorcycle ride from Jamestown to Nashville, somewhere around 1,000 riders, including several from the Cookeville area, were expected to gather at the state capital yesterday afternoon and rally in support of the school's restoration.

"The veteran community all across the state is just appalled that the state wants to tear that building down," said Bob Ousley, president of the Rolling Thunder Tennessee Chapter One motorcycle group

that organized the ride. "That school really became his greatest life work, and that institute has done so much for the state and the building is such an important symbol."

And the group will be able to see if their efforts make a difference this Wednesday -- the state building commission's executive subcommittee is scheduled to meet then at 10 a.m. with members of the York family, local historians and other officials to finally make a decision regarding the building's fate.

The same committee delayed a decision to either restore or demolish the building down back in January in order for the parties involved to raise funds for its cause. And at its most recent meeting last month, subcommittee members were calling for \$750,000 in funds to help stabilize the structure.

If not, according to the Department of Education, classes in the newer high school, located just feet away, will have to be held in portable classrooms in the fall. If the funds are not available, the request to demolish the structure will be on the subcommittee's agenda.

A Web site tally of monies collected by the Alvin C. York Patriotic Foundation, a nonprofit group based in Jamestown, totals just \$1,800 in pledges and donations.

The school hasn't been used for classes in about 20 years and is currently fenced up. An engineering report has said the building is near collapse.

York, known as Tennessee' greatest war hero from WWI, dedicated his life after battle to improving education in Tennessee.

Upon his return home from France in 1919, York hired a tutor and by 1925 had raised \$10,000 on his own to build his school.

"York helped dig the foundation for that school," Tennessee Tech professor Michael Birdwell said at that January subcommittee meeting. "York attended every graduation until 1954 when he had a stroke that left him debilitated. That school was his life. On two different occasions, he mortgaged his family's farm -- put his family in jeopardy -- to pay teacher's salaries. He bought the first two school buses out of his own pocket."

Wednesday's meeting could possibly bring all that to a close, but Ousley is hoping more people will take notice.

"Our protest will be kind of a last stand," he said. "This is to get the state government's attention and also get the attention of the public in Tennessee. To let them know this is a very unpopular thing they're doing. They're tarnishing the image of one of Tennessee's biggest heroes by tearing that building down."

HISTORIC YORK INSTITUTE BUILDING MAY NOW BE SAVED

Liz Engel
Herald-Citizen Staff
Thursday, May 15, 2008



A view of the inside of the original York Institute school building in Jamestown. After meeting in Nashville yesterday, hopes are now high for possible restoration. Herald-Citizen

NASHVILLE -- Faced once again with the possibility of demolition, supporters for the restoration of the original York Institute school in Jamestown gained another minor victory during a status meeting held yesterday in downtown Nashville.

Attended by officials with the Department of Education, Department of Finance and Administration, York family members and several citizens, a decision was made to possibly use funds set aside for demolition and instead use them to help stabilize the structure.

About \$500,000 is said to be needed to tear the building down, but by matching funds recently raised by York supporters, that money could be redirected toward stabilization until more funds are raised.

That option would need to pass several stamps of approval, including one from Finance Commissioner Dave Goetz, who wasn't at the meeting, according to the department's assistant commissioner Charles Garrett.

"I think if we can save the building, for whatever we use it for, it is a great idea," Garrett said. "We'll do everything we can."

Garrett also didn't make any promises. If for some reason the money isn't approved to be used for stabilization -- or if the money isn't budgeted at all -- the state will have to move forward with its plans for demolition.

"I don't think I'm going to take no for an answer, but my boss is my boss," Garrett said. "And in light of the situation we're in currently, not everyone in state government is in the best humor with all the budget cuts we're having to deal with."

The state and the Department of Education had hoped to make a decision regarding the building as soon as possible, so work could begin this summer -- and before classes start in the fall. If the building stays or is in the process of restoration, portable classrooms would have to be set up next door at the site of the current high school, which is located just feet away from the original structure.

The issue is also timely because an engineering report presented in January determined the 80-year-old building to be near collapse and as posing a danger to those neighboring students.

A fence currently separates the two structures.

"All we need is \$500,000," Garrett said. "I'm going to ask for \$500,000, and if I can't get five, maybe I can get \$350,000 to match (funds raised by York supporters), so we could stabilize it. Then they could put together a real campaign to actually restore the building. June is pretty much it if you plan to get it done."

York supporters, led by , presented up to \$250,000 in pledge money, \$150,000 which could be available immediately.

"It was another minor victory," Birdwell said after the meeting.

Especially since things looked so bleak in the beginning.

Garrett, who conducted the majority of the meeting, opened by saying the Department of Education was moving forward with its plans for demolition in June. A total of \$5 million had been requested for a supplemental appropriation to the building, but the chance of that being approved was said to be highly unlikely.

"I don't know if (that) even stands a prayer for getting approved," Garrett said. "We'll give the budget process time to see if it is appropriated, but I am moving forward to do what is in the best interest of the Department of Education, and in their opinion, the building needs to come down."

But when the York foundation presented letters of commitment for at least \$250,000 in funding, and with a promise by the executive director of the Tennessee Historical Commission to pursue possible grants to help save the building, the tide toward restoration began to turn.

"We have no money obviously right now to put into the building, but we would be more than willing to facilitate a Save America's Treasures grant," said Patrick McIntyre with the THC. "Since we believe the building has national significance, which is the initial priority you need to get that funded, we would be willing to do that. But if everything is moving in the direction of demolition, we can't do that until there's some sort of commitment."

McIntyre said after the meeting that he wasn't sure how much money that federal grant could amount to. But it would take upward of \$3.7 million to fully restore the structure, according to engineering reports.

And, because of the budget situation -- the state is currently looking at a \$468 million deficit -- no time frame was given as to when a decision regarding the building could be made.

But either way, York supporters will be waiting eagerly. They have already been successful in delaying demolition once before, when state officials in January decided to allow them more time to raise support and money.

"From our position, if the answer is no, your hands are tied," said Dean Duke, publicist for the York family. "That doesn't mean we're going away, nor are we going to allow the building to come down. Our commitment is to make sure that this historical monument stays. That it's put back in position to be utilized for education."

<http://www.ajlambert.com>



The condition of the original York Institute school building is poor, trees have taken root inside and floors have collapsed, and state officials have said the structure is unsafe. A decision to either demolished or restore the school could come as soon as Wednesday as the state's building commission is set to meet. Meanwhile, veterans are trying to have a voice in the decision that will decide the fate of the building erected by WWI hero Alvin C. York.

YORK INSTITUTE BUILDING TO BE RESTORED

[Liz Engel](#)

Herald-Citizen Staff: Cookeville, TN

Tuesday, Jul 15, 2008

York Institute in Jamestown has finally been saved from demolition, and its stabilization is expected to begin soon. Phase one will focus primarily on shoring the front of the building, a portion which is shown here, and should be completed by the time kids return to the newer, neighboring high school.

JAMESTOWN -- The ink was barely dry on the contract, but there was still cause for celebration yesterday in Jamestown.

After months of battling against the odds and countless meetings with state officials, the Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation was finally granted control over the original York Institute school building and will now be spearheading its rehabilitation.

A contract to deed the school and its property was signed yesterday afternoon, meaning the York Institute building has been saved from demolition.

The school has been under the control of the state since 1937, when the Tennessee Department of Education assumed its funding. In the 1980s, the original school building stopped being used, and a new school was built just feet away.

And the old building has just sat since, until several months ago, when the state building commission recommended its demolition, prompting the response for rehabilitation.

Reports received by the Herald-Citizen say immediate stabilization, known as phase one, will focus primarily on the front wall and firewall of the building, which both visually and structurally is in the worst shape. Work there is expected to cost around \$175,000 and should be completed by Aug. 13, when kids are expected to be back in school.

The state will give the \$500,000 it set aside -- originally appropriated for either demolition or rehabilitation -- to the foundation. Per the agreement, the foundation is committed to matching that money, and now that it officially has control of the building, can start seeking grants to help its cause.

The agreement stipulates the stabilization will be completed by Jan. 1, 2009, and the preservation of the building will be completed by Aug. 1. The foundation, in the meantime, will work to propose an ultimate plan for the building's use, which would need to be approved by the state.

In prior meetings, the foundation had discussed using the building the local campus branch of Roane State Community College branch, but nothing has been set.

The original building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was built through the efforts of WWI hero Alvin C. York, and was the first secondary school for children in Fentress County.

During a meeting in January, York's grandson, George Edward York, said preserving the school would have been what his grandfather wanted.

"I've heard repeatedly from the mouths of people that if Sgt. York was here, he'd say away with the building," he said. "They're completely wrong. He would never say that. In fact, if my dad was living, that building would have never been in the condition it's in."

WORK HALTED ON YORK BUILDING

[Liz Engel](#)

Herald-Citizen Staff, Cookeville, TN
Thursday, Sep 25, 2008

JAMESTOWN -- The soap opera surrounding the old York Institute in Jamestown continued this week as a stop work order has been executed against the aging school building.

Several hundred bricks were reported to have fallen from the front of the structure over the weekend and a stop work order has been posted on the front and rear of the building, according to Jamestown building inspector Bob Lane.

All work, including plans to shore up the front of the structure, is now on hold. The state had agreed in July to transfer the property to the Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation for its restoration, but that transfer has yet to occur. Now Lane says he will petition the state to tear the building down.

The newer York Institute school building, which houses more than 700 students, is located just feet away. Lane said it was likely the school would have to be evacuated and students moved elsewhere if that request for demolition was approved.

"A big bunch of the building fell either Saturday night or Sunday night, and when it did, I don't know who, but somebody called TOSHA (the Tennessee Occupational Safety & Health Administration)," Lane said. "(Compliance officer) George Cameron ordered us to stay away from the building. So I went on and issued the stop work order."

But the timing of the order and the reasoning behind it are off, say supporters.

Members of the Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation, a non-profit group that has been fighting for the building's preservation, as well as York family members, were in Nashville yesterday requesting the historical status of the building be upgraded to that of national significance, a request that was unanimously approved. York Institute was first placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991 but just for its statewide significance in education.

A national registration could open up additional funding sources for its restoration.

"Bricks have been dropping off that building for a long time. That's one reason we're trying to do what we're trying to do," said Randy Williams, historical preservation specialist with the Upper Cumberland Development District. "Of course the building is in bad shape. You don't have to know anything about architecture, engineering or history; you can drive up to the front of that building and tell it's in bad shape. There's a lot of false information out there. But it is not in danger of eminent collapse."

Because of the recommendation from the State Historic Preservation office, the foundation's request now heads to Washington, Williams said, and if approved at that level, the old building could be on the national register as soon as late November or early December.

"It's pretty much a rubber stamp from there," he said. "They usually never reject anything that comes from the State Historic Preservation office. For all intents and purposes, it's a done deal."

And the restoration of the building was expected to begin soon. Both Williams and Sgt. York Foundation member Michael Birdwell said the deed transfer from the state would occur in the next few weeks.

"As far as the stop work order, I don't know what that means, if it means anything at this point," Williams said. "It (likely) will be dealt with in a legal manner."

"We're trying to stabilize the building," Birdwell said. "It doesn't make any sense to issue a stop work order. There's a logical error there."

As for what's next, it's uncertain. Lane said he would be sending a request to the state department of education today, asking they reconsider tearing the building down. He said there's several petitions circulating around Fentress County supporting his effort, and he expects several thousand signatures to be collected by November.

"The studies have all said the building would probably fall this summer, and they're right on the money," Lane said. "That's what's happening. It's beginning to fall. And here we are putting out a fire here and a fire there. I don't know what's going to happen."

WORK ON OLD YORK BUILDING FINALLY UNDERWAY

[Liz Engel](#)

Herald-Citizen Staff, Cookeville, TN
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Work has begun to stabilize and restore the old York Institute school building in Jamestown. Tennessee Tech professor and York historian Michael Birdwell (left), historic preservation planner Randy Williams (center) and George York (right), son of Alvin C. York, recently toured the building along with several officials from Fentress County, the Tennessee Historical Commission and the Upper Cumberland Development District. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea

JAMESTOWN -- A lot has changed at the site of the old York Institute school building over the past several weeks.

Somewhat forgotten now is the falling bricks fiasco, the stop work orders, long-winded fights about the building's future and the state's once intended plans for its demolition.

Work on the school's stabilization and restoration has finally begun.

And when kids return to school in the fall, conditions will be even better. A chain-link fence that is currently serving as a 50-foot barrier around the old building will be removed. Four closed classrooms located at the new York Institute, built just feet away, will be opened back up to teachers and students.

"The entire north end of the building is stable," Tennessee Tech professor and York historian Michael Birdwell said. "Both ends were stabilized (with steel structures) so they can open those four classrooms back up in the fall. The overcrowding problem at the school should be solved at least for the short term."

But there's still lots of work to be done.

Birdwell and several officials, including fellow York historian Calvin Dickinson, members of the Tennessee Historical Commission, Upper Cumberland Development District, and Fentress County

Executive John B. Mullinix, recently toured the inside of the structure -- something that many hadn't done in four years.

"It really doesn't look all that much different from the way it looked four years ago in terms of deterioration," said Patrick McIntyre, executive of the historical commission. "It was a terrific opportunity to see how things were. It's such a great place, and being there I was struck by what a wonderful landmark it is."

Wasco, a masonry company based out of Knoxville, has removed all the loose brick, and First Response has clean up the inside debris. All hazardous material such as bird droppings and asbestos has been removed.

"There was very little asbestos," Birdwell said. "That is gone." He said stabilization should be finished around July 1.

The intention is to return the building back as a school, something the citizens of Fentress County -- as well as members of the Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation -- fought hard for. Public sentiment around the project has reached a "wait and see" type attitude, according to Mullinix.

"I'm just excited work has started. We're actually going to be able to save a national historic treasure," Mullinix said. "They've still got a lot of work to do, but we're going to finish it and it's going to be something that belongs not only to this community, but the entire state and the entire nation."

Sgt. Alvin C. York, often regarded as one of Tennessee's greatest war heroes, established York Institute in 1926. The old school has been closed off to students for more than 20 years, but the building has continued in a state of despair ever since. The state stepped in January 2008 with plans for demolition, setting in motion a more than year-long saga to save it.

After the initial stabilization and mothballing is complete, the building will be ready for restoration. That step of the project could take several years.

It's expected the entire renovation will cost in the \$4 million range. Grants are currently being pursued.

"We're working with the foundation on any and all funding opportunities," McIntyre said. The Tennessee Historical Commission has already awarded a more than \$26,000 grant which was prepared by Ross-Bryan for the building's engineering study.

Another \$8,000 donation was recently pledged by the Next Generation Underwriters, a risk management and insurance company based in Hendersonville, which will pay for the insurance that was needed for the construction to begin.

To help raise even more money for the cause, there is also a July summer fundraiser in the works. Although details are still hazy, Birdwell said, but the event will include music, a silent auction and a sit-down dinner priced at \$100 a couple and \$65 for a single. Proceeds from that event will help the Sgt. York Foundation in its restoration efforts.

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YORK BUILDING STATUS UPGRADED, HAS NEW PLACE ON NATIONAL REGISTER

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Herald-Citizen File Photo/Ty Kernea **George Edward York, son of war hero Alvin C. York**, stands in front of the old York Institute school building in Jamestown earlier this month. The status of York Institute



on the National Register of Historic Places was recently upgraded, and the building is now recognized as being nationally significant.

-- A long-standing and historically significant school building in Jamestown has found a new place on the National Register of Historic Places.

Additional documentation was recently submitted and approved in order to upgrade the status of the original York Institute, the school established by World War I hero Sgt.

Alvin C. York. Since 1991, York Institute has been listed on the national register for its local significance in education. The new rating recognizes its national standing and was achieved after a nearly year-long process.

The new rating would mean York Institute, which has for the past 20 years been closed off to students, is now eligible for major grants, a significant step since a \$4 million project to stabilize and restore the building continues to move forward. York Institute was saved from a state-led demolition effort in early 2008 after an engineering report found it just years from collapsing. The Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation, a nonprofit group dedicated to promoting York's legacy, led the effort to save the structure and work at the site of the school is currently progressing.

"The upgrade in the site's significance affirms the Tennessee Historical Commission's belief that the Institute is an iconic cornerstone of York's legacy as the monument he sought for himself," said Patrick McIntyre Jr., executive director of the Tennessee Historical Commission. "On a practical level, the Institute building is now eligible to apply for a (federal) Save America's Treasures grant."

York, often regarded as one of Tennessee's greatest war heroes, established York Institute in 1926 as a way to improve education in Fentress County, a rural community located about 50 miles northeast of Cookeville and Putnam County. The newer, neighboring school has a population of more than 700 students.

McIntyre noted the designation was not the same as being designated a National Historic Landmark, which is a different and more lengthy process.

The process to upgrade York Institute's status began last year. Michael Birdwell, a Tennessee Tech professor and York historian, said the foundation received official notification of the designation earlier this month.

"It's a huge thing. It had to go from the state review committee all the way up to Washington," he said. "It took almost a year for that to happen."

Work on phase one of the project, which includes stabilization and site clean-up, continues and is expected to be complete before school starts this fall. After the initial stabilization and mothballing, the building will be ready for restoration. That step of the project could take several years.