

Courthouse

PROBLEMS CREATED BY

Birds



The issue of the birds reached a visible climax in 1988. A cornice was pulling away from high atop the old Butler County Courthouse in Hamilton, Ohio, 23 miles north of Cincinnati. When the maintenance crew removed the cornice, recalled Dick Law, Butler County purchase director, "there were 300 lb of bird feces."

The old courthouse was designed in traditional fashion, adorned with many ornamental ledges, where the infestation of roosting birds had been going on for decades. "Conditions were deplorable," Law emphasized. "Bird droppings were a foot thick on some ledges." The mess behind the cornice generated immediate nega-

tive television news coverage and questions about health issues. There was talk of histoplasmosis, a serious bacterial infection that could infect workers and visitors. "A couple of courthouse employees were later diagnosed with the disease," he confirmed.

"It was a major problem," continued Law. "We assured news reporters that we would look into the issue and take care of it." And they did.

ONE SOLUTION

In 1989, at a cost of \$85,000, Butler County installed metal spikes to discourage birds from landing and roosting on the courthouse ledges and elsewhere on the architecture. While this made practical sense at the time, it was not an aesthetically attractive solution. To some people, the visible metal prongs made the

building look more like a fortress or a prison than a distinguished public structure.

In 1997, when the County Commission decided that the courthouse needed to be refurbished, the architects insisted that the metal be removed. Dick Law greeted this news with alarm.

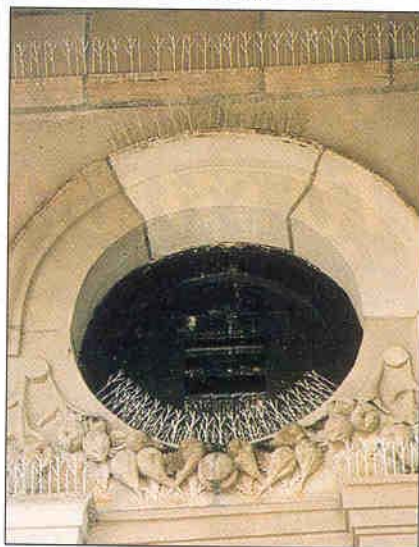
"I warned them that this could mean trouble with birds." He could envision the return of starlings, turtle doves, and sparrows that had previously inhabited the square city block occupied by the courthouse and its coterie of fine old trees. He could imagine the buildup of unsightly droppings that had plagued the courthouse before. With the former bird control devices removed, he feared the recurrence of birds and of bird droppings.

AN "OUT OF SIGHT" SOLUTION

Law had read about a different solution to bird nuisances in a trade publication, and he contacted Bird-X, Inc. (Chicago, Illinois). "Bird-X offered clear, hard plastic spikes that would not detract from the courthouse's appearance," he explained. "The company sent me a sample strip of the transparent spikes, which I put in the freezer for three days to test. There was no breakage," he stated. He felt sure that the spikes would hold up against Ohio's "deep freeze" Midwestern winters.

"I ordered the product—11,000 ft of spike strips to cover every ledge on all floors of the four-story courthouse, its four ornate porticos, and under the round windows."

Professional contractors installed the Spikes® needle strips in about two weeks, using a cherry picker to apply the adhesive and place the strips. The cost was under \$35,000 in total, including purchasing the



spikes, cleaning the courthouse exterior, and installing the spikes.

The spikes project upward and outward from the base strip at various angles, creating a dense vertical barrier to deter birds. The spiked shafts block birds and also cause a "discomfort factor" akin to humans walking on nails. Yet they are not lethal to birds. They are environmentally safe and, in

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the case of Butler County Courthouse, architecturally accepted and aesthetically unobtrusive.

HOLDS BARRED

The results were immediate. The returning birds stopped using the courthouse ledges as landing strips. Only the four portico sections need a supplementary measure such as netting to keep the birds from infiltrating.

"Older cities with ornate buildings need to address the problem of birds," Law urged. "Don't wait," he cautioned. "Lawsuits can be ugly if someone gets the disease histoplasmosis."

Law is not keeping the secret of the courthouse success to himself. He has spread the word among other professionals through the Ohio State Purchasing Association, and he is telling local business proprietors in town who have inherited the birds displaced from the courthouse. **PW**