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SHELBINA, Mo. -- The Shelby County Historical Society's museum at 107 Center St. has been a repository of historic artifacts and research materials for years.

But as more stuff kept arriving and piling up -- filling the two-story building practically to the rafters -- the museum finally ran out of space.

"It's completely full right now," said Kathleen Wilham, the historical society's longtime president. "We're just bursting at the seams."

Several months ago a golden opportunity came along. The building next door at 109 Center became available for sale after the Grille 109 restaurant went out of business.

The historical society wasted no time. It quickly bought the single-story property in November for \$55,000.

"We had to expand in some direction, and this was the most logical direction," Wilham said.

Ever since, the historical society has been working with contractor Jerry Kaser of Bethel to convert the former restaurant into a genealogical research center and library.

Wilham said the historical society plans to move many of its genealogical materials, books, old photos and family history collections into the new center, where several large tables will be made available for the public's use.

"This way, all the records and books will be available in one place, and people can come in and do research," Wilham said. "It will be one-stop shopping for research."

Moving all of the research materials to the new center will also free up space inside the historical society's museum, allowing more historic artifacts to be taken out of storage and displayed.

"We have whole collections that have never been put out," Wilham said.

For example, she said the historical society was given a large collection of documents, records and photos from the family of Shelby County native Charles "Sonny" Magruder.

"He was a famous singer in New York City," Wilham said. "We just never had the room to put out this collection. Now we will."

One room in the new research center will be dedicated to the collections of Roy T. Neff, who spent years gathering records from the schools, churches and cemeteries of Shelby County.

Wilham said the society also plans to make available 40 boxes of Catholic family records and photos collected from across Northeast Missouri by the late J.A. Buckman. In addition, Robert Steinbach's massive collection of Bethel records and genealogy will be showcased.

On top of that, Wilham, who has worked for years as a professional genealogical researcher, is donating her 45-year collection of Northeast Missouri research to the society. All of this is contained in 16 four-drawer file cabinets and 14 6-foot-tall bookcases. It includes her extensive Civil War and Bethel collections.

"All of these collections have been inventoried and organized to be easily researched," she said. "It will all be in one location, easy to find."

She also is donating her extensive collection of local newspapers dating back to the 1800s.

Wilham said expanding into the building next door will enable the historical society to display its research materials in a more comprehensive and cohesive way.

"I think it will be wonderful when it's done because everything will be all together instead of in four different locations," she said.

The renovation of the former restaurant has been going smoothly.

Wilham said the work so far has involved rewiring the building; taking out the old floor and putting in new flooring, including 124 18- by 18-inch porcelain floor tiles; tuck pointing the bricks on the inside walls; converting two small bathrooms into a single restroom; adding insulation; and installing eight new ceiling fans with energy-efficient LED lighting.

"The whole room now is bathed in light," Wilham said. "It's awesome."

Plans also call for installing new front windows. Wilham said the goal is for the two adjoining buildings to match in appearance once all of the work is completed in a couple of months.

"It will be fantastic when it's done," he said.

More information about the historical society and its projects is at shelby.mogenweb.org.