

(Oct. 1990)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Liberty County Courthouse

OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 1923 Sam Houston Blvd.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A

CITY OR TOWN: Liberty

VICINITY: N/A

STATE: Texas

CODE: TX

COUNTY: Liberty

CODE: 291

ZIP CODE: 77575

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide x locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)


Signature of certifying official

10/18/02
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register

 See continuation sheet.

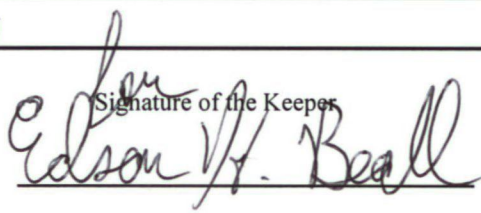
 determined eligible for the National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain): _____


Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

12/12/02

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Public - Local

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	1	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	3	2 OBJECTS
	4	2 TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: GOVERNMENT/courthouse = county courthouse

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: GOVERNMENT/courthouse = county courthouse

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION CONCRETE

WALLS STONE: Texas Cordova Cream Limestone

ROOF SYNTHETICS: Membrane roofing (Duracast brand)

OTHER

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-7).

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Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

DESCRIPTION

The 1931 Liberty County Courthouse is the seventh courthouse to occupy the original town square in Liberty, Texas. The two-story poured-in-place concrete building with a raised basement is finished in Texas Cordova Cream limestone. Reflecting the progressive economic and business attitudes that Liberty County had embraced in the late 1920s, architect Corneil G. Curtis executed a notably "modernistic" Art Deco design that featured rectangular, geometric massing, expressed verticality, decorative metal panels and a preponderance of flat, unornamented surfaces. The limited exterior ornament is confined to low-relief sculptural panels depicting regional imagery including longhorns, covered wagons, water lilies, pine trees, oil derricks, and Texas Lone Stars. The courthouse's interior, with wood doors and trim, marble wainscot, and ceramic tile flooring, is remarkably intact. Although a 1956 addition obscures the west side of the building, it retains a good degree of its historic and architectural integrity.

The Liberty County Courthouse is built in Liberty's courthouse square, bounded on the north by Trinity Avenue, on the east by Main Street, on the south by Liberty Avenue and on the west by Trinity Street. In coordination with the construction of the 1931 courthouse, the original perimeter dimensions of the square (about 295' x 295') were modified to accommodate diagonal automobile parking along all four sides. Axial sidewalks lead to the four cardinal entrances of the courthouse. (Plan-16) The north, east, and south sidewalks are enhanced by small landscaping beds, light poles and a few benches. Randomly placed trees (oaks, pecans and crape myrtles) are scattered around the site, and shrubbery accents the north, east and south entries. During the 1931 building's original construction, a low earth berm was built up to the windows of the raised basement, easing the contrast between the courthouse and its flat site.

1931 Courthouse

The 1931 courthouse, a two-story poured-in-place concrete and steel truss structure with a raised basement, is finished in Texas Cordova Cream limestone. Sited with the long axis running east-west for natural ventilation, the building mass is bi-axially symmetrical. The main block, 62 feet by 144 feet, is augmented by end bays that project eight feet in each direction. Monumental stairs lead to the north and south entrances in the recessed central façades. A bold dado caps the raised basement, and forms a plinth for the continuous two-story pilasters that regulate the building's composition. Both the steel windows and decorative metal panels covering the spandrels are painted black, forming a visual void between the pilasters that further emphasizes the building's verticality. The first and second stories are sheathed in an interesting stone coursing, with thin strips set between each course of larger blocks. A tall, flat entablature sheathed in full-height stone panels caps the composition. Above each entrance, four acroteria extend above the parapet as if continuing the pilasters beyond the rigid horizontal boundary. Low-relief sculptural panels on the dado and between the pilaster tops contain stylized regional imagery: longhorns, covered wagons, water lilies, pine trees, oil derricks, and Texas Lone Stars. Waves incised in the continuous dado warn of the proximity of the Gulf of Mexico. Large eagles over the entrances and winged Federal shields impart the building's governmental function.

The building's north and south façades are identical, with five bays in the central recessed portion and three bays in each of the projecting end sections. The projecting faces of the east and west elevations are also visible on the ends, with a

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narrow window at each floor in the sidewall. Within the primary masses, nearly identical bays are repeated rhythmically across the façade. The raised basement, distinguished by its more massive stone coursing and unique window treatment, forms a visual base for the first and second stories, which dominate the composition. In the upper two floors, pilasters divide each bay, with slightly wider pilasters framing each section. An expansive steel window at each floor spans the space between the pilasters, with a decorative metal panel covering the second-story floor structure and completing the visual void described above. Each floor contains an identical window comprised of four vertical panes of equal size, but the second-floor windows are also capped by a four-part transom. The windows' operation is unique, with the two middle panes in a center-hinged, bi-fold frame that opens outward.

On the north and south, the only divergence from the typical bay configuration occurs at each façade's central entrance. A wide stairway, flanked by walls that stop at the building's dado, leads to an open plaza in the building's recessed central section. The monumental stair conceals most of the basement, but with partially submerged entrances flanking the stairs and small windows visible between the plaza and dado, its presence is still evident. The entry in the central bay projects slightly, with separate fluted pilasters and a cap featuring a stylized eagle. The original doors and transoms have been replaced. The entry's vertical boundary is even with the second-floor sills, allowing a typical second-floor window above. The words "Liberty County," flanked by "AD" and "1930," are carved across the otherwise undecorated frieze above.

The east and west elevations of the 1931 Liberty County Courthouse were also identical, but the 1956 addition now conceals the west side almost entirely. The east elevation is much narrower than the north and south sides. With five bays and a central entrance, it closely resembles the central section of those façades. It includes the acroteria above the four central pilasters and the same carving in the frieze. Set alone and slightly altered, however, it lacks the monumentality of the north and south façades. The stairs are only as wide as the center bay, and the entrance is much less pronounced. To accommodate the entrance's placement lower in the elevation, the window above is taller than any others and divided into three vertical sections including the transom. The elevation is flat except for the narrow sidewalls of the projecting north and south end sections, which also include a narrow single window at each floor.

The building's plan is relatively traditional, organized by four cardinal entrances connected with axial corridors, dividing each floor into four quadrants. (Plan-17, Plan-18, Plan-19) Upper and lower floors are accessed by stairways at each end. The courthouse's interior is remarkably intact. Historic mosaic flooring and marble wainscoting appear throughout the building. Although some ceilings have been lowered and interior partitions built, little historic fabric was destroyed to do so. The imposing District Courtroom occupies a double height volume on the first floor of the courthouse. (A special steel truss structure was used within the concrete frame to achieve the extra height.) The courtroom survives fully intact with all of its original finishes, furnishings, and light fixtures and is an excellent example of Art Deco design. The finishes include red vinyl asbestos tile flooring, stained wood wainscot, and plaster walls and ceiling. Mimicking the exterior, the courtroom's walls are ordered by flat pilasters capped by an egg-and-dart band. Between the pilasters, a triglyph-and-menope frieze runs beneath a shallow crown molding. The ceiling plane is divided into two flat panels of acoustical tiles. The original light fixtures are made of bronze with faceted glass. The judge's bench and railing, jury box, and audience pew-type seating are constructed of ash with a stained finish that has darkened over time.

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Several small monuments have been placed on the square. A World War Two howitzer on the northwest corner is accompanied by a small bronze plaque dedicated to the 1956 Observance of the Liberty Bicentennial (noncontributing). The east side of the square includes three red granite steles. One, a Texas centennial marker erected in 1936, describes the founding of Liberty County (contributing). Another near the building's southeast corner commemorates *Captain William M. Logan, First Sheriff of Liberty County* (erected 1943, contributing). The third lies near the south entry walk, placed by the Masonic Lodge in 1948 (contributing). A state historical marker near the south entry describes the *Seven Courthouses of Liberty County* (erected 1996, noncontributing).

1956 Addition

A 1956 addition, designed by Houston architect Wyatt C. Hedrick, was built on the west side of the Liberty County Courthouse. It attaches to the west face of the courthouse and extends along the west side of the courthouse square. It is designed in a relatively plain, modern style composed of a two-story central block with one-story wings on each side. The concrete framed structure is clad in tan brick with a cream-colored limestone entry bay and limestone panels between the first and second floor aluminum windows. Although originally flat-roofed, a sloped, dark brown metal roof was added in the 1990s, creating storage areas in the attic.

Although the 1956 addition blocks the west elevation of the 1931 courthouse, its scale, placement, and materials render it almost unnoticeable from the other three sides of the building. The south (historically the "front"), north, and east elevations were untouched by the addition and much of the west elevation's original materials remain in place under the addition. Other changes to the courthouse have been minimal. In recent years a new roof has been installed and cleaning of the stone has revived the exterior appearance. Many interior finishes, particularly plaster walls and ceilings, have been damaged by water infiltration from leaking roofs and windows and through exterior masonry. Future work will focus on arresting the water infiltration problem and updating the mechanical and electrical systems. Original finishes will be revealed and restored where necessary.

With the original building largely intact, the 1931 Liberty County Courthouse retains its integrity of location, materials and workmanship. The building's continued use as a courthouse has also maintained its integrity of association. The 1956 addition is clearly distinguished, and although it has altered the courthouse's setting and feeling, it does not detract significantly from the 1931 design. The courthouse's most important architectural features, including its massing, its windows and its ornamentation, remain unchanged. Overall, the 1931 Liberty County Courthouse retains a good deal of its historic and architectural integrity and is worthy of listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- ☒ **A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- ☐ **B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- ☒ **C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- ☐ **D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Government, Architecture

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1931-1952

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1931

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Architect = Corneil G. Curtis; Builder = M.H. Ryland

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-8 through 8-13).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-14 though 9-15).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

- ☒ State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

There is no other building in Liberty with the historical and community significance of the 1931 Liberty County Courthouse. This seventh courthouse for the county, it has been in existence longer than any other in the county's history. Because of its long associations with the history, economy, and the government of the county, the Liberty County Courthouse is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of government. The courthouse was also one of the first in a long line of "modernistic" government buildings, which proliferated in Texas during the years of New Deal public works projects. Corneil G. Curtis's design, originally conceived in 1927, responded to the era's most current architectural trends and predated most similar examples by several years. Most notable is the design's reduction of forms and ornamentation to a very stylized, geometric simplicity. For its early interpretation of Art Deco architecture in Texas and as a superb example of its type, the courthouse is also eligible for the National Register under Criterion C in the area of architecture.

Development of Liberty and Liberty County

Liberty County's courthouse square was first designated an official site of government in 1831, when Mexican land commissioner José Francisco Madero platted the 49-block *Villa de las Santísima Trinidad de la Libertad*. Following the Law of the Indies, the *villa*, whose name was shortened to "Liberty" by its Anglo-American colonists, included several plazas, one of which was the site of the official government office, the *casa consistorial*. As in many colonial towns, following Texas's independence from Mexico and the establishment of Liberty County in 1836, the government plaza became the courthouse square.(Fisher 1996)

Through the middle of the 19th century, the town and county of Liberty shared an economy based on agriculture and trade. Cotton, cattle, produce and timber were all produced in the area, and with its site on the Trinity River the county seat developed into an important regional shipping center. The 1858 arrival of the Texas and New Orleans Railroad simultaneously confirmed and amplified the significance of Liberty as a transportation hub.(Kleiner 1996a) Following the Civil War, however, Liberty began to lose economic ground in relation to the county as a whole. With growth in the cattle, rice and timber industries, the county maintained a steady population before doubling rapidly in the last decade of the 19th century.(Kleiner 1996b) Following smallpox and yellow fever epidemics and the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe's rail bypass across the northern part of the county, the town of Liberty was left with a diminished population and a declining economy. By the turn of the century, Liberty was quickly becoming a ghost town.(Kleiner 1996a)

The beginning of the 20th century, however, would soon bring Liberty back to and beyond the level of wealth and prosperity it had once enjoyed. A rapid succession of oil discoveries brought a new industry to all of southeast Texas, generating overnight boomtowns in the process. The closest rail stop to the Batson-Old oilfield, discovered in 1903 in neighboring Hardin County, Liberty was reborn as such a town, and by 1910 it boasted three cotton gins, a grist mill and a cigar factory. The 1925 discovery of the South Liberty oilfield ushered in another phase of rapid growth.(Kleiner 1996a) Through the first half of the 20th century, the increasingly dominant petroleum industry continued to supplement, and then supplant, Liberty County's agricultural base. The significance of Liberty's role in this regional economy was further

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enhanced with the 1940 completion of a 236-mile waterway along the Trinity River, providing barges a direct connection with the Houston Ship Channel.(Kleiner 1996a)

World War II brought a substantial increase in Liberty County's industrial development, but agriculture and oil continued to drive the county economy throughout and after the war. In fact, the county's rural areas grew twice as fast as urban areas following the war. Soybeans and rice became the region's staple crops and sulfur mining emerged, while the oil and gas industry continued to grow and thrive. The town of Liberty continued to develop its manufacturing base while maintaining its role as a regional management and distribution center, with 70 oil firms establishing offices in the town by 1970.(Kleiner 1996a) Meanwhile, the Houston metropolitan area was expanding steadily and began to encroach on neighboring counties like Liberty. With its relatively close proximity and existing economic ties to the city, Liberty has, in addition to maintaining its local economy, become a bedroom community for Houston.

The 1931 Liberty County Courthouse

Enjoying the county's oil-fed economic and population boom of the early 20th century, the Liberty County Commissioner's Court began to examine the adequacy of its 1895 courthouse in the mid-1920s. In May 1927, they noted that, "The old Court House as it now exists is not adequate to the needs of Liberty County and does not sufficiently protect the records..."(LCC 1927: H: 375) The county hired Houston architect Corneil G. Curtis and asked for a report comparing the costs and benefits of repairing the existing courthouse versus replacing it. Curtis prepared a complete proposal for the existing building's renovation, but he very clearly favored the counterproposal of replacement, using phrases like, "thoroughly modern fireproof construction," "including the most modern conveniences," and "affording the greatest efficiency at the least maintenance costs and upkeep." He added that, "This building would provide for the needs for fifty years in the future and would be a source of pride and satisfaction to the people of Liberty County."(LCC 1927: H: 384-387)

The progressive-minded commissioners' court swiftly agreed with Curtis's recommendation and authorized him to prepare the plans for a new, modern courthouse. Although there was apparently a considerable amount of local support for keeping the 1895 building, their sentiment was ultimately no match for the "demands of progress."(McDaniel 1931: 10) By September 1927, Curtis had essentially arrived at the Art Deco design that we see today.(Figure-20) The initial bids for the building's construction, however, were all rejected as being too costly.(LCC 1927: H: 397) The issue apparently languished for three full years, as no action was taken until September 1930, when the commissioners' court once again solicited bids on Curtis's plans. This second effort was successful, and the main construction contract was let to M.H. Ryland of Uvalde in November.(LCC 1930: H: 569-581)

After the county's courtroom, offices and records were moved to a vacant Methodist Church, work began on the demolition of the old courthouse and construction of the new, commencing by the start of 1931. Construction was completed in December 1931, at a total cost of approximately \$250,000. The building was featured that month on the cover of *County Progress: The Business Magazine For County Officials*. The author, Ruel McDaniel, wrote, "The new structure embodies the most modern ideas in both design and equipment and it is one of the most modern court houses to be found in a small or medium-sized county anywhere in Texas."(McDaniel: 10) According to Liberty's newspaper, the

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new courthouse embodied "the most modern ideas in both design and equipage.... The building follows a modernistic architectural design, somewhat along the lines of other Texas court houses recently completed."(*Liberty Vindicator* 1931).

These statements indicate the importance of the courthouse's design to the county's image. Progressivism was seen as an especially important attribute at the time, especially among businessmen and "civic boosters." Consistent growth and "modernization" were seen as paramount aims, and both public and private interests were anxious about the consequences of being left behind. Erecting a building with a novel, "modernistic" design was an effective way of publicly asserting one's progressive attitudes. Corneil G. Curtis's design for the Liberty County Courthouse appropriately incorporated the era's most current and progressive architectural trends. The building's blocky geometric massing, flat unornamented surfaces, modern materials and highly stylized imagery would have seemed new and original, especially in 1927 when the design was originally proposed. Along with Curtis's very similar design for the Rusk County Courthouse (Figure-21), executed just prior to his work in Liberty, it represents one of Texas's earliest manifestations of Art Deco architecture.

For most practical purposes, it seems fair to characterize the style of the Liberty County Courthouse as "Art Deco," but the term has undergone a substantial amount of academic scrutiny and it deserves some clarification here. The term was derived from the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris, an event that both showcased and influenced the then emerging language of Modernism. Through architectural journals and word of mouth (the United States did not officially participate), the Paris Exposition offered American designers a glimpse into the dramatic stylistic changes developing in Europe. Although a pavilion designed by Le Courbousier, and those representing the USSR and Denmark, foreshadowed the profound formal changes that would accompany the International Style of the 1940s and 1950s, the majority of pavilions exemplified a less revolutionary, but still new and rich, ornamental vocabulary that would have an immediate impact, especially in America.(Little 1979: 29-31)

The most influential aspect of this new vocabulary, especially in the United States, was the tendency to replace historicist decorative features with a rigidly geometric, stylized form of ornamentation. This method was applied to buildings' defining formal components, like columns and cornices, as well as in limited areas of applied decoration, often in the form of low-relief sculptural carvings. While building's designed in this style achieved a novel and modern "look," what was inside the "envelope" remained relatively unchanged. So, "In general, Art Deco was a style of ornamentation; it did not drastically affect spatial relationships or construction techniques."(Little 1979: 31)

In order to more accurately convey the real impact of these stylistic developments, and to downplay the significance of the Paris Exposition in relation to the trend's wide array of influences, architectural historians have sought more accurate terms to delineate specific styles within the range of buildings categorized as Art Deco. In *Architecture in Texas, 1895-1945*, Jay Henry borrows a popular term from the era and labels such styles, "Modernistic Modes of Design." (Henry 1993: 194) The term "modernistic" (used to describe the Liberty County Courthouse in the 1931 newspaper article cited above) is accurate in that the buildings' modern surface was often only a veneer on a fairly traditional building. This was certainly the case with the Liberty County Courthouse, whose axial plan and formal arrangement differed little from Texas's Neoclassical and Beaux-Arts courthouses of the late-19th century. Henry therefore classifies this earliest stage of "modernistic modes" as the "Modern Classic" style.

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The Modern Classic style was the perfect solution for a county who wanted to seem progressive and forward-thinking without completely abandoning the familiarity, solidity and monumentalism of classical idioms. As Willard B. Robinson discusses in *The People's Architecture: Texas Courthouses, Jails, and Municipal Buildings*, these attributes made the Modern Classic (or what Robinson refers to as "Stripped Classic") style an especially popular choice for public architecture in the 1930s.(Robinson 1983: 262-269) The Liberty County Courthouse is an excellent, and notably early, example of the style, illustrating the melding of traditional and modern characteristics that define it. Its symmetrical composition and monumental entrances recall any number of Texas's 19th-century courthouses, but the stark geometry of the masses themselves conceals the underlying historical relationship. The building's native Texas limestone would fit well in any traditional design, but the concrete frame, decorative metal panels and steel casement windows are distinctly modern materials. The building's pilasters are stripped and plain, but their rhythmic arrangement retains the effect of a classical columnade. Regional imagery and democratic symbolism form the major decorative elements on the exterior, with low-relief panels recalling the agricultural, timber, and mineral resources of the county, as well as the county's pioneers. Inside, polished marble wainscoting and colorful encaustic tile were emblems of the Modern Classic style. Even the courthouse square was adapted to accommodate the "machine age," as the surrounding expanse of green space gave way to parking for citizens' automobiles.

Corneil G. Curtis

Corneil G. Curtis, the architect of the Liberty County Courthouse, was born October 8, 1890 in Dallas, Texas. He began his architectural training in Dallas around 1910. He apprenticed with the firm of Lang and Witchell, which was widely known for progressive designs at the forefront of contemporary architectural trends. Lang and Witchell was one of the earliest practitioners of the Prairie Style and "Chicago School" architecture in Texas, and Curtis may have participated in the design of two notable examples of that style, Dallas's Sanger Brothers Building and Sears and Roebuck Wholesale Store. He would also have worked with Charles E. Bargebaugh, the firm's main Prairie School designer, who had come to the firm after working with Frank Lloyd Wright.(Curtis 1999a; Henry 1993: 50-53) Curtis was thus exposed to America's earliest steps towards architectural modernism.

Around 1912 Curtis moved to Paris, Texas to oversee a commission for Lang and Witchell. He married Mary L. Means there, and soon established his own practice in Paris as Curtis, Broad, and Lightfoot (later Curtis and Lightfoot). In 1916, the commercial core and much of the residential area of Paris burned. Curtis, with various partners, designed or assisted in the design of many of the buildings that replaced the old High Victorian business district. Among those in his portfolio were the American National Bank, the Perkins Dry Goods Store and several schools and residences. One of Curtis and Lightfoot's most notable works is the Paris City Hall and Fire Station (1920). Henry (1993: 88) calls it a "sophisticated" treatment of the combination of the two city functions; no doubt the fire station was a prestigious commission in the wake of the Paris fire. Curtis also assisted Sanguinet and Staats in the design of the 1920 Lamar County Courthouse.(Curtis 1999a; Henry 1993: 52)

Curtis's training at Lang and Witchell is evident in his design for the 1920 Paris City Hall and Fire Station, with its clean lines, "Chicago" windows and sparse, but intricate, ornament.(Figure-22) It also illustrates, however, how much classical forms and detailing continued to dominate his, and most of his contemporaries', designs. Curtis's continued move toward modernism in the mid-1920s can most likely be attributed to his connections in the world of architecture, who must have

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kept him abreast of new developments. His longtime friend Dudley Green actually attended the 1925 Paris Exposition, before returning to Dallas to design the 1930 Dallas Power and Light Building and 1931 Lone Star Gas Building for Lang and Witchell, both elegant Art Deco skyscrapers. (Henry 1993: 311n.8, 312n.16, 223-224) Based on Curtis's subsequent designs, beginning with those for the Rusk and Liberty County Courhouses, he must have absorbed a lot from Green's first-hand experiences.

By 1926, Curtis and his family had left Paris and moved to Houston, beginning what would be the height of his career. He received two courthouse commissions, the first for the Rusk County Courthouse in Henderson and the second for the Liberty County building. (Curtis was partnered with Albert Thomas of Dallas at the time the Liberty courthouse was constructed, and the firm name, Curtis and Thomas, appears on the cornerstone. Curtis, however, handled all the design and construction supervision from his Houston office. (Curtis 1999a)) About the same time he was working on the Liberty courthouse, Curtis also had a commission from the Liberty State Bank (founded in 1913). After experimenting with gothic and classical decorative treatments, Curtis and his client decided on an Art Deco style to match the new courthouse across the street. Although the first floor elevation on the west has been "glassed over," the building still stands and imparts at least some of its historical look to the courthouse square. (Curtis 1999a; Curtis n.d.) Curtis and Thomas also had the commission for a hotel in Plainview, one of the first Hiltons, and for the 8-story Hilton Hotel (Falls Hotel) in Marlin, constructed in 1930 (Curtis 1999a; Henry 1993: 128). In addition, he took on commissions for the city halls in Alvin and Goose Creek (1927-1930), both oil boomtowns. (Curtis 1999a, 1999b) In 1936 he designed a third courthouse, a much plainer version of his earlier "Modern Classic" designs, for Chambers County.

The late 1920s and early 1930s was a prolific time for Curtis. He designed a number of buildings, including residences, schools, and commercial buildings, although not all were built. Rather than exhibiting any focus on Art Deco, however, his drawing collection from that period reveals a decidedly eclectic approach to many of his projects. Schools might have Mission Revival or Moderne decoration on the same basic form. Residences were more likely to be Tudor, Mediterranean, or Colonial Revival. Commercial designs included Mediterranean and Moderne styles. One design for Metzger's Milk dairies plant in Houston had monumental milk bottles on the front corners (Curtis n.d.). (Curtis had grown up in South Dallas near the original Metzger's plant and had become friends with the younger Metzgers.)

In 1934 Curtis moved to Austin, where he and his wife Mary were very active in the lobbying effort to require registration and certification for Texas architects. Their home was the base of operations for Lester Flynt, a Dallas architect and good friend of Curtis's from his days in Paris, who led the legislative effort. In 1937 the Texas Legislature created the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners, and Curtis received license number 14 (Curtis 1999b; Barna 1996: 6: 413-414).

Having served in a cavalry unit during World War I, Curtis tried to enlist in the army during World War II, but the military considered the Great War veteran too old to serve in combat. Instead, he worked with a private contractor building military installations in the Caribbean (Curtis 1999a). After the War, Curtis went into private practice again, associating with A. B. Benson and later with Alvin Newbury, an architect in Dallas. Curtis and Newbury built several large residences in Dallas.

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Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

By the early 1950s, however, Curtis was architect-in-charge at the Texas Highway Department, designing and building resident engineer offices and maintenance complexes throughout the agency's 25 districts. As the leader of the design team, he brought a modern aesthetic to the agency, as reflected in the International-influenced district offices that still grace many Texas counties. After he reached the age of 65 in 1955, Curtis was able to pick and choose his projects, and he preferred those in the Amarillo, Dallas, Fort Worth, Paris, and Brownwood districts. Robert Hays (1999), one of Curtis's draftsmen who went on to become the chief architect at the old Highway Department, considered the diligent and hardworking Curtis to be a "master architect." Hays also recalled that Curtis did not believe in coffee breaks. Curtis retired from the agency in 1962 and died in Austin at the age of 72 on July 1, 1963 (Curtis 1999a; *Austin American* 1963).

The 1931 Liberty County Courthouse has served as the center of Liberty County's government for over 70 years. It represents the progressive attitudes of the government that oversaw its design and construction, as well as the longstanding and continuing association of its site with governmental functions. It is therefore nominated to the National Register under Criterion A in the area of Government. Corneil G. Curtis's design for the building exemplifies the emergence of a modern ornamental vocabulary in America during the late 1920s and forecasts its widespread use on Texas's public buildings through the 1930s. As a superb and early example of Art Deco architecture in Texas, the Liberty County Courthouse is also nominated under Criterion C in the area of Architecture.

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National Park Service

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Section 9 Page 14

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

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National Park Service

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Section 9 Page 15

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	326820	3326500	3	##	#####
2	##	#####	#####	4	##	#####

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The courthouse is built in the middle of the town square, which is bounded on the north by Trinity Ave (Hidalgo), on the east by Main St. (Socrates), on the south by Liberty Ave (Allende), and on the west by Trinity St. (Jimenez).

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION The nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.

11. FORM PREPARED BY (with assistance from Peter Ketter, THC Historian)

NAME/TITLE: Beth Walker

ORGANIZATION: Ray Bailey Architects, Inc.

DATE: August 14, 2001

STREET & NUMBER: 4100 S. Shepherd, Suite 100

TELEPHONE: 713.524.2155

CITY OR TOWN: Houston

STATE: TX

ZIP CODE: 77098.5399

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-23)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS (see continuation sheets Plan-16 through Plan-19 and Figure-20 through Figure-22)

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Liberty County

STREET & NUMBER: 1923 Sam Houston Blvd.

TELEPHONE: 936.336.4667

CITY OR TOWN: Liberty

STATE: TX

ZIP CODE: 77575

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

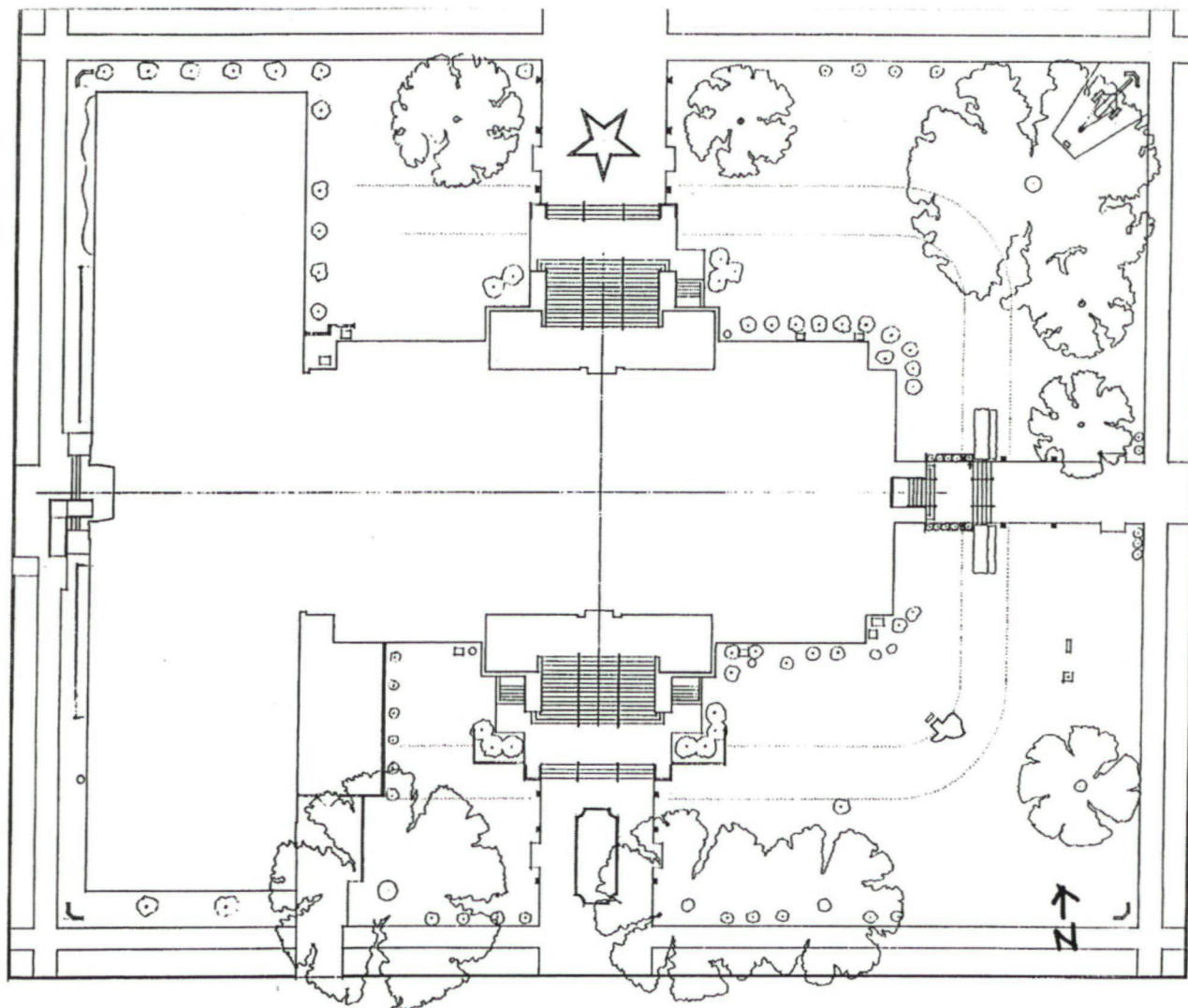
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Plan Page 16

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

Site Plan, Not to Scale

Liberty County Courthouse Master Plan, 2000



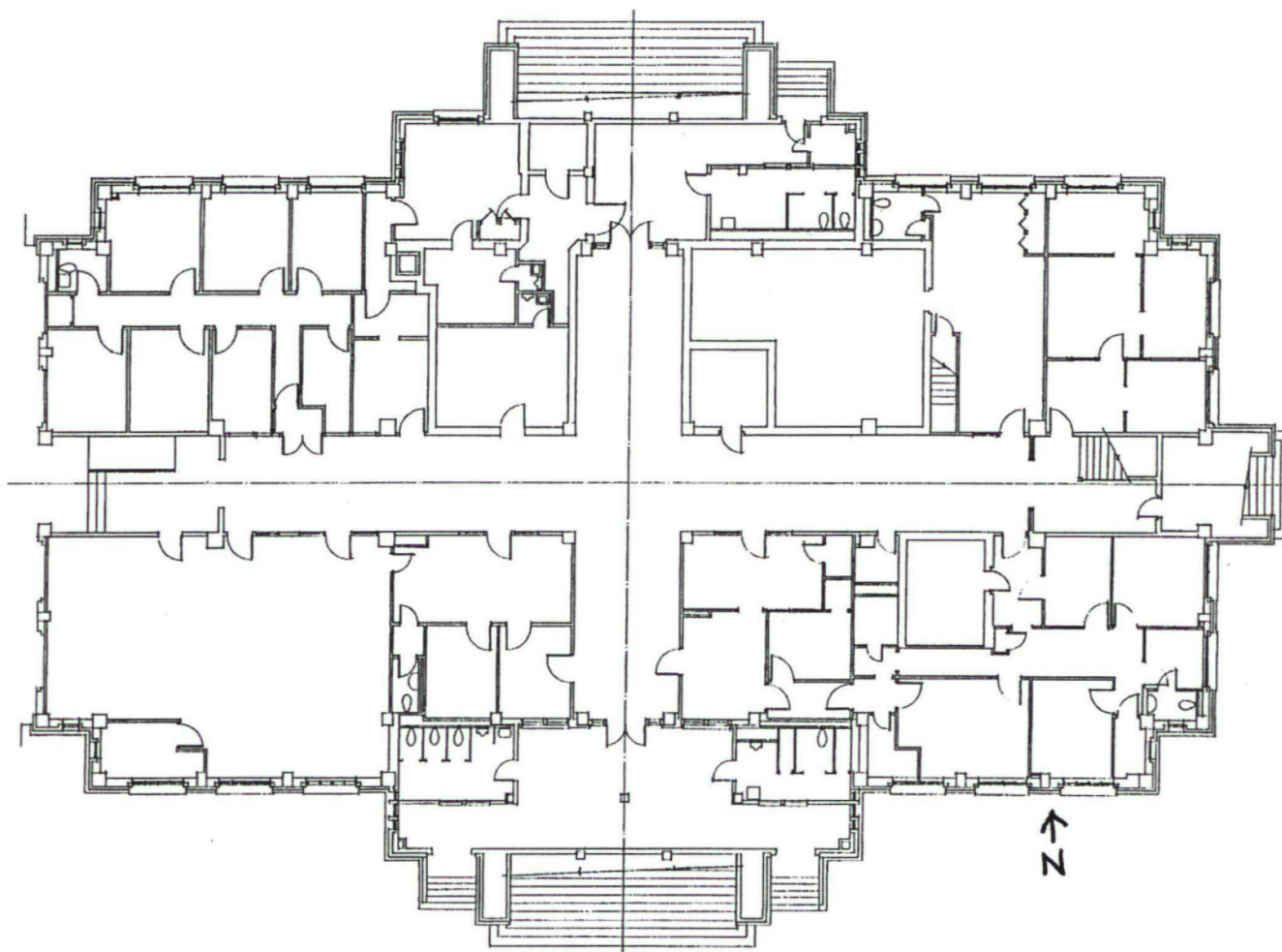
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Section Plan Page 17

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

Basement Plan, Not to Scale
Liberty County Courthouse Master Plan, 2000



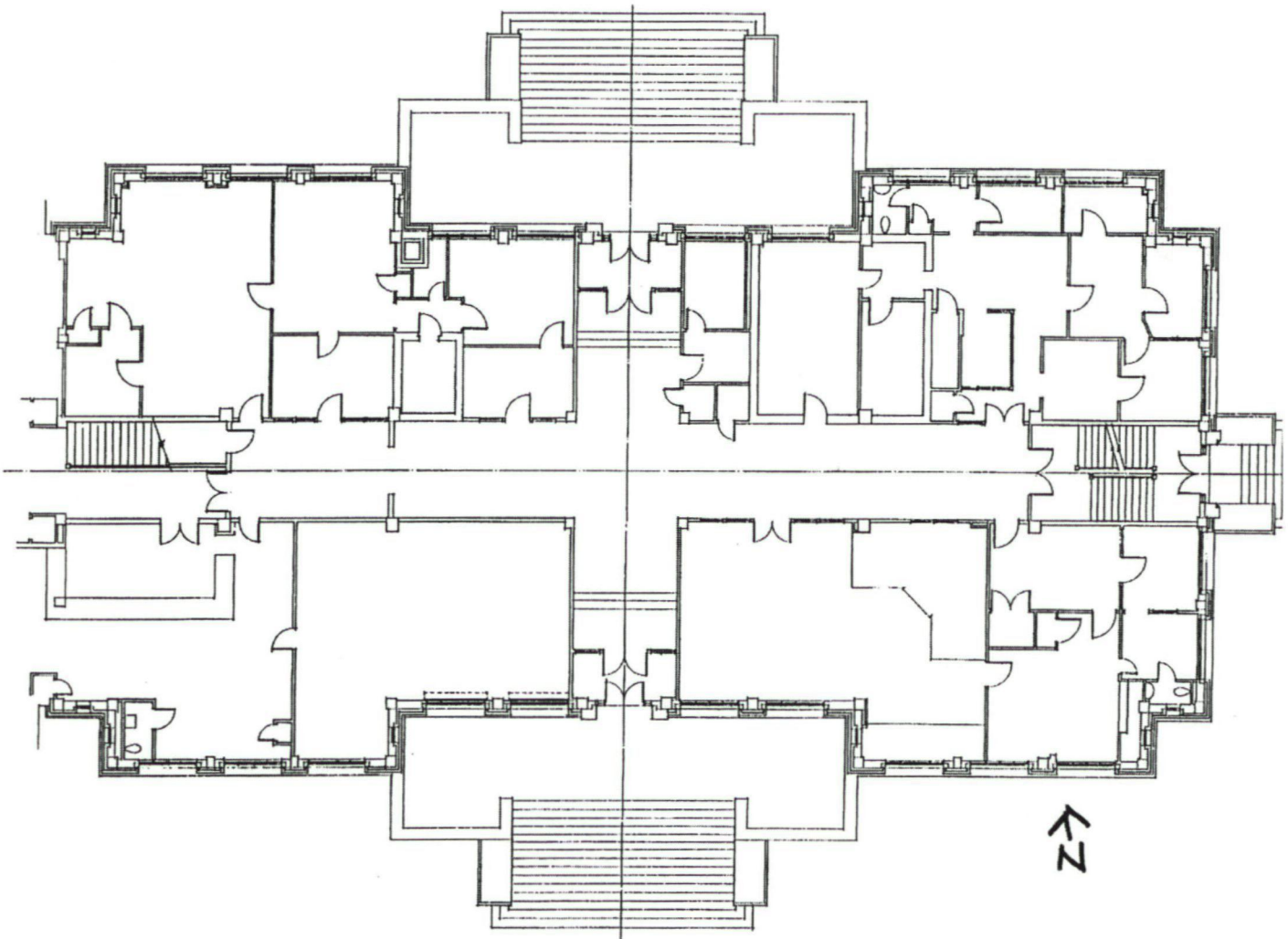
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Section Plan Page 18

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

First Floor Plan, Not to Scale
Liberty County Courthouse Master Plan, 2000



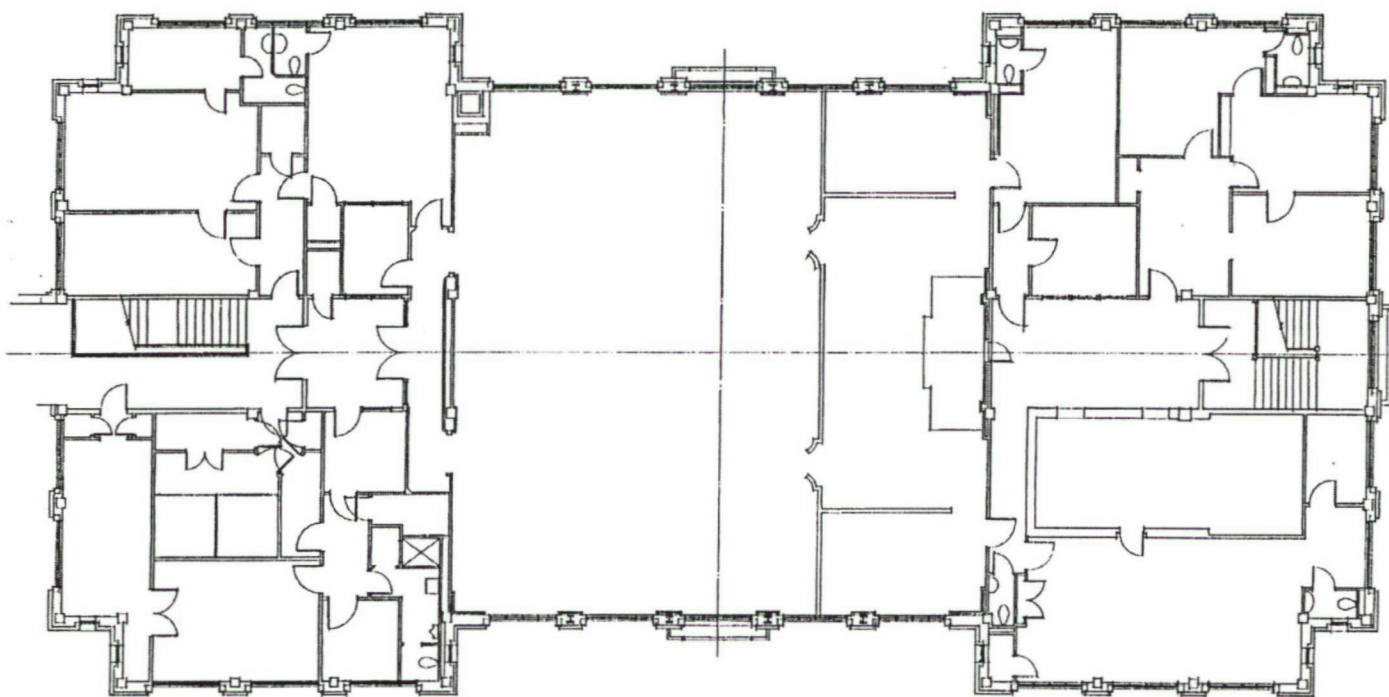
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Section Plan Page 19

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

Second Floor Plan, Not to Scale
Liberty County Courthouse Master Plan, 2000



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N

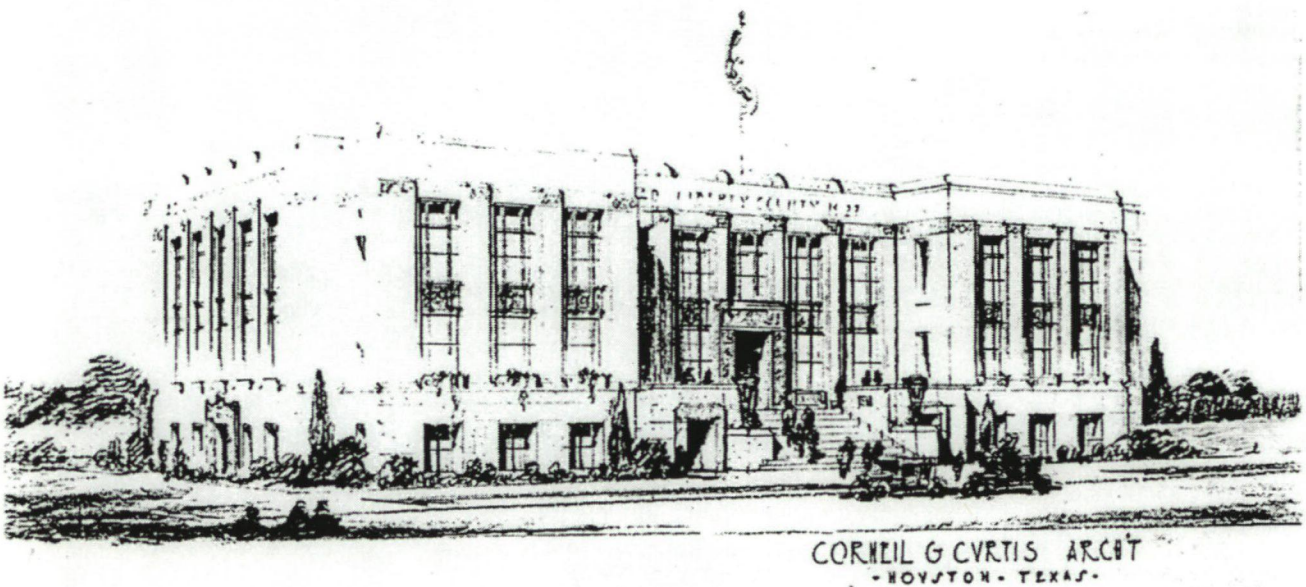
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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Figure Page 20

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

Corneil G. Curtis's 1927 Rendering of the Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty County Courthouse Master Plan, 2000



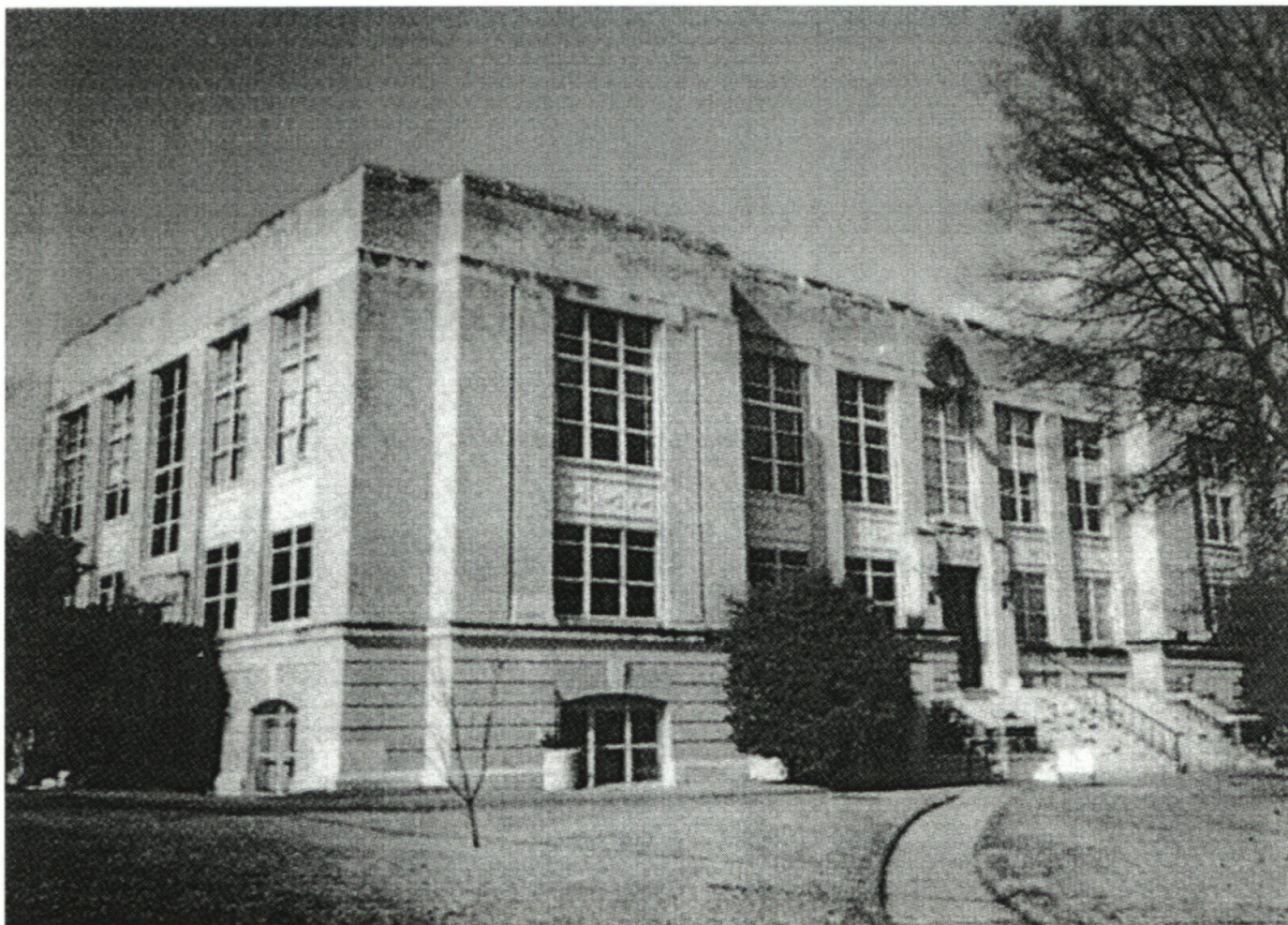
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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Figure Page 21

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

1928 Rusk County Courthouse, Henderson, Texas (also designed by Curtis)



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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Figure Page 22

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

1920 Paris (Texas) City Hall and Fire Station (designed by Curtis)
Architecture in Texas, 1895-1945



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Section Photo Page 23

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas

PHOTO LOG

Liberty County Courthouse
Liberty, Liberty County, Texas
Photographed by Gerald Moorhead, FAIA
August 1999
Negatives on File with Ray Bailey Architects, Houston, Texas

Photo 1 of 6
Southeast oblique, camera facing northwest

Photo 2 of 6
South façade, camera facing north

Photo 3 of 6
East elevation, camera facing west

Photo 4 of 6
Detail of south façade, camera facing northwest

Photo 5 of 6
1956 addition, southwest oblique, camera facing northeast

Photo 6 of 6
District courtroom interior, camera facing northeast

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Liberty County Courthouse

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Liberty

DATE RECEIVED: 10/29/02 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/22/02
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/08/02 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/13/02
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 02001514

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL:	N	DATA PROBLEM:	N	LANDSCAPE:	N	LESS THAN 50 YEARS:	N
OTHER:	N	PDIL:	N	PERIOD:	N	PROGRAM UNAPPROVED:	N
REQUEST:	N	SAMPLE:	N	SLR DRAFT:	N	NATIONAL:	N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 12/12/02 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



LIBERTY COUNTY COURTHOUSE
1923 SAM HOUSTON BOULEVARD
LIBERTY, LIBERTY CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 6



LIBERTY COUNTY COURTHOUSE
1923 SAM HOUSTON BOULEVARD
LIBERTY, LIBERTY CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 6

LIBERTY COUNTY



LIBERTY COUNTY COURTHOUSE
1923 SAM HOUSTON BOULEVARD
LIBERTY, LIBERTY CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 6



LIBERTY COUNTY COURTHOUSE
1923 SAM HOUSTON BOULEVARD
LIBERTY, LIBERTY CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 4 of 6

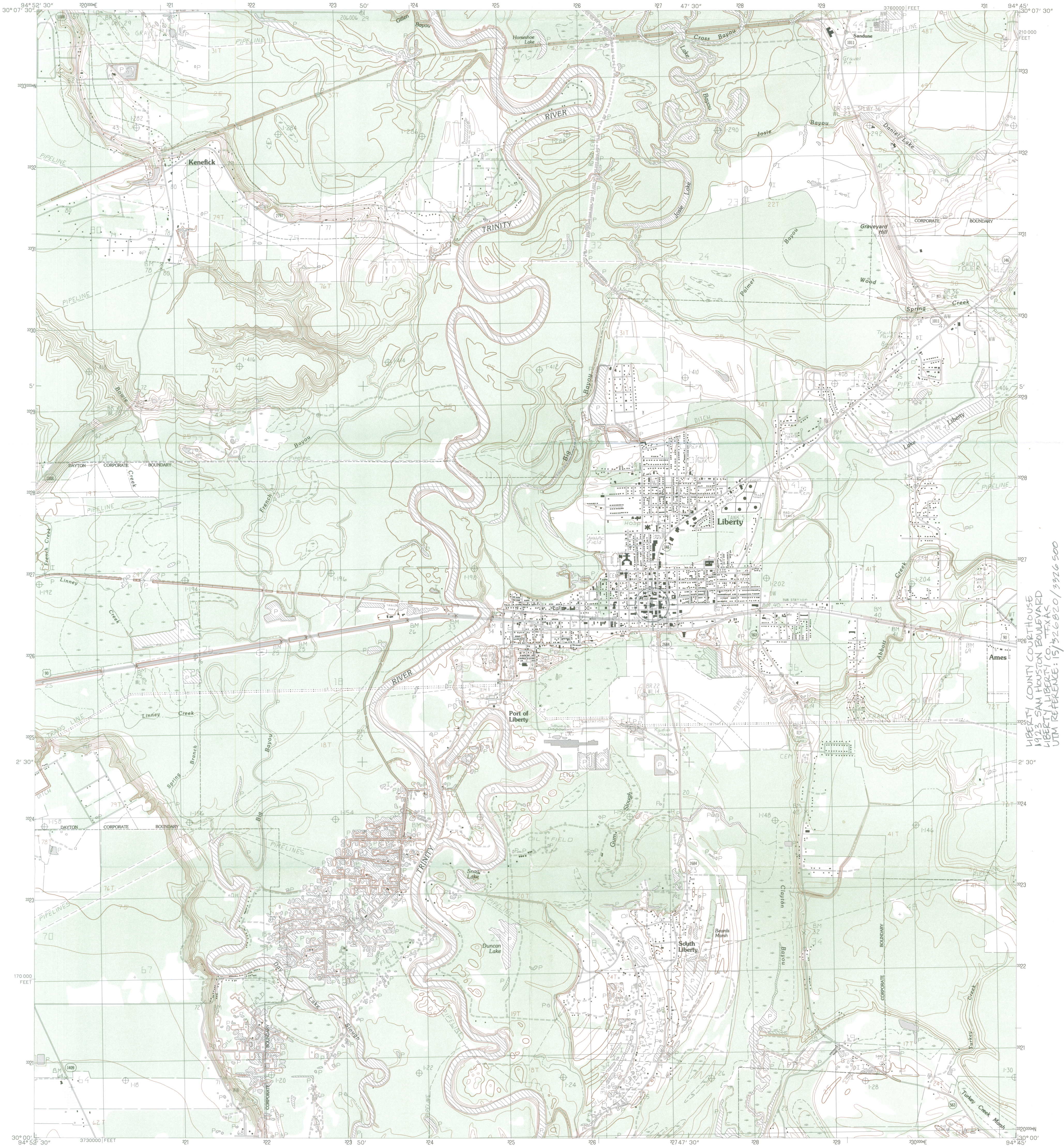


LIBERTY COUNTY COURTHOUSE
1923 SAM HOUSTON BOULEVARD
LIBERTY, LIBERTY CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 5 of 6



LIBERTY COUNTY COURTHOUSE
1923 SAM HOUSTON BOULEVARD
LIBERTY, LIBERTY CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 6 of 6

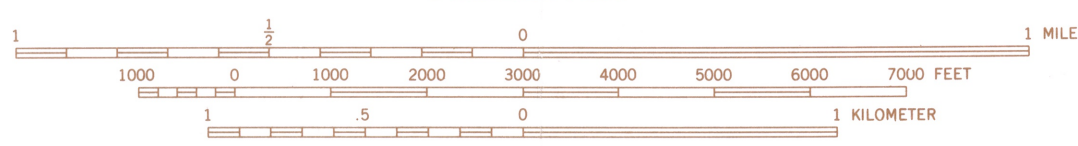


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FIELD CHECKED 1977 MAP EDITED 1984
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GRID: 1000-METER UNIVERSAL TRANSVERSE MERCATOR ZONE 15
10,000-FOOT STATE GRID TICKS TEXAS, CENTRAL ZONE
UTM GRID DECLINATION 954° WEST
1984 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION 5°30' EAST
VERTICAL DATUM NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
HORIZONTAL DATUM 1927 NORTH AMERICAN DATUM
To place on the predicted North American Datum of 1983, move
the projection lines as shown by dashed corner ticks
(19 meters north and 20 meters east)
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of any
Federal and State Reservations shown on this map

PROVISIONAL MAP
Produced from original
manuscript drawings. Infor-
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field check.

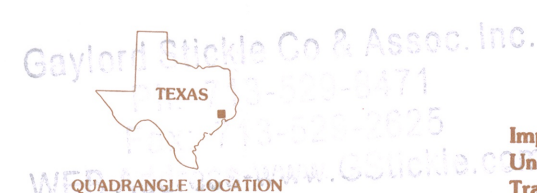
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			5 Daisetta
			6 Shiloh
6	7	8	7 New Bluff
			8 Shiloh

ADJOINING 7.5 QUADRANGLE NAMES
3094-221

ROAD LEGEND
Improved Road
Unimproved Road
Trail
Interstate Route U.S. Route State Route

LIBERTY, TEXAS
PROVISIONAL EDITION 1984

30094-A7-TF-024

LIBERTY COUNTY COURTHOUSE
1923 SAN HOUSTON BOULEVARD
LIBERTY LIBERTY CO. TEXAS
UTM REFERENCE: 15/326820/3326500

