

(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



690

NATIONAL REGISTER OF+ HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: La Salle County Courthouse
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: NA

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 101 Courthouse Square
CITY OR TOWN: Cotulla VICINITY: N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: La Salle CODE: 283 ZIP CODE: 78014

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] _____ Date 5/8/07

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] _____ Signature of the Keeper
[Signature] _____ Date of Action
2-11-07

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Public-local

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	1	1 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	1	0 OBJECTS
	<u>2</u>	1 TOTAL

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

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: NA

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: Government: Courthouse; Monument

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: Government: Courthouse; Monument

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Modern Movement: Moderne

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION CONCRETE, TERRA COTTA
WALLS BRICK, CONCRETE, TERRA COTTA
ROOF ASPHALT
OTHER

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-8).

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La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas

From its location atop Cotulla's highest hill, the La Salle County Courthouse instills a sense of pride in community, government, and history. The courthouse square, as originally platted in the 1880s by town founder Joseph Cotulla, is adjacent to a city park and at the end of an axis leading to the community's business district. Symmetrical, cross-axial and rectangular in plan, the brick building, completed in 1931, features a set back jail as its top floor, and the building's massing and ornamentation are similar to other Zigzag Moderne works of the era. Designed late in architect Henry T. Phelps' prolific career, the building's details exhibit a restrained, streamlined celebration of La Salle County's heritage, with terra cotta elements including a county seal, eagles, and other stylized Zigzag Moderne details. The building remains largely unchanged from its design and use at its completion in 1931.

Site and Plan

Typical of much of South Texas, La Salle County's topography is a landscape of flat to rolling terrain. Plant life includes mesquite, small live oak, palm, and post oak trees, as well as a variety of scrub brush, cacti and grasses.¹ Sited on a hill and visible from five miles away, the La Salle County Courthouse was originally aligned on an axis with the San Antonio Highway (Pan-American Highway), and a sense of the building's magnitude can still be felt when approaching Cotulla from the north.² The building was constructed at an approximate 18-degree offset from the cardinal directions, although within most documents, including this nomination, the elevations and respective site information will be referred to as north, south, east, and west. The site includes one non-contributing tool room building located at the northwest corner of the parking lot.

The area west of the courthouse consists primarily of an asphalt parking lot, while the eastern portion of the grounds, facing the commercial heart of town, is landscaped with mature trees. The courthouse's site originally sloped to the northeast and was terraced at the time of its construction. Sidewalks and steps, which radiate from all four entrances of the structure, appear to be original. There is no statuary on the grounds, although a white rock in a Texas-shaped configuration rests at the southeast corner of the courthouse grounds, a 1936 Texas Centennial marker commemorating the county sits on the eastern boundary of the grounds (contributing object), and a maintenance shed sits at the northwestern corner of the site (non-contributing building). While officially not part of the courthouse grounds, the city park that occupies the block immediately to the east of the square has very close geographic and civic ties to the building. The formal setting of the sidewalk as it aligns with the courthouse's main, east entrance emphasizes the relationship between the city park and the courthouse square. The architecture of the east façade, however, is largely obscured because of the trees that have matured in the park-like setting on the eastern side of the building.³

The courthouse features three floors of county office and courthouse space and a fourth-floor jail set back from the main building façades. The three main floors, built on a rectangular plan, are of brick and concrete construction; the solid masonry construction rests on a pier and beam concrete foundation. The fourth-floor jail and the mechanical penthouse of the elevator are centered above and set back from the central bay of the courthouse, which features a flat roof. They are significant visual elements, especially from a distance. Primarily seen as visual elements of the building's east and west elevations, the jail and penthouse's lack of detail and simple, stepped façades of smooth finish concrete and plaster with

¹ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/LL/hcl4.html> (accessed August 21, 2006).

² La Salle County Courthouse, Master Plan Investigation.

³ *Ibid.*

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basement, the building was constructed with only a boiler room below ground level used for mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, as well as for storage.

Exterior

Style references

The courthouse reflects a hybrid of styles. Grounded in a Classical Revival form, the emphasis, through ornamentation, is Art Deco, with highly stylized allusions to such Classical Revival features as pilaster capitals and pediments over the building's entrances. Each façade of the courthouse is symmetrical and features a central frontispiece flanked by wings featuring a regular pattern of pilasters and windows. The pilasters feature stepped, cream-colored terra cotta capitals representative of the Zigzag Moderne style popular at the beginning of the Art Deco movement. The central bays of each façade also feature Zigzag Moderne elements, including the same pilasters as well as stepped forms echoing pediments used in Classical design.

Materials

A continuous band of cream-colored terra cotta follows the slope of the site at the base of each façade. Above the base rise the three floors of the courthouse proper, constructed of rough-scored, hard-fired brick, with colors ranging from earthy orange to almost white, and accented by terra cotta decorative elements in earthy tones, including green, gold, and cream. A fourth-floor jail sits above the building's center, and a two-bay elevator penthouse is above the jail. The jail and penthouse, stepped back from the main façades, have simple exteriors of smooth finish concrete and plaster with painted surfaces that match the cream-colored terra cotta. A chimney, projecting from the west side of the building, is of brick construction with a ring of cream-colored terra cotta near the top.

Fenestration and ornament

The primary pattern of windows is found on the north and south elevations and on the wings flanking the frontispieces on the east and west sides of the building. Each floor of the courthouse has distinct decorative and functional elements, including original all-steel windows with single-pane glass and operable awning and hopper sashes. Each window features a cream-colored terra cotta sill. Terra cotta panels also serve as spandrels between the first and second floor windows, which are of eight and six lights respectively. The spandrel panels feature a colorful design of a shield with the letters "L" and "S." Surrounding each shield are stylized geometric floral designs in orange and green. Brick pilasters, flush with the face of the water-table, divide the slightly recessed bays of windows. The pilasters are capped with stepped, cream-colored terra cotta surrounding cross-shaped inlays of floral patterns. Like the chimney, the three floors of the courthouse structure are ringed with a string cornice of terra cotta near the roofline on the recessed bays. The band, the top of which meets the base of the stepped pilaster caps, consists of two parallel lines of cream-colored terra cotta. Colorful stylized floral patterns fill the negative spaces made by a continuous zigzag of the same cream-colored terra cotta.

The courthouse's stylized ornament occurs mainly at the entranceways and as a band just below the parapet. The decorative spandrels, which occur between the windows of the first floor and the second floor, are polychrome with the stylized floral patterns around a shield with the letters "L" and "S," referencing the county name, formed in the terra cotta.

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Entrance pavilions

The entrance pavilions on each side vary from the fenestration and decorative elements of the remainder of the building. None of the courthouse's aluminum doors are original. Steps lead to the entrances, and a ramp for accessibility has been constructed along the south elevation.

North and south façades

The north and south façades follow the primary pattern of pilasters and windows, with four pilasters, four regular bays, and a single-bay frontispiece. The frontispieces, in which the Art Deco emphasis on verticality is subtly rendered, features a single doorway surrounded by glass sidelights and a single pane of glass above the glass door. The door and surrounding windows are not original. Above the single pane of glass is a set of two spandrel panels featuring the La Salle County shield design. Above the spandrels on each side is an original six-light window. The vertical grouping of door, windows, and spandrels is surrounded by cream-colored terra cotta and capped with a geometric, stylized eagle design and other colorful terra cotta elements. Above each eagle is an additional six-light window, and above it, set in the center of a continuation of the zigzag string course, is a blank octagonal space originally intended to house a clock face. Surrounding the top of each octagonal spaces is an abstracted pediment comprised of stepped, cream-colored terra cotta. This pediment of sorts acts as a capital for the entire central bay and echoes the similarly stepped treatment of the pilaster capitals.

Unique to the south façade is a concrete ramp leading to the south entry. The north entry is reached by a series of steps leading up the terraced ground on the north side of the site.

East and west façades

The east and west façades are longer than their north and south counterparts. Each three-bay, projecting frontispiece is flanked by four-bay wings. The wings follow the primary pilaster, window, and ornament pattern. In the east and west entrance pavilions, as on the north and south sides, the doors have been replaced with non-historic glass doors. Within the two outer bays on each side of the doors are eight-light windows on the first and second floors, with spandrel panels featuring the "L.S." shield infilling the spaces between the first and second stories. Matching the north and south ornamentation, the vertical grouping of door, windows, and spandrels of the entryway is surrounded by cream-colored terra cotta and capped with a geometric, stylized eagle and other colorful terra cotta elements. Above the eagle on each side, and within the continuation of the zigzag string course, is the blank space originally intended for a clock face. On the east and west façades, though, instead of an abstracted pediment above the octagonal spaces, pilasters capped in stepped capitals project above the string course. Above these two pilasters and the outer two of the frontispieces is a simple stepped brick parapet. The jail and penthouse atop the structure, though, mimic the pediments from the north and south elevations. Painted to match the cream-colored terra cotta, the jail and penthouse together form a stepped feature above the brick building. Bare of decoration save windows and wide battlements, the smooth-finish plaster and stepped massing, recessed from the front of the projecting entrance pavilions, create the sense that the east and west elevations are just larger, broader versions of the north and south façades. Visually more apparent in the east and west elevations, the six-bay jail and two-bay elevator penthouse surround the frontispieces.

Unique to the east façade is the use of eight-light windows on the second floor of the frontispiece, which was designed as the building's main entrance. The terraced site that leads up to the building from the city park, and the number of mature trees give the east side of the courthouse grounds a distinctively lush appearance. Although the east elevation is in large

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part hidden behind the trees, the shady eastern side of the courthouse grounds is inviting in the glare of the South Texas sun.

The west façade is also unique. Its central bay features an irregular grouping of windows that correspond to the main interior stairway located just within the west entryway, the only entrance that features double doors. Above the doors is a spandrel panel featuring a variation on the shield design. Immediately above it is a six-light window, followed by a set of the more standard shield panels and a third set of windows featuring six-lights. The west façade adjoins the main parking area for the courthouse. Only a narrow strip of small plantings separates the building from the asphalt lot.

Exterior conditions and alterations

In general, the exterior of the La Salle County Courthouse is in very good condition. There have been almost no modifications to the original design and the deteriorative elements are almost all attributable to water penetration or rust. The condition of the exterior brick masonry and terra cotta is excellent. The only major element of the exterior façade that has been greatly altered is the entrance doors at all four entry points. Existing aluminum doors detract from the historical façade upon entering the building. Window air conditioning units also mar many of the windows. Plans are underway with funding from the Texas Historical Commission to install an HVAC system in a sensitive manner.

Interior

The rectilinear La Salle County Courthouse features four entrances, and halls to and from these entries cross in the building's center. The structure's primary stairway is just inside the west entry, and a secondary stair leads from the second to the third floor in the north hall way. The building's interior was originally designed and fitted simply. It retains a high degree of integrity and many of its original furnishings.

In addition to various offices, the first floor houses the county commissioners court room, which features terrazzo floors, historic wood baseboards and chair rail, and smooth plaster walls culminating in a drawn plaster crown molding. The second floor houses additional offices as well as the district courtroom at the south end of the structure. Courtroom furnishings include 16 benches double-loaded along a center aisles and side aisle on the east and west sides. General seating is separated from the court benches by an oak rail and newel post with steel balustrade. The elevated jury platform is sectioned off by a similar rail, and members of the jury continue to use original oak pivot seats affixed to the oak flooring. The light oak railing used in the room has a simple relief pattern similar to that found on the exterior pilaster capitals. In general, the courthouse interior features terrazzo, cork, and linoleum floors, marble wainscot, original hardware, and natural wood finishes. Only about one half of the third floor was originally finished. Designed to allow for later growth, the third floor may soon be finished out and used for additional storage and office space.

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 VALUES, 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: Architecture, Government

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1931-1957

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1931

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Phelps, Henry T.

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-13)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheets 9-14).

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

The 1931 La Salle County Courthouse is nominated under Criterion A, in the area of government, for its role as the center of county government for more than 70 years, and Criterion C, under the area of architecture, as it represents a definitive work of architect Henry T. Phelps in a style indicative of South Texas adaptations of Art Deco design. The La Salle County Courthouse is the most prominent building in its county and is a visual focal point for the community of Cotulla, Texas. This building is well-known regionally due to its scale, its presence on the courthouse square, and its design. The courthouse sits on top of the highest hill in Cotulla and serves as a testimony to the aspirations of both the La Salle County Commissioners and architect Henry T. Phelps. The building's grand appearance and clean lines suggest the local government's stability and quality, and materials, such as its all-steel windows, indicate quality construction. At the time of its construction in 1931, the courthouse was a statement about the county's stature and prosperity as a regional commercial and banking area, as well as its residents' confidence in the future of La Salle County.

The Development of La Salle County

The Texas Legislature formed La Salle County from the Bexar District on February 1, 1858 and named it for French explorer René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle. By that time, settlers had only begun to move into the area, which for many years had a reputation for lawlessness. Some of the earliest settlements in the county developed along the road from San Antonio to Laredo, and in May 1852, to protect travelers, the U.S. Army established an outpost, Fort Ewell, where the road crossed the Nueces River. Because the site proved to be unhealthful, the troops abandoned the fort in 1854, but by that time, a small town, Guajoco, also known as Fort Ewell and Huajuco, had developed nearby. When the government decommissioned the fort, its few remaining inhabitants moved to the settlement. By 1871, about 60 people lived in or near Guajoco, which had a post office, saloon, general store, and stagecoach stop.⁴

During Guajoco's development, other settlers, many of Mexican descent, made their way to La Salle County. In 1856, Ohio native William A. Waugh established a ranch where the San Antonio-Laredo Road crossed Cibolo Creek. Although he abandoned the site in 1858, he returned three years later. By the 1870s, Waugh maintained a large herd of cattle, and the area around his ranch headquarters, which included a store, became a stopping point for travelers as well as a center of local activity. In 1868, a group of families established the community of Iuka about eight miles west of present-day Cotulla. Iuka also served as a stage stop, and cattle buyers used the community as a meeting place. A post office opened in Iuka in 1880.⁵

Overall, the 1870s brought much growth to the county, with more than 25 ranches established and an increase from 69 to 789 inhabitants from the time of the 1870 census to the 1880 census. Area inhabitants formally organized the county government in 1880 and designated Stuart's Rancho, near Guajoco, as their first seat of government.⁶ In 1880, as the

⁴ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "La Salle County," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/LL/hcl4.html> (accessed August 7, 2006).

⁵ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Iuka," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/II/hriby.html> (accessed August 21, 2006).

⁶ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "La Salle County," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/LL/hc14.html> (accessed August 7, 2006).

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county organized politically, other changes in the region brought additional settlement and development. The last reported raid by Native Americans happened in 1878, and the county's reputation as a den of outlaws also began diminishing. Also, the International & Great Northern Railroad (I&GN) extended its tracks into the county in the early 1880s, and the arrival of the rail greatly impacted development as inhabitants from towns like Iuka and Guajoco moved to new towns along the tracks. Ranching also became more profitable, with access to shipping and fewer losses to thieves and raiders.

In 1868, Poland native Joseph Cotulla arrived in La Salle County. He gradually established a large ranching operation, and in the early 1880s, he learned that the I&GN Rail Company planned to build tracks into La Salle County. In 1881, he donated 120 acres of land to the railroad to encourage it to come to a townsite he was establishing. By 1882, his namesake town had a railroad depot and he had begun to sell town lots for other development. At that same time, Jesse Laxton (Laxson, Laxon), Iuka's postmaster, founded the town of La Salle. La Salle's post office had opened in 1881, and in 1882, Laxton's town became the temporary county seat. The next year, though, in a special county election, voters chose Cotulla as county seat, and the community of La Salle began to fade away. Cotulla maintained a reputation as a tough frontier town for many years, but it evolved over time into a "prosperous town," as it was described in 1892. By that time, it had a school, debating society, hotel, and various retail businesses.⁷

In the last decades of the 19th century, ranching became La Salle County's dominant industry, especially after the introduction of barbed wire fencing in the 1880s. While only six farms or ranches were reported in the 1870 Census, by 1890, the county had 98 listed, with only twelve measuring ten acres or smaller, 28 larger than 1,000 acres, and some considerably larger. The average size of all farms and ranches that year in La Salle County was more than 7,000 acres. In addition to raising cattle, many ranchers raised sheep, and in 1890, more than 50,000 sheep were reported in the county. Various factors caused a decline in sheep raising throughout South Texas, but cattle ranching remained a mainstay of the economy well into the 20th century, when commercial agricultural practices and the utilization of underground water resources allowed farming operations to succeed at a larger scale. A land boom during the early 20th century resulted from developers attempting to change dry rangeland into lucrative farmland. With the growing economy came numerous new immigrants, but the Great Depression largely impacted the county, and the farming and ranching industries, and the county's population, never again reached pre-Depression levels, although large-scale farming operations have continued. Oil and gas production also became a significant part of the county's economy during the 20th century.

The region's growth during the first two decades of the 20th century led to great optimism about La Salle County's future. The most important development in the county during this era was the completion of the Pan-American Highway. Roughly following the alignment of present-day IH-35, the Pan-American Highway, as its name suggests, was a network of roads extending from Alaska, through Canada and the United States to Mexico, continuing as far south as Chile. In Texas, the central arm stretched from Montague County on the Oklahoma border to Laredo on the border with Mexico. In the late 1920s, because the only major unpaved link went through La Salle County, the completion of the highway was seen as a source for great jubilation locally and statewide. At that time, La Salle County had no paved roads, and just as the railroads were critical to 19th-century town development in Texas, the presence of a major highway became vital in the 20th century. Cotulla held the opening celebrations of the highway on July 4, 1931, with a ribbon cutting, speeches, a "Parade of Progress" (from ox-carts through stagecoaches to 1930s cars), a huge barbecue (for which local ranchers donated 45 calves), and a rodeo.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ La Salle County Courthouse, Master Plan Investigation.

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The Courthouses of Cotulla

In 1880, Polish immigrant Joseph Cotulla platted and mapped his new town, selecting the highest elevation for the future county courthouse and centering the town around it. The town plan included a public park between the railroad and the courthouse for the convenience of travelers. In an especially rugged part of South Texas, it could be said that the courthouse placement was a conscious attempt to communicate that law and order were present in this county and that the traveling public would be kept safe. Even before the completion of the paving of the Pan-American Highway in 1931, Cotulla served as a point on the Meridian Highway, an international automobile route organized in 1911 as a direct north-south highway through the central United States.

The La Salle County Courthouse is the result of the five decades of growth that occurred after the county began planning for its first courthouse in 1881. That year, the commissioners court decided to advertise in the *San Antonio Express* and *Galveston News* for plans and specifications for a courthouse and jail, costing no more than three and ten thousand dollars respectively. Instead, the county built a temporary courthouse at a cost of \$550, and then in 1884 used the designs of San Antonio architect J.C. Breeding to build an Italianate courthouse with mansard tower and iron cresting. At the same time, the county constructed a crenellated jail, and the cost together totaled \$8,500. Twelve years later, after a controversial and bitter election, an arsonist burned the 1884 courthouse. After that, according to a 1930 article in the *Cotulla Record*, "the political situation was so tense [that] the citizens thought it wise not to invest too much money, fearing a repetition of the fire." In 1897, for \$5,000, they built an undistinguished frame structure designed by E.D. Miller. This courthouse was similarly destroyed by arson in June of 1904.⁹

After these rocky beginnings, the county contacted architect Henry T. Phelps to design a courthouse. Phelps submitted plans and specifications to the county commissioners in November of 1904 for a "two-story brick and stone fireproof court house," not to exceed \$12,500 in construction costs. His simple, symmetrical design for La Salle County's courts building was one of the earliest in his prolific career, and the style he chose was a hybrid reminiscent of a schoolhouse, with Romanesque elements such as round arches over windows, as well as an entrance porch under a tall central belvedere with pyramidal roof. From its completion in 1905, the building suffered structural problems, and the county eventually removed to belvedere, replacing it with a balcony.¹⁰

By 1930, the courthouse showed great wear. The *Cotulla Record* reported, "The present jail...is in very bad condition, with none of the modern or sanitary conveniences for prisoners. The present Court House is also in bad condition and is not adequate."¹¹ The County Commissioners Court minutes for August 11, 1930 noted, "It is ordered that architect Henry T. Phelps be invited down to look over the County Jail and see how much it would cost to build a new Jail or Court House and Jail combined." The county's choice of hiring Henry Phelps to evaluate the courthouse and jail is interesting given the disappointment with the 1905 courthouse. Nonetheless, the county held a bond election on October 18, 1930 and voters approved funding a new building.¹² The Robert Guyler Construction Company received the contract to build the courthouse, and excitement grew as its completion neared. According to the *Cotulla Record* of September 11, 1931:

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid; *Cotulla Record*, September 26, 1930.

¹¹ *Cotulla Record*, September 12, 1930.

¹² Ibid.

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“The brick work on the new Court House will have been completed by Saturday night, and work is fast going on in the interior of the building. The finish of terra cotta is very pretty. The jail on the roof is yet to have a coat of stucco and some finishing touches. It is stated that the building will be entirely completed and ready to be turned over to the county in two months time.”¹³

The Architect

Henry Truman Phelps was born in Anaqua, Victoria County, Texas, in August 1871. By 1891, after attending secondary school, he moved to San Antonio and began working as a draftsman in various architectural offices. Around 1902, he partnered with San Antonio architect Solon L. McAdoo, and the next year, Phelps established his own practice. He later partnered briefly with D.R. Jacob, but during most of his career he worked independently. Considered one of South and Central Texas' most notable architects from the early to mid-20th century, Phelps' designs included several large commercial structures in San Antonio, including the J.M. Nix Professional Building (1929, in which he had worked extensively with terra cotta) and the Maverick Building. He also designed a number of historical revival-style residences in and around San Antonio, such as the Kampmann house (1922) and the J.M. Nix house (1923), and his other works included the MKT Depot (1909) in Denison.¹⁴

By the time of the La Salle County commission, Phelps had designed a dozen courthouses in various styles throughout Texas. Extant Phelps courthouse projects include: Atascosa County, Jourdanton (Mission style, 1912); Blanco County, Johnson City (Classical Revival, 1916); Dimmit County, Carrizo Springs (Classical Revival, 1927); Frio County, Pearsall (Richardsonian Romanesque influence, 1904); Jim Hogg County, Hebronville (Classical Revival, 1913); Kenedy County, Sarita (Classical Revival, 1921); Kimble County, Junction (Moderne, 1929); Mills County, Goldthwaite (Classical Revival, 1913); San Patricio County, Sinton (Classical Revival, 1928); Schleicher County, Eldorado (Classical Revival, 1924), Terrell County Courthouse, Sanderson (altered, 1906); Uvalde County, Uvalde (Classical Revival, 1927); and an addition architect for the Bexar County Courthouse, San Antonio (1926).¹⁵

Phelps designed the new La Salle County Courthouse at the end of his career, and his decades of experience are evident in the building. The rectilinear massing and pattern of pilasters and recessed bays with windows reflect a Classical sensibility, which could be called a Stripped or Streamlined Classical style, but Phelps employed ornamentation indicative of the Art Deco movement. His design for the La Salle County Courthouse is a variant of the Zigzag Moderne style, which was popular beginning in 1920 until circa 1940. The iterations of this style extend into the late 1940s, especially in South Texas. Beginning in the 1930s, several Texas courthouses were designed in the Moderne style, with a decorative vocabulary based upon clean forms, repetitive lines, and new materials. Buildings continued to be symmetrical in composition, but Classical details were stripped away and architects began breaking up the single rectilinear volume and emphasizing vertical center pieces with lower flanking wings creating an overall stepped massing. Other Streamlined Moderne courthouses in Texas include the Eastland County Courthouse in Eastland, the Gregg County Courthouse in Longview, the Kimble County Courthouse in Junction, the Menard in Menard, the Yoakum County Courthouse in Plains, the Jefferson County Courthouse in Beaumont, and the Collingsworth County Courthouse in Wellington.

¹³ Alexander Memorial Library archives, accessed by Nora Tyler.

¹⁴ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/PP/fph14.html> (accessed August 21, 2006).

¹⁵ Texas Historical Commission courthouse architect database.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 13

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas

Summary

La Salle County's settlement and development boom of the 1920s began dying with the onset of the Great Depression. The growth that had characterized the county at the time of the courthouse's construction abruptly ceased shortly thereafter. Most of the towns that had appeared during the early 20th century severely declined in population or disappeared altogether, and the La Salle County's population became increasingly concentrated in the towns of Cotulla and Encinal. Over the years, as population decreased and shifted, the county's school districts regularly consolidated. La Salle County in 1955 had four school districts, but by the early 1980s, the county had only one district, with a total of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. After reaching a peak population of 8,228 in 1930, Cotulla's population in 2000 was 3,615, a little more than half the county's total number of residents.^{16 17}

The sensitive restoration that is planned for the La Salle County Courthouse, together with its proposed nomination as the county's first building listed in the National Register of Historic Places, are fitting for a building as significant as this one is to the history of the region. The courthouse retains a high degree of its architectural integrity, from its original footprint to its sophisticated, well-crafted details, and it is a most worthy nominee to the National Register of Historic Places.

¹⁶ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/LL/hcl4.html> (accessed August 21, 2006).

¹⁷ US Census 2000 Data.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 14

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas

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United States Census Bureau, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48283.html>, US Census 2000 county data for La Salle County, Texas.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>
1.	14	476828	3145481

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The property is the city block bounded by Stewart Street to the east, South Street to the south, Kerr Street to the west, and North Street to the north.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION: Nomination includes all property historical associated with the building

11. FORM PREPARED BY (with assistance from Linda Henderson, Texas Historical Commission Historian)

NAME/TITLE: Stephanie Hetos Cocke

ORGANIZATION:

DATE: 07/27/06

STREET & NUMBER: 4131 Albans Road

TELEPHONE: 713-667-1005

CITY OR TOWN: Houston **STATE:** Texas

ZIP CODE: 77005

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-15 through Photo-28)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS (see continuation sheet Figure-29)

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: La Salle County, Texas (Joel Rodriguez, Jr., County Judge)

STREET & NUMBER: 101 Courthouse

TELEPHONE: (830) 879-4430

CITY OR TOWN: Cotulla

STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 78014

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 15

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



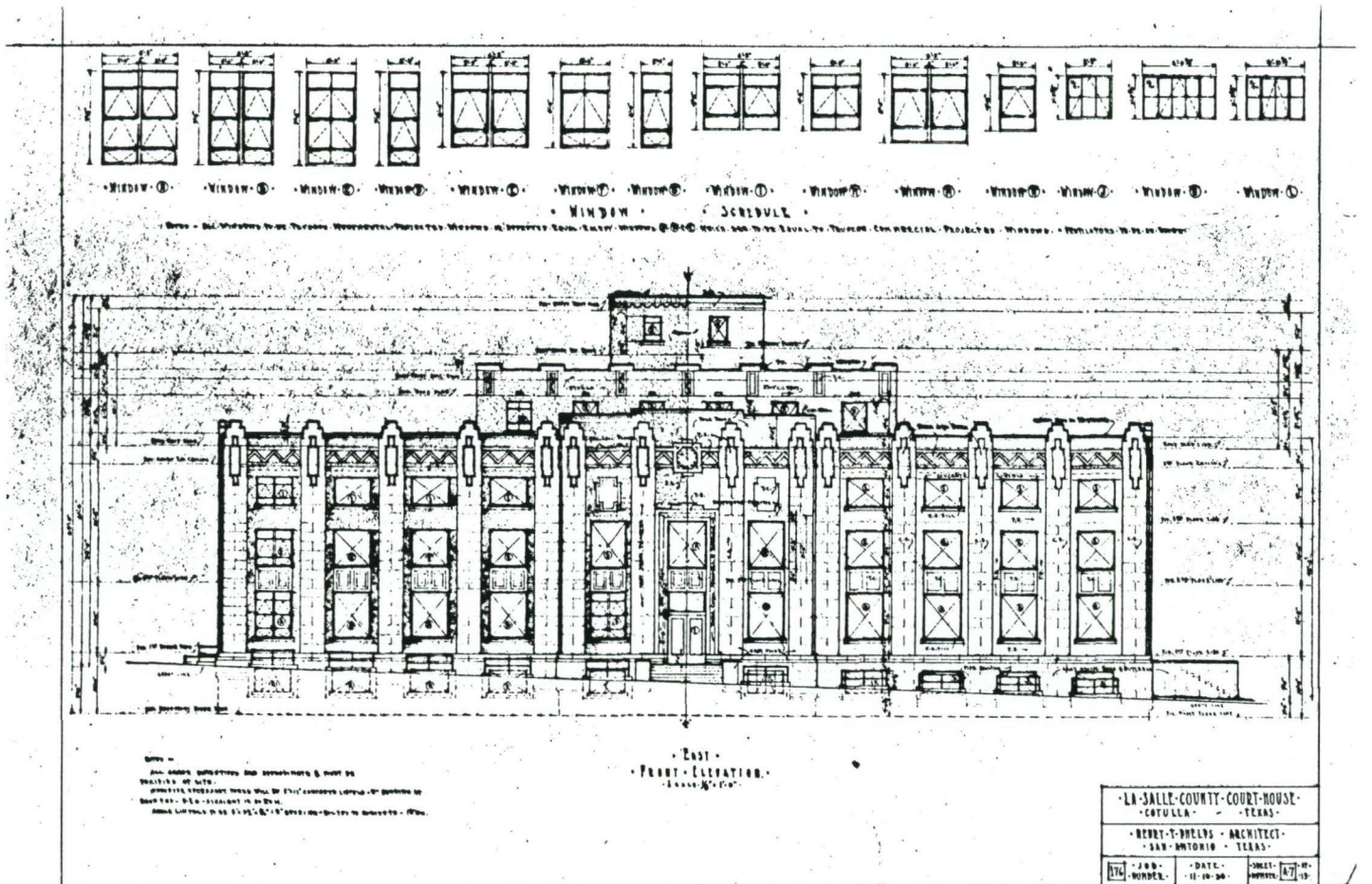
La Salle County's third courthouse, designed by Henry T. Phelps, was built in 1904 following the arson of the previous wood frame courts building. Phelps' 1904 design had structural problems from a very early date and was modified several times until it was razed in 1931. A small portion of the county's 1884 jail building can be seen to the right of the courthouse in this photograph.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 16

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



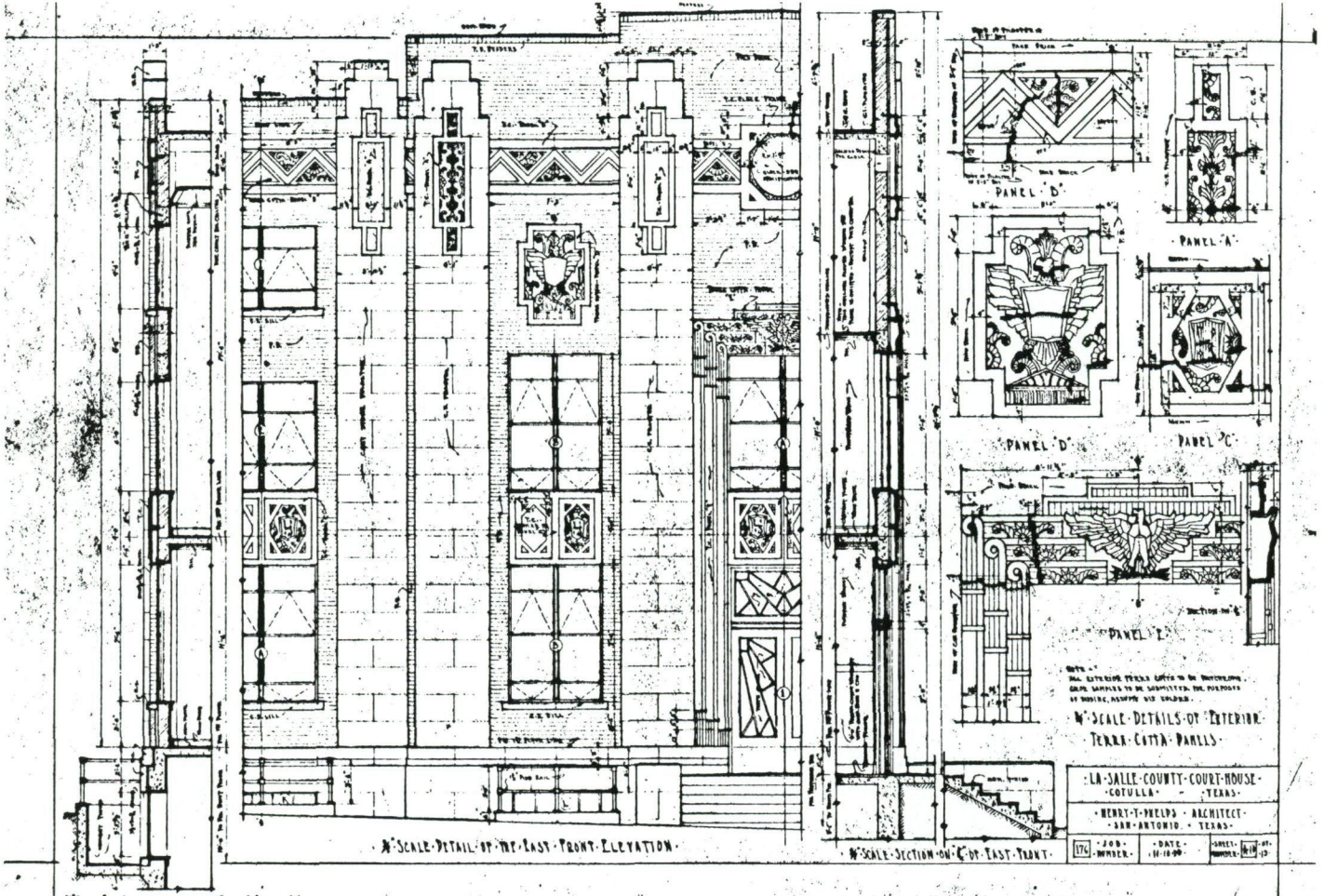
Front elevation, original drawings

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 18

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



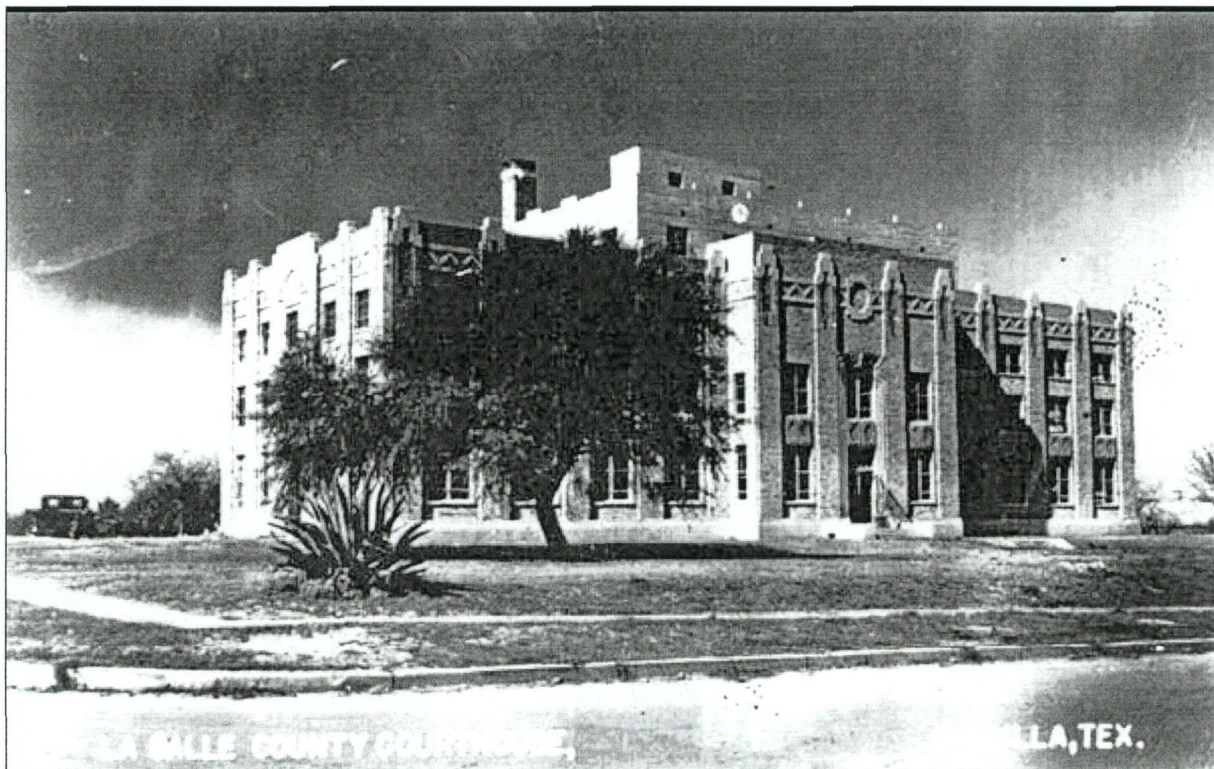
Terra cotta detailing, original drawings

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 19

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



By November 1931, the county took possession of the completed courthouse.

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National Park Service

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Section PHOTO Page 20

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



This view shows City Park and its axial arrangement to the front entrance of the courthouse. The physical relationship of the county square to City Park and to the city as a whole is distinctive among courthouse squares in Texas. The positioning of the courthouse square on the most prominent point in Cotulla and adjacent to City Park contributes to the impact of the courthouse on its community.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 21

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



North and west elevations; parking lot on west side of building

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 22

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



This photograph shows the front (east) façade at the left, the terracing of the courthouse square, and the relationship of the north façade to the side street in the foreground.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 23

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



The rear (west) and south façades. The prominence of the rooftop jail and elevator penthouse are clearly shown.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 24

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



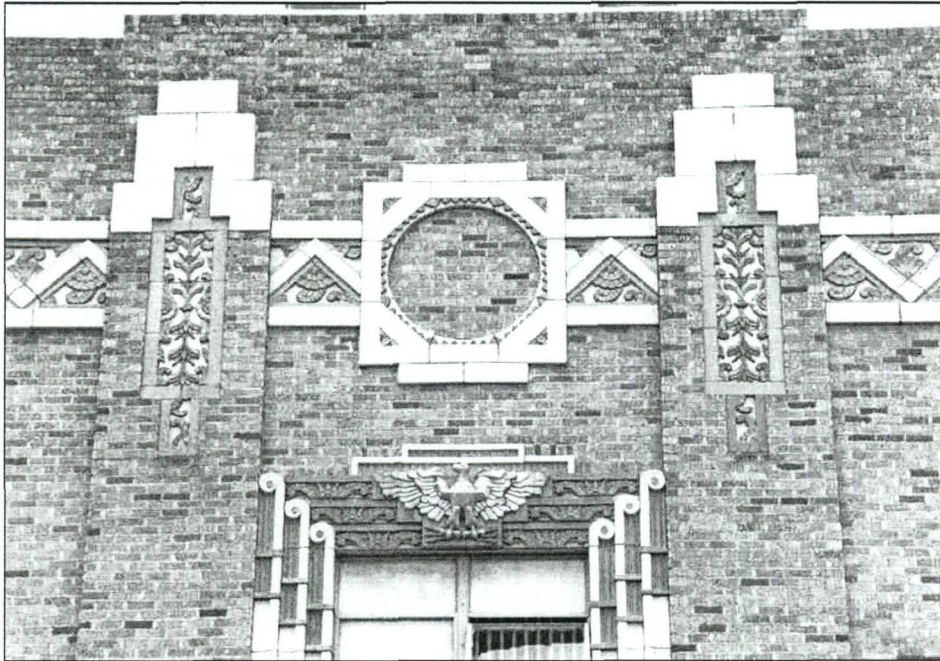
West façade

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 25

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



The terra cotta details above the entrances show the influences of modernism on Henry Phelps' design. The blank circle centered above the eagle was designed for a clock face. The terra cotta is in excellent condition.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 26

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



The stylized La Salle County shield of the terra cotta spandrel pieces between the first and second floors.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 27

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



Original chairs for the jury box are still present.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 28

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas

PHOTO LOG

La Salle County Courthouse

Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas

Photographer: Stephanie Hetos Cocke

July 2006

Original negatives on file with Texas Historical Commission

Photo 1: East elevation from across city park; camera facing west

Photo 2: West elevation and parking lot; camera facing north

Photo 3: North elevation; camera facing south

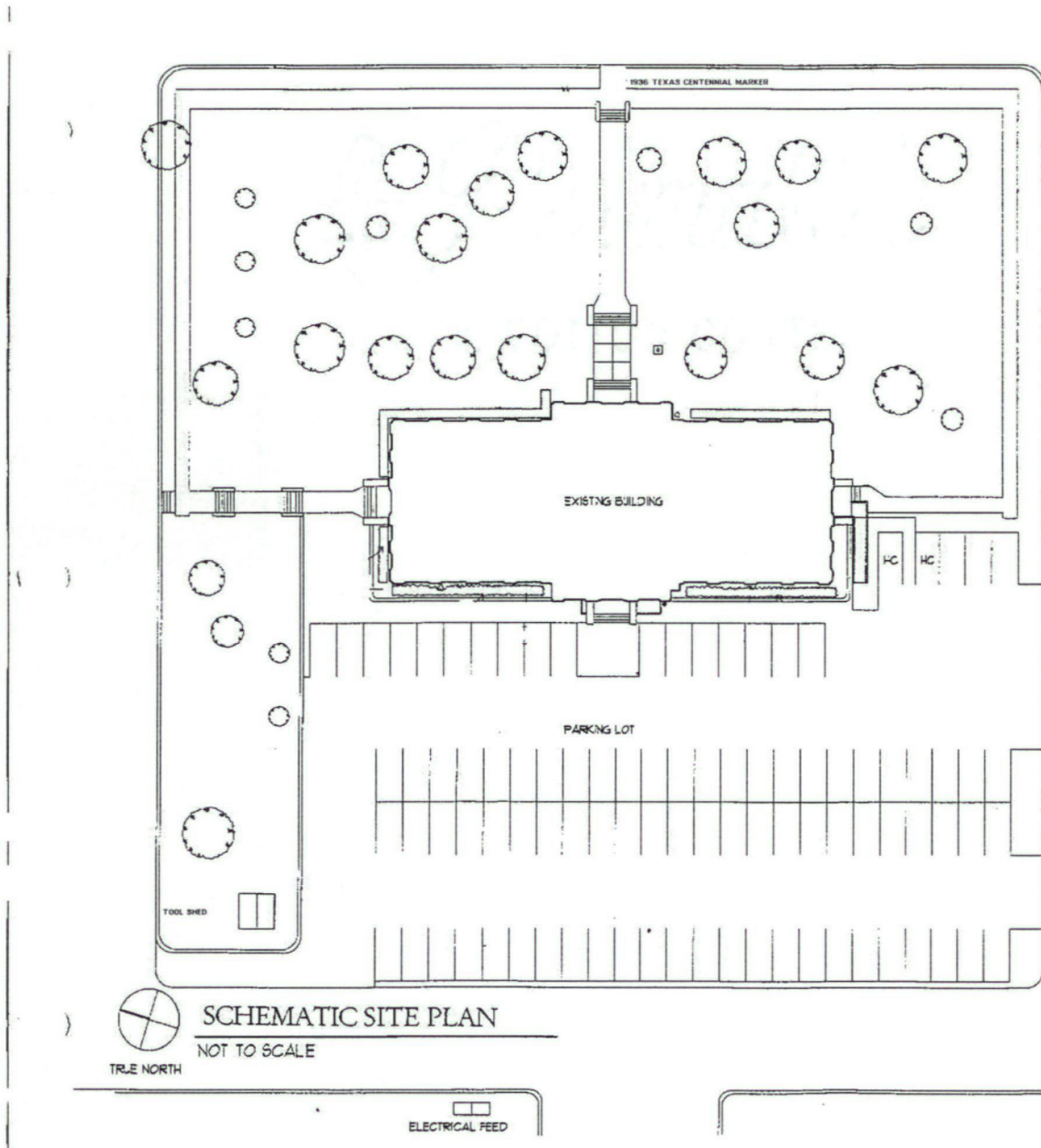
Photo 4: Spandrels over south entrance with terra cotta panels featuring La Salle shield decorative elements; camera facing north

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 29

La Salle County Courthouse
Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: La Salle County Courthouse

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, La Salle

DATE RECEIVED: 6/01/07 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 6/19/07
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 7/04/07 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 7/15/07
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 07000690

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 7.11.07 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

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



LA SALLE COUNTY COURTHOUSE
COTULLA, LASALLE COUNTY, TEXAS

PHOTO 1 OF 4



LA SALLE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

COTULLA, LA SALLE COUNTY, TEXAS

PHOTO 2 OF 4

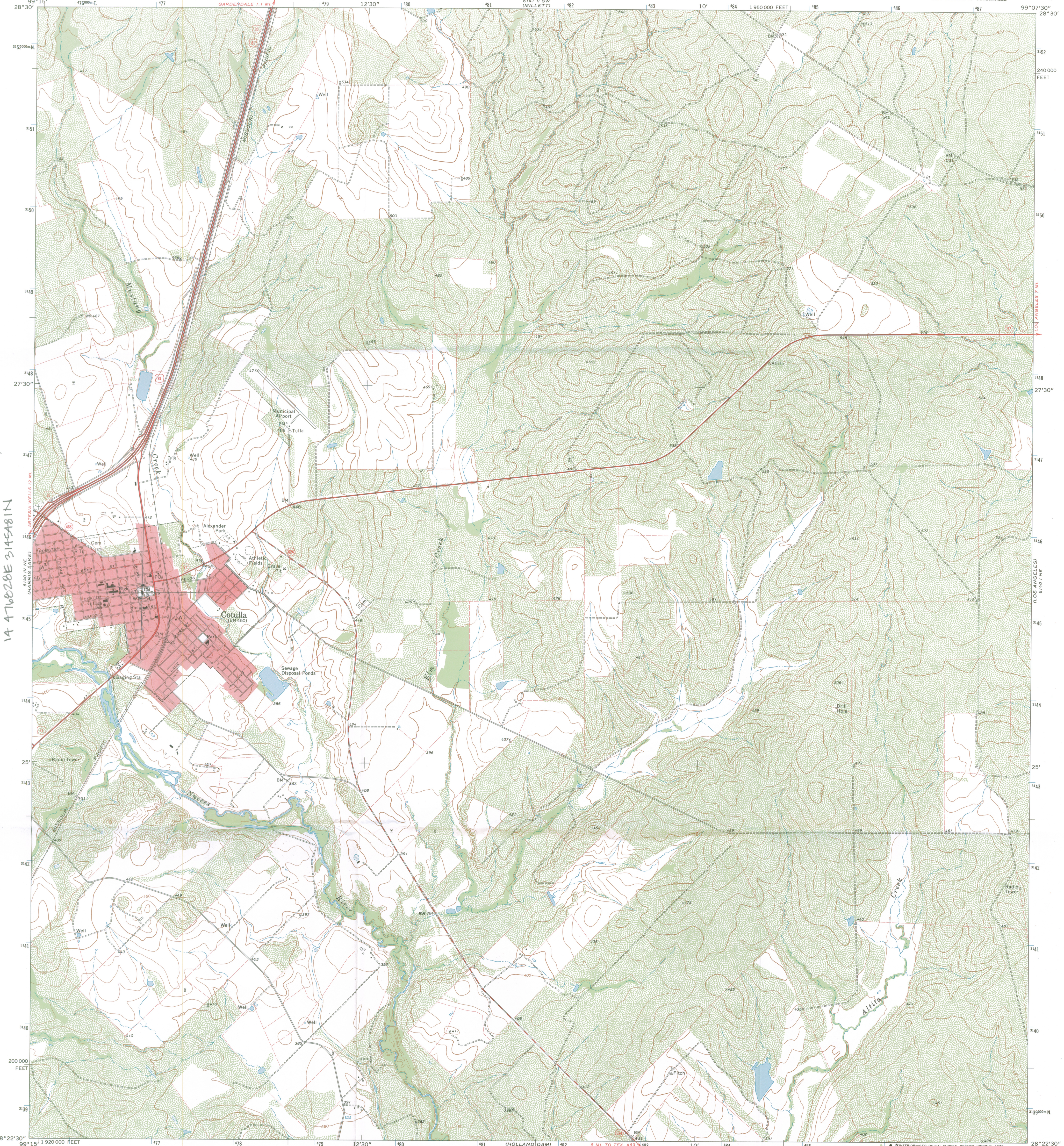


LA SALLE COUNTY COURTHOUSE
COTULLA, LA SALLE COUNTY, TEXAS
PHOTO 3 OF 4



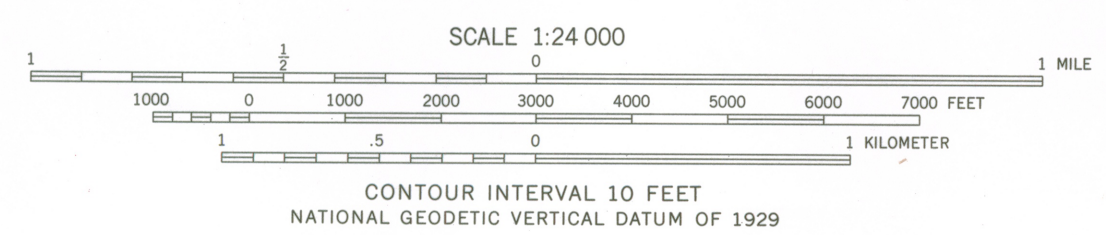
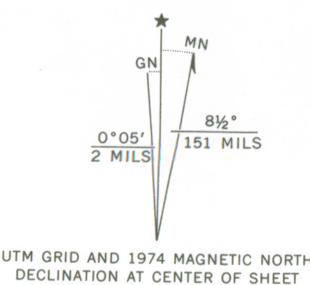
LA SALLE COUNTY COURTHOUSE
COTULLA, LA SALLE COUNTY, TEXAS
PHOTO 4 OF 4

LA SALLE COUNTY COURTHOUSE
101 COURTHOUSE SQUARE
COTULLA, LA SALLE COUNTY, TEXAS
14 470208E 3145481N



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1973. Field checked 1974
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Texas coordinate system, south central zone (Lambert conformal conic)
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 14, shown in blue. 1927 North American datum
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route



QUADRANGLE LOCATION
2899-143

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

COTULLA, TEX.
NW/4 COTULLA 15' QUADRANGLE
N2822.5-W9907.5/7.5

1974
AMS 6140 1 NW-SERIES V882



**TEXAS
HISTORICAL
COMMISSION**

Rick Perry • *Governor*

John L. Nau, III • *Chairman*

F. Lawrence Oaks • *Executive Director*

The State Agency for Historic Preservation

TO: Linda McClelland
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Gregory W. Smith, National Register Coordinator
Texas Historical Commission

RE: La Salle County Courthouse, Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas

DATE: May 29, 2007



- The following materials are submitted regarding the La Salle County Courthouse, Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original National Register of Historic Places forms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • La Salle County Courthouse, Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmitted nomination
	Multiple Property nomination form
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Photographs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	USGS maps
	Correspondence
	Other:

COMMENTS:

SHPO requests substantive review

The enclosed owner objections (do) (do not) constitute a majority of property owners

Other: