

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places Registration Form****1. Name of Property**

Historic Name: Austin County Courthouse

Other name/site number: NA

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 1 East Main Street

City or town: Bellville

State: Texas

County: Austin

Not for publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
☒ 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 ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ localApplicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Signature of certifying official / Title

State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

	Private
X	Public - Local
	Public - State
	Public - Federal

Category of Property

X	building(s)
	district
	site
	structure
	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: GOVERNMENT: courthouse

Current Functions: GOVERNMENT: government office

7. Description

Architectural Classification: MID-CENTURY MODERN NON-RESIDENTIAL

Principal Exterior Materials: Concrete; Stone: Granite, Cast stone; Metal: Aluminum; Glass

Narrative Description (see pages 7-7 through 7-12)

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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.
<input type="checkbox"/>	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: POLITICS/GOVERNMENT, ARCHITECTURE (*local level of significance*)

Period of Significance: 1961–1973

Significant Dates: 1961

Significant Person (only if criterion B is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion D is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: Hedrick, Wyatt C., Krebs Construction (builder)

Narrative Statement of Significance (see pages 8-13 through 8-24)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see pages 9-25 through 9-26)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested (DOE approved February 2020)
- ☐ 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, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than 1 acre

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 29.950366° Longitude: -96.257381°

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary follows the curb around the courthouse plaza.

Boundary Justification: The boundary encompasses the full extent of the eligible resource and is consistent with its historic significance and integrity.

11. Form Prepared By

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Date: February 27, 2022

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets MAP-27 through MAP-29)

Additional items (see continuation sheets FIGURE-30 through FIGURE-54)

Photographs (see continuation sheets PHOTOT-55 through PHOTO-77)

This project was funded in part through a grant from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as administered by the Texas Historical Commission. The contents and opinions, however, do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal funds from the National Park Service. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination in departmental Federally Assisted Programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of Federal assistance should write to: Director, Equal Opportunity Program, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photograph Log

All photographs reflect the current appearance of the nominated properties.

Name of Property: Austin County Courthouse
City or Vicinity: Bellville, Austin County
State: Texas
Number of Photographs: 23
Date Photographed: August 1, 2022
Photographer: Kristina Kupferschmid

Photo 1 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0001)
Oblique of north and east elevations with commercial buildings to the south. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 2 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0002)
Approach to courthouse from East Main Street. Camera facing west.

Photo 3 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0003)
West elevation of commercial buildings to the south. Camera facing southeast.

Photo 4 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0004)
Brick planter at the east entrance with bell and cornerstone from the 1887 courthouse. Camera facing east.

Photo 5 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0005)
East elevation of courthouse. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 6 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0006)
South elevation of courthouse. Camera facing north.

Photo 7 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0007)
North elevation of courthouse. Camera facing south.

Photo 8 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0008)
Engraving at northeast corner of courthouse. Camera facing west.

Photo 9 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0009)
Breezeway at east façade. Camera facing south.

Photo 10 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0010)
East façade entrance. Camera facing west.

Photo 11 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0011)
West façade entrance. Camera facing north.

Photo 12 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0012)
Modern style wall clock in basement. Camera facing north.

Photo 13 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0013)
Spiral staircase and dumbwaiter in basement. Camera facing east.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 14 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0014)
Typical interior wood door. Camera facing east.

Photo 15 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0015)
Water fountains in basement hallway. Camera facing south.

Photo 16 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0016)
Meeting room with stage in basement. Camera facing south.

Photo 17 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0017)
Ground floor lobby. Camera facing east.

Photo 18 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0018)
Office created by western breezeway enclosure. Camera facing north.

Photo 19 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0019)
Ground floor lobby with clock, mailbox, and building directory. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 20 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0020)
Courtroom on second floor. Camera facing north.

Photo 21 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0021)
Lobby on second floor, note the victrex on walls. Camera facing east.

Photo 22 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0022)
Office on second floor with built-in bookcase. Camera facing southeast.

Photo 23 (TX_AustinCounty_AustinCountyCourthouse_0023)
Smaller courtroom on third floor with wood paneling. Camera facing southeast.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Narrative Description

The 1961 Austin County Courthouse sits prominently in the courthouse square in downtown Bellville, Austin County. Surrounded by a sidewalk and Main Street (which also carries State Highway 159 and State Highway 36 through downtown), the courthouse occupies most of the plaza, leaving little space for landscaping or commemorative objects typical of courthouse squares. Landscaping features are limited to the east and west entrances to the courthouse include original flagpoles and 1970s brick planters. The brick planter at the east entrance holds the clock tower bell and cornerstone salvaged from the 1888 courthouse that burned in 1960. Completed in 1961, the building's modernistic design distinguishes it from many of the surrounding late nineteenth and early twentieth-century commercial buildings. Designed by architect Wyatt C. Hedrick of Houston, the courthouse's block massing, use of granite and cast stone, minimal ornamentation, and windowless upper stories make it austere in comparison to many of the commercial buildings. The interior is finished in common postwar materials including aluminum, terrazzo, granite, vinyl flooring, and wood paneling. Both the exterior and interior retain a high degree of integrity, having undergone few major alterations.

This project was funded through an Emergency Supplemental Historic Preservation Fund grant from the National Park Service that addresses damage inflicted by Hurricane Harvey. In January 2020, NPS staff concurred that property is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Setting and Site

Austin County is in southeast Texas. Despite its proximity to Houston and its suburbs—approximately 20 miles to the east—the county remains predominantly rural. Bellville, the county's second-largest city with a population around 4,500, is in north central Austin County. Rolling hills characterize the landscape in this part of the county. Austin County Courthouse, at 1 East Main Street, is in the middle of downtown Bellville, on what is said to be the highest point in the city. Within the grid-patterned street network of downtown Bellville, the courthouse square is a modified Harrisonburg type, defined as having a street that meets at the midpoint of the square (Main Street) and two streets (Holland and Bell Streets) that intersect the square's corners. Late 19th and early 20th century commercial blocks face the 1961 courthouse. Commercial development stretches out from downtown to the east and west, along Main Street, and residential neighborhoods lie to the north and south of downtown.

City streets and parking separate the Austin County Courthouse from the surrounding downtown buildings. Holland and Bell streets form the east and west borders of the square, while rows of parking and Main Street separate the building to the north and south. Main Street, which enters the square from the east and west, tightly wraps around the building, forming a one-way roundabout in the middle of the plaza. Two rows of parking spaces lie to the north and south of Main Street, separated from the street by a walkway with a low curb.

The courthouse's footprint covers most of the 0.5-acre oval shaped parcel. Low curbing defines nominated boundary, and a sidewalk wraps around the perimeter of the building. At the east and west entrances of the building, the sidewalk is incorporated into the exposed aggregate concrete entrance areas. Here, at the east entrance, stand two flag poles and a brick planter, both original. The cornerstone and bell salvaged from 1888 were added to the planter in 1976 (Photo 4).¹ Three similar brick planters are in front of the west entrance. Vegetation on-site includes two small slivers of grass at the northwest and southwest corners of the building and a small area around the paved eastern end of the courthouse. Other vegetation includes topiaries planted along the north and south perimeter of the courthouse. At the northwest corner of the building, a non-historic age wood fence encloses mechanical equipment.

¹ *The Bellville Times*, July 22, 1976, 12.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

The courthouse's position in the middle of the plaza, tightly bounded by city streets, pre-dates the period of significance. Its position in the middle of Main Street led to Bellville being known as the city "where the courthouse sits in the middle of the street."² Historic photographs and aerials indicate that while parking configurations around the courthouse have changed, the courthouse parcel itself was always small. Some of the earliest images of the 1888 courthouse show the plaza may have been somewhat larger, with more open space, dotted with trees, and carriage parking around the fenced-in perimeter (Figures 12-13). By the 1920s though, as automobiles replaced carriages, the plaza appears much the same as it does currently (Figure 14). With improvements to the city streets and the designation of Main Street as State Highway 159 (in 1939) and State Highway 36 (in 1946), the roadway was likely widened by cutting into the plaza (Figure 15). In 1940, city officials and the chamber of commerce removed parking directly around the courthouse in part "because parking has at times been inconvenient for farmers coming to Bellville to trade."³ The changes created the current parking configuration, with a row of parking along the commercial building sidewalks and "a double row in the center of each side of the square."⁴ By 1958, two years before construction began on the current courthouse, aerial images show the courthouse plaza configuration—its size and parking—similar to today (Figure 16). Consideration of this configuration and the small size of the square was necessary for architect Wyatt Hedrick when designing the new courthouse.

Architectural Description

Exterior

The 1961 Austin County Courthouse is a three-story building with a basement and a flat roof. Black granite and cast stone veneered blocks stacked atop each other comprise the above-ground floors (Photos 5-7). The building's first story occupies one block, and the second and third floors form another larger box (Figure 1). Oriented with their long axes perpendicular to one another, the larger upper block overhangs the ground floor at its east and west elevations, creating a symmetrical boxy cross-plan when viewed from above (see Map 2). This configuration and the taller height of the upper box create a top-heavy proportion. Four large rectangular columns with a black granite veneer support the overhanging upper stories. Historic-age blue mosaic tiles are inset on the east and west sides of the columns. The tiles replaced the original stainless-steel panels just months after they were installed. The county removed the stainless-steel panels after motorists complained of being blinded by the reflection of their headlights in the columns.⁵ On the roof, a smaller brick box—enclosing the penthouse and equipment—adds to the boxy, stacked massing of the building. The courthouse's minimal ornamentation is simple and Modernistic. Lacking much adornment, visual interest in the building is achieved through its proportions, varied textures, contrasting colors, and dramatic play of light and shadow.

First Floor

The first floor is roughly 12 feet tall and 60 feet wide by 96 feet long. This level has a black granite panel veneer, limited ornamentation, and minimal fenestration. Interest is achieved through intentional detail, such as the subtle pattern created by the vertically laid polished granite panels and the seams between them. Entrances into the courthouse are located on the east and west façades. Both the north and south portions of the building that extend past the upper stories lack fenestration. Engravings at the northeast corner of the building commemorate the Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas and the 1961 Austin County Commissioners and the County Judge (Photo 8).

The **east elevation** has one of two entrances into the courthouse. Unaltered since construction, the one-bay entrance is in the middle of the façade within the breezeway created by the upper-story overhang (see original elevations in Figure 2) (Photo 9). The commercial style entrance has an anodized aluminum frame and mullions with double doors that

² *Bellville Times*, April 7, 1960, 1.

³ *Bellville Times*, March 27, 1941, 1.

⁴ *Bellville Times*, March 27, 1941, 1.

⁵ "Courthouse Work Keeps Court Busy," *Bellville Times*, October 5, 1961, 1.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

open into a vestibule. Two sidelights and a three-pane transom with aluminum mullions surround the doors. Above the entrance, Hedrick incorporated another subtle design detail with a fluted aluminum fascia that runs along the top of the first floor and the upper story overhang (Photo 10).

As originally built, the entrance was inset under the breezeway, like the east façade. The current configuration of the **west façade** entrance reflects alterations completed around 1977 (see Photo 3).⁶ The original aluminum-frame entrance, still visible from the interior, occupies three bays: a three-pane storefront-like window borders both sides of the middle bay double-door entryway. In the late 1970s, the breezeway was enclosed, creating more meeting and office space. Leaving the original aluminum-frame windows and entrance intact, the alteration added the current commercial style aluminum-framed tinted windows that enclose the breezeway created by the upper story overhang. The reconfigured entrance is located in the middle bay, which is slightly recessed from the adjoining bays in order to provide space between the aluminum double doors and the brick planters, which were added sometime in the 1970s (Photo 11). The entrance opens into a hallway.

Second and Third Floors and Penthouse

The second and third floors form one big box that is roughly 31 feet tall and measures approximately 107 feet long and 59 feet wide. The box is clad with two rows of cast stone panels (for each floor) and is windowless on all façades. Similar to the granite panels of the ground floor, the grid of seams between the vertically laid cast stone panels creates a subtle pattern. Aluminum coping wraps around the top of the parapet. Aluminum letters, described as “futurica style” on the original plans, spell out “Austin County Courthouse” and are applied on the east and west façades. The letters are offset to the left and located in the façades’ upper portions. The north and south façades have decorative aluminum grating vertically inset between the first and second cast stone panels from each corner (see Photo 6). As originally built, all façades had Modern, aluminum, numberless clocks in the upper right corner. All but the north façade retain their original clocks, though the south facade clock is missing its hands. In September 1961, shortly after installation of the clocks, Hurricane Carla knocked two hands off one of the clocks, though it is not known if this was the south façade clock. The brick, rooftop mechanical box—or penthouse—is roughly 12 feet tall and 29 feet by 51 feet. The penthouse is painted gray and set to the south side in the middle of the roof. The lone door to the penthouse opens on the north façade.

Interior

General Description

The maze-like interior layout of the courthouse has changed little since 1961. Comprised of rooms of various sizes and purposes, the basement through the third floor each have a central east-west corridor – labeled as a lobby on the original plans. Offices for many of the more publicly interacting divisions—county clerk, county commissioners, tax collector—were located on the first floor, while judicial rooms and offices—including the large district courtroom—were located on the second and third floors. The corridor is surrounded by additional rooms on all sides, with some rooms directly accessible, while others are accessed from smaller hallways within the network of rooms located to the north and south of the main lobby. Still, other rooms are only accessible via doors from adjacent rooms (see original and current floor plans - Figures 3-10). Each floor is accessible by stair or elevator. On the south side of the corridor, the elevator and one stairwell connect the basement through the third floor; only the stairs reach the penthouse. A second stairwell on the hallway, toward the western end of the building, connects the basement through second floors. A metal spiral staircase, possibly salvaged from the old courthouse, in the northeast corner of the building connects the former county clerk’s vault and records in the basement to the former county clerk’s vault on the first floor. A

⁶ *Bellville Times*, June 23, 1977, 13.

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dumbwaiter next to the spiral staircase also connects the basement and first floor (Photo 13). Another stairwell, in the northwest section of the courthouse, connects the second and third floors.

In the interior, Hedrick used different materials to help define a hierarchy of spaces based largely on their public visibility. Though some original materials and finishes have been replaced or covered, many interior materials are original. Terrazzo, granite, and aluminum were used in some of the most public areas, while wood paneling, plastered walls, and vici-text—a vinyl wallpaper—were used in many offices and rooms in the courthouse. Vinyl flooring in various colors was used throughout the building, including in lobbies, meeting rooms, and offices. Bathrooms throughout were built with ceramic tile floors and had smooth-facing and clay tile walls. In the most utilitarian spaces, including vaults and storage and mechanical rooms, concrete floors were left exposed as were the clay tile or concrete walls. Throughout the building, a mixture of plaster finish and acoustic tiles cover the ceilings.

Modernistic details, including wall clocks, are found throughout the building (Photo 12). Other character-defining interior features that remain in some offices include wood doors with wood transoms and architect-designed furniture, including counters and bookshelves and cases (Photo 14). Salvaged equipment from the burned 1888 courthouse, including metal vault doors, safes, and metal record storage racks are also found in the building.

Designed during segregation, some spaces in the courthouse display evidence of this separation. The courthouse has two sets of bathrooms in the basement and on the second and third floors; there are no public bathrooms on the first floor. Bathrooms for African Americans, identified as “C. Women” and “C. Men” on the original plans, are smaller than bathrooms intended for white visitors and staff. The courthouse water fountain, located in the basement, is another display of segregationist design with the two side-by-side water fountains (Photo 15).

Basement

Comparing the original plans with the current layout of the basement reveals this level has had minimal reconfiguration. The only floor with a cross-axial plan, the basement has two central hallways that intersect near the middle of the floor. A network of smaller offices, rooms, and bathrooms occupy most of the floor, and larger rooms—storage, mechanical equipment, and the county clerk’s vault—are located along the northern edge of the floor. The basement has a large open lecture and meeting hall that occupies much of the western end. Said to double as a bomb shelter, the room has a raised stage area that includes a historic kitchen (Photo 16).

In 2017, Hurricane Harvey caused flooding in the basement. Due to the water damage, some flooring, including the vinyl flooring in the lecture and meeting hall, was replaced. Other vinyl flooring, and the terrazzo flooring in hallways, remains intact. Most of the original wall plaster finishes and wood doors also remain.

First Floor

The spatial organization and layout of the first floor are similar to original plans, though the current configuration reflects changes that occurred since the 1960s. As built, the first floor was comprised of one massed rectangular box with two vestibules that opened onto the central lobby (Photo 17). To the north of the lobby, the county clerk and county commissioners occupied interconnected offices in the eastern half, and a large vault room occupied the western end. To the south, additional county offices—tax collector, treasurer, and auditor—were interconnected, opening from one to another via doors. Both sides of offices have commercial style aluminum-framed openings with a single-door and storefront-like fixed window that open to the lobby. Much of this configuration remains intact, though some spaces have been either enlarged or enclosed on the south side. This reconfiguration is identified by different ceiling heights and wall materials. The biggest alteration to the first floor occurred at the western end where the breezeway was enclosed around 1977. During the breezeway enclosure, the interior vestibule doors and framing were removed. The exterior vestibule doors were left in place, opening onto the newly created vestibule. The original aluminum frame window walls were also left in place, forming interior walls between the original space and newly created rooms

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(Photo 18). From the vestibule, side doors open to two large rooms, the former commission's court meeting room and a county records room.

As the public face of the courthouse, finishes and materials in the first-floor vestibule and lobby are some of the richest in the courthouse. Original terrazzo flooring remains, as does the tile with the Austin County outline and Bellville identified. The walls are clad in black granite panels, and doorways and the elevator are framed with anodized aluminum. The north wall has a Modernist clock in the transom above a mailbox and building directory (Photo 19). Above the elevator, in the transom, a metal plaque identifies the completion date of the courthouse, May 1961, and Wyatt C. Hedrick as the architect, and Krebs Construction as the contractors. Suspended reflective cards originally hung from the lobby ceiling, though they were removed sometime after February 2020 (Figure 17). Throughout the rest of the first floor, many original finishes—plastered walls and vinyl flooring—remain intact, though some of the flooring has been replaced. In the county records room created from the breezeway enclosure, flooring has been removed, possibly due to water damage, exposing the concrete below.

Second Floor

The layout of the second floor—which primarily held judicial functions—remains unchanged from 1961. The district courtroom occupies the western third of the floor, and a number of smaller offices and rooms, including bathrooms, the Jury room, County Attorney's office, District Judge's office, District Clerk's office, and former Sheriff's Office, make up the areas to the north, south, and west of the central lobby.

Though the layout retains a high degree of integrity, a renovation in the 2000s removed original materials in the courtroom (Photo 20). Wood paneling wainscoting was added to the plastered walls and carpeting replaced the original vinyl floors. Outside the courtroom, original finishes, including wood paneling in some offices, victrex in the lobby, and vinyl flooring mostly remain (Photo 21). In the former Sheriff's Office in the southeast corner of the floor, the original built-in bookcase remains (Photo 22). This room also contains one of the salvaged safes from the old courthouse.

Third Floor

Of all the floors in the courthouse, the third floor has been reconfigured the most. Occurring in the 1980s, the reconfiguration kept the east-west lobby intact, but enlarged some rooms by removing walls and also created new ones by adding walls. The biggest alteration occurred at the west end of the floor where eight small "bedrooms" were turned into three larger rooms for the District Attorney's office. Though the bedrooms—originally used by jurors—were lost, the kitchenette, with a historic-age combination sink, oven, and stove, remains in the northwest corner of the floor.

While the reconfiguration resulted in the loss of original materials in some of the office spaces and rooms, the lobby retains its vinyl flooring, plastered walls, and original wood doors. The water damage from Hurricane Harvey also contributed to some loss of original materials. In the Grand Jury Room at the southeast corner of the floor, where the configuration remains unaltered, the vinyl flooring was replaced with carpet and some of the wood paneling on the walls has been removed, leaving the structural clay tile underneath exposed (Photo 23).

Integrity

The Austin County Courthouse retains its integrity of location, as well as a high degree of integrity of feeling, association, and setting. Overall, the building's design, materials, and workmanship also retain integrity. The design of the building has had few major alterations other than the late-1970s breezeway enclosure. Character-defining features of the building, including its dramatic radial massing and Modernist details, remain unaltered. Hedrick's designs for the interior floorplans also have changed minimally. Most floorplan changes are limited to the third floor, which did not originally include character-defining public spaces or high levels of finishes. The third-floor changes helped the county meet evolving functional needs with minimal damage to character-defining features. Both the exterior and interior of

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

the Austin County Courthouse retain the vast majority of their original materials and workmanship. While the removal of the distinctive lobby ceiling on the first floor and the replacement of materials in the district courtroom do detract from the integrity of materials somewhat, the vast majority of the original materials remain intact. Moreover, some of the interior material changes resulted from damage caused by water. When Hurricane Harvey hit in August 2017, parts of Austin County received more than 30 inches of rain over the course of the storm. The deluge of rain caused water damage to the courthouse as leaks in the penthouse and on the roof allowed water into the building. The basement flooded during the storm and damage also occurred on the first and third floors. This damage did require that some original materials be replaced. Since Hurricane Harvey, work on the roof and penthouse has prevented leaks into the building, helping to ensure that the building retains its integrity into the future.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Statement of Significance

The 1961 Austin County Courthouse is a two-story granite and concrete building in the center of Bellville's courthouse square. Modernistic in its block massing and devoid of ornament, it is a stark example of a 1960s governmental building with a design influenced by both postwar modernist architectural principles as well as a desire to keep costs low. Produced by noted architect Wyatt C. Hedrick, Austin County Courthouse is one of Texas' most austere midcentury modern courthouses and the first to be nominated to the National Register. The exterior and interior retain a very high degree of architectural integrity. The rich interior spaces and finishes are largely intact, including granite wall veneers, terrazzo floors, and commercial style aluminum doors, windows, and wall framing systems. The courthouse has served as the center of county government since 1961, replacing a late 19th century courthouse that was destroyed by fire in 1960 and serves as an important focal point for the city of Bellville. It is nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A (Politics/Government) and Criterion C (Architecture) at the local level of significance for the period 1961-1973, the current 50-year threshold for listing.

Criterion A: Government

Organization of Austin County and Bellville as County Seat

Permanent settlement in present-day Austin County began under Mexican rule in 1821 with the founding of Stephen F. Austin's Colony. Spread over a large area in southeast Texas, Austin's Colony encompassed all of present-day Austin County. Between 1821 and 1835—when the colonial land office closed—approximately 2,000 people lived in the colony, primarily in areas with rich soil, along the Brazos, Colorado, and San Bernard rivers.⁷ Though most colonists came from the American Southeast, immigrants also came from Germany, following the arrival of the first German settler in the area (near present-day Industry), Johann Friedrich Ernst. San Felipe, on the Brazos River in the southeastern part of present-day Austin County, was founded in 1824 and served as the capital of Austin's Colony. Though San Felipe served as the capital of the entire colony, the local unit of government was the municipality, a Spanish system of governance. In 1828, the municipality of San Felipe formed with boundaries approximating those of present-day Austin County and Waller County.⁸

With Texas's independence and passage of the County Government Act of 1836, the Republic of Texas replaced municipalities with counties as the form of government organization. Under the act, most of the municipalities organized under Mexican rule became counties, including Austin County. Named after Stephen F. Austin, Austin County organized in 1837 and San Felipe, despite the destruction it suffered during the Texas Revolution, became the county seat. Over the next decade, new settlers trickled to Austin County, which at the time encompassed present-day Waller County. Settlers continued arriving from the Southeast and Germany, and a wave of Czech settlers began arriving in the 1840s.⁹ By the mid-1840s, the county's population was around 2,500, comprised largely of farmers.¹⁰ Enslaved people accounted for roughly 45 percent of the population. The population was dispersed across the county, though the northern and western parts of the county were favored due to its rolling hills and favorable soils. Small clusters of settlements included the communities of Industry and Cat Spring. San Felipe, despite its status as county seat, never rebounded after the war. The community, in the flat grasslands of the southeast section of the county, was far from the center of the county and inconvenient for travelers to reach. In 1843, settlers sent the Congress of the

⁷ Historical Note, "A Guide to the Austin's Colony Records, 1823-1841," TARO Texas Archival Resources Online, accessed October 20, 2022, https://txarchives.org/txglo/finding_aids/00053.xml.

⁸ Charles Christopher Jackson, "Austin County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/austin-county>.

⁹ "Austin County History," Austin County, Texas, accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.austincounty.com/page/austin.History>.

¹⁰ Jackson, "Austin County," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

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Republic of Texas a petition asking to relocate the county seat.¹¹ Two-hundred thirty-four people signed the petition, many of them from the northern and western parts of the county. The petition argued, “The town of San Felipe has simply been tolerated by the people because it had been formerly the capital of the jurisdiction of Austin.”¹²

During this period, communities sought county seat designations, hoping that commercial activity would follow the governmental and legal activities associated with the courthouse. The town council of San Felipe promised to build two bridges and help “keep the courthouse in order,” in an effort to remain county seat, but without delivering on the promises, the Congress of the Republic of Texas appointed a body of commissioners to find a new county seat.¹³ Two sites were offered free of charge for the location of a new county seat. A landowner, located approximately four miles north of present-day Bellville, laid out and offered a new town, named Center Hill, to the county for consideration.¹⁴ Two other landowners, brothers Thomas and James Bell, offered the county 145 acres—108 acres from Thomas and 37 acres from James—for a new townsite.¹⁵ Florida natives, the brothers arrived as colonists with Austin’s Colony in the early 1820s. Both farmers, Thomas had a homestead near present-day Bellville. On July 4, 1846, he hosted a celebration and barbecue on his land in an effort to promote it as a town site and the new county seat. In December 1846, county voters selected the 108 acres gifted by the Bell brothers for a new townsite and as their county seat.¹⁶ One historical account states that the Bell land was selected because of the hill on which the courthouse is currently located, which “was said to have been the most beautiful grove the eye ever beheld.”¹⁷ The Legislature of the State of Texas officially passed an act naming the townsite as the Austin County seat in January 1848.¹⁸

The new town, named Bellville after the Bell brothers, was surveyed and platted by District Surveyor D. Charles Amthor in 1848 (Figures 11 and 18).¹⁹ Like many surveyors of new towns established and platted as county seats, Amthor placed the courthouse square prominently in the middle of town, atop the hill. Amthor laid out Bellville in a grid pattern with the courthouse square in the middle, in what courthouse square historian Dr. Robert E. Veselka calls the “Harrisonburg Square,” modeled after the layout of Harrisonburg, Virginia.²⁰ In this configuration, the town’s main street aligns with the middle of the square, with the block patterns and lot lines reinforcing “the prominence of the courthouse square in the townscape.”²¹ Unlike courthouse squares derived from Spanish and German planning traditions, Veselka identifies the Harrisonburg plan as one rooted in Anglo-American planning traditions. The 14 examples of this pattern in Texas are dispersed across the state in areas suggesting little connection with specific cultural traditions.

Austin County Courthouse History

The current courthouse is Austin County’s sixth: the first in San Felipe (not extant) and then the second through sixth in Bellville. Between 1846 and 1855, the county constructed the second, third, and fourth courthouses in Bellville. In 1887 the county completed the fifth courthouse, which stood for 73 years before catching fire in 1960 and necessitating the sixth courthouse, which remains extant today. Though drastically different in design, each served as the center of government of Austin County and as a symbol for the stability and democracy of the county. These

¹¹ Isabel Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, (New Ulm, Texas: New Ulm Enterprises, 1992), 2.

¹² Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 2.

¹³ W. A. Trenckmann, “History of Austin County,” (unpublished paper, 1980), 18.

¹⁴ Wilma Petrussek, *A Pictorial History of Austin County*, (Marceline, Missouri: D-Books Publishing, Inc., 1994), 3

¹⁵ Trenckmann, “History of Austin County,” 18.

¹⁶ Petrussek, *A Pictorial History of Austin County*, 2.; Trenckmann, “A History of Austin County,” 18.

¹⁷ Petrussek, *A Pictorial History of Austin County*, 2.

¹⁸ Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 5.

¹⁹ Trenckmann, “History of Austin County,” 18.

²⁰ Dr. Robert E. Veselka, *The Courthouse Square in Texas*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000), 55-57; *Harrisonburg, Va.* [map] (Sanborn Fire Insurance Company 1886), sheet 1, from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3884hm.g3884hm_g090291886.

²¹ Veselka, *The Courthouse Square in Texas*, 55-57.

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buildings have housed the county's courtrooms, storage vaults and records, county commissioners' court, and the various important county offices including tax assessor, justice of the peace, sheriff, and county and district clerks.

1848 – 1855 Courthouses

In the 1850s, Austin County's population steadily grew, adding around 6,200 inhabitants over the decade.²² Much of the county's early responsibilities focused on the need for improved infrastructure, including bridge and road construction and maintenance, law enforcement, and tax collection. Between 1848 and 1854, Austin County built three courthouses to carry out these functions. The 1848 courthouse was a temporary building constructed just off the middle of the square, at the southeast corner (not extant). The one-story frame building hosted the first meeting of the county commissioners in Bellville in September 1848.²³ By 1850, the county replaced the 1848 courthouse with a larger, permanent "four-office frame building with a courtroom."²⁴ The new courthouse was constructed by builder Sam Shelburne with proceeds from the sale of county land in San Felipe and town lots in Bellville.²⁵ The county built the courthouse in the middle of the then-tree-dotted square, in line with Amthor's plan. The courthouse, said to be "a model of comfort and efficiency," was large enough for county government functions and for "speechmaking, preaching, and on suitable occasions, for dancing as well."²⁶ Having outgrown the space just four years later, the county announced it would contract the lowest bidder for the construction of a new courthouse. In July 1854, the county awarded a contract to Philip Cuny for construction of the building for \$14,790.²⁷ Built on the site of the previous courthouse—which the county sold to be relocated—the new courthouse opened in 1855. The 1855 courthouse was a two-story, brick building with a tin roof (Figure 19). The building's eastern front had "an iron portico from which the oyez of the time were sounded," and its windows were adorned with "Old-fashioned wooden shutters."²⁸ An exterior set of stairs led to the second-floor courtroom and jury room (reportedly there were no interior stairs), and "a black plank fence" surrounded the square that was dotted with trees and boasted a well house and water trough.²⁹ Reportedly the first brick building in Austin County, the courthouse was "one of the best in the state," according to one visitor.³⁰ Like its predecessor, the 1855 courthouse was used for various non-governmental purposes including dances, dance lessons, Sunday school, and other religious services.³¹

Bellville grew slowly around the square. In the 1850s, several store buildings opened on the square, as did several hotels that provided lodging for jurors, witnesses, and lawyers.³² The town also boasted several houses, a post office, and a church. During this period, the county government also constructed the first county jail in Bellville, several blocks south of the courthouse.

²² Jackson, "Austin County," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

²³ Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 126.

²⁴ "County Courthouse Destroyed by Fire; Most Records Saved," *The Bellville Times*, April 7, 1960, 1.

²⁵ "County Courthouse Destroyed by Fire; Most Records Saved," *The Bellville Times*.

²⁶ Trenckmann, "History of Austin County," 18.

²⁷ Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 127.

²⁸ "How It Used to Look," *The Bellville Times*, August 25, 1910, 8.

²⁹ "How It Used to Look," *The Bellville Times*.

³⁰ Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 128.

³¹ Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 128.

³² Trenckmann, "History of Austin County," 19.

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1887 Courthouse

By 1887, when the county completed its fifth courthouse, Austin County's population had slowly grown from around 10,000 in 1860 to around 16,000.³³ Despite the loss of Waller County, which formed its own county in 1873, Austin County benefited from the arrival of several railroads, including the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe railroad and the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad, in the late-1870s and early 1880s. The railroads brought with them jobs and spurred commercial and industrial growth in the communities they stopped in, including Wallis, Sealy, and Bellville. Austin County's economy remained firmly rooted in agriculture, supplemented by the growth of the county's industrial sector, which included the founding of the Sealy Mattress Company in 1881.

The growth of Austin County and Bellville contributed to the need for a larger courthouse. The Texas Constitution of 1876 also increased the political organization of counties in the state, creating new legal, tax, law enforcement, and education positions, and heightening the demand for more physical space.³⁴ Across the state, a boom in county courthouse construction ensued in the late 1870s and 1880s. To accommodate its growing responsibilities, Austin County constructed an addition to the 1855 courthouse in 1877.³⁵ By the early 1880s though, "with Bellville boasting an increase in the number of inhabitants due to the recent arrival of the railroad," and the deteriorating condition of the building, the need for a new courthouse grew.³⁶ In 1884 the county judge hired architect Eugene T. Heiner to assess the building and make recommendations for either its rehabilitation or demolition. Heiner, an architect in Houston who designed 16 courthouses in Texas, noted multiple structural problems with the courthouse and concluded that it was a danger to both the county's people and its records and it was "better to begin anew than to repair the courthouse."³⁷ Following the recommendation, the county built anew, hiring Heiner to design a new courthouse. For Austin County, Heiner designed a three-story Second Empire brick building with a central clock tower and pedimented cupolas (Figure 23). Funded with bonds, the new courthouse cost around \$45,000.³⁸ The county celebrated with a cornerstone-laying ceremony that featured a procession with bands, military companies, fire companies, societies, and the Masons. Completed in 1887, the courthouse served Austin County for the succeeding seven decades. The building remained largely unaltered during that period, save for several significant additions and changes, including the addition of record vaults in the county and district clerks' offices (1925), the addition of a basement, and repainting (1937 with a Public Works Administration grant), and a new roof (1959).³⁹

1961 Courthouse

Between the completion of the 1887 courthouse and 1960, Austin County's population decreased from around 18,000 to just shy of 14,000.⁴⁰ After peaking in 1900, the county's population steadily declined over the next six decades. Over this period, Austin County remained characteristically rural and agrarian, and its economy fluctuated along with the agricultural depressions and rebounds. With few economic opportunities outside of farming and ranching, people left Austin County for areas like Houston that offered more job and educational opportunities. In 1960, the population was 21 percent Black and 79 percent White, many of German or Czech ancestry.⁴¹ Sealy was the largest city in 1960,

³³ Jackson, "Austin County," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

³⁴ Dick Smith, "County Organization," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed Jan. 20, 2021, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/county-organization>.

³⁵ "Austin County Courthouse (1855)," Texas Historical Commission, Atlas Number 4302002202, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/>.

³⁶ William Lynch Fuller, "Local History 'Doomed,'" *The Bellville Times*, April 12, 1979, 12.

³⁷ Fuller, "Local History 'Doomed,'" *The Bellville Times*.

³⁸ "Times and Prices Show Big Changes," *The Bellville Times*, October 5, 1961, 13.

³⁹ "Courthouse Committee Named," *The Bellville Times*, April 14, 1960, 2.

⁴⁰ Jackson, "Austin County," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁴¹ US Census Bureau, "Texas," 1960, 53, accessed November 9, 2022, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1960/population-volume-1/33255142v1p45ch02.pdf>; Petrussek, *A Pictorial History of Austin County*, 2.

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with a population of 2,328.⁴² It was the county's industrial center—home to a rice dryer, several factories, as well as an oil and grist mill—and it rivaled Bellville as a commercial and transportation center. Within Austin County, the county seat of Bellville retained population despite the county's overall population decline. In 1960, Bellville was Austin County's second-largest city, and despite the anticipation felt in 1887 that the new courthouse marked "the advent of a big boom," Bellville's growth, though steady, had been slow, increasing from around 800 in 1890 to 2,218 in 1960.⁴³ The courthouse square filled in with commercial buildings over the period, and new nodes of development also emerged along the highways—State Highway 159 and State Highway 36—that passed through. This commercial growth, along with the presence of the county government, supported the city's population growth.⁴⁴

Austin County's need for a new courthouse did not derive from social, economic, demographic, or cultural shifts. In 1960, the courthouse not only functioned sufficiently for the county's needs, but it was also beloved by the community, described as "the very heart of the town," by the local newspaper editor.⁴⁵ Consequently, many lamented the loss of the courthouse after an early morning fire on April 5, 1960. Despite the response of the Bellville, Sealy, Wallis, Industry, Brenham, and Rosenberg fire departments, the building was unsalvageable (Figure 20). Its origin and cause are unknown, but the fire collapsed the building roof and the clock tower and destroyed much of the interior. Despite the damage caused to the building itself, the courthouse vaults saved nearly all of the county clerk's and other important records from destruction. Of note, however, the fire destroyed records of "colored county agents," which presumably were not in vaults.⁴⁶

The functions of government continued despite the loss of the courthouse. Within days of the fire, the county found space in multiple buildings in Bellville for storage, office, and courtroom use. The subject of replacing the courthouse was also swiftly raised. In less than a week after the fire, the County Commissioner's Court appointed a 14-person advisory committee—comprised of men from across the county—to "serve in an advisory capacity to the Commissioners Court on the planning and rebuilding of the courthouse."⁴⁷ On April 11, 1960, the County Commissioners' Court first approved hiring the architectural and engineering firm of Wyatt C. Hedrick to assess the condition of the building and "whether or not the old walls may be safely left intact until the same is demolished."⁴⁸ Shortly after, in a special session held on April 18, the court ordered the hiring of Columbian Securities Corporation of San Antonio to advise "in the matter of ordering an election for the purpose of issuing bonds in the amount of \$485,000 to finance the construction of a new courthouse for Austin County, Texas, and in the matter of sale of said bonds for the purpose aforesaid."⁴⁹ Approval of the bonds would require an increase in the tax rate from 70 cents per \$100 valuation to 80 cents, but the county's financial consultants stated that Austin County remained in "better financial condition than 90 percent of Texas counties."⁵⁰

Prior to setting the bond election, the county hired Hedrick from among a dozen architects under consideration to design the new courthouse. The county selected Hedrick following an interview and consultation with him in Houston, stating at the commissioners' court on May 2 that "the court being of further opinion that Wyatt C. Hedrick of the city of Houston, Harris County, Texas, is an architect well qualified and well equipped to design and supervise the

⁴² *Texas Almanac, 1961-1962*, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, 540, accessed November 9, 2022, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph117140/>.

⁴³ Willard B. Robinson, *The People's Architecture: Texas Courthouses, Jails, and Municipal Buildings*, (Austin, Texas: Texas State Historical Association, 1983), 80.

⁴⁴ US Census Bureau, "Texas," 1960, 45-28.

⁴⁵ "Leon Hale Reflects On Local Reaction," *The Bellville Times*, October 5, 1961, 5.

⁴⁶ "County Courthouse Destroyed by Fire; Most Records Saved," *The Bellville Times*, April 7, 1960, 1.

⁴⁷ "Courthouse Committee Named," *The Bellville Times*.

⁴⁸ Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk's Office, April 11, 1960.

⁴⁹ Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk's Office, April 18, 1960.

⁵⁰ "Court Okays Initial Courthouse Sketches," *The Bellville Times*, May 12, 1960, 2.

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construction of a new courthouse... The selection of the architect for this work is based upon his personal professional skill and training.”⁵¹ They awarded him a contract for the “usual and customary fee paid to architects for such services,” being six percent of the total construction cost—not including legal fees, furniture, and equipment—of the project.⁵² The commissioners asked Hedrick to prepare two sets of plans for public consideration: Plan A, a three-story courthouse for the courthouse square in Bellville; and Plan B, a courthouse of the same size built on another site in the city or county (Figure 22).⁵³

Though Plan B was not attached to a specific location, Sealy was pushing for the designation and courthouse. In Sealy, a citizens’ committee spearhead the movement to relocate the courthouse, circulating a petition to acquire the requisite number of signatures.⁵⁴ At the time, to relocate the county seat, Texas law required a petition signed by fifty percent of the county’s qualified voters. If acquired, the petition triggered an election where two-thirds of the voters needed to approve the relocation.⁵⁵ Opponents of Plan B argued that relocating the courthouse would require relocating other county offices, including the jail, which would cost taxpayers more money.⁵⁶ They also argued that, in addition to costs, the courthouse should remain in Bellville for tradition’s sake, its convenient location in the center of the county, and the availability of parking on the square.⁵⁷ While the *Bellville Times* ran editorials and articles in support of Plan A, *The Sealy News* published articles and editorials in support of relocating the courthouse. Cost was also a main argument for proponents of Plan B. The citizens’ committee pushing for the move told *The Sealy News* that “One thing is certain, if the court house [sic] is built in Sealy it will be unnecessary for the taxpayers of Austin County to vote a bond anywhere near \$485,000” due to the sizeable amount of large individual financial contributions given for a move.⁵⁸ The City of Sealy also offered two blocks on Main Street without cost to the county for a courthouse. The committee also touted Sealy’s location on two highways, two railroads, and its school system as reasons to relocate the courthouse.

Before Austin County voted on the location of the new courthouse, voters first went to the polls for the bond vote. In a special election held May 21, 1960, Austin County residents approved the bond issuance: 2,302 for and 899 against.⁵⁹ Voters in Bellville overwhelmingly approved the bond issuance, 1,054 for and 11 against.⁶⁰ Voters in Sealy and other small communities in southeast Austin County, including San Felipe, Peters, and Frydek, largely voted against the courthouse bonds, with 87 percent of Sealy residents voting against the issue. Because the courthouse location was still up for consideration, those pushing to relocate the county seat to Sealy were still trying to garner signatures for their petition.⁶¹ By early June 1960, the committee still collected too few signatures to call for an election, and the county mailed ballots to voters giving them the option to choose between Plan A and Plan B. The county judge noted that “two ballots will be put in each letter so that both the husband and wife can vote.”⁶² By mid-June the county announced that 72.7 percent of Austin County voters, by a count of 2,847 to 1,067, favored Plan A, rebuilding in the courthouse square in Bellville.⁶³

⁵¹ Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk’s Office, May 2, 1960.

⁵² Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk’s Office, May 2, 1960.

⁵³ “Courthouse Bond Vote Called; Architect Hired,” *The Bellville Times*, May 5, 1960, 1.

⁵⁴ “Courthouse Bond Vote Carries County, 2 to 1,” *The Sealy News*, May 26, 1960, 1.

⁵⁵ “Courthouse Location,” *The Bellville Times*, May 12, 1960, 2.

⁵⁶ “Courthouse Location,” *The Bellville Times*.

⁵⁷ “Cost, Convenience Make ‘Plan A’ Best,” *The Bellville Times*, June 2, 1960, 1.

⁵⁸ “Heavy Cash Response to Courthouse Fund,” *The Sealy Times*, May 19, 1960, 1.

⁵⁹ “Bond Election Totals Listed By Precincts,” *The Bellville Times*, May 26, 1960, 1.

⁶⁰ “Bond Election Total Listed By Precincts,” *The Bellville Times*.

⁶¹ “Courthouse Location,” *The Bellville Times*, May 12, 1960, 2.

⁶² “Courthouse Site Vote Due,” *The Bellville Times*, June 2, 1960, 2.

⁶³ “Voters Select Site on Plaza,” *The Bellville Times*, September 28, 1961, 31.

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After the vote, construction work began in Bellville. During the summer of 1960, a wrecking company demolished the remains of the old courthouse. Southwest Wrecking, Inc. of Austin demolished and removed everything “save and except the old bell, the cornerstone, all metal vault doors and iron safe, which articles are to be retained by the Commissioners’ Court.”⁶⁴ In October, the commissioner’s court awarded the lowest bidder, Krebs Construction, Inc. of Houston, a contract for \$511,918, to be paid with cashed out time certificates from the courthouse bond fund.⁶⁵ Hedrick held meetings with the commissioners’ court and each county office, refining the courthouse plans to ensure each office had enough space, but also ensuring the project stayed on budget. In addition to floor plans and finishes, Hedrick also designed the building’s door frames and book storage and shelving found in some offices. A representative for Hedrick said the architect “is as interested in doing a good job on the Austin County courthouse, as he was in doing a good job on the multimillion dollar base in Iceland.”⁶⁶ Throughout the summer and into the fall, excitement and anticipation grew as the frame of the building went up (Figure 21). After an informal meeting with the architect, a *Bellville Times* journalist wrote “I’ll bet none of us will be sorry that our commissioners court hired Wyatt C. Hedrick as the architect for the new courthouse.”⁶⁷ The excitement was crowned with the opening of the 1887 cornerstone at a ceremony in September 1960. Hosted by the Bellville Masonic Lodge, a large crowd watched as a bible, the program of the laying of the cornerstone in 1886, coins, medicine, and newspapers were pulled from the cornerstone.⁶⁸

Work continued on the courthouse into 1961. The companies supplying materials and services included Texas Quarries in Austin, Venice Art Terrazzo Company in San Antonio, Fischer Tile and Floor Covering in Brenham, Fixtures International in Houston, and Coastal Plastering Company in Houston.⁶⁹ In February 1961, the commissioners agreed to purchase and install four electric clocks for \$250 each, plus freight, from American Clock Company in Los Angeles.⁷⁰ That same month, the commissioners hired Hedrick to purchase and install furniture, paying him six percent of the cost of furniture up to \$20,000.⁷¹ Hedrick’s firm, which employed an interior designer, selected furniture owned by the county to refinish and reuse, and hired Maverick Clark Company of Houston to both supply new furniture and refinish the old furniture. The company also refinished and installed shelving and counters. By the end of summer, the county began moving equipment into the building and Southwestern Bell Telephone Company installed phones in the offices. In September 1961, hundreds attended the traditional cornerstone laying ceremony held by the Masons. Because the new courthouse did not have an actual cornerstone, the canister of mementos was placed in a bronze box that took the place of an “inside construction tile” at the northeast corner of the building.⁷² Among the many items placed in the canister included: newspapers, coins, credit cards (one belonging to Hedrick), photos of commissioners’ and other elected officials’ families, the contract with Krebs Construction, Masonic lodge rosters, a bible, and a 4H Club button.⁷³

Though construction was plagued by rain and capped off by Hurricane Carla—considered at the time “the worst hurricane of the century”—hitting in late September, the Austin County Courthouse opened in October 1961.⁷⁴ The building was twenty percent larger than the previous courthouse at roughly 26,000 square feet, and it easily

⁶⁴ Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk’s Office, June 20, 1960.

⁶⁵ Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk’s Office, October 3, 1960.

⁶⁶ “Wyatt Hedrick,” *The Bellville Times*, September 8, 1960, 2.

⁶⁷ “Wyatt Hedrick,” *The Bellville Times*.

⁶⁸ “Papers Decayed In Cornerstone,” *The Bellville Times*, September 15, 1960, 1.

⁶⁹ Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk’s Office, December 21, 1961.

⁷⁰ Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk’s Office, February 1, 1961.

⁷¹ Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk’s Office, February 1, 1961.

⁷² “Hundreds Attend Ceremony, Few Know Canister Location,” *The Bellville Times*, October 5, 1961, 5.

⁷³ Austin County Commissioners Court minutes, Austin County Clerk’s Office, February 1, 1961.

⁷⁴ “Rain Plagued Job All Along the Way,” *The Bellville Times*, October 5, 1961, 9.

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accommodated all the county officials and offices needed for the government to function (Figure 23).⁷⁵ Following is a breakdown of the offices and rooms on each floor:

- Basement: large lecture and meeting room, county agent offices, the school superintendent's office, school nurse's office, the county surveyor, welfare office, county clerk's vault, segregated restrooms, storage, and mechanical rooms
- First Floor: county judge offices, county auditor and secretary, county clerk, county commissioners' office, treasurer, tax assessor and collector, photo lab, private restrooms
- Second Floor: county attorney and secretary, district clerk's office and vault, justice of the peace, district judge's office, petit jury room, sheriff's office, district courtroom, radio room, segregated restrooms
- Third Floor: grand jury room, 12 bedrooms for jurors, kitchenette, miscellaneous offices, jury room, bailiff's office, segregated restrooms

The opening of the courthouse was celebrated with a dedication ceremony held on October 8, 1961. Over 1,500 attended the event which featured speeches, music, benediction, and tours of the building led by local high school students and the 4H club. To mark the historic occasion, *The Bellville Times* printed a special keepsake edition, reprinting articles on both the new and old courthouses (Figure 24). The public's opinion on the new courthouse was somewhat lukewarm. In his column in the *Houston Post*, journalist Leon Hale wrote that the overwhelming embrace of and attachment to the 1887 courthouse made it difficult to replace and please the public, particularly with a courthouse built in such a dissimilar style. He wrote "Most of the people don't like the building... The lack of windows seems to be the biggest objection Bellville people have to it. I predict that the majority of Austin County people won't like the building and will continue not liking it for perhaps a year, at which time they'll get used to it, and accept it, and the talk will die down."⁷⁶

Over the next decade, as the county accepted and grew acquainted with the new courthouse, the population slowly increased, beginning a trend that continued into the twenty-first century. Growth in the subsequent decade after the courthouse completion was small, increasing by only 54 residents according to the U. S. Census Bureau. Bellville's population also slightly increased, growing from 2,218 to 2,371 between 1960 and 1970.⁷⁷ Over this period, the courthouse maintained its role as the center of county government. The courthouse served the people of the county in other ways, as well. Groups, including Alcoholics Anonymous, AARP, and the Boy Scouts used the basement meeting room for meetings, and newspaper articles throughout the period of significance mention music and picnics in the plaza. The building also played host to the Austin County Spelling Bee championship in the 1960s and was also used in 1962 during the threat of nuclear war for food and medical supplies storage, being the only building in the county meeting fallout specifications.⁷⁸ The courthouse, like the school districts in Austin County, began the process of integration in the mid-1960s.

⁷⁵ "Appearances Can Be Deceptive; Third of Building Below Ground," *The Bellville Times*, October 5, 1961, 7.

⁷⁶ "Leon Hale Reflects On Local Reaction," *The Bellville Times*, October 5, 1961, 5 and 9.

⁷⁷ "1970 Census of Population," U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 20, accessed November 10, 2022, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1970/pc-v1/26084397v1ch4.pdf>

⁷⁸ "Emergency Food To Be Stored Here," *The Bellville Times*, April 5, 1962, 1.

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Criterion C: Architecture

Of the 254 courthouses in Texas, the Austin County Courthouse is one of fewer than 10 built in the 1960s. The courthouse is a reflection of its time, built during a period characterized by shifting views on civic architecture. Designed by architect Wyatt C. Hedrick, the courthouse stands as an excellent example of how many architects working for county and city governments sought to create an aesthetic for the modern era that embraced new views on efficiency, technology, and economy while presenting a sense of security, strength, and prosperity. As a reflection of this trend, the Austin County Courthouse stands as an important example highlighting the evolution of county courthouse design in Texas. Built in the 1960s, the courthouse is an excellent expression of the modern philosophy of materials, massing, and ornamentation. In addition to embodying modern era design aesthetics, the courthouse is also a notable work of distinguished and prolific Texas architect, Wyatt Hedrick.

Modernism and the Evolution of Texas Courthouse Design

Designed to reflect a county's values, strength, prosperity, and aspirations, courthouses are often large and imposing, architect-designed edifices. Reflections of their time, courthouses were built with materials and designed in styles popularly used for civic buildings. As such, Texas courthouses not only stand as landmarks to the function of government, but they also stand as architectural landmarks to the evolving beliefs on public architecture.

The earliest permanent courthouses in the state were built in the mid to late-nineteenth century. Though the oldest extant courthouse in Texas—the Cass County courthouse—dates to 1859. Permanent courthouse building in Texas began in earnest after the Civil War, in the 1870s and 1880s during a period of economic prosperity, population growth, and railroad building in the state. Typically constructed to replace crude, temporary buildings first used by counties, these buildings were often the first permanent civic buildings constructed in counties. Architects during this period designed symmetrical and balanced courthouses in an effort to create a sense of orderliness, pride, stability, and permanence. Plans were commonly cross-axial, and façades featured a base, middle, and capital level. Styles used across the country for public architecture were also used by architects in Texas and included the Second Empire, Renaissance Revival, Italianate, and Romanesque Revival styles. Many designs incorporated entablatures, hipped and pyramidal roofs, belt courses, triangular pediments, and clock towers. Though availability somewhat dictated the use of materials, many courthouses from this era were built with rusticated stone and brick.

Following national trends, Texas courthouse design evolved in the twentieth century. Factors, including the need for larger buildings—necessitated by growing populations and government functions—new technologies and building materials, and changing architectural tastes influenced courthouse design in the twentieth century.⁷⁹ Courthouses of the era featured reinforced concrete and steel beams and commonly had cross-axial and cruciform plans. Brick remained a popular building material, and rusticated stone was largely, though not entirely, abandoned in favor of smooth stone accents. The hipped roofs and bell towers of the nineteenth century gave way to flat roofs, while Neoclassical and Eclectic styles were common in the early twentieth century. Until the Great Depression, the twentieth-century courthouses “reflected the exuberant optimism of the day.”⁸⁰ Continuing to draw from the classical standard but influenced by a desire to modernize, as well as the need to adapt to financial restraints, austere Moderne and Art Deco styles “transformed county courthouse design” in the late 1920s and 1930s.⁸¹ Also referred to by historians as Stripped Classicism or PWA Moderne for its use in projects funded by the federal government's Public Works Administration

⁷⁹ Michael Andrews, *Historic Texas Courthouses*, (Albany, Texas: Bright Skies Press, 2006), 22.

⁸⁰ Andrews, *Historic Texas Courthouses*, 22.

⁸¹ Amy E. Unger, “Progressive Experiments in Texas County Courthouse Design, 1910-1920,” Order No. 1475878, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2010, 4.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

(PWA), the style is characterized by symmetrical massing, flat roofs, simple cornices, steel casement windows, pilasters, and simple geometric ornamentation.⁸²

After World War II, trends in public architecture shifted away from the classism of prior periods. Influenced by advances in building technologies and materials, functionalist European styles, and “the dictates of economy,” modern architecture grew in popularity and prevalence.⁸³ Architects embraced functionalist ideas that emphasized efficient use of space that was articulated through massing and materials, rather than decorative ornamentation. The postwar economic expansion also motivated architects to design with efficiency and construct buildings to accommodate more workers and support a diverse work output.⁸⁴ Architects experimented with designs and incorporated new technologies and materials into their buildings. Popular materials included steel, glass, polished stone, and aluminum. Wood gave way to glass and aluminum doors and terrazzo flooring, and suspended acoustic tiled ceilings hung lower than older plastered ceilings for a more modern look and to accommodate ductwork for air conditioning. This style, in stark contrast to styles of the past, was characterized by bold massing and clean lines.

This new “style” permeated all realms of building, including commercial, institutional, residential, and civic architecture. For architects of courthouses and other civic buildings, this architecture posed the problem of creating a building that expressed its purpose and function. While modern architecture’s bold massing and materials lend themselves to monumentality and expressions of permanence and security, it lacked many of the design details—clock towers, domes, columns, and ornamentation—of earlier styles that helped distinguish courthouses by their appearance. Without these architectural characteristics, therefore, some Postwar Era public buildings, including courthouses, looked similar to other types of buildings, such as offices and banks.

These trends in architecture played out in Texas courthouse design in the postwar period. The courthouses from this era reflect modernization efforts and how architects attempted to create a unique aesthetic for modern courthouse architecture, similar to what existed prior to the war. In efforts to modernize, several counties renovated their old courthouses by removing domes and towers, or wrapping a veneer around the original façade, as in Scurry County. Other counties added modern additions, and still others, like Aransas County, constructed entirely new courthouses. Though Austin County built a new courthouse out of necessity, rather than a desire to modernize, the evolving trends in public architecture are reflected in Hedrick’s design of the courthouse. Guided by his belief that “American architecture should stand on its own feet rather than merely copying the designs and techniques of the past, and that it should develop structures which utilize modern techniques and reflect the changed standards of living,” Hedrick sought to embody this new age in design in his courthouse design.⁸⁵

While Hedrick endeavored to “incorporate materials and construction methods representative of contemporary design,” in the courthouse plans, he also considered the governmental function of the building.⁸⁶ He selected “prestige” materials, including granite and terrazzo, to “imply that this is a substantial structure” and to express “an integrity and dignity which is called for in a courthouse.”⁸⁷ The building’s dramatic block massing also embodies the trend toward modernism, while also conveying security and significance. Hedrick’s reliance on subtle, yet intentional, design details rather than extraneous applied ornamentation also reflects the movement. Hedrick achieved visual interest with varied textures, contrasting colors, and subtle patterns created by his choice of materials. Another character-defining feature, the windowless upper stories, reflects the influence of new technology and evolving ideas on worker efficiency.

⁸² Amy E. Unger, “Progressive Experiments in Texas County Courthouse Design, 1910-1920,” Order No. 1475878, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2010, 4.

⁸³ Robinson, *The People’s Architecture*, 301.

⁸⁴ Robinson, *The People’s Architecture*, 301.

⁸⁵ “Architect Details Contemporary View,” *The Bellville Times*, October 5, 1961, 8.

⁸⁶ “Architect Details Contemporary View,” *The Bellville Times*.

⁸⁷ “Architect Details Contemporary View,” *The Bellville Times*.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

According to William D. Holdredge, an architect in Hedrick's firm, studies found that "In many cases it has been desirable to cut out all outside light. Human beings operate better in work areas with controlled temperatures and even distribution of light. Efficiency charts show that the worker operating in these conditions is a considerably happier person who produces more than he ever did in the past."⁸⁸ Based on this belief, because modern technology—fluorescent lights and air conditioning—could control light and temperature in the building, windows were nonessential. Upon its completion, Hedrick's firm proclaimed that "many of the most notable advances in contemporary architecture have been incorporated in the new Austin County Courthouse."⁸⁹ The sleek courthouse stood in stark contrast to the former nineteenth-century building and its "fancy iron grillwork and ornate clock tower."⁹⁰ The design, according to the firm, was a representation of "the many changes in the American way of life and the many scientific and technical advances" of the postwar era.⁹¹

Architect: Wyatt Cephus Hedrick

Wyatt C. Hedrick, the architect of the Austin County Courthouse, was one of the most prominent architects in Texas in the early- to mid-twentieth century. Active for over 50 years, Hedrick designed institutional, governmental, commercial, recreational, and educational buildings across Texas and the South in a variety of styles until his death in 1964. His work transformed the built environment and the skylines of cities including Tyler, Dallas, and Houston. He was most prolific in Fort Worth, though, where he designed over a dozen buildings, contributing to the city's unique Moderne architectural aesthetic. More than 15 buildings designed by Hedrick—with partners and solo—in Texas are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.⁹²

Born in 1888 in Virginia, Hedrick earned an undergraduate degree from Roanoke College in 1909 and an engineering degree from Washington and Lee University in 1910. His training as an engineer brought him to Texas in 1913, where he worked for an engineering firm in Dallas. Within a year of moving to Texas, Hedrick opened his own construction company in Fort Worth.⁹³ During the seven years Hedrick operated his company, he worked with the Fort Worth architectural firm Sanguinet and Staats, constructing several of their designs, including Central High School (1918) and the Star-Telegram building (1920).⁹⁴ In 1921 he closed his company and joined Sanguinet and Staats as a partner. As Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick, the firm designed the Sam Houston Hotel in Houston (1924) and the Jackson Building in Jackson, Mississippi (1923). By 1926, both Sanguinet and Staats were retired, and Hedrick bought out the remaining interest in the firm.

Under Hedrick, his firm—which operated as "Wyatt C. Hedrick"—grew to one of the largest in the country. Hedrick maintained headquarters in Fort Worth, and also operated offices in Dallas and Houston with partners Thomas Stanley (Dallas) and Claude Lindsley (Houston).⁹⁵ Active until his death in 1964, Hedrick designed a number of notable buildings including the Baker Hotel in Mineral Wells (1929), the Sterick Building in Memphis, Tennessee (1930), the Shamrock Hotel in Houston (1949), multiple buildings at Texas Tech University, and the Corrigan Tower in Dallas (1952). In Fort Worth, Hedrick's many landmark Moderne designs include the Worth Theater (with Alfred C. Finn, 1927), the Lone Star Gas Co. Building (1929), Texas and Pacific Terminal and Warehouse (1931), Will Rogers

⁸⁸ "Architect Details Contemporary View," *The Bellville Times*.

⁸⁹ "Architect Details Contemporary View," *The Bellville Times*.

⁹⁰ "Architect Details Contemporary View," *The Bellville Times*.

⁹¹ "Architect Details Contemporary View," *The Bellville Times*.

⁹² National Register of Historic Places Nomination Catalog, Texas Historical Commission, Texas Historic Sites Atlas, accessed October 18, 2022, <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/AdvancedSearch>.

⁹³ Christopher Long, "Hedrick, Wyatt Cephas," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 18, 2022, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/hedrick-wyatt-cephas>

⁹⁴ "Wyatt Hedrick (Part 1): The Natural," *Hometown By Handlebar* (blog), September 2, 2021, <https://hometownbyhandlebar.com/?p=2917>.

⁹⁵ "Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick," Collection Details, Alexander Architectural Archives, accessed October 5, 2022, https://txarchives.org/utaaa/finding_aids/00005.xml.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Memorial Center (1936), and City Hall (with Elmer G. Withers, 1938).⁹⁶ Between 1939 and his death, Hedrick also worked on seven county courthouses in Texas (none listed on the National Register to date), including Comanche County Courthouse (1939), Motely County Courthouse (1948), Yoakum County Courthouse (1949), Coleman County Courthouse remodel (1952), Coke County Courthouse (with Harry Weaver, 1956), Kent County Courthouse (1956), Live Oak County Courthouse Annex (1956), and the Austin County Courthouse (1961).⁹⁷ His courthouse designs all exhibit a similar boxy scale and massing and display modern stylistic influences, including Art Deco and Mid-Century Modern. The Austin County Courthouse, the last courthouse designed by Hedrick, is the most modern in its massing, materials, and lack of windows (Figure 25).

Conclusion

Reflecting on the new courthouse, a representative for Hedrick's firm concluded, "As architects, we are indeed proud of the Austin County Courthouse and we believe that in addition to serving as a center of government for Austin County, it will also be a source of pride for all citizens of Austin County as representative of the importance which they place upon any expression of their local sovereignty."⁹⁸ The Austin County Courthouse in the middle of downtown Bellville has served both functions. As the center of the county government since its completion in 1961, the building is nominated under Criterion A in the area of Government/Politics, at the local level. The courthouse is also an excellent expression of modernist architecture philosophies of materials, massing, and ornamentation, and therefore it is also nominated under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, at the local level. The period of significance extends from 1961 to 1973.

⁹⁶ "Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick," Alexander Architectural Archives.

⁹⁷ In 1976, 12 years after Hedrick's death, the firm Wyatt C. Hedrick and Co. designed the Brazoria County Courthouse addition.

⁹⁸ "Architect Details Contemporary View," *The Bellville Times*.

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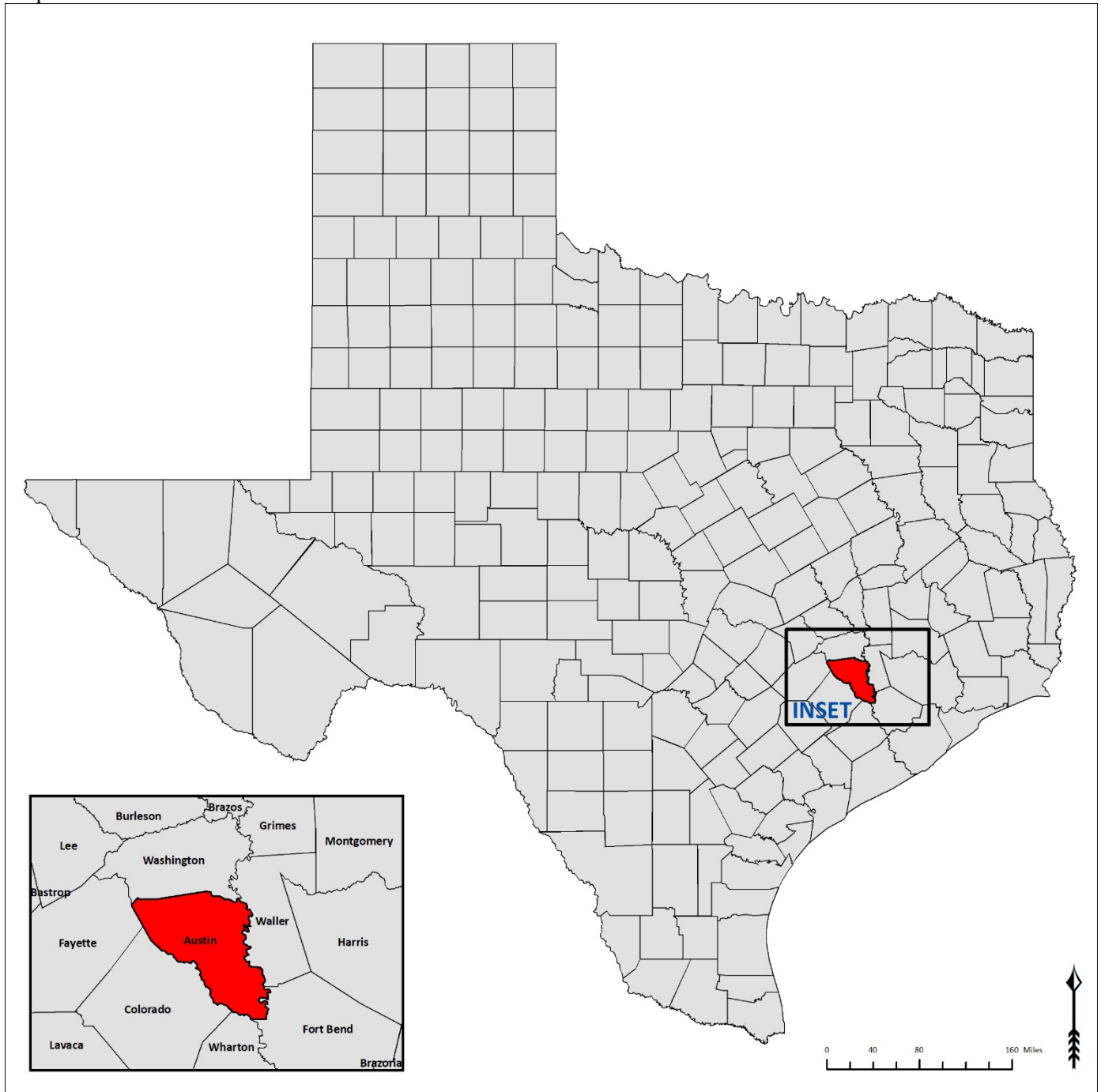
“Wyatt Hedrick (Part 1): The Natural.” *Hometown By Handlebar (blog)*. September 2, 2021,
<https://hometownbyhandlebar.com/?p=2917>.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Additional Documentation

Maps

Map 1.



Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance

LEGEND

- Austin County Courthouse Boundary
- Austin County Courthouse Centroid: 29.950366° -96.257381°

0 30 60 120 Feet

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Map 3. Vicinity of the Austin County Courthouse in Bellville. Source: HHM & Associates, Inc., 2022.

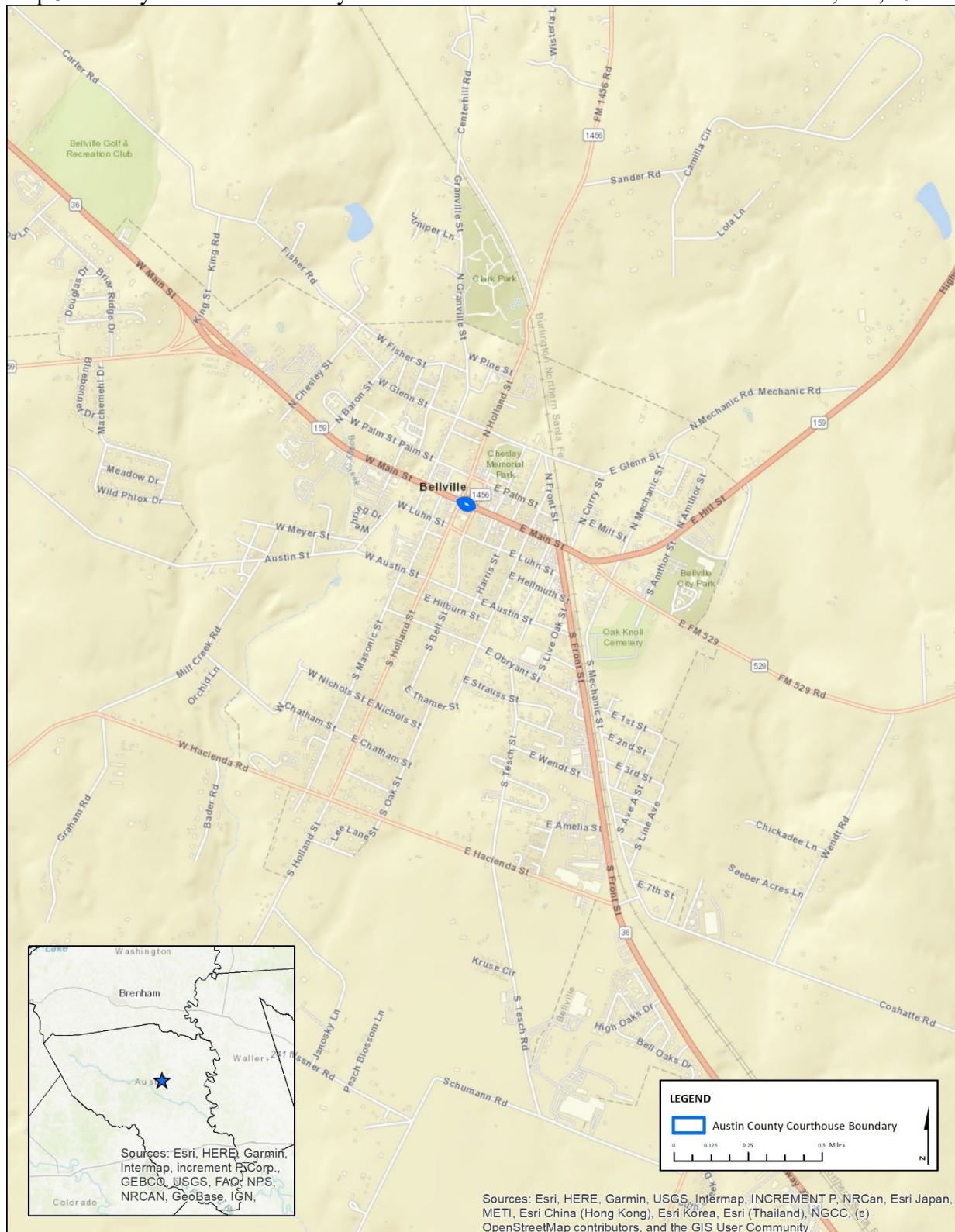
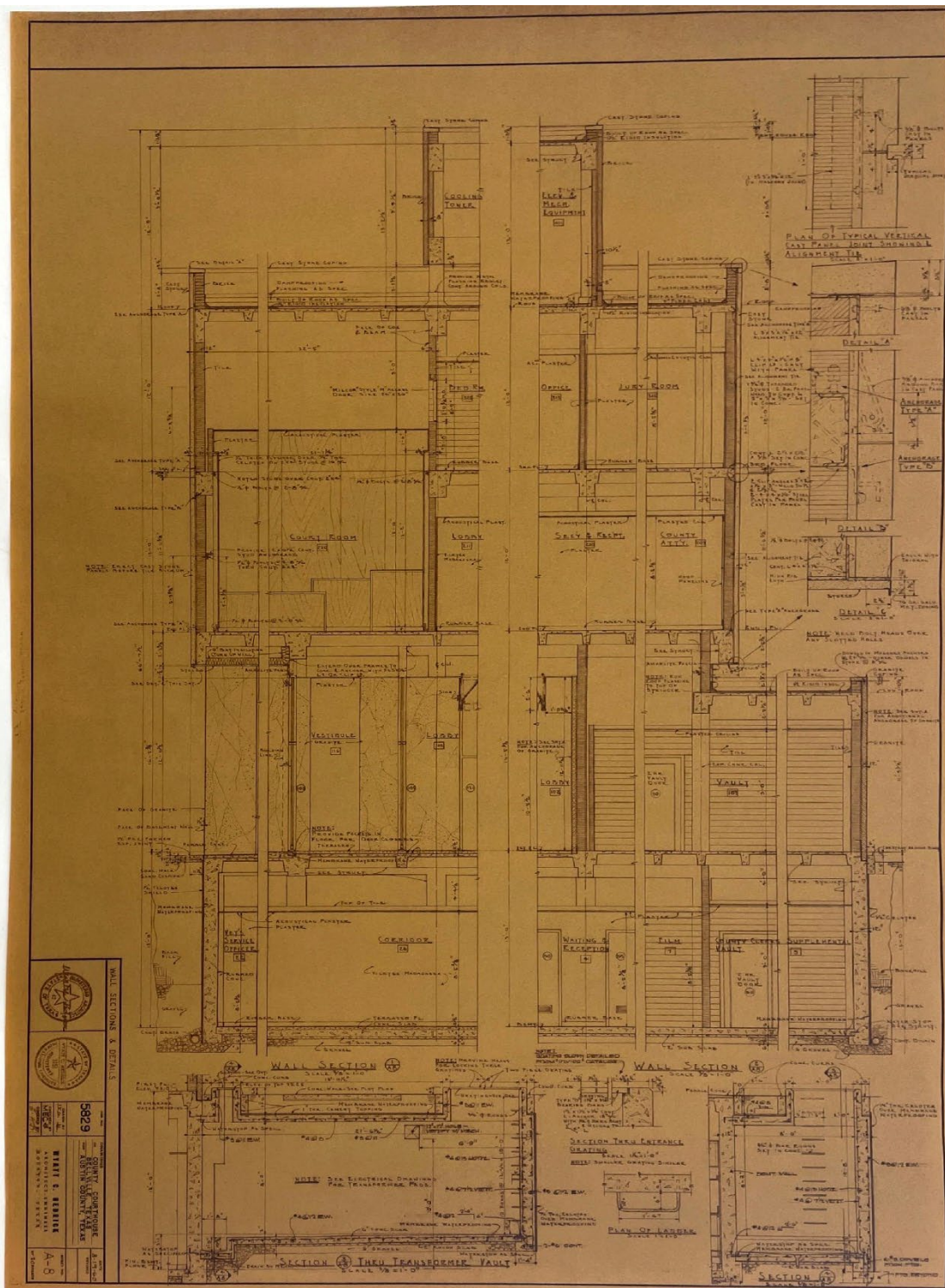
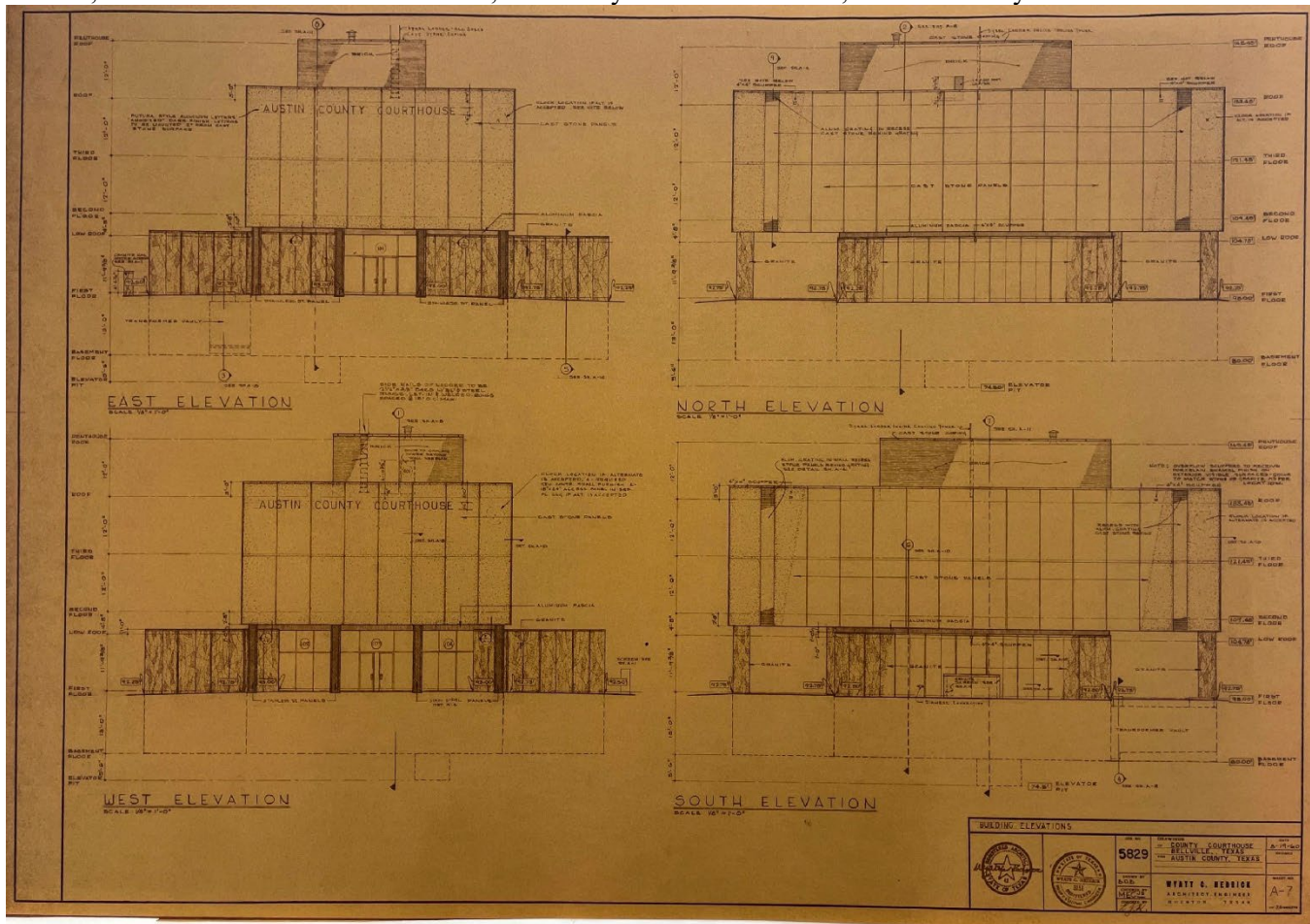


Figure 1. Architect Wyatt Hedrick's original drawings from 1960 of the wall sections. Source: Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick records, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.



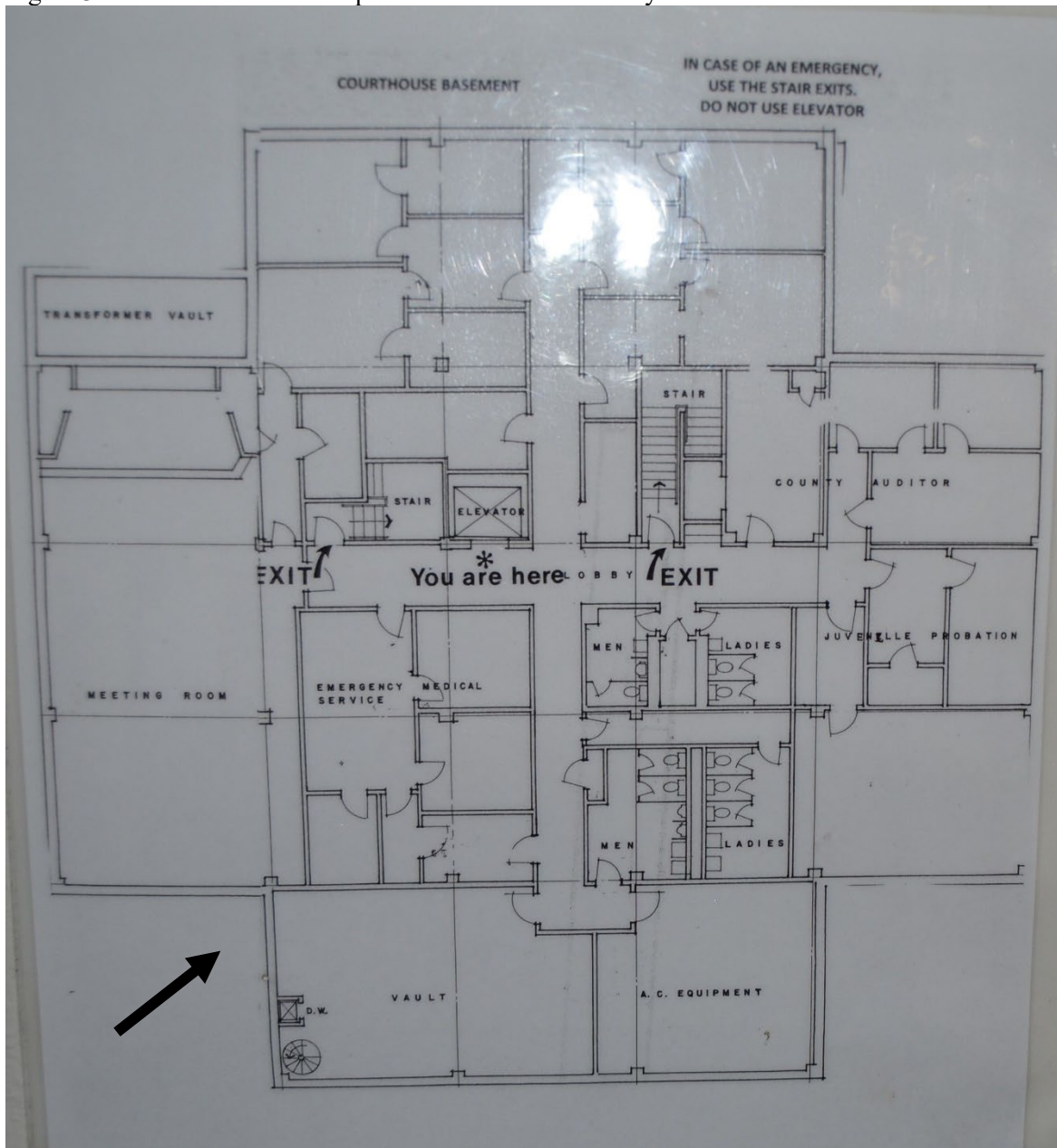
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 2. Hedrick's original drawings from 1960 of all four elevations. Source: Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick records, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.



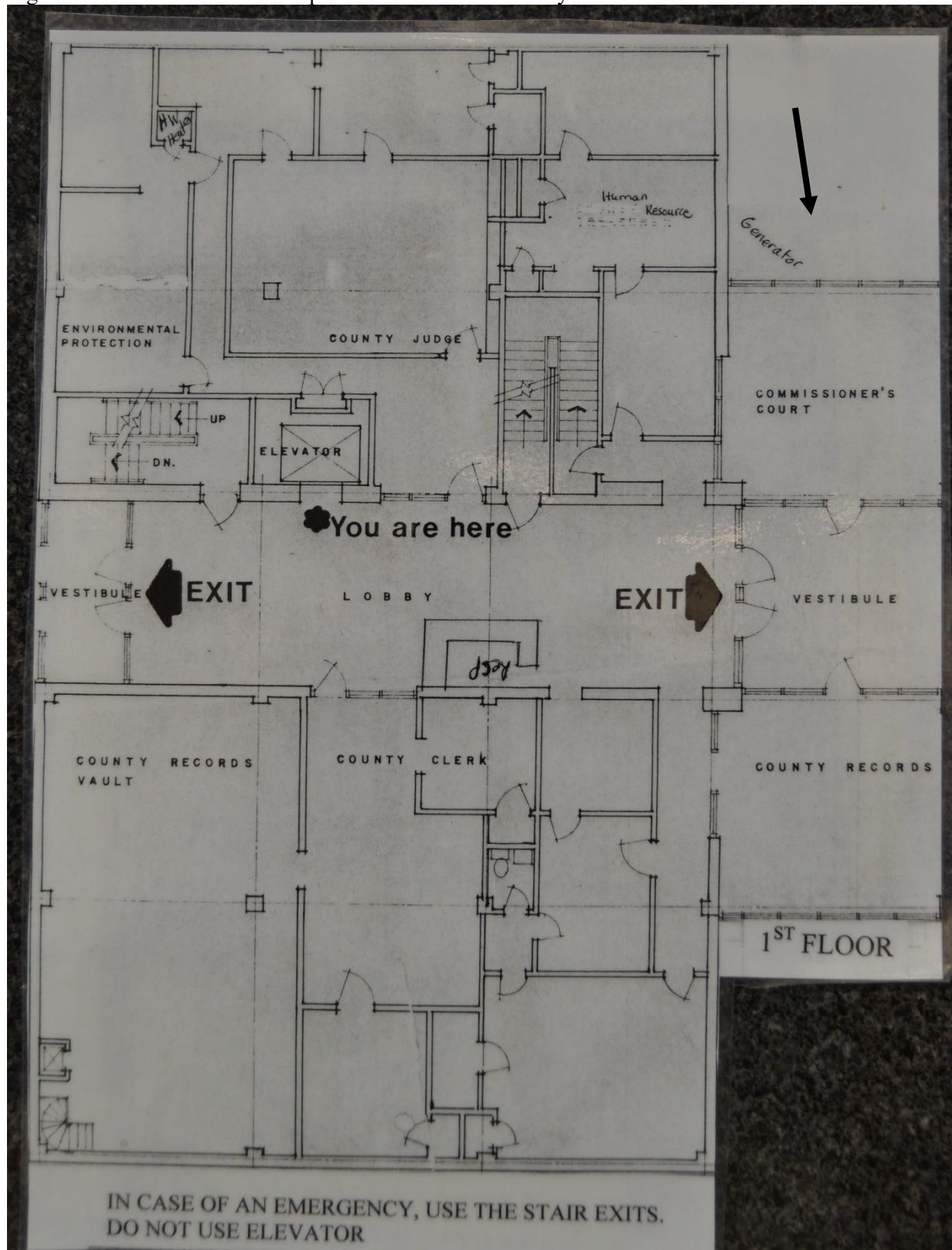
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 3. Current basement floorplan. Source: Austin County Courthouse.



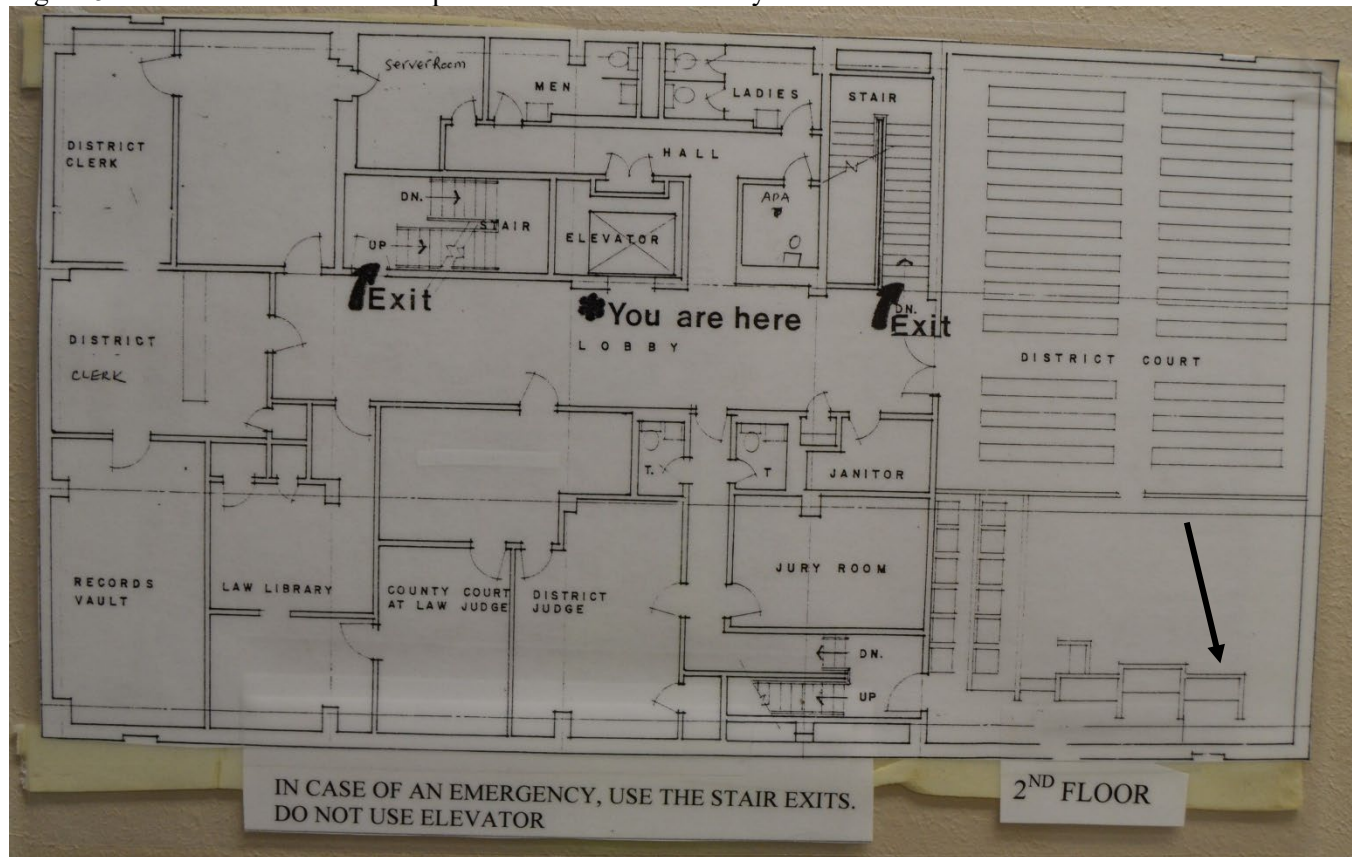
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 4. Current first-floor floorplan. Source: Austin County Courthouse.



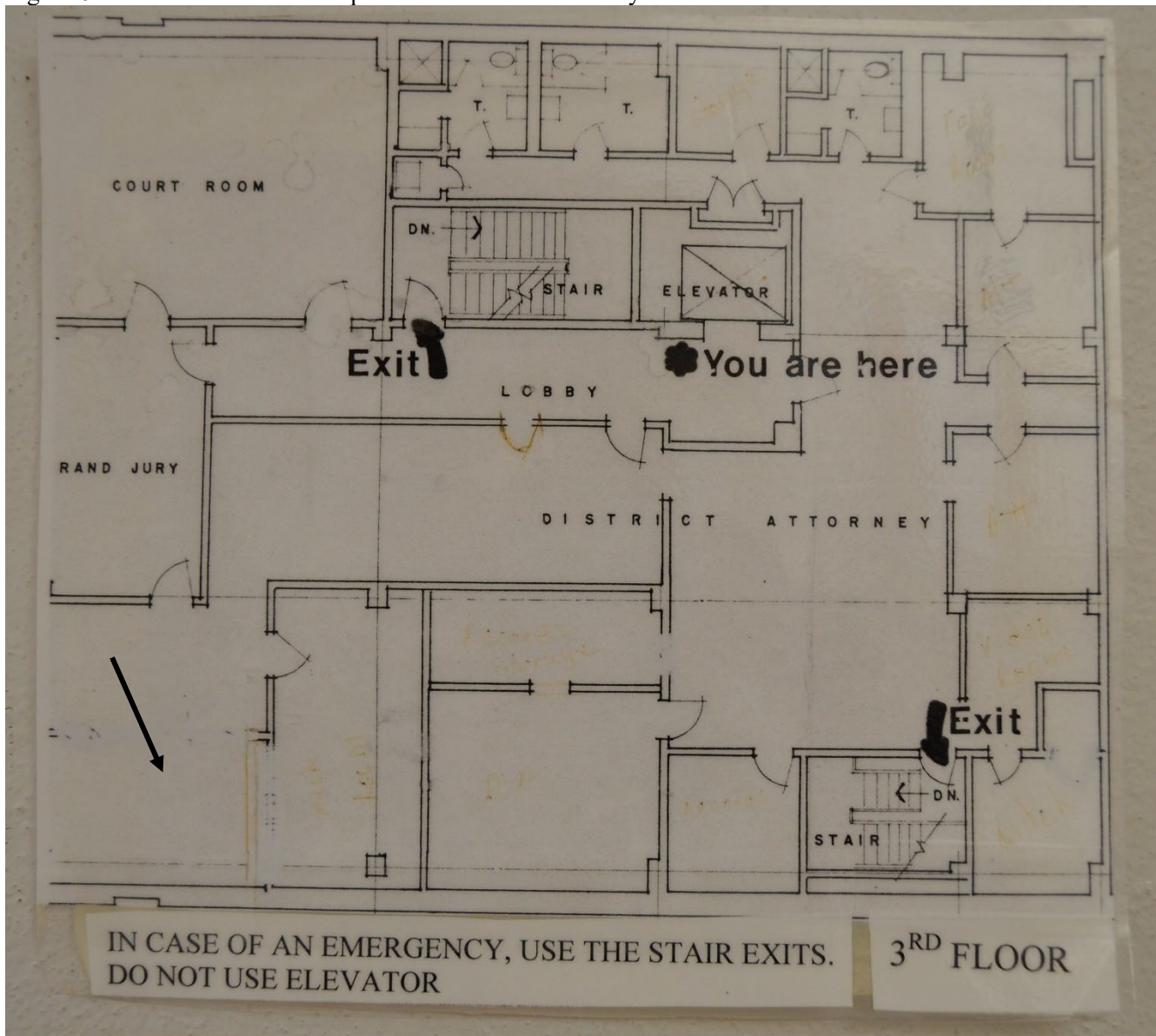
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 5. Current second-floor floorplan. Source: Austin County Courthouse.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 6. Current third-floor floorplan. Source: Austin County Courthouse.



BASMENT FLOOR PLAN

SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

TRUE NORTH
PLAN NORTH

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

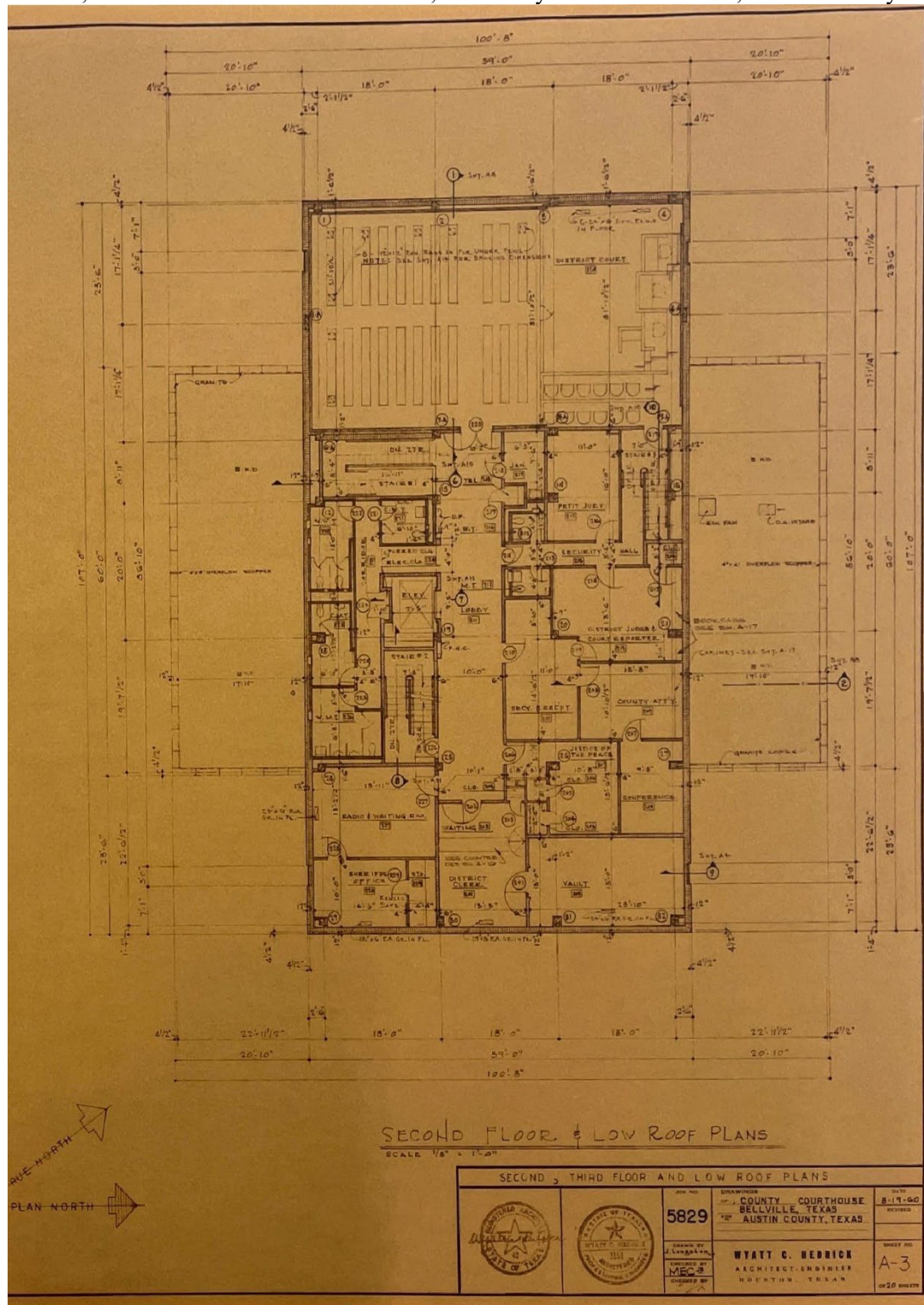
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

BASEMENT & FIRST FLOOR PLANS		NO. 5829	DRAWING NO.	DATE
COUNTY COURTHOUSE BELLVILLE, TEXAS		5829	5-19-60	REVISED
DESIGNED BY WYATT C. HEDRICK ARCHITECT-ENGINEER HOUSTON, TEXAS				

ORTH

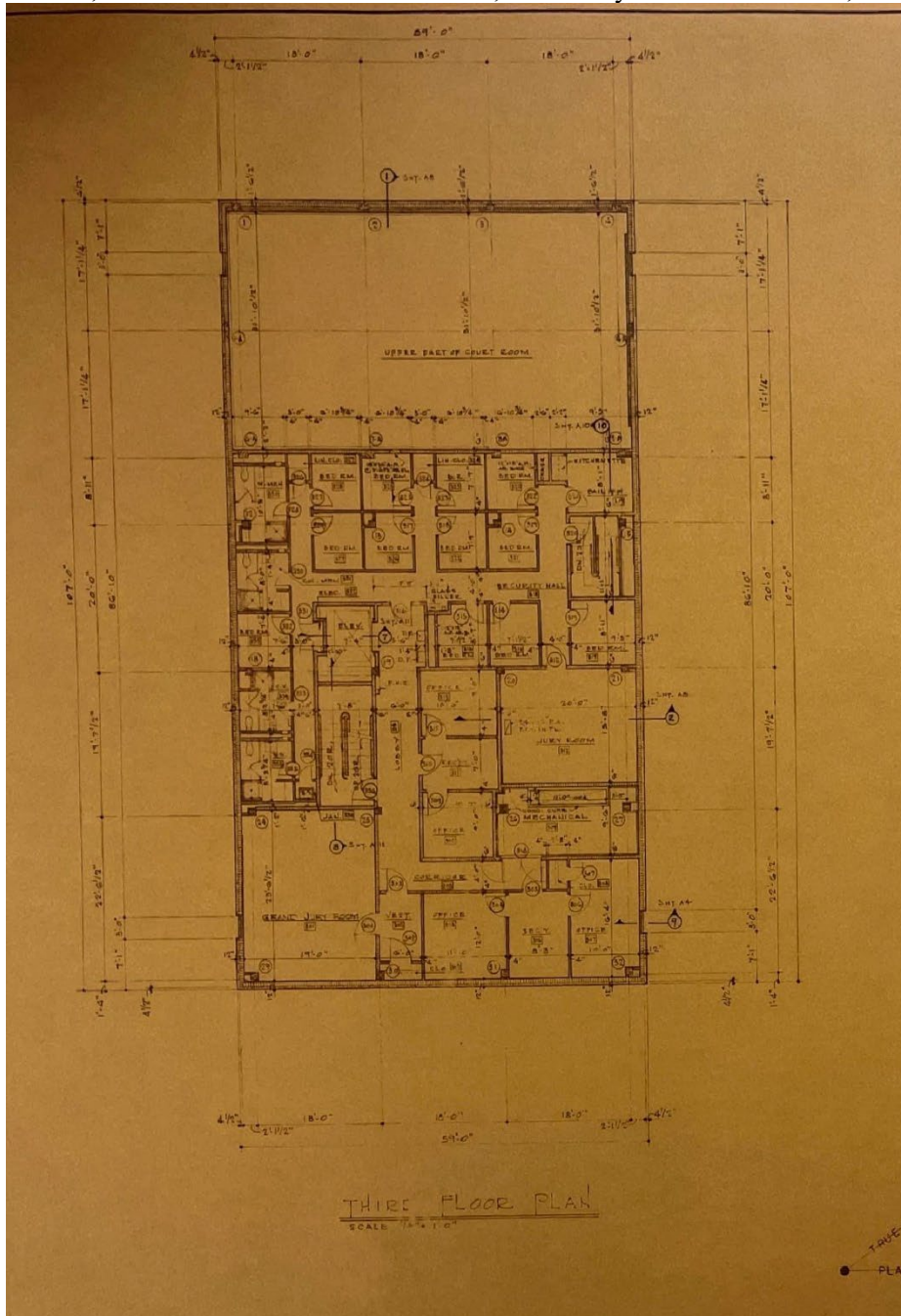
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 9. Hedrick's original drawing from 1960 of the second floor. Source: Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick records, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 10. Hedrick's original drawing from 1960 of the third floor. Source: Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick records, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.



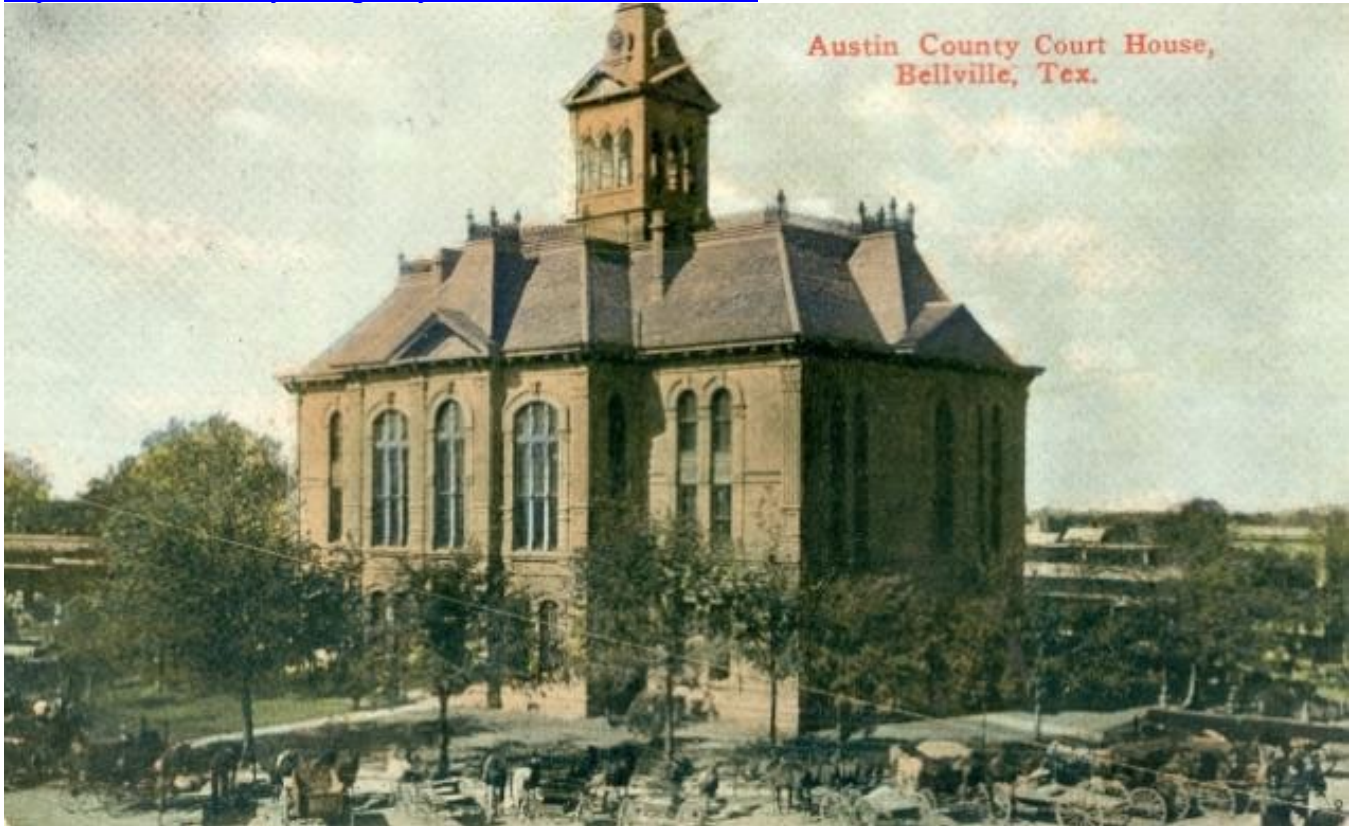
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 11. Sanborn map of Bellville from 1891 with courthouse at center. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1891, Sheets 1 and 2, University of Texas at Austin Library, <https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/txu-sanborn-bellville-1891-1.jpg> and <https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/txu-sanborn-bellville-1891-2.jpg>



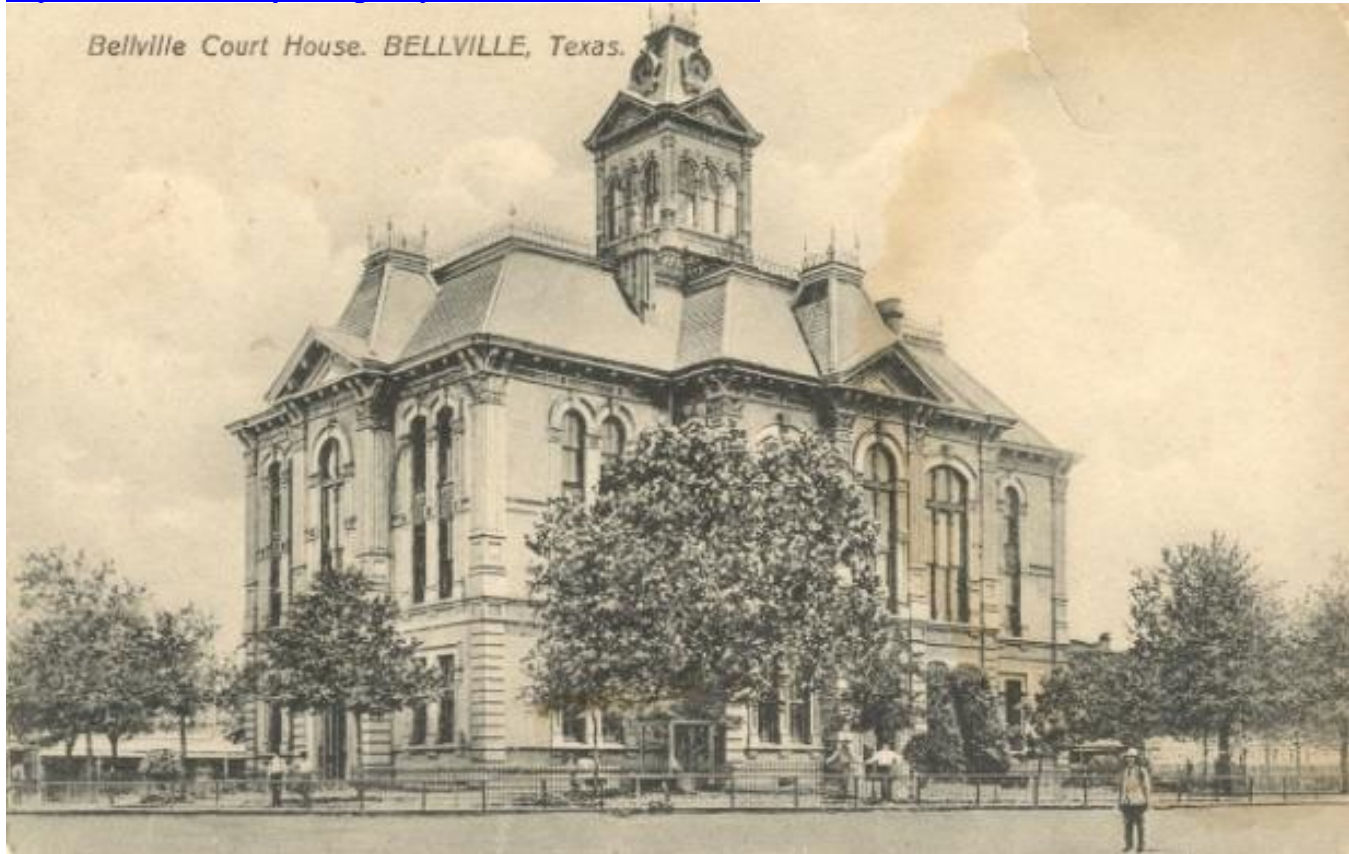
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 12. The 1887 Austin County Courthouse around 1900. Note the larger plaza with carriage parking around the perimeter. Source: CourthouseHistory.com, accessed August 11, 2022, <http://courthousehistory.com/gallery/states/texas/counties/austin>.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 13. The 1887 Austin County Courthouse around 1900. Note the larger plaza and fencing around the perimeter. Source: CourthouseHistory.com, accessed August 11, 2022, <http://courthousehistory.com/gallery/states/texas/counties/austin>.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 14. The 1887 Austin County Courthouse around the 1920s. Note the size of the plaza appears similar to today, but with parking allowed around the perimeter. Source: CourthouseHistory.com, accessed August 11, 2022, <http://courthousehistory.com/gallery/states/texas/counties/austin>.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 15. The 1887 Austin County Courthouse around the 1950s. Note the size of the plaza appears similar to today, but with parking allowed around the perimeter. Source: CourthouseHistory.com, accessed August 11, 2022, <http://courthousehistory.com/gallery/states/texas/counties/austin>.



AUSTIN COUNTY COURT HOUSE
BELLVILLE, TEXAS

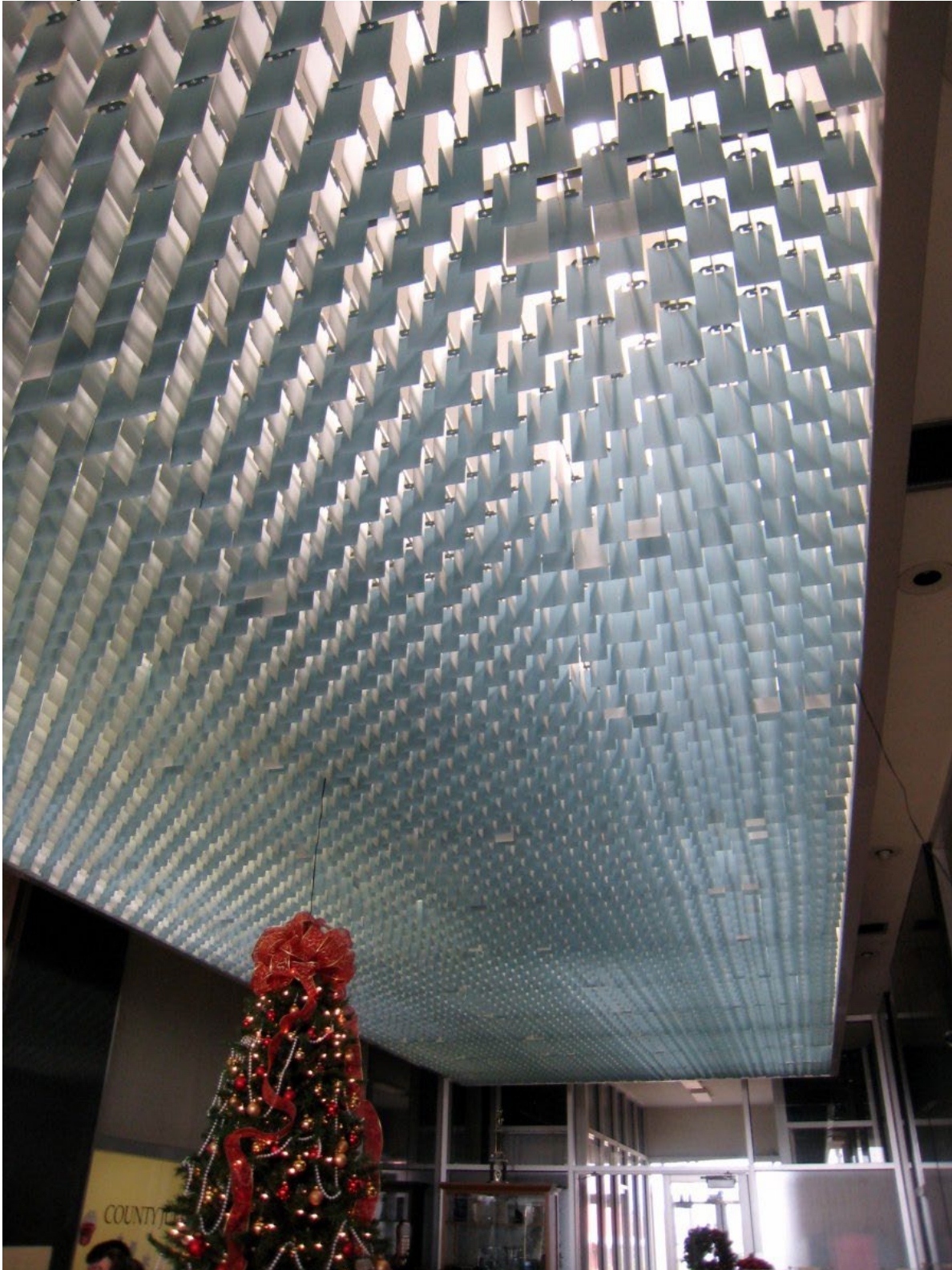
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 16. Aerial image from 1958. Note that the plaza size and parking configuration are nearly identical to the present configuration. Source: USGS EarthExplorer.



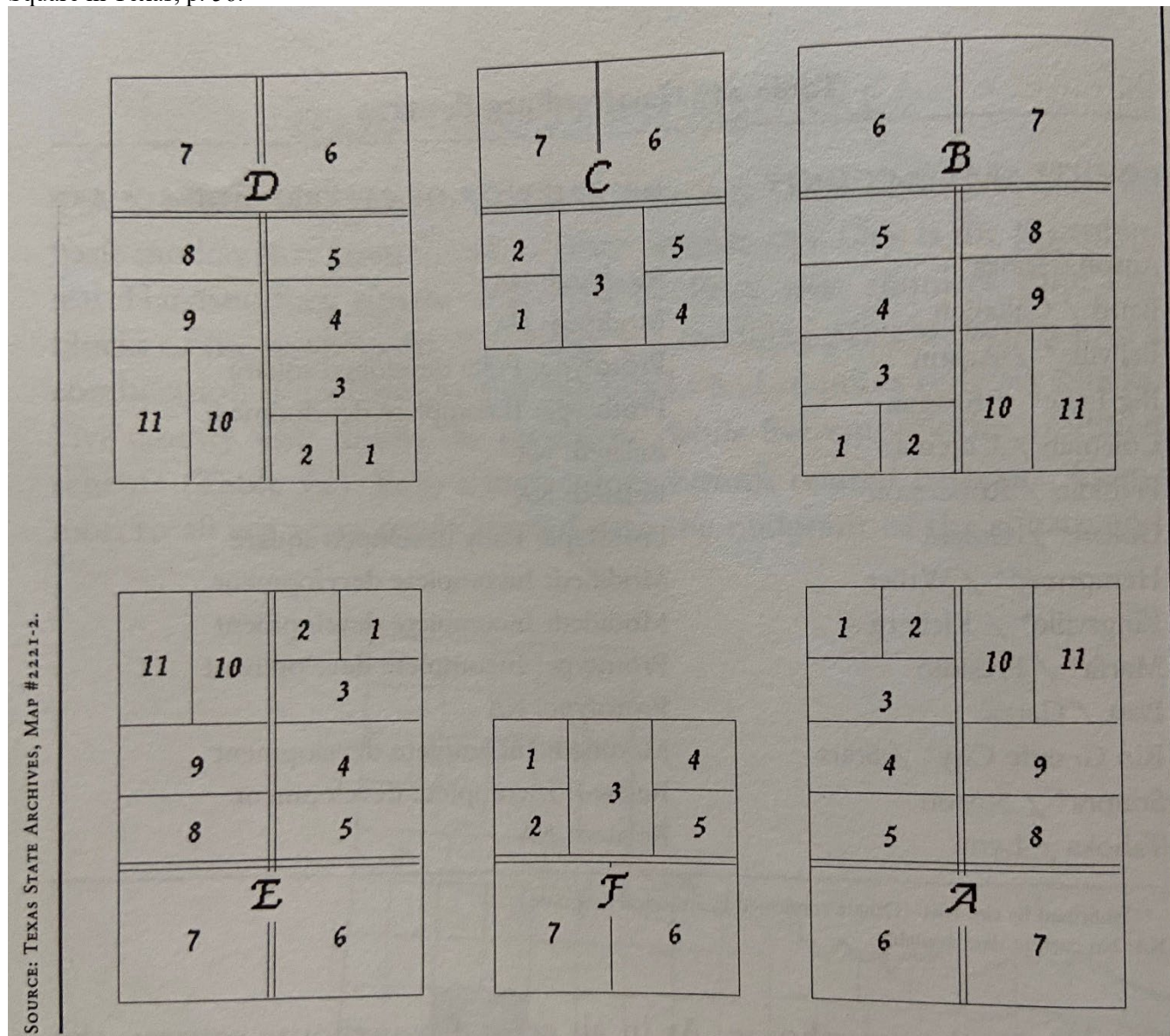
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 17. The original suspended reflective cards hung from the lobby ceiling were removed sometime after February 2020. Source: Texas Historical Commission (2020).



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 18. Bellville as laid out by surveyor Charles Amthor in 1848. This configuration is known as the Harrisonburg Square. Source: Texas State Archives, Map # 2221-2 from Dr. Robert E. Veselka, The Courthouse Square in Texas, p. 56.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 19. The 1855 Austin County Courthouse, built in the courthouse square. Source: Isabel Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, p. 133.



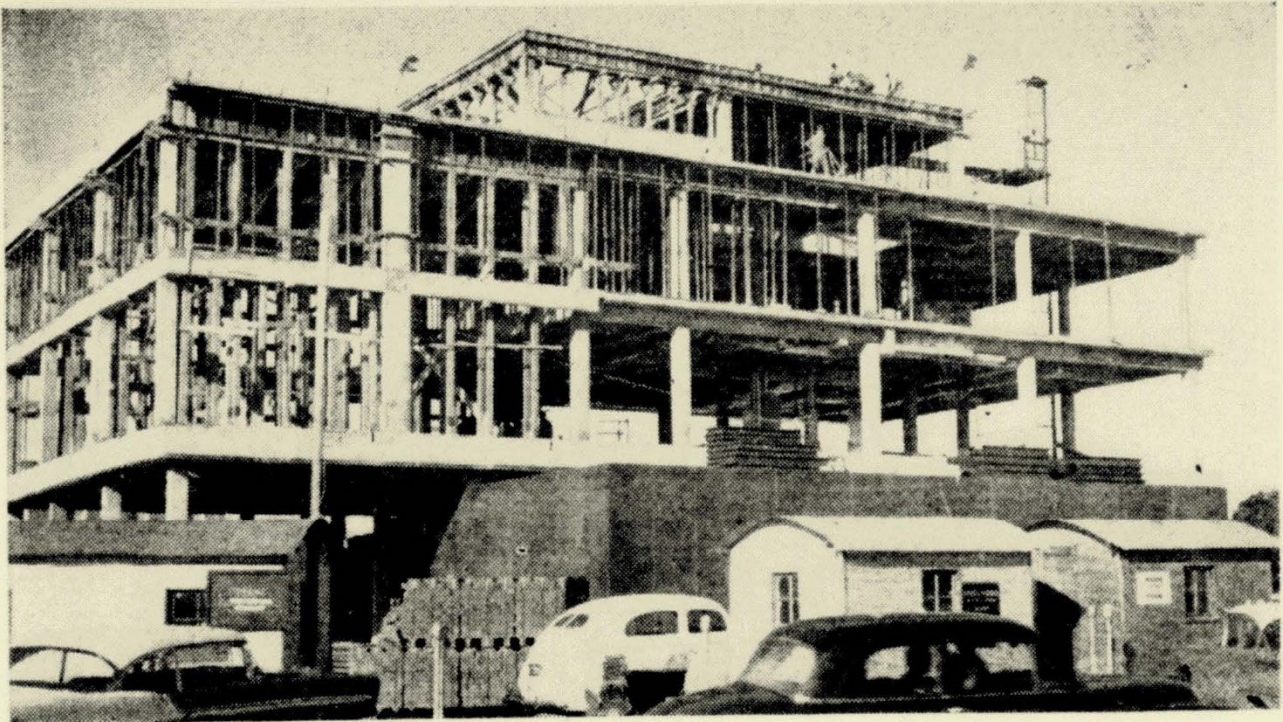
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 20. The 1887 courthouse after fire struck on April 5, 1960. Source: *The Bellville Times*, April 7, 1960, 1.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

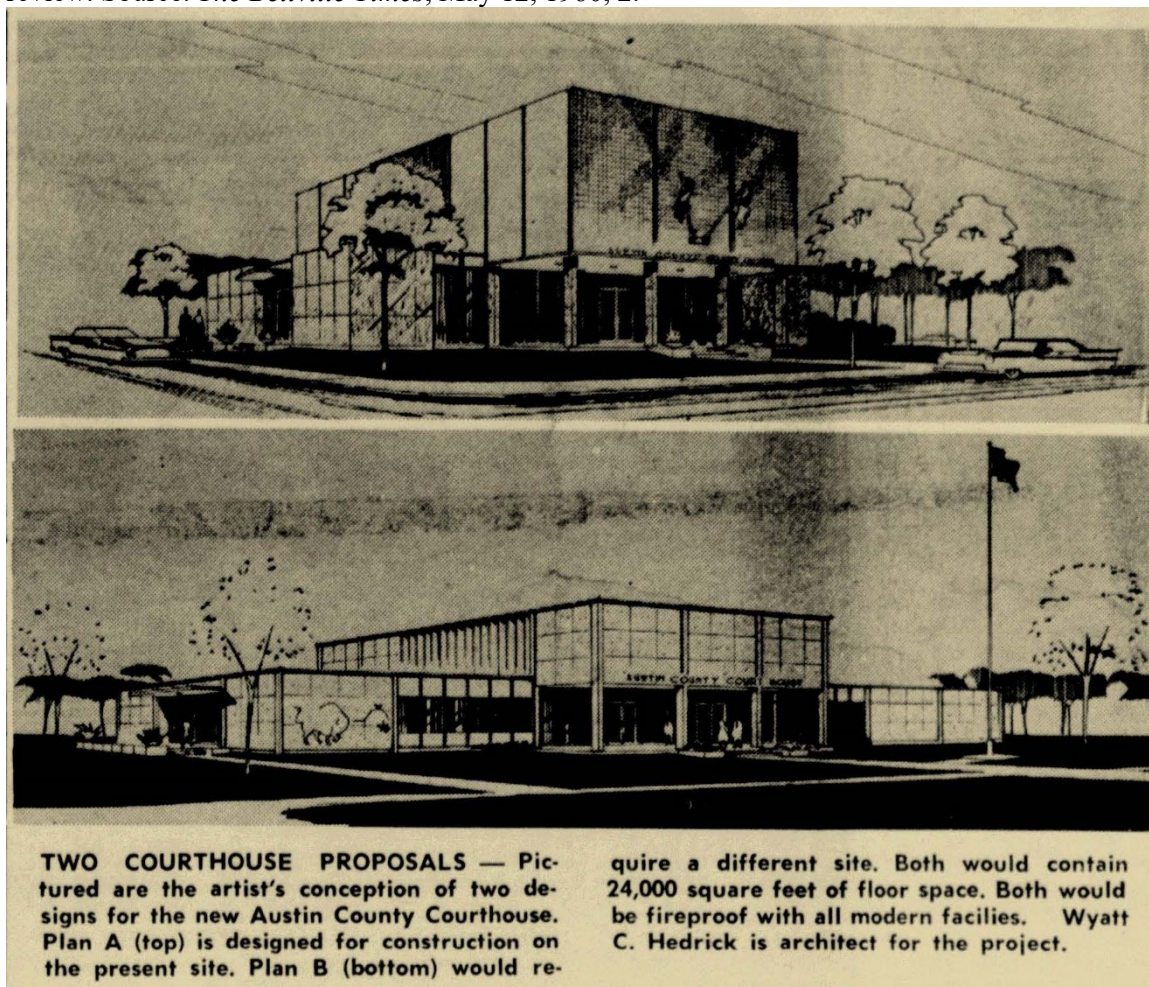
Figure 21. The Austin County Courthouse mid-way through construction, in April 1961. Source: *The Bellville Times*, September 28, 1961, 1.



TOPPED OUT — The “trees,” which are really just branches, flying from the top of the new Austin County Courthouse on Tuesday, April 4, 1961, were put there to indicate that the building had been “topped out.” It is a custom among construction workers to put the trees up when the framework for the uppermost part of the building has been completed. The custom also called for a little refreshments at the end of the day for the workers.

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 22. Architect Hedrick's two options for the new courthouse, posted in *The Bellville Times* for the public's review. Source: *The Bellville Times*, May 12, 1960, 2.



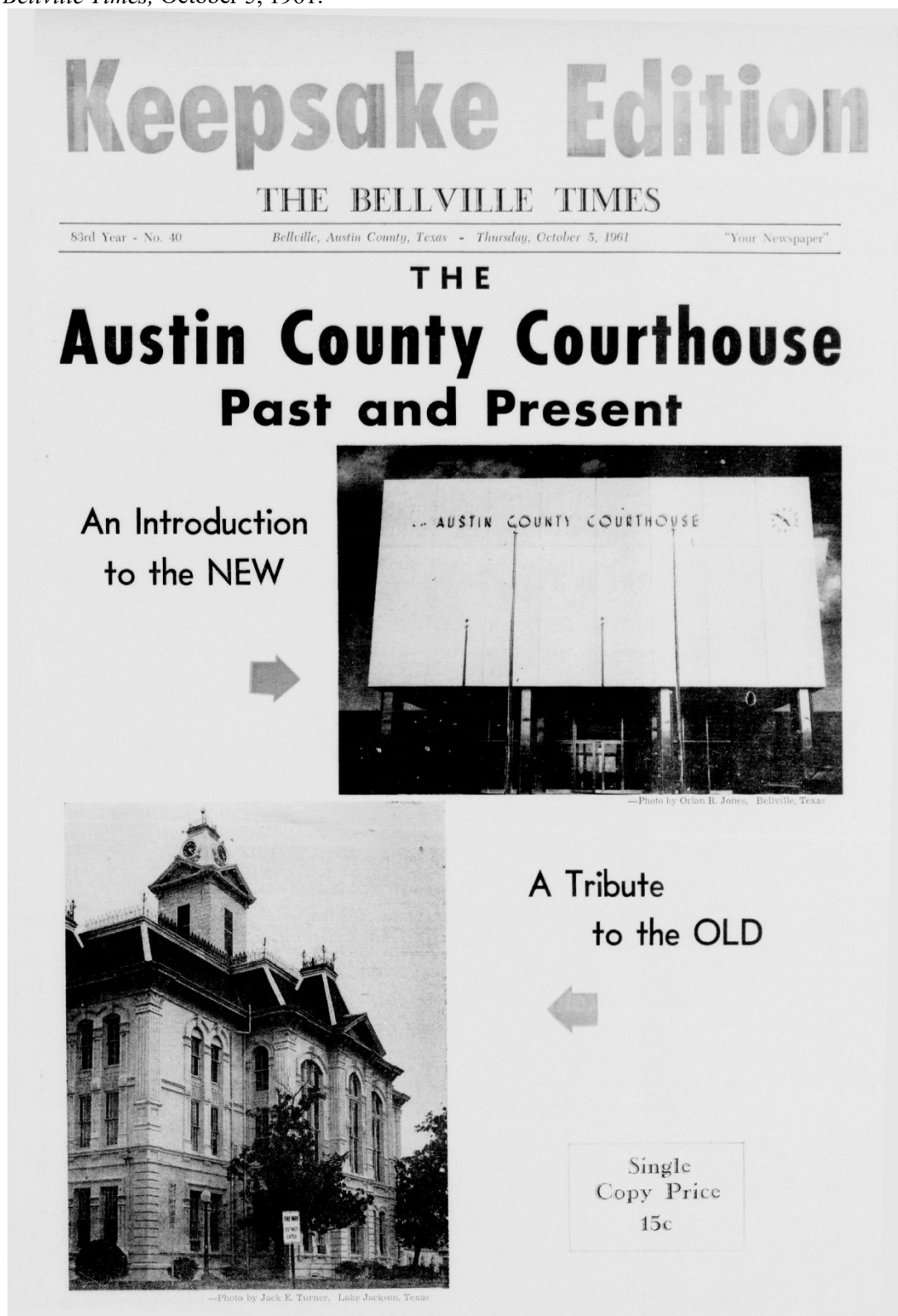
Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 23. The Austin County Courthouse shortly after its completion. Note the metal panels are still intact on the columns (replaced shortly after completion with mosaic tiles). Source: Bellville pamphlet, circa 1961, from the Bellville Public Library.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 24. The keepsake edition of *The Bellville Times* printed to commemorate the new courthouse. Source: *The Bellville Times*, October 5, 1961.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Figure 25. Four of the seven other courthouses Wyatt Hedrick designed: Coke County Courthouse (with Harry Weaver, 1956), Comanche County Courthouse (1939), Motely County Courthouse (1948), and the Kent County Courthouse (1956). Source: Courthousehistory.com and TxDOT via 254 Texas Courthouses, accessed November 9, 2022, <http://www.254texascourthouses.net/wyatt-c-hedrick-architect.html>.



Collage Maker

Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photos

Photo 1. West elevation with commercial buildings to the south. Camera facing southeast.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 2. Approach to courthouse from East Main Street. Camera facing west.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 3. West elevation of commercial buildings to the south. Camera facing southeast.
Pol19



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 4. Brick planter at the east entrance with bell and cornerstone from the 1887 courthouse. Camera facing east.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 5. East elevation of courthouse. Camera facing northwest.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 6. South elevation of courthouse. Camera facing north.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 7. North elevation of courthouse. Camera facing south.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 8. Engraving at northeast corner of courthouse. Camera facing west.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 9. Breezeway at east façade. Camera facing south.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 10. East façade entrance. Camera facing west.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 11. West façade entrance. Camera facing north.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 12. Modern style wall clock in basement. Camera facing north.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 13. Spiral staircase and dumbwaiter in basement. Camera facing east.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 14. Typical interior wood door. Camera facing east.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 15. Water fountains in basement hallway. Camera facing south.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 16. Meeting room with stage in basement. Camera facing south.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 17. Ground floor lobby. Camera facing east.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 18. Office created by western breezeway enclosure. Camera facing north.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 19. Ground floor lobby with clock, mailbox, and building directory. Camera facing northeast.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 20. Courtroom on second floor. Camera facing north.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 21. Lobby on second floor, note the victrex on walls. Camera facing east.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 22. Office on second floor with built-in bookcase. Camera facing southeast.



Austin County Courthouse, Austin County, Texas

Photo 23. Smaller courtroom on third floor with wood paneling. Camera facing southeast.

