

PH0691364

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED SEP 24 1976

DATE ENTERED DEC 12 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Bell County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Public Square Belton, Texas

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Belton,

VICINITY OF

11th

STATE

CODE  
048

COUNTY

Ball

CODE

27

Texas

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Bell County

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Belton

VICINITY OF

Texas  
STATE

048

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Bell County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Public Square

CITY, TOWN

Belton

STATE  
Texas

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE 7/31/76

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Bell County Courthouse, in a manner typical of many Texas courthouses of the period, occupies a single block reserved within the grid of streets. Four uniformly porticoed facades give equal prominence to the surrounding commercial blocks.

Imposing in mass and appearance, the building was designed in 1883 by J.N. Preston and Sons of Austin in the Renaissance Revival style. Three stories in height and measuring 155 by 76 feet, it was constructed of a golden-hued stone from a local quarry. A lower story of pitch-faced ashlar is separated from the upper portion of cut stone by a modest string course. Horizontal articulation is emphasized by continuous pilasters with molded caps and bases between each vertical course of windows. The four elevations consist of five elements. The central feature, an entrance pavilion, rises from a one-story base of rusticated stone with a portico above supported by cut-stone columns with carved capitals and bases. On either side are flanking bays terminated at each corner by a projecting pavilion.

As built, the courthouse was dominated by a central tower, 125 feet high, terminated by a statue of the Goddess of Justice, with sword and balance in hand which has since been removed. The tower was supported on a wide base and surrounded by colonnade with fluted columns and carved capitals.

Originally sheet metal details manufactured by W.J. Burt and Company of Fort Worth figured prominently in the design. Most have been removed. The roof was of stamped tin fabricated to resemble slate. Around each of the porticos was a balustrade of zinc. Cornices, handrails, balustrades, shell ornaments at the apex of the roof, and window pediments were all fabricated of galvanized iron and spun zinc.

The courthouse plan afforded twenty two offices and the district and county courtrooms. Also provided were five fireproof vaults in which county and district records were kept. Corridor and portico floors were of marble. Naturally finished wood was used throughout. The courtroom was elegantly finished with a panelled ceiling supported

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CONTINUATION SHEET Bell County ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

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by fluted pilasters with panelled pedestals and carved capitals and bases. In 1891, the county clerk's office was made fireproof and extensive remodeling and "modernization" were completed in 1950.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Bell County, originally a portion of the Robertson Colony, was first settled in 1834. During the War of Independence from Mexico and the subsequent period of uncertainty the area was abandoned several times. In 1839 the ever-present danger of Indian raids was abated by a decisive victory in the Bird's Creek Indian fight and the population of the county grew slowly until the time of its incorporation January 22, 1850.

Before the official creation of the county, public business was transacted at John Danley's Blacksmith Shop, with an anvil as a council table. On December 14, 1850, county officials approved the construction of the first of three courthouses to be situated on the town square, laid out in the midst of 120 acre site donated by Matilda F. Connell Allen for the county seat. The first courthouse was a one-story frame building 16 feet by 18 feet built by contractor Thomas T. Havens, and completed in May 1851 at a cost of \$199.00. Its construction was funded by sale of town lots.

The building soon proved inadequate; most county officials continued to transact public business from commercial structures.

On April 1, 1850, the Bell County Commissioners' Court voted to build a new two-story courthouse of native limestone. The design submitted by architect William Bock called for a conventionally arranged structure having four uniform facades, intersecting main halls, and fireplaces on both floors. The agreement with contractor Simeon Bramlett further stipulated that the building be "forty five by fifty feet with a base of three feet; lower story twelve feet to the ceiling; upper story which is to be the courtroom and two clerks offices, 15

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Fort Worth Daily Gazette, May 19, 1885, page 4, col.5  
Fort Worth Daily Gazette, June 25, 1885, page 4, col. 2

Robinson, Willard B. and Webb, Todd, Public Buildings of the Nineteenth Century, University of Texas Press. 1974

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2 acres  
UTM REFERENCES

A 14 646630 3436620  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
C                  

B                    
ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
D                  

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

North-First Avenue  
South-Central Avenue  
East-Main Street  
West-Earl Street

### LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE  
Willard B. Robinson, Professor of Architecture  
S. Elizabeth Sasser, Research Assistant

7/31/76  
DATE

ORGANIZATION  
Ranching Heritage Center  
STREET & NUMBER

806-742-2430  
TELEPHONE

P.O. Box 4499 Texas Tech University  
CITY OR TOWN  
Lubbock,

STATE  
Texas

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

SHPO

DATE 9/22/76

### FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 12/12/86

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE 12/6/76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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CONTINUATION SHEET Bell County ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

feet from floor to ceiling; and these with the cornice will give the buildings an elevation of about thirty three feet--it will be furnished handsomely throughout with seats for the audience without the bar of the courtroom rising from front to back. The walls are to be eighteen inches thick."

The building was completed December 1, 1859 at a cost of \$13,635. Like its predecessor, the building was evidently not well received and none of the commissioners who voted for funds for construction was reelected. On August 20, 1860, funds were appropriated to gravel the courthouse square.

By 1883 the existing courthouse had become structurally unsound. Several grand juries ordered it condemned and approval was given for the construction of the present courthouse. Architects J.N. Preston and Sons, noted later for their design of the Driskill Hotel in Austin, submitted drawings. Contractor Ben D. Lee of Belton entered a low bid of \$64,965 and construction proceeded with the laying of the cornerstone on June 24, 1884. The building was accepted by the county May 30, 1885. The finished structure with its classical porticos and one hundred and twenty-five-foot tower surmounted by a statue of the Goddess of Justice must have been an impressive sight. The Fort Worth Daily Gazette of May 19, 1885 noted admiringly that, "Among the many new courthouses built in the state during the past three years... the Bell County Courthouse surpasses all in beauty of design and elegance of finish ..."

Today the courthouse continues to serve its original function despite considerable alterations of the architectural fabric.

Property Bell County Courthouse

State Texas Working Number 9.24.76.4181

Bell  
Ref. # 76002004

**TECHNICAL**

Photos 3  
Maps 1

**CONTROL**

OK *pl*  
9.27.76

*state sign. is not justified in #8*

**HISTORIAN**

accept  
P. Grosvenor  
11/4/76

**ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN**

Accept  
M. H. H. H.  
11-23-76

**ARCHEOLOGIST**

**OTHER**

**HAER**

Inventory \_\_\_\_\_  
Review \_\_\_\_\_

**REVIEW UNIT CHIEF**

*active*  
**BRANCH CHIEF**

Accept  
Cole  
11/26/76

**KEEPER**

*Wm*  
12/6/76

National Register Write-up \_\_\_\_\_  
Federal Register Entry 2-1-77 Send-back \_\_\_\_\_  
Re-submit \_\_\_\_\_

Entered **DEC 12 1976**

INT:2106-74



↑ MC GREGOR 29  
↑ MOODY 19  
TEMPLE 8 →

DUKE  
MOORE  
PARKING  
PARKING

DUKE

PETER HANCHEROUGH BELL



Bell County Courthouse  
Belton, Texas

SEP 24 1976

*Bell Co., Texas*

Texas Historical Commission, 6-24-70  
Texas Historical Commission

Southwest elevation

Photo #1 of 2

DEC 12 1976

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER



Bell County Courthouse  
Belton, Texas

SEP 24 1976

*Bell Co., Texas*

Texas Historical Comm., 6-24-70  
Texas Historical Comm.

West elevation

Photo #2 of 3

DEC 12 1976

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

RUBEN



Bell County Courthouse

Belton, Texas *Belton, Texas*

SEP 24 1976

Texas Hist. Comm., 6-24-70

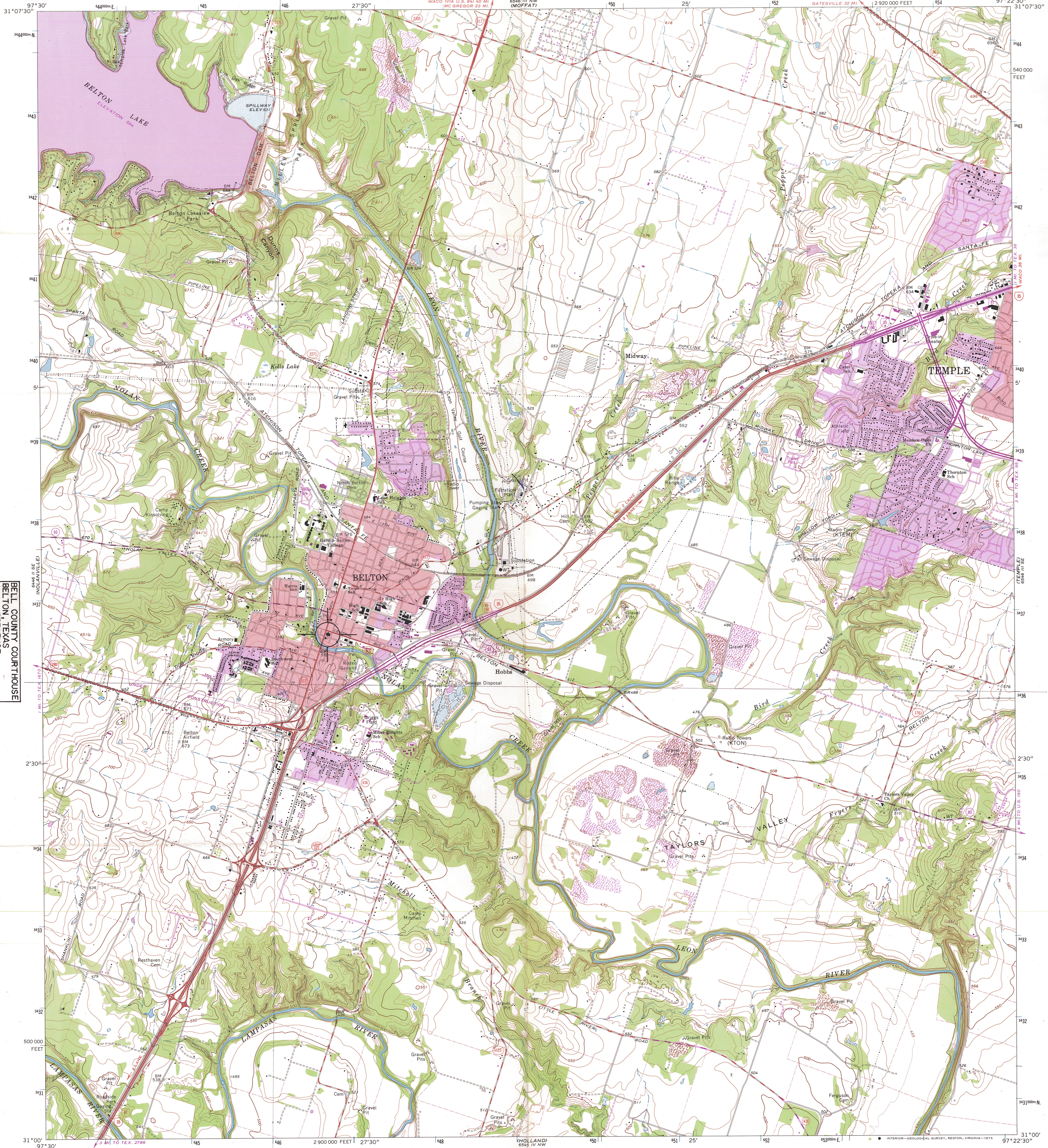
Texas Historical Commission

Northeast oblique

Photo #3 *23*

DEC 12 1976

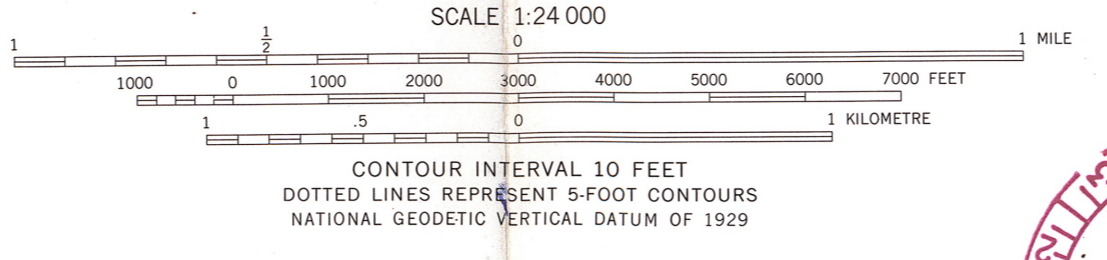
PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER



BELL COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
BELL COUNTY, TEXAS  
UTM REFERENCE:  
14S 46630 / 3436620

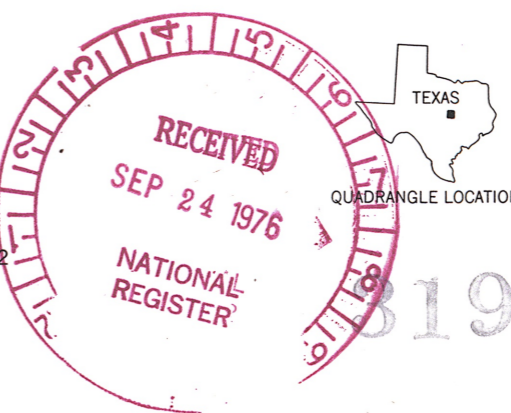
Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and USCE  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
photographs taken 1964. Field checked 1965  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system,  
central zone  
1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator spheroid  
zone 14, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines  
Areas covered by dashed light-blue pattern are subject to  
controlled inundation  
Revisions shown in purple compiled aerial photographs  
taken 1974. This information not field checked  
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

UTM GRID AND 1974 MAGNETIC NORTH  
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET  
FEB 76



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

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



BELTON, TEX.  
N3100—W9722.5/7.5  
1965  
PHOTOREVISED 1974  
AMS 6546 III SW—SERIES V882

197-122

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE      TEXAS

Date Entered      DEC 12 1976

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
Menard, Michel B., House	Galveston Galveston County
Galveston Causeway	Galveston Galveston County
St. Joseph's Church	Galveston Galveston County
Stage Coach Inn	Chappell Hill Washington County
Giddings-Wilkin House	Brenham Washington County
Regency Suspension Bridge	Regency vicinity Mills County
Bell County Courthouse	Belton Bell County

Also Notified

Hon. John G. Tower  
Hon. Lloyd M. Bentsen  
Hon. Jack Brooks  
Hon. J. J. (Jake) Pickle  
Hon. W. R. Poage  
Regional Director, Southwest  
Region

State Historic Preservation Officer  
Mr. Truett Latimer  
Executive Director  
Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276, Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711

# NATIONAL REGISTER DATA SHEET

1 NAME as it appears on federal register: Bell County Courthouse 2 OTHER NAMES: \_\_\_\_\_ 3 date of entry: 12-12-76 4 county code: 27

5 LOCATION street & number Public Square city / town Belton vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state TX county Bell 6 NPS REGION: Southwest

7 OWNER  PRIVATE  STATE  MUNICIPAL  COUNTY  MULTIPLE  FEDERAL (agency name) 8 ADMINISTRATOR: \_\_\_\_\_

9 EXISTING SURVEYS  HABS  HAER  NHL 10 FUNDED?  YES  NO 11 CONGRESS. DISTRICT 11th 12 SOURCE OF NOMINATION  STATE  FEDERAL if state who prepared form? SHPO

13 WITHIN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT?  YES, NAME \_\_\_\_\_  NO 14 WITHIN NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK?  YES, NAME \_\_\_\_\_  NO 15 ACREAGE 2 acres LOCAL  PRIVATE ORGANIZATION

16 CONDITION  deteriorated  altered  original site  ruins  unaltered  moved  good  unexposed  reconstructed  unknown  fair  unexcavated  excavated

17 features: INTERIOR  SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-1  NOT INTACT-0  UNKNOWN-4  NOT APPLICABLE-7 EXTERIOR  SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-2  NOT INTACT-0  UNKNOWN-5  NOT APPLICABLE-8 ENVIRONS  SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-3  NOT INTACT-0  UNKNOWN-6  NOT APPLICABLE-9

18 ACCESS  YES-Restricted  YES-Unrestricted  No Access  Unknown 19 ADAPTIVE USE  YES  NO 20 SAVED?  YES  NO IS PROPERTY A HISTORIC DISTRICT?  yes  no

21 AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:  ARCHEOLOGY-prehistoric-2  COMMERCE-6  ENTERTAINMENT-26  ARCHEOLOGY-historic-1  COMMUNICATIONS-7  EXPLORATION-12  AGRICULTURE-3  CONSERVATION-8  HEALTH-27  ARCHITECTURE-4  ECONOMICS-9  INDUSTRY-13  ART-5  EDUCATION-10  INVENTION-14  ENGINEERING-11  LANDSCAPE ARCH.-15  LAW-16  LITERATURE-17  MILITARY-18  MUSIC-19  PHILOSOPHY-20  POLITICS/GOVT-21  RELIGION-22  SCIENCE-23  SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN-24  SOCIAL/CULTURAL-30  TRANSPORTATION-25  RECREATION-28  SETTLEMENT-29  URBAN PLANNING-31  OTHER (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_

22 CLAIMS: explain 'first'  'oldest'  'only'

23 functions WHEN HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT: Courthouse CURRENTLY: Courthouse 24 dates of initial construction: 1884--85 major alterations: \_\_\_\_\_ historic events: \_\_\_\_\_ 25 ETHNIC GROUP ASSOCIATION \_\_\_\_\_

26 architectural style(s): 2nd Renaissance Revival and Neo-Classical Rev. 27 architect: J.N. Preston & Sons 28 master builder: \_\_\_\_\_ 29 engineer: \_\_\_\_\_

30 landscape architect / garden designer: \_\_\_\_\_ 31 interior decorator: \_\_\_\_\_ 32 artist: \_\_\_\_\_ 33 artisan: \_\_\_\_\_ 34 builder/contractor: Ben D. Lee

35 NAMES give role & date PERSONAL: \_\_\_\_\_ EVENTS: \_\_\_\_\_ INSTITUTIONAL: \_\_\_\_\_

36 NATIONAL REGISTER WRITE-UP Rock-faced and dressed stone, 3 stories, hipped and gabled roof sections, 2-story tetra-style pedimented portico, raised on ground, arcade on each facade, projecting corner pavilions, segmental-arched 1st-story windows, round-arched and pedimented windows, central tower, with metal designs, and some decorative elements removed. Second Renaissance Revival and Neo-Classical Revival elements. Third courthouse to occupy Belton's town square; served as county government center since its construction, 1884.