# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
## INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

### 1 NAME
**HISTORIC**
Old Victoria County Courthouse

### 2 LOCATION
**STREET & NUMBER**
101 North Bridge Street

**CITY, TOWN**
Victoria

**STATE**
Texas

### 3 CLASSIFICATION
**CATEGORY**
- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**
- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

**STATUS**
- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS

**PRESENT USE**
- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- OTHER

### 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
**NAME**
Victoria County

**STREET & NUMBER**
101 North Bridge Street

**CITY, TOWN**
Victoria

**STATE**
Texas

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
**COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.**
Victoria County Courthouse

**STREET & NUMBER**
101 North Bridge Street

**CITY, TOWN**
Victoria

**STATE**
Texas

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
**TITLE**
Historic Sites Inventory & Recorded Texas Historic Landmark

**DATE**
1971

**DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS**
Texas Historical Commission

**CITY, TOWN**
Austin

**STATE**
Texas
The Victoria County Courthouse is a remarkable work in Romanesque Revival style. The massing consists of a cubical block from which paired pavilions with arched openings project from each of the four sides. Facing De Leon Plaza, the east facade is emphasized by a tower with a bell and clocks while the other three elevations are virtually identical. The tower with its square spire contains openings with lintels supported by cut stone columns. The four entrances are announced with Roman arches with cut-stone voussoirs, supported by Syrian columns, above which are balconies with railings of stone in checkerboard pattern. Located on each of the corners these same details characterize arcades which contribute to the fine scale of the massing.

Other components contribute to the picturesqueness of the composition. Supported by corbelling at each corner and topped by finials are features resembling bartisang—details derived from ancient military architecture. Channeling in twisted configurations characterized the chimney pots which rise above the high chimneys.

Subtle details also contribute to the overall success of the work. In colors from grey to cream colored, cut stone details contrast with the quarry-faced ashlar. A billet is comprised of square cut and rough stones in a checkerboard pattern. Thin engaged columns terminated with capitals accent the corners of the pavilions as well as the openings in these pavilions. All the Roman arches are formed with voussoirs and archivolts of cut stone. Also comprising noteworthy details are the gables, each of which is capped with a molded arris and the cut stone window sills of the two-story arched openings which are enhanced with carved ornamental features. The floor spandrels of the two-story openings of the pavilions are ornamented with rectangular insets containing festoons.

The interior arrangement marks a significant departure from the conventional cross corridor plan. In the Victoria Courthouse and and Fayette County Courthouse which it somewhat resembles, J. Riely Gordon developed a functional plan to achieve more satisfactory natural lighting and ventilation. All the offices and courtrooms were arranged around a 30-foot central courtyard, into which office doors opened providing for a cooling breeze throughout the building. This arrangement, while basically symmetrical in plan, necessitated the placing of the tower in an off-center position. Access to the courtyard was effected through corridors opening into it from doors placed in all four facades.

Characteristic of many nineteenth-century Texas courthouses, the spaces in the Victoria temple of justice were functionally zoned. Such offices as those of the county clerk, treasurer and tax assessor were located on the ground level. Approached from stairs adjacent to the north and south entrances, the courtroom a two-story space with a balcony, was located on the west side of the court. Also on the
second floor were a jury room, and offices for the district clerk and county attorney. A grand jury room and other office spaces were provided on the third floor.

The somewhat picturesque massing produced by this plan readily accommodated the characteristics of Romanesque Revival architecture. In addition the rational approach to problems of lighting and ventilation brought national attention to bear on the Victoria Courthouse in the form of a perspective drawing published in American Architect and Building News 54 (1896) which differs only slightly from the realized design.
8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

-PREHISTORIC - ARCHAEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC - COMMUNITY PLANNING - LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE - RELIGION
-1400-1499 - ARCHAEOLOGY-HISTORIC - CONSERVATION - LAW - SCIENCE
-1500-1599 - AGRICULTURE - ECONOMICS - LITERATURE - SCULPTURE
-1600-1699 - ARCHITECTURE - EDUCATION - MILITARY - SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
-1700-1799 - ART - ENGINEERING - MUSIC - THEATER
-1800-1899 - COMMERCE - EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT - PHILOSOPHY - TRANSPORTATION
-1900- - COMMUNICATIONS - INDUSTRY - POLITICS/GOVERNMENT - OTHER (SPECIFY)

SPECIFIC DATES 1891 BUILDER/ARCHITECT J. Riely Gordon, architect

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Victoria County Courthouse possesses significance in both architecture and government. Since its completion it has been the center of political activity in the county. Designed by one of the most talented nineteenth-century Texas architects, it is an outstanding example of Romanesque Revival architecture and of unusual space arrangements deriving from the architect's desire to provide a building in the hot Texas climate which would be well ventilated.

In 1836, the former Spanish settlement of Guadalupe Victoria was organized as Victoria County. The following year Victoria was created as the county seat. In 1891 the county undertook the construction of a permanent and imposing edifice to serve as the county courthouse. On May 13, 1891, the commissioners' court, at the insistence of county judge J.L. Dupree, ordered the court clerk to advertise for four days running in The Houston Post for an architect to furnish a design. The proposed structure was to cost not less than $50,000.00 and not more than $65,000.00. In August, 1891, the San Antonio firm of Gordon and Laub was directed to prepare plans and specifications and to "superintend and manage" the construction for a fee of 5% of the entire cost. On November 17, 1891, bids for construction were accepted and the firm of Martin, Byrnes and Johnston were awarded the contract on a low bid of $64,487.00.

J. Riely Gordon was noted for his confident use of the Romanesque Revival style in a number of Texas courthouses including the Erath County Courthouse in Stephenville and the Bexar County Courthouse in San Antonio. The builder, Martin, Byrnes and Johnston were equally prominent in their own respect for the construction of courthouses in Fayette and Goliad counties. Approval of certain departures from the typical plan found in most Texas courthouses of the period may be traced to the influence of Judge Dupree who apparently consented to the use of the open arches, perhaps following the precedent set by J.R. Gordon's Fayette County Courthouse.

Other significant features such as the absence of the usual fourfold symmetry of the elevations and the off-centered tower may stem from the layout of the town itself. An old Mexican settlement, Victoria's growth did not follow the usual pattern in which the courthouse occupied a central square surrounded by business blocks giving equal prominence to each elevation.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Bounded by Ridge and Rio Grande Streets
The nominated resource only includes the old courthouse building.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>CODE</th>
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FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Willard B. Robinson, Professor of Architecture
S. Elizabeth Sasser, Research Assistant 12/9/76

ORGANIZATION Division of Architecture - Texas Tech University

STREET & NUMBER P.O. Box 4499

CITY OR TOWN Lubbock

STATE Texas

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE X __ 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 Texas State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE 3-30-77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
On June 1, 1892, the cornerstone was laid, under the direction of the local Masonic Lodge. In the interior, which was hollow, were placed a $500 Confederate bill, a copy of The Galveston News, a copy of A History of Victoria County by Victor Rose.

The courthouse remained operational until the recent construction of a new building on an adjacent site.

Currently housing several county offices, the old Victoria County Courthouse is an excellent example of J. Riely Gordon's Romanesque Revival courthouses and is an architectural landmark in the city.
Property: Old Victoria County Courthouse
State: Texas
Working Number: 45.77.546

TECHNICAL
Photos: 5
Maps: 1

CONTROL
OK: 4/6/77

HISTORIAN
Accept: B. Grover
5/14/77

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN
Accept: M. Judy
5/12/77

ARCHEOLOGIST

OTHER

HAER
Inventory: ___
Review: ___

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF
Accept: Cole
6/21/77

BRANCH CHIEF

KEEPER

National Register Write-up: 9/4/77
Send-back: ___
Federal Register Entry: 9/4/77
Enter: 8/18/77

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service WASO No. 7
Victoria County Courthouse
Victoria, Texas

Mike Yancey, October 1976
Texas Historical Commission

East elevation
Photo #1055

AUG 18 1977
Victoria County Courthouse
Victoria, Texas

Mike Yancey, October 1976
Texas Historical Commission

Southeast oblique
Photo #2 of 5

AUG 18 1977
Victoria County Courthouse
Victoria, Texas

Mike Yancey, October 1976
Texas Historical Commission

South elevation
Photo #3

AUG 18 1977
Victoria County Courthouse
Victoria, Texas

Mike Yancey, October 1976
Texas Historical Commission

Southwest oblique
Photo #4

AUG 18 1977
Victoria County Courthouse
Victoria, Texas

Mike Yancey, October 1976
Texas Historical Commission

Door detail--east elevation
Photo #5 of 5

AUG 18 1977
ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE   TEXAS

Date Entered  AUG 18 1977

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Also Notified

Hon. John G. Tower
Hon. Lloyd Bentsen
Hon. W. R. Poage
Hon. Omar Burleson
Hon. John Young
Hon. Jack Brooks
Hon. Robert C. Krueger
Hon. Charles Wilson

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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>NAME</strong></th>
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| **national register write-up** |Excellent Richardsonian Romanesque county courthouse; focal point of county government.