

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Johnson County Courthouse  
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 1 Public Square na not for publication  
city, town Cleburne na vicinity  
state Texas code 048 county Johnson code 251 zip code 76031

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	0 buildings
0	0 sites
0	0 structures
2	0 objects
3	0 Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.  See continuation sheet.

*Curtis Tunnell* Signature of certifying official Curtis Tunnell, State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission, P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711 Date 9 Feb. 1988  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date  
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

*Patrick Andrews* Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 4/14/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action



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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Government: courthouseCurrent Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Government: courthouse

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th/20th c. Revivals: Beaux Arts  
Late 19th/20th c. American: Sullivanesquefoundation granite  
walls brickroof concrete/copper  
other \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Johnson County Courthouse is one of the most noteworthy early 20th-century courthouses in Texas. While the basic form and massing reflects relatively conventional Beaux Arts traditions, much of the interior and exterior detailing shows strong Sullivanesque influence. The Courthouse with its soaring tower remains the visual focal point of the city of Cleburne, and the structure has had few alterations over the last 75 years, preserving its integrity to an unusual degree.

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The Johnson County Courthouse is a freestanding structure occupying a full block at the heart of the Cleburne commercial district. The structure is essentially rectangular in shape. It is three stories high with a full, raised basement and a square tower rising another five stories or so. East and west elevations are seven bays wide in the center pavilion with an additional three bays at each side. North and south elevations are five bays wide. There are generally paired, one-over-one windows; most retain their wooden frames. The roof is flat, except for a hemispherical dome atop the tower. The basement level is clad in Texas pink granite ashlar, while the brickwork of the first floor is rusticated. Second and third floors are faced with smooth Elgin brick, and all four sides have central colonades with stylized, Giant Order Composite columns. The entablature over the colonades has an incised inscription: 'A.D. Johnson Covnty 1912' and symmetrically-placed Sullivanesque pendants at the sides and on the tops of the paired east and west facade pylons.

The Courthouse is surmounted by an approximately 90' central clock tower. The first floor of the tower contains courthouse storage and the upper portion of the central atrium, while the bulk of the tower is a hollow shaft. The capitol portion of the tower has clocks facing cardinal directions flanked by terra cotta ornamentation in a chain-like pattern, which in turn have Sullivanesque pendants below.

Unquestionably the most spectacular interior space in the Courthouse is the six-story central atrium. Rising from the basement level, the atrium has Georgia creole marble facing the corner walls and balconies on the first, second and third floors. Rich, Sullivanesque detailing is found along the cornice, architraves and along the chamfered corners. An octagonal art glass skylight crowns the atrium; especially noteworthy are the Lone Star cartouches along the four wider sides.



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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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Other interior spaces are more conventional. Most of the hall spaces have Georgia creole marble wainscoting and tile floors. Two panel doors with crinkle glass transoms remain throughout most of the building and have simple brass hardware. Cast metal stairs have Prairie School balustrades of note, and the 118th District Courtroom has very fine ornamental plaster cornices in a Sullivanesque design; unfortunately, a false ceiling was installed in 1967, but the original remains largely intact above. An account of the Courthouse at the time of its opening noted that most ceilings in the Courthouse were painted a light buff and walls a dark shade of silver green; courtroom walls were circassian brown with ivory and gold cornices. All are presently painted white.

Wall divisions and interior detailing remains largely unchanged. A large, fourth floor room currently used for storage has windows looking into the atrium, and is one of the more noteworthy and least known spaces in the structure.

Two contributing statues, classified as objects, are found on the grounds of the courthouse. At the southeast corner of the courthouse grounds is an obelisk with small fountain, erected in 1917 by the Pat Cleburne Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. At the center of the west side is the Courthouse bell; it is inscribed, "This bell made for Johnson County Courthouse AD - 1913 Ring for Trust and Justice."

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50% COTTON FIBER



**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Politics-Government

Period of Significance

1913

1913-1938

Significant Dates

1913

1913

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

(Otto) Lang & (Frank) Witchell, Dallas  
American Construction Company

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Johnson County Courthouse is one of the most architecturally significant early 20th-century courthouses in North Texas, and it has been the seat of Johnson County government for 75 years. Built at the time of Cleburne's early boom, the Courthouse is a remarkable architectural hybrid featuring exceptional Beaux Arts/Prairie School detailing. Accordingly, it meets Criterion C. As the most visible symbol of government in the county and as a county courthouse since 1913, it meets Criterion A. Contextually the Johnson County Courthouse relates to the Texas County Courthouse 1880-1930.

From the end of Reconstruction to the advent of the Great Depression, Texas county courthouse complexes were not only the functional seat of county government but were also symbolic of the wealth, ambition and established status of Texas counties. As elsewhere in the United States, they tended to be the focal point of all political and social functions in the county. Furthermore, there was an intense boosterism among citizens of rival frontier (and settled) counties, each of whom hoped that their county would emerge as a new Dallas or Galveston or El Paso County. In many of Texas' 254 counties, the Courthouse was, and in many cases still is, the most substantial and architecturally pretentious building locally. Most were architect-designed. Later nineteenth century courthouses were usually vertical, masonry, aspiring High Style structures reflecting Second Empire, Romanesque or occasionally Renaissance Revival styles. Early 20th-century courthouses reflected Beaux Arts, some Prairie School and in later years Art Deco influence. Associated property types include detached jails and statuary/monuments.

Located on rolling prairie land immediately southwest of Fort Worth, Johnson County was created and organized in 1854. On April 15, 1912 (coincidentally the day the Titanic sank), the handsome 2nd Empire County Courthouse burned, taking the life of City Marshall Albert Bledsoe. The burnt 1883 courthouse was architecturally significant in its own right and had been designed by prolific courthouse architect Wesley Clark Dodson (1828-1914), who was responsible for similar courthouses in adjacent Hood (National Register 1974), Hill (N.R. 1971) and Parker (N.R. 1971) Counties.

See continuation sheet



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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
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According to a contemporaneous newspaper account, the Johnson County Commissioners Court "immediately called for plans to be drawn for a new building. . . the court in a body visited several towns and cities and inspected their new and modern court houses so as to determine what was best for Johnson County." Likely the Commissioners visited the Cooke County Courthouse (1911) to the north in Gainesville and possibly the Harris County Courthouse (1907-10; N.R. 1981) in Houston, for they selected their designers, the celebrated Dallas firm of Lang and Witchell, for the new Johnson County Courthouse.

Otto H. Lang, born in Germany in 1864, came to the United States in 1888 and was head of the Texas & Pacific Railroad architecture division until 1905. His partner, Frank Witchell, had worked with the prominent Fort Worth architectural firm Sanguinet and Staats, who designed numerous structures now listed in the National Register. While most Texas architectural firms in 1912 practiced in cautious Beaux Arts or even residual Late Victorian modes, Lang and Witchell and a limited number of other architects demonstrated an appreciation of the Prairie School. North Texas in particular had very strong cultural, economic and transportation links with the Midwest. Lang & Witchell's Prairie influence can be seen in such Dallas buildings as the Sanger Brothers Department Store (1910; N.R. 1975), the Rufus W. Higginbotham House (1913; Swiss Ave. H.D., N.R. 1974) and the Southwestern Life Insurance Company (1912), the latter called by writer William L. McDonald 'the finest Sullivanesque skyscraper ever to grace the city of Dallas.'

That the Johnson County Commissioners would select a particularly progressive architectural firm is not surprising. The county seat, Cleburne, was the location of the machine shops and mechanical headquarters for the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe Railroad, and between 1910 and 1920 the population of the city increased by 20% to 12,820 (a figure it would not reach again until the 1950 census). A new Carnegie Library (1905; N.R. 1981) and a U.S. Post Office (1913) had been completed in an exuberant Classical Revival mode, and a 1905 publication The Truth About Cleburne and Johnson County concluded

Taken as a whole, there is probably no better County in the entire State than Johnson. . .the constant development of her resources gives guarantee that she will continue to improve until none stands ahead of her as a place to invest for profit or to plant money and build a home.

The resulting Lang & Witchell design for the Johnson County Courthouse is remarkable. While at first glance it appears to be a twin of the firm's Cooke County Courthouse, the proportions and detailing of the Johnson County Courthouse are much finer. The strong Beaux Arts influence remains, but remarkable Sullivanesque pendants and stylized capitals are seen on the exterior of the Cleburne structure. Architectural historian James Wright Steely notes the apparent



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influence of Finnish architects Eliel Saarinen and Lars Sonck in the design of the clock tower, while architect-historian Willard B. Robinson considers the interior 'among the most spectacular of any courthouse in the Lone Star State.' The atrium in particular soars six stories and features very fine Sullivanesque foliated detailing, marble walls and an exceptional art glass dome. It should be included in any list of great interior spaces in Texas. Significantly, the Lang & Witchell courthouse drawings were initialed by architect Charles Erwin Barglebaugh, who had trained under and worked for Frank Lloyd Wright and may have been the project architect.

The newly completed courthouse was accepted by the Johnson County Commissioners Court on November 28, 1913. Cost estimates varied from \$194,606 to \$226,000. It has served as the seat of Johnson County government for 75 years, and in that time has played an important role in the lives of the citizens of Johnson County. The Courthouse has been a source of pride to the citizens of the county since its construction. As the seat of government in what was until recently a primarily agricultural county, it has acted as the political and in many ways the social hub of Johnson County.

The courthouse retains its dominant position on the Cleburne skyline and can be seen from a long distance on the major traffic arteries which converge on the Courthouse Square. It was opened with much fanfare and 24 years after its construction a local newspaper noted it was 'one of the most attractive buildings of its kind in all Texas. It was constructed in 1912, but still bears that new look that causes one to doubt its age.'

Fortunately, the Courthouse's pivotal role in the community has led to its preservation by successive Commissioners Courts. The historic interior paint schemes have been lost, a few windows changed and most unfortunately the ceiling of the primary courtroom was lowered; but the structure retains its historic integrity to an unusual degree.



## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Allin, Jack The Truth About Cleburne and Johnson County, Cleburne: privately printed, 1905.  
Cleburne Morning Review 30 Jan. 1913; 22 June 1913; 2 December 1914.  
Cleburne Times Review 28 June 1936.  
Johnson County News 7 February 1947.  
Johnson County Courthouse files, Layland Museum, Cleburne, Texas.  
Lang & Witchell, Johnson County Courthouse drawings, on file at Johnson County Courthouse, Cleburne.  
McDonald, William L. Dallas Rediscovered, Dallas: Dallas Historical Society, 1978.  
Padon, Mildred Armstrong to James Wright Steely, 12 May 1987, letter on file, T.H.C.  
Robinson, Willard B. The People's Architecture Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1983.  
Steely, James Wright 'Temples of Justice' Texas Highways, May 1987.

See continuation sheet

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

### Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

### Specify repository:

Layland Museum, Cleburne, Texas

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property less than one

### UTM References

A 

1	4	6	5	1	9	0	0	3	5	7	9	8	6	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

C 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

Public Square, bounded by Main, Henderson, Caddo and Chambers Streets.

See continuation sheet

### Boundary Justification

The Courthouse Square site nominated has been the area historically associated with the County Courthouse since at least 1883.

See continuation sheet

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Peter Flagg Maxson, Senior Architectural Historian

organization Texas Historical Commission date August 1987

street & number P.O. Box 12276 telephone 512/463-6094

city or town Austin state Texas zip code 78711



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National Park Service

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Welch, June Rayfield The Texas Courthouse Revisited Dallas: G.L.A. Press, 1984.

Interviews:

Bridewell, Judge Wayne and Padon to Peter Flagg Maxson, interview on 22 July 1987.  
Fox, Stephen to Maxson, interview by telephone on 8 September 1987.

CHIEFTAIN DONG

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88000439

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Johnson County Courthouse  
Johnson County  
TEXAS

*Substantive Review*

MAR 16 1988

Working No. \_\_\_\_\_

Fed. Reg. Date: 2/7/89

Date Due: 4/14/88 4/30/88

Action:  ACCEPT 4-14-88

RETURN

REJECT

Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review:  sample  request  appeal  NR decision

Reviewer's comments: *Significant under C for its exceptional Beaux Arts / Prairie School detailing and significant under A as the most visible symbol of government in the county since its construction in 1913.*

Recom./Criteria Accept - A,C

Reviewer Noble

Discipline Historian

Date 4/14/88

\_\_\_\_\_ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: \_\_\_\_\_ technical corrections cited below  
\_\_\_\_\_ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location \_\_\_\_\_

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property \_\_\_\_\_

5. Location of Legal Description \_\_\_\_\_

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

7. Description

Condition	Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed	
	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	
	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection



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**8. Significance**

Period \_\_\_\_\_ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below \_\_\_\_\_

Specific dates \_\_\_\_\_ Builder/Architect \_\_\_\_\_  
Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*) \_\_\_\_\_

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- applicable criteria
- justification of areas checked
- relating significance to the resource
- context
- relationship of integrity to significance
- justification of exception
- other

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

---

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal boundary description and justification \_\_\_\_\_

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

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**12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification**

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_\_ national      \_\_\_\_ state      \_\_\_\_ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

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**13. Other**

- Maps
- Photographs
- Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_





A.D. JOHNSON COUNTY 1912



Johnson County Courthouse  
1 Public Square  
Cleburne, Johnson County, Texas

Photos by Peter Flagg Maxson, July 1987;  
negatives on file at Texas Historical Commission  
in Austin.

South elevation; camera facing north

Photo 1 of 8







Johnson County Courthouse  
1 Public Square  
Cleburne, Johnson County, Texas

Photo by Peter Flagg Maxson, July 1987;  
negative on file at Texas Historical Commission  
in Austin

North elevation; camera facing south

Photo 2 of 8







Johnson County Courthouse  
1 Public Square  
Cleburne, Johnson County, Texas

Photo by Peter Flagg Maxson, July 1987;  
negative on file at Texas Historical Commission  
in Austin

West elevation; camera facing east

Photo 3 of 8







Johnson County Courthouse  
1 Public Square  
Cleburne, Johnson County, Texas

Photo by Peter Flagg Maxson, July 1987;  
negative on file at Texas Historical Commission  
in Austin

East elevation; camera facing southwest

Photo 4 of 8







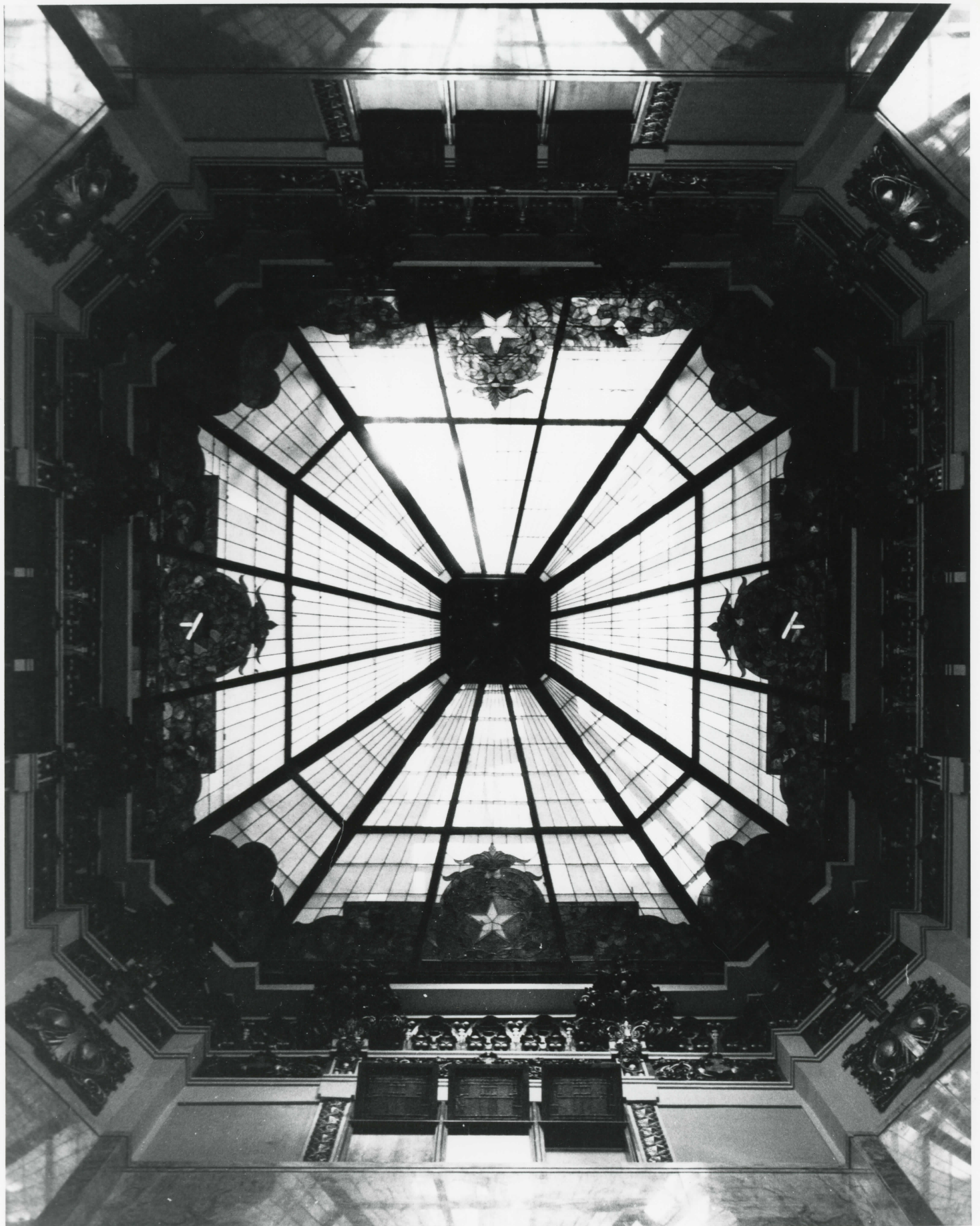
Johnson County Courthouse  
1 Public Square  
Cleburne, Johnson County, Texas

Photo by J.A. Kaufman, 1974; negative on file  
at Texas Historical Commission in Austin

Southeast oblique; camera facing northwest

Photo 5 of 8







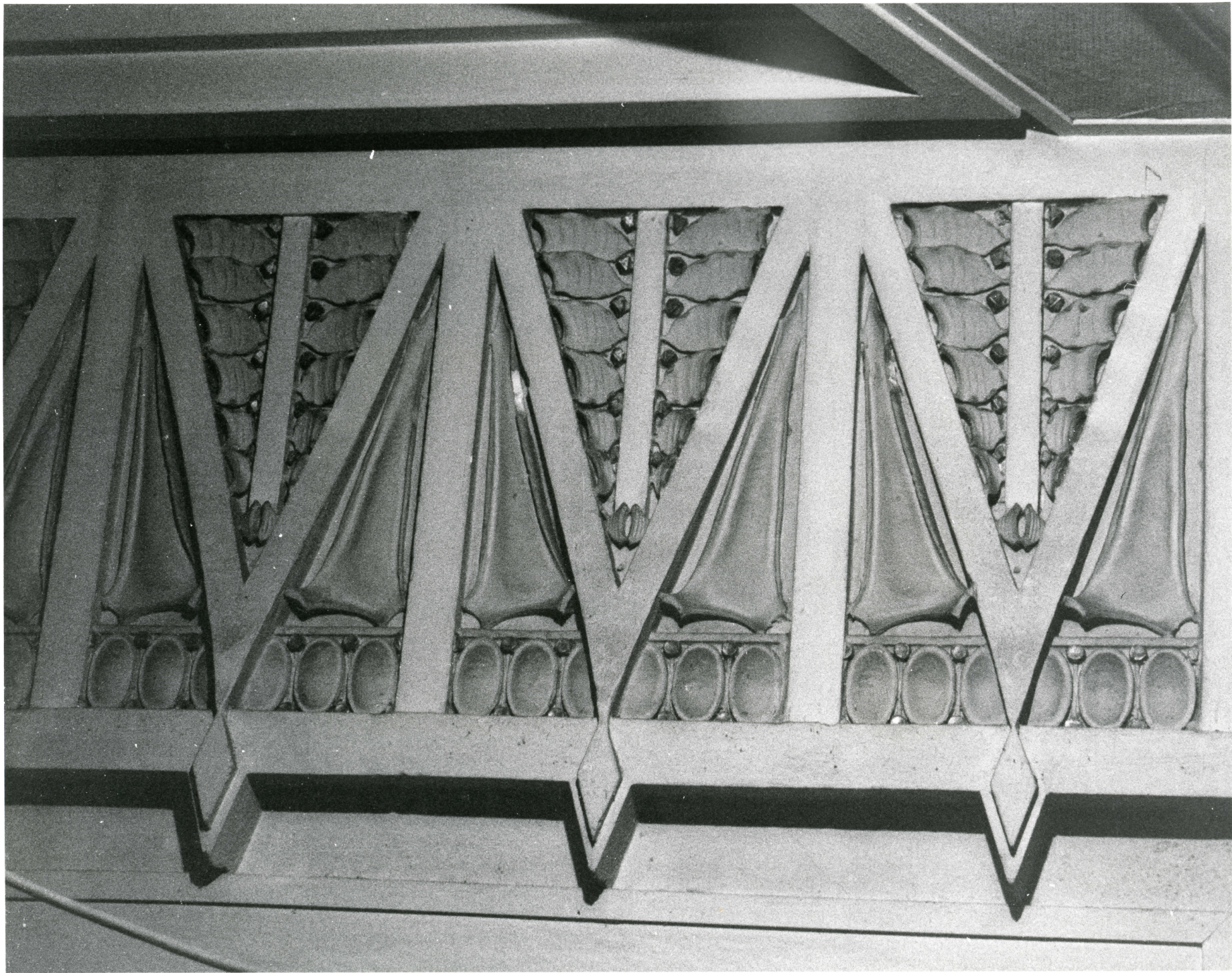
Johnson County Courthouse  
1 Public Square  
Cleburne, Johnson County, Texas

Photo by Peter Flagg Maxson, July 1987;  
negative on file at Texas Historical Commission  
in Austin

View of atrium; camera looking up

Photo 6 of 8







Johnson County Courthouse  
1 Public Square  
Cleburne, Johnson County, Texas

Photo by Peter Flagg Maxson, July 1987;  
negative on file at Texas Historical Commission  
in Austin

Courtroom cornice detail

Photo 7 of 8







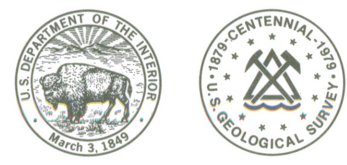
Johnson County Courthouse  
1 Public Square  
Cleburne, Johnson County, Texas

Photo by Peter Flagg Maxson, July 1987;  
negative on file at Texas Historical Commission  
in Austin

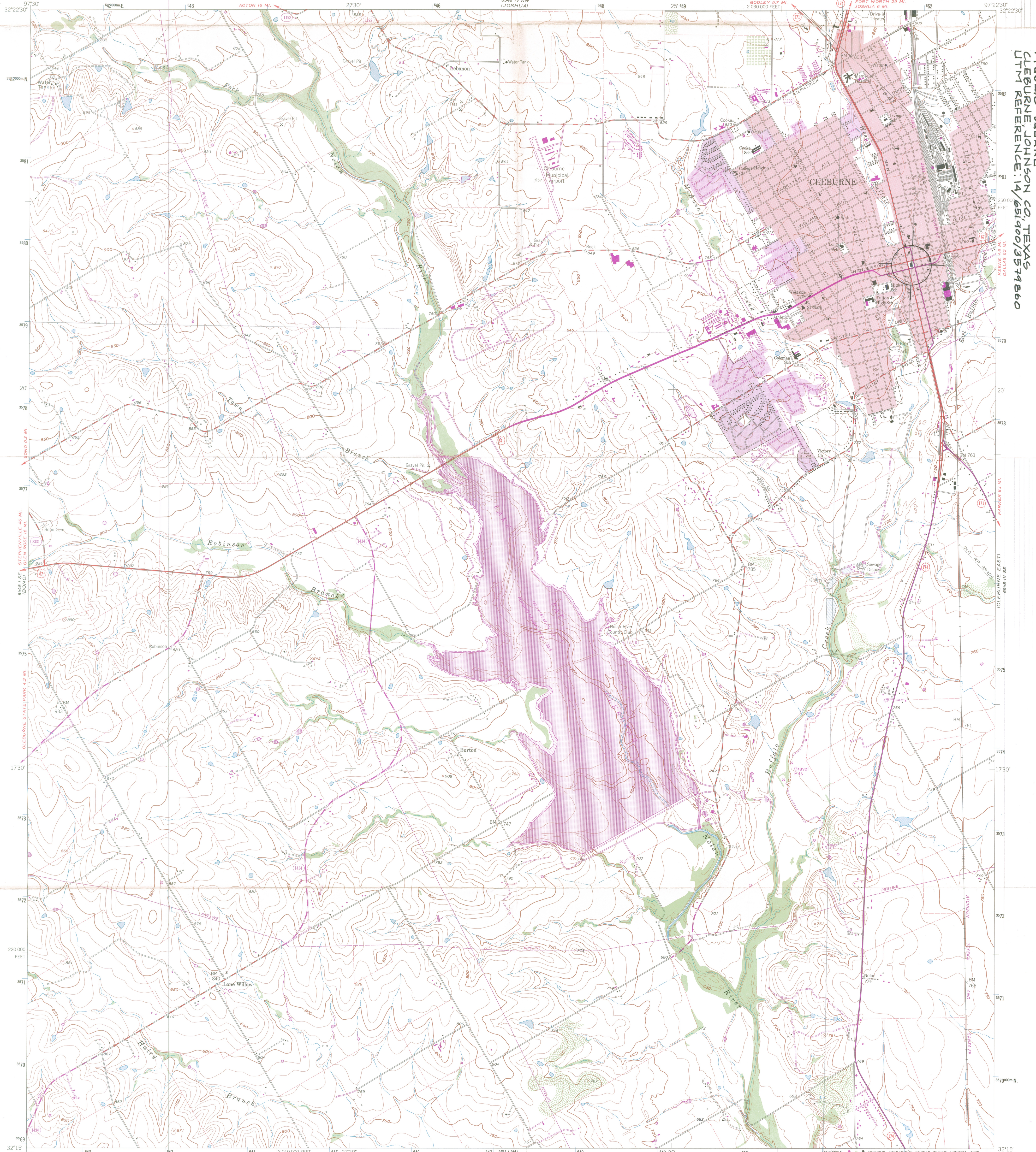
Stairway detail

Photo 8 of 8

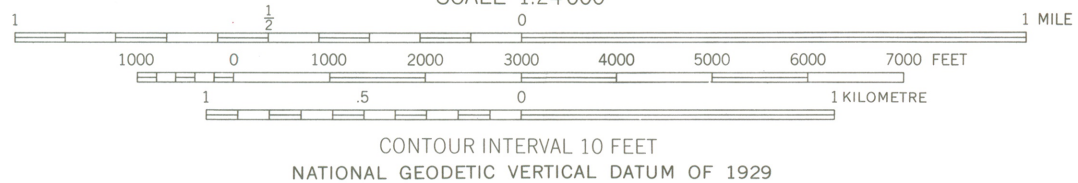
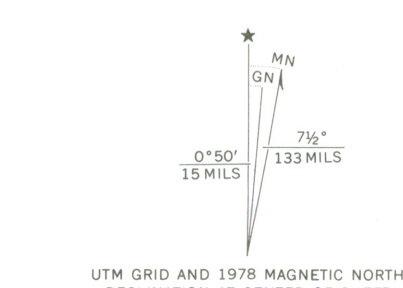




JOHNSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
PUBLIC SQUARE  
CLEBURNE, JOHNSON CO., TEXAS  
UTM REFERENCE: 14/651900/3574860



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USC&GS  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1958. Field checked 1961  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system, north central zone  
1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 14, shown in blue  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked  
Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled from aerial photographs taken 1976 and other source data. This information not field checked. Map edited 1978



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt
U.S. Route	State Route



CLEBURNE WEST, TEX.  
N3215-W9722 5/7.5

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

3297-132

1961  
PHOTOREVISED 1978  
AMS 6548 IV SW-SERIES V882