

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

RECEIVED  
FEB 19 1991

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 Cooke County Courthouse  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number Public Square N/A not for publication  
city, town Gainesville N/A vicinity  
state Texas code TX county Cooke code 097 zip code 76240

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>3</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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.  
Charles J. Russell Feb. 1991  
Signature of certifying official Date  
State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
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. Entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet. Spelman Byrum 3/22/91  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)

ju 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/Courthouse  

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government/Courthouse  

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Beaux Arts  

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Sullivan-esque  

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Limestone/Concretewalls LimestoneBrick  

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roof Asphaltother Terra Cotta Trim  

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Cooke County Courthouse of 1911 is a composition of Beaux Arts design-- in its massing and exterior classical references-- with Sullivan-esque interior details in a modern interpretation of established courthouse design. It is a 3-story cruciform-plan building set on a raised basement and surmounted by a central domed tower. The courthouse is finished in limestone and beige brick with glazed terra cotta used for decorative elements. The building occupies an entire block in the middle of Gainesville, Cooke County. Cooke County borders Oklahoma in north central Texas, roughly 75 miles north of the Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area. Surrounding the building, within the four corners of the cruciform footprint, are planted areas of grass and pecan trees where memorial statuary has been placed. Facing the courthouse square are low-scale commercial buildings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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The plan of the courthouse is a rectangle with projecting entry wings on the east and west elevations, creating the cruciform plan. On the north and south ends a central entry bay projects slightly from the facade. Access to the courthouse is at the piano nobile level from all four facades, with the primary entrance in the east elevation. The east entry stairway is wide, broken by one landing, and is flanked by chunky stepped parapets. A similar but narrower stairway is on the west facade. The north and south entries are accessed by camelback stairways set against the building face. The first two levels of the courthouse are built of ashlar limestone. The raised basement has a flat wall surface and creates a plinth for the building. It is pierced by large, flat-arch windows admitting light to the lower level. Access to the basement is made beneath the entry stairways on all four facades. The limestone walls of the second story are rusticated with segmental-arch window and door openings highlighted by prominent keystones and voussoirs.

Above the piano nobile the courthouse is finished in buff brick, referred to as "Gainesville gray brick." On the east and west fronts there are five bays of 2nd- and 3rd-floor windows within the recessed temple front of each facade; the bays of windows are divided by 2-story limestone Ionic columns in antis. The three central window bays on the north and south elevations have two engaged columns each. The capitals of the columns and the escutcheons around the cornice of the building are of glazed terra cotta matching the creamy limestone and are detailed in a slightly stylized, angular manner, suggesting a modernistic influence. The current metal-frame windows replaced the original wood frame

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

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windows and are set in sets of two or three with a small lower sash. The original windows were 1/1 wooden sash. The 4th-floor windows had a decorative upper sash divided by vertical and horizontal mullions in a pattern common to the Prairie School.

A projecting cornice encircles the building just beneath the roof parapet. Consoles in the design of an eagle atop a shield surrounded by laurel swags are set beneath the cornice at the primary corners of the building. Smaller escutchions are placed between window bays on the secondary facades of the building. Above the cornice a brick parapet with terra cotta coping conceals the courthouse roof. A large cartouche incorporating the symbols of justice is placed in the parapet wall directly above each entrance to the courthouse.

The tower rises from the middle of the courthouse roof about three stories on a square plan with chamfered corners. On each face is a large louvered vent recessed in the facade and flanked by Tuscan pilasters set in antis. The vents replace the original windows in the tower. Laurel swags decorate the upper corners of the tower just beneath the cornice molding. The dome atop the tower has a copper-clad roof with a decorative pinnacle. A parapet wall that surrounds the base of the dome rises on each elevation to enclose a clock face. Although the clock faces were part of the original design, the clock was not installed until 1920. The faces are highlighted by a geometric surround that echoes the prominent keystone and voussoirs of the 1st-floor windows.

The interior of the Cooke County Courthouse is distinctively detailed. The corridors from all four entries intersect at an atrium that is open from the basement to the base of the tower. The atrium is square in plan with chamfered corners, reflecting the tower. At the height of the space is an art glass domed skylight with an abstracted foliate design. Just beneath the skylight is a crown molding and around the top of the atrium walls are vertical decorative moldings suggesting columns, topped by ornate cast "capitals" in a foliate design in the style of Louis Sullivan. A multi-paned window is centered in each wall of the space. At the base of the atrium a semi-circular staircase with marble treads and risers connects the basement to the piano nobile. The floors of the corridors are terrazzo and the secondary stairs set off of the atrium are iron, as are the railings surrounding the atrium at the upper levels. While the offices and courtrooms of the building have undergone some alteration since their construction, the atrium survives in its original condition as the focus of the interior public space.

The exterior alterations to the courthouse are limited to the replacement of the original doors and windows. While this significantly impacts the character of the building, it does not obscure the Beaux Arts design and modernistic details that distinguish it.

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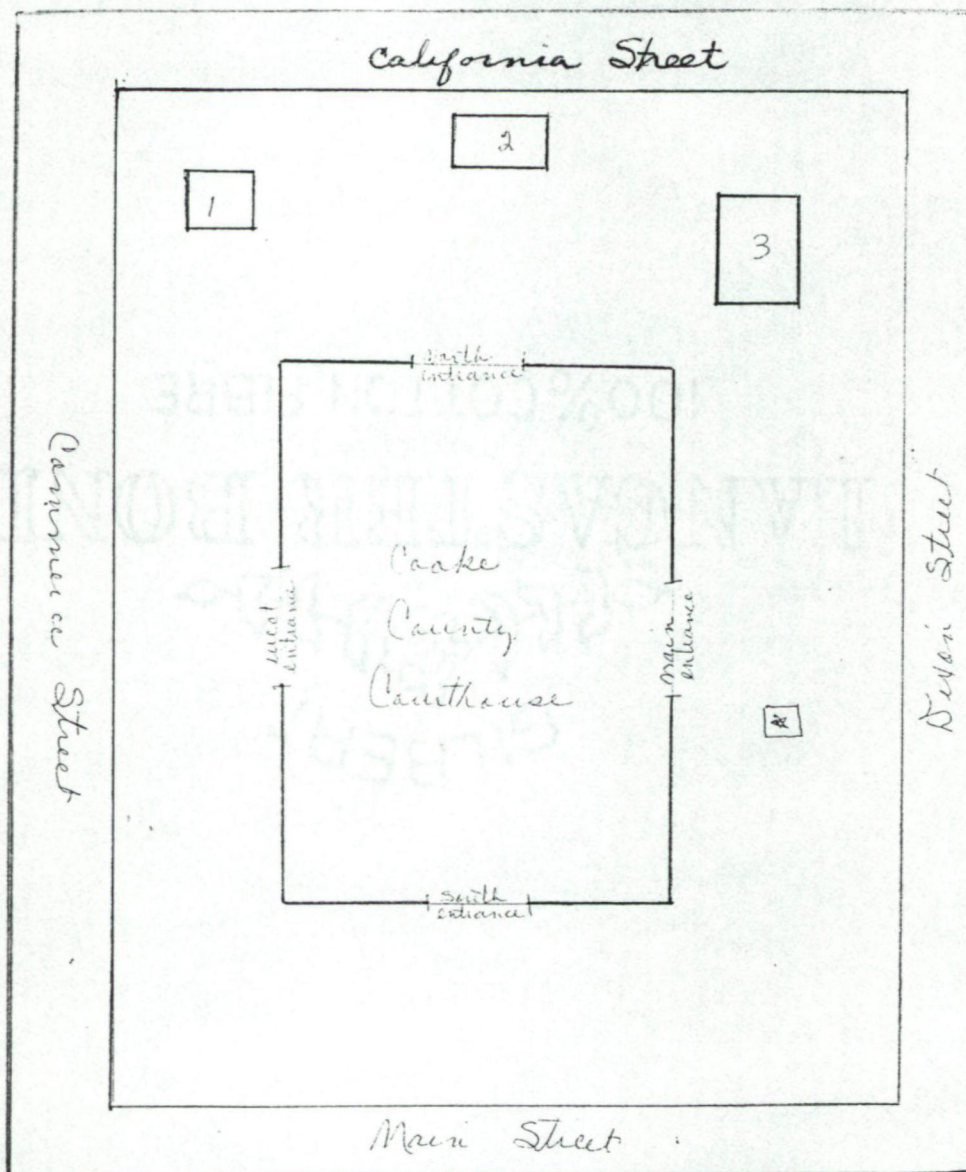
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On the northeast corner of the site is a Confederate War memorial with the statue of a soldier on top of a marble column. The memorial is surrounded by an iron fence. On the northwest corner is a World War II memorial consisting of a square column set on a pedestal. In front of the north elevation is a granite California Trails marker.

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National Park Service

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1. World War II Memorial
  2. California Trail Marker
  3. Confederate Monument
  - ★ Texas Historical Marker (added after this application was submitted)
- not to scale



**9. Major Bibliographical References**

- Collins, Michael. Cooke County, Texas; Where the South and the West Meet, Cooke County Heritage Society, 1981.
- Cooke County Commissioner's Court Minutes, Cooke County Courthouse, Gainesville, Texas. Gainesville Register, 16 March, 1911.
- The Handbook of Texas. Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1952.
- Lang & Witchell, Cooke County Courthouse drawings on file at the Cooke County Courthouse, Gainesville, Texas.
- Robinson, Willard B. The People's Architecture. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1983.
- The Semi-Weekly Register, 19 December, 1911.
- Smith, A. Morton. The First Hundred Years in Cooke County. San Antonio. The Naylor Co., 1955.
- Welch, June Rayfield and J. Larry Nance, The Texas Courthouse. Dallas: G.L.A. Press, 1977.
- Welch, June Rayfield. The Texas Courthouse Revisited. Dallas: G.L.A. Press, 1984.

See continuation sheet

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

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

Texas Historical Commission, Austin, TX

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property less than one

UTM References

A 

1	4	6	7	2	0	4	0	3	7	2	1	8	0	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

C 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

B 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Public Square, bounded by California, Dixon, Main and Commerce Streets.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Original seat of county as established in 1850.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Tory Laughlin Taylor, THC (based on research by Patricia Frasher Winstead)

organization Texas Historical Commission date March, 1990

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

city or town Austin state Texas zip code 78711

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the construction of such a grand facility was not approved without controversy in the conservative and struggling farming community.

The architectural standard for public buildings of the day was Beaux Arts or Classical Revival design. Of the approximately 40 surviving Texas courthouses built between 1908 and 1914, all but a very few are based on classical motifs. The most common form is that of the rectangular or square block with slightly projecting pedimented porticoes or entry wings incorporating a classical order. A tower traditionally crowned the courthouse and varied greatly in design from county to county. Characteristics of the Beaux Arts designs, as distinguished from the simpler Classical Revival, are the heavier use of ornamentation, the rustication of the lower levels or "plinth" of the building, a varying of wall depths, and a strongly formal plan.

The county commissioners' selection of the prominent Dallas firm of Lang & Witchell as architects for the Cooke County Courthouse reflects both great optimism about the community's future and a surprisingly progressive bent. Otto Lang and Frank Witchell were known for their work in Dallas, a young city in the midst of rapid growth as a regional trade center. Their designs increasingly reflected the influences of Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School of architecture within a framework of Beaux Arts formality. When commissioned by Cooke County, Lang & Witchell had recently designed the Harris County Courthouse in Houston (1908-11, continuation page 8-4). Soon thereafter they were hired to design the Johnson County Courthouse in Cleburne (1913, N.R. 1988, continuation page 8-6). These three buildings illustrate wonderfully the evolution of Lang & Witchell's design while following a nearly identical formula in plan and massing for each.

The Harris County Courthouse is the most traditional Beaux Arts design of the three. It is finished in granite and brick and, at six stories, is larger than the later two designs, but shows very similar proportions. It uses rusticated walls and segmental-arch portals in the piano nobile, built of a rough-faced granite in a fairly established treatment. The composite columns are traditionally detailed and the portico projections are pedimented. The tower is round in plan, squattier than in the later designs, and has a dome supported on classical columns. The Cooke County design also respects the established Beaux Arts formula, but it is bolder in the geometricality of details: the ashlar rustication creates stark horizontal lines in the base of the building, the terra cotta details are executed in an angular style, and the tower is squared with classical columns as a less prominent element. The original 4th-floor windows with their decorative upper sash suggested the Prairie School influence, and inside the Sullivan-esque details are a dramatic departure from traditional detailing. In the Johnson County Courthouse the Prairie School details are moved to the exterior, the classical motifs are toned down, and the building takes on a distinctively modern angularity. The rusticated plinth with segmental portals,

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the engaged columns on the main elevations, plus the basic form of the building remain. But flanking the projecting entry wings are blocky corner pylons that rise slightly above the parapet and have Wrightian abstracted swags at the top. They echo the design of the tower that is of exaggerated height, and has abstract, geometrical detailing. The small dome on the tower is a far cry from the traditional capital dome supported on classical columns of the Harris County Courthouse.

The Lang & Witchell plans for the Cooke County Courthouse were accepted by the commissioners court on April 10, 1910. The architectural firm of Garrett and Collins of Gainesville were contracted as supervising architects of the project. M.P. Kelly of Gainesville was selected to build the courthouse. The supervising architects and contractor were known primarily for their work around Gainesville on public buildings and public works projects. The cornerstone of the courthouse was ceremoniously laid on November 10, 1910, and the courthouse was finished late in 1911 at a final cost of approximately \$150,000.

The Cooke County Courthouse was received by the community with great pride in their thoroughly modern and elegant facility. It filled all of the anticipated official and nonofficial functions of the time. The role of the county courthouse in the life of an agricultural community is made apparent by the attention paid to the provision of a "ladies rest room" in the Cooke County Courthouse. A contemporaneous newspaper account goes into some discussion of the lounge designed "so that visiting ladies would have a known convenient place for rest after traveling to the city..." The courthouse square, and the courthouse as its focus, were the destination of farming families when they came to Gainesville to sell their cotton or buy their provisions. Beyond its official legal functions, the courthouse was a place to meet, trade and rest before returning home. Although oil replaced cotton as the economic base in the 1920s, Cooke County remains an area of diversified agriculture. Over the course of the 20th century the 1911 courthouse in Gainesville has been at the center of the public life of the county and is interwoven with the events of government and its people.

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Harris County Courthouse

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Cooke County Courthouse

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Johnson County Courthouse

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Cooke County Courthouse

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Cooke

DATE RECEIVED: 2/19/91      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 3/05/91  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 3/21/91      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 4/05/91  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 91000336

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    3/22/91 DATE

Entered in the  
National Register

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_  
REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_  
DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

---

CLASSIFICATION

count       resource type

---

STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

---

FUNCTION

historic       current

---

DESCRIPTION

architectural classification  
 materials  
 descriptive text

---

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

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

acreage       verbal boundary description  
 UTM's       boundary justification

---

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION/PRESENTATION

sketch maps     USGS maps     photographs     presentation

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OTHER COMMENTS

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GAINSVILLE, LOOKE CO., TEXAS

CAMERA FACING SOUTHWEST

BOB DAVIS

1988

NEGATIVE WITH PHOTOGRAPHER

PHOTO 1 OF 9



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GAINSVILLE, COOKE CO., TEXAS

EAST ELEVATION, CAMERA FACING WEST

BOB DAVIS, PHOTOGRAPHER

1988

NEGATIVE WITH PHOTOGRAPHER

PHOTO 2 OF 9



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GAINSVILLE, COOKE CO., TEXAS

NORTH ELEVATION, CAMERA FACING SOUTH

BOB DAVIS, PHOTOGRAPHER

1988

NEGATIVE WITH PHOTOGRAPHER

PHOTO 3 OF 9

County Historical Commission  
North elevation, camera facing south



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GAINSVILLE, COOKE CO., TEXAS

WEST ELEVATION, CAMERA FACING EAST

BOB DAVIS

1988

NEGATIVE WITH PHOTOGRAPHER

PHOTO 4 OF 9



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GAINSVILLE, COOKE CO., TEXAS

SOUTH ELEVATION, CAMERA FACING NORTH

BOB DAVIS

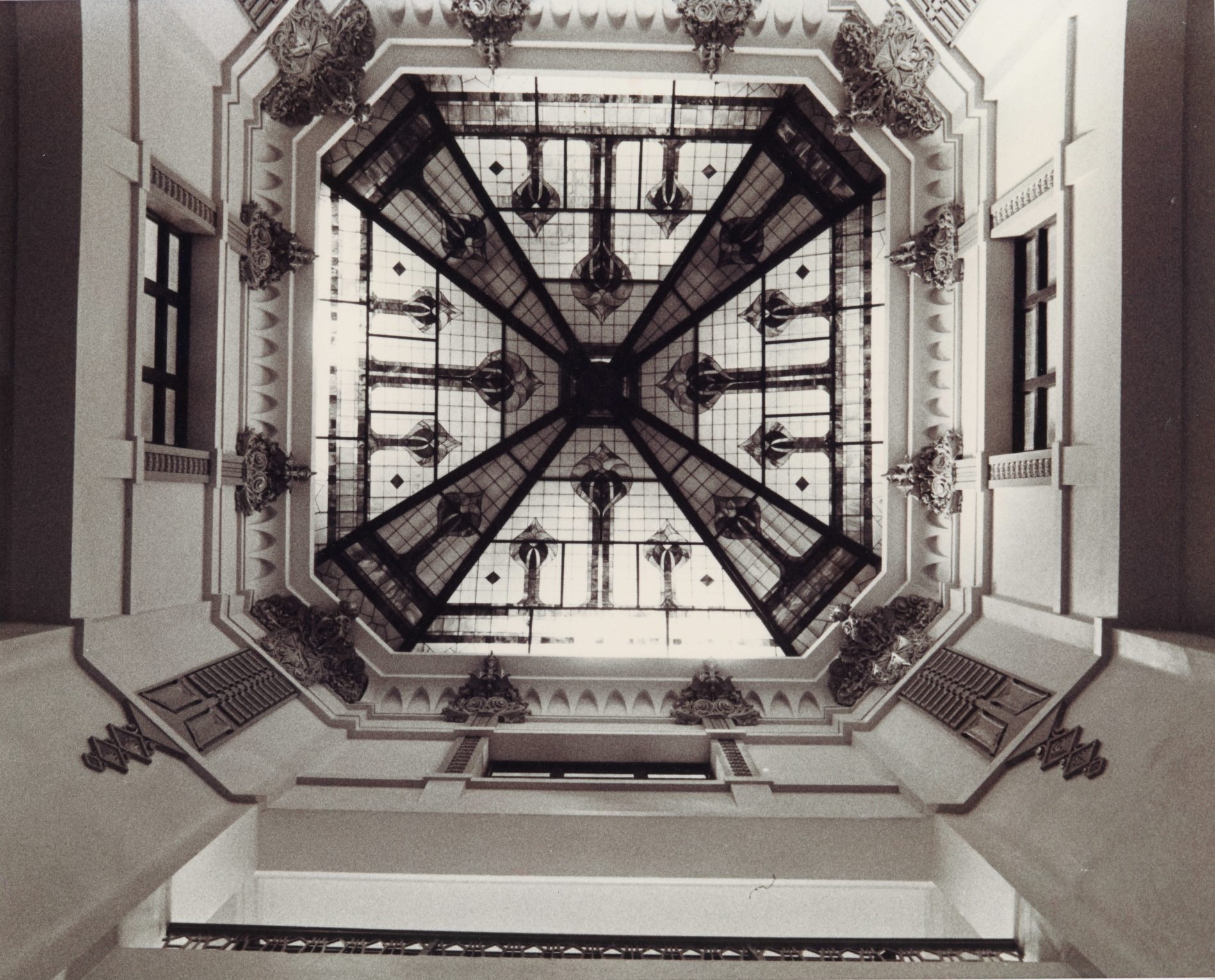
1988

NEGATIVE WITH PHOTOGRAPHER

PHOTO 5 OF 9

Cooke County Historical Commission  
south elevation, camera facing North

P



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GAINSVILLE, COOKE CO., TEXAS

INSIDE ROTUNDA, LOOKING UP

BOB DAVIS

1988

NEGATIVE WITH PHOTOGRAPHER

PHOTO 6 OF 9

Inside rotunda, looking up



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GAINSVILLE, COOKE CO., TEXAS

DETAILS OF CAPITALS & CORNICES IN ROTUNDA

BOB DAVIS

1988

NEGATIVE WITH PHOTOGRAPHER

PHOTO 7 OF 9

View of capitals and  
cornices in rotunda showing a  
supporting pier on the right with  
a window to the left.



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GAINSVILLE, COOKE CO., TEXAS

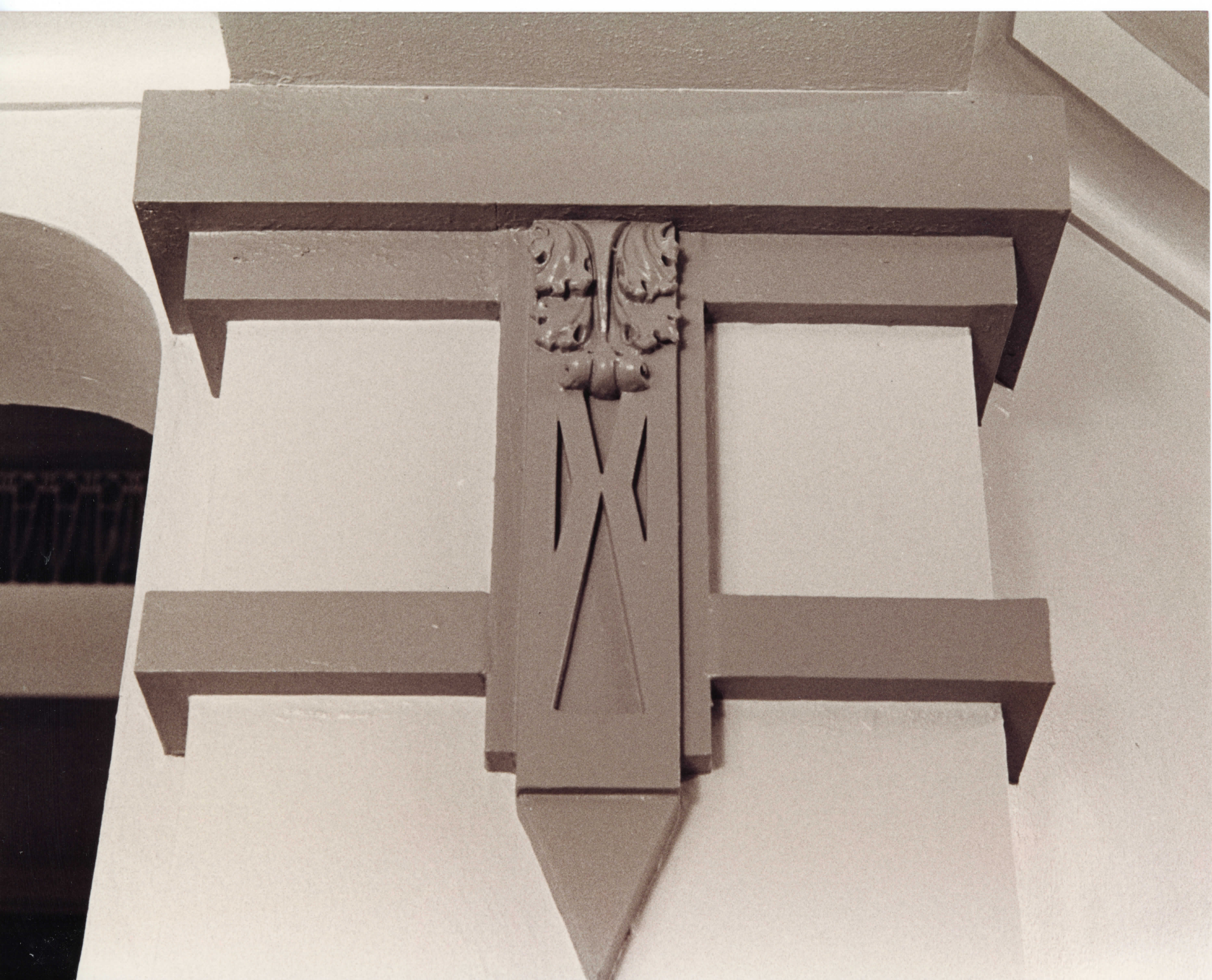
PLASTER FRIEZE ORNAMENTATION IN THE DISTRICT COURTROOM

BOB DAVIS

1988

NEGATIVE WITH PHOTOGRAPHER

PHOTO 8 OF 9



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GAINSVILLE, COOKE CO., TEXAS

ENGAGED COLUMN IN CORRIDORS AROUND THE ROTUNDA

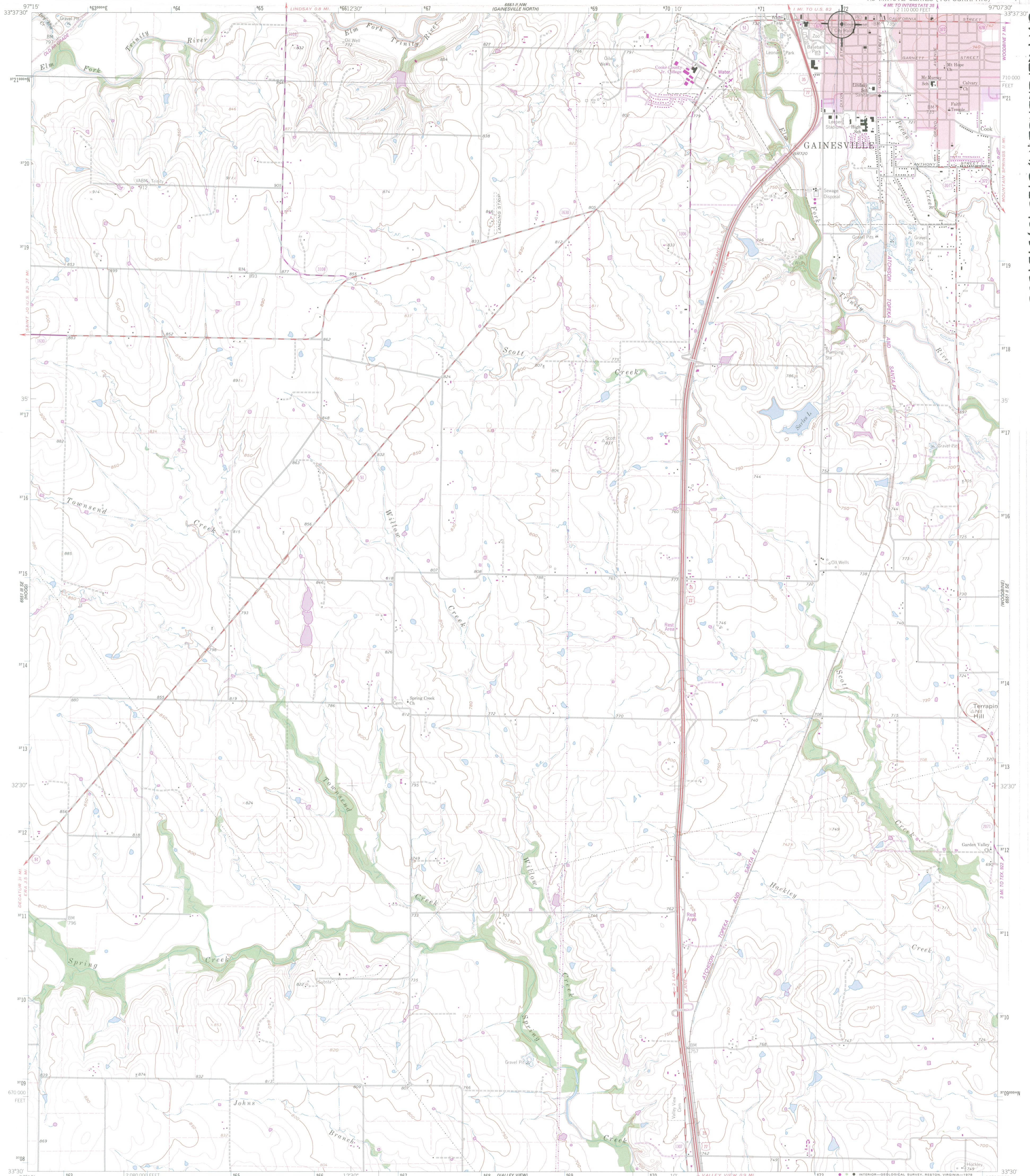
BOB DAVIS Davis, photographer

1988

NEGATIVE WITH PHOTOGRAPHER

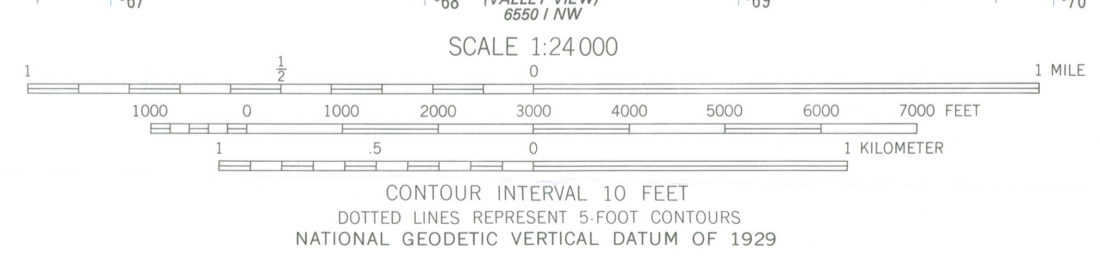
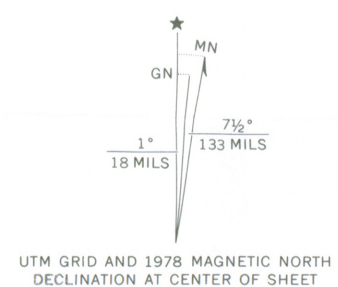
PHOTO 9 OF 9 2, Texas

Engaged column in corridors  
around the rotunda. There are  
16 of these on either side of  
the corridor on the first and  
second floors. This is a detail  
of the top.



COOKE COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
COURTHOUSE SQUARE  
GAINESVILLE COOKE CO. TEXAS  
UTM REFERENCE: 14/672040/3721800

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USC&GS  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1957. Field checked 1960  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system, north central zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 14, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines  
Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs taken 1976. This information not field checked.  
Map edited 1978  
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, all weather, hard surface	Light-duty road, all weather, improved surface
Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface	Unimproved road, fair or dry weather

○ 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

GAINESVILLE SOUTH, TEX.  
N3330-W9707.5/7.5  
1960  
PHOTOREVISED 1978  
AMS 6551 II SW-SERIES V882