

# COURTHOUSE CORNERSTONES

A Quarterly Update of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program

## TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION AWARDS ROUND III GRANTS

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) announced Round III grant recipients of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program at a January 11 quarterly meeting in Houston. Commissioners awarded matching grants totaling approximately \$39.2 million to 14 Texas counties to help preserve their historic courthouses.

Grants were awarded to Archer, Cameron, Denton, Dimmit, Fayette, Goliad, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Lamar, Lavaca, Maverick, Parker, Val Verde and Wheeler counties.

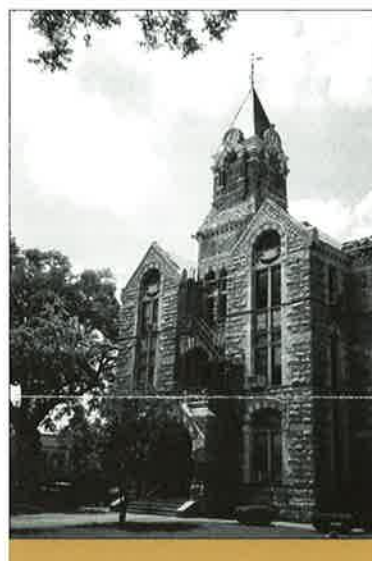
THC commission members awarded the majority of the \$50 million received from the Texas Legislature during the 2001 legislative session. The money will be used for construction and building costs. Like the previous two rounds, the commission will grant the remaining money for courthouses determined to be highly endangered; to complete plans and specifications; or based on other eligibility. THC commissioners requested additional study of courthouse grant applications scoring high in the endangerment category. Inspections of those courthouses will be conducted by THC staff over the next several weeks.

“The THC funded the highest scoring applicants, as we did in

Rounds I and II,” said THC Executive Director Larry Oaks. “The THC also wants to take the time to gather necessary additional information on courthouses scoring high in the endangerment category. Based on those inspections and other eligibility factors, the commission will have its next opportunity to award grants at the April quarterly commission meeting in Abilene.”

The inspections and potential April grant awards are a continuation of Round III of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. Pending additional funding from the Texas Legislature in future legislative sessions, the

— *Continued on page back cover*



**The Fayette County Courthouse  
in La Grange.**

**Peach Festival  
at the Parker  
County Courthouse  
in Weatherford.**



# THC OFFERS SUPPORT WITH COURTHOUSE REDEDICATIONS

Thanks to the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, the new year brings several courthouse rededication celebrations across Texas. The first took place January 5 in Marfa.

The rededication of the 1886 Presidio County Courthouse brought together young and old, neighboring county representatives, Texas Historical Commission (THC) staff and a host of regional residents to admire the restored structure.

The large courthouse dome, visible for miles, is spectacular whether viewing from afar or from the spacious cupola tucked beneath it. A cake with the courthouse designed in icing delighted guests at Presidio County Judge Jerry Agan's open house. The event was held in the judge's chambers as guests strolled the courthouse corridors and courtrooms admiring the finished product. The rededication ceremony, which was to have been held outside, took place in the upstairs courtroom — the West Texas wind competing with speakers for attention.

"Presidio County, only the second to have completed its courthouse restoration, is to be congratulated on a job well done," said THC

Executive Director Larry Oaks who attended the celebration.

Presidio County officials took advantage of the THC's help and support in planning their courthouse rededication ceremony, and the THC encourages other counties to do the same. Counties want to showcase their newly refurbished courthouses and they want to do it right. The THC can help.

The THC offers a packet of guidelines that will help make any courthouse rededication celebration a successful one. A step-by-step "to do" list guides counties through the process — from setting the date to arranging media coverage of the event. The THC provides names and addresses of state officials and THC commissioners for invitation and speakers lists, and large outdoor banners with the county's name to help showcase the event, the courthouse and the program. Podium signs and name tags provided by the THC visually coordinate with the banners.

The rededication ceremony is an important part of a county's success

story, as well as an example of the success of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. These events can be examples for other counties, and eventually, for other states, to demonstrate what a community can do to preserve and protect its historic resources.

The THC has prepared these guidelines and materials in an effort to make each rededication a success. These beautiful courthouses are built to last many lifetimes, but most likely there will be only one rededication event during most Texans' lives — it is important to make it a memorable one.

The next dedication is the Grimes County Courthouse in Anderson on March 2, and planning is well underway. Shackelford County held the first courthouse rededication event in June 2001.

If you were unable to attend the first two dedications, make an effort to be a part of this one. To witness new life being given to these historic structures is to witness the confirmation of a community's future. ★

*To witness new life being given to these historic structures is to witness the confirmation of a community's future.*

**The dome of the newly restored Presidio County Courthouse can be seen for miles.**



## COURTHOUSES AS UNIQUE AS THE REGIONS WHERE THEY RESIDE

The carefully laid bricks and mortar of a courthouse is where the drama of life unfolds — a time capsule containing the details of human existence.

Like a courthouse, the Texas Forest Trail Region is a repository for the history of Texas. Called the “Gateway to Texas,” Caddo Indians, Spanish and French explorers, Anglo pioneers and African Americans helped shape East Texas. Their stories live on through the records of the area’s historic courthouses.

Three courthouses in the Texas Forest Trail Region received grants from the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. J. Riely Gordon and C.G. Lancaster built the Harrison County Courthouse in Marshall in 1899. Currently in the restoration planning stage, this Renaissance Revival beauty features buff-colored brick atop a pink granite base. Since 1965, it has housed the Harrison County Historical Museum and Research Library.

“The courthouse is a symbol of the great past, a symbol of roots,” said Conover Hunt, project coordinator for the courthouse restoration. “Festivals are held on the grounds, politicians speak on the stairs, outdoor music festivals and parades are held here. We also see the courthouse restoration as the beginning of a major revitalization of downtown.”

William H. Wilson designed the 1884 Red River County Courthouse in Clarksville in the Renaissance Revival style with Second Empire details. Builders recently discovered the quarry that supplied stone for the original courthouse.

“The people of Red River County saw the courthouse as a strong symbol for the community and rallied behind it,” said Larry, Irsik, principal, ARCHITEXAS, who started working on the courthouse in 1998. “Even though they were aware of the problems, they felt it was a treasure they needed to bring back.”

Contractors Martin and Moody built the Newton County Courthouse in 1902. It is reminiscent of the 19th-century Second Empire style. Before the tragic courthouse fire in 2000, the three-story brick building featured a truncated clock tower and a mansard roof. For Bonnie Smith of the Newton County Historical Commission, memories of the courthouse are inextricably tied to her life.

“My roots run very, very deep here. I can recall learning to skate around the courthouse square. It was the only paved sidewalk in town,” said Smith. “The night the courthouse burned, I was unable to stay and watch it. I couldn’t. I knew then we were in for a tragedy.”

The Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program is not just about replacing bricks. It is also about restoring what is special and unique about Texas — its culture, history and heritage. Next time you are driving the Texas Forest Trail Region, stop in and visit one of these Texas treasures. ★

*Historic courthouses in the different regions of Texas will be a regular feature in upcoming Courthouse Cornerstones.*

## COMMON COURTHOUSE QUESTIONS

### **Q: Restoration vs. preservation — which is more appropriate?**

A. Either can be an appropriate method for treatment of historic properties depending on the condition of and knowledge of the development of any particular building, as well as the desires of the property owner.

When a building is “restored” it is returned to its former appearance and grandeur as accurately as possible. Later intrusions such as suspended ceilings or aluminum windows are completely removed and missing features like clock towers are reconstructed. The goal of a restoration is to present the building exactly as it was at a particular point in time while all modern necessities for air conditioning, lighting and handicapped access are hidden as much as possible.

“Preservation” is a strategy intended to ensure a building’s survival. If intact historic features are present, they should not be altered. However, the maintenance and repair of all existing components, even if they are unsympathetic, is the overall objective.

### **Q: Do building alterations have architectural merit if they do not “restore” a property to its former appearance?**

A: Regrettably, alterations to historic buildings, particularly those made in the ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘70s, often have little architectural merit. When these “improvements” are removed, the historic character and integrity of the property once again becomes visible. This public benefit is recognized in the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program’s scoring criteria, which gives greater weight to a proposal for a restoration project than a preservation project. ★

**Did you know? Only one percent of the \$50 million allocated for the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program each biennium goes to administrative costs.**



TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

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## HELP SAVE OUR HISTORIC COURTHOUSES!

Shown above: Bexar County Courthouse  
Illustrated by Larry Bridges, 800/398-8419

— Continued from front cover

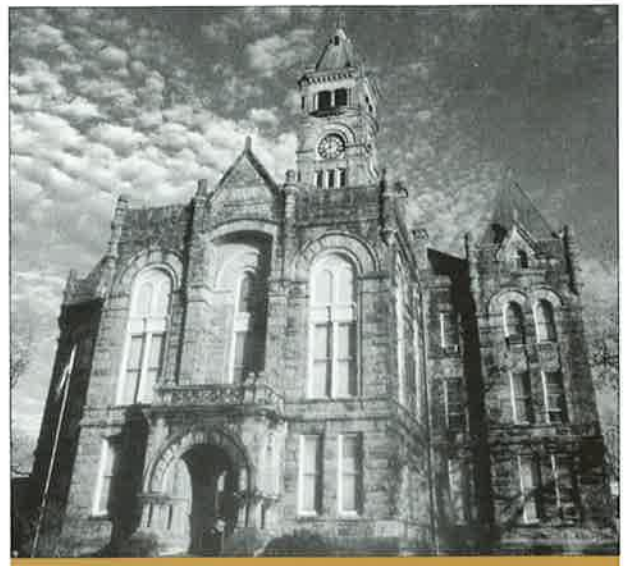
THC plans to continue the program with several more rounds of grant opportunities.

“This program is truly evolving,” said THC Architecture Division Director Stan Graves. “Counties that previously applied are learning how they can improve their scores. First-time applicants see the success and progress other counties are experiencing. Our goal is to restore each and every one of the state’s historic courthouses to their former glory.”

A total of 83 counties applied for grant money in Round III, requesting approximately \$195 million in assistance to preserve and restore their historic courthouses. Nine of the counties were first-time applicants, 25 counties were automatically rolled over from Round II with no changes to their application and 49 counties from Round II revised their applications for reconsideration.

In Round I, 16 counties received \$42.7 million of the original \$50 million allotment from the legislature. The remaining money was rolled over into Round II to help counties develop plans and specifications and for courthouses determined to be highly endangered.

“The growing interest and understanding of this important preservation program benefits all Texans,” said THC Chair John L. Nau, III. “Communities across Texas are beginning to see the potential benefits of preserving their historic resources. Other states are looking to Texas to see how it’s done. These counties are pioneers in preservation.” ★



Lavaca County Courthouse in Hallettsville.

*Among the most significant and recognized collections of historic buildings in Texas are its historic county courthouses.*