

# COURTHOUSE CORNERSTONES

A Quarterly Update of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program

## READ ALL ABOUT IT: COURTHOUSE RE-DEDICATED!

Like an old black and white movie clip, a young man strides up and down the sidewalk waving newspapers and yelling “Extra! Extra! Read all about it: The courthouse is re-dedicated!” This extra 30-page special section of the *Waxahachie Daily Light*, *Midlothian Mirror* and *Ennis Journal* discusses the history of the Ellis County Courthouse and its restoration, as well as offers congratulatory notes from local merchants. Most events associated with the re-dedication of the Ellis County Courthouse exude an old-fashioned, small-town charm.

The two-day celebration began on Friday, Oct. 4, 2002 with a ceremonial commissioner’s court meeting in the beautifully restored district courtroom.

“You have clearly set the standard and raised the bar for courthouses all across the state,” said THC Chair John L. Nau, III, in remarks delivered in the packed courtroom. Texas First Lady Anita Perry received a standing ovation after delivering the keynote address.

— *Continues on page 2*



*The Ellis County Courthouse in Waxahachie has always been a popular gathering place, both in 1902 when the Ringling Brothers Circus came to town, and for the courthouse re-dedication Oct. 4, 2002.*



— Read All About It, continued from page 1

“This turnout is an indication of the spirit and determination of Ellis County,” said Perry. “It fills my heart with pride to be a Texan — think of the children who will hear the stories of this courtroom.”

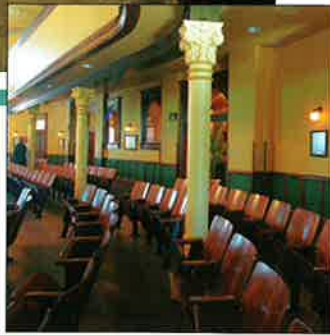
Designed by noted architect James Riely Gordon, the restoration of the Ellis County Courthouse was like solving a puzzle. Ellis County Judge Al Cornelius talks about difficulties encountered in restoring portions of the Pecos red sandstone exterior, and the dangers to passersby as pieces often tumbled to the ground.

He smiles when sharing the fables of the faces perched atop the pillars of the courthouse exterior. Cornelius promised voters a functioning courthouse that was historically accurate when he was elected to office, and as he steps down in January, he leaves a legacy behind.

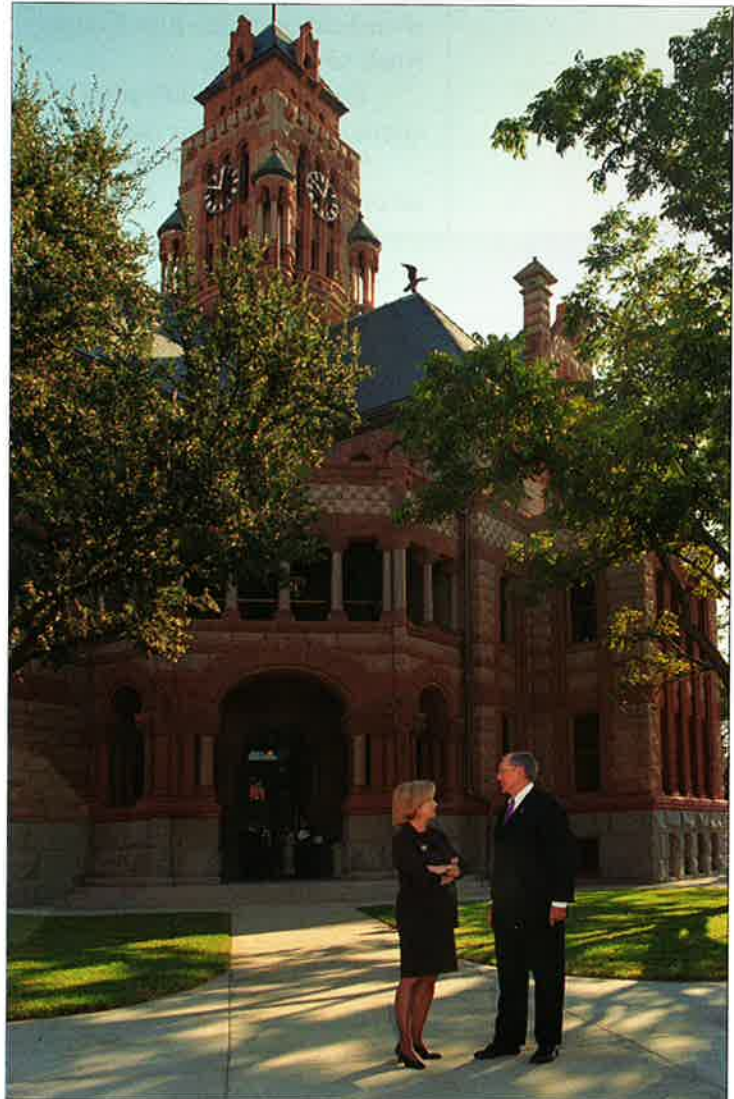
History repeats itself. As the *Waxahachie Daily Light* reported in 1887, “The people of Ellis County would long talk of the celebration in Waxahachie, the day the cornerstone for the new county courthouse was laid.” People across the state will talk about this dedication for a long time, too. ★



Stone carved faces on the Ellis County Courthouse set it apart from any others in Texas.



Texas First Lady Anita Perry and THC Chair John L. Nau, III visit in front of the Ellis County Courthouse before the re-dedication ceremony.



## COMMON COURTHOUSE QUESTIONS

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**Q: If we make repairs to our courthouse now, how will these expenditures be included as match money?**

A: Any capital expenditures incurred by a county on work approved by the Texas Historical Commission during a 30-month period prior to the application round can be used as a match. The expenditures may be applied to any round in which the county participates.

**Q: Our courthouse originally featured window treatments and courtroom furnishings. Would the restoration or replication of these features be an eligible expense in this program?**

A: Although such items were not considered eligible expenses in the first grant round, they are important historical and architectural features of the building and *will* be eligible expenses for reimbursement in future rounds of the program.

**Q: Our courthouse is generally in fine shape but we would like to make some alterations and update equipment. Does this program require we fully restore our courthouse?**

A: No, the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program does not require the full restoration of a courthouse. However, those that do intend to return their courthouse to its historic appearance will typically receive more points. Projects with the most points receive top priority.

**Q: Our county is undecided about whether we want a full restoration or a limited rehabilitation project. Can we develop a master plan before we commit to a particular course of action?**

A: In cases where the county is undecided regarding the extent of restoration, a master plan can be developed with both a rehabilitation and restoration phase. This ensures that the necessary master plan is complete at the time of the grant application. The county can then make an informed decision whether to pursue funding for a full restoration or a more limited rehabilitation.

**Q: Does “full restoration” mean we have to restore everything to its historic appearance?**

A: No, generally a “full restoration” is limited to historic public spaces, such as the exterior, courtrooms and hallways. Secondary spaces receive varying degrees of restoration or rehabilitation, depending on functional requirements. The Texas Historical Commission supports use of these buildings as working courthouses and helps counties achieve this in a manner that maintains the building’s historic character. ★

## THE FUTURE OF THE COURTHOUSE PROGRAM

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Contingent on funding from the 2003 legislative session, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) will continue to help finance county courthouse restoration projects. The legislative appropriation request for the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program for the biennium is a level request of \$50 million to fund approximately 16 additional courthouse projects. The Texas Legislature created the program in 1999 with an initial appropriation of \$50 million. An additional \$50 million allocation came from the 77th Legislature after the program proved to be a success.

Since 2000, the THC has awarded more than \$98 million to 46 courthouses for full and partial restorations, planning and stabilization, and to address emergency situations. The THC has received 120 master plans, the first step required in the assistance process. Of those 120 plans, 104 were approved. Approximately \$214 million in state funds is the current estimated need to restore courthouses that have submitted approved master plans. Nearly 125 historic county courthouses still need to complete the required master plan process in coming years.

The urgent need to preserve Texas’ historic courthouses is evident, as is Texans’ enthusiasm for the program. There are still more than 185 nationally recognized historic courthouses across the state that could benefit from the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program.



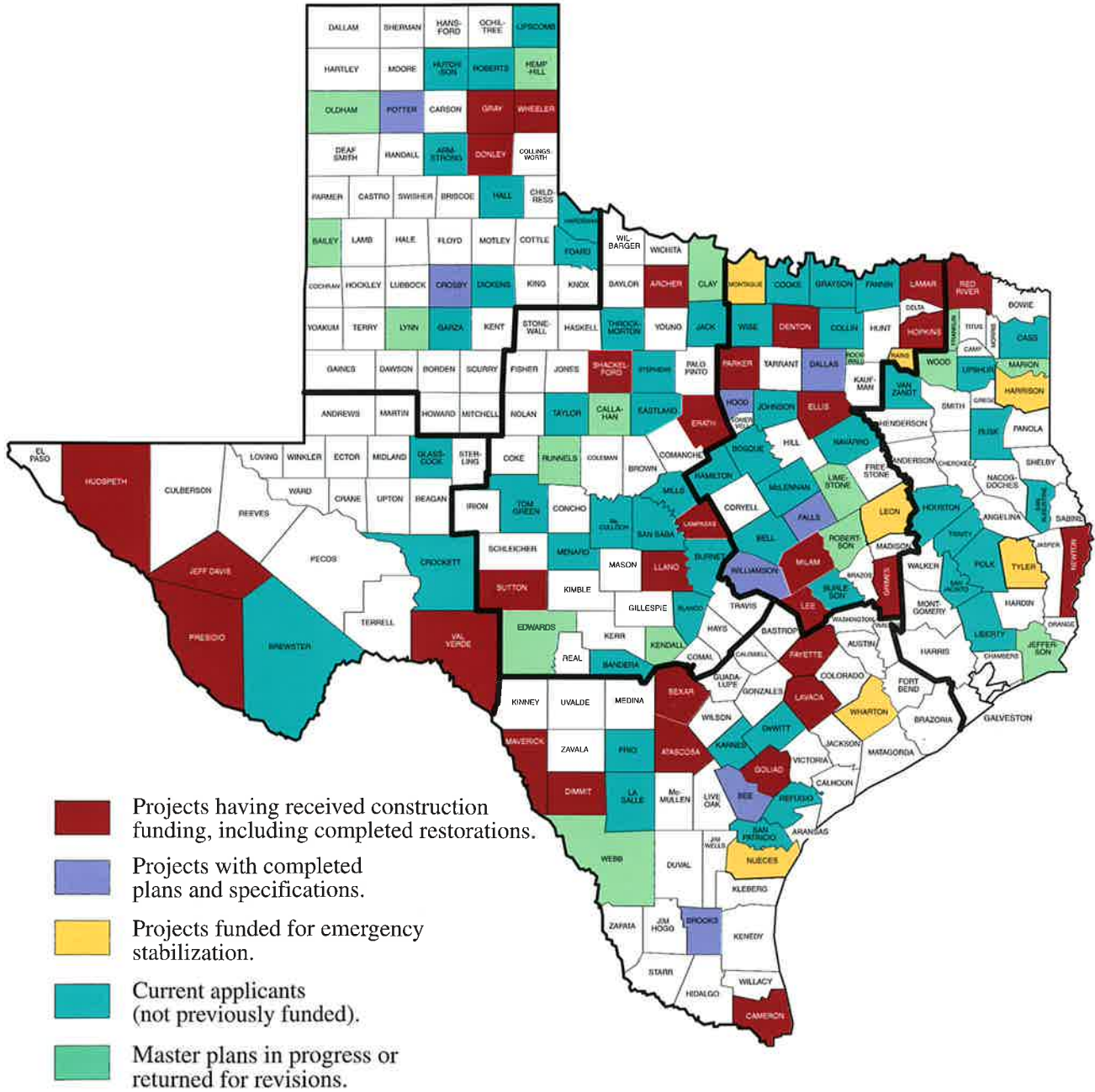
*Llano County Courthouse,  
Llano*

F. Lawrence Oaks  
Executive Director  
Texas Historical Commission

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**County representatives interested in applying for future funding should call 512/463-6094 or visit [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us).**

# TEXAS HISTORIC COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION PROGRAM



- Projects having received construction funding, including completed restorations.
- Projects with completed plans and specifications.
- Projects funded for emergency stabilization.
- Current applicants (not previously funded).
- Master plans in progress or returned for revisions.

Revised January 2003

# PARTNERS IN PRESERVATION

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The Texas Historical Commission (THC) partners with public and private organizations to help preserve the state's architectural heritage. Without the assistance of The National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Texas, and the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program would have greater difficulty in achieving its goals.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation works to save historic places in Texas through direct intervention in preservation projects, technical assistance and advocacy. In 1998, the National Trust listed Texas' historic courthouses on America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. It was the first time they chose 225 buildings to represent one of the 11 most endangered structures in America.

Preservation Texas is a private, nonprofit membership organization that is dedicated to being a full-service statewide preservation group. Founded in 1985 by volunteers, the group builds partnerships between government and nonprofits. Members include individuals, government agencies and local nonprofit organizations. Preservation Texas hosted its Annual Preservation Day in Austin in February 2001, and will again Feb. 25, 2003, to advocate funding for the THC's Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program.

"Preservation Texas educates through conferences and seminars, advocates for local, state and national policies, and collaborates through peer groups and associations with other organizations to preserve historic buildings in Texas," explained Preservation Texas Executive Director Elizabeth Ann Gates.

Preservation Texas nominated Texas' 225 historic courthouses for the National Trust's America's 11 Most Endangered Places. In 1997 Gov. George W. Bush requested action and the legislature responded by awarding \$50 million for courthouse restoration and creation of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. The 77th Texas Legislature awarded an additional \$50 million in the following session.



*Milam County Courthouse, Cameron*

The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation is the state regulatory agency responsible for enforcing accessibility standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Architectural Barriers Division of the agency mandates accessibility in publicly and privately funded buildings and facilities. In an important partnership with the THC, a Memorandum of Understanding between the two state agencies streamlines the review and approval process for Texas' qualifying historic courthouses. At the same time, the agreement ensures a project achieves maximum accessibility without threatening or destroying the historic significance of the state's historic courthouses.

Thanks to these important preservation partners, the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program is a successful example for other states of how to preserve historic architectural resources. ★



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*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

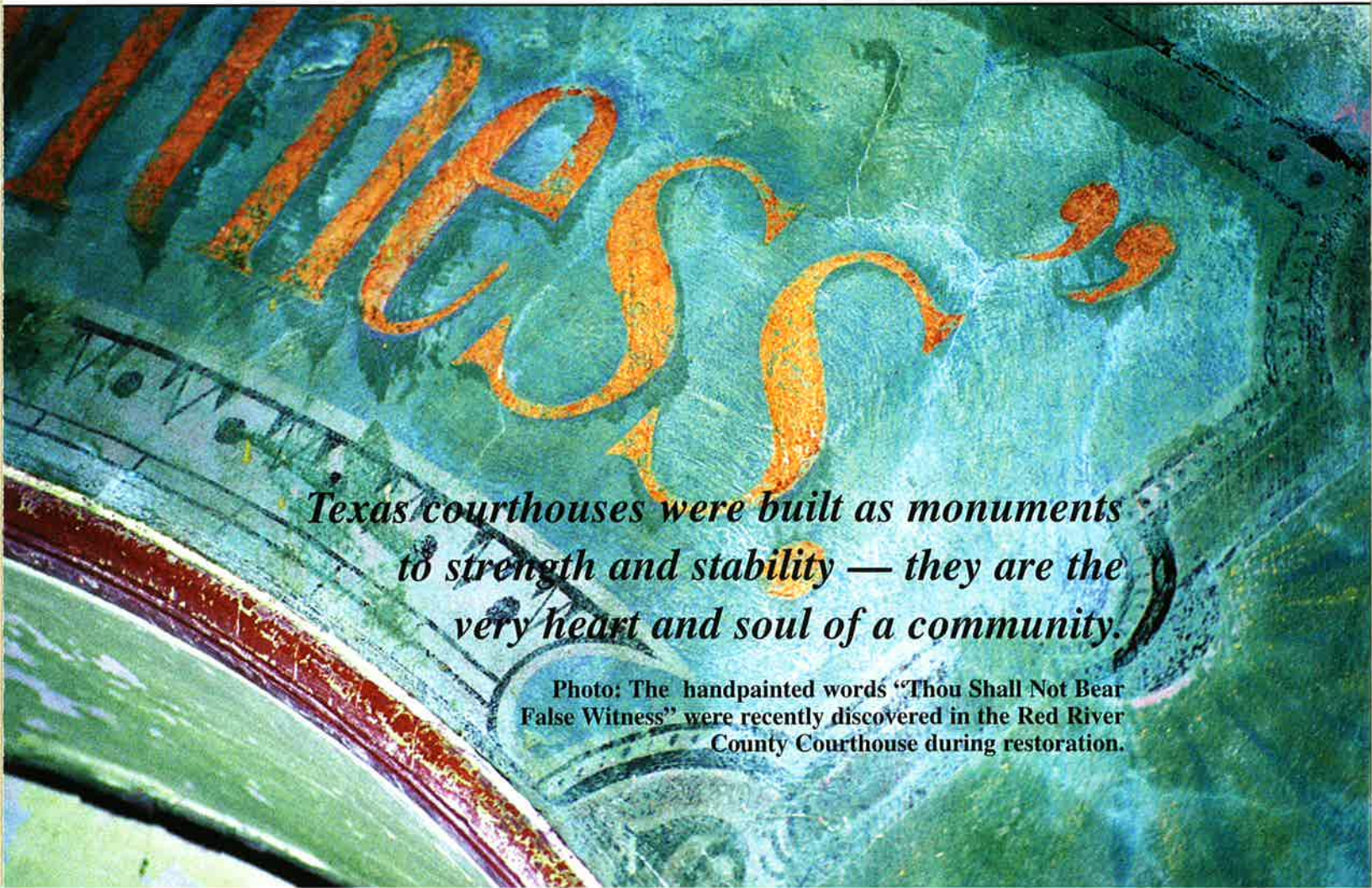
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HELP SAVE OUR  
HISTORIC  
COURTHOUSES!

*Above: Presidio County Courthouse, Marfa, 1887*



*Texas courthouses were built as monuments  
to strength and stability — they are the  
very heart and soul of a community.*

Photo: The handpainted words "Thou Shall Not Bear False Witness" were recently discovered in the Red River County Courthouse during restoration.