

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**1. Name of Property**

Historic Name: Jack County Courthouse

Other name/site number: NA

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 100 N. Main Street

City or town: Jacksboro

State: Texas

County: Jack

Not for publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ localApplicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D_____
Signature of certifying official / Title

State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal GovernmentIn my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria._____
Signature of commenting or other official_____
Date_____
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register☐ determined eligible for the National Register☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.☐ removed from the National Register☐ other, explain: __________
Signature of the Keeper_____
Date of Action

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

	Private
X	Public - Local
	Public - State
	Public - Federal

Category of Property

X	building(s)
	district
	site
	structure
	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	2	objects
2	2	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: Government: courthouse

Current Functions: Government: courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification: Modern Movement: Modern Classical

Principal Exterior Materials: STONE/limestone, marble

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7-6 through 7-9)

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

X	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X	C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Architecture, Government

Period of Significance: 1940-1962

Significant Dates: 1940

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: Voelker & Dixon, architects; Eckert-Fair Construction, Builder/Contractor

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8-10 through 8-15)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 9-16)

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 (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: approximately 5.7 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 33.218723 Longitude: -98.157967

Verbal Boundary Description: A 5.7 acre square tract of land located at the center of the Original Plat for the City of Jacksboro, recorded at Volume E3, Page 520 of the Jack County Records of Jack County, Texas.

Boundary Justification: Nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.

11. Form Prepared By

Name / title: Gregory Smith, National Register Coordinator, with sections adapted from the Jack County Courthouse Master Plan by Tom Malone Architects, Inc.

Organization: Texas Historical Commission

Street & number: PO Box 12276

City: Austin

State: Texas

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Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheet Map-17)

Additional items (see continuation sheets Figure-18 through Figure-20)

Photographs (see continuation sheet Photo-5)

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Jack County Courthouse
Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas
Photographed by Gregory Smith
April 2012

Photo 1
West elevation
Camera facing east

Photo 2
West elevation parapet detail
Camera facing east

Photo 3
South elevation
Camera facing northeast

Photo 4
Southeast oblique
Camera facing northwest

Photo 5
North elevation
Camera facing south

Photo 6
West vestibule, ceiling molding and light
Camera facing south

Photo 7
Main lobby and grand staircase, from vestibule
Camera facing east

Photo 8
Lobby light fixture with fasces and eagles
Camera facing northeast

Photo 9
South corridor, first floor, facing commissioners' court room
Camera facing south

Photo 10
North corridor, first floor, cashiers' windows.
Camera facing west

Photo 11
First floor, grand staircase
Camera facing southeast

Photo 12
Second floor, commissioners' court room
Camera facing west

Photo 13
Commissioners court room, ceiling detail above bench
Camera facing southwest

Photo 14
Commissioners' court room, facing east from bench
Camera facing east

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Description

The Jack County Courthouse is centered on a square city block in Jacksboro, a north central Texas city approximately 65 miles northwest of Fort Worth. Designed in 1939 by the Wichita Falls firm Voelcker & Dixon, and completed in 1940, the three-story (with basement), cast-in-place concrete structure is sheathed in Texas limestone with marble spandrels. The building is modernistic in its block massing and stylized details, and stands as a rich example of the Modern Classical Style, a contemporary interpretation of classical design, with fluted pilasters separating recessed vertically ranked window and spandrel bays, and an entablature with low relief sculpture. The rich interior spaces and finishes are largely intact, including the original decorative light fixtures, stone and wood paneled wall veneers, decorative moldings, door hardware, duct covers, and aluminum cashier window screens. The courthouse exterior and interior retain a very high degree of architectural integrity.

Setting

The Jack County Courthouse is in the heart of Jacksboro, Texas, near the geographic center of Jack County. The terrain of the commercial district is relatively flat, and the streets are laid out in an irregular rectangular grid (a modified Shelbyville plan). Sidewalks lead to the courthouse's four central entrances. A low berm surrounding the courthouse partially covers the ground floor of the building. The courthouse square is open and spacious, covered with wide expanses of grass, and a few scattered trees. The primary west side of the square is distinguished by a wide sidewalk leading to the entrance, featuring two paths separated by a planting bed with grassy, low-profile shrubs, a flagpole, and an illuminated Lions Club-sponsored signboard that provides for the temporary display of community-interest messages. A tall illuminated sign to south of the sidewalk (possibly a repurposed gas station sign) honors the Jacksboro High School Tigers football team, state AA division champions in 1962 and 1971. These two signs are large in scale and are counted as two noncontributing objects. Other objects on the west lawn include a four-tiered martin house on a metal pole on the south side, and the cornerstone and bell from the former courthouse on the northwest corner of the lawn (placed c. 1967). A 1948 veterans memorial is on the southwest corner of the lawn. These resources are small in scale and are not counted apart from the courthouse landscape (which constitutes one contributing site).

General Characteristics

The Jack County Courthouse exhibits characteristics of the Modern Classical style, with simplified and abstract ornament and rectangular massing. The building's long axis runs north to south, and the building's principal entry faces west. The courthouse has a modified rectangular footprint, with the central five bays of the east side slightly recessed, forming a U-shaped plan. The building features four levels (three floors on a raised basement, hereafter referred to as the ground floor), with a total floor area of 34,376 square feet. The ground floor is approximately two feet below the nominal grade. The concrete frame structure with concrete decks is clad in Cordova Cream limestone with metal casement windows and marble spandrels. Stone belt courses, sills, and thresholds are indicated on the original plans as "hard limestone," and may be of Leuders stone.

From a distance, the courthouse is austere and understated, with a boxy profile and shallow relief sculpture. The overall appearance is that of a simplified temple, with pilasters serving as columns separating dark vertical bands of recessed casement windows and dark marble spandrels, which together read as voids and reinforce the building's verticality. The entablature is also simplified, with finely-detailed carvings. The fluted pilasters lack capitals, and the face edges of the flutes are flush with the tall stone entablature above. Doors at the building entries are hollow bronze, topped with metal ornamentation on the west side and carved limestone on the east side. The courthouse has a flat roof, with a single-story utility penthouse, only visible from the ground on the east side.

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

West Elevation

The primary elevation on the west side is symmetrically composed of seven narrow bays between two slightly projecting pavilions. The central bays are separated by limestone pilasters and each features three casement windows corresponding to the three upper floors of the courthouse, with dark marble spandrels. Some of the windows have been modified to accommodate small air conditioning units. The eight center pilasters support a simplified entablature, with bands of repeating stylized semicircular floral carvings above and below the frieze. The frieze identifies the building as the "Jack County Courthouse" with the incised words centered between rectangular panels with sculpted eagles. Each pavilion features a vertical ribbon of three windows with marble spandrels, similar to those in the central bays, topped by a sculpted panel at the entablature level featuring a fasces set in a field of scrolls. Access into the building is primarily through the west entry in the three central bays via a half-flight of monumental stairs, flanked by stone head walls. Each of the three central bays features an inset pair of bronze doors, topped by a single-light fixed transom with a decorative geometric-patterned bronze grill. A decorative bronze boxed awning with chamfered corners projects slightly above the doors in each bay.

East Elevation

The east elevation is also symmetrical, but features a different composition than the primary west façade, with seven narrow bays inset between two larger pavilions, each with three bays of stacked vertical windows. The pavilions project far enough to give the building a modified U-plan. The entrance is at ground level, featuring a pair of dark metal full-light doors under a large fixed transom covered by a decorative grille with a geometric pattern. The doorway is inset and framed by limestone pilasters topped by a carved lintel. The lintel features square panels positioned over the pilasters with stylized scrolls and acanthus plants, while the central panel features a carving of an open book flanked by the scales of justice in a field of scrolls. Placed on either side of the lintel are matching cylindrical aluminum light standards. The central lintel at the parapet level is relatively plain, featuring a narrow band of incised fluting at the top. The northern pavilion features windows that correspond to the three upper floors of the courthouse, while the southern pavilion bays feature taller windows on top, corresponding to the double height of the courtroom. Each pavilion bay is topped by a panel with a vertical decorative carving, placed between horizontal ribbons of dentils (below) and incised fluting (above). The pilasters are not fluted, and rise to the parapet without supporting a lintel.

South and North Elevations

The south and north elevations are on the narrow sides of the courthouse, and are similarly detailed. Both feature seven recessed window bays with dark marble spandrels. Each window bay is topped by the same carved panel design used on the eastern pavilions. The pilasters are not fluted, and each has a single step setback near the windows. As seen in the east side pavilions, each pilaster continues to the parapet level with supporting a lintel. Some of the windows have been modified by the addition of small air conditioning units. Both of the short elevations feature central doorways that lead to the ground level, at the bottom of half-flight staircases. The southern facade has a variety of utility boxes and conduit lines attached, and an irregular window pattern on the upper two floors, featuring tall windows in the five eastern bays which correspond to the double-height courtroom. The ground level doorway on the north side is accessed by a half-flight of stairs descending from ground level, as well as a concrete accessibility ramp with a railing.

Interior Plan & Features

Each floor features rooms of various sizes along a north-south corridor, accessed primarily by a grand staircase on the east side. The building houses two courtrooms (the Commissioners Court on the first floor, and the District

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Courtroom on the second floor), and numerous offices on all four floors. The county jail originally occupied the top floor, including control and dispatch desk, offices, a low-security dormitory, and a higher security cell area. These functions have been moved to a new jail building.

The limited palette and delicate carvings of the courthouse exterior belies a colorful and richly finished interior, which retains a very high degree of integrity. Virtually all original fixtures and finishes are unchanged from the time of construction, including: terrazzo floors incorporating a map of Jack County just inside the west main entry; marble foyer walls and grand staircase railing; raised relief plaster moldings at the ceilings in the corridors, courtrooms and in the county judge's office; original wood paneling in the district courtroom; and wood judges benches, witness stands, attorneys tables and jury boxes. Decorative aluminum ceiling and pendant lights function throughout the main public spaces of the building. On the first and second floors, the light fixtures feature stylized fasces and eagles. The courthouse also features the original roped and counter-weighted Otis elevator, which is in good working condition.

The main entrance leads to a small marble-walled vestibule with a terrazzo floor. On the left wall are two dedication plaques: the upper one identifies the courthouse as a product of the Federal Works Agency, while the larger lower plaque identifies various county officials, the architects, and the contractor. The side walls also feature large radiator vents near the floor, with decorative metal grilles. The foyer ceiling, like that found in the rest of the first floor lobby and corridors, features ornate multicolored plaster molding with strings of repeating geometric and floral patterns, typical of Art Deco design. Three pairs of wooden doors with transoms lead to the foyer, which is distinguished by a large multicolored terrazzo map of Jack County as it existed in 1939, with four square county districts meeting in the center of a square county, with highways, railroads, rivers, and other features delineated by polished aluminum and brass. The foyer and the adjacent corridor are similarly detailed with golden marble walls accented with fluted pilasters at the corners, and ornate plaster molding of the style found in the vestibule. The grand staircase dominates the east wall of the lobby. Down the corridor to the north is the original tax assessor and collector's office, a large room occupying the northeast quadrant of the floor. Five cashier windows (no longer used) on the west side of the corridor feature original decorative aluminum grilles. The elevator, with hand-painted decorations on the doors, is across the corridor to the east. The commissioners' courtroom is at the far south end of the corridor, and features the original oak furniture, and patterned plaster ceiling. The corridor floor is rubber tile set in a checkerboard pattern. Other offices on the first floor were originally designated for use by the sheriff, school superintendent, county auditor, county clerk, and county judge, and most feature unadorned plaster walls and ceilings, with wood molding.

The basement is organized along a long corridor with exits at either end, featuring an assortment of offices, bathrooms, and utility rooms. The original plans indicated separate restrooms for whites and African-Americans, offices of the justice of the peace, constable, farm agent, home agent, relief office, county clerk's vault, a small kitchen, and an assembly room. The corridor is simpler than that of the first floor, with a marble wainscot, open single-bulb ceiling fixtures, and an assortment of paneled oak and glass doors in various configurations, with transoms and steel hardware with a clean modernistic design.

The second floor features a much shorter corridor than the two lower floors, as the plan is dominated by a large district courtroom to the south, and a collection of smaller offices to the west and north, some set two-deep from the corridor. These offices housed the grand jury, grand jury witnesses, county engineer, district attorney, county attorney, county surveyor, court reporter, district judge, district court witnesses, district court jury, and janitor. The corridor features a checkered linoleum floor, and the same marble walls, plaster ceiling molding, and decorative aluminum light fixtures found on the first floor.

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The 1,715-square-foot district courtroom and adjacent jury room and judge's chamber occupy the southern third of the second floor. The double-height courtroom walls are lined with oak paneling, per the finish schedule on the historic plans. The paneling is carved to simulate pilasters flanking the public entrance and windows. Other sections of paneling are beaded. Decorative molding at the ceiling edge is similar to the geometric patterns found in the first floor lobby and corridor, while the patterned and painted plaster ceiling above the bench features an intricate zigzag motif filled with acanthus, scrolls, and floral motifs. The walls behind the bench are chamfered, perhaps to direct attention to the court proceedings, and also to allow for added restroom space for the jury room and judge's chamber. The courtroom features tall windows on the east and south side, and is also lit by a series of aluminum pendant lights with large disk shades, which serve the dual purpose of reflecting light up to the ceiling and also throughout the room. The original oak furnishings include the judge's bench, witness stand, clerk's table, and jury boxes in both courtrooms.

The third floor jail retains the original steel riveted plat cells with the original operation mechanisms in place. The jail is no longer in use.

Summary of Alternations and Integrity

Modifications to the courthouse are limited, and most are the result of cumulative changes made to address changing expectations of comfort in a public building, while other modification reflect the changing way of conducting county business. For example, the cashier windows at the tax assessor's office are intact, but are no longer used. The ending of segregation and the greater awareness of the needs of all courthouse patrons led to the conversion of the Negro restrooms in the basement to eventually become handicapped-accessible facilities, with an entrance ramp leading to the north door of the courthouse. Although air conditioning has been introduced to the courthouse in an incremental manner, the original ceilings of the most significant public spaces have never been covered, but small irregularly-placed window units detract from each façade. Other changes include the addition of a small rough-hewn limestone smokers' pavilion and an intrusive CMU transformer shed flanking the east entrance. In 2000, Tom Malone Architects, Inc. of Fort Worth prepared a two-volume preservation master plan for the Jack County Courthouse. In 2011, under guidance of the Texas Historical Commission, the county replaced the roof, utilizing federal stimulus funding. The marble spandrels, which had been painted in 1984, were also removed, cleaned, and reattached to the building. The limestone façade was also gently cleaned.¹

Compared to other unrestored courthouses in Texas, the level of integrity of the Jack County Courthouse is remarkable. The building's exterior and interior retains a high degree of design, materials, feeling, and workmanship. The courthouse's most important architectural features, including its massing and its ornamentation, remain unchanged. Like the exterior, the interior of the courthouse also retains a high degree of integrity, reinforcing the building's continuous significance to the community. Furthermore, the Jack County Courthouse retains its integrity of location and association, having served the county and its communities without interruption since its completion in 1940.

¹ www.jackcountycourthouse.restoration.blogspot.com. Article posed July 23, 2011 – September 16, 2011.

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Statement of Significance

The Jack County Courthouse has served as the center of county government since 1940. In 1938 the county received a grant from the federal Public Works Administration to construct a new judicial building, supplementing local bond funding. Architectural firm Voelcker & Dixon of Wichita Falls, Texas, produced a design that followed contemporary trends, blending traditional elements from classical architecture with popular modernistic forms, ornamentation, fixtures, and finishes, resulting in a richly textured and finely-detailed building. The courthouse acts as the center of all upper levels of government in Jack County by providing not only the administration of law but government record storage, and a center of elections and their administration, and until recently, the county jail was housed on the 3rd floor. For its decades of service as the center of Jack County government, the courthouse is nominated under Criterion A in the area of Government at the local level of significance. It is also nominated under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance as an excellent example of Texas's early modern courthouses.

Jack County Historic Overview²

Jack County is bordered by Clay, Archer, and Montague counties to the north, Young County to the west, Palo Pinto and Parker counties to the south, and Wise County to the east. Before Anglo settlement, Jack County served as a borderland between the Caddo to the east and the Comanches to the west. The area of Jack County was included in the Texan Emigration and Land Company lands, more commonly known as the Peters Colony. Anglo settlers began arriving in the mid-1850s, and by 1856 the first settlement, Keechi, was established. Most early settlers arrived from the middle Southern states, many by way of Smith County or other parts of Texas. The Texas legislature approved the establishment of the county in August 1856, naming it for William H. and Patrick C. Jack, participants in the Texas Revolution. Centrally-located Mesquiteville (later renamed Jacksboro) was designated county seat in 1858. The Butterfield Overland Mail served the town until 1861, and regular postal service began in 1859.

Jack County never developed a plantation economy, although thirty-seven slaves lived in the county immediately prior to the Civil War. The earliest newspaper in the county (the *Whiteman*, established in 1860) advocated for secession, but county residents voted 76 to 14 against it in February 1861. Jacksboro was the most westward settlement in Texas after the Civil War, although it had been devastated by Indian raids and most of the buildings were in ruins. Although federal troops returned to the area after the war, Indian raids continued. In July 1866, initial elements of the 6th US Cavalry came to Jack County, and bivouacked on the then-empty town square where the courthouse now stands. The United States Army established nearby Fort Richardson on Lost Creek in 1868. It was the northernmost Texas frontier fort built to protect pioneers against Indian raids, and the anchor of a line of fortifications that included Fort Griffin and Fort Concho. The presence of Fort Richardson just south of Jacksboro made the area safer for Anglo settlers and the population increased to several hundred. After the Warren Wagon Train Raid of May 18, 1871, in neighboring Young County, chiefs Satanta and Big Tree were taken to Jacksboro for trial and sentenced to be executed.³ The sentence was commuted to life imprisonment for fear of further Indian uprisings. After the threat of Indian attacks diminished in the mid-1870s, the county's population rapidly increased. By 1880 the number of residents was 6,629, more than ten times what it had been only a decade before, and by 1890 the population had grown to 9,740. The Chicago, Rock Island and Texas Railway, which reached Jacksboro in

² Partially adapted from Robert Wayne McDaniel, "JACK COUNTY," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcj01>), accessed July 19, 2012.

³ The young prosecutor in the trial, S.W.T. Lanham, later served as Governor of Texas from 1903 to 1907 and to the U.S. House of Representatives for most of the period of 1880 to 1903. He was the last Confederate veteran elected Governor.

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

August 1898, brought additional growth and provided important access to markets outside the county. The Gulf, Texas, and Western Railroad reached Jacksboro in 1910.

Cattle ranching dominated the county's economy during its early years, with the first cattle drive north made in 1866. By 1890 the cattle population was 68,756. Large-scale farming began after the Civil War, dominated by corn, with 115,761 bushels harvested in 1880 and 663,490 bushels in 1900. Oats and wheat were introduced in the late 1800s, and by 1920 Jack County accounted for large grain production (1920 yields included 498,250 bushels of oats, 249,643 bushels of corn, and 351,819 bushels of wheat). Despite the growth of crop farming, livestock continued to play an important role in the county's economic life, with continued production of cattle, chicken, and eggs throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. The 1923 discovery of oil near Bryson (approximately 14 west of Jacksboro) attracted numerous oilfield workers, but the county population overall fell from its high of 11,817 in 1910 to 9,046 in 1930. Oil income helped some farmers to survive the Great Depression, but many others were forced to sell their land and equipment. Between 1940 and 1990 the number of residents fell from 10,206 to 6,981. The 2010 population was 9,028.

Early Jack County Courthouses⁴

The present courthouse is the fourth such building to serve Jack County. Very little is known about the first two. The initial courthouse was established in 1858 in an existing building located on the west side of the Jacksboro town square. The simple wooden building was remodeled for its new community purpose at the cost of \$800. The first jail was built in 1860. Records indicate that the county began to raise funds for a new courthouse in 1868. Completed on the public square in 1871, the sandstone courthouse was the site of the historic Satanta and Big Tree trial that same year, an event that still figures prominently in county lore.

By 1884, county officials began to discuss the need for a new courthouse, and the 1885 report of the grand jury to the Hon. B.F. Williams indicates that the current building was "totally unfit for the purpose for which it is used, that pile of rubbish in the center of our public square usually designated the Court House." The report cited unfavorable winter temperatures within the building, foundation failure, and cracking walls. Furthermore, the report asserted that the building was:

odious to the sight, uncomfortable to the occupants, a disgrace to our town and county, and reminds one more of a bat cave rather than a temple of justice. For one to be satisfied with the present structure would be for him to equalize himself in the intellectual capacity with the detestable tumbler that still rolls the same ball, composed of the same matter, and in the same manner as his illustrious ancestors did one thousand years ago.⁵

In 1885, the county approved new courthouse plans by Dallas architect James E. Flanders and awarded a construction contract to Strain, Risley, and Winburn of Henrietta, Texas. The cornerstone ceremony on November 25 was a cause for local celebration, and upon the building's completion, the *Jacksboro Gazette* described it as "very handsomely designed and finished...built of the finest, best, and most beautiful blue limestone with trimmings." County Judge Thomas Horton described the courthouse in 1932 in his *History of Jack County*:

⁴ Partially adapted from *Jack County Courthouse: Courthouse Preservation Master Plan for the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program*, 2000.

⁵ Jack County District Clerk Records, 1885. The report continues to detail that several of the jurors serving during the January 1884 term contracted typhoid pneumonia and later died.

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Our public buildings consist of a rock court house in the center of the Public Square, three stories high, sufficient capacity for all our court business, erected in 1885-6 by Risley Brothers, after the plans of a most skillful architect, still standing intact, an observatory extending three stories above the main building, surmounted by the Goddess of Liberty, looking benignly down on saint and sinner alike, surrounded by a yard of ample proportions, a lawn of Bermuda grass and flowers, rows of shade trees. Be it said to the credit of our judges and commissioners, always kept in first class condition.⁶

Despite the judge's assertion, the 1885 courthouse began showing evidence of structural problems by the turn of the century, and at that time the Commissioners Court had iron bars inserted into the walls in hopes of stabilizing it. The building continued to deteriorate, and by the 1930s, the plumbing was so bad that the smell of ammonia was almost overpowering to all who entered the courthouse.

1940 Jack County Courthouse⁷

In March, 1938, a group of county citizens were assigned the task of determining the need to replace the courthouse. Voters approved the issuance of a bond to fund construction of a new building in September 1938, and the Commissioners Court immediately filed an application with the Federal Public Works Administration (PWA) for a \$90,000 grant, to be matched by local bond funds of \$110,000.⁸ The PWA was a comprehensive New Deal public works program that encouraged the employment of professionals and craftsmen in the planning and building of various public facilities. The agency administered the construction of various public works, such as public buildings, bridges, dams, and housing developments, and made loans to states and municipalities for similar projects. The PWA was established as a component of the Federal Works Agency (FWA) by Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1939, succeeding the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, which had been in place since 1933. The agency was abolished in July 1943.

The Jack County Commissioners Court granted the construction contract to Eckert-Fair Construction Co. of Dallas, Texas, and accepted a design by Voelcker & Dixon Architects of Wichita Falls, Texas, a firm responsible for many courthouses built during the period. In late December 1938, county offices were relocated to various buildings around the square and demolition work commenced. A few hours before the walls of the courthouse were pulled down, a large group of citizens – many of whom lived in Jacksboro when the cornerstone was laid for the old structure – gathered at the site. The cornerstone was removed and its contents were examined and inventoried. The cornerstone still is displayed on the northeast corner of the square, beneath the old bell that hung in the tower. In a time when nothing that could be used again was thrown away, a substantial portion of the old building was used to construct a city hall on the north side of the square. An article in the *Dallas Morning News* noted that “Jacksboro was preparing this week to make two civic improvements grow where only one had been planned as workmen attacked the walls of the old Jack County courthouse in the process for clearing the site for a new building. It was found that the stone walls could be used again and the material will be salvaged to erect a municipal building.”⁹

Construction of the new courthouse began in April 1939. County Judge John P. Simpson is largely credited with the caring and farsighted leadership that led to the construction of the new courthouse, although one of his daughters later related that there were many citizens angry with her father over the destruction of the 1885 courthouse. Judge

⁶ Horton, Thomas, *History of Jack County* (1934), np.

⁷ Partially adapted from *Jack County Courthouse: Courthouse Preservation Master Plan for the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program*, 2000.

⁸ “Jack County Allotted \$90,000 for Courthouse,” *Dallas Morning News*, December 18, 1938, p. 9.

⁹ “Old Jack County Courthouse Torn Down,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 6, 1939, p. 4.

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Simpson died in 1939, before the courthouse was completed. Most of the construction workers were skilled artisans from other locales, but a number of the men who worked on the project were local laborers. Much of the work was not mechanized: the concrete, for example, was mixed on site and carried primarily via large wheel barrows to the pour location. One of the workmen involved in the construction of the upper floor jail related (in a c.1999 interview) that the steel cage was assembled using a cold rivet method, a slow and no doubt exhaustive process. A mechanical hoist lifted the stone veneer panels into place for the stone mason's final touches, a process that required two workers about an hour to prepare, lift and finish the setting of each piece of stone. The largest and heaviest stone in the building was the lintel over the east entrance that was lifted and moved into place by means of a block and tackle. The stone supplier, Texas Quarries of Austin was swamped with orders and had difficulty making timely deliveries. The stone finally began arriving by rail in regular shipments beginning in August, 1939. The courthouse was completed in the spring of 1940, opening with festivities that had been planned the previous year, including:

“a reproduction of the famous trial of Satanta and Big Tree, Indian chiefs who were condemned to death in one of the famous court sessions of pioneer Texas. The original trial took place on this site and Representative Fritz Lanham of Fort Worth has agreed to act as prosecutor in the mock trial, representing his father, the late Governor Lanham who, as prosecuting attorney, convicted the Indian leaders.”¹⁰

Upon the building's completion, the *Dallas Morning News* lauded the building, as expressing “the simple dignity of modern architecture,” and identified it as “one of the outstanding buildings of the state.”¹¹

The courthouse has served as the center of government for Jack County continuously since 1940, and stands as an excellent example of the federal, state, and local government funding partnerships that resulted in the construction of large-scale public buildings through the Great Depression, as well as supplying employment opportunities for skilled craftsmen and unskilled laborers though a period of economic hardship. As such, it is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A in the area of Government, at the local level of significance.

Architectural Significance of the Jack County Courthouse

The Jack County Courthouse meets National Register Criteria C in the area of Architecture as an outstanding example of Depression-era Classical Modern design, and as the work of the Wichita Falls firm Voelcker & Dixon. The courthouse is a significant example of the Modern Classical style frequently utilized throughout Texas for civic buildings during the 1930s and 1940s. Buildings of this style are often categorized as “Art Deco” or “Art Moderne,” terms derived from Paris's 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, which is commonly (but imprecisely) used to describe a diverse assortment of “modernistic” art and architectural styles of the 1920s and 1930s. The Jack County Courthouse's appearance is more accurately understood as a combination of fairly traditional design concepts with elements of the modern vocabulary associated with Art Deco and Moderne architecture. Richard Guy Wilson traces the origins of the Modern Classical style in the United States to Bertram Goodhue's National Academy of Sciences Building (1919-24) and Paul Cret's Folger Shakespeare Library (1928-1932), both in Washington, DC. Each building demonstrates a response to modernist ideals by retaining traditional monumental qualities, but abstracting historical styles and forms, and using simplified

¹⁰ “New Jack County Courthouse,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 5, 1939, p. 9.

¹¹ “New Jack County Courthouse,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 15, 1940, p. 4.

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

ornament in new design schemes. Both are classical in form and symmetry, but neither adheres to classical orders nor lavish ornament found in Beaux Arts design.¹²

These buildings served as prototypes for governmental buildings designed and constructed through various New Deal programs. Modernistic appearance was commonly achieved by utilizing a geometric, stylized form of ornamentation in place of a more literal interpretation of historicist design. This approach was applied to formal design components, such as columns and cornices, as well as in limited areas of applied decoration, often in the form of low-relief sculptural carvings and flattened moldings. Buildings designed in this style achieved a novel and modern appearance, even when the interior plans and functions remained relatively unchanged from previous courthouse types. The style is representative of the progressivism that defined the era, in which erecting a courthouse with a modernistic design became a public assertion of the county's commitment to growth and improvement. Counties that built courthouses in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s were replacing buildings that had been constructed in the Victorian era, and the Modern Classical style was the perfect solution for a county who wanted to seem progressive and forward-thinking without completely abandoning the familiarity, solidity and monumentalism of classical idioms. These attributes made the style an especially popular choice for public architecture in the 1930s.

Paul Cret's Folger Shakespeare Library is a definitive and influential expression of the style, wherein the building mass is a closed box with vertically banded windows separated by fluted piers, a basement and an attic.¹³ The library combines the simplicity of modernism through the abandonment of capitals, traditional moldings, and strict adherence to classical orders, but retains the qualities of classicism with emphasis on form, balance, and symmetry. In philosophy as well as form, the library serves as a clear precedent for the Modern Classicism of the Jack County Courthouse. Both buildings feature an abstracted temple form placed on a podium set back from the street, as well as rectangular block massing, flat roofs, corner pavilions, deep voids for openings with stacked windows between pilasters, low relief ornament, and a U-shaped plan. The classical orders are reduced to fluted piers, and floor levels are indicated by spandrel panels. Certain details of the courthouse bear a striking resemblance to those in the library, such as the chamfered awnings over the entrances of both buildings. One notable difference is that the library does not have a central entrance, but two separate entrances, each located in a corner pavilion. This composition was determined by the dual functions of the building as a library and a theater requiring separate entries. The Jack County Courthouse retains the pavilions, even though they don't share the same function as those in the library: the courthouse has a central grand entrance, and the pavilions hold first-floor window bays. The Jack County Courthouse also shows the influence of Art Deco design in its fine details, with geometric and stylized floral patterns repeating in stringcourses and moldings inside and out.

The Jack County Courthouse is architecturally significant also for its attention to detail and richness of design that is not apparent from a distance, but only upon closer inspection. While the building's pale limestone color, block

¹² Wilson, Richard Guy. "Modernized Classicism and Washington, D.C.," in *American Public Architecture: European Roots and Native Expressions*, Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University, ed. Craig Zabel and Susan Scott Munshower (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1989), pp. 273-274; 279. Architectural historian Willard B. Robinson uses the term "Stripped Classic" in *The People's Architecture: Texas Courthouses, Jails, and Municipal Buildings* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1983), while Jay Henry uses the term "Modern Classicism," and also acknowledges the terms "Starved Classic" and "Cret Classic," in *Architecture in Texas, 1895-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993). Terms such as "PWA Deco" and "PWA Moderne," refer to New Deal building programs, and are often used to describe a variety of modernistic styles found in public buildings of the 1930s.

¹³ In addition to the influence of his works outside of Texas, Cret produced several significant Texas projects, including the 1933 master plan for the University of Texas. The Texas Memorial Museum (with John Staub, 1937) follows Cret's penchant for Classic Modernism, with its blocky mass, stark design, and incised pilasters. Cret's U.S. Courthouse in Fort Worth (with Wiley Clarkson, 1933), also features a symmetrical plan and boxy massing inspired by the classical canon.

Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

massing, and the shallow relief sculpture emphasize its traditional Greek temple-derived composition, the courthouse features rich decorative elements and a mix of sumptuous materials (especially on the interior). The courthouse's representational sculpture is most appropriate for a governmental building of the period, with elements symbolizing the rule of law (books), the power of government (eagles and fasces), and the promotion of uniformly-applied justice (scales).

Architects Voelcker & Dixon

Architect Herbert Voelcker was born in New Braunfels, Texas in 1888. He attended Texas A&M College, earning an Architectural Engineering degree in 1909. He worked in offices in Waco, Fort Worth, and Austin, before taking positions in the Kansas City and Chicago offices of Lewis and Kitchen. After working in Louis Kahn's Detroit office for six months, he arrived in Wichita Falls in 1916, first working with E.S. Fields, and then establishing a partnership with J.L. Dixon in 1918.¹⁴ Biographical information regarding Dixon is limited, and the firm's archives have been scattered and lost.

Voelcker & Dixon was the premier architectural firm in Wichita Falls during the city's "golden age" after the discovery of the nearby Burkburnett Oil Field in 1918, which led to the establishment of nine refineries and 47 factories by 1920. The firm is credited with several major commercial buildings in downtown Wichita Falls, as well as public buildings, including the Wichita Fall Hospital (1926), Wichita Falls City Hall and Municipal Auditorium (1928, with Lang & Witchell), the U.S. Court House and Post Office (1935), Hardin Junior College (later Midwestern University) Administration Building (1936), and the Psychopathic Ward of the Wichita Falls State Psychopathic Hospital (1938). The variety of these large scale-buildings in style, form, and function displays the firm's versatility, employing elements of various period styles with contemporary construction techniques (particularly steel and concrete forms, with stone and brick veneer). The refined eclectic but traditional architectural vocabulary of their 1920s buildings gave way to the modernistic mode by the end of the decade, when they began to produce designs for numerous north Texas county courthouses built with federal funding during the Great Depression.

Voelcker & Dixon designed ten county courthouses in north Texas between 1928 and 1940 (Herbert Voelcker also designed the 1955 Waller County Courthouse). Most of these followed the modern idiom, blending a mix of traditional and contemporary forms in the Modern Classical style. The 1928 Wilbarger County Courthouse is the most conservative of these, tied to Beaux Arts tradition with a gray limestone façade featuring a piano nobile with a prominent 2-story attached Ionic colonnade supporting a molded entablature, and corner pavilions with pediment windows. The Callahan County Courthouse of 1929 is a much simplified version of this form, composed of buff brick with low-profile brick pilasters and limited cast stone ornament. The firm's modernistic Cottle County Courthouse of 1930 is a departure from their previous work, with dramatic stepped massing and the incorporation of large-scale and highly stylized figurative sculpture into the building façade, demonstrating an understanding and appreciation of contemporary design elsewhere in the United States, in particular the 1924 design of the Nebraska State Capitol by Bertram Goodhue. Voelcker and Dixon's seven other Texas courthouses designed through 1940 – including the Jack County Courthouse – are good examples of Modern Classicism, with varying degrees of low-relief sculpture. The designs for these courthouses are much simpler than their earlier examples, with a tendency towards a single massive block with simple projecting pavilions or a single block broken by vertical windows.

¹⁴ *The Encyclopedia of Texas*. Dallas, Tex: Texas Development Bureau, 1921, p.561.

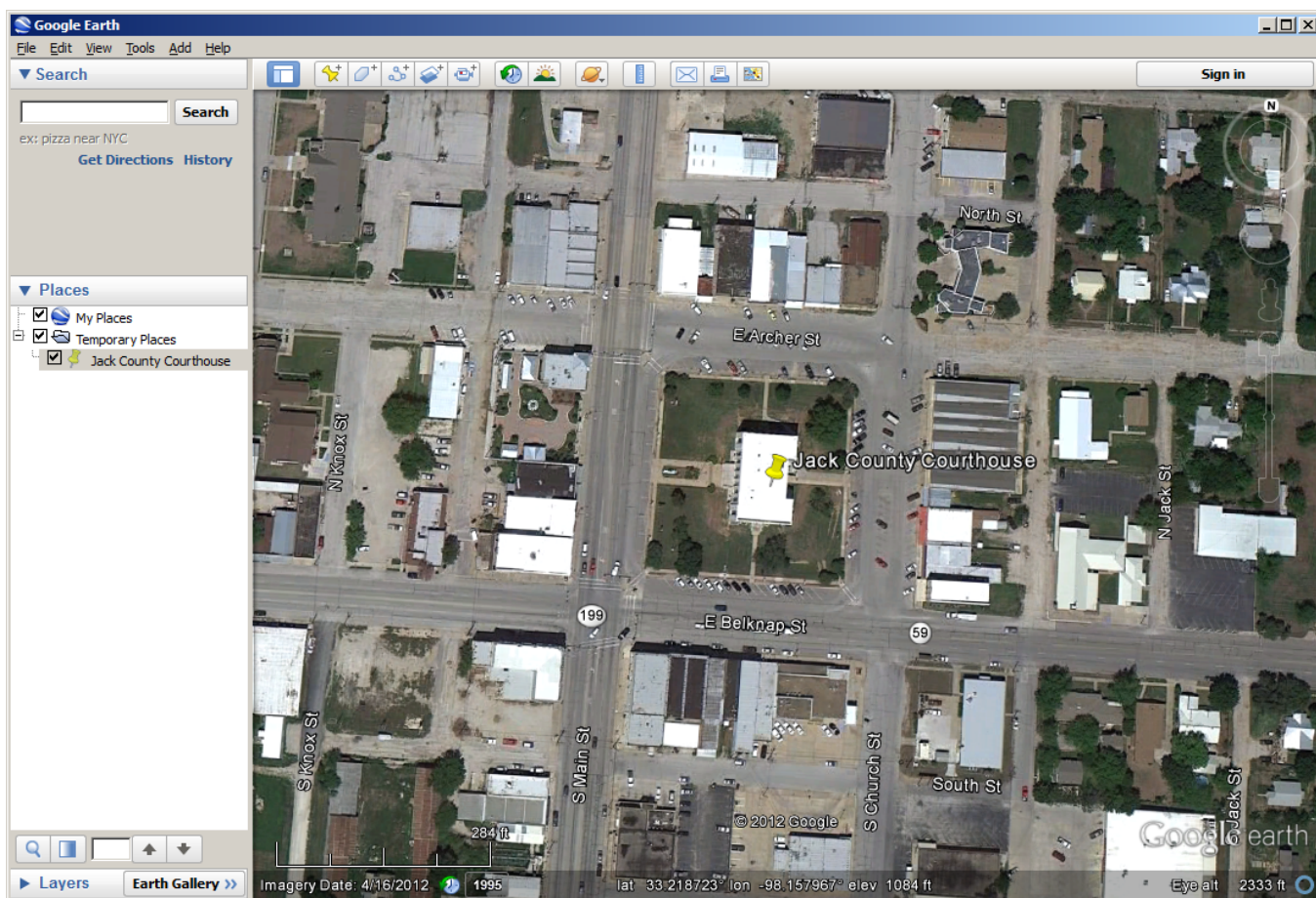
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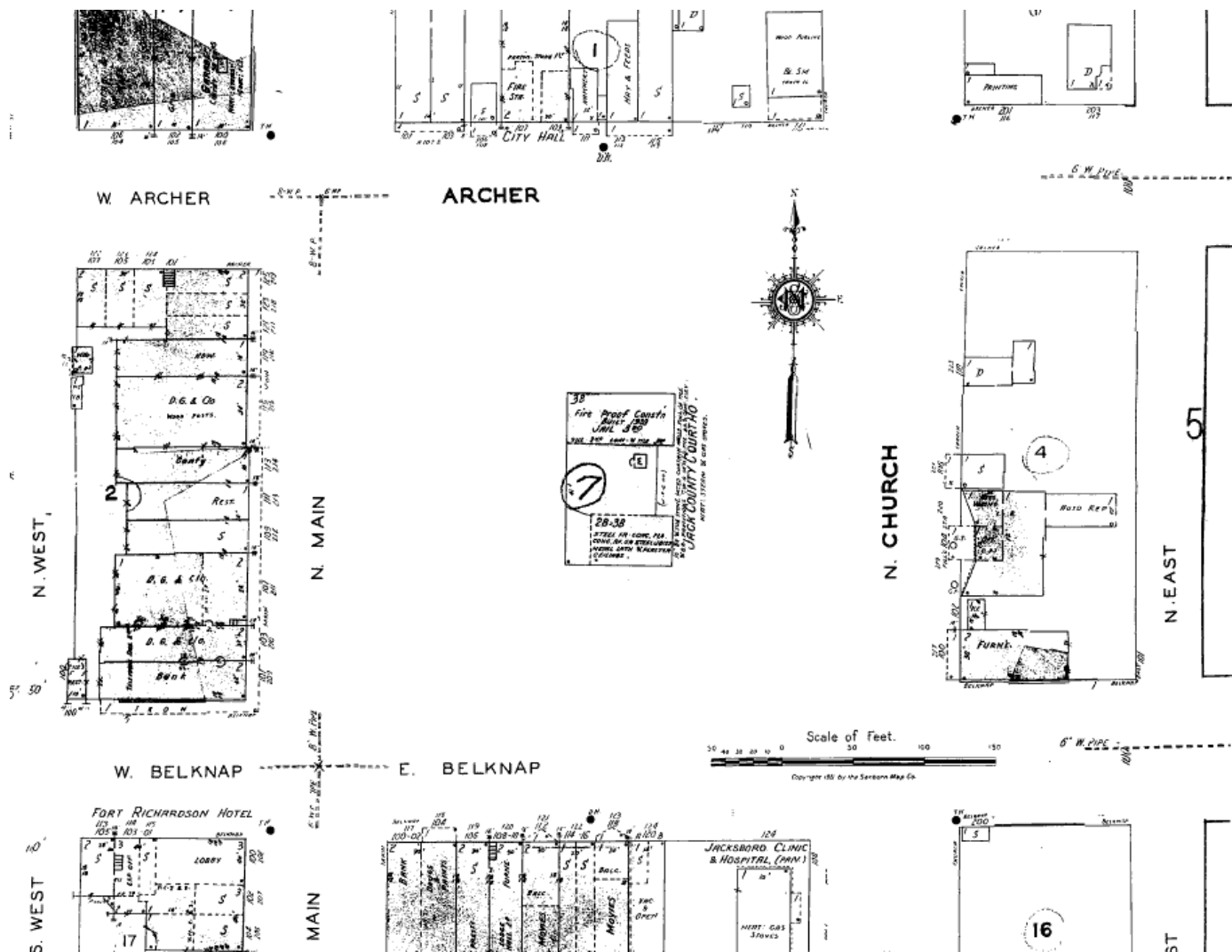
Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Jack County Courthouse, c. 1940
Photo courtesy Texas Department of Transportation



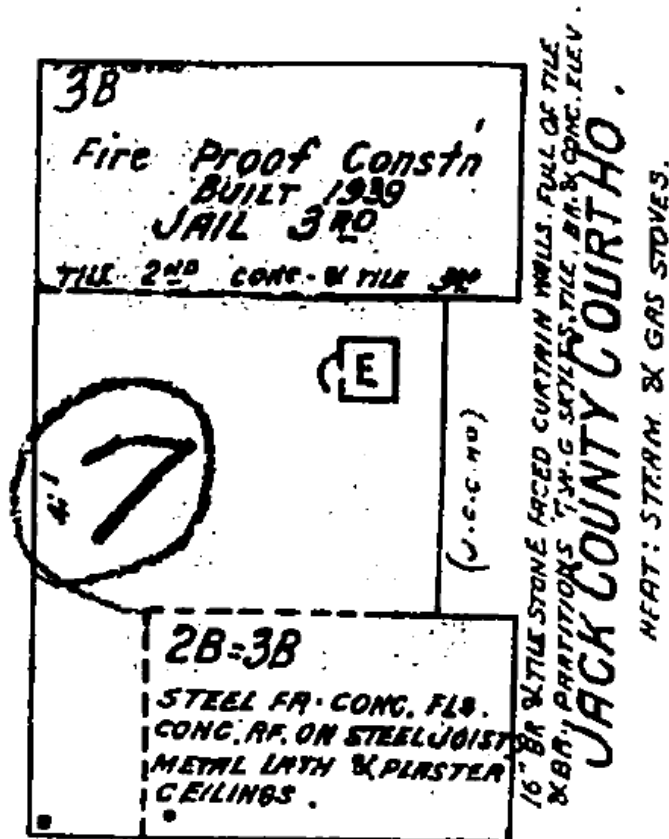
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Sanborn Map, Updated 1942



Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Sanborn Map, Updated 1942



Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Photo 1: West Elevation



Photo 2: West elevation parapet detail



Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Photo 3: South elevation



Photo 4: Southeast oblique



Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Photo 5: North elevation



Photo 6: West Vestibule, ceiling molding and light



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Photo 7: Main Lobby and Grand Staircase, facing east from vestibule



Photo 8: Lobby light fixture with fasces and eagles



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Photo 9: South Corridor, First Floor, facing Commissioners Court Room



Photo 10: North Corridor, First Floor. Cashiers' windows.



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Photo 11: First Floor, Grand Staircase



Photo 12: Second Floor, Commissioners' Court Room



Jack County Courthouse, Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas

Photo 13: Commissioners Court Room, Ceiling detail above bench



Photo 14: Commissioners' Court Room, facing east from bench

