



TEXAS HISTORIC COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION PROGRAM

Texas has more historic courthouses than any other state. Today more than 240 courthouses still stand that are at least 50 years old. About 80 were built before the turn of the 20th century. By the end of that century, most of these structures were significantly deteriorated due to inadequate maintenance, insensitive modifications, or weather-related damage. The Texas Historical Commission (THC) documented the condition of 50 of the state's oldest courthouses in the late 1990s and determined that counties lacked the resources to preserve the buildings for future generations.

BACKGROUND

In 1999, the Texas Legislature and Gov. George W. Bush created the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program (THCPP).

Providing assistance to counties reached a critical point when Texas county courthouses were added to the National Trust's 11 Most Endangered Places list in 1998. The state's response was to create the THCPP, the largest preservation grant program ever initiated by a state government. This nationally recognized preservation program has turned around the trend of disrepair and begun the process of restoring the state's most treasured historic landmarks.



1916 Lipscomb County Courthouse, Lipscomb.

The THCPP provides partial matching grants, up to 85 percent of eligible project costs for the restoration of historic county courthouses. The program also awards planning grants for development of architectural plans and specifications, as well as emergency grants. The program awards planning and construction grants based upon 23 established scoring criteria.

Since the program's inception, 138 courthouse preservation plans (the first step in program eligibility) have been approved. To date, program funds have facilitated the restoration and preservation of 103 county courthouses.

IMPORTANT POINTS

- More than \$650 million in matching state and local courthouse grants has generated nearly 13,300 jobs, \$791 million in income, and almost \$970 million in gross state product 1999–2023.
- The threat to historic courthouses is real. In 1993, fire ravaged the 1890 Hill County Courthouse in Hillsboro. In 1999, fires destroyed the 1911 Reagan County Courthouse in Stiles and damaged the 1891 Tyler County Courthouse in Woodville. In 2015, the 1930 Midland County Courthouse was demolished, and the 1956 Aransas County Courthouse was lost in 2017 due to damage from Hurricane Harvey.
- On August 4, 2000, fire gutted the historic 1902 Newton County Courthouse just two weeks after the THC approved its master plan for the THCPP. The THC provided emergency stabilization funds and Round III funding for full restoration of the courthouse.
- In 2021, an arson fire virtually destroyed the Mason County Courthouse in Mason, which was weeks away from a restoration project getting underway. With the THC's restoration grant and additional funding from the Texas Legislature, the community, and other sources, the Classical Revival structure is being rebuilt.
- Over 245 Texas historic courthouses are currently eligible for the program; 176 remain to be restored.
- County courthouse projects serve as catalysts in economic revitalization in business districts surrounding courthouse squares throughout the state.
- Historic courthouses are focal points for heritage tourism, one of the fastest-growing segments of the travel industry in Texas.
- A total of 144 Texas courthouses are listed in the National Register of Historic Places; 152 are Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks and 116 are State Antiquities Landmarks.
- The state has invested over \$360 million, which has generated more than \$290 million in direct expenditures from participating counties and millions more in indirect expenses.
- This program has been recognized by the Texas Society of Architects and the National Trust for Historic Preservation with honor awards. In May

2008, the program received the Preserve America Presidential Award.

- Projects have increased employment in the construction industry, generated revenue in rural areas, and strengthened skills of craftspeople in many specialty trades.
- Restored courthouses offer an efficient and healthy environment for conducting business through compliance with life safety codes, accessibility standards, and the removal of hazardous materials, mold, and outdated mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.
- Restored courthouses provide safe and secure storage for vital county records, as well as more efficient space for use of the records by the public.
- More than 20 major movies and series have included scenes shot in a historic Texas courthouse, including “Bernie,” “True Grit,” “Lone Star,” “Tree of Life,” “Hope,” and “The Leftovers.”

HOW TO REACH US

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