**NAME**

HISTORIC

Dallas County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

---

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Houston and Commerce Streets

CITY, TOWN

Dallas

STATE

Texas

---

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

COMMERCIAL

PARK

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

MILITARY

OTHER:

---

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

County of Dallas

STREET & NUMBER

Houston and Commerce Streets

CITY, TOWN

Dallas

STATE

Texas

---

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Dallas County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Houston and Commerce Street

CITY, TOWN

Dallas

STATE

Texas

---

**REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic Sites Inventory

DATE

1970

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Texas Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Austin

STATE

Texas
The Dallas County Courthouse, a massive structure of contrasting blue granite and red Pecos sandstone, was built in the Romanesque Revival style. The primary architect, M.A. Orlopp, was born in Brooklyn, New York, to German immigrant parents. In June 1881, Orlopp graduated from the United States Naval Academy, and spent the next four years surveying railroads for the United States Corp of Engineers. At the time of his commission for the Dallas Courthouse he was practicing as a principal in the firm of Orlopp and Kusener of Little Rock, Arkansas. Originally the building was dominated by a massive central tower 205 feet in height which, at the time of its erection, made it the second tallest building in the state. It housed four clockfaces and a 4,500 pound Howard bell. In February of 1919 a structural failure forced removal of the tower.

Otherwise the exterior largely retains its historic character. Rising from a one-story base of blue granite from Arkansas, the succeeding stories are of red Pecos sandstone enhanced by contrasting stringcourses and window enframements of the lighter stone. The masonry is strongly textured and features the heavily arched openings characteristic of the Romanesque. The entrances are supported on marble columns from Burnet. Eight circular turrets are dominant visual elements of the building as it now stands. At two elevations projecting pavilions rise to triangular terminations lacking only the small flanking spires with which they were originally adorned. Originally each elevation featured a four foot terra cotta griffin from the Indianapolis Terra Cotta Company as adornment. Only two remain, one in its historic position, and the other preserved in the Dallas Historical Commission's archives.

The interior retains many of its historic features. Marble wainscots appear throughout and many cast iron decorative and structural features are still extant. Several major renovations have occurred; the first on November 4, 1915, when the Woerner and Cole firm was allocated $60.00 for drawing plans detailing the installation of electric lights. In November of 1968, the firm of Mollat D. Adams undertook improvements of lighting and plumbing facilities and the installation of two staircases and a new elevator. The contract for renovation was awarded to the Jansen Construction Company at a cost of $13.50 a square foot, with a total cost of $584,000.00.

Despite these modifications the quadrilateral layout typical of Texas courthouses of the period is preserved along with much of the original character of the exterior. The Dallas County Courthouse has been described as "second to none in the South, a building to reflect the wealth and enterprise of the states' leading county." It is certainly one of the more significant Romanesque Revival structures in Texas.
8 SIGNIFICANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>PREHISTORIC</em></td>
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<td>X 1800-1899</td>
<td><em>COMMERCE</em></td>
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<td>1900-</td>
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</table>

SPECIFIC DATES 1891-1892

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The historic Dallas County Courthouse has regional architectural significance. One of the largest Romanesque Revival buildings to be erected in the state, it is also one of the most handsome. Good proportions and interesting massing with cylindrical forms juxtaposed against rectangular forms all contribute to the strength of the architectural statement. The use of arched openings of various proportions is successfully unified on the two narrow facades by two-story arcades comprising dominant central features on each elevation. Noteworthy details further contributing to the visual impact of the design include archivolts in strong relief, slender engaged columns flanking the openings of the upper stories, and decorative tympanums in the two-story range of arches. While the use of stone from state quarries provides local association, the stylistic details are consistent with Romanesque buildings found in other sections of the United States.

The block on which the 1891-92 courthouse is located has been the site of the nucleus of county government since the founding of Dallas. The first settler of Dallas County was John Neely Bryant, who established himself near the present courthouse square in 1841. The area was incorporated as Dallas County by an act of the Texas Legislature on March 30, 1846. For a time Bryant's log cabin housed the county court under the jurisdiction of Judge John H. Reapan.

The first permanent courthouse was a log cabin described as being sixteen feet by sixteen feet with a puncheon floor and split log seats. It was located on the northeast corner of the square.

The third courthouse was a two-story building of brick, fifty feet by fifty feet. Its construction was authorized in October of 1855 and plans were prepared by John J. Good, J.M. Patterson, and W.W. Peak. It occupied a central position in the courthouse square and was received by the press as "most handsome." This structure was almost destroyed in 1860 by a fire which ravaged nearly the entire city. The structure was rebuilt and served the county until 1871, at which time it was sold at "public auction."

The cornerstone for a fourth courthouse was laid in October, 1871. The building, to be constructed of "hard granite" from a quarry six miles east of the city, was two stories in height, and 66 feet by
10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING NORTHING
A 1 4 7 0.5 3 9 0
C

ZONE EASTING NORTHING
B 3 6 2 8 7 4 0
D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Bounded by Houston Street and Jefferson Avenue; and Main and Commerce Streets

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Willard B. Robinson, Professor of Architecture
S. Elizabeth Sasser, Research Associate 9-16-76

ORGANIZATION Date
Division of Architecture-Texas Tech University 806/742-2430

STREET & NUMBER
P.O. Box 4499

CITY OR TOWN STATE
Lubbock Texas

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE X ___ LOCAL X ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE Oct. 21, 1976

DATE 12/12/76

DATE 12/8/76

GPO 892-453
110' feet. It cost $75,000. In 1880, a fire partially destroyed the building. The walls were, however, left intact and remodeling was accomplished with the addition of a Mansard roof and central tower at a cost of $80,000. The building burned once again on February 15, 1890.

Architect, M.A. Orlopp of Little Rock, was employed to prepare drawings for the construction of a new courthouse. The project was let to contractor R.L. James on July 23, 1890, for an estimated cost of $276,967.50. The cornerstone block of blue-grey granite, was laid on November 16, 1890. Construction was subsequently halted by a labor dispute in which unskilled laborers struck for a wage of $1.25 an hour for a ten-hour work day. On July 20, 1891, James was relieved of his duties by the commissioners' court which ordered his name chiseled off of the cornerstone. The Fort Worth Daily Gazette for that date reported that "the labor element is delighted, as James paid no attention to their demands, and hired union and non-union labor as best suited him." A further source of controversy was a high board fence surrounding the construction site. Having been denounced repeatedly by the Federation of Labor and Farmer's Alliance, it was removed after James' dismissal. Architect Orlopp was retained as architect and job superintendent at a salary of $2,000 after a $10,000 performance bond was posted.

The building was occupied in the winter of 1892. Its finished cost was $59,140.00 more than the original estimate. Although a new structure has been built, the Romanesque Revival temple continues to serve the functions of county government.
Dallas
7600 2019

Property Dallas Co. Courthouse
State Texas Working Number 10.26.76.4390

TECHNICAL
Photos 4
Maps 1

CONTROL
Called 18.7.76
OK 10.26.76

HISTORIAN
accept
F. Brown 11/14/76

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN
accept
Lebenhelm 12.1.76

ARCHEOLOGIST

OTHER

HAER
Inventory
Review

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

BRANCH CHIEF

KEEPER

National Register Write-up 2-1-77
Send-back Re-submit

Federal Register Entry Entered

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service WASO No. 7
Dallas County Courthouse
Dallas, Texas

Texas Historical Commission, 1970
Texas Historical Commission

West elevation
Photo #1

OCT 26 1976

DEC 12 1976

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Dallas County Courthouse
Dallas, Texas

Texas Historical Commission, 1970
Texas Historical Commission

North elevation
Photo #2

OCT 26 1976
Dallas County Courthouse
Dallas, Texas

Texas Historical Commission, 1970
Texas Historical Commission

Detail of north entrance
Photo #3  

OCT 26 1976

DEC 12 1976

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Dallas County Courthouse
Dallas, Texas

Texas Historical Commission, 1970
Texas Historical Commission

Northeast oblique
Photo #4

OCT 26 1976

DEC 12 1976
## ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

### STATE TEXAS

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<tr>
<td>Cleburne Carnegie Library</td>
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<td>Britton-Evans House</td>
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<td>Nueces County</td>
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<td>Alamo Portland and Roman Cement Works</td>
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### Also Notified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hon. John G. Tower</th>
<th>State Historic Preservation Officer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Lloyd M. Bentsen</td>
<td>Mr. Truett Latimer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Charles Wilson</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Olin E. Teague</td>
<td>Texas Historical Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Omar Burleson</td>
<td>P.O. Box 12276, Capitol Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. John Young</td>
<td>Austin, Texas 78711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Robert C. Krueger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hon. Alan W. Steelman</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hon. Henry B. Gonzalez</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Director, Southwest Region</td>
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**NATIONAL REGISTER DATA SHEET**

**NAME as it appears on federal register:**

**DALLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE**

- **LOCATION**: Houston and Commerce St., Dallas
- **COUNTY**: Dallas
- **STATE**: TX
- **NPS REGION**: Southwest

**CONDITION**

- Unexcavated

**ACCESS**

- Yes - Unrestricted

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE**

- Prehistoric
- Historic

**ARCHITECTURE**

- Richardsonian Romanesque

**FUNCTIONS**

- Courthouse

**ARCHITECT**: M.A. Orloff

**NAMES give role & date**

- Personal:
  - R.L. James - Dismissed
  - 07.20.91

**NATIONAL REGISTER WRITE-UP**

- Rock-faced sandstone, blue granite; 5 1/2 stories, modified rectangle; hipped roof with gabled dormers and truncated central tower; triple arched entrance in slightly projecting front center bay with corner tourelles and arceded attic lights; 8 1/2-story round corner towers with conical caps; 2nd and 3rd story round-arched openings; roof acroteria; corbeled cornice; interior marble trim; exterior alterations, 1919; interior alterations, 1915 and 1968; outstanding example of the Richardsonian Romanesque; 5th Courthouse on site.