United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Palo Pinto County Courthouse
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 520 Oak
CITY OR TOWN: Palo Pinto
STATE: Texas
COUNTY: Palo Pinto
CODE: 363
ZIP CODE: 76484

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official: ____________________________ Date: 2-10-97

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this 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: 4/17/97
5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Public/local

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

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NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION CONCRETE
WALLS STONE: Sandstone
ROOF STONE: Slate
OTHER CONCRETE

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-8).
The Palo Pinto County Courthouse, at 520 Oak Street, is a 3-story Moderne building with Renaissance Revival elements. Constructed between 1940-42 by the Work Projects Administration and designed by architect Preston M. Geren, Sr., of Fort Worth, Texas, with M.A. Howell of Palo Pinto serving as associate. It is the third courthouse on the site, the first two having been built in 1857 and 1882. The present courthouse is constructed of sandstone recycled from the second, with a basement level of rubble sandstone and the upper stories of ashlar sandstone. The building follows an H-plan, the main block having a hipped red slate roof and a pediment, and the two wings with flat roofs. A low sandstone wall defines the perimeter of the courthouse block on the inside of a 4-foot wide sidewalk. The WPA completed the wall, sidewalks, and landscaping in 1942.

Palo Pinto, population 350, is the county seat of rural Palo Pinto County with a population of approximately 25,711. The largest city in the county is Mineral Wells with the remaining sizeable communities of Gordon, Graford, Mingus, and Strawn (see Illustration #1). The land area of the county is 952.9 square miles.

The Palo Pinto County Courthouse is located in the center of town on a block known as Courthouse Square. The square is bounded by Cedar Street on the north, Sixth Avenue on the west, Fifth Avenue on the east, and Oak Street on the south (see Illustration #2). Set close to the street, the building is surrounded by shrubs and a cultivated lawn with a sandstone retaining wall, also built of stone from the second courthouse. The entire courthouse block is defined by a 4-foot wide sidewalk that connects to wider sidewalks leading from the street to the south and north entrances, and narrower sidewalks leading to the raised basement on the east and west.

The most prominent feature of the principal (south) facade is the recessed central portion of the plan, the middle two-thirds of which projects slightly. A flight of concrete steps leads up to the massive arched entrance with its solid oak double doors and large transom. Two black period lights flank the entrance while a terra cotta eagle tops the arched entryway. The second level has five windows, three centered directly over the archway and two narrow windows extending from the first to second floors. On the third floor are two windows on either side of three arched windows separated by pilasters. A stone pediment typical of the Renaissance Revival style projects from the hipped roof, a circular window at its center. The central block is topped by a steeply pitched hipped roof covered in red slate. The north elevation is similar in detailing to the south facade. A rusticated stone base denotes the raised basement and provides a transition from the smooth, flat surfaces of the building to the landscaped site.

Projecting on each side of the central section are identical flat-roofed wings, one story shorter than the center. The 3-bay by 6-bay wings are typical restrained Moderne designs modestly decorated by quoins and a defined parapet. The strongest design elements are the 5-light composite metal windows that extend from the second to third floors with a connecting recessed panel. The windows provide a vertical thrust for the otherwise horizontal planes of the building. The east and west facades are identical to the west one, with the addition of a large stone
The principal floors of the interior continue the Moderne theme with Renaissance influences. Extensive use of oak trim, terra cotta flooring, and period lighting create a warm setting. Pedimented doorways and paneled wall treatments reflect a popular Classical design fitting for the building's use. A majestic staircase adds prominence to the main entrance and upper floors.

At the southeast corner of the lot is a Pioneer Monument (no date provided) a Veterans Monument (no date provided) is on the southwest corner. These are Noncontributing objects. Two Texas Historical Markers are on the south portion of the lawn in front of the courthouse. A flagpole stands to the south and west of the front entrance. These three objects are not included as Contributing or Noncontributing elements. The WPA stone wall and sidewalks are each counted as Contributing structures.

The main building has not been altered. It has been maintained in excellent condition and retains its integrity of location, materials, design, workmanship, feeling, and association.
8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

___ 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 POSSESS HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, 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: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1940-1942

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1940-1942

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Geren, Preston Murdoch, Sr. (architect); Howell, M.A. (associated architect)

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-15).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-16).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

_ 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:

x State historic preservation office (Texas Historical Commission)
_ Other state agency
_ Federal agency
_ Local government
_ University
_ Other -- Specify Repository:
Statement of Significance

The Palo Pinto County Courthouse is the most prominent building in the small rural county seat of Palo Pinto. The county is predominately ranch land with a sizable cattle industry and numerous manufacturing and petroleum facilities. Palo Pinto County was created in 1856 from Bosque and Navarro counties and organized in 1857. The early pioneers recognized the need for a governmental institution and built the first courthouse in 1857, the second in 1882, and the third and present courthouse in 1940-42. The 3-story building with flanking 2-story wings are set on a raised basement. The hand-hewn sandstone rocks were recycled and used in the present courthouse built on the same location, Lot 1, Block 1, Courthouse Square. The architectural design is Moderne with Renaissance Revival elements, designed by Preston M. Geren, Sr., of Fort Worth, Texas, with M.A. Howell of Palo Pinto as associate architect. The principal facade has a symmetrical rectangular plan, broad expanses of flat wall surfaces, and symmetrical windows, all typical of the Moderne style of the 1930s. Renaissance Revival elements, however, are unusual in combination with the Moderne giving further support to its architectural significance. The main entrance is from the south facade of the building along U.S. Highway 180, a major transcontinental highway. The courthouse continues to be the nucleus of the county’s political and social activity. The Palo Pinto County Courthouse retains significant integrity and meets Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance.

Palo Pinto County was created from Bosque and Navarro Counties by an act of the Texas Legislature approved August 27, 1856. The Chief Justice of Bosque County was charged with the duty of calling an election of officers and qualifying the Chief Justice, who in turn was authorized to qualify the remaining county officers. Section 4 and 5 of said act provided:

SECTION 4: That it shall be the duty of the Chief Justice and County Commissioners of Palo Pinto County, when qualified, to select the county seat of said county, within five miles of the center of the said county; to lay off the county town, to designate the lots and land reserved for the use of the county, and to cause such buildings to be erected as are necessary for the use of said county not in conflict with the general laws.

SECTION 5: That said county site shall be called "Golconda" and that this act take effect after the passage. J.A. McLaren was appointed to serve as Chief Justice. On May 13, 1857, the county was organized by the first official act of Judge McLaren to appoint D.B. Cleveland, County Clerk, pro-tem. The second order of business on the record was approving the official bonds of John Hittson, Sheriff; I.W. Price, Assessor and Collector and B.B. Meadows, Constable. The first County Commissioners elected were J.J. Cureton, William Caruthers, R. W. Pollard, and Washington Hullum.

The first settlers came to the valley about the time of formation in 1856 and 1857. Some of the newcomers were emigrants, but many were families who had first settled in another section of the county and moved later to the
new county seat. The settlers began building log cabins and picket houses on this new frontier. Golconda, the first settlement and county seat, developed in this picturesque valley of cedar-covered hills and the winding Brazos River.

The Spanish explorers are responsible for the name Palo Pinto which means painted pole or painted stick. As those early day adventurers rode through the country, that is now known as Palo Pinto County, they noticed the brilliant colored autumn leaves of red and gold along the creek they followed and crossed, naming the creek, "Palo Pinto." The county was named Palo Pinto and the name of Golconda was later changed to Palo Pinto as well.

Initially, county residents used a makeshift courthouse for minor offenses, typically under a large oak tree on the south side of the village. County leaders, however, saw the growing need for an organized county and a dignified house of justice. During the summer of 1857, the present site of Palo Pinto was selected for the county seat and thereafter the court convened at "Golconda." The first voting boxes were in the home of John Hittson, southeast of Palo Pinto, at Black Springs and in Golconda.

1857 Courthouse

The first meeting of the newly appointed court occurred in August 1857. The minutes note the decision to build a courthouse, review and lay out roads, and establish the boundary of the county. The court also ordered that Golconda, the county seat, be laid out and surveyed. The commissioners approved paying for the new courthouse from the sale of town lots in Golconda and advertised in the Dallas Herald and the Birdville Union newspapers.

On August 18, 1857, the Commissioners Court gave notice that bids would be received on August 31, 1857, for the building of a courthouse. Commissioners proposed a 16 x 22 feet, and 12 feet high building framed and weatherboarded with clapboards. A roof of two foot board shingles, two doors and three windows also were identified. The commissioners awarded the contract to W.B. Evans at a cost of $300 on Lot 1, Block 1, Courthouse Square. The lumber for the courthouse was cut from the cottonwood trees along the town branch.

As approved by the commissioners, Golconda, the county seat, was ordered to be laid out around a courthouse square that was 120 yards wide with streets 60 feet wide, running from the corner of the square. The court also contracted with J. J. Metcalfe to survey the townsite for the county seat and paid him $22.75. The Governor had approved an act which donated 320 acres of land to Palo Pinto County. The Commissioners Court met in September 1857, and employed John Flower to survey this acreage for which he was paid $75.50. Settlers laid off the first roads from Golconda toward Fort Belknap and in the direction of Jacksboro (known as Mesquitesville), Weatherford and Stephenville.

Thereafter the county seat was referred to in the records as Palo Pinto. No reason was given in the court minutes for the change. Both Golconda and Palo Pinto appeared as post offices in the Postal Guide of the United States Post Office Department for the year 1858. Almost 100 years later the spirit of Golconda arose once more to trouble the commissioners court. M.A. Howell, county surveyor, informed the commissioners court there of a potential problem. Howell discovered that the first map surveyed on August 18, 1857, was for the town of Golconda, the county seat, and the name had never officially been changed. Judge John H. Smith and the commissioners court on May 11, 1953, laid Golconda to rest by ordering a new survey and a new map to officially record the name of the town, "Palo Pinto," the county seat.

The county was becoming known as a ranching center because of some of the most prominent cattle men of Texas lived there. Among them were the Lovings, Goodnights, Slaughters, Cowdens, Stuarts, Strawns, Daltons, Hittsons, Lynns and many others. Captain J. H. Dillahunty was the first merchant in town. He came to Texas with his family from Tennessee, opening the first general store in 1857. The first jail was built in 1858. Professor James H. Baker opened the first school on November 1, 1858, in a rented cabin which cost $25. for a term. The Methodist congregation were the first to build a new church in 1859. Dr. Stephen Slade Taylor is credited with being the first doctor in Palo Pinto in 1857. Dr. R. H. Smith came to Palo Pinto County from Ferris, Texas, on January 8, 1903, and made his calls on horseback. J.C. Carpenter was given a contract in 1860 to make fourteen benches for the courthouse, seven feet long with backs put on with screws. The benches were made with lumber two inches thick. Also a platform, four by five feet wide, for the district judge. This is the first mention of a district judge in the County and evidently the court wanted to dress up the building for the judge of a higher court.

By 1880 county commissioners recognized the poor condition of the original courthouse when a well known rancher from the northwest part of the county fell through the floor of the courthouse floor. This accident prompted a new courthouse, as did the rapid growth within the county. The first courthouse was used for 25 years, from 1857 until 1882, when a new courthouse was built.

1881-82 Courthouse

In 1881 county commissioners began plans for construction of the second Palo Pinto County Courthouse. In 1882, just after the Texas Legislature allowed counties to issue bonds for new courthouses, the large sandstone
structure was built. According to the 1956 historical edition of the "Palo Pinto County and Strawn Information Guide," J.B. Sole, a Weatherford contractor, built the courthouse for a cost of $35,000. As was typical of the late 19th century courthouses in Texas, the architect designed a large 2 1/2-story building in a cruciform plan with central clock tower following the Victorian architectural vocabulary of Italianate and Second Empire (see Illustration #3). Sandstone rock for the structure was quarried south of Palo Pinto. Frank Corbin, his son, Henry Corbin and his step-son, Jim Keller, hauled the sandstone by wagon to the building site. All the stones used in the building were hand-hewn. (12)

It was noted at a commissioners court meeting on November 18, 1898, that there was an insufficient water supply for the public near the courthouse especially for the stock during sessions of the different courts. A sum of $200. or more if necessary was appropriated by the county for artesian water for the courthouse on condition that citizens of Palo Pinto contribute an equal amount.(13)

In 1906 a 2-story sandstone annex was added and connected to the courthouse by an iron bridge. The county continued to grow and it was evident the courthouse was not large enough to accommodate the needs of the people.(14) The second courthouse stood on the square for 58 years until efforts began for a new building in the late 1930s.

1940-1942 Courthouse

By 1931, county offices were overcrowded in the courthouse forcing the tax assessor-collector to move across the street in a former bank building. The county jail also moved to a separate 2-story building away from the courthouse.(15) In 1939, the county commissioners proposed a bond election of $100,000 for construction of a larger courthouse. With bond approval in place, the county leaders called for a third Palo Pinto County Courthouse on the same location on U. S. Highway 180. To take advantage of federal work programs, the county applied to the Works Progress Administration (changed to Work Projects Administration in 1939) for labor. In 1940 the second courthouse was torn down in order to build the new courthouse. The hand-hewn stone from the 1882 second courthouse was recycled and recut to be used in the present building and courthouse fence. This building is a substantial Moderne building designed by Preston M. Geren, Sr., with M. A. Howell serving as associate. The building was completed in 1942 at a cost of $250,000.(16)(17)

Preston Murdoch Geren, Sr., (1891-1969) graduated from Texas A&M in 1912 in architectural engineering. From 1923 to 1934, Geren worked in the Fort Worth office of Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick serving as chief engineer. In 1934 he opened his own practice in Fort Worth and was joined in 1949 by his son, Preston M. Geren, Jr. The Palo Pinto Courthouse was the first of two courthouses designed by Geren and his only Work Projects Administration project. Geren, however, designed the Elmwood Sanitarium (1939) in Fort Worth for the Public Works Administration, and he was an associate architect on two of Fort Worth's public housing projects in 1938-39. His second courthouse is in Panola County and was completed in the 1950s. A number of
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Palo Pinto County Courthouse
Palo Pinto, Palo Pinto County, Texas

ILLUSTRATION #3
other buildings designed by Geren are found around Fort Worth and North Texas and include many academic institutions, commercial buildings, and over 150 school buildings.(18)

The Palo Pinto Courthouse is an unusual combination of Moderne architecture with Renaissance Revival details. A low pitched roof of red slate, entablature, arched windows, and decorative quoins add further contrast and are consistent with the Renaissance Revival style from this period. The smooth flat surfaces and vertical window units are strong Moderne elements that reflect the popular style of the 1930s. The architect's use of local sandstone in variations of natural earth tones connects the building to regional architectural expressions unlike the typical Moderne building. The courthouse is the most significant building in the community of Palo Pinto and for county residents the most important example of the Moderne style in the county dating from the Depression era public building programs. The Palo Pinto County Courthouse meets Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance.

END NOTES


6. Commissioners Court Minutes, County Clerk Office, Palo Pinto County Courthouse, Book A. Palo Pinto County Historical Commission, Palo Pinto County History Book II, 1986, p. 5.


8. Mary Whatley Clark, The Palo Pinto Story, p. 17, 23, 27, 35, 37


16. Mavis P. Kelsey, Sr. Courthouses of Texas, and Donald H. Dyal, Palo Pinto County, p-11


Bibliography


Palo Pinto Historical Commission, *Palo Pinto County History*, Dallas, Texas, Curtis Media Corporation, 1986.


Richhart, C.L. “New Courthouse Plans Exciting to Palo Pinto.” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, January 21, 1940.

Work Projects Administration Records, 1940-1942, copies on file with National Register nomination.
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Lot 1, Block 1, Courthouse Square, Palo Pinto, Palo Pinto County, Texas

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION Boundaries include all resources historically associated with the nominated property.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Tara Scott (description); Jean Price; Pauline Mitchell; Robb Smith, with assistance from Dwayne Jones, THC
ORGANIZATION: Palo Pinto County Historical Commission DATE: 3/96

STREET & NUMBER: P.O. Box 116 TELEPHONE:
CITY OR TOWN: Palo Pinto STATE: TX ZIP CODE: 76484

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS
MAPS (see USGS map)
PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-17)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Palo Pinto County
STREET & NUMBER: P.O. Box 190 TELEPHONE: (817) 659-1253
CITY OR TOWN: Palo Pinto STATE: TX ZIP CODE: 76484
Photograph Inventory

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The Palo Pinto County Courthouse is eligible under National Register Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a fine local example of early twentieth century civic architecture. Completed in 1940-42, the handsome sandstone building is an unusual blending of Moderne architecture and Renaissance Revival details and an important local example of WPA construction.
Palo Pinto County Courthouse
520 Oak
Palo Pinto, Palo Pinto Co., Texas

Photograph 1 of 6
Palo Pinto County Courthouse
520 Oak
Palo Pinto, Palo Pinto Co., Texas
Photograph 3 of 6
Palo Pinto County Courthouse
520 Oak
Palo Pinto, Palo Pinto Co., Texas
Photograph 4 of 6
PALO PINTO COUNTY COURTHOUSE
520 OAK
PALO PINTO, PALO PINTO CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 5 OF 6
Palo Pinto County Courthouse
520 Oak
Palo Pinto, Palo Pinto Co., Texas

Photograph 6 of 6