

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Parmer County Courthouse
Other name/site number: NA
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 401 Third Street
City or town: Farwell State: Texas County: Parmer
Not for publication: [ ] Vicinity: [ ]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
( [x] 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 ( [x] meets [ ] does not meet ) the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
[ ] national [ ] statewide [ ] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [ ] A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D

Signature of certifying official / Title: Mark Wolfe, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 1/28/19
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In 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

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	1	structures
1	1	objects
3	2	total

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

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** Government: courthouse, jail; Recreation and Culture: monument/marker

**Current Functions:** Government: courthouse, jail; Recreation and Culture: monument/marker

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** Mixed

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Brick; Stone/limestone; Terra Cotta

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7 through 9)

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	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.
	<b>D</b>	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:** 1916-1969

**Significant Dates:** 1916, 1917, 1929

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): N/A

**Architect/Builder:** C. Risser & Co. (Christian Risser, William C. Townes), architects; W.M. Rice Construction Co., Builder/Contractor

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 8 through 16)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheet 17)

**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

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** approximately 2.15 acres

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 34.384818° Longitude: -103.039561°

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The boundary includes the central third of the city block bounded by Avenue C, Third Street, Avenue E, and Fourth Street. The nominated property includes the courthouse and jail, and immediately adjacent parking lots, and excludes the city park to the south, and the medical office and sheriff's department buildings to the north.

**Boundary Justification:** The nomination include the historic courthouse and jail, and the immediate portion of the block associated with those buildings.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Gregory Smith (NR Coordinator) and Gladys Spring, Parmer County Historical Commission  
Organization: N/A  
Street & number: PO Box 12276  
City or Town: Farwell State: TX Zip Code: 79325  
Email: gladyss40@windstream.net  
Telephone: 806-251-1356  
Date: September 13, 2018

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets 18-21)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets 22-34)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets 35-46)

**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.

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### **Photograph Log**

Parmer County Courthouse  
Farwell, Parmer, Texas  
Photographed by Gregory Smith, October 2014

*All photographs accurately depict property conditions. No changes nor significant deterioration has occurred since photos were taken in 2014.*

All Photos by Gregory Smith, October 2014 (except as noted)

Photo 1  
West Elevation.

Photo 2  
West Elevation from Third Street.

Photo 3  
Northwest oblique; 1974 addition on left.

Photo 4  
West façade.

Photo 5  
West Entrance.

Photo 6  
Second floor balcony, west side.

Photo 7  
West elevation parapet.

Photo 8  
West elevation, camera facing north.

Photo 9  
South pediment.

Photo 10  
South façade

Photo 11  
Southeast oblique, east wing at right.

Photo 12  
Former county jail (left), courthouse (east elevation, right).

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Photo 13

East elevation with radio tower and 1974 addition at right.

Photo 14

1974 addition, east elevation.

Photo 15

Ground floor hall, facing addition to the north.

Photo 16

Ground floor east hall, facing elevator at for west entrance.

Photo 17

Ground floor elevator and staircase, facing northwest.

Photo 18

Second floor hallway and stair landing.

Photo 19

Second floor courtroom, facing east, mezzanine supports at left and right. 2018 photo by Gladys Spring.

Photo 20

Second floor porch, facing south.

Photo 21

Third floor mezzanine level.

Photo 22

1916 jail with c.1929 second floor addition, southeast oblique.

Photo 23

Former jail, northwest oblique.

Photo 24

Jail interior, second floor, facing east.

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## Description

The Parmer County Courthouse in the Texas Panhandle city of Farwell is sited on a large rectangular block approximately 0.2 miles east of the Texas-New Mexico state line. Completed in 1916, and occupied beginning in 1917 the three-story tan brick building has a T-shaped plan and faces west across a partially-wooded lot, with the base of the T extending eastward. Amarillo architects Christian Risser and William Townes incorporated elements of Classical, Renaissance, and Mission design in the building, which features a two-story inset entrance bay with three arches set on a pair of stone Tuscan columns and brick pilasters, and elegant brick and terra cotta stringcourses. The third floor is expressed as an attic, topped by an alternating stepped parapet featuring a central decorative terra cotta medallion with the letter "P" under a central semicircular parapet curve. The interior floor plan of the courthouse is largely intact, although the courthouse ceiling has been lowered and the former primary entrance foyer has been infilled with an elevator. While many of the original finishes have been covered with wood paneling, the building retains the original tile flooring, hardware, and other features. A single-story annex was added to the north elevation of the building in 1974-75. Despite these changes, the courthouse overall retains a good degree of integrity. The original brick jail, built in 1916 and enlarged with a second floor in 1929, is immediately east of the courthouse, as is included as a contributing building.

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## Setting

The Parmer County Courthouse is in the west-central portion of downtown Farwell, Texas, on the southwest border of Parmer County, just 1,000 feet (less than a fifth of a mile) from Texas-New Mexico state line, which also marks the boundary of the Central and Mountain time zones. The terrain is flat, and unlike many Texas county courthouse settings, the Parmer courthouse block is not within a commercial district but is surrounded by residences, churches, and open lots, with three historic 1-story commercial buildings on the west side of Third Street. The courthouse block is a long rectangle, oriented north-south, with two non-historic buildings on the north portion, and a small city park on the south side. The block was originally twice as large but was bisected on the current east side by an extension of Fourth Street. Asphalt streets and vehicle parking define the perimeter of the nominated property, and concrete sidewalks lead to three formal entrances on the north, west, and south sides of the building. A concrete sidewalk leads to the former primary entrance on the west façade through a grove of row-planted trees, which obscures the view of the entire west elevation.<sup>1</sup> A gray granite Texas Centennial marker dedicated to the founding of the City of Farwell is set in the middle of the west sidewalk and is counted as a contributing object. A Texas Centennial highway marker is set on the building's west side (relocated from its original location; non-contributing).

The former county jail immediately east of (and behind) the courthouse, was built as a single-story building at the time of the courthouse's construction in 1916 and expanded with a second-floor addition in 1929.<sup>2</sup> It is clad in similarly-colored tan brick. A latticed steel radio tower stands adjacent to the courthouse within a pocket created by the north and east wings. A single-story annex abuts the courthouse at its north façade. Completed in 1975, the annex is clad in off-white or tan brick with vertical strip windows and ornamental vertical banded brickwork on its northwest elevation. Although they are sited on the same parcel, a paved drive north of annex visually separates the courthouse from a modern Sheriff's Department building and a dentistry office. The courthouse is surrounded by the Farwell City Park to its immediate south, First Baptist Church of Farwell to the southeast, and Hamlin Memorial United Methodist Church to the northeast.

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<sup>1</sup> The original formal entrance has not been used as such for decades and was permanently blocked by the placement of an elevator in the vestibule in 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Some sources claim that the second floor was added in 1927, but architectural drawings on file in the courthouse include those for an unbuilt jail designed in 1928 by architect J. Roy Smith and plans for the second-floor addition to the existing jail drawn by Kerr and Walsh in July 1929.

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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### General Characteristics<sup>3</sup>

The courthouse has three floors and a T-shaped plan. In 1974, a single-story annex was added to its north elevation. The building's long axis runs north to south with its principal facade facing west. In 1990, the west entry was closed to pedestrian traffic when an elevator was installed within the vestibule. The county and district courtrooms occupy the building's east wing. The steel-framed structure features concrete decks throughout the building and is clad in brick with terra cotta embellishments. Heavy white stone features include arches, belt and/or stringcourses, plinth, and low-rise fencing with square balusters. Modern single-hung metal framed windows are present throughout the building. Design drawings indicate only one subsurface space, a boiler room directly beneath the judge's office.

It is difficult to attribute one design tradition to the whole of the Parmer County Courthouse as it does not follow one distinct architectural style; its exterior and general form exhibit characteristics of Mission, Classical Revival, and Italian Renaissance.<sup>4</sup> At first glance, the building's hulking block mass gives it the appearance of an early Classical Revival style construction, with symmetrical fenestration, pilasters, entrance portico, cast stone stringcourse, and a large two-story portico with two columns dominating its west facade. However, the portico is characterized by a triple-arch over the entry, a feature more commonly attributed to Italian Renaissance design. The courthouse's arched windows, flat roof, its third floor expressed as an attic are typically features of the Italian Renaissance style. The exterior of the entire courthouse possesses four distinct stone courses, two flat belt courses and two protruding stringcourses, all of which frame the division between the courthouses' interior floors but do not accurately correspond to them. One of the building's most outstanding features is its elaborate geometric parapet with three curved pediments on its south, north, and west elevation. Each curved pediment has a cast medallion with the letter "P" at its center.

### West Elevation

Originally designed as the primary façade, the west side is the most extravagant face of the courthouse, characterized by two large stringcourses, heavy stone plinth, symmetrical composition, and an arched porch in the center of three bays. The west doorway served as the principal entrance into the courthouse's interior until 1990 when it was permanently sealed to accommodate installation of an elevator. Additionally, the west elevation is obscured by a grove of trees that prevents a full view of the building from street level.

A ground-floor metal-framed double door with sidelights is the focal point of the portico. A transom composed of solid metal contains horizontal ornamentation rests above the doors. Two fixed glass windows with spandrels flank the first-floor entrance. The exterior height of the first-floor level is exaggerated due to spacing between the first stone belt course and plinth; with its single-hung metal framed windows abutting the table above the plinth and the thinnest stone course situated directly below the second-floor windows. This arrangement gives the courthouse the illusion of a grand first floor but does not correspond to the actual floor levels. The second belt course demarcates the second and third floors, as a thicker white stone course is sited slightly above the second-floor ceiling. The course is accented by fascia brick courses that are adjoined below. Approximately one foot above, the stringcourse projects outward creating a faux ledge that obscures much of the lower third floor, presenting it as a half-floor or attic space. A central 3/3 rectangular window and six adjacent small horizontal single-hung windows correspond with the third floor and are framed between the two large stringcourses. The second cast stone stringcourse is fixed approximately 2 feet above the third-floor windows and approximately four feet below the parapet wall. An ornamental cast medallion with floral design is centered in the curved pediment above the second stringcourse. The entire portico is framed by two slightly projecting pilasters that extend from the plinth to the second flat belt course. A triple-arched portico is supported by two central columns that extend two full floors. A concrete balcony corresponds with the second floor and single door. The whole

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<sup>3</sup> The following sections are adapted from the first draft of the nomination by former THC historian Stephen F. Austin (2016).

<sup>4</sup> McAlester, Virginia and Lee, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, New York: Knopf, 1984.



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balcony is now faced in netting to prevent roosting birds; a low-rise heavy stone fence extends from the plinth level, creating a terrace space off the west façade. A ground-floor metal-framed double door with sidelights is the focal point of the portico. A transom composed of solid metal contains horizontal ornamentation rests about the doors. Two fixed glass windows with spandrels flank the first-floor entrance.

A square plaque anchored to a pilaster on the northwest corner of the building bears the names of local officials and contractors involved in construction of the courthouse. The inscription reads:

FARWELL LODGE  
A.F. & A.M. No.977  
J.D. HAMLIN CO. JUDGE  
C.F. KELLNER - F.W. M<sup>C</sup>ELORY  
G.W. LAMBERY - F.L. REED  
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
RISSER & TOWNES ARCHTS  
W.M. RICE CONST. CO. BUILDERS  
- 1916 -

South Elevation

The south door now functions as the building's primary entrance. The south facade of the main block is symmetrically composed with four slightly projecting brick pilasters with eight windows of differing composition positioned on each floor. The south entrance is an inset metal frame glass door topped with a metal transom. The doorway is topped with a projecting stone course. A large projecting stone belt course with brick dentils visually distinguishes the first floor from the second. Paired sash windows flank the doorway on the first floor, a pattern repeated on the second floor. A second and significantly larger belt course separates the second and third floors, with two smaller rectangular windows on the third floor. A final stone belt course runs below the parapet, with an ornamental medallion with "P" centered in the curved pediment. The east (rear) wing of the courthouse is set back from the main block, effectively creating the building's T-shaped layout. Its south façade is characterized by four tall arched windows on the second level, corresponding to the original double height of the courtroom.

East Elevation

A two-story two-part wing (original to the building) dominates the east elevation. The wing contains the judge's office and a consultation room for both the county (lower level) and district (upper level) courtrooms. The exterior features the basic composition of the other elevations, with corner pilasters, stone plinth, single flat belt course, and alternating stepped parapet. A door provides access to the first-floor consultation room, while a concrete half-flight staircase provides access to the subsurface boiler room beneath the first-floor office spaces.

North Elevation and 1974-75 Annex

The north elevation is similar in composition to the south. The major difference is the addition of a single-story tan brick annex attached to north façade in 1974 (completed in 1975). The addition removed the original entry which possessed the same components and configuration as that on the south elevation. A low-pitch side gabled metal roof covers the entire building, whose cross-axial floor plan includes three exterior entrances. The primary entrance abuts the former north entry, providing access to the courthouse via two steel and glass double doors. The east elevation is comprised of plain brick walls, with one pedestrian door located at the corner near the cross-axis. A small freestanding prefabricated utility shed is on the northeast corner of the annex (not included in property count).

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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## **Interior Plan & Features**

The courthouse retains its original floor plan, with a single arterial corridor oriented north-south with slight variations on each floor. All three floors feature office spaces of varying sizes adjacent to the corridor. The first floor is arranged in a T-shape, with the primary (north-south) corridor and a single hallway that leads to the county courtroom. Original components on the first floor include the mosaic tile flooring, metal spiral staircase connecting the county and district clerks' offices, restroom stalls, signage, and courtroom doors. Other features and finishes are likely intact behind wood paneling. Two staircases are located on the east and west sides of the central lobby. The south façade is now utilized as the main entrance, opening on to the central north-south corridor bordered by offices including those of the County Clerk, Tax Collector, and County Attorney. The modified east-west corridor at the center of the courthouse leads directly from the elevator to the county courtroom to the east. The county courtroom is situated at the east end of the building, with a two-story wing containing the judge's office and consultation room attached at the farthest end.

The second level has the same linear plan, with offices for Adult Probation, Justice of Peace, Law Library, and a storage space. Offices for the District Clerk and a Grand Jury room flank the district courtroom on its north and south elevations. Except for the mosaic tile flooring and wooden doors, the hallway retains few original features. Measuring approximately 30 by 40 feet, the district courtroom fills the second and third floors of the east wing. A mezzanine originally provided additional seating space during trials, but a dropped ceiling was installed at the mezzanine level, with ductwork installed above it. The district courtroom's furnishings are not original. Two original iron mezzanine support columns are visible in the courtroom. Its eastern wall, behind the judge's bench, is clad in wood paneling with trim work, likely installed in tandem with renovations to the entire courthouse interior. The walls consist of white plaster or sheetrock.

The third floor retains its original linear layout, characterized by two staircases on its west that access the main (north-south) corridor. The floor is surfaced in the same mosaic tile flooring found throughout the building. Offices flank the hallway to the north, west, and south, including those of the Department of Public Safety, Court Reporter, County Agent, and the local Agricultural Extension Agent. Original plans indicate that the curved balcony extended over the rear portion of the district courtroom, with a single door in west wall. Currently, the space is utilized as storage and houses large central air ductwork.

## **Summary of Alterations and Integrity**

The exterior of the Parmer County Courthouse has changed little since its 1916 construction, although the primary façade is partially obscured by a grove of trees that was well-established by 1950. The doors of the former primary entrance were sealed in 1990 to install an elevator, but while this affects the historic layout of the interior space, the change is not noticeable from the building's exterior. The 1974 annex addition is relatively unobtrusive and subservient to the original courthouse in height, massing, and ornamentation. The building's exterior retains a high degree of integrity, despite replacement of the original windows. Incremental and piecemeal repairs and modifications to the building's interior include the installation of wood paneling through all hallways, replacement of original fixtures with fluorescent lighting, and conversion of third floor balcony to storage space. Many of these changes, however, appear to be reversible and does not permanently impact the historical character of the courthouse. The building has continuously served the county and its communities without interruption since its opening in 1917.

## **Historic Jail (1916; second floor added c.1929; contributing building)**

A single-floor jail, with a footprint measuring approximately 26.5-by-28.5 feet was built in conjunction with the Parmer County Courthouse in 1916. A second floor was added to the building c.1929 (blueprints date to July 1929). The jail is of solid brick construction, with concrete slab floors, and features decorative brickwork demarcating the

**Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas**

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first floor, entablature, and frieze. It has a flat roof with a stone capped parapet, with four pilasters capped in concrete or stone stationed on each corner. The only entrance is a single full-metal door centered in the west façade (facing the rear of the courthouse). All of the cells have been removed and the jail is used for storage.

**Table 1: Properties within nomination boundary**

<b>Property</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
Courthouse	Building	1916	Contributing
Jail	Building	1916; 1929 addition	Contributing
Centennial Marker	Object	1936	Contributing
Centennial Highway Marker	Object	1936	Noncontributing in current location
Radio Tower and Equipment Shed	Structure	Less than 50 years old	Noncontributing
Metal shed at northeast end of sheriff's addition	Building	Less than 50 years old	Not counted

**Centennial Marker Text**

FARWELL, TEXAS  
 NAMED FOR JOHN V. FARWELL AND  
 C.B. FARWELL - BUILDERS OF THE TEXAS  
 CAPITOL, 1882-1888, IN EXCHANGE FOR  
 THREE MILLION ACRES OF STATE LAND  
 FOUNDERS OF THE XIT RANCH, 1885

**Centennial Highway Marker Text**

PARMER COUNTY  
 FORMED FROM  
 YOUNG AND BEXAS TERRITORIES  
 CREATED ORGANIZED  
 AUGUST 21, 1876 MAY 7, 1907  
 NAMED IN HONOR OF  
 MARTIN PARMER  
 CAME TO TEXAS IN 1825 AND  
 LOCATED AT MOUND PRAIRIE. A  
 LEADER IN THE FREDONIAN WAR IN  
 1826. SIGNER OF THE TEXAS  
 DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE  
 DIED IN 1856  
 COUNTY SEAT PARMERTON, 1907  
 FARWELL, SINCE 1909

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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### Statement of Significance

Completed in 1916, the Parmer County Courthouse in Farwell, Texas, is the first and only permanent courthouse building in the county. Constructed using county bonds, the building was designed by Amarillo architects Christian Risser and William C. Townes and built by the W.M. Rice Construction Company, also of Amarillo. Its eclectic yet conservative and elegant composition features elements common in Mission Revival, Classical, and Renaissance Revival styles. The building houses both the county and district courtrooms and offices of county officials, arranged in the same manner as when the building opened. The courthouse also houses government record storage and is the center of county elections and their administration. Only 1000 feet east of the Texas-New Mexico state line (also a boundary between Central and Mountain time zones), the building is the westernmost courthouse in the Texas Panhandle. For its decades of service as the heart of Parmer 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 an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Texas courthouse and the most prominent historic building in Parmer County. The period of significance is 1916-1969.

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### Parmer County, Texas<sup>5</sup>

Parmer County is approximately 30 miles square in shape and size and is bordered by Curry County (New Mexico) to the west, and Texas counties Deaf Smith to the north, Castro to the east, and Bailey and Lamb to the south. The region remained relatively isolated through most of its history, with Anglo-American settlement not occurring until the end of the Red River Wars in 1874. Prior to this, the area including Parmer County was inhabited by indigenous peoples: first the Apaches until approximately 1700 when they were displaced by the Kiowa and Comanche peoples respectively. Created in 1876 by the Texas legislature, the county was named for Martin Parmer, signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence.<sup>6</sup> The first Anglo settlers did not arrive until 1882. That same year, a group of Chicago-based investors, known as the Capitol Syndicate, accepted nearly 3,000,000 acres of land as payment for construction of the new Texas State Capitol.<sup>7</sup> Once surveyed, the syndicate established the XIT Ranch to utilize the land until it could be subdivided and sold. As a result, ranching was the main economic driver in the region until the early-twentieth century.

In 1898, the Pecos and Northern Texas Railway constructed a ninety-five-mile extension of the line from Amarillo to the Texas-New Mexico Border.<sup>8</sup> Introduction of the railroad attracted settlement, with communities coalescing near switches and other points along the line, but county population was only 34 in 1900. Two towns developed at the point where the railroad crossed the state line: Texico, New Mexico and Farwell, Texas. The Texico post office was established in 1902 and the town began to grow, but when the railroad selected Clovis (approximately 9 miles west) as its division point, the expected development of Texico stalled and Clovis became the county seat. On the Texas side of the state line, Farwell was established in 1904 and surveyed in 1905. Named for Capitol Syndicate heads Charles and John Farwell, the Farwell townsite occupied lands originally owned by the XIT Ranch. The townsite became the headquarters for the company's land commissioner, James D. Hamlin, and permanent large brick buildings, warehouses, businesses, and a congregational church soon followed.

The county remained unorganized and sparsely populated until May 1907, when an election selected the community of Parmerton (near the geographical center of the county) as the county seat. In September 1907, the Parmerton Townsite Company constructed a one-story frame courthouse, followed shortly by a post office, but on December 10, 1907,

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<sup>5</sup> Donald R. Abbe, "Parmer County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, June 15, 2010, modified on February 15, 2016, accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcp04>.

<sup>6</sup> Parmer County Historical Society, *A History of Parmer County Texas*, Vol. 1, Quanah, Texas: Nortex Press, 1974, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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county residents voted to move the county seat 20 miles southwest to Farwell.<sup>9</sup> The Santa Fe Railroad established a freight depot and coal yard in Farwell, propelling the town to rival other regional shipping centers.<sup>10</sup> The town's population soon expanded to over 800 residents, a result of the growing railroad industry and sale of former XIT lands. A permanent courthouse and jail opened in 1917 to replace a temporary location on Third Street.<sup>11</sup> By the mid-1920s, Farwell possessed modern amenities, with improvements to local utilities continuing into the 1930s. At the same time, a primitive road system was created in the county, including a route from Farwell to Amarillo and State Highway 7 (now U.S. Highway 84) which linked to Lubbock.<sup>12</sup>

As the county population grew to 5,869 in 1930, about 100,000 acres were planted in sorghum, 11,000 acres in corn, 2,500 acres in wheat, and 4,500 acres in cotton.<sup>13</sup> That same year, 818 farms and ranches reported to be raising poultry and cattle, making up a significant portion of the local economy. While growth slowed during the 1930s, Parmer weathered the Great Depression, with modest growth continuing throughout the decade. A substantial increase in drilled irrigation reinvigorated the counties slumping economy during the 1950s. Farwell boasted 1,250 residents in 1950 and voted again to incorporate and form a city government. Population fluctuated little throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, with the majority of the county's economy tied to the agricultural industry. The introduction of industrial cattle feedlots also contributed to the county's growth, with nearly 11,000 people residing in Parmer County in 1970. Population declined slightly in the 1980s and has remained relatively static, with a reported population of 9,749 in 2015. Agriculture continues to be the main economic driver in the county.

### Parmer County Courthouse and Jail

The first building to serve as a Parmer County courthouse, erected in May 1907 in Parmerton, was a one-story frame building with a shingle roof, measuring approximately 28 by 40 feet.<sup>14</sup> The fledgling town received a post office in September 1907, which closed by August 1908 after county residents elected to move the county seat 20 miles southwest to Farwell. All county records were moved to new brick office buildings known as the "Hamlin Brick" in Farwell.<sup>15</sup> In May 1913, a fire struck the Hamlin buildings, resulting in the displacement of court proceedings to a new building on Third Street, which served as a temporary courthouse until a permanent one was built. In August of that year, Parmer County residents voted in favor of a \$50,000 bond for the construction of a permanent courthouse. In addition, a new jail (to cost less than \$3000) was approved for construction behind the courthouse. Both were erected in 1916, with county officials moving into the new facilities in 1917. Designed by architect Risser & Co. and erected by W.M. Rice Construction Co., both of Amarillo, the three-story building was completed at a cost of \$43,243.65 before furnishings.<sup>16</sup> Rice also won the contract to build a one-story brick jail (architect unknown). The \$50,000 bond was paid by June 1931, 22 years before it was due, and saving the county \$6,600 in interest.<sup>17</sup>

Texas State death records indicate that architect Christian Risser died in September 1916 due to "some form of heart disease."<sup>18</sup> The firm's junior member, William C. Townes, is identified as a co-architect on a marble plaque at the

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<sup>9</sup> "Here's Some History on the County Courthouse," *State Line Tribune*, February 7, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> *A History of Parmer County Texas*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>12</sup> "Farwell, TX (Parmer County)," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Hugh Moseley, "Parmerton, Texas," *Parmer County Historical Survey Committee*, Texas Historical Commission Marker File: Parmerton Parmer Co., Job #3216, September 24, 1970.

<sup>15</sup> "Farwell, TX (Parmer County)," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>16</sup> Parmer County Historical Society, *A History of Parmer County Texas*, Vol. 1, Quanah, Texas: Nortex Press, 1974, 1974, 58-59.

<sup>17</sup> "Paying Bonds Before Due." *El Paso Times*, June 5, 1931.

<sup>18</sup> Texas State Board of Health. "Standard Certificate of Death: Christopher Risser." *Bureau of Vital Statistics*, September 18, 1916.

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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northwest corner of the courthouse.<sup>19</sup> Parmer County Commissioners minutes specify that half of the \$1,320 architects fee was paid to Townes, with the other half going to Risser's estate.<sup>20</sup> Townes would become a successful architect in west Texas and New Mexico (biography at end of this section).<sup>21</sup>

In December 1926, Farwell was roiled with news of a mass murder by George Hassell on farm three miles east of town. Hassell had married his late brother's wife and moved from Oklahoma the previous year with his wife and her eight children. In early December, Hassell murdered the entire family, a crime to which he confessed on Christmas day. On December 28, Hassell was spirited away from the Parmer County jail to the Hale County Jail in Plainview, reportedly to prevent vigilante action in Farwell. The trial took place at the Parmer County Courthouse a mere three weeks later, with a guilty verdict after two hours deliberation, and a death sentence scheduled at Huntsville for February 25. After his trial, Hassell confessed to four additional murders in Whittier, California. The execution was delayed while an appeal was filed, and Hassell returned to the Parmer County Courthouse for resentencing in January 1928, after which his execution was rescheduled, and finally carried out on February 10 in Huntsville.<sup>22</sup>

The Hassell trial and follow-up resentencing hearing brought attention to the deficiencies of the tiny 1916 jail. In November 1928, architect J. Roy Smith of Amarillo, drew plans for a new county jail. The plans, on file at the courthouse, reveal an ambitious 2-story design with over four times the floorspace of the existing jail. It would have featured a ground-floor jailkeeper's residence (not unusual in Texas jails), with three bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom, and breakfast nook. The second-floor plans reveal segregated cell areas for white and "colored" men, women, and juveniles, and a special cell for those prisoners deemed "insane."<sup>23</sup> For unknown reasons, but likely associated with the cost of a seemingly extravagant new building, the county opted to instead add a second floor to the existing jail. Blueprints on file in the courthouse indicate that Kerr & Walsh Architects, of Amarillo, designed the addition in July 1929.

In July 1935, another high-profile case was tried in the Parmer County Courthouse, when the second Amarillo murder trial of George S. Hamlin was transferred to the 69<sup>th</sup> district court in Farwell, after the first jury was unable to reach a verdict. Hamlin was charged with slaying of his wife Irene Hare with a hammer in January 1935. The 22-day trial began in January 1936, and after 55 hours of deliberation, the jury acquitted Hamlin.<sup>24</sup> Except for the brief periods during the Hassell and Hamlin murder trials, the Parmer County Courthouse was the scene of more routine cases, and quietly served as a community gathering spot. Numerous articles in the *State Line News* of the 1920s and 30s highlight the courthouse as the location of county-wide art, craft, and flower shows, and other community events. A 1936 article in the *Amarillo Daily News* highlighted a response to an out-of-town critique of the courthouse block's unconventional landscaping:

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<sup>19</sup> Texas Trade Review and Industrial Record, "New Architectural Firms," Volume 21, (November 15, 1916) 26.

<sup>20</sup> *A History of Parmer County Texas*, Vol. 1., 58.

<sup>21</sup> Little is known about architect Christian Risser (1850-1916) except that he was born in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, moved to Wabash County, Indiana by 1874, and relocated to Amarillo by 1910, where he worked in partnership with G.L. Murray until 1911. The Parmer County Courthouse is the only building attributed to him.

<sup>22</sup> "Closely Guard Texas Slayer. Rangers Sent to Protect Killer of 13," *El Paso Herald*, January 10, 1928. One Texas newspaper noted that "Hassell was the fifth white man to die in the chair and the thirty-eighth person since its installation seven years ago." "Slayer Fills Appointment With Death," *Waxahachie Daily Light*, February 10, 1928.

<sup>23</sup> Parmer County reported one African-American resident in the 1920 census, while adjacent Curry County, New Mexico, reported seven. The reported African-American population in the 1930 census was 7 (Parmer) and 85 (Curry).

<sup>24</sup> "Hammer Slaying Suspect to Face Trial in Farwell Court," *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, July 13, 1935; "Arguments Heard At Hamlin Trial," *Pampa Daily News*, February 3, 1936; "Hamlin Freed of Killing His Wife," *Longview Daily News*, February 7, 1936. According to the *Pampa Daily News*, "the prosecution based its case chiefly on the purported confession. Defense attorneys intended to show that Hamlin was insane and that his wife was unfaithful."

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Civic pride was aroused here in connection with the George S. Hamlin murder trial when a press report described the Parmer County courthouse as being “surrounded by corn fields and a croquet court.” Irate citizens announced: “We’d rather have a courthouse in a corn patch that was paid for than a white elephant with a mortgage.”

Farwell residents, boasting of the high soil fertility in the region, recall that eight bales of cotton were raised on the county’s “farm” a few years ago. A small plot in front of the west entrance to the building is planted in blue grass and clover. Nearly a thousand (sic) American Elm trees have been set around the courthouse since 1932. The croquet court is at the rear of the building. Miniature bleachers have been erected for spectators.<sup>25</sup>

An October 1950 front-page article in the *State Line News* announced that Parmer County Courthouse and grounds were getting a “new look,” and described changes to the landscape, as well as to some of the building’s interior spaces. The article touted a new lawn sprinkler, a lawn seeded with Kentucky bluegrass, and the redecoration of the jury sleeping room, including the acquisition of new mattresses and linens. The courtroom floors were also sanded and varnished, while the courtroom windows were tinted. An accompanying photo (see page 22) shows the trees on the west lawn that in time would grow to obscure the building’s primary façade.<sup>26</sup>

The county made further changes in the mid-1970s. A 1-story annex was added to the north side of the courthouse in 1974 and completed in 1975; it functioned as the new jail (housing up to 18 inmates) and Sheriff’s Department.<sup>27</sup> A modern building was built adjacent to the annex and is not used as by the Department. An elevator was installed in main entrance lobby on the west side in 1990; the third and second floors were renovated in 1991 and 1992.

### Architectural Significance of the Parmer County Courthouse

The Parmer County Courthouse meets Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent example of an eclectic design with elements of Classical, Mission Revival and Renaissance Revival styles, and exemplifies of a blending of contemporary styles that was common in the Panhandle region of Texas. The courthouse was built during the “Golden Age” of Texas courthouse construction. Spanning from the 1880s to the 1920s, this period coincided with a period of tremendous economic and cultural development in the state and the increase in wealth led to an increase in new public buildings.<sup>28</sup>

The Parmer County Courthouse and many of its regional contemporaries exhibit elements of classical design, due in part to a resurgence of classicism in the early-twentieth century and various stylistic choices favored by regional architects. Similar courthouses of Dallam (1922), Lynn (1916), and Freestone (1919) counties all bear a similarity to the Parmer Courthouse in their façade composition, with emphasis on the lower two floors and diminution of the top floor, but only Parmer has a T-shaped plan. The Dallam County Courthouse was designed by Smith and Townes and is virtually identical to the Freestone County Courthouse by Amarillo architect W.R. Kaufman. The strikingly similar 1916 Lynn County Courthouse was designed by W. M. Rice of the W.M. Rice Construction Company. While it is unclear if there is a substantive connection between the architects and contractor that helped to determine the design of

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<sup>25</sup> “Residents of Parmer County Proud of Courthouse and Twelve-Acre Plot.” *Amarillo Daily News*, January 22, 1936. A more accurate description of the tree count would be a “dozen.”

<sup>26</sup> “Parmer County Courthouse Well on Way to Becoming Striking Government Edifice.” *State Line Tribune*, October 12, 1950.

<sup>27</sup> “Detention Center Near Completion.” *Clovis News-Journal*, March 4, 1975.

<sup>28</sup> Willard B. Robinson, *The People’s Architecture: Texas Courthouses, Jails, and Municipal Buildings* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1983), 195-260. See also Michael C. Andrews, *Historic Texas Courthouses* (Houston: Bright Sky Press, 2006).

## Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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these courthouses, the geographical base of companies in Amarillo and the greater-Panhandle region, suggests a regional proclivity towards blending popular contemporary styles of the early-twentieth century for large public buildings. Unlike other Classical Revival courthouses in region, mission features such as curvilinear and irregular parapet walls, are common to among these four buildings. Additionally, each possesses an individual cast stone ornament within a curved pediment that bears the first letter of each respective county at its center. While not unprecedented, this amalgamation of stylistic elements seems concentrated among buildings connected to William C. Townes or W.H. Rice.<sup>29</sup>

What makes the Parmer courthouse distinctive amongst other Townes and Rice-related buildings is its use of arched windows its east wing, a T-shaped plan, and its pronounced parapet. Dallam, Lynn, and Freestone more closely follow the Beaux-Arts arrangement with the first floor sited above ground level, creating a hierarchy in its spatial arrangement indicative of the style.<sup>30</sup> All three are constructed of red brick with white cast stone ornamentation throughout its exterior and possess the same block massing with stepped north-south facades and projecting porticos on their east and west elevations. The Parmer courthouse is a slight departure from this grandiose use of the temple form and other ornamentation. Its T-shaped massing, plain wall surfaces, balanced fenestration, and subdued color palette helps differentiate it from the more formal motifs of the majority West Texas courthouses.

### **William C. Townes, Architect<sup>31</sup>**

Born June 28, 1883, in Haskell, Texas, William C. Townes moved to Amarillo in 1905 and worked as a carpenter while studying architecture from home. He worked with C. Risser on the Parmer County Courthouse in 1916, partnered with J. Roy Smith in the architectural firm of Smith & Townes from 1920–1924, and formed the firm of Townes, Lightfoot and Funk in 1927. The firm disbanded upon Rabey Funk's death in 1939 and from that point on the firm operated as William C. Townes and Associates. Though he designed numerous residential and institutional buildings, Townes specialized in courthouses throughout west Texas and eastern New Mexico.<sup>32</sup> His eight other Texas county courthouses are those for: Briscoe County (1922); Dallam County (1922; NR 1992); Hutchinson County (1927; NR 2012; Hansford County (1931); Potter County (1932; NR 1996), Childress County (1939; NR 2016), Castro County (1940); and Ward County (1940). All eight actively still serve as county courthouses. Townes served as the contractor for the Jons-Gilvin House in Amarillo (1907; NR 1992) and also designed the Potter County Library (1922) in Amarillo, as well as numerous school buildings throughout the Texas Panhandle. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects and the Texas Society of Architects. He died on May 21, 1961 in Amarillo, Texas.<sup>33</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Parmer County Courthouse has functioned as the center of political and social action in Parmer County for over 100 years. In 1962, the courthouse was designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark. The building serves as an important symbol of prosperity and sophistication, marking the entry of Parmer County into the modern era at the time of its construction. It continues to play a pivotal role in the administration and political life of the county and meets Criterion A in the area of Government. It is a handsomely-finished mixed-style building with elements of Mission and Renaissance Revival design. The courthouse retains a good degree of integrity and meets Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level as an exceptional example of regional variation of the classical courthouse.

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<sup>29</sup> Amy Dase, *Dallam County Courthouse*, National Register nomination, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, Sec 8,4.

<sup>31</sup> Adapted from the Hutchinson County Courthouse (Stinnett, Texas), National Register Nomination, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Carla Breeze, *Pueblo Deco* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990), 70.

<sup>33</sup> William C. Townes obituary. *Amarillo Globe-Times*. May 22, 1961.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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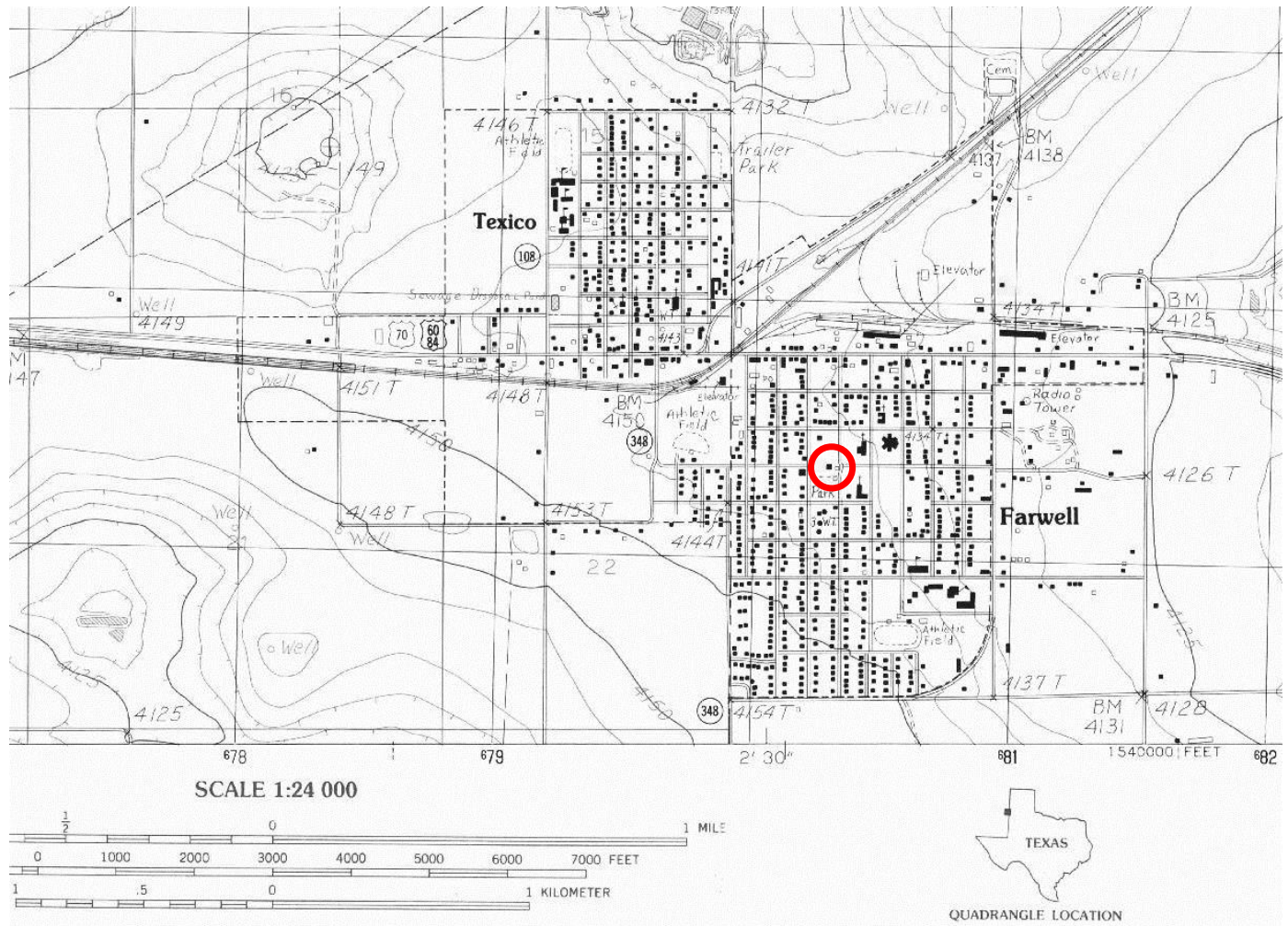
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- William C. Townes obituary. *Amarillo Globe-Times*. May 22, 1961.

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas



USGS map (detail) showing proximity of of Texico, New Mexico and Farwell, Texas.  
Courthouse indicated by circle.  
Provisional Edition, 1985



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

Parmer County Courthouse at center of public block  
Source: Google Earth (accessed September 20, 2018)



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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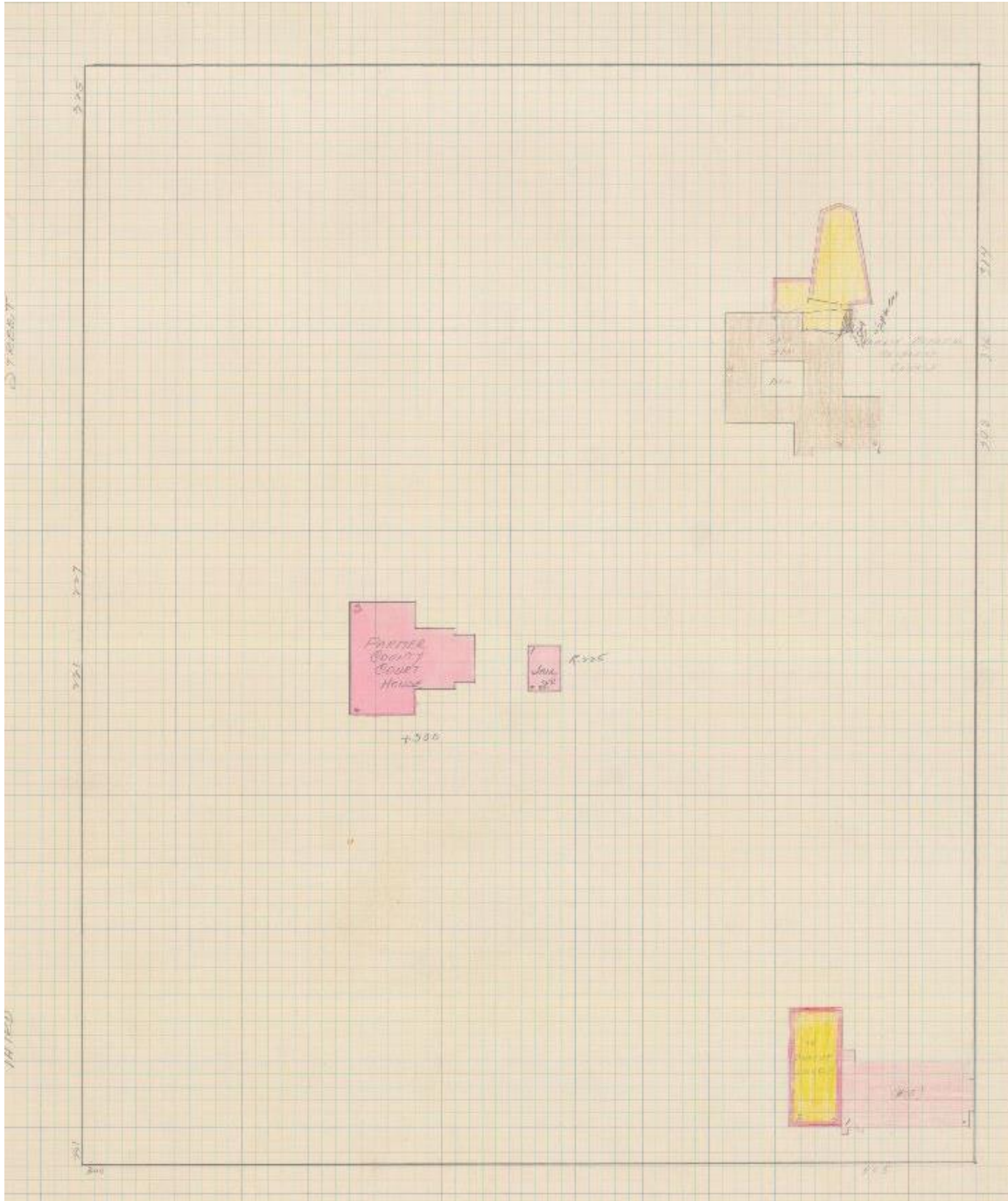
Parmer County Courthouse at center of public block  
1-story addition to the north; freetsanding jail to the east.

Source: Google Earth (accessed September 20, 2018)



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

Detail of "Farwell 3" map (1939; amended at later date with changes to church buildings on the east side of the block). Texas Department of Insurance State Fire Marshal maps, Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library and Archives Commission. No Sanborn Fire Insurance maps exist for Farwell, Texas.

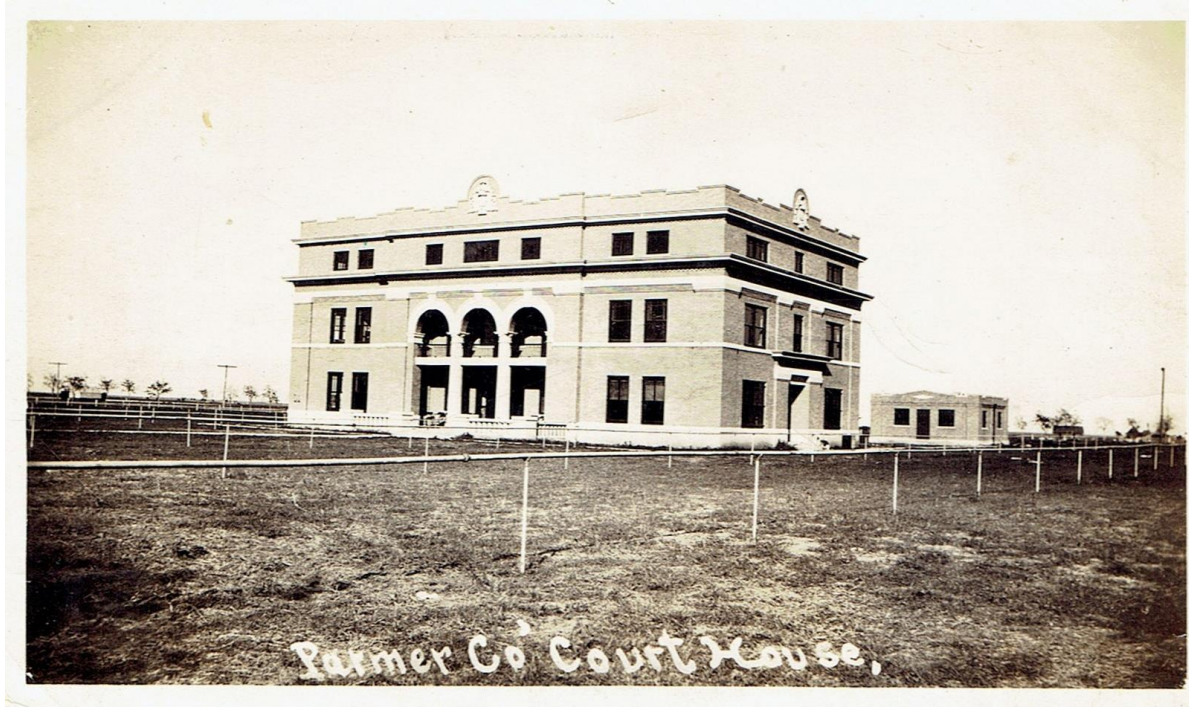


Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Parmer County Courthouse, c.1917

Photo postcard from the collection of Keith Vincent, CourthouseHistory.com



Parmer County Courthouse, c.1917

Photo postcard from the collection of the Parmer County Historical Commission.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

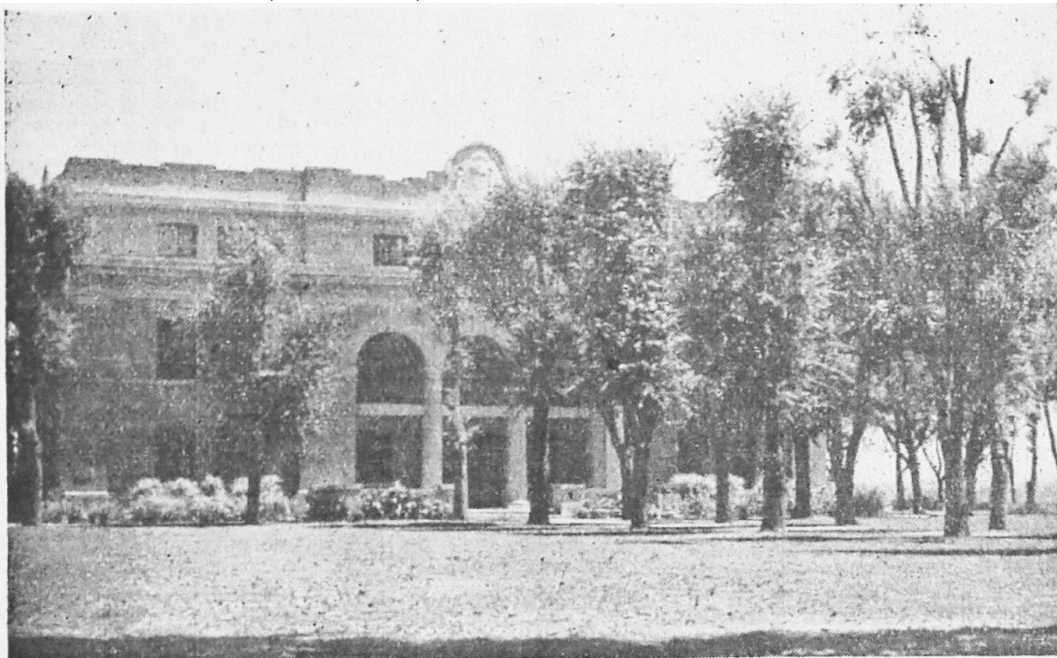
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Parmer County Courthouse, c.1918

Photo postcard from the collection of Keith Vincent, CourthouseHistory.com



“Parmer County Courthouse Well on Way to Becoming Striking Government Edifice.”  
*The State Line Tribune*, October 12, 1950.



An up-to-the-minute view of Parmer County's new courthouse grounds, showing the fresh, luxuriant lawn of Kentucky blue grass in the foreground. With the new lawn, Caretaker Noble Goldsmith has a new duty of keeping it mowed regularly, which he delights in doing with a brand new power mower.

Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Parmer County Courthouse, c.1955

Photo postcard from the collection of Keith Vincent, CourthouseHistory.com

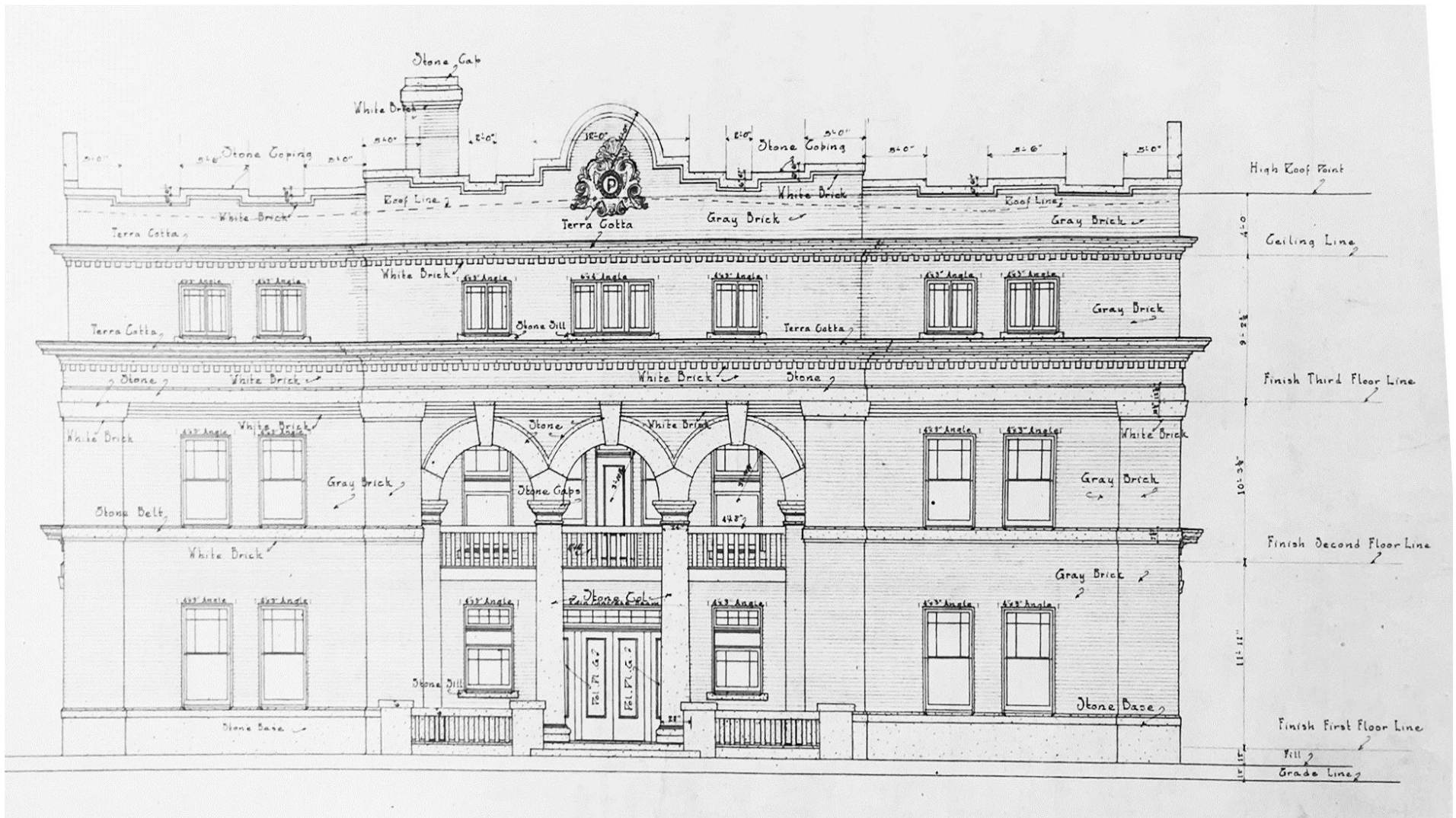




Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**West Elevation**

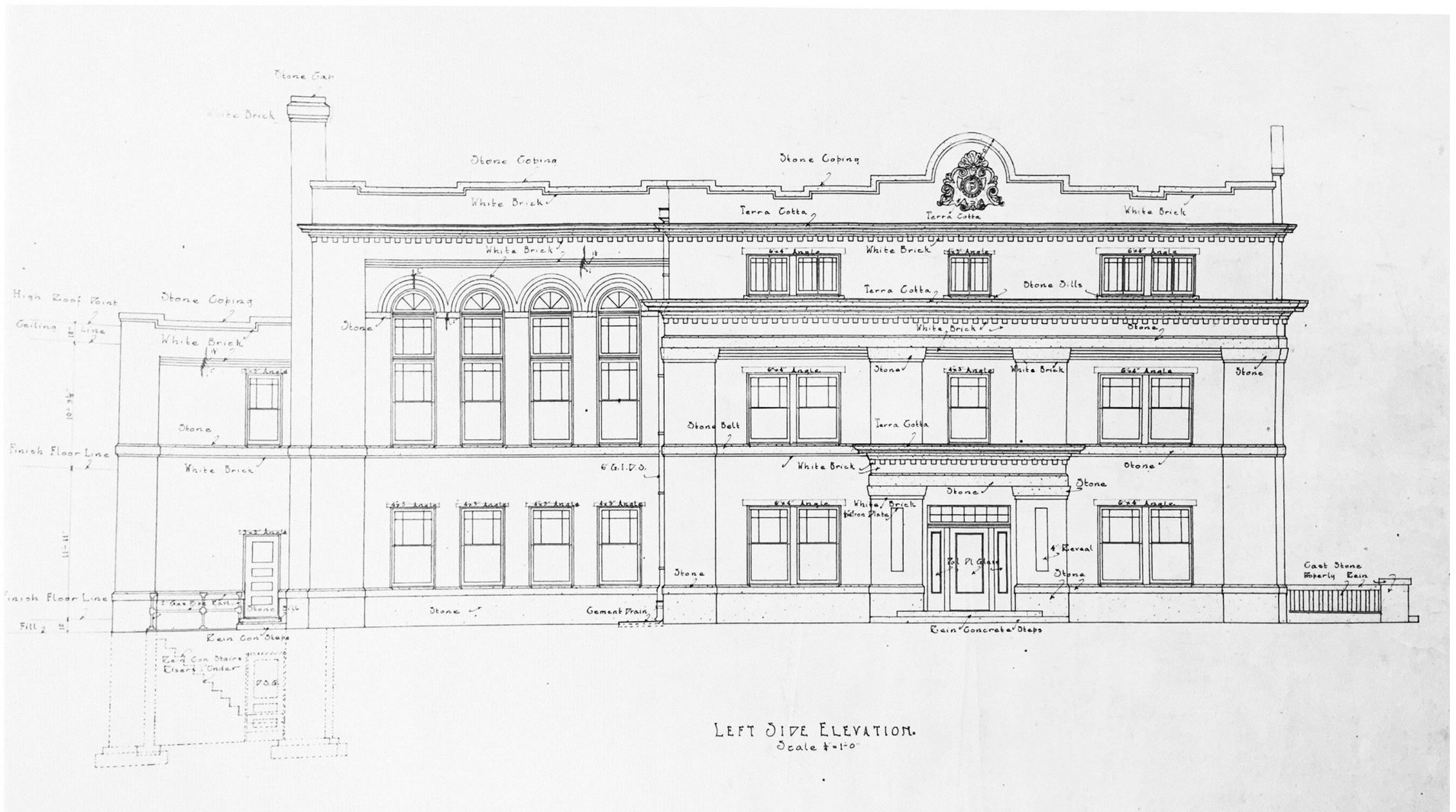
From blueprints on file at the Parmer County Courthouse (G. Risser & Co. Architects, 1916)



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**North Elevation**

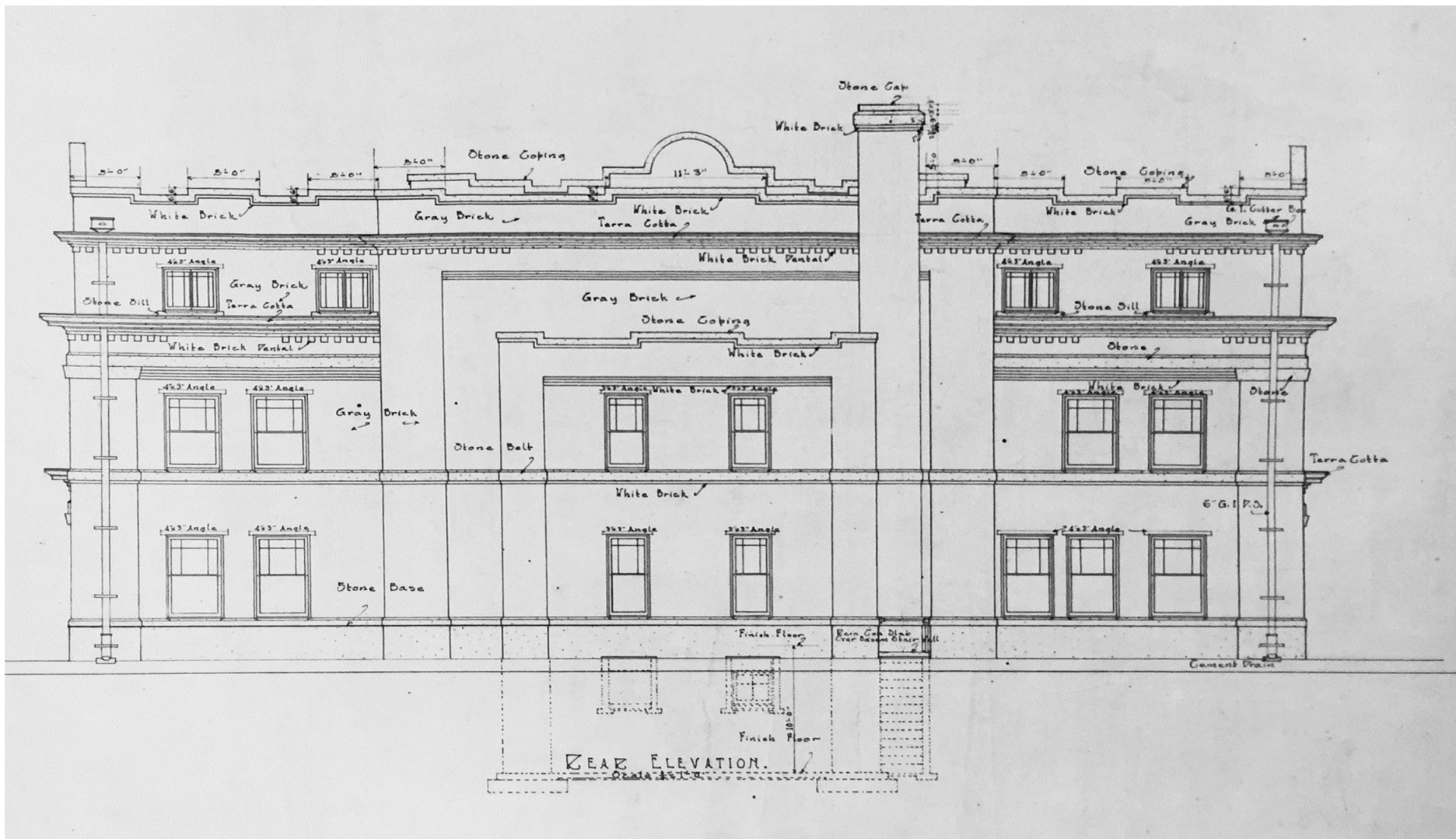
From blueprints on file at the Parmer County Courthouse (G. Risser & Co. Architects, 1916)



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**East Elevation**

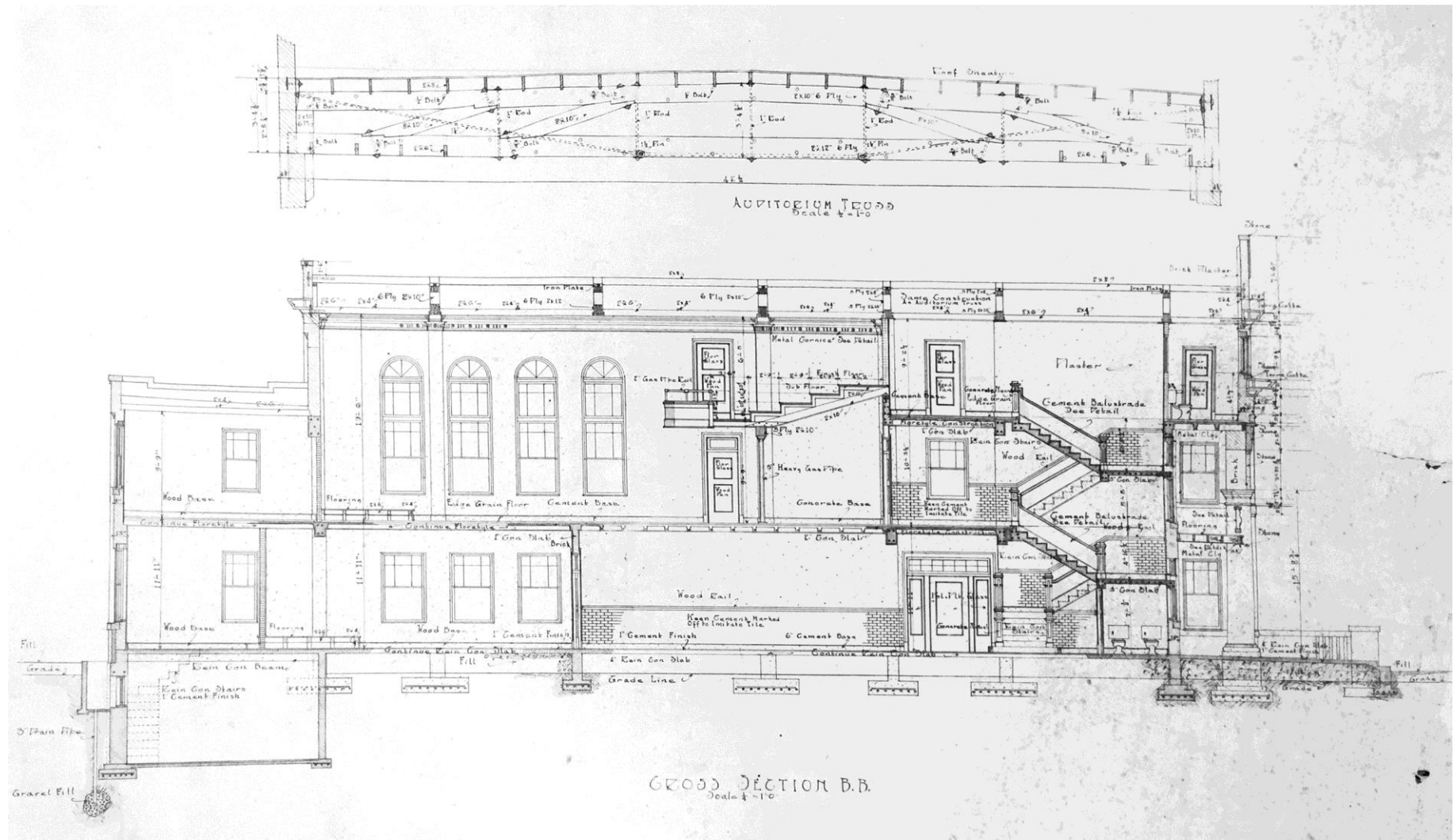
From blueprints on file at the Parmer County Courthouse (G. Risser & Co. Architects, 1916)



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**Cross Section, looking south**

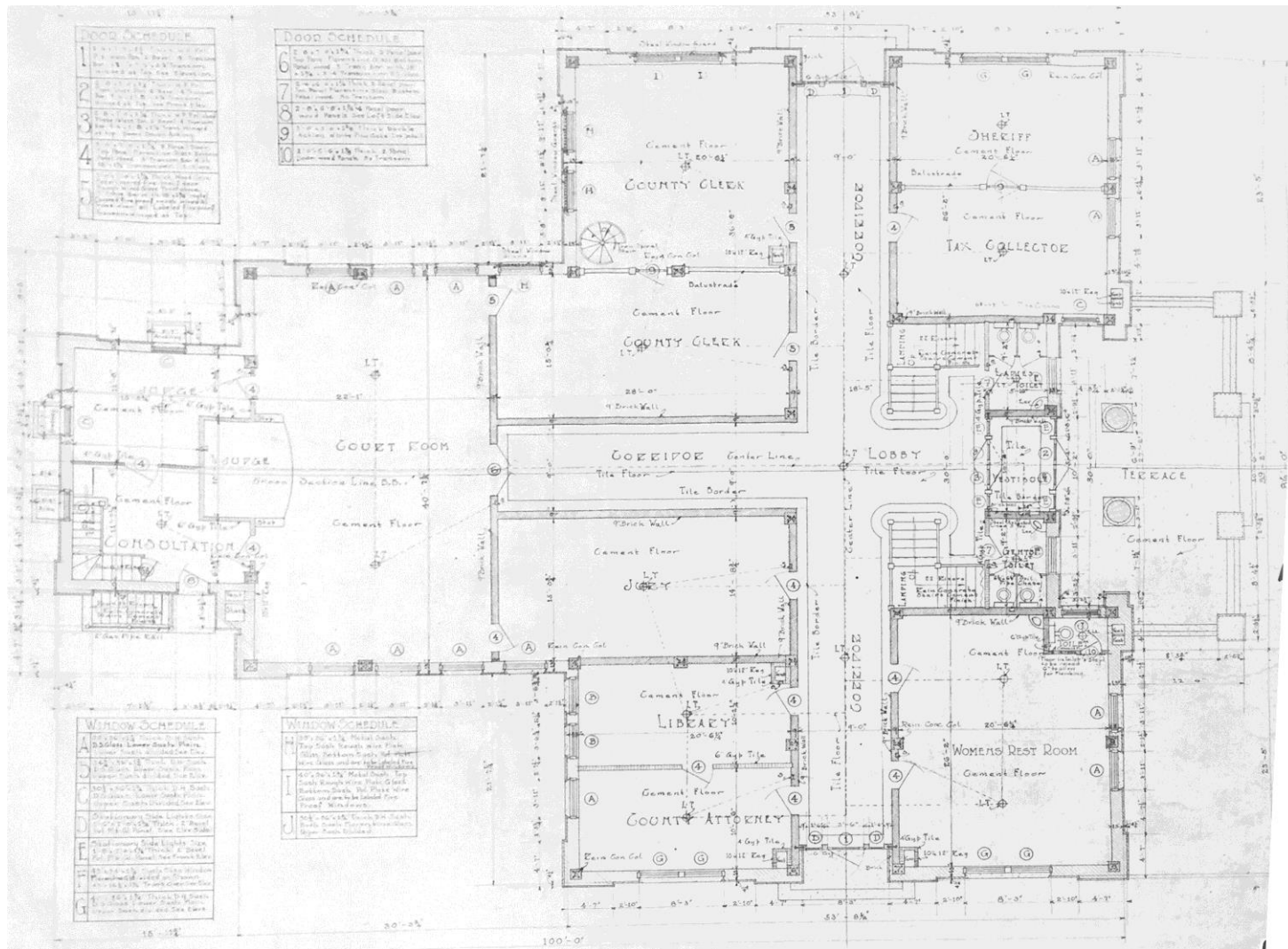
From blueprints on file at the Parmer County Courthouse (G. Risser & Co. Architects, 1916)



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**First Floor Plan**

From blueprints on file at the Parmer County Courthouse (G. Risser & Co. Architects, 1916)

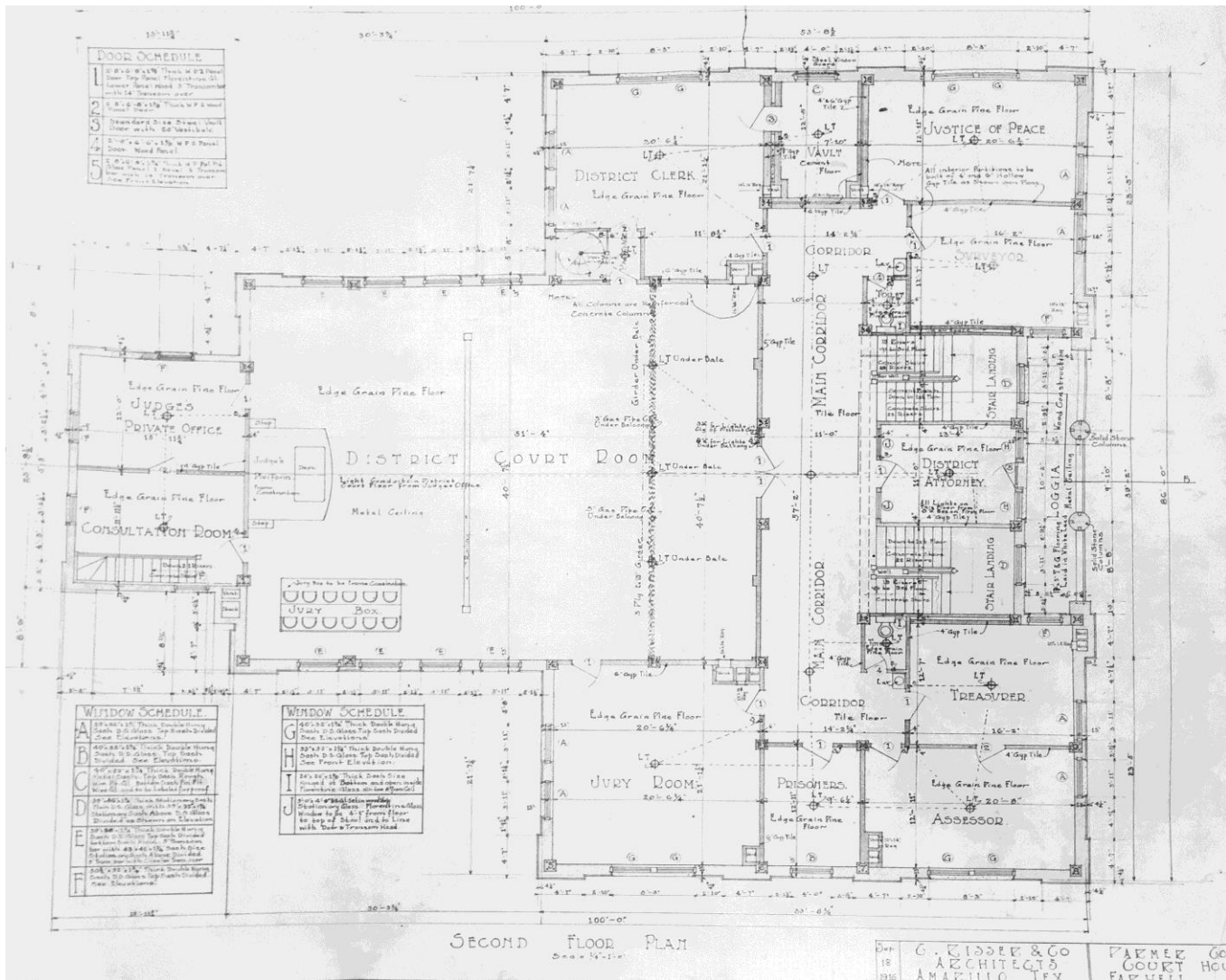


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Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**Second Floor Plan**

From blueprints on file at the Parmer County Courthouse (G. Risser & Co. Architects, 1916)

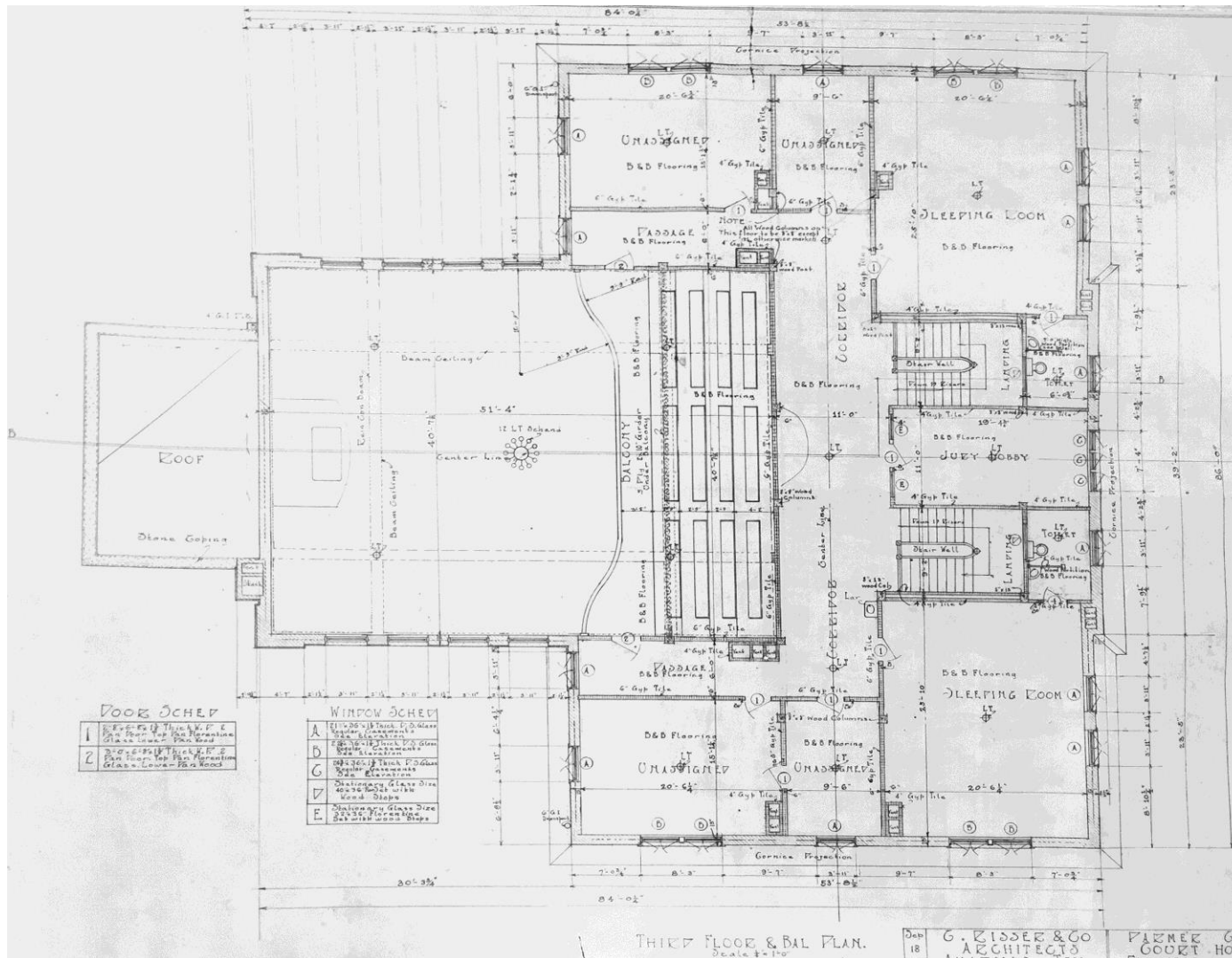


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Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**Third Floor Plan**

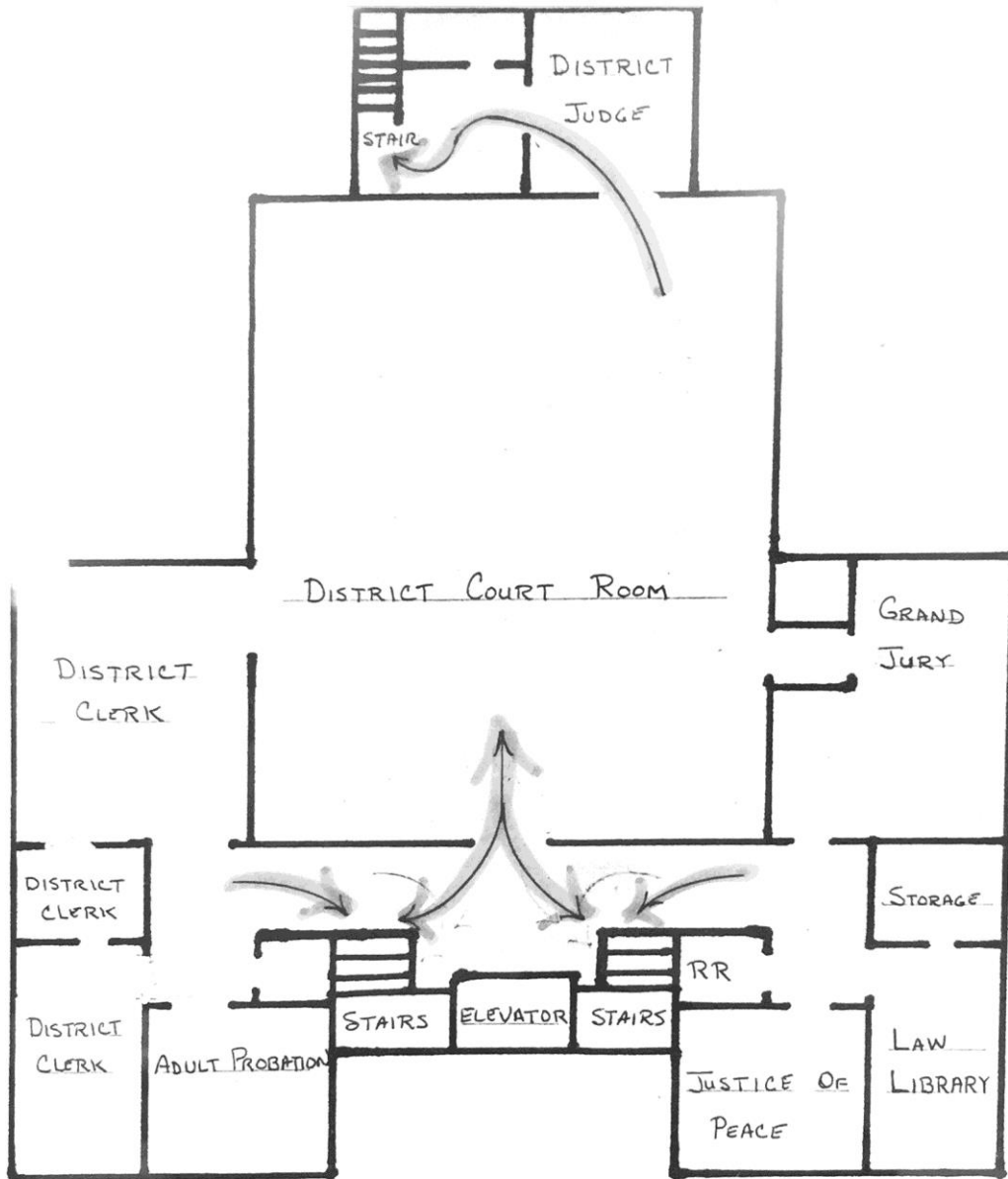
From blueprints on file at the Parmer County Courthouse (G. Risser & Co. Architects, 1916)



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Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**Second Floor Plan (as of 2014)**

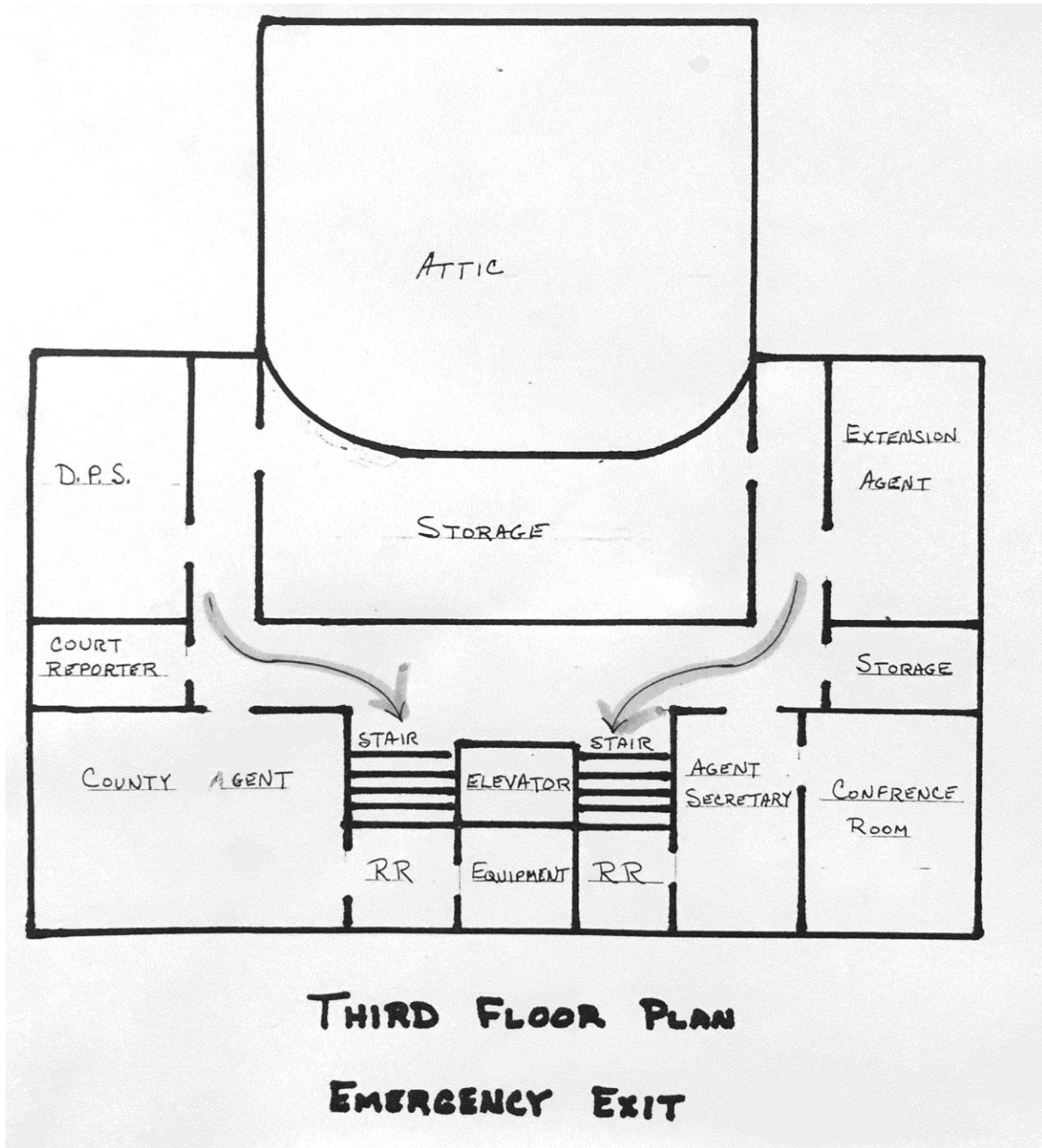


**SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
EMERGENCY EXIT**



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

**Third Floor Plan** (as of 2014)



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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All Photos by Gregory Smith, October 2014 (except as noted)

Photo 1  
West Elevation.



Photo 2  
West Elevation from Third Street.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 3

Northwest oblique; 1974 addition on left.



Photo 4

West façade.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 5  
West Entrance.



Photo 6  
Second floor balcony, west side.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 7

West elevation parapet.



Photo 8

West elevation, camera facing north.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 9  
South pediment.



Photo 10  
South façade.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 11

Southeast oblique, east wing at right.



Photo 12

Former county jail (left), courthouse (east elevation, right).



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 13

East elevation with radio tower and 1974 addition at right.



Photo 14

1974 addition, east elevation.





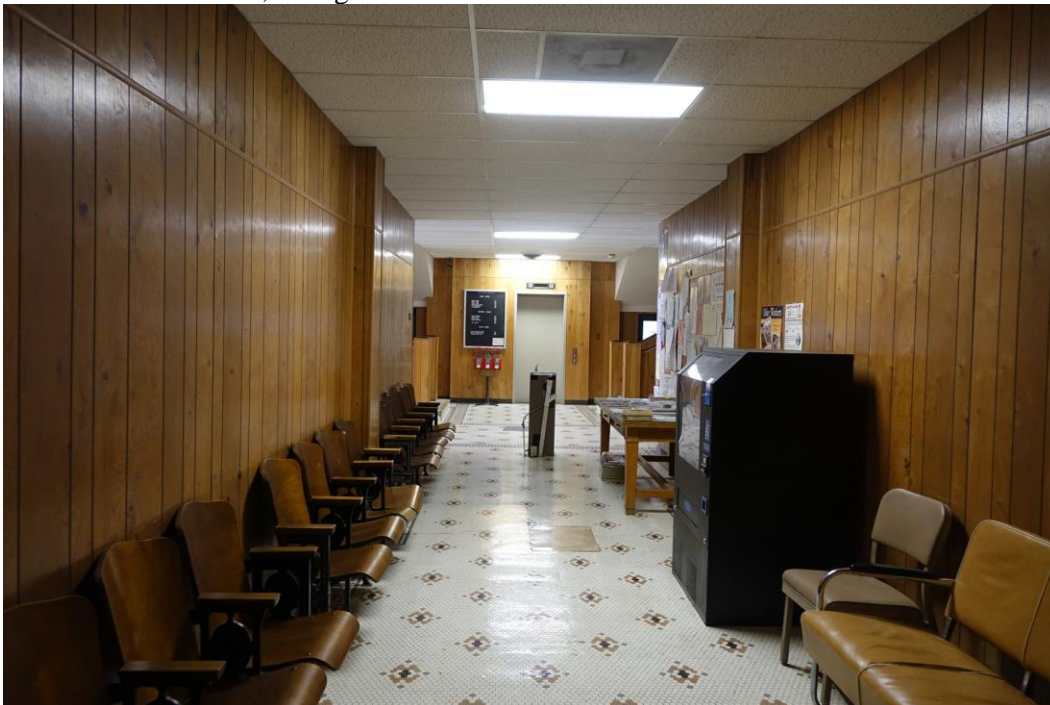
Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 15  
Ground floor hall, facing addition to the north.



Photo 16  
Ground floor east hall, facing elevator at for west entrance.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 17  
Ground floor elevator and staircase, facing northwest.



Photo 18  
Second floor hallway and stair landing.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 19

Second floor courtroom, facing east, mezzanine supports at left and right. 2018 photo by Gladys Spring.



Photo 20

Second floor porch, facing south.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 21  
Third floor mezzanine level.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 22

1916 jail with c.1929 second floor addition, southeast oblique.



Photo 23

Former jail, northwest oblique.



Parmer County Courthouse, Farwell, Parmer County, Texas

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Photo 24

Jail interior, second floor, facing east.



- end -