



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

July 26, 2010

Notice to file:

This property has been automatically listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This is due to the fact that the publication of our Federal Register Notice: "National Register of Historic Places: Pending Nominations and Other Actions" was delayed beyond our control to the point where the mandated 15 day public comment period ended after our required 45 day time frame to act on the nomination. If the 45<sup>th</sup> day falls on a weekend or Federal holiday, the property will be automatically listed the next business day. The nomination is technically adequate and meets the National Register criteria for evaluation, and thus, automatically listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

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National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Karnes County Courthouse  
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 101 Panna Maria Avenue  
CITY OR TOWN: Karnes City VICINITY: N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A  
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: Karnes CODE: 255 ZIP CODE: 78118

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.)

*Mark Wolfe* State Historic Preservation Officer Date 6/7/10  
Signature of certifying official / Title Date  
Texas Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- other, explain  See continuation sheet.

*Edson Beall* Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 7-26-10

**5. CLASSIFICATION**

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: PUBLIC—Local

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: BUILDING

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING	
	3	0	BUILDINGS
	0	0	SITES
	0	0	STRUCTURES
	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>	OBJECTS
	4	6	TOTAL

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 = county courthouse

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: GOVERNMENT / Courthouse = county courthouse

**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: LATE VICTORIAN: Second Empire; Richardsonian Romanesque

MATERIALS:	FOUNDATION	BRICK, CONCRETE
	WALLS	BRICK, CONCRETE
	ROOF	CERAMIC TILE
	OTHER	

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-11)

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Karnes County Courthouse is a three-story, load-bearing brick masonry building with rusticated stone trim constructed in 1895, with two concrete-frame and masonry additions constructed in 1924. The 1895 structure is covered with stucco and painted to match the 1924 additions, and the entire building is roofed in terra cotta tile. As originally designed, the structure exhibited both Second Empire and Richardsonian Romanesque elements; these features—including projected mansard towers, conical corner towers, a central clock tower and slate roofing—were altered or completely removed in 1924. Two full-height additions with basements were made to the building's west elevation. More recent changes include the replacement of wood windows with steel sash and aluminum windows, and the replacement of original exterior wood doors with aluminum storefront doors. The interior has been reconfigured, and suspended ceilings obscure original ceiling heights and detailing in most areas. Despite these physical changes, the building has remained the focus of county politics and government since the time of its construction.

The Karnes County Courthouse is located in the county seat of Karnes City, on the courthouse square bounded by Buchel Avenue (north), Calvert Avenue (south), Panna Maria Avenue (east), and Davidson Avenue (west). The original western boundary was Park Avenue, which has been closed. Calvert and Panna Maria avenues were the primary roads leading into early Karnes City at the time of construction; today Calvert Avenue is the city's primary commercial thoroughfare. The San Antonio and Aransas Pass (SA & AP) railroad ran diagonally from the northwest to southeast through the town grid and crossed Panna Maria Avenue three blocks to the south of the courthouse.

Karnes City was laid out on a grid pattern with quadrants formed by Calvert Avenue running east-to-west and Panna Maria Avenue running north-to-south. The courthouse is located in the northwest quadrant of the town at the western end of the commercial district. The surrounding neighborhood is comprised of small and largely dilapidated housing. Some streets remain unpaved.

The building site is located on a hill that dominated the surrounding landscape prior to adjacent development. The courthouse is located within the southeast corner of the block, and its primary façade faces east. The county jail, built in 1954, is located at the northeast corner of the block. The county's financial departments are located in a converted savings and loan building at 200 East Calvert Avenue.

## Site

The courthouse site is separated from the sidewalk and street below by a low perimeter wall penetrated at various points by concrete stairs with simple pipe railings. This wall, which appears in early photographs of the courthouse, extends along Panna Maria Avenue to the east and Calvert Avenue to the south, and is built of reinforced concrete with iron rings for tethering horses placed at regular intervals.

A small memorial oak dedicated to former county judge and historian Robert Thonoff and one large live oak tree are located at the square's southeast corner, while the open space west of the building is filled with live oak and pecan trees; a grass lawn covers the square. There are two historical markers on the site: a Texas Historical Commission subject marker documenting the courthouse and a 1936 Centennial marker for Karnes County from

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the Texas Highway Department. Two flagpoles flank the sidewalk leading to the east entrance at Panna Maria Avenue. A pre-World War II artillery piece is on permanent display near the southwest corner of the square. The air conditioning equipment is located on the north and west sides of the building.

### Karnes County Courthouse Exterior

As originally constructed in 1895, the three-story Karnes County Courthouse was rectangular in plan, with load-bearing, buff-colored brick walls set on a four-foot tall base. Each of the four elevations had a central projecting entrance pavilion with a recessed doorway and multi-light, arched transom. The primary entrance was from the east elevation into the main corridor, which ran east-to-west. A hallway extended perpendicularly to the north entrance. The south entrance is thought to have accessed a ground floor courtroom. Four archways at the center of the first floor supported the central tower, which was removed in the 1920s. A portion of the north-to-south circulation plan and three of the four interior arches are now obscured by enclosures and dropped ceilings.

Four full-height, rounded towers were originally topped by conical roofs with finials that rose above the main structure to a four-story level. In 1924 the conical roofs were removed and the towers truncated to the cornice level of the building, and the towers remain at this shortened height.

The original mansard roof profile remains intact only on the north and south elevations. As designed in 1895, the building's gabled central pavilion was crowned on both the east and west sides by a crested mansard structure that rose to the height of the corner towers. These structures were removed in 1924, and the remaining mansard roof—originally covered with slate—was re-roofed in terra cotta-colored "S" tiles. The mansard roof profile was extended on the 1924 additions to the building's east and west elevations. A copper cornice extends around the roofline.

Today, the east-to-west corridor continues to provide the building's only through-access. The north entrance and hall connect to the east-to-west corridor, while the south entrance has been closed. The additions extend the floor plan on both the southwest and northwest corners of the original structure. At the southwest corner the addition extends fifty feet beyond the original building, while at the northwest corner a second addition extends twelve feet. These additions project on either side of the original west door which is now used as the accessible entrance.

### East Elevation

The courthouse's primary entrance is from the east. The elevated site is approached by wide concrete steps and a walkway leading to the main entrance. A central gabled pavilion projects beyond the building's east face. The entrance is recessed within a large archway, one of the remaining Richardsonian design motifs. It is flanked by paired half-columns of red granite with highly decorated capitals, and the columns are set on the building's base. The gabled central pavilion has a single, wide bay with a multi-paned window that is capped by an arch at the third floor level.

Original wood doors were replaced by aluminum store-front doors circa 1959. The original multi-paned fan light has been removed and its opening has been plastered. Contemporary metal lettering that spells KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE is mounted in the fan light area.

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The east elevation is organized horizontally by rusticated masonry belt courses that have been plastered and painted red. These belt courses also extend around the west, north, and south elevations and are replicated in cement-based plaster on the 1924 additions. First- and second-floor window openings are flat arched, while third-floor openings are united by round, repeated arches. Plain spandrel panels separate the second and third floor windows. Second- and third-floor window openings have been sealed in the southeast corner tower. The east elevation's fenestration pattern was replicated on the west elevation, but additions in 1924 removed original fenestration on the west elevation. All original wood windows on the east elevation have been replaced with multi-paned aluminum sash windows.

### North Elevation

The north elevation is a wider and more developed version of the east elevation. Here, as on other elevations, the central feature is a full-height, projecting gabled pavilion with an arched doorway on the first floor, triple windows on the second floor, and an arched, triple window on the third floor. In contrast to the east elevation, the north gable features a central, arched 1-over-1 window flanked by two rectangular single-pane windows.

A bay with windows and a rounded tower flanks each side of the central pavilion. The single, multi-paned windows are flat headed on the first two floors and arched on the third floor. Beyond the flanking towers is another bay with narrow, paired windows that are flat on the first two floors and arched on the third. Analysis of historic photographs indicates that the window sizes were modified in prior renovations. All original wood windows, except for those in the attic gable, have been replaced with metal windows. The towers modified in 1924 now end at the cornice. Window openings in the northeast tower are sealed at the second and third floors; all windows in the northwest tower are intact.

The north entrance has been modified by the addition of a concrete landing and stairs with ADA-compliant railings. The doorway was closed for many years, but it is now reopened to accommodate a fire exit. The door and side lights are reconstructed, while the original, multi-pane fan light is intact.

Gable detailing on the north elevation differs from that described on the east elevation. The north gable features a central, arched 1-over-1 window flanked on either side by a rectangular single-pane window. Corners of the gable are decorated with copper, cone-shaped pinnacles that mimic the building's corner towers; these decorative features are painted silver.

The northwest corner of the north elevation has been altered by the 1924 addition, which extended the building to the west by one bay. First, second, and third floor windows in the addition were configured to match those in the original design.

### West Elevation

The west elevation consists of the smaller 1924 wing at the northwest corner, the original 1895 entrance, and the longer 1924 wing at the southwest corner. Belt courses and arches were replicated in concrete plaster on these wings which are otherwise rather plain in design. The wing additions were constructed of concrete frame with concrete floors and masonry infill on full basements as the site slopes slightly to the west.

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The northwest wing's west elevation consists of a basement level entry door and single window. The stairway is surrounded by a simple pipe railing. There is a single rectangular window on the first floor. Paired windows on the second and third floors were designed to match those of the original building.

The center portion of the west elevation contains the 1895 first floor entrance and window openings on the second and third floors. The original gable was removed during previous roof modifications, and the original wood door and windows have been replaced with metal fixtures. The entrance is accessed by a handicapped ramp with regulation railings.

The west elevation of the southwest wing contains windows that reflect the style and shape of those on the original building, with smaller rectangular windows at the basement level.

## South Elevation

The south elevation was originally built to match the north elevation, reflecting the same gable fenestration and decoration. Today the 1924 addition extends four bays west of the 1895 building. Each bay contains paired windows that reflect the original design, with flat headed windows on the first and second floors and arched windows on the third floor. There are four windows at the basement level and a light well with concrete areaways. As on all other elevations of the addition, the original building's arches and belt courses are replicated in concrete plaster.

The south entrance has been altered by sealing the lower part of the door area and installing windows in the upper part. The multi-pane fan light is intact. Windows in the building's southeast corner tower are open on the first floor but have been sealed on the second and third floors.

## **Karnes County Courthouse Interior**

The interior has been extensively remodeled, most notably in 1965-1966, but remnants of 1895 fabric are still visible. Suspended acoustical tile ceilings have been installed below original ceilings throughout most of the building to obscure mechanical and electrical equipment.

The north hallway, once enclosed, was reopened to accommodate a fire exit; this work exposed a wide masonry arch that is thought to be repeated on all four sides of the two hallways' point of intersection. A partition with a door separates the north corridor from the main east-to-west corridor. In 1995, an elevator and fire stair were added in the northwest bay of the 1895 structure. The fire stair is accessed from the north corridor, while the elevator is accessed from the east/west corridor. The 1895 cast iron open stairway and its ornate railing are intact at the west end of the east-to-west hallway; this stair connects all floors and has intermediate landings between each floor.

The district courtroom, always located on the building's second floor, was originally a two-story space that occupied the entire eastern half of the building. It is unclear if the courtroom had a balcony; county commissioners' minutes from 1894 indicate that the gallery was removed from the plans for cost reasons. Today the courtroom is a

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single story space reduced in size on both the north and south sides; there is an eleven-foot space above the current courtroom ceiling. East-facing windows are blocked by wood veneer panels and there is no natural light in the room.

Interior doors and trim, including baseboards, reflect both periods of construction, and most of the doors have a single-light transom overhead, regardless of their age. There are two styles of interior doors: one style is horizontally divided into five panels without lights, but with ornate trim including bull's eye corners and plinth blocks; the second style is divided at the center rail into a lower wood panel and upper light, but the surrounding molding is without bull's eye ornaments.

Remnants of a pressed tin ceiling have been found on the third floor, but no additional evidence of this material has been located. The second and third floor ceilings are constructed of steel beams and concrete vaults.

Flooring is of various types, and most is either vinyl tile or carpet. The first floor corridor contains marble tile flooring that likely dates to the 1924 remodeling. The second floor hallway is thought to contain a wood floor, and the wood floor is visible in the third floor hallway.

### **Other Contributing Buildings and Objects**

#### Karnes County Sheriff's Office and Jail (1954)

The 1954 Karnes County Sheriff's Office and Jail is located at the northeast corner of Panna Maria and Buchel avenues and faces east onto Buchel; it was designed by the architecture firm of Weidner & Walther and built by general contractor Walter E. Bowden, both of San Antonio. The rectangular building is constructed of masonry that is covered with stucco and painted to match the courthouse. Its primary (east) elevation features a projecting center bay with no fenestration. Entrance is from a protected porch in the south wing, defined by a perforated brick screen and low, perforated red brick wall. The projecting roof is supported by metal pipes. Louvered and casement windows are of metal. The north wing contains eight louvered windows. A chain link and razor wire fence encloses an open porch at the northwest corner of the building. The north elevation is decorated with a pattern of 24 recessed squares at both the northeast and northwest corners; these squares are sealed, and there is no indication if they were originally open to emit light. A solid metal door, no longer operable, is set in the center of the north elevation. The west elevation contains a central projecting bay that is now enclosed on both the north and south sides. Six louvered windows emit light at the northwest corner of the building. The south elevation contains a single casement window. The flat roof is covered with mechanical and transmission equipment. There are fenced open areas at both the northwest and southwest corners of the building. The County Sheriff's Office and Jail is contributing to the nominated property.

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### Storage Building (c. 1945)

A small, rectangular storage building is located near the middle of the west property line. The building measures approximately 9 feet by 18 feet; it has a flat roof and is constructed of masonry that is stuccoed and painted to match the courthouse. There is a one single pane wood window located high on both the north and south elevations and no window on the west elevation. Access to the storage building is from the east. There is an entry door at the southeast corner and a sliding garage door for equipment at the northwest corner. A single pane wood window is located high on the wall between the doors. The building is decorated with a simple, raised parapet cap and a raised belt course over the doors and windows. Designated "storage" on the 1951 Sanborn fire insurance map, today the building is in poor condition.

### Karnes County Marker (1936)

A metal plaque mounted on red granite base, erected by the Texas Highway Department in commemoration of the Texas Centennial celebration of 1936. The plaque's text summarizes a brief history of Karnes County.

### **Noncontributing Objects**

Six objects on the county courthouse grounds are noncontributing to the nominated property: a Texas Historical Commission subject marker—a metal plaque mounted on pole—providing a history of the courthouse (1994); a second pole-mounted metal plaque commemorating the planting of an oak tree in honor of former county judge and local historian Robert H. Thonoff (2008); a pre-World War II artillery piece; a transmission tower; and two metal flagpoles. The markers and artillery piece are grouped at the southeast corner of the site, while the metal flagpoles are set on either side of the sidewalk leading to the building's primary (east) entrance, and the transmission tower sits to the west of the County Sheriff's Office and Jail building.

### **Future Plans for Building Restoration**

Restoration plans call for the removal of the 1924 additions. These plans are based on architectural and engineering determinations that the concrete additions were tied too tightly to the 1895 masonry structure, negatively impacting the original building.

The building's exterior masonry will be fully restored. Plaster will be removed from all walls, exposing the brick exterior with its stone belt courses and voussoirs. All exterior masonry will be cleaned and re-pointed.

Modified window openings will be reconstructed to their original configurations. The tops of the masonry towers will be extended to their original full height, and conical roofs will be rebuilt. The west façade's central gable will be rebuilt above the central pavilion. The central masonry clock tower will be reconstructed to once again crown the entire composition. The steeply pitched Second Empire roof features over the east and west entries will be reconstructed. The entire structure will be re-roofed with slate shingles.

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The building's interior will be returned to its nineteenth-century character. All suspended acoustical ceilings will be removed to expose the original steel beams of the floor above, along with the plastered vaults between each beam. The ceiling at the third floor will be restored with pressed metal panels. The large courtroom on the second floor will be returned to its original size with a double-volume height. Natural light will pass through two levels of windows on three sides of the courtroom.

The courthouse site will be returned to its 1914 appearance as documented by historic photographs. Circular planting beds will be reinstalled on the south and east lawns and an iron fence will be replicated to enclose the site.

## Summary of Contributing and Noncontributing Resources

Karnes County Courthouse (1895, 1924 addition)	Contributing
Storage Building (ca. 1945)	Contributing
Karnes County Sheriff's Office and Jail Building (1954)	Contributing
1936 Centennial Marker	Contributing
Flagpoles (counted as 2)	Noncontributing (2)
Transmission tower	Noncontributing
Artillery piece	Noncontributing
Texas Historical Commission subject marker (1994)	Noncontributing
Commemorative marker for Judge Thonoff at oak tree (2008)	Noncontributing

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.
- C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUES, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Politics / Government

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1895-1960

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1895, 1924

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT / BUILDER: 1895 Architect / Builder: John Cormack, Jacob Astor Austin  
 1924 Architect: Henry T. Phelps  
 1924 Builder: San Antonio Construction Company

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-12 through 8-20)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheets 9-21 through 9-22)

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:

- State historic preservation office Texas Historical Commission, Austin
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Karnes County Courthouse is the third building to serve as the seat of Karnes County government. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, county seats often were relocated to accommodate the political and economic forces that were re-shaping rural Texas; this courthouse was constructed after the county seat was moved in 1894 from Helena to Karnes City, a distance of about seven miles. Designed and constructed in 1895 by John Cormack, the building was enlarged and remodeled in 1924 by architect Henry T. Phelps. The courthouse has served as the legal and administrative center of Karnes County throughout the area's shift from a ranch-based economy to an agricultural-based economy at the turn of the twentieth century. The courthouse continues to serve as the center of Karnes County government in the early twenty-first century and is therefore nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government.

### Karnes County, Texas

Karnes County is located in central Texas, approximately fifty-two miles to the southeast of the city of San Antonio, in Bexar County. It is bounded on the north by Wilson County, on the east by Gonzales and DeWitt counties, on the south by Goliad and Bee counties, and on the west by Live Oak and Atascosa counties. The terrain ranges from flat to rolling and hilly, and it consists of grassland and brush interspersed with mesquites, oaks, pecans, and cacti. The land is used largely for farming and stockraising. The primary waterways are the San Antonio River, which flows through the central part of the county from northwest to southeast, and the Cibolo Creek, which joins the river near the town of Panna Maria to the north of Karnes City.

The Texas legislature established Karnes County in 1854 from portions of Bexar, Gonzales, DeWitt, Goliad, and San Patricio counties. The new county was named for Henry Wax Karnes, a leader in the Texas Revolution and a Texas Ranger.<sup>1</sup> The area had long been occupied, however; in the mid-eighteenth century the Spanish government granted land to several families for settlement, most notably to the Hernandez and Manchaca families, who established ranches between the San Antonio River and Cibolo Creek. Indigenous peoples—including Comanches, Tonkawas, Karankawas, Lipan Apaches, Pataguillas, and Pitaias—had been living in the region for many centuries before the arrival of the Spanish, and their defenses of their homelands effectively discouraged most newcomers' permanent settlement in the area until the early nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Anglo residents first came to the region in the 1840s, and the town of Helena was established in 1852 on the site of an earlier town called Alamita.<sup>3</sup> Helena was strategically located on the San Antonio River, where the Chihuahua Trail intersected with the road from Gonzales to San Patricio. As shipping and immigration increased, wagon traffic to the Gulf Coast assumed greater importance, and Helena became a key stopping point. When settlers petitioned the legislature in 1853 to establish a new county, Helena became the first county seat.

<sup>1</sup> Ron Tyler, editor, *The New Handbook of Texas* (Texas State Historical Association, Austin: 1996) 3: 1035.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Long, "Karnes County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed on March 10, 2010 at: <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/KK/hck1.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Tyler, op. cit.

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## First and Second Karnes County Courthouses at Helena

The first election in Karnes County was held on February 27, 1854, followed by construction of the county's first courthouse on Jefferson Square in Helena. The building was described as a two-story frame and clapboard structure, and a separate county clerk's office was built nearby. The courthouse building was destroyed in a storm in 1864, and the county clerk's office—containing official records—burned in 1865; surviving commissioners court records begin on October 11, 1865.<sup>4</sup>

After the first courthouse was destroyed, county business was conducted for three years in a variety of rented facilities. In July 1867 county commissioners appointed a building committee "to make a contract for building a suitable courthouse in Helena." The following month, the commissioners approved plans to construct a two-story stone courthouse on Helena's public square. Although funding was allocated, the contract never was finalized. The county continued to rent space as needed, and the courthouse was not completed for over five years.<sup>5</sup>

In October 1868 county commissioners approved an expenditure of \$1,600 to purchase and expand an existing stone building for a courthouse on the northeast side of Helena's public square; this plan, too, was not carried out. The county continued to rent space in which to conduct public meetings, and in June 1869 the commissioners again sought bids to construct a courthouse. The new building was to be two stories and measure 30 by 40 feet, coinciding to "plans and specifications on file."<sup>6</sup>

Construction of the courthouse was fraught with problems and delays. By September 1870 the building was "in the course of construction," but an inspection committee found structural weaknesses and ordered a portion of the walls removed down to the foundation. A second committee appointed to inspect it proposed that the courthouse be completed as a one-story building, but further examination found the structure unsafe even in reduced form. The construction contract was cancelled in February 1871.<sup>7</sup>

The county commissioners continued to rent the clubhouse of the Alamita Lodge Number 200 for use as the courthouse until the middle of 1872. In July 1871 Thomas Ruckman proposed to complete the courthouse structure for \$1,000, and the offer was accepted on September 26, 1871. No official acceptance of the building appears in Commissioners Court minutes, but Ruckman was paid the balance of his contract on November 28, 1872.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Robert H. Thonhoff, *Narrative History for the Historical Marker for the Karnes County Courthouse*, unpublished typescript, 2; County Commissioner Minutes (CCM) A:1.

<sup>5</sup> CCM A:9; A:23-24; CCM A: 33-34; A-38. Commissioners allocated \$824.05 for the building and tentatively approved a construction contract with G. Gabrisch. Space was rented from the Masonic Lodge.

<sup>6</sup> CCM A:45, 50. It is possible that the building owner, L.W. Lawhon, did not follow through with the agreement to make additions to the building.

<sup>7</sup> CCM A:53-55, 87, 92-93, 104, 107. W. McNamarra (sometimes spelled McNemarra) was hired on July 27, 1869, to complete the foundation and masonry work on the new building, and Charles Brown was retained as carpenter. The committee deemed the building was not being constructed according to plan and that the superstructure was too weak to support the building. They ordered removal of the east and west walls and corners to the windows on the north and south sides.

<sup>8</sup> CCM A:114, 127, 129-31, 140, 141, 153, 160, 179, 278. Ruckman requested an additional \$6.00 for cleaning the building prior to beginning work, and John Gawlik was hired for \$12 to put an extra foundation under the courthouse stairs. Before the

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Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas

### The San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad

The future of small Texas towns like Helena was altered dramatically in the late nineteenth century as rail lines began to cross the state. Helena had thrived because of its location at the intersection of the Chihuahua Trail and the road from Gonzalez to the coast. Because of these roads, many incidents of the Cart War—a violent dispute between Anglo and Mexican freighters during the early 1850s—took place in and around Helena; the Cart War ended in 1857 through the intervention of Governor Elisha M. Pease.

Agriculture was introduced to Karnes County in the pre-Civil War era by Polish immigrants who established colonies along the San Antonio River. Among these was Panna Maria, the oldest permanent Polish colony in the United States. Immediately after the Civil War, the economy boomed as major cattle drives passed through Karnes and DeWitt counties to intercept trails leading north to markets in Kansas. As cattle drives were dwindling in the 1880s, the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad (SA & AP) was constructed through Karnes County, bypassing Helena and altering the future development of that town and the entire county.

The SA & AP was financed largely by stocks, bonds, land donations, and cash bonus payments provided by individuals and towns benefiting from the railroad. Helena residents, confident that the railroad would not bypass the county's largest town, were unwilling to raise the required \$30,000 to \$60,000. As a result, the tracks were routed some eight miles from Helena.<sup>9</sup> The SA & AP line passed through Marcelina (now Poth) and Brackenridge (now Falls City). At Kenedy Junction (now Kenedy) it formed a "Y" with one branch continuing south to Corpus Christi and the other east to Houston. Karnes City was not established until March 1891.<sup>10</sup>

Brothers P.B., M.L., and William G. Butler conveyed right-of-way to the SA & AP "in consideration of advantages to be divined by construction and operation of the SA & AP." The fifty-foot right-of-way—which established the path of the railroad to the future site of Karnes City—ran across numerous surveys, including those of Carlos Martinez, Isaac Clover, Hugh M. Swift, William E. Lewis, and James W. Looney.<sup>11</sup>

A popular and somewhat romanticized story regarding the routing of the SA & AP claims that rancher William G. Butler resolved to destroy the town of Helena after his son was murdered there; subsequently, he donated right-of-way to divert the railroad away from the town. This story was the plot of "The Oldest Law," a 1969 episode of the popular television series *Death Valley Days*, with the actor Jim Davis playing William G. Butler.<sup>12</sup>

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project was finished, Ruckman was paid an additional \$650. The final balance of Ruckman's bill was \$636.08. As late as December 1875, Ruckman was ordered to finish the courthouse by completing necessary work on a door in the building.

<sup>9</sup> Schuenemann, 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> KCDR L:269 (P.B. Butler to SA&AP, April 6, 1889); L:271 (W.G. Butler to SA&AP, April 2, 1889); L:272 (M.L. Butler to SA&AP, July 22, 1889).

<sup>12</sup> Ellen Cousins to Maria Watson Pfeiffer, e-mail correspondence, September 2, 2009. "The Oldest Law" aired on May 2, 1969, in the series' seventeenth season. The episode was hosted by Dale Robertson, who succeeded Robert Taylor as host; Taylor was ill and died on June 8, 1969. Taylor had succeeded the iconic host of *Death Valley Days*, Ronald Reagan, who left the series in 1966 when he entered politics. The series ceased production in 1970, making "The Oldest Law" one of its last episodes. Jim Davis, the star of the episode, later became known for his role as Jock Ewing in the 1980s television series *Dallas*.

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Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas

### Karnes City, 1891-1894

The story of Karnes City begins in December 1890, when J.L. Calvert conveyed 1,000 acres at five dollars an acre to a partnership that included Otto Buchel, A.B. Davidson, C.H. Bond, George Schleicher (all of Dewitt County), L.H. Browne (Hays County), and Charles H. Mayfield (Bexar County). By February 1891 the town of Karnes City had been surveyed and laid out, and the first house was constructed soon after.<sup>13</sup> In May 1891 the partnership conveyed a portion of the 1,000 acre tract to the SA & AP; the 1,000 acre property was described as "the same tract, a portion of which we have laid off into the town site of Karnes City."<sup>14</sup>

Karnes County was sparsely populated prior to the railroad's arrival and the economy was dominated by livestock and ranching. After the railroad improved access to markets, the economy became increasingly dependent on agriculture. The transformation was described in 1895:

For a great number of years this county was almost entirely a stock county, the land all being enclosed in exceedingly large pastures which contained thousands of acres which were devoted exclusively to grazing stock, but in the last six or eight years a considerable change has taken place in this respect. A large amount of these pasture lands have been subdivided into small tracts and sold to farmers, and now the whole county in every portion presents the appearance of being an agricultural district...<sup>15</sup>

It was estimated that the county had 493 farms growing crops that included cotton, corn, potatoes, hay and sorghum. By October 1895, Karnes County had a population of 8,000 and Karnes City, its largest town, had a population of 600.<sup>16</sup>

In 1893 voters petitioned to hold an election to move the county seat from Helena. An election was held on December 21, 1893, "for the purpose of submitting to the qualified voters of Karnes County the question of

<sup>13</sup> Karnes *Reformer*, October 20, 1895. Calvert retained an undivided interest in 200 of the 1,000 acres, and the remainder was allocated to Buchel, Davidson, Bond and Schleicher who each received 150 acres, and Browne and Mayfield who each received 100 acres.

<sup>14</sup> KCDR M:252 (Calvert to Buchel, et al, December 12, 1890); KCDR N:102 (Calvert et al to SA&AP, May 25, 1891). Additional partners in the 1891 transaction included T.J. Calvert and W.I. Mayfield (Karnes County) and George and John James (Bexar County). Sources commonly state that "Karnes City was founded by Buchel, Wagner, and Company," a wholesale and retail mercantile firm based in Cuero, Texas. However, as noted, investors included various other individuals. There is no mention of "Buchel, Wagner and Company" in the deed records, nor is William Wagner listed in the partnership of that laid off part of the 1,000 acres "into the town site of Karnes City." One of the partners, Otto Buchel began his mercantile career in Indianola and moved to Cuero after the Gulf, Western, Texas and Pacific Railway was extended inland. William Wagner, who had worked with Buchel for several years, formed a partnership with him in 1882.) One source states that Buchel, Wagner and Company "...purchased 1,000 acres along the SA&AP railroad near the center of Karnes County on December 12, 1890," however, that transaction does not include William Wagner. A post office was established at Karnes City on April 1, 1891, and Buchel, Wagner and Company is said to have been one of the town's first businesses (*The History of Dewitt County*, 324; <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/KK/hgk1.html> (accessed September 8, 2009)).

<sup>15</sup> Karnes *Reformer*, October 20, 1895.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas

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removal of the county seat of said county from the town of Helena to some other point in the county." Karnes City won decisively with 861 votes, followed by Runge (308), Helena (120) and Kenedy (1).<sup>17</sup>

Helena residents contested the election and refused to allow the county's records to be moved to Karnes City. History maintains that a group of Karnes City men took twenty wagons to Helena in the middle of the night to retrieve the records. The records were officially transferred to the new, permanently established county seat and county commissioners held their first meeting in Karnes City on February 12, 1894.<sup>18</sup>

### Construction of the Karnes County Courthouse and Jail

Karnes County commissioners wasted no time making plans for a new courthouse and jail. On January 4, 1894—at their first meeting following the vote canvas—county commissioners awarded J.I. Calhoun a \$350 contract to build a temporary jail using the old cages from Helena; the building was to be complete by March 19, 1894. The commissioners immediately sought bids for a more permanent jail building, and on February 20, 1894, the low bidder, L.T. Noyes, general agent for Diebold Safe and Lock Company of Ohio, was awarded the contract for \$11,900. The jail was completed in four months, and accepted on June 23, 1894.<sup>19</sup>

The county commissioners also were accepting plans and specifications for a new county courthouse. Typical of the fierce competition among Texas courthouse designers in the 1890s, ten architects and contractors submitted plans and specifications for the Karnes County Courthouse. On February 26, 1894, commissioners considered submittals from "J.I. Calhoun; Alfred Giles; Otto P. Kroeger; Knight E. Coody; Davey and Shott; John Cormack; \_\_\_ Hodges; J. Riley Gorden (sic); J. Wahrenberger; and A.O. Wattson (sic)."

Commissioners selected the design of James Wahrenberger and directed that construction bids be received by February 28, 1894. Interestingly, a publication of James Riely Gordon's work includes a presentation drawing for the Karnes County Courthouse with the caption, "Accepted Design, Court-House, Karnes County, Texas." Neither Wahrenberger nor Gordon, in fact, won the contract to design the Karnes County Courthouse. Action was postponed indefinitely, and at the subsequent meeting on March 15, 1894 Wahrenberger's contract was "rescinded, annulled, and set aside" for no stated reason. Though Wahrenberger was re-hired on April 4, 1894, his contract was rescinded a second and final time on May 18, 1894.<sup>20</sup>

The following day, Karnes County Commissioners met to consider plans and specifications submitted by the following contractors: M. Clark; Davey and Schott; Otto P. Kroeger; S. White; and John Cormack. With the exception of White, all had previously submitted plans and specifications or bid on the construction contract. John Cormack was awarded the contract at a cost of \$43,000.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> CCM 2:220 (November 10, 1893); CCM 2:221 (January 2, 1894); CCM 223 (January 4, 1894). The results were announced on January 2, 1894 and it was ordered "that all records, books, papers in all the county offices be removed at once."

<sup>18</sup> CCM 2:224 (February 12, 1894).

<sup>19</sup> CCM 2:223 (January 4, 1894); CCM 2: 235; CCM 2: 241 (February 20, 1894); CCM 2: 272 (June 23, 1894).

<sup>20</sup> CCM 2:243-45, 248, 262; *The Sketchbook of James Riely Gordon*, n.p. Three firms submitted bids to construct Wahrenberger's design: Maurer and Simpson, Davey and Shott, and M. Clark.

<sup>21</sup> CCM 2:262-263 (May 18, 1894).

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### John Cormack, Architect, and Jacob Astor Austin, Contractor

Little is known of the life and career of John Cormack, who died on August 26, 1894, just three months after being awarded the Karnes County Courthouse contract.<sup>22</sup> A brief account of his death states that Cormack was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, and came to the United States as a young man, where he entered the building and contracting business, specializing in "court houses, jails, and other large public buildings."<sup>23</sup>

In its news from Karnes County on August 28, 1894 the San Antonio *Daily Express* noted that County Judge Little had left the previous day for Austin, and that a telegram had been received in Karnes City ordering that work be stopped on the courthouse. The newspaper writer puzzled over this, speculating that the Attorney General had failed to approve the courthouse bonds. The following day, the news of Cormack's death was reported.<sup>24</sup>

Cormack died in Brownwood where, according to the *Daily Express*, he "was taken a few weeks ago from San Antonio with the hope that he would soon regain his health." The Brownwood newspaper reported that Cormack died after "an illness of several months." He died at the home of his friend, Jacob Astor Austin, and was buried in the Austin family plot in Brownwood's Greenleaf Cemetery.

Though Cormack owned real estate in Brownwood, it is not known if he resided there permanently; he traveled to job sites throughout the state and worked with various associates. With J.B. Kane, he built the Concho County Courthouse in Paint Rock, designed by Oscar Ruffini (1886); at that time, Kane and Cormack were based in Lampasas. Cormack also built the Uvalde County Courthouse in Uvalde, designed by B.F. Trester, Jr. (1890), and was designer of the Somervell County Courthouse in Glen Rose, built by John Carmichael (1894). Cormack is alternately referred to in various sources as a designer or builder. Karnes County records designate him as "contractor," while the Karnes County Courthouse cornerstone refers to him as the "architect and contractor."<sup>25</sup>

Cormack's death delayed courthouse construction for only a short time. "As a consequence of his death, it will be a few days before the work on the courthouse will be resumed, so your reporter was informed by Mr. Jeff Reagan, Mr. Cormack's bookkeeper and overseer."<sup>26</sup> Responsibility for construction of the Karnes County Courthouse was assumed by John Cormack's friend, Jacob Astor Austin.<sup>27</sup> In his will signed just ten days before his death, Cormack appointed Austin as his sole executor. He also bequeathed to Austin "one half of the profits and proceeds arising

<sup>22</sup> San Antonio *Daily Express*, August 29, 1894, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Brownwood *Bulletin*, August 26, 1894.

<sup>24</sup> Brownwood *Bulletin*, August 28, 1894, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Texas Historical Commission website, accessed September 16, 2009 at: <http://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/shell-kword.htm>; also Karnes County Courthouse cornerstone inscription.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, August 29, 1894, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob Astor Austin (1852-1920) was a native of North Carolina who moved to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, as a child. He became mercantile store clerk, and established his own business at age 21. In 1884 he moved to Goldthwaite, where in 1888 he established the town's first bank. Austin moved to Brownwood in 1892 and worked for a bank until 1897. It is presumed that Austin was still working as a banker when Cormack died and he assumed the responsibility of finishing the Karnes County Courthouse. Austin later managed a wholesale grocery company and then entered the mill and grain business. He was active in civic and church affairs, and remained a leading citizen of Brownwood at the time of his death in June 1920. See Brownwood *Bulletin*, August 26, 1894.

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and due me from Karnes County, Texas under the contract that I have with said Karnes County for building a courthouse at Karnes City, Texas.”<sup>28</sup> Probate records indicate that “the contract was just begun at the death of deceased” and that Cormack was owed \$2,000 by Karnes County.<sup>29</sup>

Austin continued construction of the courthouse with little delay. The cornerstone was laid by A.F. & A.M. Lodge Number 200, on October 25, 1894, “with thousands attending.”<sup>30</sup> Bands from Runge and Beeville played for the occasion, and the day concluded with a ball at the courthouse. It is not clear how far construction had advanced at the time the cornerstone was laid, but in November 1894, Austin asked county commissioners to extend the completion date beyond February 15, 1895, to “cover any reasonable and unavoidable delay as may occur.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time he asked for an extension, Austin also requested \$1,059 “for extra work in the foundations of the new courthouse.” The amount required for the foundation was actually only \$1,384, and an additional \$160 was allocated for stained glass—presumably for the fan lights over the doors. At the same time, a gallery was eliminated from the original plans. On May 29, 1895, county commissioners approved a motion to accept the courthouse as “complete per plans and specifications.” Austin’s only remaining task was to install the walnut railing on the stairway.<sup>32</sup>

## Karnes County Courthouse, 1895 to 1929

The character of Karnes County changed as new towns were established, agricultural production expanded, and the road system was extended throughout the county. Beginning in the late 1880s, growth of towns along the SA&AP railroad contributed to the county’s population increase. United States census figures document this growth:

1890	3,637
1900	8,681
1910	14,942
1920	19,049

This population growth increased real estate filings, court proceedings, and other day-to-day business activities that were based at the Karnes County Courthouse. It was during this boom period that county commissioners voted to improve and enlarge the building.<sup>33</sup>

The courthouse and its grounds evolved largely between 1910 and 1930. Between 1912 and 1915, an iron fence replaced the original mesquite post-and-wire fencing surrounding the courthouse and curbing, walkways, and

<sup>28</sup> Brown County Probate Records, H:272.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, H:287.

<sup>30</sup> *Karnes Reformer*, November 1, 1894. The cornerstone is inscribed on one side with the names of County Judge W.A. Little and commissioners Alex. Dziuk, J.M. Yeary, J.B. Carmichael and J.D. Newbery. The other side bears the inscription “in memory of John Cormack, architect and contractor, died August 26, A.D. 1894.

<sup>31</sup> CCM 2:290 (November 12, 1894).

<sup>32</sup> CCM 2:344 (May 29, 1895).

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Long, “Karnes County,” in *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed September 4, 2009 at: <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/KK/hck1.html>.

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ornamental plantings were added. One major project included the 1914 installation of tie rods to reinforce the courthouse structure.<sup>34</sup>

In July 1919 county commissioners voted to "engage a competent architect to inspect the courthouse," but no further action was taken until February 1924, when they voted to "secure plans and specifications from a competent engineer to repair the Karnes County Courthouse."<sup>35</sup>

The Karnes County Courthouse was enlarged and remodeled in 1924 to appear much as it does in 2010. On June 9, 1924, a motion was approved that "the Karnes County Courthouse be rebuilt and remodeled to make a substantial, modern building with modern conveniences." The unidentified architect was instructed to prepare plans for the work. There is no mention of soliciting proposals, but one month later, on July 14, 1924, commissioners approved plans and specifications by architect Henry T. Phelps. The San Antonio Construction Company was awarded the \$51,400 remodeling contract on September 15, 1924.<sup>36</sup>

The 1924 remodeling modified the courthouse's Second Empire and Richardsonian Romanesque detailing. Major changes included the addition of wings at the southwest and northwest corners, removal of the clock tower and upper portions of the corner towers, and stuccoing the entire structure. In addition, steel Fenestra windows were installed, colored glass replaced, and new flooring added in the courtroom and corridors. By 1929 the courthouse roof had been replaced with tile.<sup>37</sup>

### Henry T. Phelps, Architect (1871-1944)

Henry Truman Phelps was born in Anaqua, Texas, in 1871 and graduated from the University of Texas in 1889. He then went to San Antonio, where he worked as a draftsman for prominent architects James Riely Gordon (1891-1893) and Albert Beckmann (1894-1898). Phelps also worked for one year as an inspector for San Antonio Underwriters, an insurance underwriting firm, before he left the city to serve in the Spanish American War. Upon his return in 1900, Phelps formed an architectural partnership with Solon McAdoo, another war veteran; their

<sup>34</sup> CCM 2:508 & 518; 3:510; 4: 219; 5:71,84, 89, 349. In March 1903, commissioners ordered that the courthouse roof be recovered in tin, presumably replacing the original slate material. The Commissioners ordered "that the courthouse roof be recovered at once with the best grade tin laid in the best manner possible to make a good and substantial covering." There is no mention prior to this entry as to why this work was required. In March 1914, Commissioners approved the bid of R.A. Spears for \$585 to reinforce the courthouse walls by installing one-inch tie rods at sixteen locations. J.A. Campbell was hired in April 1917, to "make a new roof and repair the old roof" at a cost of \$375.

<sup>35</sup> CCM 5:439; 6:113.

<sup>36</sup> Despite the extent of this work, no substantial documentation has been located. CCM 6:134, 142, 149; *Karnes Citation*, May 21, 1925. The approval of Phelps' work took place shortly after commissioners voted in April 1924, to advertise for bids to "replaster and repair" the building (CCM 6:123). Commissioners Court minutes contain no summary of the work specified by Henry T. Phelps and no collection of Phelps's drawings has been located.

<sup>37</sup> CCM 6:153-55, 174, 458, 489. Commissioners' instructions for remodeling the adjacent, original jail in 1928 direct the contractor to install a new roof to match the courthouse. The contractor was instructed to stucco the jail to match the courthouse. It is possible that the red clay tile roof on the building today was installed in 1929. In February 1929, the firm of Kuhnel and Son was hired to "fix" the roof. Their representative stated, "We will need additional tile, finials, etc. and perhaps some new valleys if you furnish the materials we need, we agree to put you a roof that will not leak."

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partnership was short-lived, however, as McAdoo died in March 1901 from an illness contracted during the war. Phelps continued as a sole practitioner until 1908, when he formed a brief partnership with Donald R. Jacob. In 1910 Phelps again opened his own practice, which he maintained until just prior to his death in 1944<sup>38</sup>

Phelps was a prolific designer of Texas courthouses and his designs incorporate a wide range of styles including Classical, Romanesque, Beaux Arts, Mission Revival and Art Moderne.<sup>39</sup> In addition to the Karnes County Courthouse expansion and remodeling project in 1924-1925, Phelps designed thirteen other county courthouses in Texas: Frio County (Pearsall, 1904); Terrell County (Sanderson, 1906); Atascosa County (Jourdanton, 1912; NR 1997); Jim Hogg County (Hebronville, 1912); Mills County (Goldwithe, 1913; NR 2000); Blanco County (Johnson City, 1916); Kenedy County (Sarita, 1917); Schelicher County (Eldorado, 1924); Dimmit County (Carrizo Springs, 1925; NR 1984); Uvalde County (Uvalde, 1927); San Patricio County (Sinton, 1928); Kimble (Junction, 1929); and La Salle County (Cotulla, 1931).

### Significance of the Karnes County Courthouse

The Karnes County Courthouse remains the largest governmental structure in the county and continues to serve its original function as the seat of county government. The building is therefore nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government.

The Karnes County Courthouse remained virtually unchanged between 1924 through the mid-1950s. Changes since then include replacement of doors and windows, interior renovations, and health and safety improvements. The old jail at the northwest corner of the courthouse site was demolished and a new county sheriff's office and jail building was constructed at the northeast corner in 1954. Plans are now being made for a full restoration of the courthouse to a period of significance dating from 1895 to 1920.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Boswell, 25; *San Antonio Express*, December 6, 1944; *San Antonio City Directories*, various years; *Men of Affairs of San Antonio*, n.p.; *San Antonio Daily Express*, March 23, 1901; Bexar County Probate Records, K:454.

<sup>39</sup> Tyler 5:180. Other notable Phelps' designs include the Nix Professional Building (San Antonio; 1929) and Missouri, Kansas and Texas Depot (Dennison; 1909).

<sup>40</sup> CCM 13:453, 521; CCM 14:131,138; CCM 15:546; CCM 17:621; 18:56, 178; *Karnes County Centennial*, 28; Historical Collection, Karnes County Public Library. Commissioners approved a contract with R.J. Ives of Austin to dismantle and remove the old jail building. The new jail was designed by San Antonio architects Weidner and Walther and constructed by Walter E. Bowden, also of San Antonio. Prison equipment was purchased from Southern Steel Company, and the final cost of the building was \$81,975. The jail was remodeled in 1980, by D.R. Building and Supply Company, Inc. according to the design of San Antonio architect Edward R. Gondeck. A 1954 picture of the courthouse (Karnes County Centennial publication) shows some of the original wooden windows still in place. A 1960 photograph (Karnes County Public Library) indicates that these windows had been replaced. Additional documentation of this replacement has not been located. It is possible, but not documented, that window replacement coincided with the installation of new aluminum doors in the courthouse. In December 1959, Samuels Glass was awarded the contract to remove the existing wooden doors at the two courthouse entrances and to replace them with aluminum doors, frames, and transoms.

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San Antonio City Directories, various years.

San Antonio *Daily Express*, August 29, 1894; March 23, 1901.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>
	14	607106	3195745

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The Karnes County Courthouse site is comprised of property that constituted the original courthouse square (an unnumbered block) as designated on the plan of Karnes County. The site is bounded as follows: by West Buchel Avenue on the north; by West Calvert Avenue on the south; by North Panna Maria Avenue on the east; and by the abandoned Park Avenue right-of-way on the west. The site measures 232.8 feet on Buchel; 250 feet on Calvert, 255 feet on Panna Maria, and 255 feet on the abandoned Park Avenue right-of-way.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION: Nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.

11. FORM PREPARED BY (with assistance from Rachel Leibowitz, Historian, Texas Historical Commission)

NAME / TITLE: Maria Watson Pfeiffer

ORGANIZATION: DATE: March 15, 2010

STREET & NUMBER: 213 West Washington Street TELEPHONE: (210) 222-1586

CITY OR TOWN: San Antonio STATE: Texas ZIP CODE: 78204

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS (see continuation sheet Map-23 through Map-30)

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-43 through Photo-44)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS (see continuation sheets Figure-31 through Figure-42)

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Karnes County (Honorable Alger Kendall, County Judge)

STREET & NUMBER: 101 North Panna Maria Avenue TELEPHONE: (830) 780-3732

CITY OR TOWN: Karnes City STATE: Texas ZIP CODE: 78118

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**Map 1.** Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas; courthouse is located to the left of the "A" marker. North is toward top.

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Karnes County Courthouse  
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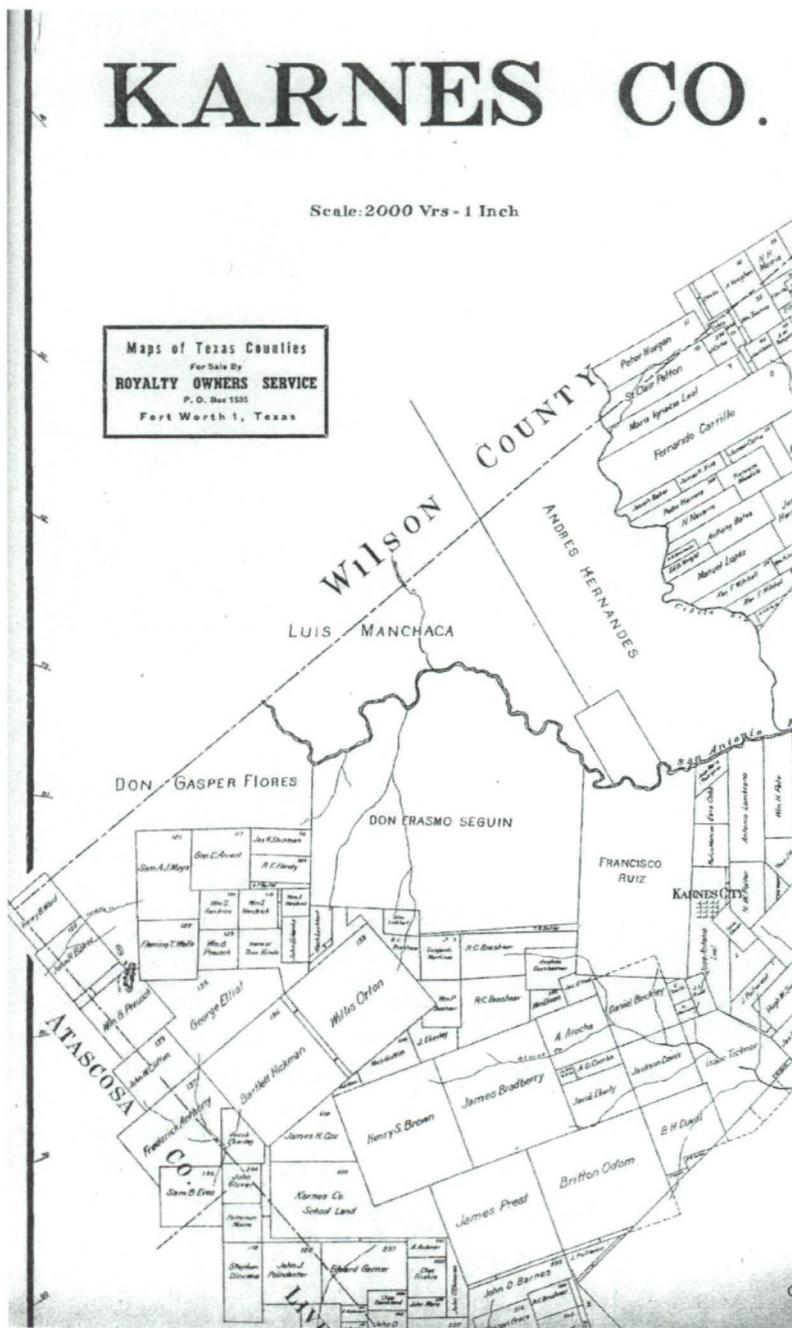
Map 2. Karnes County Courthouse is in the lower half of the city block as outlined. North is toward top.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section MAP Page 25

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



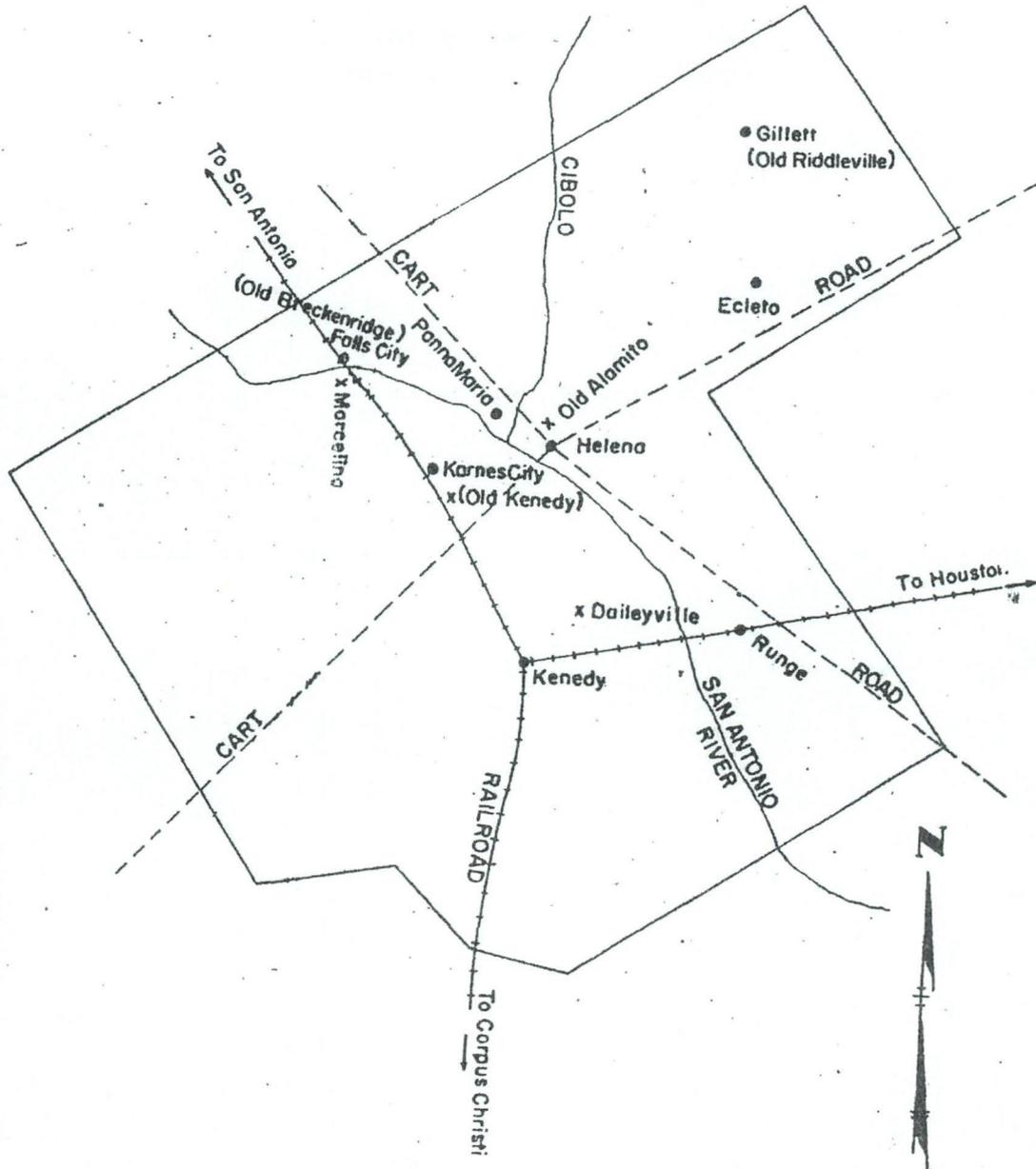
Map 3. Spanish land grants within the Karnes County area.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section MAP Page 26

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



**Map 4.** Karnes County, showing towns and cart roads in 1854; "X" denotes abandoned towns.

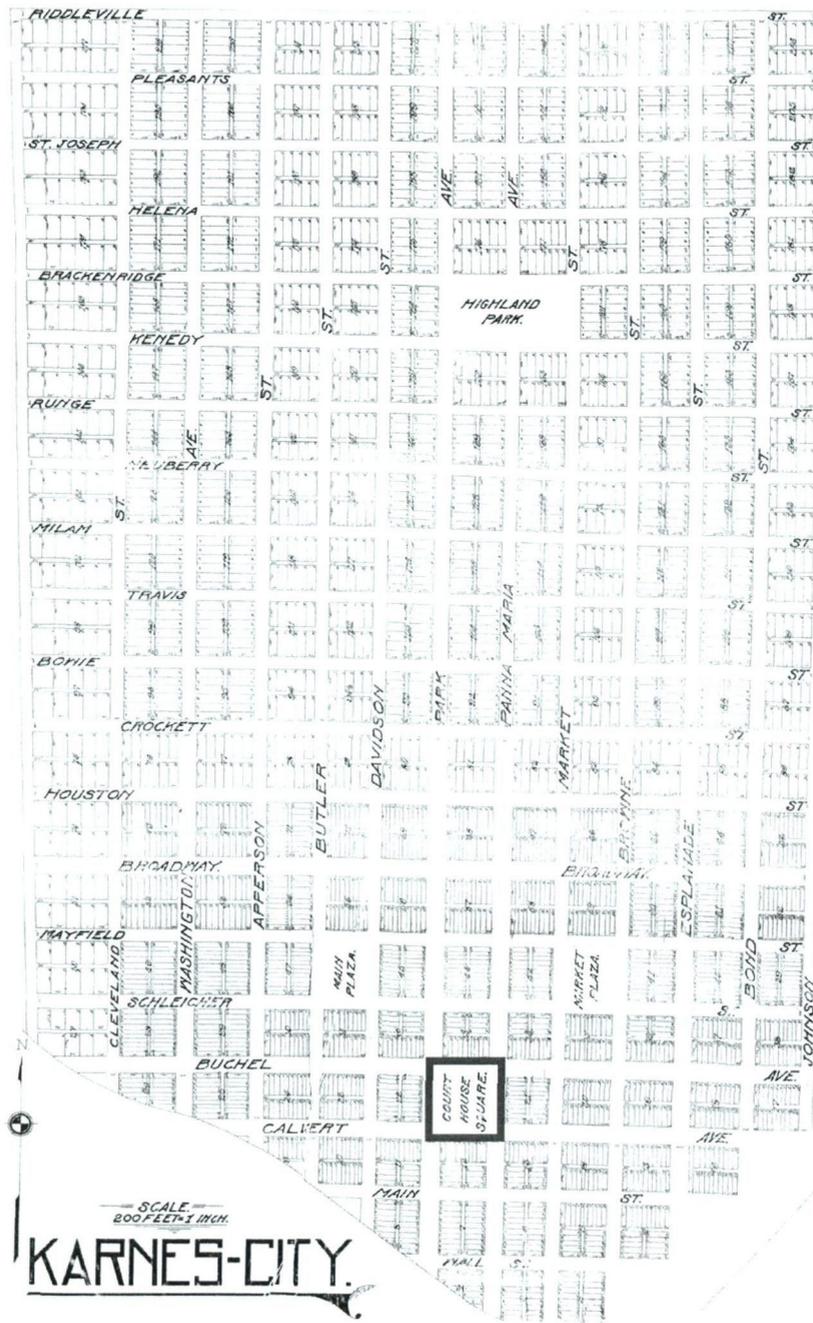
Note that the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad does not lead to the former county seat of Helena.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section MAP Page 27

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



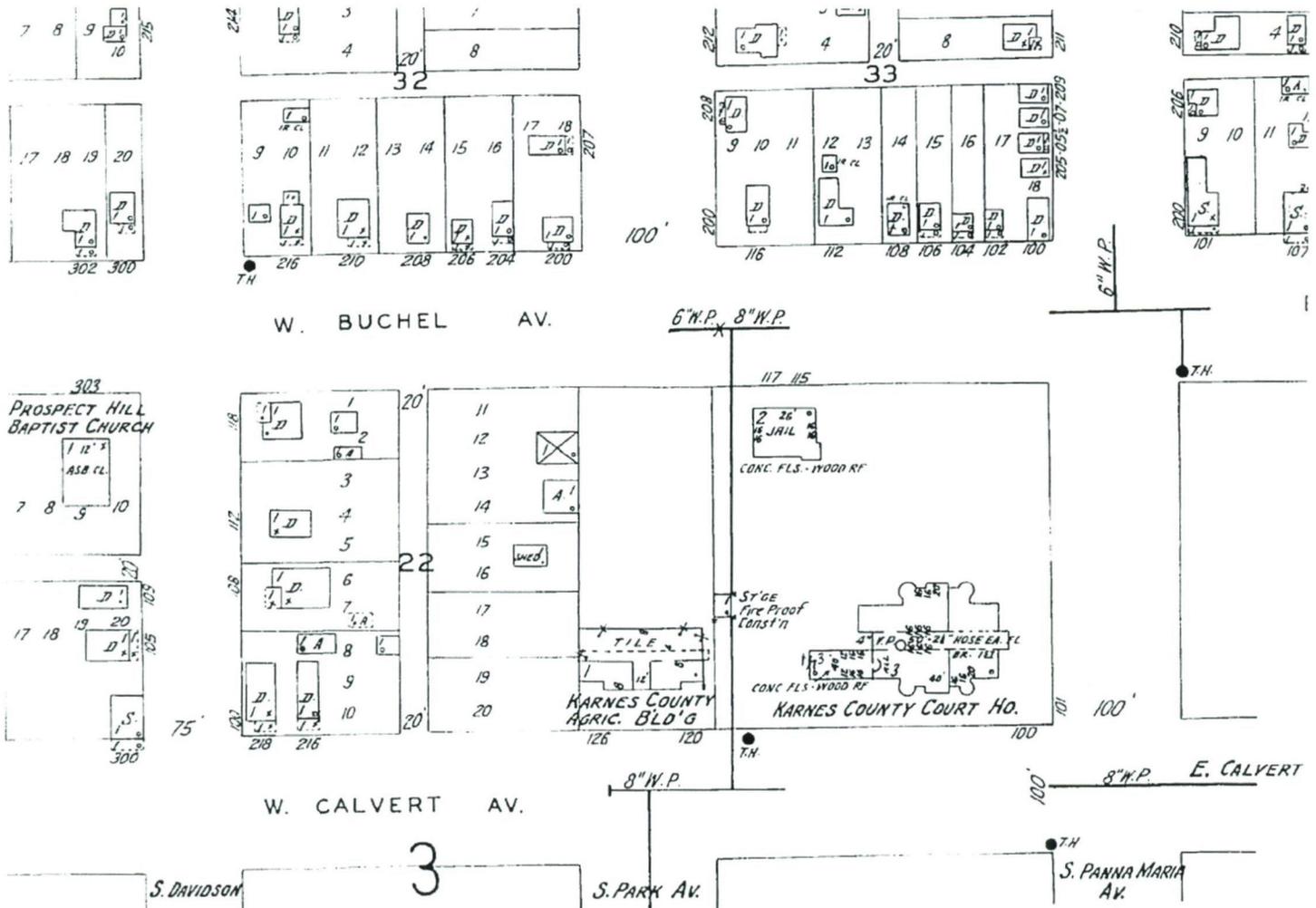
**Map 5.** Karnes County townsite survey, delineated by O.E. Cherry, C.E., on December 8, 1914. Note the placement of the “Court House Square,” bounded by Park, Panna Maria, Calvert, and Buchel avenues.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section MAP Page 28

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



Map 6. Sanborn map of Karnes City, 1951, showing the jail before its demolition.

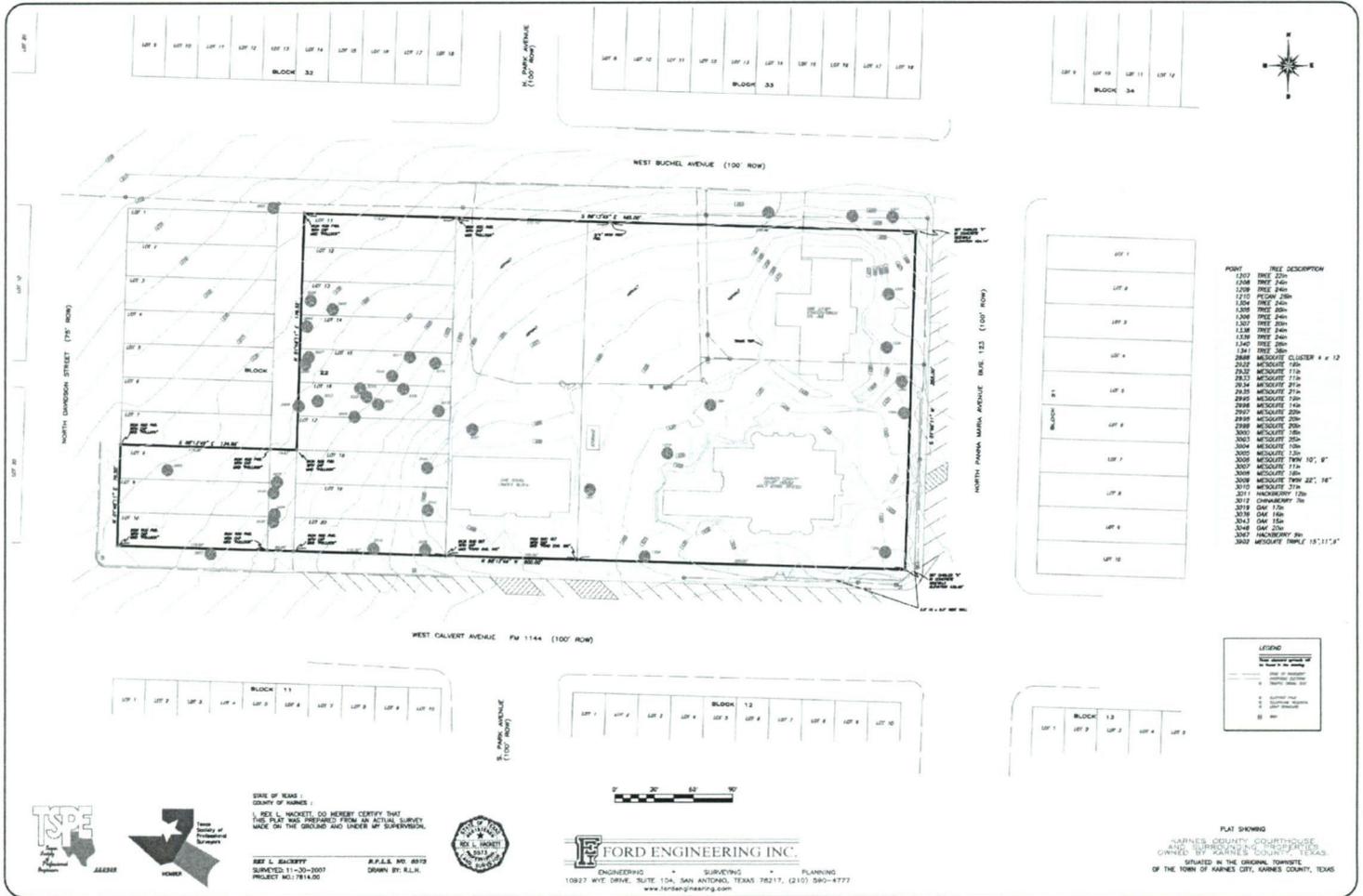
By this time, the courthouse square had been joined to an adjacent city block to its west, and South Park Avenue had been closed to allow for the construction of the Karnes County Agricultural Building, located in the former right-of-way. This agricultural building was demolished in 2009 in anticipation of the courthouse square rehabilitation project.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section MAP Page 29

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



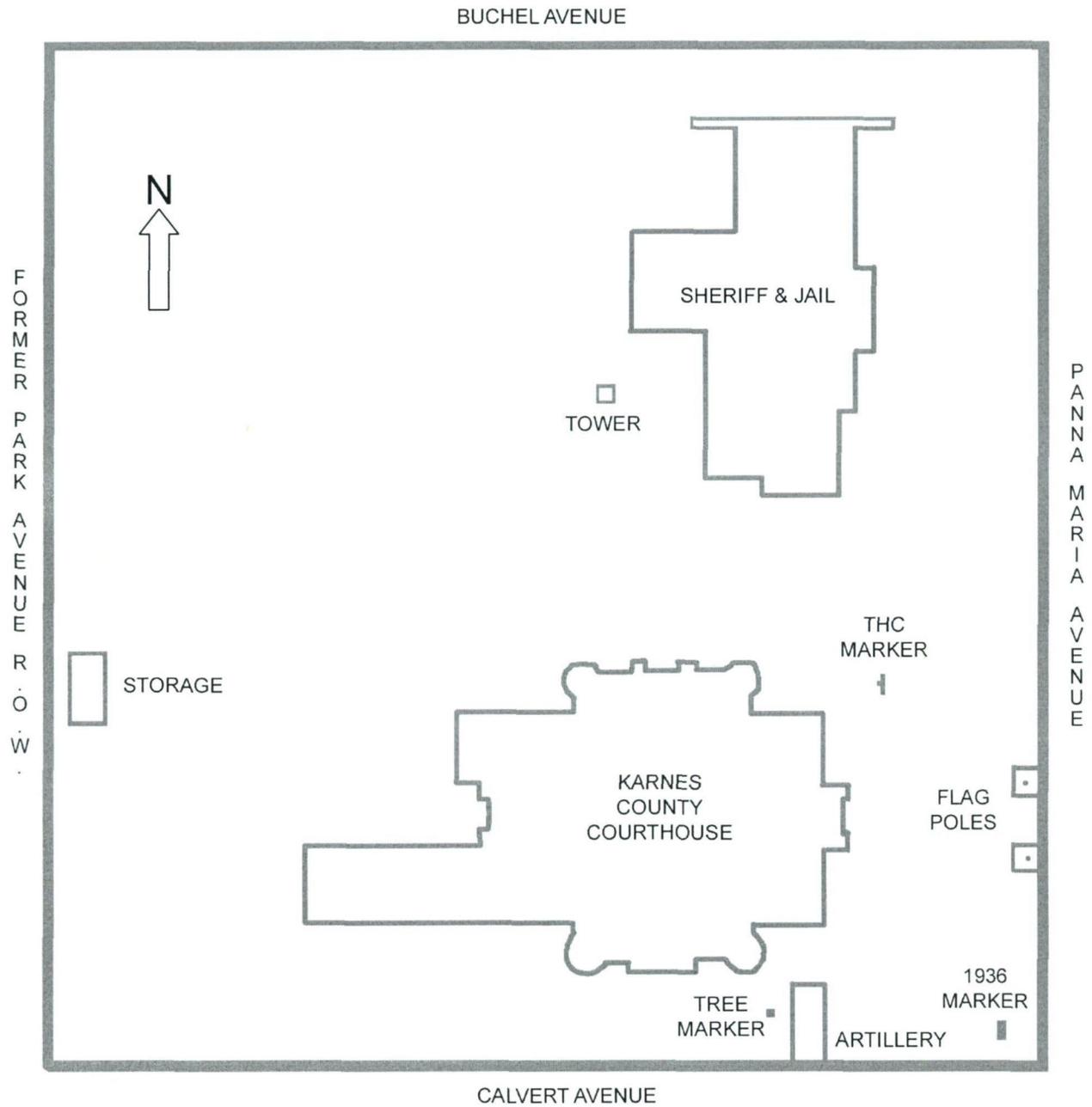
Map 7. Site survey showing Karnes County Courthouse site in context (2007).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section MAP Page 30

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



**Map 8.** Boundary of nominated property, showing location of contributing and noncontributing resources.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 31

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



**Figure 1.** The second Karnes County Courthouse, constructed in Helena in 1872. (n.d.)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 32

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



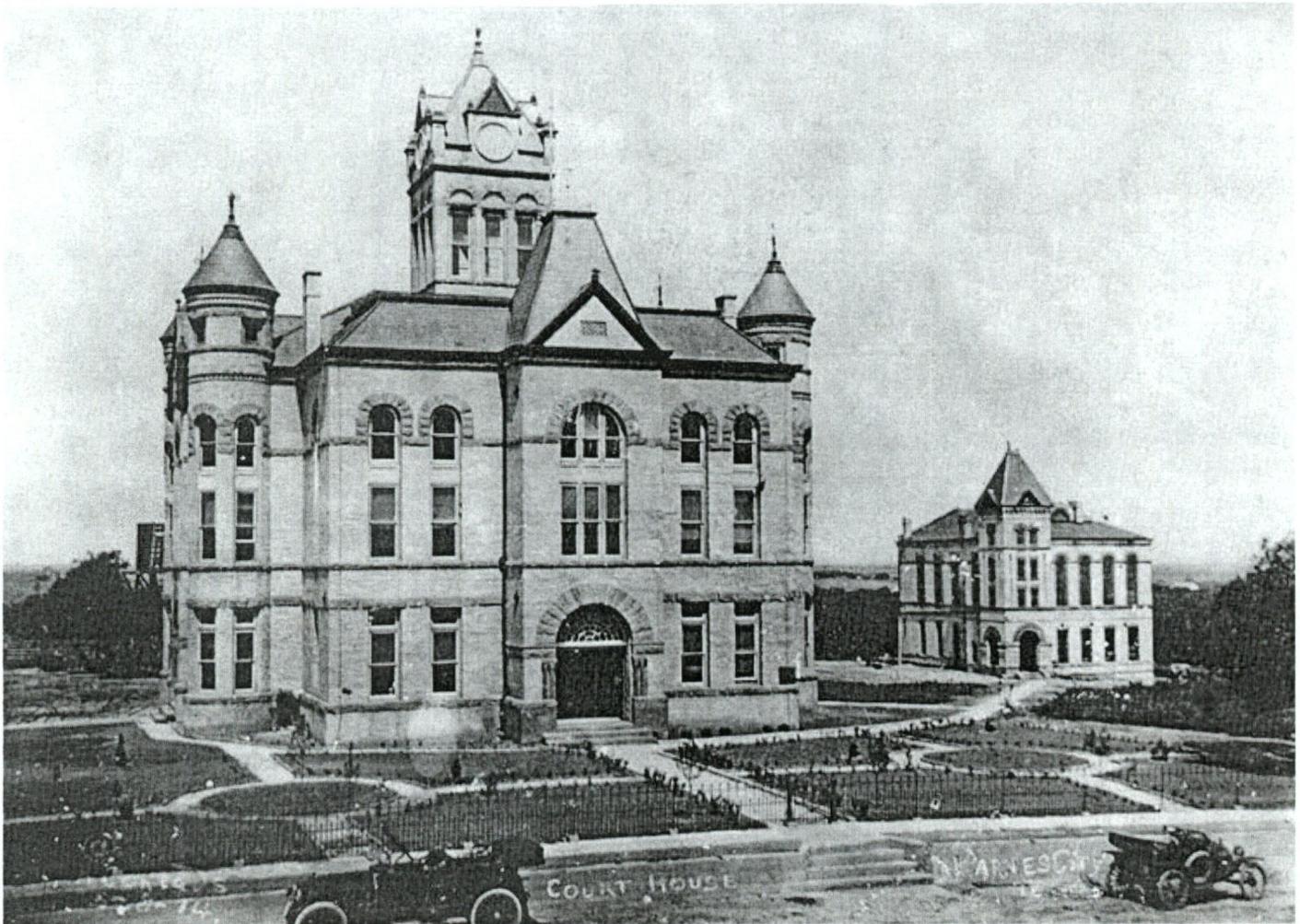
**Figure 2.** Historic photograph (n.d.) of the Karnes County Courthouse with the earlier jail building, now demolished; courthouse designed and constructed in 1895 by John Cormack and Jacob Astor Austin.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 33

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



**Figure 3.** A later historic photograph (ca. 1914) of the 1895 Karnes County Courthouse and Jail, with formal gardens and iron fencing around the public square.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 34

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



**Figure 4.** Historic aerial photograph (n.d.) that shows a fire escape structure and vestiges of formal gardens.

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National Park Service

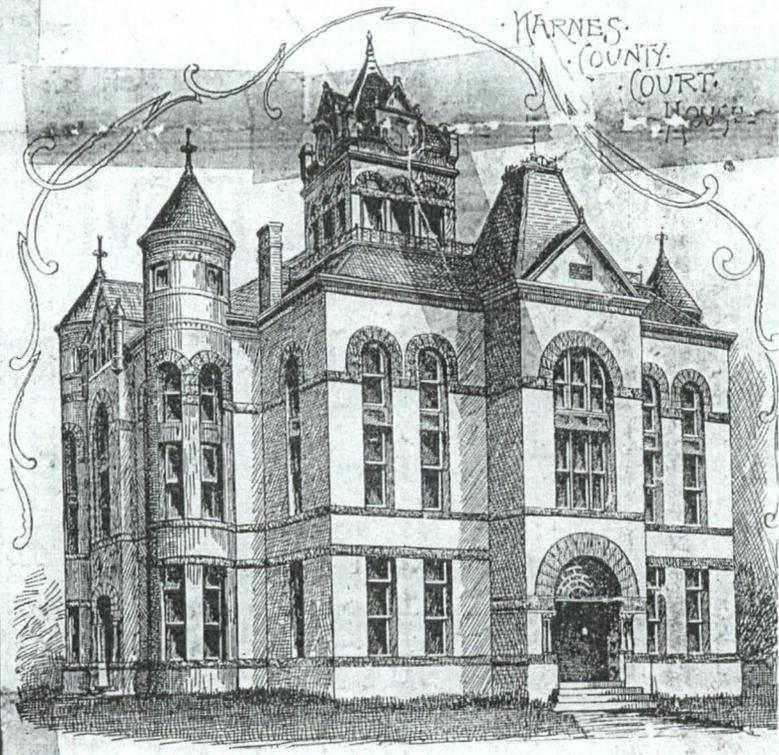
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 35

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas

SPECIAL EDITION.  
**KARNES REFORMER**

Published by E. NORDHAUS.  
KARNES CITY, TEXAS, OCTOBER 20, 1895.



KARNES COUNTY COURT HOUSE, AT KARNES CITY, TEXAS.

## RESOURCES OF KARNES COUNTY

One of the best Counties in Southwest Texas for Farming Purposes!

If you want a Home come to Karnes County.  
Lands in all Parts of the County for sale cheap.

Karnes County, the healthiest and one of the best counties in Southwest Texas, containing a larger area of the best tillable lands in this section, was created by the act of the Legislature of the State of Texas on the 4th day of February, 1854, and during the same year

maintained its organization. It was named in honor of Captain Henry Karnes, a noted ranger and Indian fighter.

This county is situated in what is known as Southwestern Texas, about 75 or

tude 29 degrees, 5' West longitude 97 degrees, 50' and is composed principally of high rolling and picturesque prairies, the western portions, where some parts heavily timbered with the native oak

/ 171

Figure 5. "Resources of Karnes County," in the *Karnes Reformer*, October 20, 1895.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 36

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



**Figure 6.** Karnes County Courthouse with its 1924 additions, southeast oblique view (facing northwest), ca. 1940.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 37

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



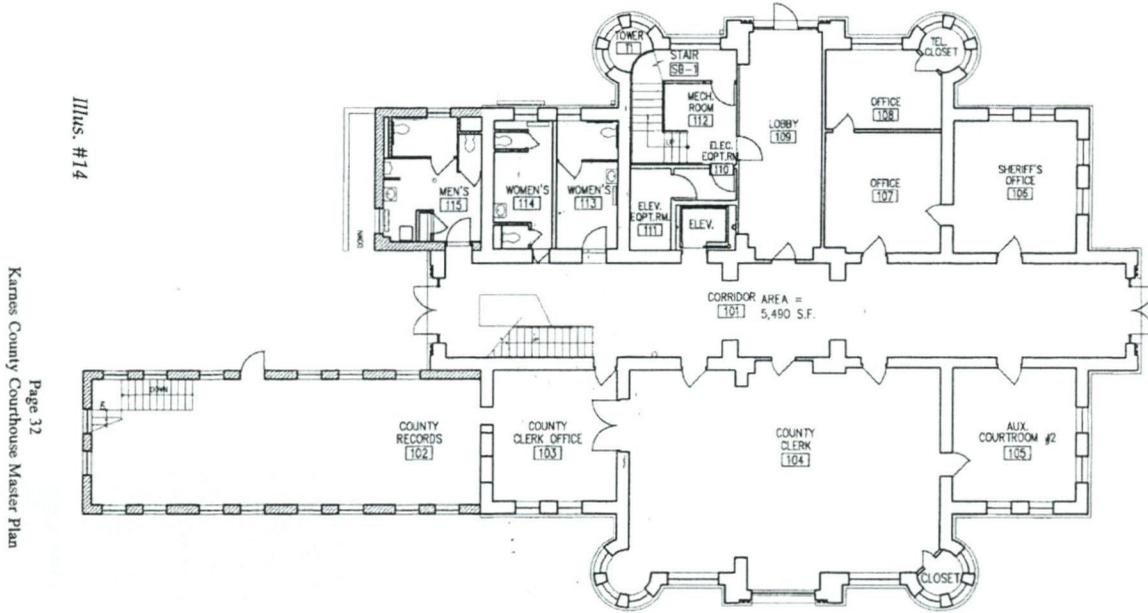
Figure 7. Memorial plaque to John Cormack, Architect and Contractor, with Masonic symbol.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 38

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

1/16" = 1'-0" 0 5 10 20

LEGEND

- ORIGINAL WALL
- BUILDING ADDITIONS C.1924



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San Antonio, Texas 78205

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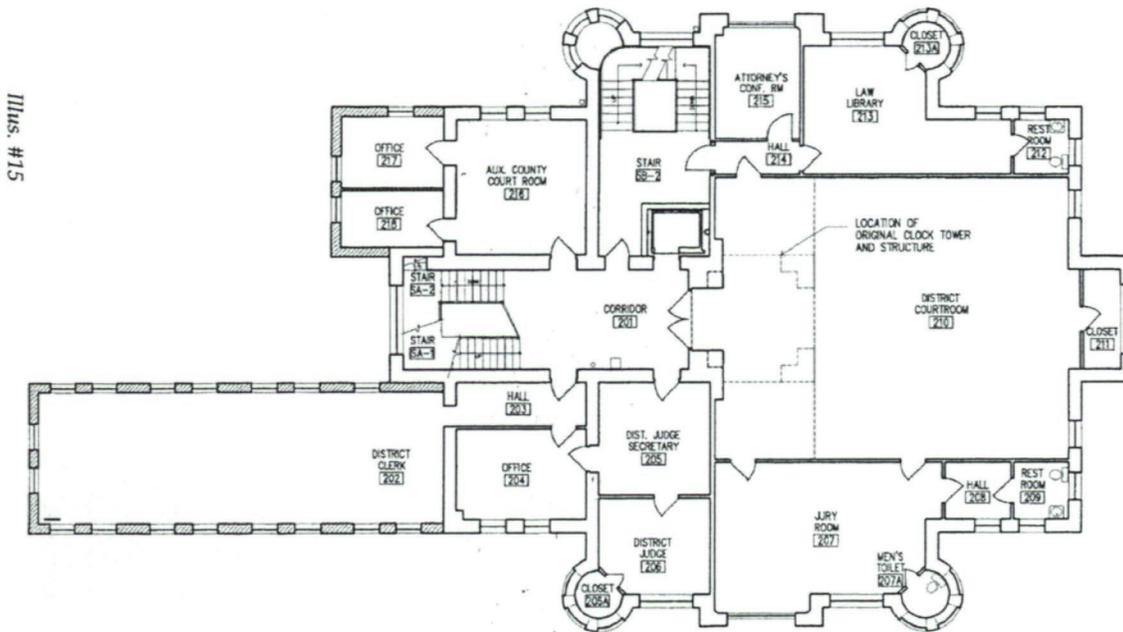
Figure 8. First floor plan

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas

Section FIGURE Page 39



Illus. #15

Page 33  
Karnes County Courthouse Master Plan

EXISTING SECOND FLOOR PLAN

1/16" = 1'-0" 0 5 10 20

LEGEND

-  ORIGINAL WALL
-  BUILDING ADDITIONS C.1924



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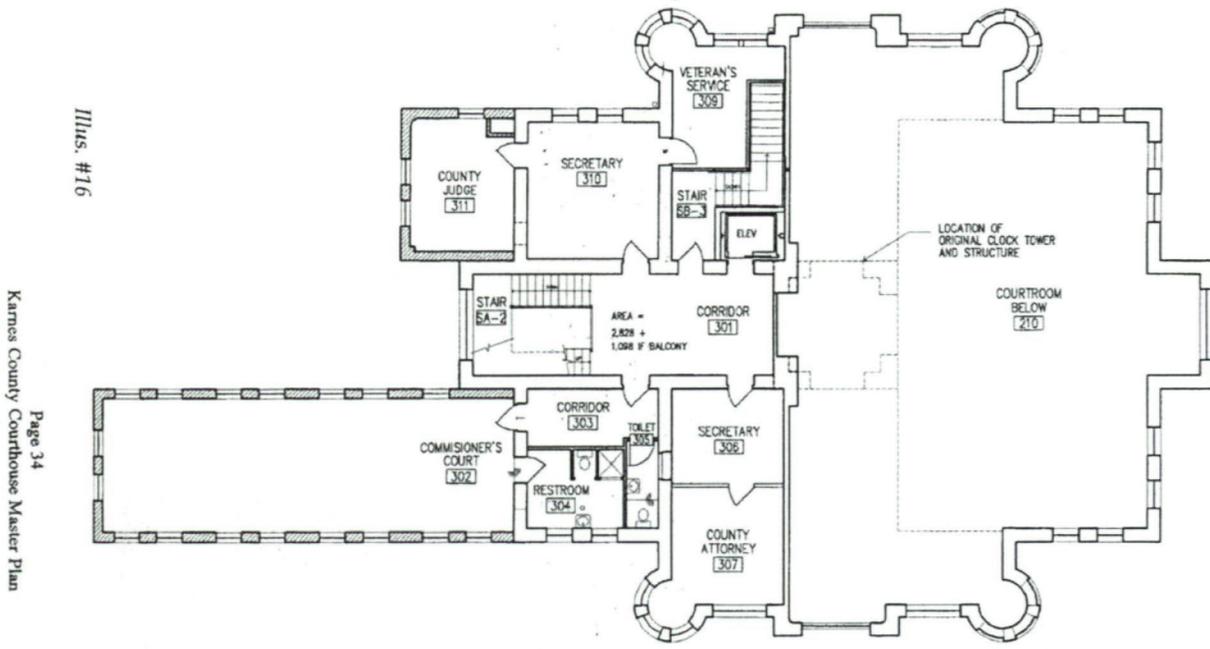
Figure 9. Second floor plan

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 40

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



Illus. #16

Karnes County Courthouse Master Plan  
Page 34

EXISTING THIRD FLOOR PLAN

1/16" = 1'-0" 0 5 10 20

LEGEND

-  ORIGINAL WALL
-  BUILDING ADDITIONS C.1924



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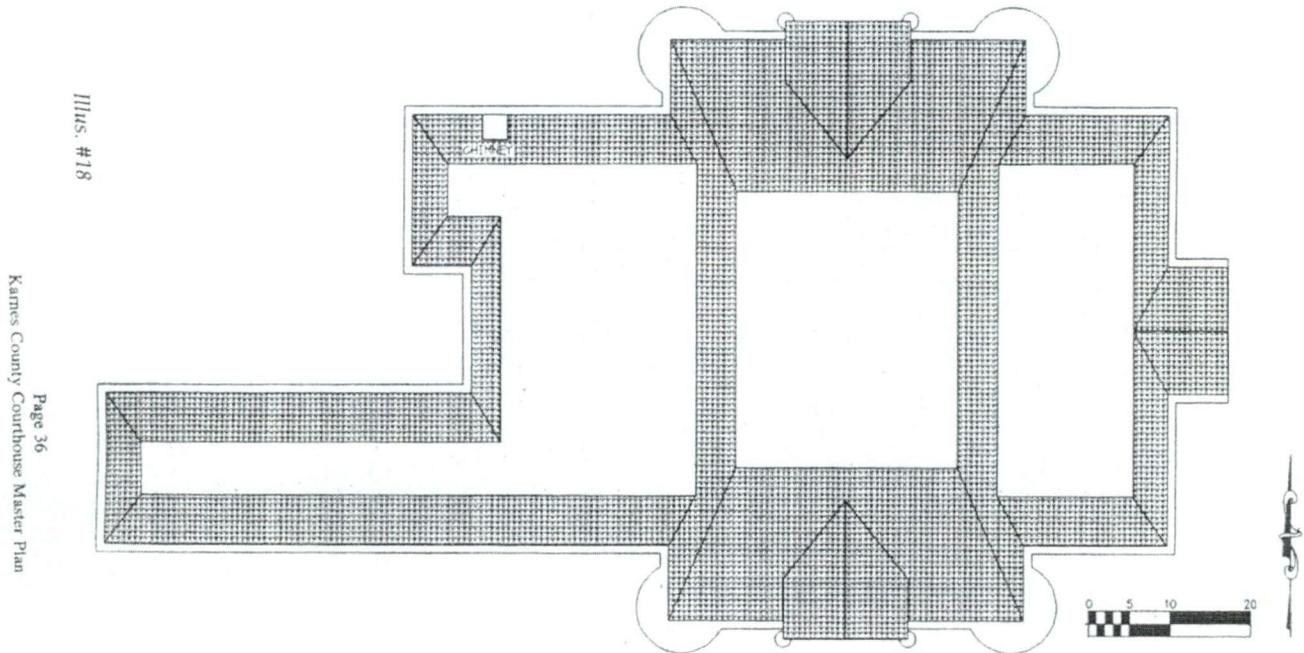
Figure 10. Third floor plan

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 41

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



Illus. #18

Karnes County Courthouse Master Plan  
Page 36

EXISTING ROOF PLAN 1/16" = 1'-0"

LEGEND

-  EXISTING CLAY TILE ROOF C. 1930
-  PAINTED COPPER CORNICE
-  EXISTING BUILT-UP ROOF

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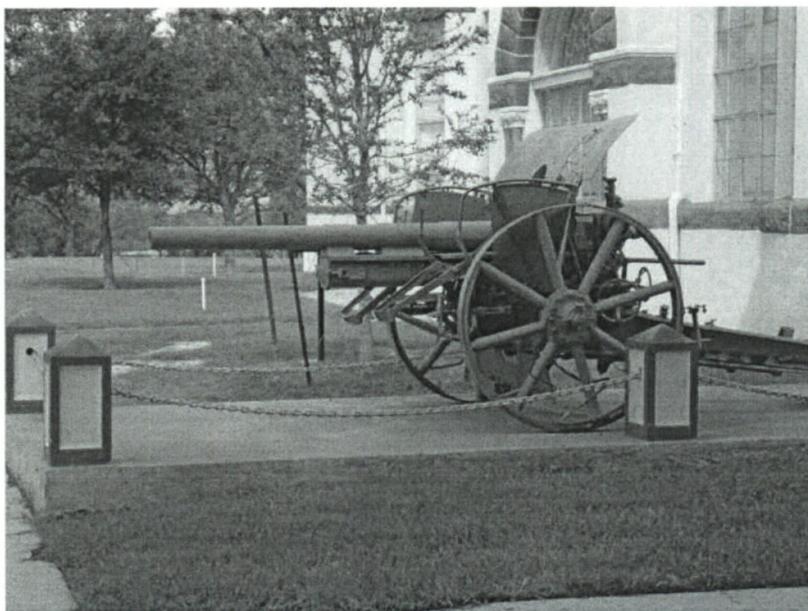
Figure 11. Roof plan

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 42

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas



**Figure 12.** Noncontributing objects include a 1994 Texas Historical Commission marker (top center), a 2008 marker for a tree dedication (top right), and a pre-World War II artillery display (bottom).

The 1936 Centennial marker from the Texas Highways Department, a granite base with a bronze star, is contributing (top left).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 43

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas

### PHOTO LOG

All photographs are credited as follows:

Name of Property:	Karnes County Courthouse
City:	Karnes City
County:	Karnes County
State:	Texas
Photographer:	Sue Carter
Date:	May 21, 2010
Location of digital files:	Texas Historical Commission, Austin

Printed on Epson Ultra Premium Presentation Paper with Epson Ultrachrome ink

**Photo 1** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0001.tif)

East elevation

Camera facing: West

**Photo 2** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0002.tif)

South elevation

Camera facing: North

**Photo 3** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0003.tif)

West elevation

Camera facing: East

**Photo 4** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0004.tif)

North elevation, northwest oblique view

Camera facing: Southeast

**Photo 5** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0005.tif)

East entrance, interior view of door with fan light and side lights

Camera facing: East

**Photo 6** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0006.tif)

Interior stair and first floor corridor

Camera facing: West

**Photo 7** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0007.tif)

Interior stair, second floor landing

Camera facing: West

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 44

Karnes County Courthouse  
Karnes City, Karnes County, Texas

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**Photo 8** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0008.tif)  
Interior stair, looking down to marble floor at entrance

**Photo 9** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0009.tif)  
District Courtroom, second floor  
Camera facing: East

**Photo 10** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0010.tif)  
Storage building (contributing), southwest oblique view  
Camera facing: Northeast

**Photo 11** (TX\_Karnes County\_Karnes County Courthouse\_0011.tif)  
Karnes County Sherriff's Office and Jail (contributing), southwest oblique view  
Camera facing: Northeast

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Karnes County Courthouse

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Karnes

DATE RECEIVED: 6/10/10                      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 7/14/10  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 7/29/10                  DATE OF 45TH DAY: 7/25/10  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10000499

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

**JUL 26 2010**

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places**

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE

KARNES COUNTY, TX

PHOTO 1 OF 11



KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE

KARNES COUNTY, TX

PHOTO 2 OF 11



KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
KARNES COUNTY, TX  
PHOTO 3 OF 11





KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE

KARNES COUNTY, TX

PHOTO 4 OF 11



EXIT

RESTROOMS  
1st Fl.  
1st Fl.

KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE

KARNES COUNTY, TX

PHOTO 5 OF 11



KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
KARNES COUNTY, TX  
PHOTO 6 OF 11



KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE

KARNES COUNTY, TX

PHOTO 7 OF 11





KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE

KARNES COUNTY, TX

PHOTO 8 OF 11





KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE

KARNES COUNTY, TX

PHOTO 9 OF 11





KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE

KARNES COUNTY, TX

PHOTO 10 OF 11



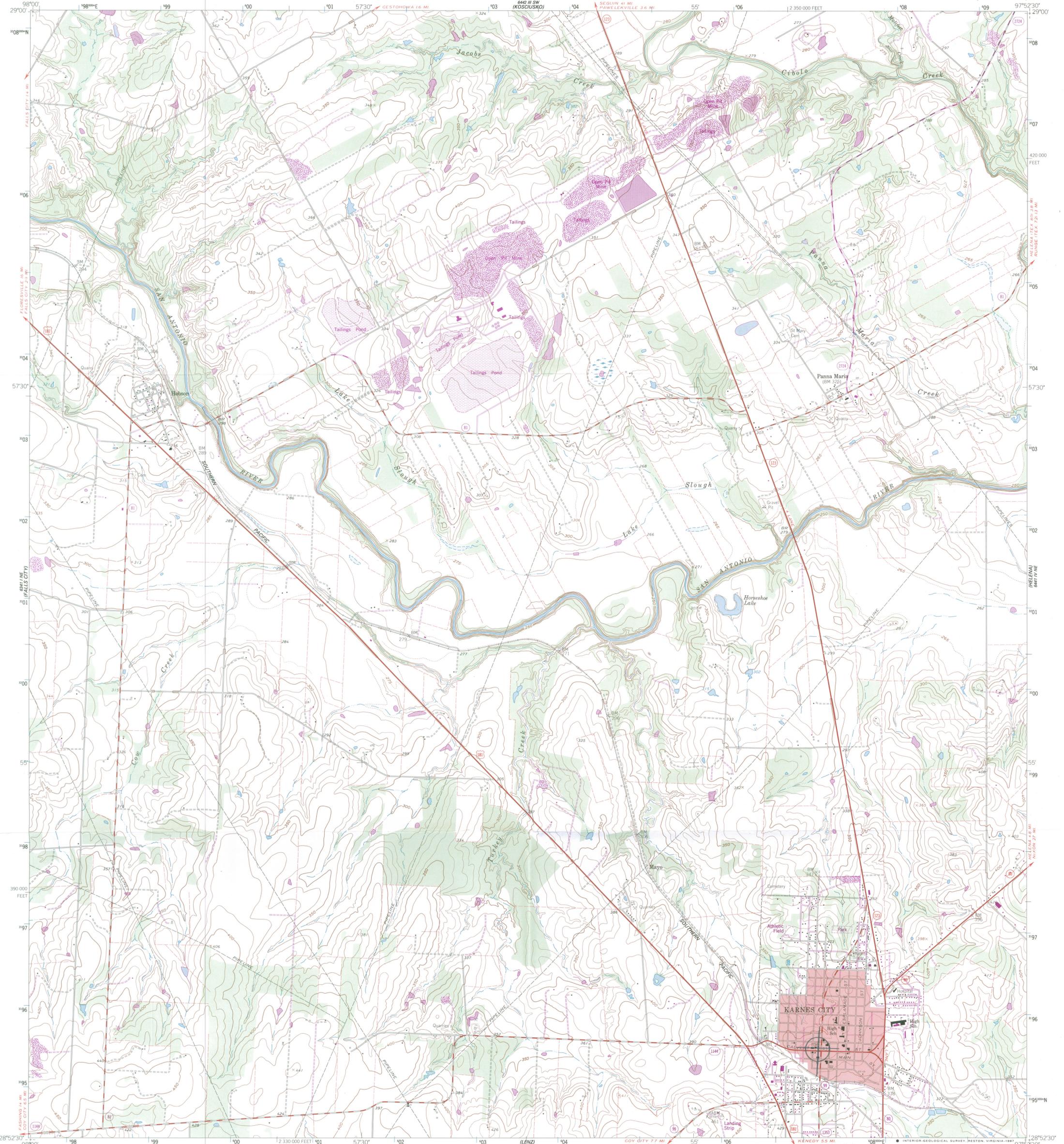


KARNES COUNTY COURT HOUSE

KARNES COUNTY, TX

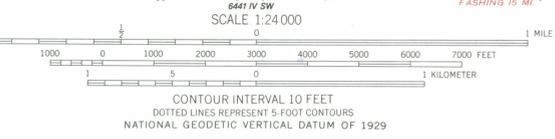
PHOTO 11 OF 11





Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA  
Topography from aerial photographs by photogrammetric methods  
Aerial photographs taken 1958. Field check 1960  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American Datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system,  
south central zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 14, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates area in which only  
landmark buildings are shown  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines  
where generally visible on aerial photographs  
This information is unchecked

UTM GRID AND 1987 MAGNETIC NORTH  
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET  
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983  
move the projection lines 23 meters south and  
27 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks



UTM  
607106 E  
3195745 N

ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Heavy-duty ——— Light-duty ———  
Medium-duty ——— Unimproved dirt ———  
U.S. Route ——— State Route ———

KARNES COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
101 PANNA MARIA AVE  
KARNES CITY, TEX.  
KARNES COUNTY, TX

2897-333  
QUADRANGLE LOCATION

1960  
PHOTOREVISED 1987  
DMA 6441 IV NW-SERIES V882

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled from  
aerial photographs taken 1981 and other source data  
This information not field checked. Map edited 1987

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
*real places telling real stories*



MEMORANDUM

TO: Linda McClelland  
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Rachel Leibowitz, Historian  
Texas Historical Commission

RE: Karnes County Courthouse  
101 Panna Maria Avenue, Karnes City  
Karnes County, TX

DATE: June 7, 2010

The following materials are submitted regarding [address]:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original National Register of Historic Places form
<input type="checkbox"/>	__ Resubmitted nomination
	Multiple Property nomination form
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Photographs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	USGS maps
	Correspondence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other: archival gold CD with digital image files (.tif)

COMMENTS:

- SHPO requests substantive review
- The enclosed owner objections (do \_\_) (do not \_\_) constitute a majority of property owners
- Other:

