FORM NO. 10-300

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Bell County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Public Square Belton, Texas

CITY, TOWN
Belton

STATE
Texas

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY
DISTRICT
BUILDING(S)
STRUCTURE
SITE
OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
PUBLIC
PRIVATE
BOTH
PUBLIC ACQUISITION

STATUS
OCCUPIED
UNOCCUPIED
WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
YES: RESTRICTED
YES: UNRESTRICTED
NO

PRESENT USE
AGRICULTURE
COMMERCIAL
PARK
EDUCATIONAL
PRIVATE RESIDENCE
ENTERTAINMENT
GOVERNMENT
SCIENTIFIC
TRANSPORTATION
MILITARY
OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Bell County

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Belton

STATE
Texas

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Bell County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
Public Square

CITY, TOWN
Belton

STATE
Texas

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE
The Bell County Courthouse, in a manner typical of many Texas courthouses of the period, occupies a single block reserved within the grid of streets. Four uniformly porticoed facades give equal prominence to the surrounding commercial blocks.

Imposing in mass and appearance, the building was designed in 1883 by J.N. Preston and Sons of Austin in the Renaissance Revival style. Three stories in height and measuring 155 by 76 feet, it was constructed of a golden-hued stone from a local quarry. A lower story of pitch-faced ashlar is separated from the upper portion of cut stone by a modest string course. Horizontal articulation is emphasized by continuous pilasters with molded caps and bases between each vertical course of windows. The four elevations consist of five elements. The central feature, an entrance pavilion, rises from a one-story base of rusticated stone with a portico above supported by cut-stone columns with carved capitals and bases. On either side are flanking bays terminated at each corner by a projecting pavilion.

As built, the courthouse was dominated by a central tower, 125 feet high, terminated by a statue of the Goddess of Justice, with sword and balance in hand which has since been removed. The tower was supported on a wide base and surrounded by colonnade with fluted columns and carved capitals.

Originally sheet metal details manufactured by W.J. Burt and Company of Fort Worth figured prominently in the design. Most have been removed. The roof was of stamped tin fabricated to resemble slate. Around each of the porticos was a balustrade of zinc. Cornices, handrails, balustrades, shell ornaments at the apex of the roof, and window pediments were all fabricated of galvanized iron and spun zinc.

The courthouse plan afforded twenty-two offices and the district and county courtrooms. Also provided were five fireproof vaults in which county and district records were kept. Corridor and portico floors were of marble. Naturally finished wood was used throughout. The courtroom was elegantly finished with a panelled ceiling supported.
by fluted pilasters with panelled pedestals and carved capitals and bases. In 1891, the county clerk's office was made fireproof and extensive remodeling and "modernization" were completed in 1950.
Bell County, originally a portion of the Robertson Colony, was first settled in 1834. During the War of Independence from Mexico and the subsequent period of uncertainty the area was abandoned several times. In 1839 the ever-present danger of Indian raids was abated by a decisive victory in the Bird's Creek Indian fight and the population of the county grew slowly until the time of its incorporation January 22, 1850.

Before the official creation of the county, public business was transacted at John Danley's Blacksmith Shop, with an anvil as a council table. On December 14, 1850, county officials approved the construction of the first of three courthouses to be situated on the town square, laid out in the midst of 120 acre site donated by Matilda F. Connell Allen for the county seat. The first courthouse was a one-story frame building 16 feet by 18 feet built by contractor Thomas T. Havens, and completed in May 1851 at a cost of $199.00. Its construction was funded by sale of town lots.

The building soon proved inadequate; most county officials continued to transact public business from commercial structures.

On April 1, 1850, the Bell County Commissioners' Court voted to build a new two-story courthouse of native limestone. The design submitted by architect William Bock called for a conventionally arranged structure having four uniform facades, intersecting main halls, and fireplaces on both floors. The agreement with contractor Simeon Bramlett further stipulated that the building be "forty five by fifty feet with a base of three feet; lower story twelve feet to the ceiling; upper story which is to be the courtroom and two clerks offices, 15
10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
North-First Avenue
South-Central Avenue
East-Main Street
West-Earl Street

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

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE
STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Willard B. Robinson, Professor of Architecture
S. Elizabeth Sasser, Research Assistant

ORGANIZATION Ranching Heritage Center

STREET & NUMBER P.O. Box 4499 Texas Tech University

CITY OR TOWN Lubbock, Texas

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ✓ LOCAL ___

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
feet from floor to ceiling; and these with the cornice will give the buildings an elevation of about thirty three feet--it will be furnished handsomely throughout with seats for the audience without the bar of the courtroom rising from front to back. The walls are to be eighteen inches thick."

The building was completed December 1, 1859 at a cost of $13,635. Like its predecessor, the building was evidently not well received and none of the commissioners who voted for funds for construction was reelected. On August 20, 1860, funds were appropriated to gravel the courthouse square.

By 1883 the existing courthouse had become structurally unsound. Several grand juries ordered it condemned and approval was given for the construction of the present courthouse. Architects J.N. Preston and Sons, noted later for their design of the Driskill Hotel in Austin, submitted drawings. Contractor Ben D. Lee of Belton entered a low bid of $64,965 and construction proceeded with the laying of the cornerstone on June 24, 1884. The building was accepted by the county May 30, 1885. The finished structure with its classical porticos and one hundred and twenty-five-foot tower surmounted by a statue of the Goddess of Justice must have been an impressive sight. The Fort Worth Daily Gazette of May 19, 1885 noted admiringly that, "Among the many new courthouses built in the state during the past three years... the Bell County Courthouse surpasses all in beauty of design and elegance of finish ..."

Today the courthouse continues to serve its original function despite considerable alterations of the architectural fabric.
Property: Bell County Courthouse
State: Texas
Working Number: 9.24.76.4181

TECHNICAL
Photos: 3
Maps: 1

CONTROL
OK: 9.27.76

HISTORIAN
Accept: P. Aranha
11/4/76

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN
Accept: M. T. Chaps
1/23/76

ARCHEOLOGIST

OTHER

HAER
Inventory: 
Review: 

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

BRANCH CHIEF
Accept: P. Cole
11/26/76

KEEPER

National Register Write-up: 2-1-76
Federal Register Entry: 2-1-76
Send-back: 
Re-submit: 
Entered: DEC 12 1976

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

Texas Historical Commission, 6-24-70
Texas Historical Commission

Southwest elevation
Photo #1  

SEP 24 1976

DEC 12 1976
Bell County Courthouse
Belton, Texas

Texas Historical Comm., 6-24-70
Texas Historical Comm.

West elevation
Photo #2

SEP 24 1976

DEC 12 1976
Bell County Courthouse
Belton, Texas

Texas Hist. Comm., 6-24-70
Texas Historical Commission

Northeast oblique
Photo #3-43

SEP 24 1976

DEC 12 1976
## ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

### STATE TEXAS

#### Date Entered: DEC 12 1976

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menard, Michel B., House</td>
<td>Galveston Galveston County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galveston Causeway</td>
<td>Galveston Galveston County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph's Church</td>
<td>Galveston Galveston County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Coach Inn</td>
<td>Chappell Hill Washington County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giddings-Wilkin House</td>
<td>Brenham Washington County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regency Suspension Bridge</td>
<td>Regency vicinity Mills County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell County Courthouse</td>
<td>Belton Bell County</td>
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### Also Notified

- Hon. John G. Tower
- Hon. Lloyd B. Bentsen
- Hon. Jack Brooks
- Hon. J. J. (Jake) Pickle
- Hon. W. R. Poage
- Regional Director, Southwest Region

- State Historic Preservation Officer
- Mr. Truett Latimer
- Executive Director
- Texas Historical Commission
- P.O. Box 12276, Capitol Station
- Austin, Texas 78711
NAME as it appears on federal register: Bell County Courthouse

LOCATION street & number Public Square

city / town Belton
county Bell
state TX

NPS REGION Southwest

EXISTING SURVEYS HABS HAER NHL

OWNER PRIVATE STATE MUNICIPAL COUNTY MULTIPLE FEDERAL (agency name)

EXISTING SURVEYS HABS HAER NHL

CONGRESS. DISTRICT 11th

SOURCE OF NOMINATION Federal

WITHIN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT? YES NAME

WITHIN NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK? YES NAME

CONDITION

excellent

fair

ruins

unexposed

altered

unaltered

unexcavated

original site

moved

reconstructed

unknown

features:

SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-1

SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-2

SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-3

SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-4

SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-5

SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-6

SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-7

NOT INTACT-0

NOT INTACT-1

NOT INTACT-2

NOT INTACT-3

NOT INTACT-4

NOT INTACT-5

NOT APPLICABLE-8

NOT APPLICABLE-9

local

PRIVATE

ORGANIZATION

ACCESS Local

PRIVATE

ORGANIZATION

ADAPTIVE USE EDUCATION-10

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE(s): 2nd Renaissance Revival and Neo-Classical Rev.

ARCHITECTURAL GROUP

ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:

ARCHITECTURE-4

ECONOMICS-9

EDUCATION-10

ENGINEERING-11

Landscape Arch.

LANDSCAPE ARCH.

ARCHITECTURAL-10

ART-5

INVENTION-14

PHILOSOPHY-20

POLITICAL-7

RELIGIOUS-21

SETTLEMENT-29

POLITICAL-7

RELIGIOUS-21

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RELIGIOUS-21

COLONIAL-10

CONSERVATION-8

DEVELOPMENT-17

MILITARY-18

EDUCATION-10

EDUCATION-10

ART-5

ECONOMICS-9

ARCHITECTURE-4

STATE A HISTORIC DISTRICT

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:

ARCHITECTURE-4

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STATE A HISTORIC DISTRICT

FUNCTIONS

WHEN HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT: Courthouse

CURRENTLY: Courthouse

ARCHITECT:

J. N. Preston & Sons

CONSTRUCTION DATES:

1884-85

MATERIALS:

Rock-faced and dressed stone

3 stories, hipped and gabled roof sections, 2-story tetra-

style pedimented portico raised on ground arcade on each facade, projecting corner pavilions, segmental-arched 1st-story windows, round-arched and pedimented windows

elements removed. Second Renaissance Revival and Neo-Classical Revival elements. Third courthouse to occupy Belton's town square; served as county government center since its construction 1884.