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
Wise County Courthouse

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER
Public Square
CITY, TOWN
Decatur
STATE
Texas

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
DISTRICT
BUILDING(S)
STRUCTURE
SITE
OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
PUBLIC
PRIVATE
BOTH
PUBLIC ACQUISITION
IN PROCESS
BEING CONSIDERED

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

PRESENT USE
AGRICULTURE
COMMERCIAL
PARK
EDUCATIONAL
ENTERTAINMENT
GOVERNMENT
INDUSTRIAL
ENTERTAINMENT
TRANSPORTATION
MILITARY
OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME
Wise County
STREET & NUMBER
Public Square
CITY, TOWN
Decatur
STATE
Texas

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Wise County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER
Public Square
CITY, TOWN
Decatur
STATE
Texas

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE
Historic Sites Inventory & Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
DATE
1970 & 1964
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Texas Historical Commission
CITY, TOWN
STATE
The design of J. Riely Gordon for the Wise County Courthouse was similar to but not identical with his design for the Ellis County Courthouse. One of a number of Texas courthouses designed by J. Riely Gordon in a Romanesque Revival idiom, the Wise County Courthouse exhibits a number of characteristics of form, such as, the use of turrets, a tower, broken massing, and fine ashlar masonry of contrasting textures. In addition, it reveals the Greek cross plan developed by Gordon with access at the four reentrants and a central stair.

The broken massing produced by the cruciform plan lent itself readily to the stylistic vocabulary of the Romanesque Revival. Turrets and dormers mark the east and west facades. At the north and south elevations the arms of the cross are connected visually by the swinging curve of the four entry pavilions. The central tower with its bartizans, setbacks and dormers dominates the composition.

Particularly distinctive is the fine masonry work throughout. Exterior walls were of Texas granite. The specifications called for "quality granite in two colors selected by the architect . . . laid up in pitch-faced and pean hammered alternating courses with pointed beds and joints." The main columns were of polished pink granite. Terra cotta in the friezes, turrets and dormers was used extensively. For the roof, "the best quality Bangor slate of very light blue color" was specified.

The interior was appointed with equal attention to detail. The floors were a finish of marble tiles of contrasting hue in a checkerboard pattern. Bases and wainscoting in the lobbies, halls and stairways were also of marble.

The outstanding and distinctive quality of the construction and overall design of the Wise County Courthouse mark it as worthy of conservation.
### Significance

#### Period
- Prehistoric
- 1400-1499
- 1500-1599
- 1600-1699
- 1700-1799
- 1800-1899
- 1900-

#### Areas of Significance
- Archeology
- Agriculture
- Architecture
- Art
- Commerce
- Communications
- Community Planning
- Conservation
- Exploration/Settlement
- Industry
- Invention
- Landscape Architecture
- Law
- Literature
- Military
- Music
- Philosophy
- Politics/Government
- Religion
- Science
- Sculpture
- Social/Humanitarian
- Transportation
- Theater
- Other (Specify)

### Specific Dates 1895-1897

#### Statement of Significance

Wise County named for Henry A. Wise of Virginia was created from Cooke County in 1856 and organized in the same year with Taylorsville, later renamed Decatur as the county seat. The first courthouse was built in 1860. On October 13 of that year, the Clarksville Standard advertised that "the building of a courthouse will be let to the lowest responsible bidder....in November 1860." It was specified to be "a frame building thirty-six feet square, two stories high." The contractor was to furnish materials. On November 26, 1861, this building was destroyed by fire. By great effort the county records were saved. The Fort Worth Daily Democrat reported that, "the loss will be a serious one to the county, but it will be the means of securing a new courthouse which was very much needed."

Architect R.F. Sayers was chosen by the County Commissioners on December 15, 1881, to prepare plans and specifications for the construction of a new courthouse. The plans were to contain, "one large room for the County Clerk, one large room for the Collector and Treasurer and not less than four other rooms and one sufficiently large for the County Court. Also three fire-proof vaults below the stairs, one for the County Clerk, one for the Distric Clerk, and a small vault for the Treasurer. The arrangement upstairs will comprise one Large Court Room, Grand and Petit Jury Rooms." For the design and supervision of this project, architect Sayers was to receive the sum of $1,200. On February 25, 1882 the contract was let to the firm of W. Johnson and Tom Hogan for stonework at a price of $18,735.00 and to Joseph Kane, contractor, for all other work totaling $15,600. In March, Sayers was discharged for failure to inspect the work and J. Kane was hired as supervisor. By December 1882, the work was largely complete.

On January 9, 1895, flames destroyed the second courthouse. Following the fire the County Commissioners rented a building from the Wise County National Bank to serve as a temporary seat and proceeded to deliberate on the choice of an architect to design a new courthouse. The commissioners were allotted $3.00 a day to travel to San Antonio and other points to inspect local Temples of Justice.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHERICAL REFERENCES

The Clarksville Standard, October 13, 1860
Fort Worth Daily Democrat, November 27, 1881
Wise County Commissioners' Court Minutes Vol. 7

GEOGRAPHERICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2

ZONE EASTING NORTHING ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
Spur 357 and FM 730 - public square

FORM PREPARED BY
NAME/TITLE Willard B. Robinson, Professor of Architecture
S. Elizabeth Sasser, Research Associate 8/24/76
ORGANIZATION Division of Architecture-Texas Tech University 806/742-2430
STREET & NUMBER P.O. Box 4499
CITY OR TOWN Lubbock
STATE Texas

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION
THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:
NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL X

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE Texas State Historic Preservation Officer
DATE Oct. 21, 1976

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DATE 12/17/76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
DATE 12/17/76
The statement of significance is in #1.

For such an unusual object, it deserves a stronger statement of significance.

ARCHEOLOGIST

OTHER

HAER

Inventory

Review

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

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

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service WASO No. 7
Wise County Courthouse
Decatur, Texas
Texas Historical Commission, 1970
Texas Historical Commission
Southwest oblique
Photo #1 of 3

OCT 26 1976

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER DEC 12 1976
Wise County Courthouse
Decatur, Texas
Wise Co., Texas
Texas Historical Commission, 1970
Texas Historical Commission

Detail of southwest entry
Photo #2 1/3

OCT 26 1976

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER DEC 12 1976
Wise County Courthouse
Decatur, Texas
Wis Co., Texas
Texas Historical Commission, 1970
Texas Historical Commission
Southeast oblique
Photo #3 of 3
# ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

## STATE TXEAS

| Date Entered | DEC 12 1976 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stark, W. H., House</td>
<td>Orange, Orange County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleburne Carnegie Library</td>
<td>Cleburne, Johnson County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wise County Courthouse</td>
<td>Decatur, Wise County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britton-Evans House</td>
<td>Corpus Christi, Nueces County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comal County Courthouse</td>
<td>New Braunfels, Comal County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas Courthouse</td>
<td>Dallas, Dallas County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alamo Portland and Roman Cement Works</td>
<td>San Antonio, Bexar County</td>
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</tbody>
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## Also Notified

- Hon. John G. Tower
- Hon. Lloyd M. Bentsen
- Hon. Charles Wilson
- Hon. Olin E. Teague
- Hon. Omar Burleson
- Hon. John Young
- Hon. Robert C. Krueger
- Hon. Alan W. Steelman
- Hon. Henry B. Gonzalez
- Regional Director, Southwest Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Historic Preservation Officer</th>
<th>Mr. Truett Latimer</th>
<th>Executive Director</th>
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<tr>
<td>Texas Historical Commission</td>
<td>P.O. Box 12275, Capitol Station</td>
<td>Austin, Texas 78711</td>
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</table>

INT: 2850-75
**NR Data Sheet**

**NAME AS IT APPEARS IN FEDERAL REGISTER:** Wise County Courthouse

**LOCATION:**
- **Public Square**
- **Decatur**, Texas 76234

**OWNER OF PROPERTY:** (Circle)
- PRIVATE
- STATE
- LOCAL GOV'T
- MUNICIPAL
- COUNTY
- OTHER

**OWNER OF PROPERTY:** (Circle)
- PRIVATE
- STATE
- LOCAL GOV'T
- MUNICIPAL
- COUNTY
- OTHER

**ADMINISTRATOR:** (underline)

**FEDERAL (AGENCY NAME):**

**NPS REGION:** (CIRCLE)
- N.Atlantic
- Mid Atlantic
- Southeast
- Midwest
- Southwest
- Rocky Mountain
- West
- Pacific Northwest

**FEATURES:**

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<th>Substantially intact-3</th>
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<td>_unknown—6</td>
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<tr>
<td>not applicable—7</td>
<td>not applicable—8</td>
<td>not applicable—9</td>
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**CONDITION:**  
- EXCELLENT
- GOOD
- FAIR

**ENVIRONS:**
- Substantially intact—2
- Substantially intact—3
- not applicable—4

**ACCESS:**
- Yes-restricted
- Yes-unrestricted
- No access
- Unknown

**WITHIN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT?**
- YES
- NO

**WITHIN NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK?**
- YES
- NO

**ADAPTIVE USE:**
- YES
- NO

**FUNCTION(S):** (use vocabulary words)

| then- |
| courthouse |
| now- |
| courthouse |

**SIGNIFICANCE:**

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<tr>
<th><strong>FUNCTION(S):</strong></th>
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<td>Communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td><em>OTHER(SPECIFY)</em></td>
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<td><em>ENGINEERING</em></td>
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**Claims:**

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<td>&quot;first&quot;</td>
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<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;oldest&quot;</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;only&quot;</td>
<td>YES</td>
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**DATE:** DEC 12 1976

**INITIALS:**
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE: Richardsonian

ARCHITECT: Riely Gordon

LANDSCAPE/GARDEN DESIGNER:

INTERIOR DECORATOR: 

ETHNIC GROUP: 

NAMES: personal

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (Specific date or 1/4 of century): 1895

DATE(S) OF "MAJOR" ALTERATIONS: 1960

HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT DATE(S): 

SOURCE: (OF NOMINATION) PRIVATE

ACREAGE: (to nearest tenth of an acre) 

COMMENT: (include architectural information here)

SIGNIFICANCE: (maximum two sentences)

The Wise County Courthouse is an exceedingly unusual Richardsonian Romanesque example with refined detailing, similar to another of architect J. Riely Gordon's rural Texas courthouses at Wadahatchie.

Geoff 8.4