**Form No. 10-300**

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**DATA SHEET**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

**RECEIVED**

AUG 10 1976

**DATE ENTERED**

AUG 9 1977

---

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Bexar County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

---

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Main Plaza

CITY, TOWN

San Antonio

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Texas

CODE

048

COUNTY

Bexar

CODE

029

---

**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
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER

---

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

County of Bexar

STREET & NUMBER

Main Plaza

CITY, TOWN

San Antonio

STATE

Texas

---

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Bexar County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Main Plaza

CITY, TOWN

San Antonio

STATE

Texas

---

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1968

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington, D.C.

(Continued)
J. Riely Gordon, Architect for the Bexar County Courthouse, described the new structure in 1896 as follows: "The new Count Courthouse is a four-story and basement structure of the Romanesque style of architecture. The materials are all native Texas granite and red sandstone. With its tall towers, tile roof and numerous colonades it makes a mammoth structure...It has been especially designed with reference to the peculiarities of this climate. The open court on the east (Dwyer Avenue) has been designed for the purpose of securing the prevailing southeast breeze...With wings projecting out it catches all the breeze that strikes between them upon the principle of a funnel, and forces it throughout the entire structure, and the natural breeze is not wasted, thereby securing a thorough system of ventilation. It is entered by ascending very large and spacious granite steps with immense granite columns and bronze lamps on each side, to a platform floored in marble with a granite balustrade. Over this is a magnificent 26 foot fountain, surrounded by various kinds of tropical plants...From the first platform which is flanked by stairs of granite, turning to the right, and left, one enters into the colonades which surround the entire court and fountain. They are floored with marble and surmounted with polished granite columns with magnificently carved capitals and spacious hall on the right and left. The approach from Main Plaza is flanked on each side by heavy granite buttresses and magnificent bronze lamps. Expensive (sic) steps pass under the massive 32 foot segment arch, built between the two towers, which act as buttresses to resist its thrust...The south entrance is also gained through massive arches, polished granite columns with marble floored loggia, etc. The entrance from the west has not yet been completed and is not included in any of the present contracts, but the arrangement is for an entrance through a carriage porch of heavy granite arches, enabling ladies and others to attend court, as well as to be used in wet weather..." In addition, the two towers on Main Plaza were elaborate, the west one topped by a pyramid of green tile, and the taller east tower by a beehive form of red tile. Building of this structure continued from 1892 through 1896 under the supervision of George Dugan, Otto P. Kroeger and David Hughes. (See Appendix A)

The Courthouse proved adequate as constructed for only twenty years. In 1914, the construction of a five-story addition on the south side of the building was begun. Architects for this work were Leo M. J. Dielmann and Charles T. Boelhauwe. The structure was completed in 1915. H.N. Jones Construction Company served as contractor.

It was not until June, 1926, that the Courthouse underwent a major remodeling. Architects were Phelps and Dewees and Emmett T. Jackson and George Willis. E. Simpson Company was the engineering firm, and Walsh and Burney the general contractors. A fifth story was added to the center of the building, and a new roof constructed. Two wings were added to the west side. As in the 1914 work, the same granite and sandstone of the original structure were used. Tile flooring was installed in public spaces, and cork floors in courtrooms and libraries. The entire structure was artificially heated and cooled, an innovation for the time. The steel beams and masonry arches of the original structure were removed, and a reinforced concrete frame used.

(Continued)
San Antonio Historic Survey
Local 1972
San Antonio City Planning Department
San Antonio, Texas

Historic Sites Inventory
State 1970
Texas Historical Commission
Austin, Texas 78711
The 1926 remodeling unfortunately destroyed the east side patio, one of the building's finest features. This work was completed in October, 1928, and brought the overall dimensions of the Courthouse to 400 feet long and 140 feet wide.

The Courthouse remained intact for almost fifty years. Then in 1963, a new addition to the Sheriff's Department was made, and two courtrooms added on the second floor. In 1970, a $2,600,000 project was undertaken to modernize and expand the entire structure. An addition of 24,000 square feet was made to the southwest corner of the building. Central air conditioning and heat were installed as well as new plumbing and wiring. Edward R. Gondeck was architect for both projects. Hilmer Uhr served as contractor for the 1963 work, and Wallace L. Boldt for the 1972 work. In neither of these additions was the same use of materials of the original structure made, and a major portion of the west side of the building was destroyed in the 1972 work.

The most recent work was done in 1973 when a law library was constructed under the roof, creating a sixth story on top of the old library. This work was done at the cost of $124,000. Architects for the project were Jack Peterson and John Williams.

(See Appendix A, Drawings/Photos and Appendix B, Surveys)
Missing Core Documentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Name</th>
<th>County, State</th>
<th>Reference Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bexar County Courthouse</td>
<td>Bexar, Texas</td>
<td>77001426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following Core Documentation is missing from this entry:

- [X] Nomination Form (Page 7.2)
- [ ] Photographs
- [ ] USGS Map
The entire courthouse square containing the 19th century courthouse and jail is being nominated to the National Register, but the 1956 jail is not considered a historic resource.
The Bexar County Courthouse is important architecturally, historically, and symbolically. The 1892 structure has served as the center of county government and a focal point of downtown activity since its completion. It illustrates the historical association of Main Plaza with the administration of justice throughout the development of San Antonio and Bexar County. Along with the San Fernando Cathedral on the west side of the Plaza (itself a National Register Property), the Courthouse gives definition and continuity to this vital portion of the central city. It serves as a cornerstone for the Main and Military Plaza Historic District recently designated by the San Antonio City Council.

Main Plaza
When the Canary Islanders, the first civilian settlers of San Fernando de Bexar, joined the established Spanish military population in 1731, they made their homes on what became known as Plaza de los Islenos (later Main Plaza). Three years after their arrival, in 1734, the cornerstone for the parish church of San Fernando was laid on the Plaza's west side, and the Casas Reales, the town's governmental center, was begun in 1742 on the east side of the Plaza.

Casas Reales
This first meeting place for city officials was a one-story adobe structure with dirt floors, with the jail adjoining. It was completed in 1749. The Casas Reales functioned as a meeting place for public officials throughout the Spanish and Mexican rule of the area, and through the period of the Republic of Texas. It was twice reconstructed, however, first in 1779, and again in 1783. By the mid-Nineteenth Century, much needed new buildings to house city and county offices and the jail were begun in September, 1850, on Military Plaza.

Bat Cave and Jail
Built by Thomas Whitehead, this early City/County complex became known as the "Bat Cave" due to the number of bats that inhabited it. The buildings served as the courthouse and jail until 1879, and were occupied by the Recorder's Court, Police Headquarters and jail until 1889 when it was demolished. Even as early as 1870, the building had inadequate space for both city and county offices and some offices moved back to Main Plaza to the French Building on the southeast corner. Still more offices were in the Kampmann Building on the northeast corner of the Plaza.

On February 20, 1872, the split between City and County government, favored since 1870 was authorized. The "Bat Cave" and jail buildings became city property, though the county would continue to occupy them free until a new courthouse could be built. On August 1, 1872, the Commissioners' Court authorized the purchase of the "Masonic
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Chabot, Frederick C., San Fernando, Naylor Printing Company, San Antonio, Texas, 1930.


(Continued)

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: APPROXIMATELY 1 ACRE

ZONE EASTING NORTHING
A 14 549160 32 54780
B
C
D

VERBALBOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE
STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Joe R. Williams, Project Director
Ann Maria Watson/Ronald A. Bechtol, Researchers

ORGANIZATION: Texas Historical Commission

DATE: 4/7/76

STREET & NUMBER: P.O. Box 12276, Capitol Station

TELEPHONE: (512) 475-3094

CITY OR TOWN: Austin

STATE: Texas 78711

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL __ STATE X 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

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE
"Building" on the side of Soledad Street and 54'9" to the north for the new courthouse and jail. This site was just north of Main Plaza.

Masonic Building
Though there were offices in the Masonic Building in the 1870's, it was not enlarged and remodeled until 1882. Alfred Giles was chosen as architect and D.C. Anderson as contractor. The project was completed and accepted April 3, 1883. The building developed structural as well as space problems very early and by 1887, a new courthouse project was being considered. On March 13, 1891, the Commissioners' Court passed a resolution declaring the County in need of a new courthouse, and on May 11, a bond issue for property purchase was passed. The location chosen was the south side of Main Plaza, property owned by the estate of Joseph Dwyer.

Present Structure
A series of bond issues to enable construction, eventually totaling $621,000 was passed, and a design competition was held. James Riely Gordon, architect of courthouses throughout the United States and Texas particularly, won first prize of $1,000 when he was only 27 years old.

Gordon made a specialty of constructing public buildings mainly in the Romansque mode. He developed a plan that served him well in many projects, that of a Greek cross with a square central stairwell and quarter-circular entrance porches in each corner. He built a dozen courthouses of this type in Texas between 1891 and 1900. Some of them included Fayette County (La Grange, Texas, 1891), Victoria County (Victoria, Texas, 1893), Ellis County (Waxahachie, Texas, 1897) and Comal County (New Braunfels, Texas 1898). Among his other notable buildings were the Arizona State Capitol at Phoenix and the Texas Pavilion at Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition. In all his career, Gordon designed 72 courthouses. In 1904, at the age of 40, James Riely Gordon moved to New York. He served 13 terms as the president of the New York Society of Architects. Gordon died in 1937 in New York at the age of 73. (See Appendix C)

Ground was broken for Gordon's structure on August 4, 1891, and laying of the granite foundation was begun. (See description) In spite of disputes over construction techniques and building materials, the cornerstone was laid December 17, 1892 by Alamo Lodge 44 and Anchor Lodge 424. Several delays and bond issues later, construction was fully completed in 1896.

The Bexar County Courthouse has been the center of local and regional judicial activity since its completion. In 1896, it housed the 37th and 45th Judicial District Courts. The 37th dates to 1884, and the 45th to 1889. The need for rapid expansion of courthouse facilities is explained by the increase in the number of courts housed in the structure. The 57th Judicial District Court was created in 1899, the 73rd in 1911, the 94th in 1923, and later the 131st 144th, 150th, 166th, 186th, and 187th District Courts were added. In addition to these, there are six County Courts, five Justice
Courts, the District Attorney and District Clerk all located in the Bexar County Courthouse.

Recent pressures to increase the number of courts in Bexar County, as well as discussion of merging City and County government once again (separated in 1872) in one office complex adjacent to the present facility, make it imperative to draw attention to the importance of the existing structure.

(See Appendix D)

Morrison, Andrew, Historic San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas, 1887.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Bexar County Courthouse</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Number</td>
<td>8.10.76.3912</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ry. #</td>
<td>77001426</td>
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**TECHNICAL**
- Photos: 5+2
- Maps: 1

**CONTROL**
- 
- OK 8.12.76

**HISTORIAN**
- Accept
- 28 Oct 76

**ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN**
- 
- 11.8.76
- 3.28.77

**ARCHEOLOGIST**
- 
- 

**OTHER**
- 
- 

**HAER**
- Inventory
- Review

**REVIEW UNIT CHIEF**
- Accept
- 4.3.77

**BRANCH CHIEF**
- 
- 4.25.77

**KEEPER**
- 
- 8/29/77

**National Register Write-up**
- 

**Send-back**
- 

**Federal Register Entry**
- 10-4-77

**Re-submit**
- 

**Entered**
- AUG 29 1977

**United States Department of the Interior National Park Service WASO No. 7**
Bexar Co. Courthouse
San Antonio
Texas Hist. Comm.
Northeast Oblique
Across Plaza
1976
Ron Bechtol: Photographer

AUG 10 1976

AUG 29 1977

Photograph #1 of 7

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Bexar Co. Courthouse
San Antonio
Texas Hist. Comm.
South Blenation
1976
Ron Bechtol: Photographer

Photograph #2 of 7

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Bexar Co. Courthouse
San Antonio
Texas Hist. Comm.
Northeast Oblique
1976
Ron Bechtol: Photographer

Photograph #3 7

AUG 10 1976

AUG 29 1977

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Bexar County

Bexar Co. Courthouse
San Antonio
Texas Hist. Comm.
Detail North Tower
1976
Ron Bechtol: Photographer

Photograph #4 of 7

AUG 29 1977

AUG 10 1976

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Bexar Co. Courthouse
San Antonio
Texas Hist. Comm.
Viewing South
From Main Plaza
Ca. 1910
From Office Of Frank B. Vaughn Jr.
County Commissioner Pec. #3
Bexar County

AUG 29 1977

Photograph #5 of 7

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Bexar County Courthouse
San Antonio, Texas

Stanley Klein, November 1976
Texas Historical Commission

Northwest oblique of the courthouse showing the addition made to the west(side) and south(rear) facades of the building.

#6 of 7

AUG 29 1977
Bexar County Courthouse
San Antonio, Texas

Stanley Klein, November 1976
Texas Historical Commission

Southeast oblique of the south (rear) facade revealing the addition made to the southwest corner of the building.

#7 of 7

AUG 29 1977
Mr. Bill Lebovich
National Register of Historic Places
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
18th and C Streets, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20240

Dear Bill:

Regarding your request for photographic coverage of the Bexar County Courthouse additions, I have enclosed two pictures revealing the west and south additions. Although the modern annex is unsympathetic to the original building, the Richardsonian Romanesque design and architectural features of the 1890 courthouse are still evident. Furthermore, the additions were made to the southwest corner (rear) of the building and do not detract from the prominent north facade, which faces the Main Plaza. I think the description of the alterations in Item #7 is sufficient, but if you need further information, let me know. The appendixes mentioned in the description that you inquired about were part of a prepared format sent to us by the Bexar County Historical Commission and were only xerox pictures, not appropriate for the National Register nomination.

Also at your request I am sending a photograph of the modern Val Verde County Jail located on the square with the historic courthouse and jail, as well as a continuation sheet explaining exactly what is being nominated.

Sincerely,

Marie D. Landon
Coordinator, National Register Nominations

MDL/s
Enclosures
# ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

**STATE**  
**TEXAS**

**Date Entered**  
**AUG 29 1977**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irion County Courthouse</td>
<td>Sherwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irion County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tyler Hydraulic-Mill Dam</td>
<td>Tyler vicinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smith County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bexar County Courthouse</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
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<td>Bexar County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brownsville-Wagner House</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
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<td>Cameron County</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Also Notified**

- Hon. John G. Tower
- Hon. Lloyd M. Bentsen
- Hon. Robert C. Krueger
- Hon. Ray Roberts
- Hon. Henry B. Gonzalez
- Hon. E. de la Garza

- State Historic Preservation Officer
  - Mr. Truett Latimer
  - Executive Director
  - Texas Historical Commission
  - P. O. Box 12276, Capitol Station
  - Austin, Texas 78711

Regional Director, Southwest Region
**NR Data Sheet**

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

**LOCATION:**
- **Street & Number:** Main Plaza
- **City, Town:** San Antonio
- **State:** Texas
- **Vicinity:** Bexar County Courthouse
- **Congressional District:** 20th
- **County Code:** Bexar - 029

**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:**
- **Interior:**
  - Substantially intact
  - Unknown
  - Not applicable
- **Exterior:**
  - Substantially intact
  - Unknown
  - Not applicable
- **Environments:**
  - Interior, exterior, environs not intact

**CONDITION:**
- **Excellent**
- **Good**
- **Fair**
- **Deteriorated**
- **Unaltered**
- **Altered**
- **Ruins**
- **Unexposed**
- **Reconstructed**
- **Unexcavated**
- **Excavated**
- **Original Site**
- **Moved**

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

**WITHIN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT?**
- Yes
- No

**FUNCTION(S):** (use vocabulary words)
- THEN: Courthouse
- NOW: Savings

**SIGNIFICANCE:**
- Archeology: Prehistoric
- Archeology: Historic
- Agriculture
- Architecture
- Art
- Commerce
- Communications
- Conservation
- Economics
- Education
- Engineering
- Exploration
- Landscape architecture
- Literature
- Military
- Music
- Philosophy
- Politics/Government
- Religion
- Science
- Social/humanitarian
- Transportation
- Urban & community planning
- Entertainment
- Health
- Recreation
- Settlement
- Socio-cultural
- Urban & community planning

**CLAIMS:**
- "first" YES No
- "oldest" YES No
- "only" YES No
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE: Romansque

architect/m.builder: James Riddle Gordon
landscape/garden designer: Leo Dushman
interior decorator: Charles Baerham
engineer: George Dugan, Otto P. Kroeger
artist/artisan: David Hughes

ETHNIC GROUP:

NAMES: personal
(label role & appropriate date)

events

institutional

DATES:
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (Specific date or 1/4 of century): 1391 - 1896
DATE(S) OF "MAJOR" ALTERATIONS: 1914 addition, 1926 remodeled
HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT DATE(S): 1963 addition, 1970 remodel

SOURCE: (OF NOMINATION)
PRIVATE
STATE
LOCAL GOV'T
MUNICIPAL
COUNTY
OTHER
FEDERAL AGENCY:

ACREAGE: (to nearest tenth of an acre)

COMMENTS: (include architectural information here)
HABS 1968
STONE, 5 STORY, RECTANGULAR, TOWERS, RUSTICATED, BAND, HIP ROOF
LARGE 1963 ADDITION

SIGNIFICANCE: (maximum two sentences)
The Bexar County Courthouse has been the center of local and regional judicial activity since its completion. The imposing Romansque architecture symbolizes its function and forms one side of the Main Plaza.