### NAME
- **HISTORIC**
- McLennan County Courthouse

### LOCATION
- **STREET & NUMBER**
  - Public Square
- **CITY, TOWN**
  - Waco
- **VICINITY OF**
  - Waco
- **STATE**
  - Texas
- **CODE**
  - 048
- **COUNTY**
  - McLennan
- **CODE**
  - 309

### CLASSIFICATION
- **CATEGORY**
  - DISTRICT
  - BUILDING(S)
  - STRUCTURE
  - SITE
  - OBJECT
- **OWNERSHIP**
  - PUBLIC
  - PRIVATE
  - BOTH
- **STATUS**
  - OCCUPIED
  - UNOCCUPIED
  - WORK IN PROGRESS
  - ACCESSIBLE
  - YES: RESTRICTED
  - YES: UNRESTRICTED
  - NO
- **PRESENT USE**
  - AGRICULTURE
  - COMMERCIAL
  - EDUCATIONAL
  - ENTERTAINMENT
  - GOVERNMENT
  - INDUSTRIAL
  - MILITARY
  - TRANSPORTATION
  - OTHER:

### OWNER OF PROPERTY
- **NAME**
  - County of McLennan
- **STREET & NUMBER**
  - Public Square
- **CITY, TOWN**
  - Waco
- **STATE**
  - Texas

### LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
- **COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.**
  - Office of the County Clerk, McLennan County Courthouse
- **STREET & NUMBER**
  - Public Square
- **CITY, TOWN**
  - Waco
- **STATE**
  - Texas

### REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
- **TITLE**
  - Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
- **DATE**
  - 1970
- **DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS**
  - Texas Historical Commission
- **CITY, TOWN**
  - Austin
- **STATE**
  - Texas
Constructed 1901-1902, the McLennan County Courthouse was designed by J. Riely Gordon. The building was erected by Tom Lovell, contractor, and construction was supervised by W.C. Dodson, architect. Built during prosperous times, it is the fourth courthouse in the county's history.

The courthouse is on a cruciform plan with corridors extending lengthwise through each arm. On the upper two levels, several courtrooms are located at ends of the cross. A rotunda extends up through the crossing.

The exterior is distinguished by Beaux Arts Classical style on a monumental scale. The concept of composition of the building with its wings, dome and dominant entrance is similar to that employed in the Texas Capitol.

Numerous features contribute to the success of the Beaux Arts style in this building. A colonnade with paired end columns announce the main entrance; above the entablature supported by these is a wall with decorated pilasters, surmounted by triangular pediment and bull's eye window. This compositional theme was duplicated in the pavilions on the long wings; however, in these a balcony is introduced and the paired columns are brought forward, thus breaking the plane of the facade. The Corinthian order was used for the columns, while Doric was employed on the pilasters.

The monumentality of the edifice is further dramatized by the lengthy stair. In the entrance portico, the door opening is emphasized by a segmental pediment, and windows are surmounted by triangular pediments.

The building is essentially a three-part composition; the base encompasses the first story; two stories, extending between a water table and entablature, are contained in the middle section; and one story is included in the terminal feature. Two entablatures, the upper one of which is topped by a balustrade, encircle the top level.

The dome unifies the entire composition. In typical Beaux Arts style, paired columns around the drum support an entablature above which rises the dome. Roman-arched openings flanked by pilasters in Corinthian order are contained between the paired columns. Surmounting the lantern of the dome is a statue of Themis, the Greek personification of justice. Below are two smaller statues, one of a torchbearer, the other of Justitia, the Roman version of Themis. Roman eagles surround the dome.

Urns appear above the ends of the secondary pediments.

The exterior walls incorporate beautiful materials. Quarry-faced granite was employed for the base; above this cut limestone with rusticated joints was used. Marble was used for accent at various locations. For the structure, steel and concrete were used.
8 SIGNIFICANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREHISTORIC</td>
<td>ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400-1499</td>
<td>ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500-1599</td>
<td>AGRICULTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-1699</td>
<td>ARCHITECTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1799</td>
<td>ART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800-1899</td>
<td>COMMERCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-1999</td>
<td>COMMUNICATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2099</td>
<td>COMMUNITY PLANNING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2100-2199</td>
<td>LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2200-2299</td>
<td>CONSERVATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2300-2399</td>
<td>CONSERVATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2400-2499</td>
<td>LAW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2500-2599</td>
<td>LITERATURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2600-2699</td>
<td>ECONOMICS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2700-2799</td>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2800-2899</td>
<td>ENGINEERING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2900-2999</td>
<td>EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000-3099</td>
<td>INDUSTRY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3100-3199</td>
<td>INVENTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3200-3299</td>
<td>SCULPTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3300-3399</td>
<td>SCIENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3400-3499</td>
<td>SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3500-3599</td>
<td>POLITICS/GOVERNMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3600-3699</td>
<td>ART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3700-3799</td>
<td>MUSIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3800-3899</td>
<td>PHILOSOPHY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3900-3999</td>
<td>RELIGION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4000-4099</td>
<td>THEATER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4100-4199</td>
<td>TRANSPORTATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4200-4299</td>
<td>OTHER (SPECIFY)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SPECIFIC DATES  1901-1902  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The courthouse has architectural and historical significance. It is one of the finest Neo-Classical buildings in the state. Historically it has served county government for over three-quarters of a century.

McLennan County was created in 1850. Earlier in the century the area had been occupied by the Waco Indians, who established a village on the present site of the city of Waco. Some settlement occurred during the 1830's and 1840's, and by 1860 the county population exceeded 6,000. In 1849 Waco was surveyed, and in 1850 a commission voted to locate the county seat there. Education has been an important aspect of the culture of Waco. At one time Texas Christian University was located in the city. Waco University also was founded there; in 1886 it was united with Baylor University when the latter was moved to the city.

The first courthouse was built in 1850. It was thirty feet square, one and a half stories high and cost $400.

In 1858-1859 a larger courthouse was constructed for about $11,500. Robert H. Smith was the contractor for the edifice which was built of bricks and had a tin roof.

In 1876 a third courthouse was built according to the plans of W.C. Dodson, a local architect. This was completed the following year for about $30,000.

Finally in 1900, county commissioners submitted a $250,000 bond proposal to the electors. This was passed and plans and specifications were invited for a courthouse to be located on a new site. Upon the recommendation of W.C. Dodson, the plans of J. Riely Gordon, of San Antonio, were adopted. The contract was awarded to Tom Lovell of Denton, Texas. On November 3, 1902, the new temple of justice was accepted.

The pride of the people in their accomplishment is commemorated on the granite cornerstone where the inscription, "built by the taxpayers of McLennan County" appears. It still serves county government.
# Major Bibliographical References

McLennan County Commissioners' Court Minutes, Office of the County Clerk, McLennan County Courthouse, Vols. 1, 2, B-F.

Walter Prescott Webb (ed.) The Handbook of Texas (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952), Vol. II.

## Geographical Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quadrangle Name</th>
<th>Acreage of Nominated Property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waco West, Tex</td>
<td>About 1½ acres.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### UTM References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Easting</th>
<th>Northing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Verbal Boundary Description

The courthouse is bounded by Columbus Avenue on the north, Washington on the south, Fifth Street on the east, and Sixth Street on the west.

## Form Prepared By

Willard B. Robinson, Professor of Architecture

Texas Tech University

F.O. Box 4499

Lubbock, Texas

## State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is: 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

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

Chief of Registration
The attached National Register Inventory-Nomination form is being returned to your office for clarification of the information indicated below. PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM WHEN THE NOMINATION IS RESUBMITTED.

**Description:**

---

**Statement of Significance:** Please elaborate on the structure's value in the context of Neo-Classical architecture. Also, having stated that the property has historical significance, the discussion presents instead a 19th century history of the county. Please evaluate the property in the context of Criteria A. What patterns of community history are represented by or related to this structure?

**Bibliography:**

---

**Geographical Data -- Acreage:**

---

**UTM Reference(s):**

---

**Verbal Boundary Description:**

---

**Certification:**

---

**Photographic Coverage:**

---

**Map Coverage:**

---

**Other:**

---

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to Marcella Sherfy on the National Register staff, telephone 202-343-6401.

Thank you for your attention to the above items.

Chief, Branch of Registration

United States Department of the Interior - Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Building has more architectural integrity and probably value than other courthouses that we have been seen seeing. But historical value to community in context of Criteria A is not supported.

Courthouse possesses architectural significance as an outstanding example of the Beaux-Arts/Neo-Classical styles executed in a manner rendering high artistic value to the building. Significance of its characteristics (e.g., building materials) need to be addressed. 

Bill L. refer to your judgment - Declaration of Beaux-Arts characteristics appears in #7 - your value of building may suffice for listing without Declaration of Historical Association.

Lacking explicit statement of good signs, but significance as local interpretation of Beaux Arts and Texas Capitol is adequate for listing in architectural significance.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service WASO No. 7
McLennan County Courthouse
Public Square
Waco, McLennan County, Texas

Will Robinson 1977
negative filed at Texas Historical Commission

South elevation

DEC 14 1978
NOV 1 1978
# ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

**State**: Texas

**Date Entered**: DEC 14 1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McLennan County Courthouse</td>
<td>Waco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McLennan County</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Also Notified**

- Honorable John G. Tower
- Honorable Lloyd M. Bentsen
- Honorable Marvin Leath

---

**State Historic Preservation Officer**

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

---

**Byers/es**: 1/11/79
Mr. William J. Murtagh  
Keeper of the National Register  
United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Washington, D. C.  20240  
Attention:  H34-NR YP  
Subject: McLennan County Courthouse  

Dear Mr. Murtagh:

Thank you for your letter of December 27, 1978, containing further information in regards to the possible listing of our Courthouse in the National Register.

Based on the information contained in your letter, particularly the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation, the Commissioners Court of McLennan County has decided that the nomination of McLennan County Courthouse for listing in the Register should be withdrawn and McLennan County has no wish to have the Courthouse listed in the National Register due to the stringent standards on rehabilitation.

As I explained in my previous letter, the Courthouse is used currently to carry on the business of the County and as such requires renovation and remodeling from time to time and this can not be done in the most economical manner under the Secretary's standards. We believe that it would be better utilization of the taxpayer's money to remodel our Courthouse as needed using the most modern techniques and materials.

Sincerely,

Jim McDermitt  
Administrative Assistant  

NJM/glb
called a explained effect of mining, Sec. 106 etc.
Dr. William J. Murtagh  
Keeper of the National Registrar  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

Dear Dr. Murtagh:

In regard to your letter of November 8, 1978, concerning the nomination of the McLennan County Courthouse, Waco, Texas, to be listed in the National Register of Historical Places, the county is honored by the nomination of our historic courthouse to the National Register. We feel that we are justified in our pride of such a historic building and believe that it does warrant the recognition for which it has been nominated.

Being a unit of government, of course, we would derive no benefits from the Tax Reform Act of 1976 and our request for a listing would be more a matter of public pride than a desire for a tax benefit.

The County Commissioners' Court's primary consideration in making a decision whether or not to apply for a listing in the National Register would be the standards for rehabilitating old buildings. The McLennan County Courthouse is in daily use and is utilized as the courthouse for McLennan County. As in all public buildings and because of the county's increased population and increased work load, we are constantly remodeling and re-arranging our office and courtroom space. Any restrictions as to our rights to use and remodel the courthouse, as it exists, would, of course, be a burden which the Commissioners' Court would not want to impose upon themselves. In fact we are presently building a correctional facility behind the courthouse which will be tied onto the existing courthouse by a walkway.
If the McLennan County Commissioners' Court could be assured that there would be no restrictions on our use of the courthouse, and our right to remodel it to meet our needs, we would be most pleased and honored to have such a historic structure as the McLennan County Courthouse listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

If I can be of assistance to you in answering any questions concerning this matter, please feel free to contact me at my office.

Sincerely yours,

Jim McDermitt
Administrative Assistant

NJM/glb
McLennan County Courthouse

Public Sq.

Waco, TX

McLennan County

S. Central

1978

CONDITION

yes

EXISTING SURVEYS

yes

CLAIMS: explain

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE(S):

architect:

master builder:

engineer:

landscape architect / garden designer:

interior decorator:

artist:

artisan:

builder / contractor:

NATIONAL REGISTER WRITE-UP