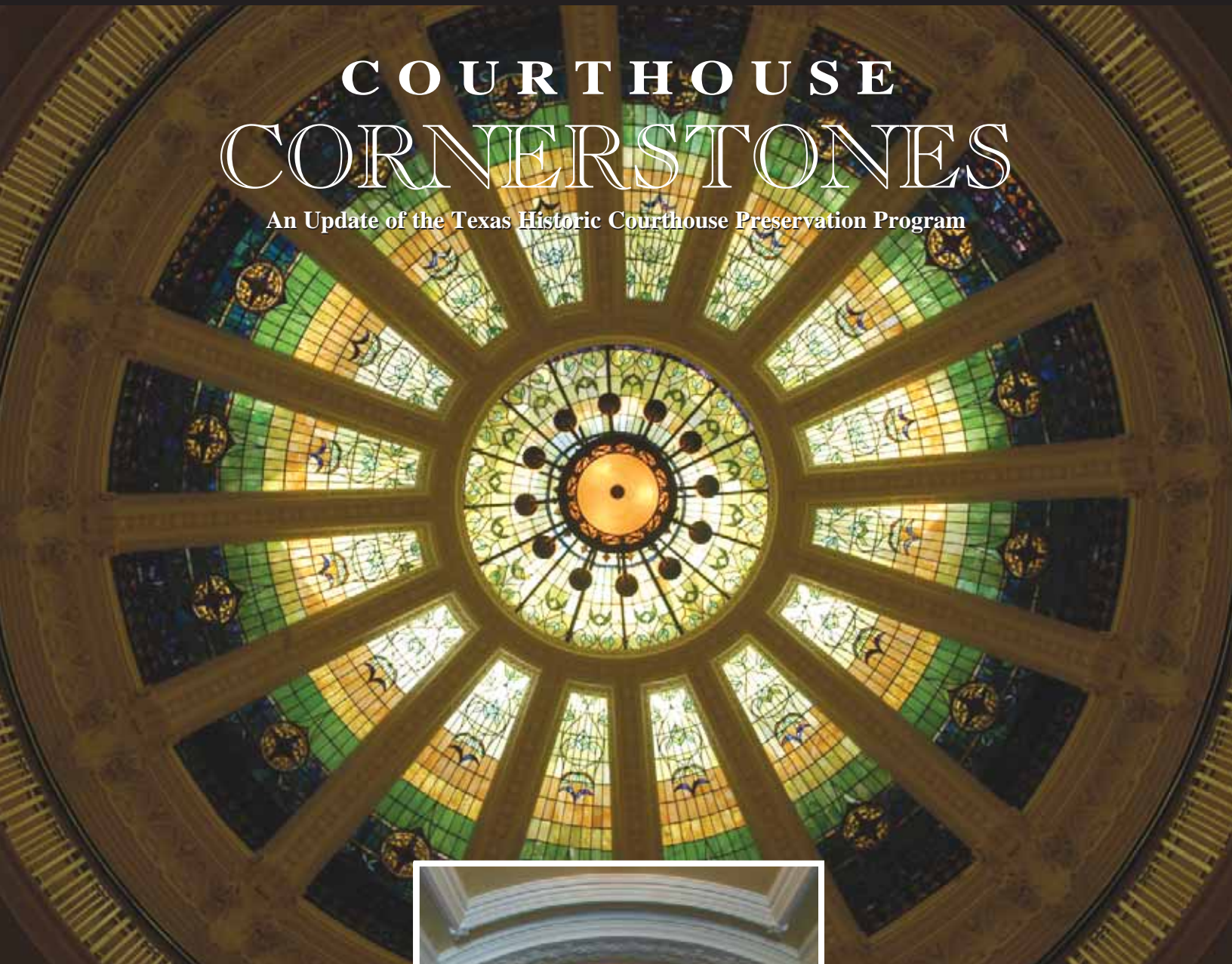


# COURTHOUSE CORNERSTONES

An Update of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program



1912 Cameron County Courthouse

**T**he difference is like looking at a stone picked up off the ground and comparing it to a diamond.” Those are the words of Brownsville rancher and businessman Frank Yturria, who served on the Texas Historical Commission (THC) for five years, in describing the restored Cameron County Courthouse, better known as the Dancy Building.

The Dancy Building, named for County Judge Oscar C. Dancy

who worked in the building for 50 years, was rededicated on Oct. 17, 2007 as the county’s primary courthouse. The event marked the 33rd restoration of a county courthouse through the THC’s Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. After years of work, a \$3.75 million THC grant, and painstaking attention to details, old photographs and modern building codes, the halls

— Continued, page 2

## A SHINING EXAMPLE OF REVITALIZATION

— Continued from front page

once again echo with voices, laughter and footsteps. The arched ceiling in the courtroom provides an airy feeling, the walls are painted the original forest green color thanks to the aid of paint analysts and a microscope, and the magnificent glass dome truly shines like a diamond. County officials and residents alike could not be more proud.

“The loss of historic structures in the city is not replaceable,” said Cameron County Judge Gilberto Hinojosa. “As a county, we need to start looking at revitalizing and restoring downtown.”

This has been an integral part of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program since its inception in 1999. Restored courthouses are proven catalysts for economic development in the business districts surrounding the courthouses. They are magnets for the heritage tourist. As a direct outcome of the first \$145 million in grant funds, courthouse restorations have generated 4,692 jobs, more than \$130 million in local income and more than \$177 million in gross state product.

*1926 Dimmit County Courthouse*

## FUNDING FOR FUTURE GRANT ROUNDS

When the 79th Texas Legislature appropriated \$80 million for funding Round V of the highly successful Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, lawmakers identified Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) as the funding source. Projects eligible for TE funds exhibit an outstanding example of historic preservation activity with a long-standing relationship to surface transportation. The historic courthouses of Texas, which are as varied as the regions and citizens of the state, offer an impressive example of surface transportation projects that preserve Texas’ unique and diverse history.

Early county courthouses were placed in the geographic center of a county to be equidistant to those who traveled there. The courthouse contains the historic records of the county and its residents, from birth to death. As

centers of business and trade, courthouses were, and





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“WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE RETURN ON THIS INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTIES THAT HAVE RESTORED THEIR COURTHOUSES, YOU UNDERSTAND THIS PROGRAM IS GOOD FOR THE CITIZENS, THE COMMUNITIES AND THE STATE OF TEXAS.”

— Director Stan Graves  
Texas Historic Courthouse  
Preservation Program

*Mariachis at the Cameron County Courthouse rededication*  
Inset: THC's Stan Graves presents a plaque to Cameron County Judge Gilberto Hinojosa

remain, instrumental in the economic development and growth of a community.

Texas courthouses have been recognizable landmarks for travelers since the days of the horse and buggy. People would identify the courthouse tower from afar and many served as a stagecoach stop. In addition, the county business of road construction, prior to federal and state highway programs being established — and recorded — in the county courthouse. Today the historic county courthouses of Texas are a heritage tourism destination

for travelers who still scan the horizon, searching for the courthouse tower that tells them they have reached their destination.

It seemed obvious to state lawmakers that the historic courthouses of

*1917 Lamar County Courthouse*



*1891 Donley County Courthouse*

Texas serve as excellent examples of preservation projects relating to public transportation. However, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) did not immediately concur.

TxDOT Executive Director Michael Behrens notified THC Chairman John L. Nau, III in January, 2006 that FHWA was willing to consider the eligibility of individual courthouses for TE funding, but would not provide funding for the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program as a whole. FHWA indicated projects that can

demonstrate a reasonable relationship to surface transportation are eligible for TE funds.

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“Although we feel that every courthouse project is an obvious example of a preservation project with a distinct relationship to surface transportation, and that the courthouse program should be recognized as a whole, we submitted five project requests for funding that we felt would, without a doubt, demonstrate that relationship,” said THC Executive Director Larry Oaks.

Those projects include Comal, Hood, LaSalle, Mills and St. Augustine counties. They were submitted in June 2006. To date, the THC and the counties are wait-

★  
**NOT ONLY DOES THE RESTORATION OF A COURTHOUSE PROMISE ECONOMIC RETURNS, BUT IT ALSO DEMONSTRATES A COMMITMENT AND DEDICATION TO THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY .**

*Opposite:  
 The great-great grandson of Judge Oscar C. Dancy leads the Pledge of Allegiance at the rededication of the Cameron County Courthouse.  
 Inset: Three generations of Dancys attend the rededication of the Cameron County Courthouse.*

1891 Fayette County Courthouse



1914 Nueces County Courthouse





reply from FHWA, but it is also determined to continue the momentum the program has generated, and will again seek the Texas Legislature's support.

As the 80th Texas Legislative session gets under way, lawmakers have before them a request for \$85 million in general revenue monies to fund the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. The money would be expended over the next five years, which would complete the restoration of up to 20 additional historic courthouses with approved master plans, as well as provide funds for emergency repair, phased

ing for a response on eligibility from FHWA.

Recently, TxDOT announced it was discontinuing the call for enhancement projects, citing its response to FHWA's recession of more than \$305 million promised to Texas. The vast majority of this money to meet the recession will apparently come from TE projects. The THC takes issue with the decision, and is pursuing the matter with its legal counsel, commissioners and other officials. The implications of this decision on potential courthouse funding are unknown at this time.

The THC is uncertain as to when or if it will receive a favorable

construction and planning at additional courthouses. The program's work to date has gained national and international attention with honors and recognition

*1883 Lampasas County Courthouse*



# THE TRIUMPHS OF 2005–06: RESTORATIONS UNDERWAY AND COMPLETED

Similar to the enthusiasm and support shown for the hometown football team, there is a natural allegiance to the venerable Texas county courthouse that causes people involved in its restoration to put hands and heads together and get the job done.

The Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program works with counties and their citizens to transform both buildings and communities across the state. The hard work of restoring grace and utility to these government icons has been completed in Archer, Bee, Cameron, Cooke (exterior) Denton, Dimmit, Fayette, Hudspeth, Lamar, Maverick, Menard, Nueces (Phase 1), Sutton and Wheeler counties since fall 2004.

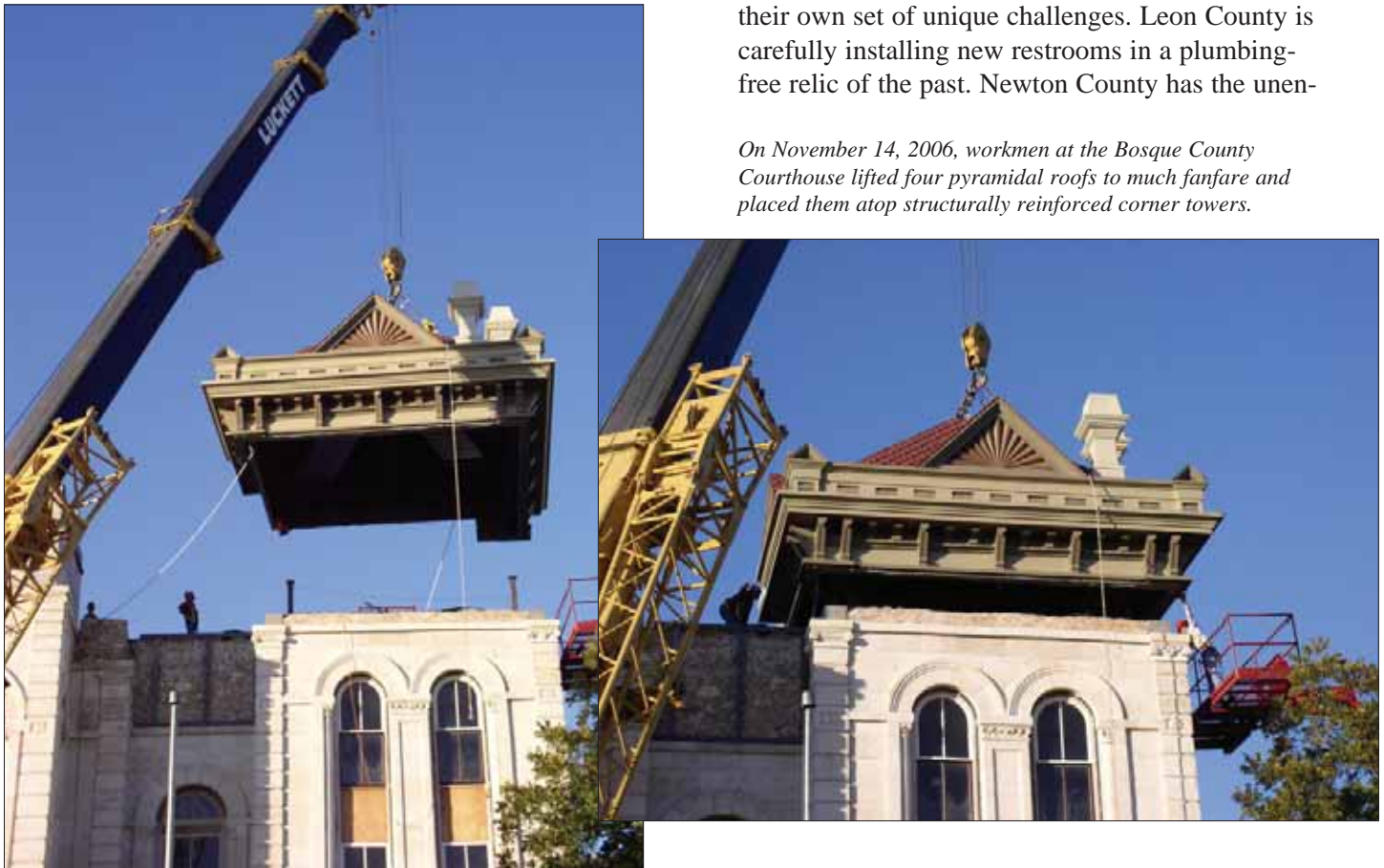
County seats with restored courthouses are now easily recognized by specific common traits. Grounds are neatly kept and freshly landscaped and the buildings' architecture now highlights rather

than conceals their beauty. Handsome surfaces such as pressed metal, patterned floor tile and decorative plaster attract attention and admiration. Walls are painted in unexpected, yet complimentary colors. Wood wainscot, stair railings and trim are gleaming. But most importantly, the occupants of these buildings are genuinely proud and grateful for the privilege of working in such a beautiful building.

Each courthouse rededication has been distinctly different, from tented evening receptions to barbeque lunches to parades and bands playing on the lawn. At every celebration, however, speeches share certain themes — the government's role in our history and lives today, preservation of history for the sake of our children, the association of the courthouse with the community's unique identity and recognition that the accomplishment of restoring the building was challenging, but well worth the effort.

Projects still under construction are now posing their own set of unique challenges. Leon County is carefully installing new restrooms in a plumbing-free relic of the past. Newton County has the unen-

*On November 14, 2006, workmen at the Bosque County Courthouse lifted four pyramidal roofs to much fanfare and placed them atop structurally reinforced corner towers.*





## REDEDICATED COURTHOUSES

| County      | City            | Rededicated |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Archer      | Archer City     | 5/12/2005   |
| Atascosa    | Jourdanton      | 6/14/2003   |
| Bee         | Beeville        | 5/20/2006   |
| Bexar       | San Antonio     | 4/4/2003    |
| Cameron     | Brownsville     | 10/17/2006  |
| Cooke       | Gainesville     | 10/14/2006  |
| Denton      | Denton          | 11/6/2004   |
| Dimmit      | Carrizo Springs | 11/18/2004  |
| Donley      | Clarendon       | 7/4/2003    |
| Ellis       | Waxahachie      | 10/4/2003   |
| Erath       | Stephenville    | 8/20/2002   |
| Fayette     | LaGrange        | 6/25/2005   |
| Goliad      | Goliad          | 12/4/2003   |
| Gray        | Pampa           | 4/12/2003   |
| Grimes      | Anderson        | 3/2/2002    |
| Hopkins     | Sulphur Springs | 12/7/2002   |
| Hudspeth    | Sierra Blanca   | 7/3/2004    |
| Jeff Davis  | Fort Davis      | 11/8/2003   |
| Lamar       | Paris           | 9/3/2005    |
| Lampasas    | Lampasas        | 3/2/2004    |
| Lee         | Giddings        | 10/8/2004   |
| Llano       | Llano           | 6/15/2002   |
| Maverick    | Eagle Pass      | 10/13/2005  |
| Menard      | Menard          | 11/11/2006  |
| Milam       | Cameron         | 7/4/2002    |
| Nueces      | Corpus Christi  | 7/21/2006   |
| Parker      | Weatherford     | 6/4/2005    |
| Presidio    | Marfa           | 1/5/2002    |
| Red River   | Clarksville     | 10/26/2002  |
| Shackelford | Albany          | 6/30/2001   |
| Sutton      | Sonora          | 6/11/2002   |
| Val Verde   | Del Rio         | 7/23/2004   |
| Wheeler     | Wheeler         | 10/16/2004  |

viable task of reconstructing the entire interior of a building gutted by fire. Harrison County steadfastly proceeds to complete another phase of work to restore its beloved crown jewel. Dallas County is developing an improved concrete and steel structure to support the new spires of its original central tower. DeWitt County has cautiously removed a milky synthetic coating of unknown origin that obscured its courthouse's fine exterior stonework.

Beyond these amazing architectural feats, the ongoing projects face new difficulties not as common in previous years. Inflation for the construction industry has seen double-digit



*An 800-piece terra cotta jigsaw puzzle recreated the Williamson County Courthouse's original four ornamental porticos.*

increases in each of the last two calendar years forcing an increase in project costs.

The reduced availability of construction materials in the Gulf states due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita recovery resulted in schedule delays. Construction companies and managers are busy, as are specialty restoration contractors, resulting in a less-competitive bidding environment.

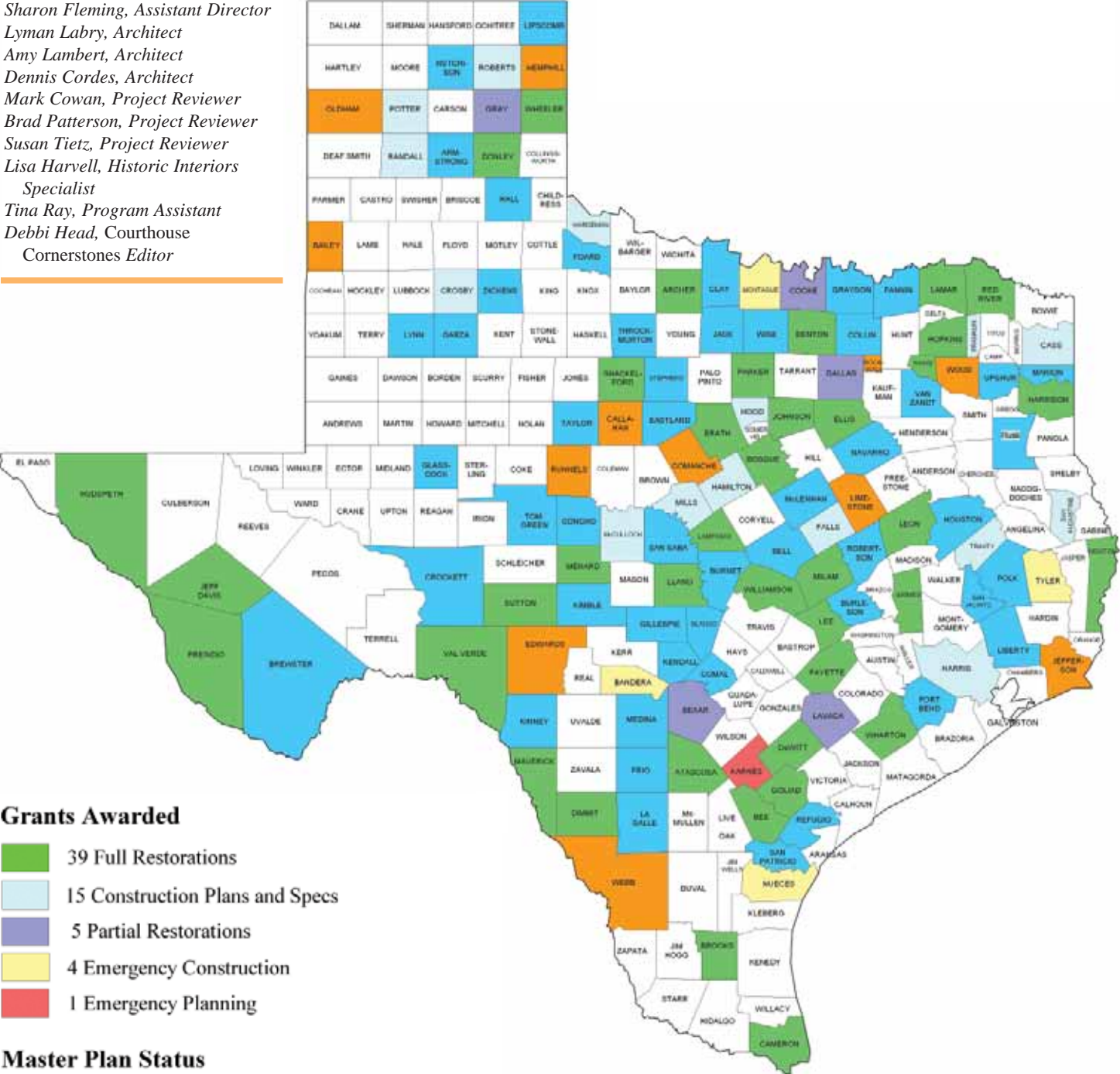
For reasons such as these, the courthouse grant program legislation was amended during this biennium to raise the cap for grant awards from \$4 million to \$6 million. This will facilitate the cost sharing for future projects at levels closer to the 85 percent state share/15 percent local share envisioned for the program in 1999, and reduce the unexpected financial burden imposed on the counties.

Blueprints for the potential next round of construction projects are nearing completion. These include Comal, Cass, Franklin, LaSalle, Hamilton, Hardeman, Harris, McCullough, Mills, Randall, Roberts, San Augustine and Trinity County courthouses. These applicants, together with other program participants yet to be funded, remain hopeful that a courthouse rededication party is in their near future. ★

# TEXAS HISTORIC COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION PROGRAM

TEXAS HISTORIC  
COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION  
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 Cornerstones Editor





# KEEPING TEXAS HISTORY ALIVE

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*U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson*

Texas has the most vivid history of any state in the nation. Stories about the heroes of the Texas Revolution, the Battle of the Alamo, and the six flags that have represented our state are well known by Texans young and old. Much of our history is also reflected in county courthouses, which are true Texas treasures. These enduring landmarks possess significant intrinsic value, and Texas has made a priority of preserving our heritage with quality restoration.

Local activities have long revolved around town squares, and many courthouses can trace their roots to the early years of our state – a time when the county courthouse was a symbol of prosperity and progress for a growing area. As the main location for business and trade, courthouses were pivotal in the economic development and expansion of many Texas communities.

Designation of the county seat has always been a measure of prestige and honor. In fact, feuds over county seat locations were common during the settlement of Texas. Once the community was chosen, courthouses were placed in prominent locations on public lands typically donated by the town's founders.

The many changes Texas has experienced over the years are apparent in the variety of our courthouses. The architecture of these buildings reflects the attitudes of local communities, with each style expressing origin and tastes of the earliest Texans. The first courthouses were typically small, wooden structures patterned after buildings in the South. This style gave way to larger more substantial courthouses made of brick or stone, which displayed the Greek Revival details that were popular before the Civil War. Courthouses began to transition from ornate Victorian to Romanesque revival styles based on Renaissance buildings in Europe after the Civil War, and early 20th-century courthouses were heavily influenced by the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago and conformed to the Neoclassical Revival style.

Courthouses continue to be used for public business today, as they house county courts, city and district attorneys, justices of the peace, county clerks, and other county administrative offices. They also provide a location for marriages, a place to research your family history, or the best spot in town to see a local parade.

I have long appreciated the value of Texas historical landmarks such as courthouses. When I served in the Texas State Legislature, I sponsored the bill that allowed counties to create historical commissions to preserve their past. These commissions have helped save many courthouses throughout our state's 254 counties.

Communities are breathing new life into their courthouses. Funding from the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program is restoring the Nueces County courthouse in Corpus Christi as a new science and technology museum. The Denton County courthouse, which concluded its restoration in 2004, functions as both a home for several county offices and as a museum with permanent and traveling exhibits on early Denton County history. And while traveling across Texas during this month's Senate recess, I had an opportunity to visit with residents of Albany at the Shackelford County courthouse, which has also participated in the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program.

Though the exact number of structures is unclear, more than 700 sites have been identified by the Texas Historical Commission as present or former locations of county courthouses. There is likely one near you. For more information on the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program at the Texas Historical Commission, or to search for a local organization involved in restoration, visit [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us) or call (512) 463-6100. Your involvement and support can help keep Texas history alive.

August 18, 2006

# PROTECTING YOUR INVESTMENT: TEXAS LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION SPONSORS STEWARDSHIP WORKSHOP FOR COURTHOUSE MAINTENANCE

The Wharton County Courthouse was in dire need of attention. Layers of stucco encrusted its original brick façade, and its charming mansard roof had been demolished and replaced by a lifeless, flat concrete surface. Now, thanks to the Texas Historical Commission's (THC)



*1889 Wharton County Courthouse, before and after restoration*

award-winning Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, Wharton residents can once again schedule their daily routines around the chimes from the restored clock tower, which proudly rises from this once-neglected landmark.

The Wharton County Courthouse is one of more than 30 restored courthouses benefiting from a recent grant provided by the Texas Land Title Association (TLTA). The grant will establish a two-year pilot program to promote ongoing, regular courthouse stewardship and upkeep.

As a result, the THC will host an educational Stewardship Workshop March 1–2, 2007, at the Texas Association of Counties Education Center in Austin, 1210 San Antonio St. To ensure greater participation, the THC will cover most travel expenses, and representatives from counties with recently restored courthouses are strongly encouraged to participate to share advice and learn more about keeping newly restored buildings in superior condition.

“We greatly appreciate the Texas Land Title Association’s generous donation to help grant recipients provide the necessary maintenance to their historic courthouses,” said THC Chairman John L. Nau, III. “TLTA has taken the lead in this one-of-a-kind, public/private venture and it is incumbent upon the counties to now follow through with this unique opportunity to keep their historic courthouses in the condition they deserve.”

The TLTA is a trade association founded in 1908 whose members include title insurance underwriting companies, title agents, companies that provide goods or services to the title industry and individuals employed by member companies. THC Commissioner Frank Gorman of El Paso was instrumental in work-



ing with the TLTA to secure this grant, a critical resource for counties needing the specialized training required for courthouse maintenance.

“Without this guidance, the state could again face the challenge of preserving and restoring its historic courthouses in 25 to 30

years,” Gorman said, adding “the people of Texas have invested so much into these beloved landmarks and they will accept nothing less than the highest standard of ongoing care.”

As guardians of home and property records, Texas county courthouses have long been associated with title companies affiliated with TLTA. The organization represents 2,000 members who protect property owners from problems that could affect their legal right to own property.

*1894 Goliad County Courthouse*





“The Texas Land Title Association is proud to support the Texas Historical Commission’s efforts to preserve and maintain our state’s historic county courthouses,” said TLTA President R. Bruce Boyer. “Title companies, in the course of conducting title searches, regularly access public records and are appreciative of these courthouse resources. We believe this is an additional way to assist the counties we serve throughout Texas.”

The Stewardship Workshop in March is a continuation of support offered through the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, which provides partial matching grants to Texas counties for the restoration of historic county courthouses. Workshop speakers will include members of the Texas Legislature, facility maintenance experts and architects with the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. The workshops will cover such topics as Tools for Maintenance and Disaster Planning, Creating a Maintenance Plan, and How to Conduct an Exterior Building Inspection.

The Wharton County Courthouse is a prime example of how counties can benefit from the



1931 Menard County Courthouse courtroom

workshop. Completed in 1889 in the Second Empire style by noted Texas architect Eugene Thomas Heiner, the courthouse has undergone significant changes to restore the building to its original glory.

The restoration work resulted in reconstruction of its demolished towers and the removal of stucco to reveal the warmth of the original brick exterior. After a lengthy investigation, the courthouse’s original bell was located in a church only a few blocks away, and was donated back to its prior home. Although the original clock could not be located, a similar model from the same year was found in Pennsylvania and promptly purchased and restored. This weight-driven, hand-wound clock is now the focal point of the restoration project and one of the key elements that will require continued maintenance and monitoring through the years.

“The Wharton County Courthouse embodies the success of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program and the necessity of the stewardship workshops,” said Stan Graves, director of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. “Clock towers represent one of the numerous elements in these structures that demand specialized care and attention.”

The workshops will address maintenance issues like proper care for clock adjustments and how to identify mechanical malfunctions before they cause irreparable damage. Courthouse representatives will acquire instruction on potential problems ranging from the wear and tear caused by nature to the hazard modern cleaning products may pose to delicate materials.

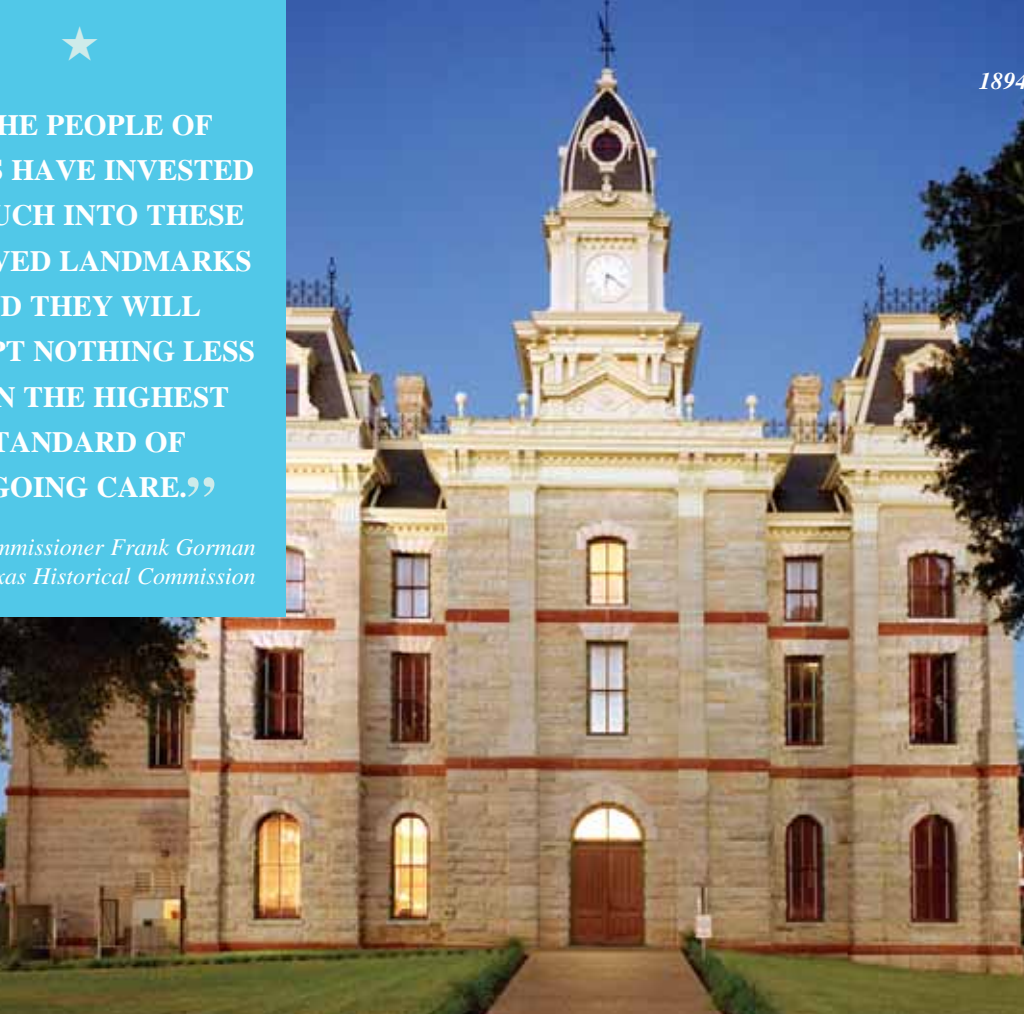
For more information on the upcoming Stewardship Workshop contact Tina Ray in the THC’s Architecture Division at 512/463-8821 or [tina.ray@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:tina.ray@thc.state.tx.us). ★



“THE PEOPLE OF TEXAS HAVE INVESTED SO MUCH INTO THESE BELOVED LANDMARKS AND THEY WILL ACCEPT NOTHING LESS THAN THE HIGHEST STANDARD OF ONGOING CARE.”

— Commissioner Frank Gorman  
Texas Historical Commission

1894 Goliad County Courthouse



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HELP SAVE OUR  
HISTORIC  
COURTHOUSES!

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