

THE 1901 HISTORIC HARRISON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

START OF TOUR: IN GIFT SHOP

WELCOME

Welcome to our community's Wonderland of Lights and to the Old Harrison County Courthouse. My name is _____ and I am _____. (EX: community volunteer, member of the Board of the Harrison County Historical Museum, etc.)

TOUR OVERVIEW

1. Our tour of the 1901 Old Harrison County Courthouse will take about 40 minutes.
2. To help us protect the building we ask that you do not take food or drink on the tour.
3. Photographs are allowed.
4. We will start our tour here with a few facts about the county and its courthouses
5. We will then go into the west wing and I will tell you about an amazing effort to make the courthouse larger.
6. Then we will go to the second floor and sit in the historic courtroom for a brief overview of how the community worked together to restore the Courthouse
7. Finally, to the basement exit and then outside to talk about the exterior architecture and surrounding historic square.

HARRISON COUNTY CREATED

1. Harrison County was **established on January 28, 1839** by the Republic of Texas. It was a very large county. The county seat was Greensborough on the Sabine River in the southern part of the county.
2. Two years after it was created Harrison County was **split into 2 districts**.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Panola & Harrison

Texas laws required **county seats to be located near the center** of the county so citizens could **travel to the county seat**, vote, and get home in one day.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The area now known as Harrison County was settled in the 1820s. After independence from Mexico the area was part of a very large Shelby County. More and more settlers came into the area. Small villages began to develop. Citizens of these settlements wanted smaller counties to be closer to government and better law and order. In 1839, Harrison County was formed. Harrison County has had 3 county seats. The county went through several changes in size and shape, becoming smaller each time, before reaching today's boundaries. First was Greensborough, then Pulaski. Both were in southern Harrison County. No town existed on the site chosen for 3rd county seat. A new settlement, Marshall, was created to be the third location for the Harrison County government.

The Congress of Texas **appointed five commissioners** to find a county seat for the smaller county. Congress stipulated that the town would be called “Marshall.”

One of the commissioners appointed was **Peter Whetstone**, who had received a large land grant in Harrison County from the Republic of Texas

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Sebron Williams, John Clifton, David Hill, James A. Williams were also appointed.

A **legend** is often told about how the exact location of a new county seat was chosen. This is the way it goes:

Peter Whetstone offered the commissioners free land on top of this wooded hill for a county seat. One official commented that the land looked too dry to support a new town. It is said that Whetstone then reached into a hole in a nearby tree and produced a jug of whiskey. After some time spent sharing the jug, the other officials decided the land was not too dry. Whetstone’s hill was deemed the perfect location for the new county seat.

STOP 2: TAKE GROUP FROM VISITOR CENTER TO ROTUNDA. DOCENT STANDS ON STAIRS.

1. HARRISON COUNTY’S COURTHOUSES.

This is Harrison County’s fourth county courthouse in Marshall and is the third one to sit in the center of Marshall’s town square.

The **first courthouse** was a wooden structure built just off the square. The county grew to become one of the **richest and most populated counties in the state**. The first courthouse became too small.

Before the county was 10 years old citizens raised the funds to build a **second courthouse**. It was the first one built in the middle of the town square. The 2-story, square, red brick building was called the “Little Virginia.” It looked like public buildings in Virginia.

After 40 years Harrison County outgrew the “Little Virginia” courthouse. A **third courthouse** was built on this site in 1889. It was a grand building with a tower on the roof that was over 175 feet tall. It was totally destroyed by fire in 1899

This courthouse, the third on this site, was completed in 1901.

2. **THE ARCHITECT: J. RIELY GORDON**

James Riely Gordon **designed this courthouse**. He also designed 17 other courthouses for Texas counties.

Our courthouse has been called “an excellent example of Gordon’s Neo-Italian **Renaissance Revival** style.”

It was built on the concept of a **cruciform plan**. Gordon developed the cruciform plan type with offices in the arms of the cross and entrances at the angles formed by the cross pattern.

When built the courthouse had the **latest modern conveniences** – electric lights, running water, steam heat, and indoor bathrooms – conveniences that many citizens did not have in their homes.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Twelve of James Riely Gordon’s courthouses are still standing: in Bexar, Comal, Ellis, Erath, Fayette, Gonzales, Harrison, Hopkins, Lee, McLennan, Victoria, and Wise counties. His most important structure built outside Texas is the Arizona Territorial Capitol (1898–1900). It is similar to the Harrison County Courthouse.

10. **THE ATRIUM.** Reminiscent of the rotunda of the Texas State Capitol, the **central space** called the atrium forms a monumental point of arrival for visitors to the Courthouse.

The atrium area has a **cast iron central stair** with marble steps.

These **marble steps** were worn thin by the thousands of visitors to the Courthouse throughout its 100-year history. But, they did not meet current safety standards. During the recent construction the steps were turned over. One of the original steps was left in place. It is the top step of the first flight of stairs.

The light fixtures and floor tile are original. **Translucent, glass tile was used on the first floor.** The tile allows natural light to filter from the windows in the top of atrium to the basement below.

11. **THE DOME.** Looking up, you can see into the **dome** that sits on the top of the building.

We call this rotunda an “**atrium**” because of the natural light that comes into the building from the dome windows.

Stained glass windows form the base of a drum. The drum supports the dome. A 7-foot tall statue of **Lady Justicia** (Jus-tee-cee-u) sits on top of the dome.

INTERESTING FACT: The U. S. Capitol has Lady Freedom The statue is a classical female figure of Freedom wearing flowing draperies. Her right hand rests upon the hilt of a sheathed sword; her left holds a laurel wreath of victory and the shield of the United States with thirteen stripes. Her helmet is encircled by stars and features a crest composed of an eagle's head, feathers, and talons, a reference to the costume of Native Americans. A brooch inscribed "U.S." secures her fringed robes. ; The Texas Capitol has Lady Liberty, "Liberty" holds a five-pointed American stars on a raised hand. Another hand holds a sword downward. Lady Justicia has the typical blindfold and scales, as well as a sword to administer justice.

12. **NOW**, I'll tell you about amazing engineering feat that enlarged this building. **Move through the doors on your right** into the west wing.

LEAD TOUR GROUP TO WEST WING OF COURTHOUSE

STOP 3: WEST WING OF 1ST FLOOR

DOCENT MOVES TOWARD NORTHWEST CORNER.

1. This area is on its way to becoming one of the galleries for the new exhibits of the Harrison County Historical Museum. These exhibit cases will become part of the new exhibits. This 3-room gallery will tell the history of Harrison County from the time of the Caddo Nation to the Modern Era.
2. But, the reason I brought you in here is to tell you about the engineering marvel.
3. After county government continued to grow more space was needed. In 1924 and again in 1927, a remarkable expansion of this building took place. **Corneilus Lancaster** who helped build the Courthouse designed and directed this new building project with imagination and courage. The

county wanted to **extend the east and west wings**. But, they also wanted to **preserve the grand, columned east and west exteriors**. This west face of the building was cut free and slowly moved out on tracks 22 feet from the original building. New floor space was added in between. They carefully matched brick, stone, and metal trim. This expansion was so skillfully done that today it is almost impossible to tell where the building was cut and enlarged. You can tell by looking at the difference in the flooring.

4. When you are on the outside of the building you can see a slight change in the color of the brick.

CALL attention to group to photograph.

5. **NOW**, let's **move to the 2nd floor**. Some of you may want to take the elevator, some may want to climb the grand staircase. I'll meet you at the 2nd floor elevator lobby.

STOP 4: 2ND FLOOR, ROTUNDA

SAFETY WARNING FOR TOUR GROUP: WHILE YOU ARE IN THIS SECOND FLOOR ATRIUM AREA WATCH FOR THE STAIRWELL AS YOU WALK AROUND THE LANDING TOWARD THE COURTROOM.

1. **Encircling the rotunda space**, this balcony, along with the third floor balcony, is supported by these large, **decorative brackets** on the walls. Each bracket has the pattern of the acanthus plant – a symbol of quality, longevity and creativity. The brackets are accented by an electric light.

Windows and door transoms open into the rotunda providing for natural ventilation which was important in the days before central heat and air. Windows could be opened in the offices on the exterior walls and the air would circulate into the rotunda through these transoms.

12. **Let's move to your right** -- through the double door into the courtroom.

STOP 5: COURTROOM, 2ND FLOOR

ASK TOUR GROUP LOOK AT ROOM AND THEN TO SIT DOWN

Please take a seat for a few minutes.

First, I want to tell you about this courtroom and then about the amazing story that led to the restoration of this building.

Prior to restoration this courtroom, like much of the building, had been “**modernized**” to accommodate a growing county government. The balcony was removed and a floor added above. These beautiful features were removed or covered.

Historic preservation is can be like **detective work**. No one was certain how this courtroom looked in 1901. Old photographs, paint scrapings and similar work in other J. Riely Gordon buildings were used to guide the restoration work. This detective work revealed the beautiful ornamentation and lively colors as the original ornamentation and colors.

Adding offices and **covering up details** occurred throughout the building so when the county moved out in 1965 it looked nothing like the building we are in today.

THE DECISION TO PRESERVE THE COURTHOUSE. In the 1960s, after much discussion about whether to demolish this building to make way for a new, larger courthouse, the county wisely **decided to preserve this building** and build its 5th courthouse on the southwest side of the square. Voters let county commissioners know they wanted this building was preserved.

The modern, **new courthouse** was completed in 1964. This building became the home of the Harrison County Historical Museum until 2000 when the Museum moved out to make way for restoration of the building.

Now, following restoration, this **grand, old courthouse** is once again home to both county government and the Historical Museum.

THE RESTORATION

1. Telling the story of this building would not be complete without telling the story of county citizens **working together** with determination to help this important symbol of the county to shine once again.

2. After county government moved out the building started to deteriorate – the bricks were sandblasted removing the protective coating, anchors were put in the building and the roof leaked. With these and other **problems** came damage to both the exterior and interior. The county had limited funds and could not take on the major repairs to the building.
3. In 1993 citizens from throughout the county **came together** to talk about the future of this Old Courthouse. A plan was created to return the building to its earlier beauty.
3. Through **16 years and 3 phases** of construction the restoration of the building was finally completed last year. Involved in the project were several towns in the county; the county through 3 county judges; 2 volunteer organizations, a state agency; and, many, many **dedicated citizens** who gave of their time and money. Adults gave, children gave. Large amounts were given, small amounts were given. Some of you may have made a donation for the restoration.

Are there any questions?

NEXT we will go to the exterior and talk about the building materials and Peter Whetstone Square. For those who want to use the elevator, use the “B” button for “basement”. Those who want to take the stairs will need to find the second set of steps into the basement. Look under the stairwell of the grand staircase when YOU get to the first floor. I’ll meet you in the basement rotunda.

STOP 6: BASEMENT

1. Before we go outside take time to look up at the translucent tile.

DOCENT LEADS GROUP OUT HANDICAPPED EXIT TO THE SOUTHEAST PORTICO (ACROSS FROM FEDERAL COURTHOUSE)

EXTERIOR STOP 1. Docent stands on steps on southeast portico

1. **THE PUBLIC SQUARE.** In 1841, one of the first sites laid out in the new Harrison County seat of government was this public square. It is now called Peter Whetstone Square. A courthouse is meant to stand alone in the middle of a park-like setting – a symbol of local pride and self-government. All roads in the county led to the county seat and all streets in the county seat led to the courthouse square. The town of Marshall grew up around this square.
2. **HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE.** This building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It is also a Texas State Archaeological Landmark and a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark.
3. **EXTERIOR BUILDING MATERIALS.** Looking, to your right and then at this portico you can see the exterior building materials. They are granite, stone, brick, and marble.

The pink quarry-faced granite used as the base of the building is from the same quarry as the granite used in the Texas State Capitol.

The buff colored bricks were manufactured locally

NEXT, we'll move to the west around the building. Look at how two streets enter the square, one at the corner; one at the center of the square. We'll talk more about this square as we walk around the building

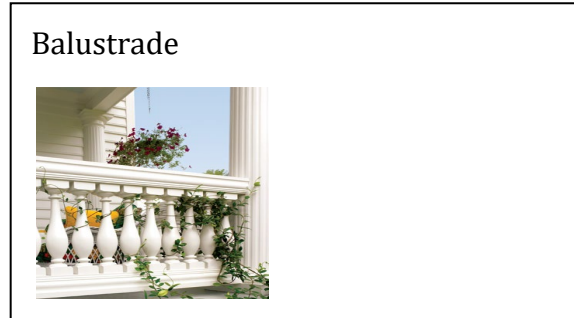
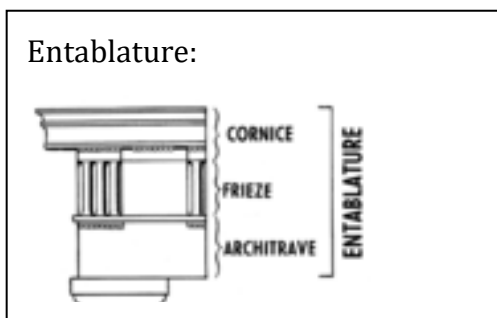
EXTERIOR STOP 2. Docent moves group to the west around the building. Stop at mid-point of west wing extension.

1. As you walk past this west wing of the Courthouse, look carefully at the **change in color of the brick**. You'll be able to **see where this west wing was extended**. There is a slight difference in the color of the building materials.

NEXT, let's continue west and turn left as you reach the next sidewalk. Walk to the end of the sidewalk and we'll look at some of the building's features.

EXTERIOR STOP 3. Docent moves group to the west-away from building along sidewalk to near west steps

1. Before we look back at the building, **notice how two more streets** enter the square -- one at the corner; one at the center of the square.
2. Now **look back at the Courthouse.**
3. This is an excellent view of the various levels of the exterior and the material used.
 - the **pink granite** at the bottom
 - the **buff brick** walls
 - the **polished granite** columns
 - **galvanized iron** forms the entablature and balustrade between the walls and roof, this is typical of much turn-of-the-century work.



- the likenesses of **eagles** are on each side of the courthouse. They have a wingspan of 6 feet.
- rising gracefully above all this is the dome with its **supporting drum in octagonal form**, which contrasts with the interior circular shape.
- Covered with copper plate the dome is accented by four clocks, each of which is flanked by flat columns supporting an entablature and a scroll pediment. **At the top of the dome** is a statue of the goddess of justice with scales and sword in hand.
- Through the years there has been quite a discussion on the proper color of the dome. Finally, through research it was determined this was the original color of the dome.

NEXT, let's move to the left around the building to the northeast portico and we'll conclude our tour there.

**EXTERIOR STOP 4. Docent moves group to the northeast portico.
Stands on stairs.**

1. Now, I'll finish the story about our square. The most common square pattern in Texas is the **Shelbyville Square**, where a courthouse stands in the center of a standard sized city block with city streets running along each side of the square. Buildings run continuously along each street enclosing the square. This block pattern is found in 157 Texas county seats.

Now look once again at **how streets enter the center** of each side of our square (Washington & Houston). This is known as the **Lancaster Square**. Only 4 Texas county seats follow the same pattern as Harrison County's public square. The purpose of this layout was to give a clear, grand view of all four sides of the courthouse.

2. The **grandeur of the 1901 Harrison County Courthouse** was so pleasing to the citizens of the county that a **hill blocking its view** was removed. This street, North Washington, running from the courthouse to the railroad depot was lowered several feet, allowing passengers stepping off trains to look directly up the **lengthy vista to the beautiful new courthouse**. If you drive to the depot, notice how the street gets lower and the houses higher as you approach the depot.
3. When the building was completed in 1901 the local newspaper shouted in the headlines:
“ **Our courthouse is a thing of beauty and will be a joy forever.**”
4. Thanks to the **hard work of** so many people this beautiful Courthouse survives as one of the outstanding turn-of-the-century governmental buildings in Texas. More importantly, it is once again becoming the center of life for Harrison County.
5. **THIS IS THE END OF OUR TOUR. Thank you** for taking time to tour our Courthouse. We hope you will come back.