

THE
MEDALLION
TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
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THE
BEST
COURTHOUSES
IN THE
GALAXIE





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To protect and preserve the state's historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, enjoyment, and economic benefit of present and future generations.

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TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
 REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES

ABOVE, TOP: Brownsville's 1912 Cameron County Courthouse dome.
 ON THE COVER: Arlington resident Kevin Moss with his 1966 Galaxie 500 convertible at the Bosque County Courthouse in Meridian.





THC CHAIRMAN JOHN L. NAU, III LEADERSHIP LETTER

With the Legislative session underway in Austin, it's a good time to reflect on how support from the Texas Senate, House, and our statewide elected officials makes it possible for the Texas Historical Commission to inspire and educate people around the world about Lone Star State history.

Our agency partners with county historical commissions, communities, and history lovers across Texas to preserve the state's most important historic resources.

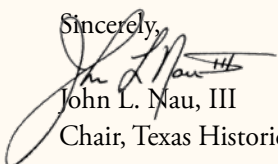
Our state historic sites are some of the most important tools to accomplish our agency's goals, and we've continued adding to our network—now 36 properties. We're thrilled this year to welcome the Bush Family Home in Midland and Presidio La Bahía in Goliad to our family of sites, and we have major projects underway to improve and expand the visitor experience at San Jacinto in the Houston area and the Washington-on-the-Brazos complex of historic sites in Washington, Texas.

The THC also makes a strong contribution to the state's economic development through heritage tourism and its Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. A major restoration project is happening now in Mason, Texas, where the Mason County Courthouse was devastated by arson in 2021. These irreplaceable buildings and projects make a big impact across the state, supporting nearly 13,500 jobs in Texas and generating more than \$970 million in gross state product.

Those courthouses and other historic places across the state support a major industry in Texas—travel and heritage tourism. According to the Office of the Governor-Economic Development and Tourism, Texas tourism is a nearly \$77 billion annual industry, with visitor spending in the state directly supporting more than 625,000 jobs in 2021 and generating \$7.9 billion in state and local taxes. Nearly \$2.3 billion can be attributed annually to heritage-related activities in the state. Our heritage travel website, [TexasTimeTravel.com](https://www.texas-timetravel.com), is your one stop for information about these spots as you plan your next trip into Texas history.

I encourage everyone to support Texas' historic treasures, from battlefields to county courthouses and revitalized Main Streets. The real places and real stories of our history educate, inspire, and connect all Texans. By preserving and learning from Texas history, we help ensure a stronger, more prosperous, and more unified Texas for generations to come.

Sincerely,



John L. Nau, III
Chair, Texas Historical Commission

RESTORING COMMUNITY

MASON COUNTY COURTHOUSE RISING FROM ASHES OF DEVASTATING BLAZE

By Andy Rhodes
Managing Editor, *The Medallion*

On the night of February 4, 2021, Mason County Judge Jerry Bearden received a call from the county's dispatcher, who reported she could see flames billowing out of the courthouse's second-story window across the street.

"I grabbed my coat and hat and drove toward town—I could see the flames from a mile away," Bearden recalls, adding that the county had firetrucks on the scene with more arriving from surrounding towns. "Just going around the courthouse as it burned and watching the fire consume the insides and the roof of the building left me stunned. The cupola with our historic clock and bell fell through the roof, and flames went higher and higher. The last office to burn was mine, where I had served for over 18 years."

The following day, Bearden made phone calls, held meetings, and promised everyone he'd try everything he could to rebuild the courthouse and return it to the people of Mason County and the state of Texas.

He added, "I made the comment that we would be like 'the mythical bird, Phoenix. The courthouse would rise from the ashes!'"

Fast forward two years, and Bearden's mission is taking shape. After determining the fire was caused by arson, local and state officials immediately began working on a new rehabilitation plan, which an existing restoration plan helped to advance. The Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program (THCPP) had approved a \$4.1 million restoration grant in 2020, allowing the process to continue at an accelerated pace. As an unintended blessing, the building's records and some furnishings had already been moved to another building.

Bearden wrote a letter to the then-assembled Texas Legislature requesting financial support, and a \$6 million special appropriation was allocated toward the reconstruction. Combined with community donations, the THC's grant, and the Texas Association of Counties' \$12.7 million insurance disbursement, funding was secured. With an architect and contractor already onboard for the planned restoration, plans to rebuild the 1903 Mason County Courthouse began immediately.

Judge-elect Sheree Hardin, who worked in the courthouse alongside Bearden for many years, is now overseeing county





efforts. She said she greatly values Bearden’s guidance and is proud to be working with the dedicated Friends of the Mason County Courthouse organization to help meet financial needs not covered by insurance and grants.

“Our courthouse is in the center of Mason and represents the strong

community in which we live,” she says. “People come to the courthouse to conduct business, take pictures, picnic on the grounds, reminisce about old times, celebrate accomplishments, and so much more. Today, it’s a reminder that when tough times come our way, we unite, count our blessings, and move forward.”

Before the fire, the Classical Revival building was one of the most intact historic courthouses in Texas, with original windows, exterior and interior doors, light fixtures, clockworks and bell, ornamental pressed-metal ceiling tile and cornice, decoratively painted vault doors, and more. For this reason, the full restoration of the courthouse was estimated to cost under \$5 million. After the fire, the cost of reconstructing the roof and cupola, installing new systems, and replacing damaged sandstone with a perfect match from a nearby quarry, is currently over \$20 million.

Bearden believes it’s worth every penny.

“The courthouse is the most important and beautiful building in our county,” he says. “It serves as a place for court proceedings, record keeping, marriages, adoptions, and in general, it is the most important building to all the citizens

of the county. Every day, people are always asking about the progress with the rebuilding, and they are so appreciative of the fact that it is being restored and not replaced.”

He adds that the building’s future is in extremely capable hands with judge-elect Hardin, who will step into the position with more knowledge and experience than most new judges.

“She’s been my administrative assistant and ‘right arm’ for over six years and has participated in all court proceedings, probates, guardianships, and all the things a small county judge must learn day by day,” he says. “She and her family are a well-respected part of Mason County, and the citizens know she’ll do a great job as judge. I am confident she will do a super job, and Mason County will be well served by her.”

For her part, Hardin says she’s looking forward to continuing to build upon the culture in Mason, where citizens, community leaders, and county departments work together to meet the needs of the growing community. She adds the courthouse reconstruction is estimated to be completed in the latter half of 2023; meanwhile, she asks only a few simple favors of the community.

“Pray for the minds of the planners and the safety of the workers, be patient by extending grace over uncontrollable circumstances, and plan to attend the opening ceremony,” Hardin says.

To learn more about the THC’s courthouse preservation program, visit thc.texas.gov/thcpp.

OPPOSITE: The February 2021 courthouse fire and its aftermath. ABOVE: Progress is being made on the restoration, which is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2023.

By Andy Rhodes, Managing Editor, *The Medallion*

PRESERVING COMMUNITY

TEXAS COURTHOUSE RESTORATIONS ATTRACT DOLLARS TO DOWNTOWNS



Statue of James Pickney Henderson, Texas' first governor,
at the San Augustine County Courthouse in San Augustine

Texas' county courthouses were often the first buildings in a downtown development plan. Serving as central meeting places and architectural beacons, the courthouses became anchors surrounded by manicured grounds and businesses that served the community.

Today, these courthouses continue to be at the center of downtown activities. They provide the primary park space in many historic business districts, and their unique designs and central locations contribute to walkable, enjoyable experiences for locals and visitors.

County courthouses are among Texas' most widely recognized and valued assets. Their stately silhouettes, classical domes, and lofty spires punctuate the skylines of many rural counties, luring residents and travelers to enjoy a meal under a shade tree or participate in a community festival.

The Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program (THCPP) is protecting these iconic structures throughout the state by providing grants to counties that help preserve their

historic courthouses. In the process, Texas is providing a cost-effective case study on how to use existing assets, refocus community pride, and maximize the return on historic buildings in county seats.

The THCPP provides the incentive for counties to invest matching funds to help their courthouses be safe, energy efficient, and inspiring places to visit and conduct government business. Program participants experience many benefits, such as improving functionality and creating a tangible link to the past.

Since the program's inception in 1999, 78 county courthouses have received full restoration funding, and 26 counties have received emergency and/or planning grants while awaiting major construction funds.

So far, the program has attracted 148 participants and awarded over \$360 million to 104 counties. There are still 27 applicants awaiting full restoration funding after receiving planning or emergency grants, and 47 other program participants that have not yet received any funding at all, with a total

outstanding need among participants of over \$600 million.

In addition to providing safe and functional buildings, restoration of historic courthouses benefits the state and local economies. Courthouse preservation projects have created almost 13,500 jobs in Texas and generated over \$790 million in revenue, and more than \$970 million in gross state product. Restored courthouses reinvigorate historic downtowns and promote heritage tourism, a \$7.3 billion industry in Texas.

The economic impact has been especially significant in Texas' rural communities, where courthouses often anchor a historic downtown district, and the associated heritage travelers bring money to the community. Restored courthouses reinvigorate historic downtowns and promote tourism, which, according to the Office of the Governor—Economic Development and Tourism, is a nearly \$77 billion annual industry, with visitor spending in the state directly supporting more than 625,000 jobs in 2021 and generating \$7.9 billion in state and local taxes.



Fayette County Courthouse, La Grange

Williamson County Courthouse, Georgetown



PRESERVATION MAKES CENTS

The THCPP also serves as a catalyst that encourages additional public and private investment in historic downtowns. When a courthouse project begins, vacant buildings in the central commercial district often dwindle by the project's completion.

“There aren't many places that can strengthen and transform an entire community like a restored courthouse,” says Elizabeth Brummett, director of the THC's Architecture Division. “Preserving Texas' historic courthouses is an investment that offers immediate returns while paying dividends to the citizens of tomorrow.”

In 2005, the THC developed the Texas Courthouse Stewardship Program to help counties prevent these state landmarks from returning to a state of decay or deterioration. As part of the

stewardship program, THC reviewers help counties by offering professional advice on how to best preserve the buildings. Useful information is also available at thc.texas.gov/tcsp, where county staff can access the Courthouse Maintenance Handbook and other resources on courthouse components and systems. These reference materials are valuable tools, allowing county staff to plan for budgeting and construction projects.

The THCPP can also assist counties with developing a cyclical maintenance

plan for immediate and long-term care of their historic buildings and sites. The program's maintenance handbook provides additional guidance by offering preservation resources, preventive maintenance checklists, sample templates for schedules, budget formats, and inspection forms.

This assistance has been bolstered by important statewide partnerships. The THC and the Texas Land Title Association, a statewide member-based trade organization for title agents, developed an annual workshop series for



Franklin County Courthouse, Mount Vernon

the stewardship program and regional training workshops. This initiative provides training for facilities managers with an emphasis on committing to routine maintenance programs.

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

Texas' restored historic courthouses are charming destinations that provide memorable settings for community events. The following festivals typically take place each year on or around the courthouse square, with the communities' iconic temples of justice serving as picturesque backdrops.

About an hour east of Austin, La Grange features heritage and food on its downtown courthouse grounds at several events throughout the year. They include the La Grange Uncorked food and wine festival, Oktoberfest on the Square, and Schmeckenfest (named for the German word for taste, *schmecken*). All of them showcase the restored **1891 Fayette County Courthouse**, designed by renowned architect J. Riely Gordon. During Halloween, hundreds of children and their parents descend on La Grange for trick-or-treating at the shops around the square and live music and games on the courthouse lawn.

The East Texas town of San Augustine's restoration of its stately **1927 San Augustine County Courthouse** sparked interest in downtown revitalization.



Denton County Courthouse, Denton

The courthouse is an integral part of festivities put on by the Main Street program and its many partners, including the popular American Main Street event held annually on September 11 to honor first responders, law enforcement, and military service organizations.

The **1911 Williamson County Courthouse** anchors the Georgetown Swirl, a food and wine festival held each spring. When it debuted more than a decade ago, Swirl started a statewide trend for similar events. Proceeds benefit existing improvement grants for the rehabilitation of properties in the National Register-listed Williamson County Courthouse Historic District.

Another longstanding tradition on a courthouse square is Marshall's popular

Wonderland of Lights. From the day before Thanksgiving to December 31, thousands of lights adorn the restored **1901 Harrison County Courthouse** and trees along the surrounding red brick streets. The event features a large outdoor ice-skating rink, a carousel, Santa's workshop, horse-drawn carriage rides around the square, and other activities.

Many other events on downtown squares anchored by THCPP-restored courthouses feature live music. Denton, Gainesville (Cook County), and Mount Vernon each have a popular music series that take place around the courthouse.

To learn more about the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, visit thc.texas.gov/thcpp.



Harrison County Courthouse, Marshall

FOUR SQUARES

THC REDEDICATES RESTORED COURTHOUSES ACROSS NORTHERN TEXAS

By Andy Rhodes
Managing Editor, *The Medallion*

Over the past two years, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) rededicated four courthouses in northern Texas counties—Falls, Fannin, Lipscomb, and Marion—through its Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program (THCPP).

In most states, a northern region is geographically cohesive, but Texas isn't most states. In fact, two of the recently restored courthouses are a nine-hour drive from each other. Lipscomb, in the far northeast corner of the Panhandle, and Jefferson (Marion County) near the Louisiana border, are on opposite ends of the state culturally and geographically. The others—Fannin (Bonham) and Falls (Marlin)—aren't as distant, but they all share the common trait of local and state support for preserving historic treasures at the heart of their communities.

Using funds appropriated by the Legislature, THC staff members bring the state, counties, and local citizens together to restore these iconic landmarks and revitalize Texas communities. Each full-restoration project includes completely restored exteriors, district and county courtrooms, public corridors, security, and new mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.

ABOVE: Falls County Courthouse, Marlin.

ABOVE, RIGHT: Falls County officials pose with (seated, from left) First Lady Cecilia Abbott and Texas Sen.

Brian Birdwell at the courthouse rededication ceremony.
OPPOSITE: Fannin County Courthouse, before and after.



FALLS COUNTY, MARLIN

Once drab and dull, the exterior of the 1937 courthouse—flat limestone paneling, steel casement windows, and Art Moderne design—is now pristine. Its handsome Texas pink granite steps and porches prepare visitors for rich interior finishes.

Inside are halls with seafoam green walls, rose and gray marble wainscots, zig-zagged, two-toned terrazzo floors, and stunning aluminum and glass light fixtures. The county courtroom and corridors feature a unique, green-grained wood, while the district courtroom features beautifully carved rosewood.

The rededication ceremony in October 2021 featured First Lady of Texas Cecilia Abbott as the keynote speaker. Part of the ceremony included the ringing of a bell that was salvaged from an earlier 1880 courthouse, which is now displayed on the current building's lawn. The bell was proudly rung by Building Superintendent Miguel Lopez, who was commended for his stewardship of the courthouse.



Photo taken May 2016



Photo taken March 2022

Praising the THCPP, Abbot stated, “We are not just trying to save an old building, although that is important. Courthouse preservation projects support the economy with more than 600 jobs yearly and more than 12,000 jobs total since this program began.”

Now restored to its historic beauty and bolstered by more functionality and energy efficiency, the Art Moderne masterpiece stands ready to impress heritage tourists and serve the citizens of Falls County for decades to come.

FANNIN COUNTY, BONHAM

Those who haven’t seen the Fannin County Courthouse since 2017 won’t believe it’s the same building. After a \$27.8 million restoration via the THCPP, it is utterly transformed.

The beautiful 1888 French Second Empire-style courthouse with elaborate stonework and soaring clock tower was destroyed by a fire in 1929. Although stabilized and reoccupied, it was substantially altered—exterior walls and window openings were retained, but the clock tower was gone and the gable roof and ornamental stone decoration were removed.



In 1966, the entire exterior was covered in a new Moderne-style façade. Interiors were completely altered—even the two-story district courtroom and balcony was displaced and divided into two floors.

The recent restoration completely reversed the dramatic changes from the 1930s and 1960s. Original building materials and finishes were carefully investigated, researched, and restored to allow public spaces to return to their original grandeur. The old stone exterior was uncovered and restored, and a new clock tower was added, matching the look of the original. The combined efforts of over 35 specialty contractors and contributions from local companies were required to complete the full restoration.

On March 10, 2022, hundreds gathered on the courthouse square (while many more watched a livestream) and cheered as the bell tower clock struck 10 a.m. and Fannin County Judge Randy Moore began the rededication ceremony.

The THC awarded a \$5.6 million restoration grant in July 2016, while the county contributed \$22.2 million authorized by the Commissioners' Court with resident support.

LIPSCOMB COUNTY, LIPSCOMB

Located in the far northeastern corner of the Texas Panhandle, Lipscomb County is a remote and rugged place. The 2020 census recorded 3,059 people, with the village of Lipscomb—the county seat—having just 66 residents.

Modern conveniences are sparse in Lipscomb—there are no gas stations or grocery stores, and electricity and cell service can be spotty. There are no city officials and none of the usual local ordinances and regulations. The residents are self-reliant, independent, and determined.

Standing in the center of the small town is the impressive Lipscomb County Courthouse, a Classical Revival structure with Prairie Style influences. Built in 1916, it is a State Antiquities Landmark, Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. And it is now fully restored.

The community centerpiece was rededicated on September 11, 2021. The \$4.9 million THCPP project included masonry repairs, roof replacement, removal of suspended ceilings, modern wall finishes and floor coverings, and the restoration of the balcony and all interior finishes. New mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems were installed, and modern security features were added. A new elevator was installed inside the building after the removal of an exterior elevator that was added in the 1970s.

The Lipscomb County Courthouse stands restored and proud, a testament to its residents' determination.



MARION COUNTY, JEFFERSON

With the cutting of a ribbon in May 2021, the newly restored Marion County Courthouse came full circle. The ribbon-cutter was Marcia Thomas, great-granddaughter of a commissioner, George Washington Brown, who had been present at the courthouse's original construction in 1913.

Almost 110 years after it was built, dozens of guests and dignitaries looked on to celebrate the full restoration of the stately Greek Revival structure. County Judge Leward LaFleur conducted the ceremony, with remarks given by THC Executive Director Mark Wolfe and Karl Komatsu of Komatsu Architecture, which provided restoration project design and construction administration services. Tours of the restored building followed the ceremony.

The building opened its doors to the public after completion of a three-year construction project. The downtown landmark was restored with assistance of a \$4.7 million THCPP grant, as well as \$1 million of county funding authorized by the Commissioners Court, which began saving money for the project about 20 years ago.

To return to its former glory, anything not original to the 1913 courthouse was removed, and modern improvements such as LED lighting and air conditioning were installed. Most of the original interior building fabric remained intact under layers of materials installed during a 1973 renovation. The restoration project reversed the 1973 renovation efforts that were in serious disrepair and obscured the view of the original building



materials. Changes were also made to upgrade site drainage, building access, fire protection, and plumbing systems.

To learn more about historic Texas courthouses and the THCPP, visit thc.texas.gov/thcpp.

ABOVE: Lipscomb County, Lipscomb. ABOVE, TOP: Marion County, Jefferson. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Marion County Judge Leward LaFleur (at podium) and ceremony guests celebrate the reopening of the restored county courthouse.

GET IN THE GALAXIE

ARLINGTON MAN VISITS ALL 254 TEXAS COURTHOUSES IN VINTAGE CAR

Ten years ago, Arlington resident Kevin Moss became the proud owner of a partially disassembled 1966 Galaxie 500 convertible. He placed an offer on eBay and fully expected to be outbid; instead, he found himself towing the car from Kansas City to Texas with a big project on his hands.

In September 2020, with the Galaxie upgraded and roadworthy, he embarked on an even bigger project to drive to all 254 Texas courthouses. He tackled it in segments, logging 24 separate trips over 37 days. About a year and 18,500 miles later, he finished his quest at the El Paso County Courthouse.

Moss and his “Gal” didn’t encounter too many obstacles during his journey, other than some brake issues in East Texas and the relentless Texas summer heat (with no air-conditioning). Reflecting on his trip, he discovered there’s a direct connection between restoring historic vehicles and courthouses.

“Preserving the beauty of the past is important for the next generation,” Moss says. “To properly appreciate the present, it’s good to get a feel for what came before.”

Moss and his Gal at Meridian’s Bosque County Courthouse. Find all 254 photos at 1966galaxie.com/courthouses. Read a full interview in the THC’s *Courthouse Cornerstones*: thc.texas.gov/about/publications.



NEWS BRIEFS

TEXAS ANTISEMITISM STUDY HIGHLIGHTS RISING HATE

The Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission (THGAAC) has submitted the first-ever Study on Antisemitism in Texas to Gov. Greg Abbott, legislative leaders, and Texas lawmakers. The commission also laid out recommendations for Texans to promote awareness, improve security, and fight back against rising hatred against Jews.

In 2021, the Texas Legislature established the THGAAC as an advisory commission to the Texas Historical Commission and directed it to produce a biennial study on antisemitism. In the 18 months since then, antisemitic incidents have grown more frequent and more extreme in Texas, the study finds.

“This study is a powerful call to action for Texans to come together to fight modern-day antisemitism in all forms across our communities,” said THGAAC Chair Kenneth E. Goldberg of Dallas. “This hatred has no place in our state, and this report provides a roadmap for local officials, educational leaders, and state officeholders to support Jewish Texans.”

Three of the recommendations will require legislative action this year. They include:

- Creating a state-funded security grant program to help religious organizations, schools, and community centers harden their security infrastructures.

- Prohibiting state-funded colleges from implementing academic boycotts, like those promoted via the anti-Israel and anti-semitic global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement.
- Scheduling “listening tours” for lawmakers to speak with THGAAC, local educators, and museum officials to better understand their needs around Holocaust and antisemitism education.

To read the anti-semitism study and additional recommendations, visit thgc.texas.gov.

HISTORICAL MARKER PROGRAM RECEIVING APPLICATIONS

Applications for new THC historical markers will be accepted March 1 through May 15. The process begins at the county level. After applicants have reviewed the relevant information at thc.texas.gov/markers, they should contact their county historical commission chair. A link with contact information for each county’s CHC chair is available on the THC’s website.

Please note that applying for a marker is highly competitive and that all required components must be included when submitting an application. For more information on how to apply, a marker toolkit, research guides, and resources about training and workshops are available on the THC’s website. The entire process of application submission to marker dedication can take up to 18 months.

To learn more, visit thc.texas.gov/markers.

The Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site drew large crowds on December 9, 2022 when it reintroduced a Fresnel lens to illuminate Gulf Coast skies after 117 years.



WHERE ON EARTH...IN TEXAS

KNOW YOUR TEXAS HISTORY? Put your skills to the test by identifying the pictured site! The first three people who correctly identify the location will receive a prize and be named in the next issue of *The Medallion*. Email your answer and preferred mailing address to medallion@thc.texas.gov or send it to: *The Medallion*, P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711. Limit one prize annually per contestant.

NEED A CLUE? This stately courthouse is in the Texas Tropical Trail Region.



ANSWER TO THE PHOTO FROM THE LAST ISSUE:

The photo at left is the Elizabeth Ney Museum in Austin's historic Hyde Park neighborhood. It was the home and studio of its namesake sculptor, who purchased the property in 1882 and created pieces of Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston, both now in the State Capitol.

Congratulations and eventual prizes go to the first readers who correctly identified the site: Beverly Gavenda of Austin, eighth-grader Elizabeth Nation of Austin, and Raynell Wilke of Fredericksburg. Thanks to all who participated!

