

# **The History Of The Bexar County Courthouse**

**By Sylvia Ann Santos**

**An Occasional Publication In Regional History Under The Editorial Direction Of  
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For The Bexar County Historical Commission**

**Dedicated  
To The People Of Bexar County**

## **EDITOR'S PREFACE**

The concept of a history of the Bexar County Courthouse originated in discussion sessions of the Bexar County Historical Commission. As a topic worthy of serious research, the concept fell within the purview of the History Appreciation Committee in the fall semester of 1976. Upon returning to The University of Texas at San Antonio from a research mission to Mexico City, I offered a graduate seminar in State and Local History in which Sylvia Ann Santos accepted the assignment of investigating and writing a survey history of the Bexar County Courthouse. Cognizant of the inherent difficulties in the research aspect, Mrs. Santos succeeded in compiling a bibliography of primary sources and in drafting a satisfactory outline and an initial draft of the manuscript.

Following the conclusion of the seminar, Mrs. Santos continued the pursuit of elusive answers to perplexing questions. Periodically in Commission meetings, the status of the project came up for discussion, the usual response being that sound historical writing required time for proper perspective. Finally, in the fall of 1978, after endless hours of painstaking research in old public records, private collections, and microfilm editions of newspapers, Mrs. Santos submitted the manuscript for editorial review and revision.

This volume is a contribution to the Bexar County Historical Commission's series of Occasional Publications in Regional History. The editor gratefully acknowledges the support and encouragement of Major General William A. Harris (U.S A., Ret.), Chairman of the Bexar County Historical Commission, and of the Honorable Albert G. Bustamante, County Judge, and the Commissioners' Court of Bexar County. Hopefully, Courthouses of Bexar County: 1731 1978 will reinforce the tradition established by earlier publications, namely The Missions of Son Antonio, A Heritage for ALL Americans and Guide to the Catholic Archives at San Antonio.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I acknowledge with gratitude the invaluable assistance I received at different institutions during the course of my research on the Bexar County Courthouse. I am equally appreciative of the unfailing courtesy extended to me by the personnel at all of these institutions. Given the regional focus of this specialized study of the courthouse in San Antonio, I conducted most of the research at the Bexar County Archives, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, the San Antonio Public Library, Trinity University Library, the University of Texas at San Antonio Library, the San Antonio Conservation Society, the reference room of the San Antonio Express Publishing Company, the Institute of Texan Cultures, the office of the Bexar County Historical Commission and the Witte Memorial Museum. In Austin, I consulted materials in the Barker Texas History Center on the campus of the University of Texas. The microfilmed newspaper collections at some of these institutions provided reliable and rewarding primary source information.

In a very special way, I wish to thank the following individuals for their assistance and support of this project: Frank B. Vaughn, Jr., former Bexar County Commissioner (Precinct 3); Robert D. Green, Bexar County Clerk; Elton R. Cude, former Bexar County District Clerk; Thelma V. Gavin, former Archivist, Marjorie Harris, and Elaine Crawford, Archives Division, Bexar County Clerk' s Office; Maria Dora Guerra and Anna Maria Watson, DRT Library; Mrs. Eyrle G. Johnson, San Antonio Conservation Society; Mrs. Marie B. Berry, San Antonio Public Library; Charles O. Kilpatrick, San Antonio Express Publishing Company, Major General William A. Harris (USA, Ret.), Chairman, Bexar County Historical Commission; Mrs. Gloria V Cadena, Bexar County Historical Commission member; Claude B. Aniol; Charles Long, curator at the Alamo; and Dr. Felix D. Almaraz, Jr. , UTSA Associate Professor of History, in whose graduate Seminar in State and Local History I initiated research for this study.

I also wish to express my appreciation for the ready assistance of many other persons, too numerous to list individually, who shared information, answered inquiries, and allowed me the use of irreplaceable books, documents, and photographs.

My thanks also go to my friends and family members who were patient and understanding during the long course of study. Finally, I pay tribute to the memory of my late friend, Patricia Anti Womack, who encouraged me many times when I encountered difficulty, and I acknowledge the assistance of my daughter, Cynthia Ann, who not only typed my research notes, but spent countless nights reading microfilm.

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San Antonio, Texas

# Courthouses of Bexar County

1731 - 1978

Citizens in every county in Texas share particular pride in their own courthouse. Although in many regions new, modern air conditioned buildings are the hallmarks of progress, some counties still maintain the courthouses constructed long ago. (1) Between 1870 and 1910, almost every county in Texas built a new courthouse and San Antonio was no exception. (2)

Many of the older courthouses, such as in San Antonio, retain the flavor of the last century in their majestic, temple-like architecture popular at the turn of the century. During their peak of construction, county courthouses were looked on by citizens as symbols of liberty and independence, purveyors of justice in the land of the free. Courthouses were also viewed as staunch hometown symbols of the people's faith in their ability to govern themselves, and sometimes, too, of the determination of one county to outshine the adjacent area. In this context, a building representing a sacred object such as justice, required monumental dignity, and just as jewels need a fine setting to display their beauty, courthouse sites were selected with utmost care. (3)

Over the centuries, Bexar County has had four courthouses, and each had a history of its own. With the establishment of the Villa de San Fernando de Bexar by the Canary Islanders on July 2, 1731, the present day courthouse of the County of Bexar is the direct heir of the oldest municipal government agency in Texas, the Cabildo of the Spanish colonial period. (4)

Typically a county's courthouse history began with borrowed or rented quarters, and thus it was in San Antonio. For a period of eleven years the Cabildo of San Fernando conducted its meetings at the homes of the members, while official documents of the villa were kept at the home of the commander of the presidio (5). It was not until 1742 that the settlers arranged for the construction of the much needed Casas Reales. The building was a one-story adobe structure with dirt floors and a cactus for a flagpole. Above the doorway of the building was a sundial, then the city clock, one of the very few timepieces in this part of the Borderlands. Accordingly, when the citizens needed to know the hour they were obliged to visit the old courthouse in order to glance at the dial (6). Near the front door was the whipping post, a curved affair to which lawbreakers were tied to receive lashes assessed by the court and administered by the sheriff or his assistants (7). The Casas Reales was located on the east side of the Plaza de los Islenos, also known as Main Plaza. In 1779, due to expansion and other reasons, Don Jose Antonio Curbelo, alcalde of the Villa San Fernando de Bexar, rebuilt the Casas Reales at the same location (8).

The Casa Reales remained the oldest capitol, city hall, and courthouse in Texas until approximately about 1850 when it was finally abandoned. In the course of its history, however, it was frequented by the great names and figures of Texas history. Spanish and Mexican governors, as well as Austin, Bowie, Houston, Navarro, Ruiz, and even

Santa Anna visited the Casas Reales at one time or another. (9) Two famous battles occurred in and around its environs.

The first bloody scene took place here when the Texas officials invited the Comanches to send delegates for the purpose of exchanging prisoners and arranging a treaty. On this occasion, 65 Comanches entered the city. A disagreement ensued and the conflict that erupted became known as the "Court House Fight." (1840) (10)

Two years later another incident occurred when General Adrian Well and Mexican troops crossed the Rio Grande, took possession of the district court and made prisoners of the members of the court then in session. Reportedly, during this invasion many court records were removed or destroyed. Thus, from 1731 to the years of the Texas Republic, the Casas Reales was the seat of local government in San Antonio. In 1850, citizens approved a plan for constructing a new courthouse and jail, and for converting the old courthouse into a public school. The following year, the city and county, acting in harmony, occupied new quarters on Military Plaza near the northwest corner of the present City Hall. Thomas Whitehead constructed the facilities for the new courthouse and jail. The courthouse was occupied jointly by the county and the municipality as courthouse and city hall.

The courthouse and jail, constructed as adjoining buildings were two-stories high. For a time they remained as the only two-story structure on the plaza. The upper floor in the main building was originally the district courtroom and Thomas Jefferson Devine was its first presiding judge. The lower floor was reserved for the city court and city department. The jail was located in the rear of the building, surrounded by a high wall, crowned with imbedded glass to prevent escapes. The jail had four cells constructed of the plainest, and most irregular stones, which could easily have been removed with a heavy piece of pointed iron.

The courthouse building later became a roosting place for bats. Citizens quite commonly referred to it as the "Old Bat Cave." According to one account, "thousands of bats made their home between the roof and the whitewashed canvas ceiling of the courthouse. It was necessary, whenever court convened, to drive the bats out by using two long poles and a crosspiece of timber, which was bumped against the canvas ceiling.

The joint buildings served as the courthouse and jail until 1879. For another ten years they were used by the Recorder's Court, Police Headquarters and jail until 1889 when workers razed the structure.(18) On other occasions the building was also used by civic and religious groups. According to tradition, it was the site for the first gathering of Baptists in the community. The vigilantes of the Civil War also met in the "Bat Cave," as did the famous Belknap Rifles who held their organizational meetings there. Not long after it had been built, the "Bat Cave" proved to be inadequate, causing city officials to relocate in 1859 in the French Building on the southeast corner of Main Plaza. On April 13, 1868, the French Building was designated the Bexar County Courthouse. Requiring two years of workmanship, the French Building, of massive

stone construction, had been completed in 1858 by John C. French. The office building was the most modern of the day. When the War Between the States ended on June 2, 1865, Union officers established Headquarters for the Western District of Texas in the French Building.

The split between city and county government, advocated since 1870, was finally authorized on February 29, 1872. Although the "Bat Cave" and jail buildings became city property, the county continued to occupy space free of charge until a new courthouse could be built.

In May of 1879, city offices again moved back into the French Building while other facilities could be located in the upper floor of the Kampmann Building on the northeast corner of the Plaza. Offices of both city and county apparently were scattered and moved from one building to another during this period.

As early as August 1, 1872, the Commissioners' Court authorized the purchase of the property known as the "Masonic Building" and also of 54 feet and 9 inches of land adjoining it on the north. Under this order the commissioners closed a purchase agreement with Alamo Lodge No 44 A.F. and A.M. for the "Masonic Building," a three-story rock structure on Soledad Street. They also concluded an agreement for the purchase from Thomas J. Devine of 54 feet 9 inches of frontage on Soledad Street adjoining the Masonic building. For this later track the county promised to pay six thousand dollars.

The cost of the property was nominal, taking into consideration contemporary rates for such real estate as a basis. The Masonic lodge, deeply in debt, was about to have its hall sold at auction to satisfy this indebtedness. Admittedly, the sale of the property at auction would not have generated enough money to pay all the bills, and the Masons were aware they were about to lose their property and still be in debt.

As part of the agreement, the county would pay off the indebtedness, amounting to \$9,836.25 in gold and \$9,079 85 in currency (which altogether amounted to approximately \$15,000 in gold). In addition, the county was to pay the lodge a small sum of money and remit all back taxes.

On October 3, 1872, the transfer of the site of the courthouse of Bexar County from the old "Bat Cave" was officially promulgated in the following order issued by the Commissioners Court:

It is ordered, decreed, and declared by the court that hereafter, until further ordered, the courthouse of the County of Bexar is and shall be on the east side of Soledad Street, in the building formerly owned and occupied by the order of A. F. and A. M., known as the Masonic Building, and recently sold by them to the County of Bexar.(27)

The Masonic Building, three stories high, extended back to where the wall of the vault, used by the county and district clerks, stood. Its north wall, still intact on the lower floor, formed the south wall of the lobby. Soon after moving into the building, the commissioners made a contract with J. H. Kampmann for the construction of the two-story building, the facilities of which were occupied by the county clerk on the lower level and the district clerk on the upper floor.

By November 25, 1881, the county commissioners decided that the courthouse needed expansion and remodeling. Consequently, officials invited competitive bidding and the submission of plans, which would best utilize the Masonic Building. At their meeting of March 13, 1882, the commissioners selected plans submitted by Alfred Giles and shortly afterwards, they accepted D. C. Anderson's bid for construction. The new courthouse building was completed and accepted by county commissioners on April 3, 1883.

Alfred Giles, in remodeling the Masonic building, found it necessary to utilize the Second Empire style for this public facility. He divided the design of the facade into three equal parts, comprising a central bay flanked by terminal mansard-roofed pavilions. Ornate porthole-shaped dormer windows pierced the roof, which was curbed with iron cresting. J. R. Riely, in his book *San Antonio - Past, Present, and Future*, described the courthouse building:

We give an admirable illustration of the courthouse of Bexar County, as remodeled by Mr. Alfred Giles, the architect. The original building was built by the Free Masons as a lodge building, but the present structure, while retaining some of the old walls, is really a new building, the front having been extended two-thirds the old size and the interior being entirely changed. The present building, which is located on Soledad Street has a total front of eighty-two feet, six inches. In the center of the front, on the first story, are large double iron gates entering into a lobby twenty six by twenty-eight feet in size, in which is a stairway, eight feet wide, leading to the second story of the building and the District Court room. At the end of the lobby, on the first floor, is a hall eighteen feet wide, which continues through the building. The first story contains the following rooms and offices, all of which are spacious and airy: the County Collector's office, County Commissioners' court room, County Judge's room, County Assessor's office and privy (sic) room, County Surveyor's office, County Treasurer's office, County Clerk's office and private room.

At the head of the stairway, on the second floor, which leads from the lobby, are the double doors, which open into the District Court room. This room is forty by seventy feet in size and twenty-five feet high. At one end of the court room is a passage leading to the District Clerk's office, which is over the County Clerk's office, and both of which adjoin the large two-story stone fire-proof vault in which the records are kept. The District Court room is especially well ventilated. The other offices on the second floor are, the Sheriff's with a private office, a witness room and the County Attorney's office.

On the third floor is a gallery, overlooking the District Court room, a jury room, with a private office, and a grand jury room. The, whole building shows great architectural as well as artistic ability on the part of the architect, and Mr. Giles has added another monument to the many others attest his skill as an accomplished architect.

When finished the Courthouse seemingly was a spacious affair. Many observers remarked that it was much too large for the purposes and complained of the extravagance of the commissioners. But the county, though greatly reduced in size by the creation of other counties from its domain, grew rapidly in population and prosperity. With the increasing population, the legal business also expanded, thus making it necessary to establish another court and consequently to secure more room.

In 1888, upon the creation of the 45th District Court, the commissioners purchased the property known as the Meny Building on Soledad Street, immediately south of the courthouse. With the addition of the Meny property, officials believed that the county would have sufficient quarters for a long time to come, but this contention proved incorrect. When it became apparent that the Texas Legislature desired to establish another Court of Appeals, San Antonio made a determined effort to secure the court. Eventually the city succeeded, thus making it necessary to locate spaces for the new court. Temporarily, officials secured a room, the old city council chamber, on the fourth floor of the Kampmann Building.

Within a few years the courthouse building began to show cracks and was considered unsafe. Alfred Giles, the architect, reacted strongly to accusations leveled against him:

The crack that several parties have spoken about in the Grand Jury room of the third story is where the new front joins the old building that was built over thirty years ago, and this crack by actual measurements is not over 1 1/16 of an inch, and such a settlement cannot possibly be helped where new work joins old, but it has been scratched out and looks badly. The county, like private citizens, should have their little defects attended to. The dangerous portion of the building was removed about six days ago, and that was the carpet on the stairs that was more holy than righteous.

Bexar County's present courthouse is perhaps one of the most interesting landmarks in downtown San Antonio. The present building, begun less than a decade after the construction of the previous courthouse on Soledad Street, was indicative of the rapid development of the county and the resulting need for larger space to accommodate expanding government functions and services.

By 1887, members of the Commissioners' Court had already initiated serious discussion on the subject of a new and better courthouse elsewhere. On February 24 of the same year, the Commissioners Court adopted a resolution, part of which affirmed that:

it is the sense of the great majority of the people of Bexar County that the present courthouse is not properly located, and does not answer the wants of this growing community, and that a necessity exists for a new courthouse that may be a credit to Bexar County.

Serious discussion notwithstanding, it was not until March 13, 1891, that the planning of the new courthouse was formally begun. After adopting another resolution restating the need for a new courthouse, the Commissioners appointed a committee to select a new site. Two months later, on May 11, 1891, the court approved a \$94,000 bond for the purchase of property. After considerable investigation on the part of the committee, they selected the site of the present courthouse. The location they chose was the south side of Main Plaza, a property offered by Mrs. Annette M. Dwyer, independent executrix of the estate of Joseph E. Dwyer. In turn, Mrs. Carolina Kampmann offered a twenty-one foot lot fronting on the plaza and adjoining the new courthouse site on the west, belonging to the estate of the late John H. Kampmann. The committee gratefully accepted both proposals. Structures standing on the property at that time were the Dwyer building, a livery stable, and several real estate offices. The west boundary of the Kampmann lot extended twenty-one feet into an older building for many years occupied by the Central Hotel. On the same date the Commissioners approved a bond issue for property, they voted in favor of a second bond for \$10,000 for the construction of the building, beginning with a design competition.

J. Riely Gordon, one of the most talented architects who practiced in Texas during the nineteenth century, submitted the winning design, for which he received a prize of \$1,000. Altogether, the first and second prizes of \$1,000 and \$500, respectively, attracted twenty-seven entries, some from as far away as Philadelphia, Kansas City, Atlanta, Chicago, and Denver. Since the rules of the competition did not require anonymity, on the first ballot all four commissioners cast their votes to Gordon, a local resident then twenty-seven years old. They awarded the second prize to another San Antonian, James Wahrenberger, Gordon's winning design, which was published in the *American Architect and Building News* of October 20, 1894, has since been altered by rear additions, but the entrance facade has remained unchanged.

Gordon specialized in the construction of public buildings, mainly designed in the Romanesque 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. Between 1891 and 1900, Gordon designed more than a dozen courthouses of this type in the state of Texas. In 1904, J. Riely Gordon moved to New York where he continued his practice in architecture emphasizing public buildings. His obituary in *The New York Times* of March 17, 1937, stated he had designed 72 courthouses. Gordon's lengthy service of thirteen terms as president of the New York Society of Architects indicated the esteem of his fellow professionals.

In 1896, Gordon described the new Bexar County Courthouse in minute detail:

The new County Court House 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 colonnades it makes a mammoth structure, devoid of gaudiness of color or other flashy effect. 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, the silvery sprays of the fountain as it plays over them presenting a beautiful and a delightfully cooling effect.

From the first platform which is flanked by stairs of granite, turning to the right, and left, one enters into the colonnades, which surround the entire court and fountain. They are floored with marble and surmounted with polished granite columns, with magnificently carved capitals and granite balustrades and from this court entrance is had (sic) to the spacious halls on the right and left. The approach from Main Plaza is flanked on each side by heavy granite buttresses and magnificent bronze lamps. Expansive (sic) steps pass under the massive 32 foot segment arch, built between the two towers which act as buttresses to resist its thrust.

Passing through the loggia, 16 feet by 36 feet, floored with marble, one enters the vestibule through massive polished oak doors into the inner vestibule, which in turn is provided with another set of similar doors all of which, facing towards the north, act in the capacity of storm doors and prevent the entrance of cold air. The south entrance is also gained by ascending granite steps 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, over which are to be the toilets etc., for the judicial floor.

All the halls in the lower floor are marble and the walls wainscoted (sic) part of the way up, the balance of the walls and ceiling of hard plaster of paris finish.

The offices on this floor include those of the treasurer, assessor, collector, physician, clerk, the justice's court, constable, commissioners, etc. The justices

courts are so arranged as to have the jury rooms below, with private stairways so that the judges can retire without coming in contact with the audience.

The building is provided with spaces for four electric elevators, only one of which is in operating order at present. The other three can be added at any time. The building is provided with the United States mail chute connecting every floor. Each room is provided with drinking fountains. The vaults are lined with steel and are burglar proof with time locks, etc. The stairs are of marble with ornamental wrought iron railings.

The second story is reached by three stairways. The halls have handsome tile floors, are wainscoted (sic) and have handsomely finished ceilings. The district court rooms are 50 X 70 feet each and are two stories in height, provided with galleries for spectators. There are no columns in these courtrooms except the minor ones to support the galleries.

Notwithstanding the fact that to some observers the courthouse was outwardly a massive and beautiful building, it did not escape unfavorable criticism. While most agreed that the building was very aesthetic and pleasing to the eye, the interior arrangement was the subject of much uncomplimentary discussion. The most serious objection was the location of the large court in the center of the building, which, the critics alleged, virtually divided the structure into two parts connected only by a narrow hallway and a single row of interior rooms. To accommodate this court, the critics opined, space for rooms and corridors in the building had been sacrificed.

With the exception of the gallery around the court and the hallways along the west side of the building, nearly all of the walkways in the building were considered narrow, the majority of them hardly exceeding six feet in width. Apparently to some observers, the hallways, by reason of their short turns and acute angles, were very tortuous and dark. Critics claimed that throughout the building there were numerous sharp corners and cut-offs, which were, useless as arranged. Also, they complained that the entranceways to some of the rooms such as to confuse persons who were not familiar with the route of the narrow halls. Another point of criticism focused on the smallness of many of the rooms and their inconvenient arrangement. Especially signaled out for criticism was the arrangement of the rooms for the Court of Civil Appeals on the third floor. Numerous other points about the building were also criticized but they pertained mainly to questions of small detail.

After some difficulties with tenants in existing structures and businesses, the leases which had not yet expired, the commissioners conducted groundbreaking ceremonies on August 4, 1891. Soon thereafter workers began construction under the supervision of the architect.

On February 8, 1892, an additional bond issue for \$24,000 was voted by the commissioners. In the meantime, construction continued and by December the foundations were completed, at which point the work abruptly halted because of a

controversy concerning the quality of the workmanship. The charges were to the effect that the work had not been carried out according to specifications; that the contractors had built the foundation of three courses of granite instead of the required five, thereby saving from \$5,000 to \$7,000, which should have reverted to the county; that the cost of concrete work had exceeded the estimates; and that the contractors had received too much money for the work already done. The county commissioners, after conducting an investigation, concluded that the foundations were structurally more substantial as built than they would have been if erected according to the original plan, and that the contractors had not received one cent above their justifiable compensation.

Following the settlement of the foundation controversy, work was further delayed by yet another conflict of opinions. Initially, the county commissioners had selected sandstone from the Brackenridge Quarry for the building. However, the contractors, Dugan and Kroeger, contended that Pecos sandstone would be more appropriate for such a permanent structure as the courthouse. The opposition of County Judge Bryan Callaghan and Commissioner William Boerner to the change in stone contributed to the second major delay. In any event, in spite of these set backs, the cornerstone was laid with Masonic honors, by Alamo Lodge 44 and Anchor Lodge 424 on December 17, 1892.

The ceremonies were very impressive and admirably conducted. Notwithstanding the cold weather, a local newspaper reported that, during the ceremonies, the vacant space in front of the site was filled with a crowd of spectators and windows and housetops adjacent to the structure carried their complement of interested observers. The Grand Marshal, after forming the procession of Masons in full regalia promptly at 3:00 p.m., led the march west on Commerce Street, proceeded by the Twenty Third United States Infantry Band. Upon arrival at the courthouse site, the Masons conducted a formal review.

Following the customary cornerstone ritual, a metal box was placed in the cavity provided in the stone. Deposited in the box were the following articles: a copy of the constitution of the Grand Lodge of Texas; Proceedings of the Fifty-Sixth Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge; By Laws of Alamo Lodge 44 with a membership roster; By Laws of Anchor Lodge 424 with membership roll; a document of dispensation to the Alamo Lodge and Anchor Lodge to appear jointly in procession for the laying of the cornerstones; a program of the ceremonies; issues of the San Antonio Daily Express for the dates of December 15, 16 and 17, 1892; the dedication address of Grand Master McLeary; Taylor's Monitor, a newspaper published by Alamo Lodge; eight linotype lines by the San Antonio Daily Express; a checklist of county officers, and various articles by county commissioners and other persons in the audience.

The actual work of placing the cornerstone was done by electricity and the huge stone was superbly handled, after which the Masons paraded around the Plaza, then proceeded to Alamo Plaza, and finally to the Lodge. That evening a dinner dance was held at Turner Hall, with the facility handsomely lighted, and music provided by an

orchestra in the stand. With about 75 couples in attendance, the orchestra performed ten numbers for their enjoyment.

Delays and rising costs, as well as continuing changes in plans, created more problems, all of which required that two additional bond issues be submitted to the voters for approval. The fourth bond issue for \$115,000 was voted affirmatively on August 18, 1893, and a fifth for \$82,000 on November 14, 1895. Shortly thereafter, the San Antonio Express reported that the building was completed with the exception of the interior ceilings. Less than a month later, nearly all the county and district offices had moved into their new quarters in the building.

In October, 1895, a third controversy erupted regarding the acceptability of the plumbing, which resulted in the arrest of the plumbing contractors. This crisis was initiated by the City Plumbing Inspector who determined that the work violated city ordinances governing that aspect of construction. Embarrassingly, the court dismissed the case when attorneys for the defendant showed evidence that the county commissioners, and not the contractors, were the parties responsible for the alleged violation of the city ordinances in respect to plumbing.

On October 28, 1896 the architect, James Riley Gordon, advised the county commissioners that he could not consider the building acceptable under the contract because of deficiencies in the plumbing, heating, and electrical work which did not comply with the drawings and specifications. Two days later, a board of arbitration was appointed. Eventually the problems were resolved, and final work on the courthouse progressed satisfactorily toward completion under the supervision of George Dugan, Otto P Kroeyer, and David Hughes.

Bexar County has had a system of courts since the adoption of the Texas Constitution in December, 1836. With the completion of the final Bexar County Courthouse, it has been the center of local and regional judicial activity. In 1896, the courthouse provided facilities for the 37th and 45th Judicial District Courts. The Texas Legislature created the 37th Judicial District Court in 1884, and the 45th in 1889. The need for prompt expansion of courthouse facilities is explained by the increase in the number of courts housed in the structure, including the 4th Court of Civil Appeals. By the way of review, the legislature authorized the 57th Judicial District Court in 1899, the 73rd in 1911, the 94th in 1923. Later, between 1957 and 1969, the legislature added the 131st, 144th, 150th, 166th, 186th, and 187th District Courts. Only more recently, in 1977, the Legislature created four more district courts: the 225th, 226th, 227th and the 228th. In addition to these, there are six county courts at law, five Justice of the Peace Courts, the District Attorney, the County Clerk, and the District Clerk, all located in the Bexar County Courthouse.

The 19th century courthouse, proved adequate as constructed for nearly twenty years. In 1914, the first major expansion of a five-story addition on the south side of the building was begun. The addition was completed the following year. The architects were

Leo M. J. Dielmann and Charles T Boelhauwe, with the H. N. Jones Construction Company serving as contractor.

Between 1920 and 1924, the residents of Bexar County again decided that the courthouse was not large enough to serve this thriving community properly. In 1925, the electorate voted \$2,000,000 in revenue bonds. A fifth story was added to the center of the building, and the green tile was installed. Two wings were augmented on the west side. As in the 1914 work, the granite and sandstone to match the original structure were used. In the public spaces the workers installed tile flooring, but in the courtroom and libraries they used cork. A special feature of the renovation was that every office was artificially ventilated, heated or cooled. Up to that date it was the only courthouse that had such equipment.

Unfortunately, the 1926 remodeling destroyed the east side patio, which signified the end of the spiral stairways as well as the disappearance forever of the statue of justice that had decorated the tower. The new work, completed in October, 1928, brought the overall dimensions of the courthouse to 400 feet long and 140 feet wide. The architects were Phelps and Dewees, Emmett T. Jackson and George Willis. The engineering was performed by E. Simpson Company, with Walsh and Burney as the general contractors.

For almost forty years, the Bexar County Courthouse remained unchanged. Then, in 1963, a new project called for the construction of facilities for a new County Court-at Law in the southwest corner of the courthouse's second floor, and for the remodeling of county clerk's offices on the first floor and in the basement.

Again, in June, 1970, the county commissioners approved a proposal for extensive remodeling. They projected an estimate of \$2,600,000 to modernize and expand the entire structure. Moreover, a spatial addition of 24,000 square feet was made to the southwest corner of the building. Central air conditioning and heat system were installed, as well as new plumbing and electrical wiring. During the renovation process, two perfectly preserved cisterns and traces of an aqueduct going into Main Street were uncovered. An old grave was also unearthed in the parking lot. For the first time, the courthouse was connected to the city's water system. Previously, the plumbing had been so inadequate that a cistern on the roof provided supplemental water to the building. On August 28, 1970, a completely new telephone system, Centrex, was inaugurated for all offices. In the 1972 remodeling, a major portion of the westside of the building was destroyed. In neither of these two later additions were the same materials used to complement the original structure. Although Edward R Gondeck was the architect for both the 1963 and 1970 projects, Hilmer Uhr served as contractor for the 1963 work, and Wallace L. Boldt for the 1972 remodeling.

After expanding south from the original building, the courthouse extended west and then southwest. In 1973, a new sixth floor was constructed above the-then law library complex on the fifth floor. The sixth floor was to accommodate staff offices, a boardroom, two conference rooms, and ancillary quarters. The cost of the remodeling

and expansion of the law library was estimated at \$124,000. The project architects were Jack Peterson and John Williams.

On May 27, 1976, a few interesting details were revealed when the courthouse received its first bath in more than 80 years. A thorough cleaning, with thousands of gallons of pressurized water, disclosed various decorations that had been carved above the courthouse entrance. The entire process, which required a week at a cost of a few thousand dollars, was the first external washing the structure had received since it was built during the 1890's.

Also rediscovered during the cleansing process were several antique brass lamps. Actually, the lamps had been in plain sight at the courthouse entrances, but black paint obscured their aesthetic beauty. Under the direction of official courthouse custodian, County Commissioner Frank B. Vaughan, the lamps were taken down, refurbished, and then reset on their mounting. Vaughan, responsible for most of the courthouse decor for many years, also reinstalled antique brass knobs and handles on office doors. Paintings by local artists and old photographs of the courthouse also decorate the corridors and hallways, visible reminders of Vaughan's innovations in housekeeping.

In January, 1975, the bell from the U.S.S San Jacinto was installed on the south lawn, after Frank Vaughan decided "we needed something to spruce up our appearance." Benches, trees, and markers honoring the four presidents of the Republic of Texas also line the walks on the East Side of the courthouse .

By January 1977, the county commissioners once more discussed the topic of a new county administration building. Local architects were invited to submit plans for a new county administration building to be located across Main Avenue from the present courthouse. Two years previously, the county had purchased blocks of real estate immediately west of the courthouse for purposes of expansion. Also, the city and county had appointed a select committee of citizens to study the feasibility of a joint government building or complex.

The need for space became more evident with the creation of four additional district courts, the 225th, 226th, 227th and the 228th. A logistics struggle emerged in the Bexar County Courthouse. At issue was the location of the facilities for the four new district courts. By March 15, 1977, the commissioners produced a space plan allotting room for all four new district courts within the structure of the Bexar County Courthouse. The plan advocated remodeling the Central Jury Room on the second floor of the courthouse by converting half of the space into a Courtroom with the other half retained as the Juror's room. The three other district courts moved into facilities vacated by the county judges. A portion of the wall between the Sheriff's Office and the news reporters' room was removed to accommodate a section of the constabulary in the former press area.

On May 19, 1977, Commissioners Court approved a contract for the initial plans for remodeling the courthouse with Ford, Powell & Carson, John Franklin Williams Associates and Humberto Saldana, Associated Architects. The group, chosen from a

list of 36, was assigned responsibility for planning present and future space needs of the county in the proposed building. However, the commissioners refused to grant the team the authority to begin a planning study on the county's future space needs in conjunction with the City of San Antonio for a proposed municipal county government building.

Within three months, the team of architects presented to the commissioners a preliminary site report. In the opinion of the architects, the survey of all available buildings within two and one half blocks disclosed that not one had enough space for expansion. In view of these physical restrictions, to meet future office space needs, they recommended that the county courthouse should be expanded by erecting a building on the parking lot across Main Street. Since the county already owned the parking lot, the architects urged the commissioners to purchase the rest of the block. The architects then presented six proposals for using the lot, ranging from separate office buildings and an eight-story parking garage to an office building constructed above an underground-parking garage.

By October 12, 1977, Bexar County had just about decided on a unilateral action without the city's participation on construction of a new downtown administrative building to relieve its critical space shortage. Shortly, thereafter, municipal officials informed County Judge A. J. Ploch that the city was not prepared to participate in a cooperative construction venture at that time.

If a new building does become a reality, the county would invest about \$4million, mostly its allotment of Federal revenue-sharing funds, and leave the judicial courts in the existing Bexar County Courthouse. Admittedly, some court related offices would remain in the old historical building.

Recently, the Texas Historical Commission nominated the Bexar County Courthouse for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. On August 29, 1977, when its name entered the Register, it received the privilege and protection extended under the Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Certainly no other building of that type has had such widespread impact upon local history. Its monumental quality and location make it a real symbol of the community. As such it reflects the physical and social organization of countless American communities. This building is the only major remaining structure of the Romanesque style in the San Antonio area.

It has often been noted that one of the most important roles of the courthouse was symbolic. The Wharton Independent, in 1888 observed: "It has been truly said that the glory of a people is inspired by the genius of their institutions, by the monuments they build and the edifices they erect . . . How well it is then, in this era of progress, that we people of Wharton should set up in our gateway a structure that shall proclaim to the world our advanced ideas, our high conception of patriotism, and our love for the beautiful in art . . . Build, build high this temple of justice, that the virtues of our people may endure forever." And so it has been with the Bexar County Courthouse.

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