



■ Williamson County's current courthouse in Georgetown — its fifth one — was built in 1911 in the Beaux Arts style, with arched windows and French Neoclassical adornments. Visitors can climb the impressive spiral staircase with marble wainscoting. Tours are given most Friday and Saturday afternoons. One of the courthouse's most infamous cases, in the early 1920s, involved the first successful prosecution and jailing of several members of the Ku Klux Klan. Today, the county's criminal courts are in a separate facility.

STANDING PROUD

■ Lee County's courthouse in Giddings is its second one. It was built in 1899 for \$32,270, replacing the original courthouse, which burned two years earlier. The building is designed in the Richardson Romanesque style, named after Henry Hobson Richardson, a prominent American architect who mixed classic French, Spanish and Italian elements. Limestone arches and a striking red brick exterior lend grandeur to the building. The interior showcases a rotunda and marble tile, and the courtroom features expanses of woodwork and a metal ceiling. Of note: The bell tower is the highest point in Lee County.



A look at the 14 courthouses that grace the Bluebonnet region

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They are the hub of public life in our county seats, the buildings where residents engage in the mundane paying of taxes, the joy of getting married and the very serious pursuit of justice. Everything from land disputes to murder trials unfold within the courthouses of the 14 counties where Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative provides most or some of the electricity.

Many of the courthouses are ornate, architectural beauties that date to the 1800s, usually towering over a town square. The newest was built in the 1960s.

Texas has 254 counties but has a few more courthouses than that because some counties now have more than one courthouse to handle growing demands. More than 240 of them are historic buildings still in use. Eighty were built before 1900. The Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, administered by the Texas Historical Commission, has provided millions of dollars in grants to restore some of these treasures. Nearly 140 are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Fire took a toll on more than 100 original courthouses in Texas. Wood-frame construction, open fireplaces, faulty wiring, lightning, under-equipped volunteer fire departments and a handful of arson cases were to blame. The limestone, granite and marble used to rebuild grand courthouses in the late 1800s were more fire-resistant.

Texas' oldest courthouse, dating to 1861, is in Cass County in East Texas, and the newest likely will be that of Aransas County in Rockport, which should be rebuilt by 2021 after severe damage from Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

From the stately Greek, Renaissance and Romanesque Revival architecture of the late 1800s to the Classical Revival and Art Deco of the early 1900s, Bluebonnet-area courthouses remain majestic. ■



Milam County's fifth — and current — courthouse in Cameron was built in 1892 and underwent a lavish renovation in the 2000s. It is a classic example of the Renaissance Revival style of architecture, with Corinthian columns towering above the entryway. A replica of the statue that symbolizes justice was mounted atop a clock tower in 1895, but the tower and statue were removed in the late 1930s due to safety concerns. A new tower and statue were added during the recent restoration. The adjacent old jail is now the Milam County Historical Museum.



■ Bastrop County's first courthouse was built in 1832, but it burned. Today's building, above, is Bastrop's third courthouse, built in 1883. Originally, it was a classic example of the Renaissance Revival architectural style. It was designed by F.E. Ruffini and Jasper Preston, who also planned and built the historic Driskill Hotel in Austin. Next door, the old county jail, built in 1891, is a striking Victorian-style building with tan and contrasting red brick window arches. It housed criminals until 1974.

■ At right, Colorado County's courthouse in Columbus, completed in 1891, is another Renaissance Revival-style building, its overhanging eaves inspired by 16th century Italian design. It suffered tornado damage in 1909, losing its original clock tower and part of the roof. A copper dome replaced the tower, and a large clock is there now.



■ The Caldwell County Courthouse, at left, has appeared in movies and TV shows. Widely regarded as one of the finest courthouses in Central Texas, this ornate 1894 Second Empire-style structure dominates Lockhart's historic district. Unlike many courthouses in the area, the interior remains largely as it was when originally built, down to the elaborate hand-carved features on the wood staircase posts.

■ Gonzales County's first Greek Revival-style courthouse burned in 1893 and was replaced three years later with the Romanesque Revival structure that remains today in Gonzales, below. The 'Come and Take It' present-day floor mat highlights a defining piece of Texas history — a small, bronze cannon previously given to Texas troops by Mexico. At the Battle of Gonzales, in 1835, Texans created a flag bearing a black star, a cannon and the challenge 'Come and Take It,' a saying that lives on in Texas.





■ Guadalupe County's fourth — and current — courthouse, above, with its clean Art Deco and Moderne lines and limestone facade, was completed in 1935 in Seguin. It replaced an 1889 structure built in the Italianate style. Carved into the limestone above the building's entrance are the figures of Justice and Wisdom. A striking eagle sculpture sits atop the county's veterans memorial, which is surrounded by 2,100 paver stones bearing the names of members of the military from Guadalupe County.



■ The atrium of the Fayette County Courthouse in La Grange, above center, was open to the sky when it was first built. Today it has a glass ceiling. Romanesque Revival through and through, Fayette County's fourth — and current — courthouse dates to 1891 and has undergone periodic renovations since the 1970s. The style harkens back to medieval Europe. It has rounded arches and a checkerboard exterior made of limestone and blue and red Pecos sandstone. High above the main entrance is a tall clock tower.



■ Austin County's concrete Moderne courthouse in Bellville, above right, dates to 1960. It is the county's fifth courthouse. Its predecessor, built in 1888, was known as the 'majestic' courthouse and had a colorful past. A cornerstone contained a time capsule, which was opened in 1960. The contents were a disappointment because most of the paper items inside had rotted away. Today's Austin County courthouse has its own time capsule, added when it was built.

■ Burleson County's fourth — and current — courthouse, below, in Caldwell, was finished in 1927, replacing an 1890 structure. Architect J.M. Glover built the square courthouse in the Classical Revival architectural style, which played off the look of ancient Greek temples. Windows vary in shape from square to arched to rectangular. Outside, a large memorial bears the names of the county's veterans who died fighting for their country in World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.



■ Art Deco style defines Washington County's fourth — and current — courthouse in Brenham, above, with clean limestone lines on its exterior and geometric detailing characteristic of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration, which funded the construction.



■ Hays County's courthouse in San Marcos, above right, is its fourth, built in 1908 in a predominantly Renaissance Revival style. The fountain near the east entrance was added in 1907, complete with a trough for dogs to quench their thirst. The courthouse appeared in the 2014 Oscar-winning film 'Boyhood.'

■ Travis County's busy six-story civil courthouse, bottom right, is in the heart of downtown Austin. The current building was completed in 1931. Its impressive use of limestone and ornamentation inside and out make it a standout example of Art Deco, or Art Moderne, an architectural style popular during the Great Depression.



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