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DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The White County Courthouse is a two-story masonry structure styled in what might loosely be termed Classical Revival. The later modifications of both the plan and facade have diluted its pure style.

The original structure, now the center of the present "H" Plan, was completed in 1871. The east and west facades of this original building are virtually unchanged and are visible as the indented portion of the east and west elevations of the building.

In 1912, two-story additions were constructed on both the north and south sides of the original courthouse. These additions are very compatibly designed and the materials and methods of construction are identical to that of the original building. 20.2.12 1 1 Te

The ground floor of the courthouse was executed in smoothed faced stone. laid in regular ashlar bond while the remainder, the second and parapet walls are of brick masonry in common bond.

The east and west elevations are identical. They are dominated by double tierred entry porticos capped by triangular pediments. The ground floor entry is defined by a stone entry arcade. The stone courses match the buildings ground floor stonework and each arcade entry is formed by five semicircular arches with stone voussoirs and keystone.

At the second floor level four round fluted columns and four square fluted pilasters rise from a rectangular ballastal porch, to support the pediment. The columns and pilasters of both the original building and additions are capped by Corinthiah capitals. The second level porch ceiling is comprised of three semicircular vaults springing between column bays.

The pediment is decorated by a denticulated cornice and a circular ventilation.

The entire structure is balanced by a wide frieze, also capped with a denticulated cornice, above which is a plainly capped parapet.

The clay tiled roof is a slightly sloping hip with the exception of the pedimented porticos. The hipped effect is however diminished by its very slight slope and parapets.

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PAGE 1

Rising from the center of the roof is a square planned clock/ observation tower. Each of the towers and elevations are identical and consist of a stylized venetian window, clock face, and a band of small scale denticulated cornice rising to a peak above each window. The tower roof is a shape reminiscent of sail vaulted roofs and is fashioned of metal. A flag pole extends from the roof's highest point.

All fenestration in the stone work of the ground floor is spanned by matching stone lintels. The window and door openings in the brick of the original courthouse structure are spanned by decorative slightly arched cut-stone lintels whereas, the lintels of the addition are simple stone. All fenestration is symmetrical about the center of each elevation.

Notable interior features include handsome stairways to the second (courtroom) level and beautiful ceramic tile (l" hexagon) floors.

With the exception of minor interior intrusions; such as lowered ceilings, _inappropriate finish materials and paint; the court-house remains much the same as it did in 1912 following its addition.

SIGNIFICANCE

		ECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW	4
ARCHEOLUGY-PREHISTORIC	COMMUNITY PLANNING	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	-RELIGION
ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	CONSERVATION	<u>X</u> LAW	-SCIENCE
AGRICULTURE	ECONOMICS	LITERATURE	-SCULPTURE
XARCHITECTURE	EDUCATION	MILITARY	
ART	ENGINEERING	MUSIC	THEATER
COMMERCE	EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	PHILOSOPHY	TRANSPORTATION
_COMMUNICATIONS	_INDUSTRY -	POUTICS/GOVERNMENT	-OTHER (SPECIFY)
		COMMUNICATIONSINDUSTRY -	COMMUNICATIONSINDUSTRYPOUTICS/GOVERNMENT

SPECIFIC DATES	BUILDER/ARCHITECT M. H. Baldwin
1870-1912	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The largest number of architecturally significant public buildings in Arkansas are the courthouses scattered over the State's seventyfive counties. A structural symbol of American government, the county courthouses serves as the center of local political activity. Often the largest and most costly building in the county, the courthouse is almost always a source of pride to the citizens who financed and make use of its facilities.

White County was created by the Territorial Legislature on October 23, 1835, from parts of Pulaski, Independence, and Jackson counties as Arkansas' thirty-fifth county. White County contained 1,020 square miles at its creation, making it the second largest county in Arkansas. County court records date from May 23, 1836.

The David Crise farm near White Sulphur Springs, now the site of Oak Grove Cemetery, temporarily served as the first seat of county government. The legislature established a five-man commission to permanently locate the county seat. The commission discussed Frankfort as a possible site, but it took no action. By 1838, an irate group of sixty-five citizens petitioned the General Assembly for a new commission to locate the courthouse. The commission decided upon a site near the present location. John Howerton promised to donate the property for the courthouse, but he died before he had signed the deed of conveyance. The guardian appointed to care for Howerton's widow and children refused to sign the conveyance, and another site had to be selected.

In 1840, Crawford Walker, who married the daughter of Colonel John Magness, an early pioneer of White County, donated ten acres of land to the commission. Lots were sold, and the revenue was used to construct White County's first permanent courthouse, located just southwest of the present courthouse. The first courthouse was a onestorey log structure that contained a 4 foot by 10 foot table and two 10 foot benches. The courthouse and furnishings cost the county \$138.50.

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The United States Congress authorized two million acres of land between the St. Frances and Arkansas Rivers to be used as bounties for the veterans of the War of 1812. If a veteran was unsatisfied with the property he drew from the lot, he could exchange the bounty for another unoccupied section. In 1842, Allen McVey disliked his original 160-acre lot near Conway and selected as his bounty the Searcy townsite. McVey soon sold the property to William Pelham but Pelham neglected to obtain a deed. Israel Moore purchased the land three years later. When McVey died soon after this, an heir of his, John Osborn, sold forty acres of the land to David Maxwell and James Walker. Subsequent lawsuits resulted in the United States Supreme Court deciding the case. The Supreme Court ruled that Israel Moore held title to the land. Moore honored all previous sales of lots in the business district and donated the courtsquare, as well as acreage for a city park and a church to the city.

Israel Moore, a surveyor from Philadelphia, settled in Searcy and was commissioned to design the streets for the city. Adhering to the specifications of the Territorial Land Ordinance of 1785, Moore used rectangular surveys with streets running due north-south and eastwest, which divided the land into townships of thirty-six square miles. Moore centered the courtsquare in the town. He named the streets of Searcy to honor the major Streets of Philadelphia near Independence Hall. However, he did not include a "Chestnut Street" in his grid; instead he used "Main Street." Moore numbered the streets running north-south, but these have since been changed to names. Moore also laid out the streets of Texarkana.

By 1850 White County needed a larger courthouse. The second courthouse was a two-storey frame structure with single-storey adjacent wings. The main building measured 30 feet by 20 feet, while the wings measured 20 feet by 14 feet. The new courthouse cost \$1,000 and occupied the site of the present courthouse.

In November, 1859, a committee to study the need for a new courthouse reported that White County indeed did need a new, larger courthouse. The committee presented a proposal designed by H. H. Higgins that called for a two-storey brick building with 56 square feet and at a cost not to exceed \$12,000. Stephen Brundidge received the contract and construction was scheduled to begin in April, 1861. The Civil War delayed the plans until 1869. However, the old courthouse had been sold, moved to a new location and converted into the Burrow Hotel. UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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The county rented space in the Masonic Lodge for \$450 annually until a new courthouse could be constructed.

In August 1869, County Clerk, John Cole, advertised that sealed proposals would be accepted by the county until September 6, 1869, for the construction of a new White County Courthouse in Searcy. The county authorized \$25,000 for the courthouse and commissioned architect, M. H. Baldwin of Memphis, Tennessee, to design it. Wyatt Sanford of Searcy received the contract with a low bid of \$25,000. Costs, however, far exceeded the original estimates.

The new Courthouse, completed in 1871, was a very imposing structure. The first storey was constructed of cut stone, while brick was used on the second storey. The first storey contained the county offices and vault but was designed to accommodate social functions as well. The courtroom was located in the second storey. A large clock-tower rested atop the courthouse and a bell, dated 1855, that resembled the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia was put in the tower. The bell has traditionally functioned through the years to commemorate special events such as New Years, national victories, and the beginning of circuit court sessions.

The new courthouse sufficed until 1912 with only minor alterations. In 1878, four gas lamps were positioned at each corner of the square, and a new tin roof was installed. An iron picket fence replaced the original wooden fence in 1888.

In 1912, the courthouse received major remodeling. Frank Gibb, an architect from Little Rock, supervised the work. Gibb added protruding wings on the north and south elevations. Cut stone and brick, identical to the original materials, were employed by Gibb. He flattened the hipped roof and removed the gables from the north and south elevations.

One of the most unusual cases tried in the courthouse involved a communal group of Cobbites in 1877. The group were disciples of Reverend Cobb, or the "Walking Preacher," as he preferred to be called. Cobb claimed that he received divine inspiration from God, and he arose each day before sunrise to summon the sun to rise. As a result of "true n No. 10-300a 7, 10-74)

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faith" in Cobb, the group possessed "sanctification"-no member of the group could sin and no bodily harm could come to any member.

The group had settled just outside Searcy early in 1876, but no trouble was registered until the late fall of 1876. A severe drought in the county convinced the Cobbites of the sinfulness of the local residents. As the people traveled past the Cobbites' residence, they were physically dragged from their carriages or horses and forced into the house to pray with Reverend Dover for repentance. One night two intoxicated residents, Carter Humphries and Rufus Blake, decided to stop the Cobbites' interference. The two rode up to the house and a fight ensued between Humphries and Reverend Dover. Blake escaped back to Searcy. Reverend Dover, infuriated by Humphries, commanded that Humphries be beheaded for his sin. The group performed a ritual around the decapitated head and then impaled it on the fence as a lesson for other "Imps of Satan."

A mob organized in Searcy under the leadership of Humphries' brother. The armed mob advanced to the house of the Cobbites and fighting erupted. Several Cobbites, including Reverend Dover and his son-in-law, were killed. On January 26, 1877, five surviving Cobbites were indicted for the murder of Carter Humphries, but on July 28, 1877, they were acquitted of the charge. The court ruled that Reverend Dover and his son-in-law were responsible for the death and both had already received their punishment. The Cobbite group left Searcy and relocated in Randolph County. None of the mob of local residents were ever arrested.

In the summer of 1880, James B. Weaver of Iowa, the Greenback Labor Party candidate for President, spoke at the courthouse square. Weaver and his Vice-presidential candidate, B. J. Chambers of Texas, were defeated by James Garfield and Chester Arthur in the November elections.

The White County Courthouse in Searcy possesses both architectural and historical significance. Although it has been remodeled, the alterations of 1912 were compatibly done and do not detract form the architectural merits of the courthouse. The handsome courthouse, located on the courtsquare, has been an integral part of both county & city history. Local residents are extremely proud of the structure, and it has been well maintained by both county and city funds. Very importantly, the White County Courthouse is the oldest courthouse in Arkansas still functioning as the seat of county government.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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(Searcy: Harding Press, 1976).

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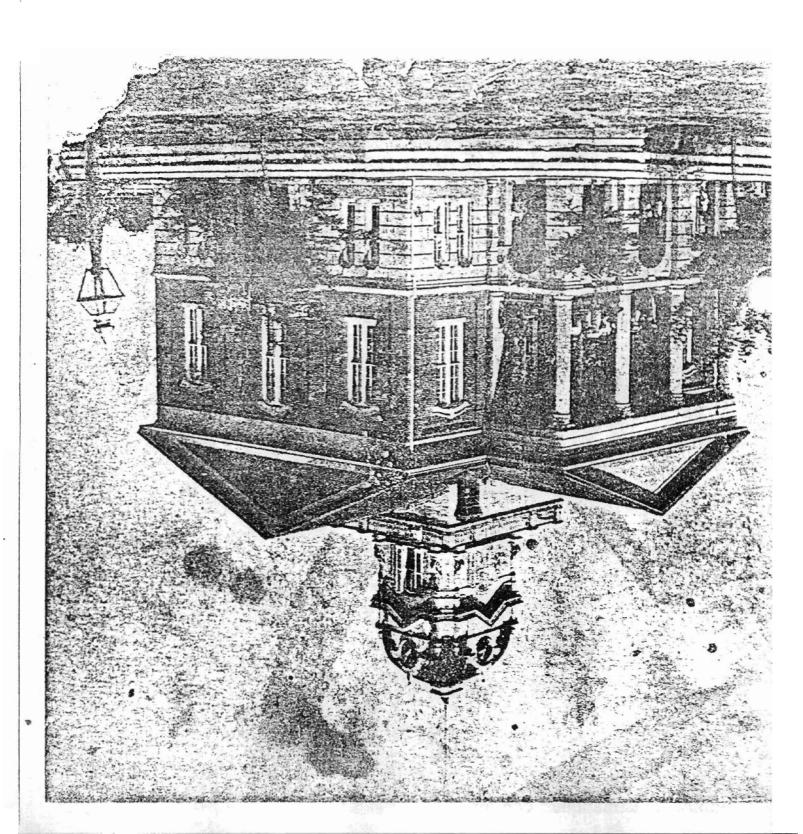
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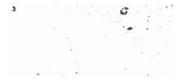
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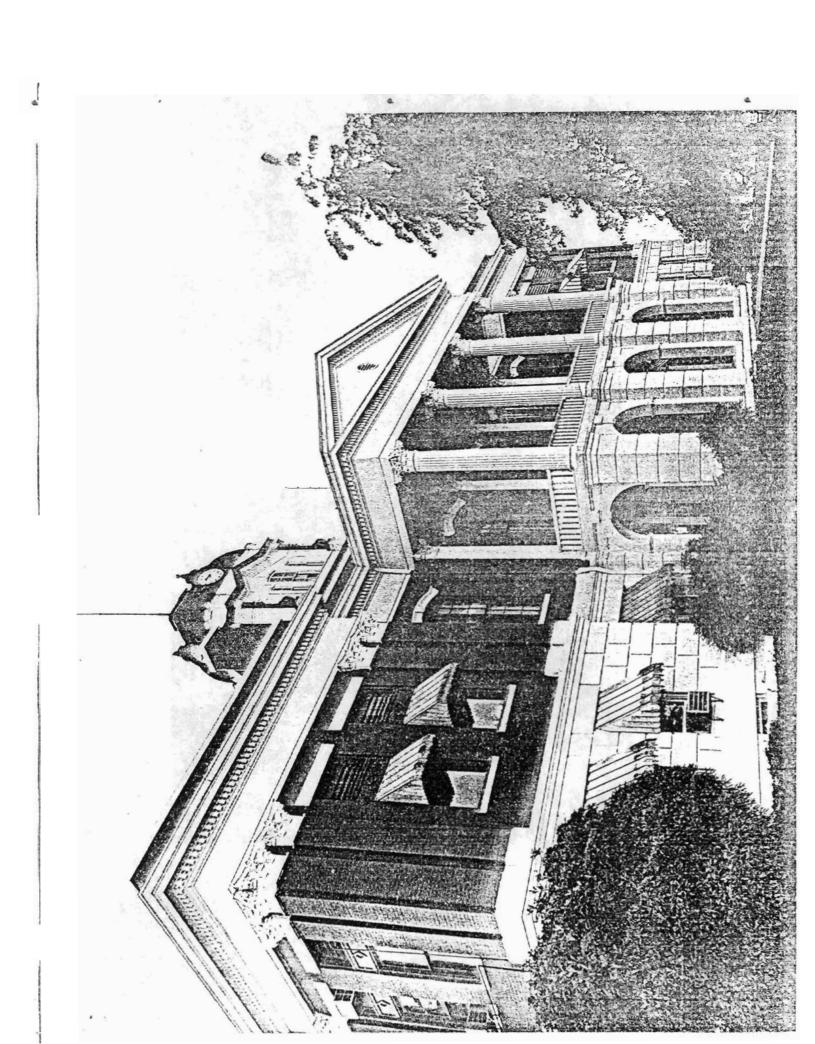
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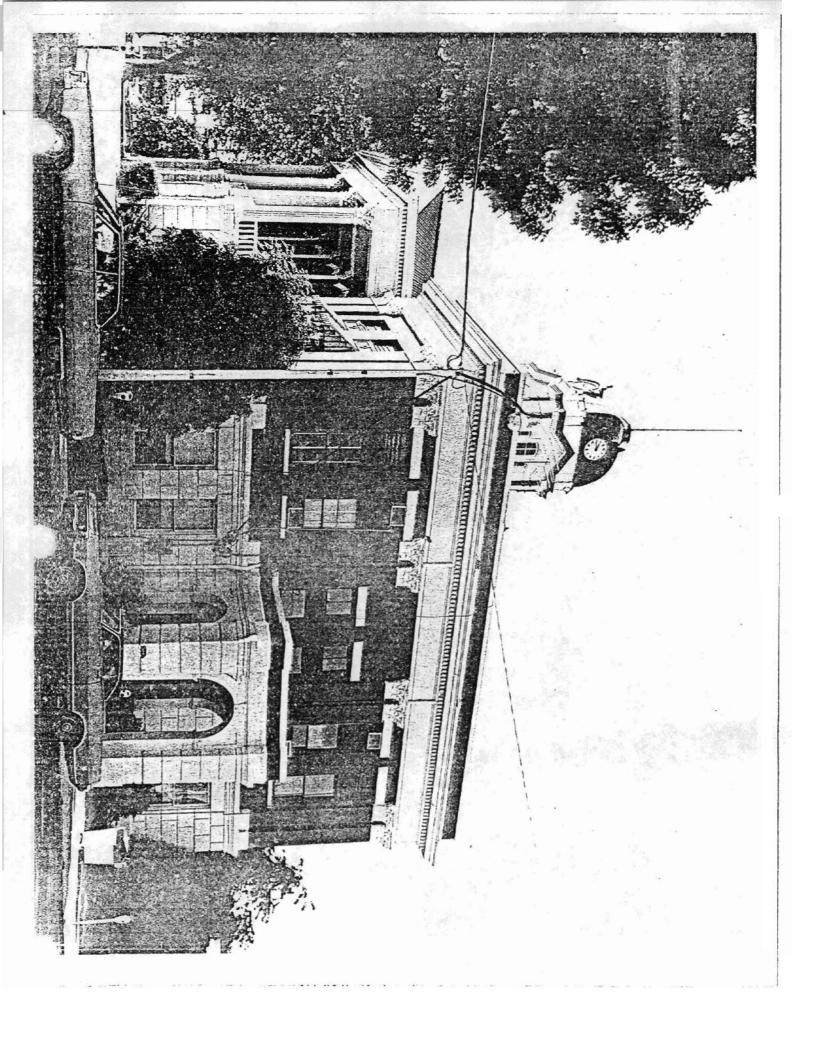
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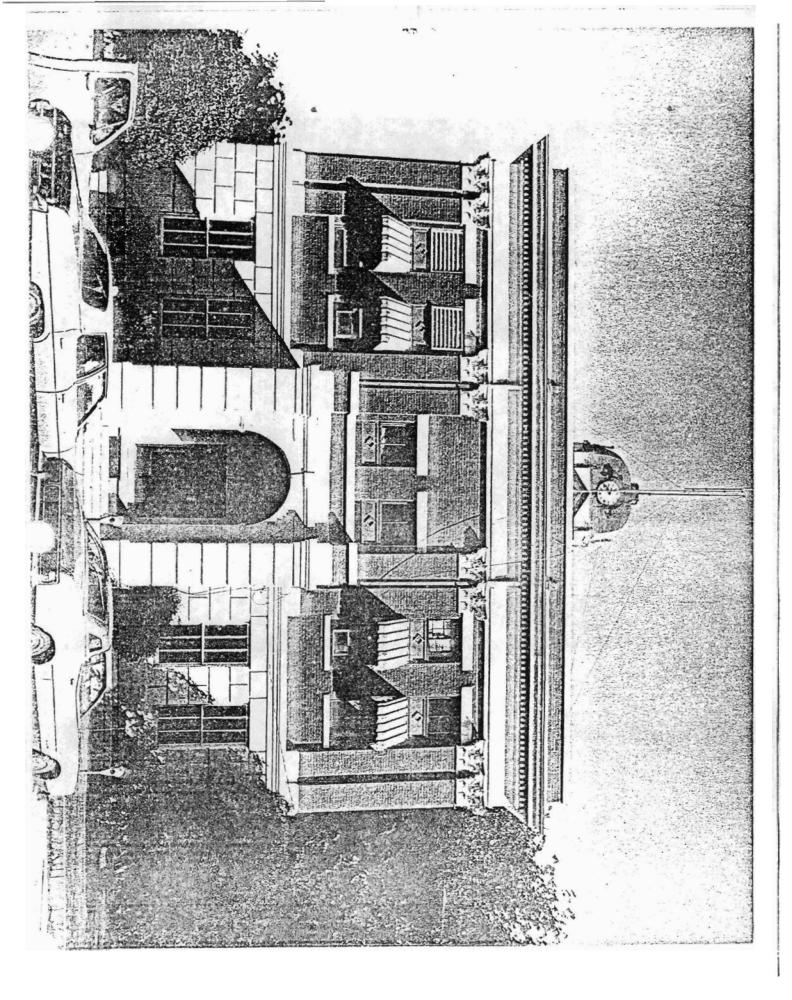
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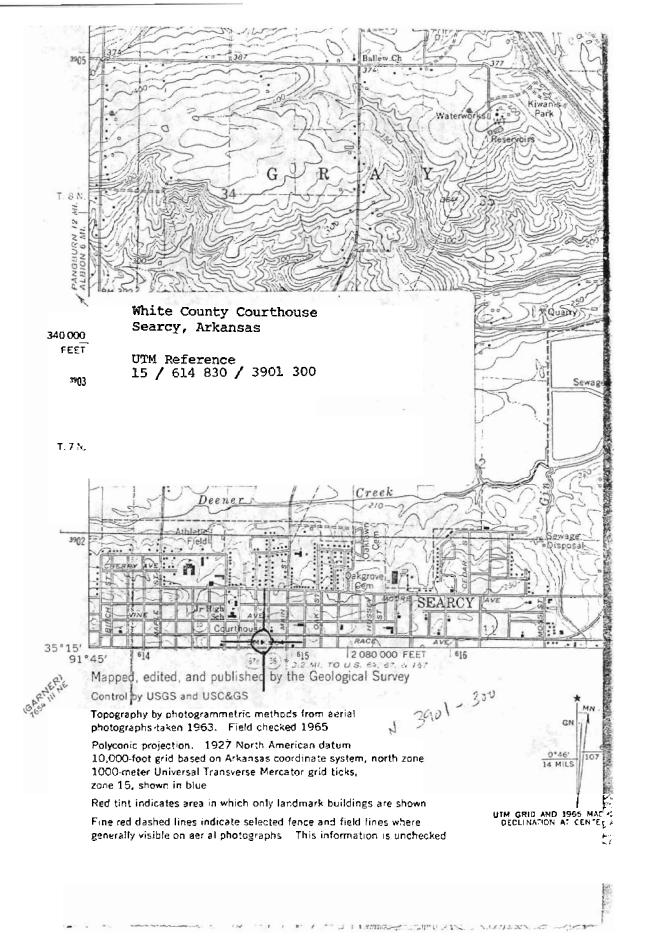
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1. PROPERTY BOUNDARIES

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