





Restoration Preserves Courthouse History and Traditions

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JIM MCKINNIS

As I dangled 40 feet above the intersection, focusing my Nikon F5 on the Wharton County Courthouse, I was suddenly aware that I resembled a fish on a line. Paul Shannon, the county's maintenance supervisor, had convinced a local company to provide a bucket lift truck to raise me above the power lines, giving me the ideal vantage for photos of the courthouse. From this height, I was able to see what the courthouse looked like when it was built in 1889.

ABOVE: SHACKELFORD COUNTY COURTHOUSE (ALBANY)

The first courthouse to be restored under the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program will celebrate the 10th anniversary of its rededication in June 2011.

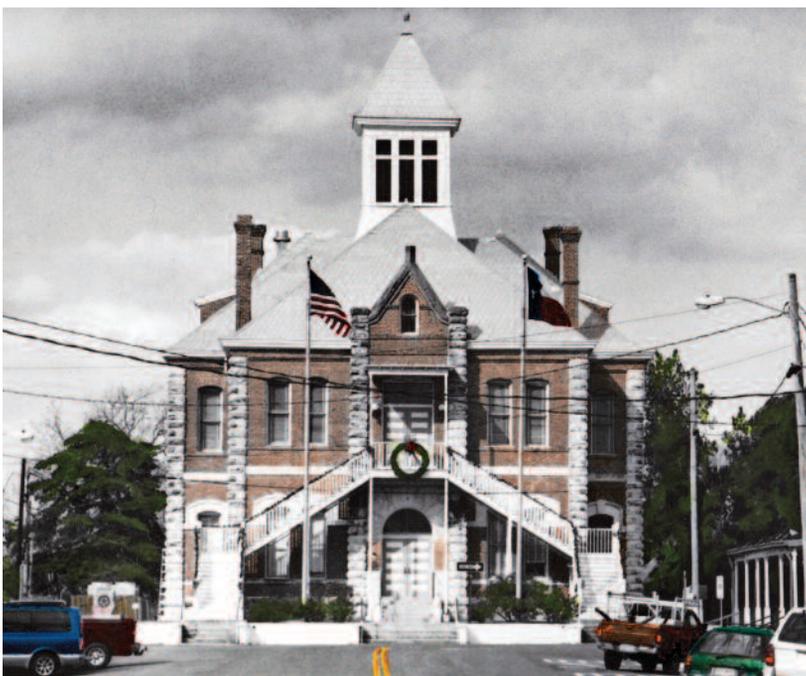
LEFT: 1892 MILAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE (CAMERON)

The Goddess of Justice stands tall atop the restored courthouse.



ABOVE: HILL COUNTY COURTHOUSE (HILLSBORO)

The courthouse was damaged by a fire on New Year's Day in 1993. With help from community members, including Hill County native Willie Nelson, this building was restored.



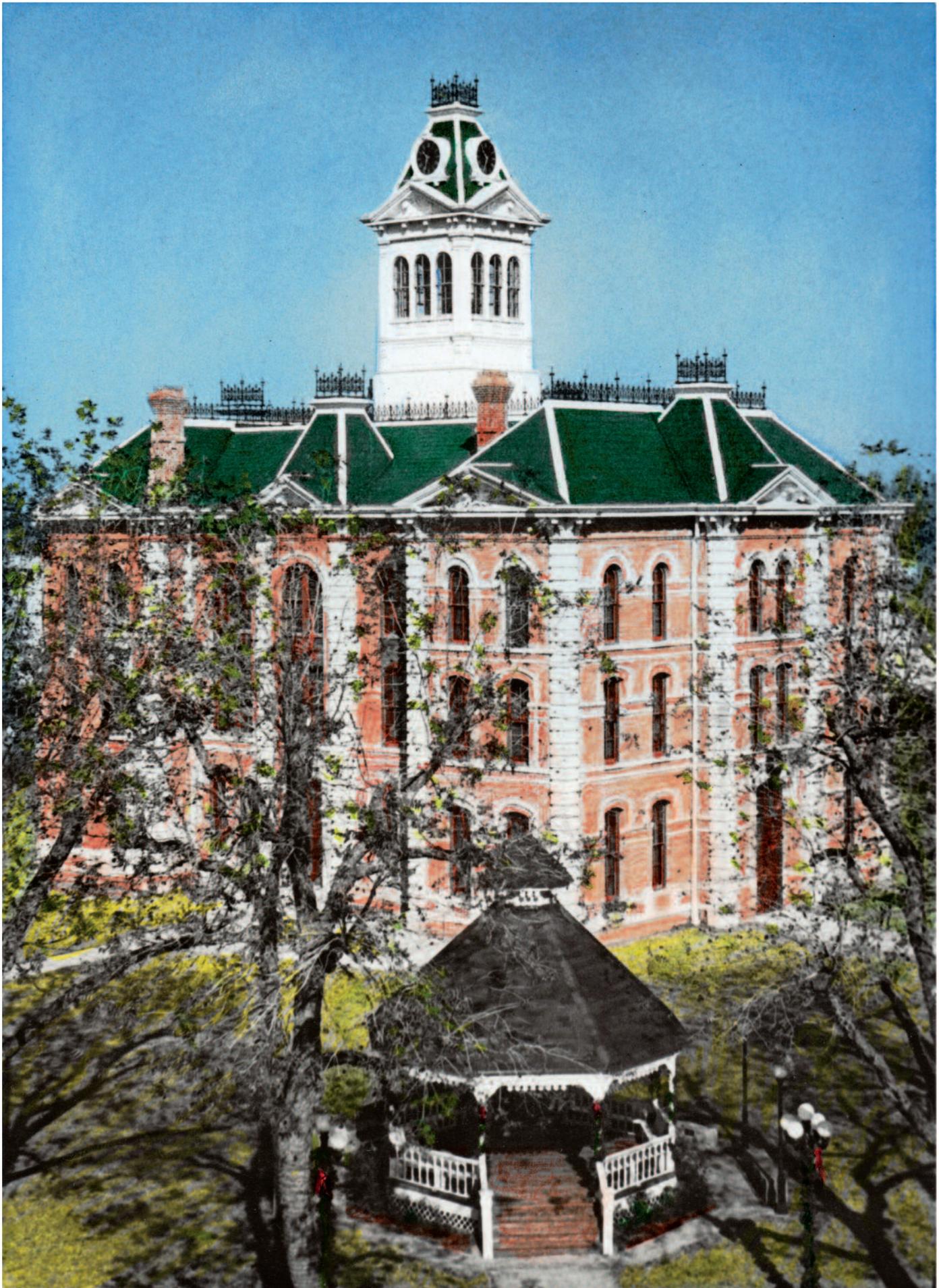
LEFT: GRIMES COUNTY COURTHOUSE (ANDERSON)

As in many smaller communities, "Main Street" runs right up to the courthouse.

OPPOSITE: LLANO COUNTY COURTHOUSE

This picturesque Hill Country courthouse again features its original cupola from 1892.



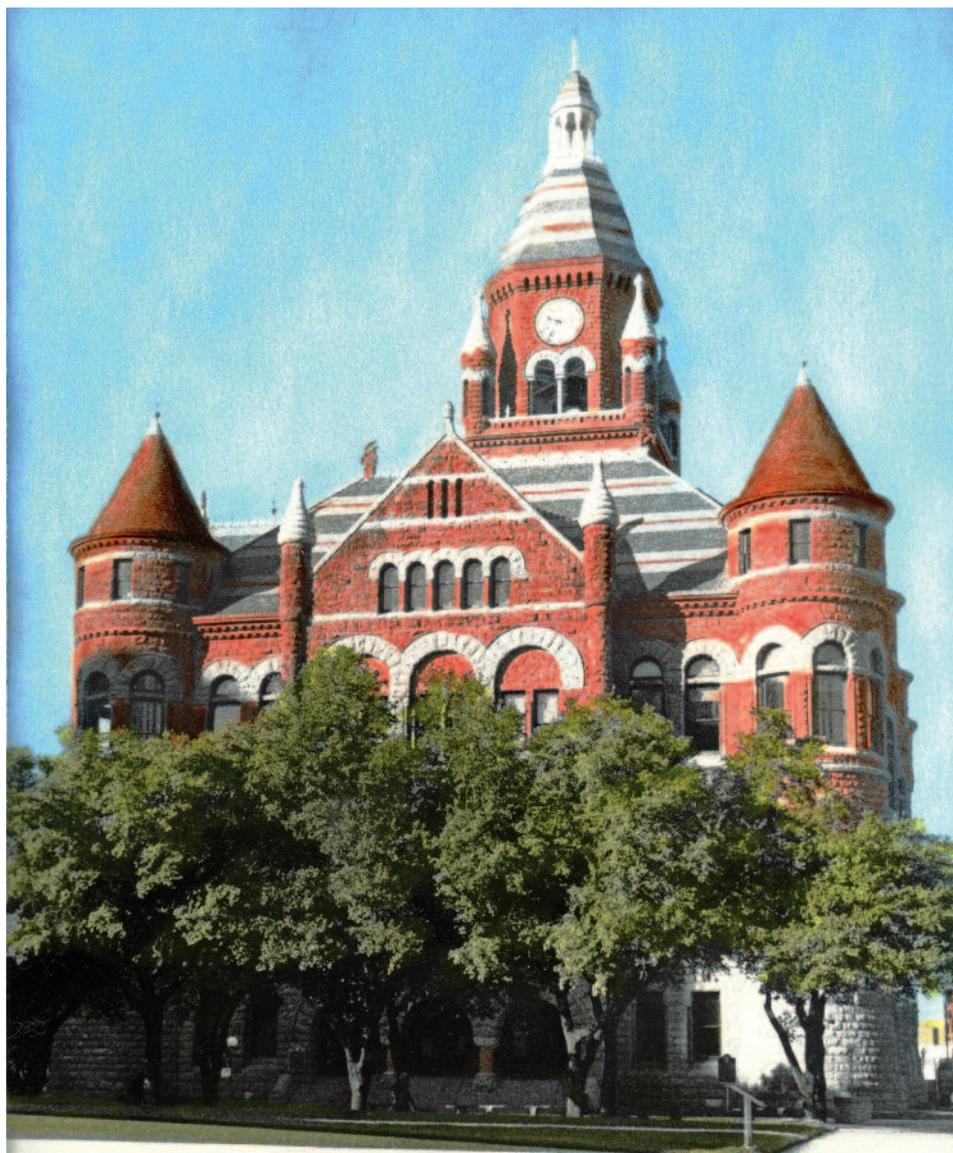


**RIGHT: 1892 “OLD RED”
COURTHOUSE (DALLAS)**

*The restored courthouse now serves
as a museum and cultural center.*

**OPPOSITE: 1889 WHARTON
COUNTY COURTHOUSE**

*The Wharton County Courthouse
was designed by famed Houston architect
Eugene Heiner.*



Wharton County Courthouse Restoration

During the 1930s and 1940s, the Wharton County Courthouse went through extensive remodeling. The clock tower and mansard roof were removed and wings were added to all four sides of the building. The original bricks — made of clay from the banks of the Colorado River — were covered with stucco, giving the courthouse an Art Deco façade.

By the 1990s, the courthouse had become outdated. At first, the community considered demolishing the building and constructing a modern replacement outside of downtown. But thanks to the hard work and efforts of individuals wishing to recover a part of the town's history — and to the support of the Texas Historical Commission (THC) — the courthouse was restored to its original state. This beautiful treasure once again graces the Wharton courthouse square.

Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program

The National Trust for Historic Preservation added Texas courthouses to its list of America's Most Endangered Historic Places in 1998. A year later, the Texas Legislature and Gov. George W. Bush created the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program (THCPP). The program provides partial matching grants to Texas counties for the restoration of their historic county courthouses. As of March 2011, 43 courthouses had been fully restored through the THCPP.

After restoration, courthouses such as the one in Wharton County continue to function in an official capacity. Others, such as “Old Red” in Dallas, find jobs as museums or cultural centers. Whatever the function, restoring these beautiful architectural monuments preserves our history and traditions for future generations. ✪

JIM MCKINNIS

is an Austin photo artist and author of two books on handcolored photography. McKinnis uses black and white film, prints the photographs himself, and colors them by hand. His work has been included in two previous issues of the *Texas Bar Journal* (February 1994 and May 2005). For information, contact him at jamckinnis@sbcglobal.net or (512) 924-0166.