

# The Terrell County Courthouse

The Terrell County Courthouse in Sanderson, Texas, began life in 1906 as a completely different building from what is seen today. The original building was designed by architect Henry T. Phelps in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The district courtroom upstairs featured a paneled dome over the judge's bench, with marvelous woodwork throughout. The building was equipped with the latest business equipment, much of which is now in the county museum.

The fledgling county was served well by this imposing edifice, but by the late 1920s it was evident that the building was too small, and worse, in dilapidated condition. In 1930, choosing to go with a completely different style, the old building was demolished and replaced by a new one, using the old foundation, new materials and the best of salvageable materials from the old. The new building was designed in a modified Mediterranean style, again by Henry T. Phelps at the end of his career, and it was markedly different from the old.

In addition to demolishing the old courthouse, the old jail, a foreboding structure adjacent to the courthouse, was also removed and a third-floor addition was created for the jail and sheriff's office atop the new courthouse.

The new building served through the war years and the 1950s. In the 1960s and '70s, with the advent of new heating and cooling systems and advanced communications, the courthouse was in need of modernization. The sheriff's office and jail had outgrown their quarters on the third floor, and it was time for a change.

In 1983, a major renovation was completed, moving law enforcement from the third floor into a new annex on the north side of the building. The third floor jail was removed and a hipped roof with Spanish terra cotta tile was added to give the building a true Mediterranean appearance. The Terrell County Courthouse is the only courthouse in the state of Texas constructed in this style.

Features inside the core building remain much as they were originally designed. The Clerk's, Treasurer's and Tax Offices have vaults with heavy ornate doors and metal shutters inside to protect against cataclysm. Most of the offices have small windows called transoms over their doors, though now blocked and sealed, with original control mechanisms in place. The building was the pride of its citizenry and a handsome addition to the town.

In 2010, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) contacted Terrell County about renovating one more time, to restore the courthouse to its original 1906 appearance. After a visit by the THC architect, it was deemed too expensive to mount that kind of project with the funds available. The THC has been very successful at doing courthouse restorations in Texas, but in our case, to return the building to its former appearance would require totally demolishing the present structure and building a new one using the old plans and historically correct materials. At an estimated \$10,000,000 price tag, THC funding meant to renovate several courthouses would be totally depleted by just one project.

So, blessed with good bones and a strong foundation, the Terrell County Courthouse shall sit tight, well able to go into the next century as the seat of government for the Cactus Capitol of Texas.