

TEXAS COURTHOUSES DESIGNED BY

OSCAR RUFFINI

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century, the courthouses of Texas served governmental functions as well as being a focal point of early settlements. The courthouses of the late 1800's were frequently the most notable buildings within the county. It was during the prosperous mid and late 1800's, a time of increased wealth and population, that Texas courthouses grew in number and design ornamentation. Due to the increased wealth and population, people became more conscientious of the courthouses they built to represent their county government.

The architects who designed the courthouses had the task of designing a dignified edifice that the people of the county sought. Without exceeding the budgetary restrictions of the county, the courthouse needed to reflect values and hopes of a proud and hopefully economically strong community. A number of architects helped to fulfill the goal of designing such courthouses for Texas' 254 counties.

Purpose

It is the purpose of this study to show the role one architect named Oscar Ruffini played in designing a few of Texas's courthouses in the late 1800's.

The courthouses of the 1890's expressed the pride of a community and their faith in government. The courthouses played a role in contributing to a community, county, and state history. The writer wished to show the contribution Oscar Ruffini made in designing some of the courthouses in Texas.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made for purposes of this study:

1. The courthouse designs which are credited to Oscar Ruffini were representative of his own ideas.
2. The legal documentation conveyed accurate information.
3. The material collected from primary and secondary sources was representative of Oscar Ruffini and his work.

Limitations

Data regarding Oscar Ruffini was limited to information available in the Angelo State University Library, the Tom Green County Library, the San Angelo Standard Times, the Fort Concho Library, the Archives Division of the Texas State Library, the Texas Historical Commission, the Office

of the Sterling County Clerk, the Office of the Sutton County Clerk, the Office of the Crockett County Clerk, Historic Angelo Incorporated, and Oscar Ruffini's goddaughter, Mrs. Alvin Huggins.

Data regarding Oscar Ruffini's plans and specifications were limited to information available in the Fort Concho Library, the Archives Division of the Texas State Library, and documents owned by Dr. Robert V. Prestiano.

Data regarding the architects of Texas courthouses during the late 1800's were limited to information available in the Angelo State University Library and the Tom Green County Library.

Definitions

Although the architectural styles varied from one another, many courthouses combined elements which classified them as either style. Also, the architectural styles often had a time lag of up to thirty-five years in Texas from the vogue of that in Eastern States.

The following definitions are pertinent to this study. They are as follows:

1. Romanesque Revival: Marcus Whiffen (1969, p. 61) points out that the Romanesque Revival began in the mid-1840's. He describes the style in the following way:

This was the revival of the round-arched medieval style that preceded the pointed-arched Gothic. Semicircular arches are used for all openings and sometimes where there are no openings, in series as a form of wall enrichment; in such cases the arches may intersect one another. Nearly always

the round-arch is repeated in miniature in the arcaded corbel table. Under stringcourses and eaves, including the raking eaves of the gables, this is a feature - and may on occasion be the only feature - which distinguished the Romanesque from other round-arched styles. . . . Massing may be symmetrical or asymmetrical. . . . Wall surfaces are broad and smooth.



Source: Robinson, 1974, p. 248

Figure 1. Hopkins County
Courthouse--
James Riely Gordon,
Architect

2. Richardsonian Romanesque (Figure 1): Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886) was a Boston architect whose contribution to architecture in the nineteenth century had enormous influence. Whiffen (1969, p. 133) describes the style in the following way:

Like all Romanesque, this is a round-arched style. However, most of the buildings of the Richardsonian Romanesque are immediately distinguishable from those of the earlier Romanesque Revival by being wholly or in part of rock-faced masonry, while arches, lintels, and other structural features are often emphasized by being of a different stone from the walls. The resultant sense of weight and massiveness is reinforced by the depth the window reveals, the breadth of the planes of the roofs, and . . . a general largeness and simplicity of form.

3. Second Empire (Figure 2): The Second Empire, imported from the France of Napoleon III, reached the Northern States as early as the 1850's. The style remained in vogue throughout parts of Texas as late as the 1890's. The Second Empire is related to the Italianate with its Classical details. Whiffen (1969, p. 103) describes the style in the following way:

The hallmark of the style is the high mansard roof, with a curb around the top of the visible slopes. Dormer windows are universal, both wall dormers and roof dormers being employed (sometimes in the same building); they take many shapes, including the circular. In larger buildings projecting pavilions, central or terminal or both, are usual; each pavilion has its own roof, sometimes with convex slopes. In general, buildings of the Second Empire style are tall boldly modeled, and emphatically three dimensional in effect.



Source: Robinson, 1974, p. 230

Figure 2. Hood County
Courthouse--
W.C. Dodson,
Architect

Summary

The architecture of Texas courthouses during the late 1800's reflected the cultural history of its people, economy and environment. The people of the different counties took considerable pride in their courthouses, as can be seen in the edifices within the community. In the more remote and unstable communities, which were primarily located in west

Texas, the courthouse was often viewed as a symbol of hopes for the future.

A great number of nineteenth century courthouses have been razed or are no longer used for governmental purposes. With the destruction of these edifices, the people of Texas have lost examples of their early architecture as well as of their history. The courthouses played a major role in contributing to community, county, and state history. This study was designed to show what Oscar Ruffini contributed through his designs of courthouses in Texas during the late 1800's.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF TEXAS' LATE 1800'S COURTHOUSE HISTORY AND STYLES

Introduction

In order to best understand the role Oscar Ruffini played in designing Texas' courthouses during the late nineteenth century, it is necessary to understand the history of Texas' early courthouses. The documented styles of architecture in the late nineteenth century courthouses are limited to three architects who practiced at the time in which Oscar Ruffini designed courthouses.

Texas' Early Courthouse History

The courthouses of Texas during the late 1800's were often the most prominent of all buildings in the county and state. The courthouse served as a temple of justice and did much more than that in developing a county's history.

The residents of various towns fought to establish the county seat in their town, for the courthouse location brought distinction, greater commercial activity, and greater community pride to the city or town. The courthouses were built to fulfill the needs of the county government as well as to represent the local people's values

and fulfill their hopes. Robinson (1974, p. 195) states that courthouses "fulfilled fundamental needs for both monuments and symbols: their strength conveyed assurance: their style dignity."

The courthouses of the late nineteenth century served multiple functions aside from the role of county government. Either in the courthouse or in the lawn area surrounding the courthouse, a variety of community gatherings were held. Since some towns had no churches, religious services were often conducted in the courthouses. People also gathered at the courthouse for events such as Masonic meetings, dances, concerts, exchanges of news and gossip, business transactions, political meetings, schools, and lectures. However, as time progressed, county commissioners often passed ordinances to restrict the uses of courthouses to county functions. Even with these ordinances, people were attracted to the courthouse for trials. In many cases, large courtrooms were required to fulfill the needs of such entertainment as provided by a trial.

The development of community pride in the courthouse is shown in the positioning of the edifice within the city or town as well as in the outer ornamentation. A courthouse was often constructed to be the most dignified and the largest edifice in the city or town and was centrally positioned in a public square. Often, an entire block was devoted to the edifice, and, if possible, the top or side of a hill was desirable. The formal designs of the

architecture revealed the communities' desires to express their pride at a symbolic level.

During the 1800's times became more affluent for Texas. It was during this time that county commissioners were capable of levying taxes to finance larger courthouse buildings. In 1881, counties were permitted to sell bonds to finance the construction of new courthouses (Robinson, 1981). In a few counties the new courthouses were constructed of wood, although most Texas county courthouses were constructed from native stone and replaced any previously existing courthouses. Therefore, with Texas' increased wealth most counties constructed a new courthouse either out of need or desire.

Those styles of architecture that played a part in expressing the noble distinction were the Victorian Gothic and the Classical. The Classical style was inspired by the Renaissance. The most popular styles for Texas courthouses in the late 1800's were the Richardsonian Romanesque and the Second Empire. Since the greatest importance was placed on a courthouse's appearance, an appearance of pride and economic strength, the interior was often left bleak and plain. One of the authors of Courthouse: A Photographic Document (Pare, 1978, p. 166) states, "More often than not, the exterior was merely a shell masking hives of plain rooms devoted to everyday uses which, though considered very important, required no adornment."

Styles of Texas Courthouse Architecture
in the Late 1800's

During the late 1800's the architects of many Texas courthouses, as well as other public buildings, were often selected through architectural drawings competitions. In the case of courthouse competitions a building committee or county commissioners would announce the competition through published notices in newspapers or architectural journals. The committees or county commissioners who chose the designs were usually without professional merit. The county's committees or county commissioners would often base their choice on desirable features seen in other counties.

After the drawings had been submitted, a selection was made and the winner was awarded the commission. Many times the winner of the competition also received a cash reward. For undocumented reasons, the winner of a competition was occasionally replaced as architect of the courthouse (Robinson, 1981). Those competing often entered numerous competitions of the same nature. Therefore, the competitors frequently used a standard design that could be modified in size and ornamentation to compensate for the budgetary limitations of a specific county or to satisfy those judging the competitions.

Architects were also chosen by direct selection. This was simply a matter of choosing the architect who was desired or available.

Three Texas Architects

Paul Kenneth Goeldner (1970, p. 78) states, "By mid-century architecture had become a full-time profession which afforded a respectable income to at least a few practitioners." In Texas during the 1800's those that referred to themselves as architects had varied professional credentials. The largest percentage of these people had learned the profession through an apprenticeship or through practical experience. A few received academic training in architecture or art. Academic training was rare, "Architectural education in major universities began at M.I.T. in 1865. . . ." (Goeldner, 1970, p. 80). Regardless of how these people obtained their knowledge of architecture, many of them were gifted enough to provide Texas with aesthetically pleasing edifices. Prior to this time an architect was considered a superintendent of construction.

Three men, besides Ruffini, who provided Texas some of its courthouse architecture during the late 1800's and early 1900's were W.C. Dodson, Alfred Giles, and James Riely Gordon. These men, along with other architects, designed numerous residential, commercial. and public buildings for Texas.

W.C. Dodson. W.C. Dodson was the earliest of the three architects discussed here. Dodson was considered to have had a great influence on Texas architecture. He has been credited with eighteen Texas courthouses (Pare, 1978).

Dodson practiced architecture in association with W.W. Dudley as well as by himself. His architectural practice was located in Waco, Texas.



Source: Robinson, 1974, p. 228

Figure 3. Lampasas County
Courthouse--
W.C. Dodson,
Architect

Dodson exploited the Second Empire and the Italianate styles in several courthouses in the 1880's. Three courthouses which utilized this combination of architecture were the Lampasas County Courthouse erected in Lampasas in 1883 (Figure 3), the Anderson County Courthouse erected in Palestine between 1884 and 1885, and the Fannin County

Texas during the late 1800's and one of the first to be finished with electricity. Pare (1978, p. 221) summed the Denton Courthouse as showing "little or no comprehension, however, of either the Richardsonian or the rising Academic reaction as propagated nationally by the Chicago World's Fair two years before it was begun."

It was towards the end of the century that Dodson altered his traditional plans to include a masonry tower which was centrally located. Large spaces were located on either side of the main corridor, which permitted supporting walls of the tower to pass through the core of the mass (Robinson, 1974). The Coryell and the Denton Courthouses were two of Dodson's central tower designs.

Alfred Giles. Another man who gave Texas some of its early courthouse architecture was Alfred Giles.

Giles was born May 23, 1853, near London, England. Upon finishing his formal education he began an apprenticeship with the Giles and Beven architectural firm (Jutson, 1972). After an apprenticeship and a short employment with the firm, he made his way to the United States in 1873. Giles spent some time in New York before he made his way to San Antonio, Texas. In San Antonio, he was employed by one of the city's contractors before establishing his own firm in 1876.

In the 1880's Giles returned to England for one year. Giles was not satisfied with a life of retirement and he returned to Texas (Jutson, 1972). He relocated his family

near Comfort, Texas, and commuted to San Antonio. He opened an office in Monterrey, Mexico, during the 1900's.

The Italianate was the mode Giles administered on the Wilson County Courthouse erected in Floresville in 1883. He combined elements of the Italianate and the Renaissance Revival in the Gillespie County Courthouse erected in Fredericksburg between 1881 and 1882 (Figure 4). The symmetrical balance of the courthouse incorporated heavily decorative consoles and Classical roof slopes. When Giles was awarded the Gillespie Courthouse commission and prize money, he gave the money to the other competitor, as an acknowledgement of talent, labor, and expense compensation.



Figure 4. Gillespie County Courthouse--
Alfred Giles, Architect

Giles featured the Second Empire mode in a number of courthouses. His capability to handle the style was reflected in the El Paso County Courthouse erected in El Paso between 1884 and 1886 (Figure 5). This courthouse combined the Second Empire style with Italianate characteristics. In this brick courthouse Giles incorporated corner pavilions, a central tower, slate mansardic roofs of different colors, decorative consoles, and numerous stylistic elements which added character and interest to the edifice. The Bexar County Courthouse erected in San Antonio between 1882 and 1883 was another structure which Giles implemented the Second Empire mode. This courthouse was razed after less than a decade and replaced with a courthouse designed by James Riely Gordon and D.E. Laub.

The Live Oak County Courthouse erected in George West in 1919 was the last courthouse designed by Giles. The structure employed a combination of features which classify it as Beaux-arts Classicism. Jutson (1972) states that Giles may have implemented this style as a reflection of his earlier work in Mexico.

One of Giles's noteworthy contributions was that he adopted the style for edifices requiring a limitation of ornament. One source (Jutson, 1972, p. 81) states, "The facade he divided 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."



Source: Texas State Historical
Association, Austin

Figure 5. El Paso County Courthouse--
Alfred Giles, Architect

James Riely Gordon. James Riely Gordon was born in 1864 and died in 1937. He was born at Winchester, Virginia, and raised in San Antonio, Texas. Gordon studied architecture and later served an apprenticeship with W.C. Dodson. In 1883, Gordon became a draftsman in the U.S. Supervising Architectural Office in Washington, D.C. Gordon remained in Washington for about four years and then returned to Texas to open an office in San Antonio. After 1904, Gordon moved to New York to practice architecture. In Texas, Gordon practiced architecture in association with C.G. Lancaster and D.E. Laub as well as by himself.

Gordon has been credited with no less than sixty-nine courthouses (Whithey, 1970). It was in San Antonio that he produced designs for many of Texas' courthouses.

Gordon was one of the architects of Texas who executed the Richardsonian Romanesque admirably. Some of the courthouses for which Gordon employed elements of the style were the Bexar County Courthouse erected in San Antonio between 1892 and 1896, in association with D.E. Laub, the Fayette County Courthouse erected in La Grange between 1890 and 1891, the Erath County Courthouse erected in Stephenville in 1891 (Figure 6), in association with D.E. Laub, the Hopkins County Courthouse erected in Sulphur Springs between 1894 and 1895 (Figure 1), the Ellis County Courthouse erected in Waxahachie between 1894 and 1896, and the Comal County Courthouse erected in New Braunfels in 1898. In the Erath County Courthouse, white limestone was incorporated in the major parts of the masking, while Pecos red sandstone was incorporated in the accent areas. The Ellis Courthouse and the Hopkins Courthouse implemented a number of different types and textures of stone to create interesting and vivid contrasts. The Ellis Courthouse incorporated rough pink and grey granite, and red sandstone for the major parts of the masking, while rough sandstone and polished sandstone and granite were incorporated in the accent areas. In the Hopkins Courthouse, rough pink granite walls were accented with cut red sandstone around openings and stringcourses, and polished blue granite columns and steps provided this edifice with vivid contrasts.

Another edifice which played heavily on Romanesque features yet incorporated Moorish elements was the Aransas

County Courthouse erected in Rockport. The courthouse features provided the county with a highly distinctive edifice.

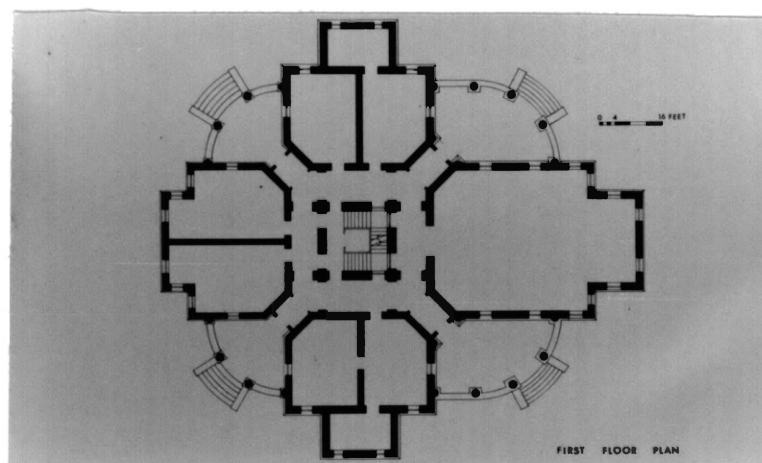


Figure 6. Erath County
Courthouse--
James Riely
Gordon,
Architect

Another important design contribution of Gordon's was a change in the basic plan of courthouses. The traditional or basic plan most architects utilized included corridors on the first level running in each direction and a centrally located courtroom on the second level. Gordon altered this traditional cross plan to achieve an improvement in natural lighting and ventilation. His design was carried out by the

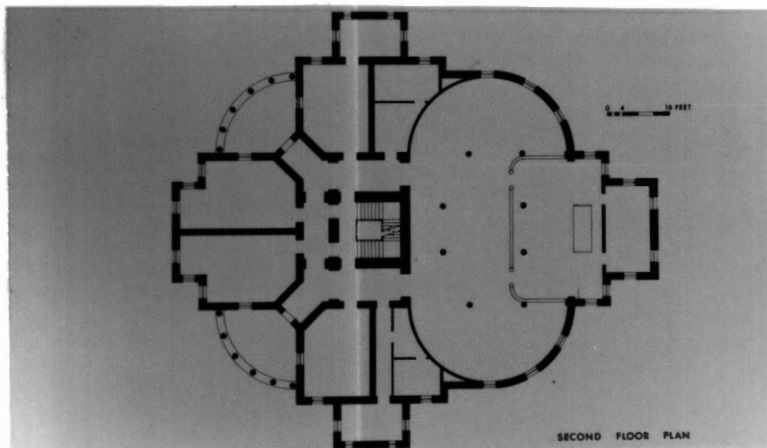
placement of offices around a centrally located courtyard on the first level, more offices and a courtroom encompassing the open area above the courtyard on the second level.

Gordon later altered this scheme by relocating the stairway to where the courtyard had been (Figures 7 and 8). The outcome of Gordon's design was a Greek cross. The Brazoria County Courthouse erected in Brazoria between 1893 and 1894 (Figures 7 and 8), the Wise County Courthouse erected in Decatur between 1895 and 1897, the Lee County Courthouse erected in Giddings in 1898, and the Hopkins County Courthouse (Figure 1) are a few of the courthouses in which Gordon engaged this plan. The Greek cross could be adapted to fit locations other than the middle of a public square.



Source: Robinson, 1981, p. 133

Figure 7. Brazoria County Courthouse--
First Floor Plan
James Riely Gordon, Architect



Source: Robinson, 1981, p. 133

Figure 8, Brazoria County Courthouse--
Second Floor Plan
James Riely Gordon, Architect

The Greek cross plan could also incorporate a centrally located masonry tower. This type of structure was not possible using the traditional plan due to weight-bearing restrictions of the wooden trusses (Robinson, 1974).

Summary

The 1800's were prosperous times in Texas, and with this prosperity came a great deal of change. One change was the abundance of courthouses constructed to provide for the needs and desires of a county. The people of different counties took pride in the courthouses of the late 1800's as seen in the formal designs and the placement of the edifices within the community.

Many of the courthouse commissions were granted through competitions. The architects who entered competitions or

sought services through other means generally kept similar plans that could be altered accordingly. Most counties were concerned with the architectural features of the mode rather than the plan or scale of the courthouse.

The architects who designed courthouses in the late 1800's engaged several different styles. Whether used singly or combined, styles were chosen to express the desired character of county government. Often when two styles were combined, the edifice could be classed as either style.

W.C. Dodson designed a number of Texas courthouses in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Although Dodson employed several modes of architecture, he used the Second Empire and the Richardsonian Romanesque styles most frequently for courthouses.

Alfred Giles came to America from England in 1873. His architectural career was mostly in south central Texas and northern Mexico. Giles successfully employed the Italianate and the Second Empire styles in his courthouse designs.

James Riely Gordon is probably the best known architect discussed here. Gordon was raised in San Antonio, Texas, where he eventually opened an architectural practice. The Richardsonian Romanesque was the style Gordon implemented in many of his Texas courthouse designs. Gordon also provided a version of the Greek cross plan which allowed a more flexible design to be implemented.

Two major styles of architecture used for Texas courthouses throughout the late 1800's were the Richardsonian Romanesque and the Second Empire. These two styles appeared to be among the best for conveying the strength and dignity demanded for courthouse architecture.

CHAPTER III

OSCAR RUFFINI, THE MAN

Oscar Ruffini was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on August 10, 1858. He was one of five children, three boys and two girls.

Oscar Ruffini's father, Ernst, left his home in Florence, Italy, for a trip to Dresden, Germany. While in Dresden he met and later married Adelaide (Adelheit) Reihne. They traveled to America for their honeymoon as well as to visit Adelaide's sister in Chicago. It was during this time that they visited the Cleveland, Ohio, area and decided to settle there and raise a family.

Ernst Ruffini became a successful businessman in the vastly unrelated professions of architect and furrier. They raised their five children in a comfortable manner. At least two of the children followed in their father's footsteps to become architects.

According to Oscar Ruffini's goddaughter, Mrs. Alvin Huggins (1983), Ruffini learned his architectural skills in the Cleveland, Ohio, area and in Paris, France. Ruffini probably studied in Paris in the late 1860's or early 1870's. He practiced his skills in architectural offices in Ohio and Indiana. Ruffini was also employed by Elijah E.

Meyers in Detroit, Michigan. It was in this office that Ruffini helped with the plans of the Texas State Capitol (Goeldner, 1970).

In 1878, Ruffini moved to Austin, Texas, to join his brother Fredrick E. Ruffini in a previously established architectural practice. Oscar was an assistant to his brother in the architectural firm for a number of years. Oscar appeared to be the more gifted artist of the two brothers and did most of the renderings for the firm. Fredrick offered Oscar a partnership in the firm, but Oscar gracefully declined.

In April 1884, at the age of twenty-five, Oscar boarded a train for Abilene, Texas. On April 19, 1884, he left Abilene around seven in the morning on the Concord Stage, heading for San Angelo. Due to bad weather, the usual twelve-hour journey of about ninety miles turned into a tremendously lengthy ride of approximately twenty-four hours. Even after such an ordeal, Ruffini continued to use the stage as a means of transportation until 1888 when the Santa Fe Railway made its way to San Angelo.

Coming to San Angelo, which lies on the edge of the Edwards Plateau in west central Texas, to supervise the construction of the Tom Green County Courthouse, he decided to stay in the town.

Shortly after his arrival in San Angelo, he made his office and home at eleven South Chadbourne Street. His new office and home was what had been a tool shed, housing

supplies for the construction of buildings in the area. The structure, such as it was, remained his office and residence for approximately sixty-seven years.

As the years passed, people of the town began to claim that the building which Ruffini resided in was a hideous sight in their growing and prosperous community and wanted the building razed. Part of the reason for the building becoming an unattractive sight was that it had been damaged by fire, wind, rain, and neglect. A city zoning ordinance restricted some of the repairs from being made, and Ruffini's refusal to attend to repairs added to the building's deterioration (Huggins, 1983). The dilapidated structure which Ruffini called home appeared not to inconvenience him. Mrs. Huggins (1983) recalls entering the home on rainy days to find guttering linked from the holes in the roof to wash tubs on the floor, to catch the rain. He also could be found working in his office holding an umbrella to keep from getting wet (Waring, 1981).

In 1950, the San Angelo Commission ordered that the building be razed or moved because it was a "Public hazard and nuisance" (Alfor, 1977, p. 11). In about 1951, the building was relocated at Fort Concho grounds in San Angelo. Since then the building has been restored, and the interior contains many of Ruffini's personal belongings.

Ruffini moved from his home on Chadbourne Street to the St. Angelus Hotel in San Angelo. He resided there until his death on January 18, 1957, at the age of ninety-eight.

At the time of his arrival in San Angelo, he was suffering from poor health. He had problems with his lungs and was told by doctors to quit smoking. His tobacco intake consisted of around twenty cigars per day and a heavy use of chewing tobacco (McDonald, 1979). On the day he quit smoking the cigars, he placed what cigars he had in a drawer of his drawing table, and they remained there until they disintegrated (Huggins, 1983).

Ruffini appeared to be a straight-laced nineteenth century man, as seen in his traditional values and the formal architectural styles he implemented. His dress was very formal; he always wore a black suit with a white shirt and a black bow tie. His goddaughter (Huggins, 1983) summed him up by stating he was shy, reserved, meticulous, stubborn, extremely formal, and he had a weakness for sweets, especially chocolate.

An example of how meticulous Ruffini could be is his obsession for accuracy (Huggins, 1983). He had a number of pecan trees planted in a straight line along one of San Angelo's streets. After some time had passed, he discovered that one of the trees had shifted out of line; he ordered that the tree be dug up and replanted to resume the line.

One of his favorite pastimes was astronomy. In his backyard a telescope was set up to study the stars and planets. He often became so excited about what he viewed that he would go to his goddaughter's house, waken her, bundle her up, and carry her back to his yard to look

through the telescope (Huggins, 1983). His knowledge in astronomy was evidently very good.

On October 28, 1885, a group of concerned San Angelo citizens gathered at Ruffini's office in hopes of establishing a fire department for the town. Ruffini, along with a number of other men, became volunteers in the San Angelo Hose Company #1 fire department. Along with their duties of fighting fires, the group held monthly meetings at one of the local saloons (Gibson, 1971).

Oscar Ruffini left his mark not only in San Angelo but also in surrounding areas of Texas. He was not only a successful architect in San Angelo, but he was also one of the longest living businessmen, one of the wealthiest men, and one of the thriftiest men in San Angelo.

His thrift included such actions as carefully splitting envelopes open with a penknife and pressing them flat so they could be used as notepaper (McDonald, 1979). He owned a large amount of land in downtown San Angelo and Big Lake, Texas, and he held stock in such companies as Standard Oil of New Jersey and Humble Oil and Refining Company. His estate, which he left to relatives, was valued at nearly half a million dollars (McDonald, 1979). Oscar Ruffini left his mark on San Angelo through architecture, finances, and character.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORKS OF OSCAR RUFFINI

Introduction

Oscar Ruffini came to San Angelo in April 1884, to be the superintendent for the construction of the Tom Green County Courthouse. Prior to the appointment as superintendent, Ruffini had submitted plans for the courthouse. Although the plans were not successful in providing an appointment as architect, he did accept the job as superintendent.

Like many architects during the late 1800's, he submitted a number of courthouse plans to Texas counties. In attempts to be appointed the commission as architect, he developed a standard design which could be adapted to specific county requirements and county budgets. A few of the unsuccessful attempts were for Jasper County, Childress County, Coke County, and Menard County. The specifications for these county courthouses appear to be full and true documentations. No explanations were given concerning the rejection of the commissions.

Ruffini and his brother Fredrick, who worked together for a time in Austin, Texas, used similar styles and plans for courthouses they designed independently of each other.

Fredrick's designs for the Blanco County Courthouse in Blanco, Texas, and the Concho County Courthouse in Paint Rock, Texas, are similar to Oscar's designs for the Mills County Courthouse in Goldthwaite and the Sutton County Courthouse in Sonora. These courthouses are examples of the two architects' mutual preference for the Second Empire style.

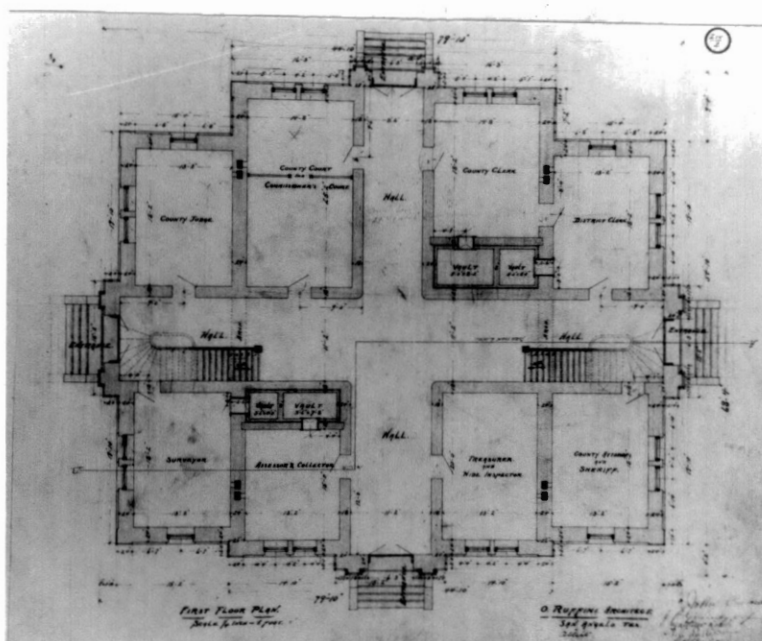
The Concho County Courthouse erected between 1885 and 1886 was designed by Fredrick and supervised by Oscar. Fredrick died before the courthouse plans were accepted, and Oscar acted as architect and superintendent.

Courthouses Designed by Oscar Ruffini

Ruffini was successful in four attempts to become the architect of different Texas county courthouses. Each of the courthouses were designed while he resided in San Angelo between 1889 and 1901. The plans were accepted for Sterling County (Figure 12), Mills County (Figure 13), Sutton County (Figure 14), and Crockett County (Figure 15). Each of these edifices housed the county's government and provided a place in which part of the county's history was made, as well as making history itself.

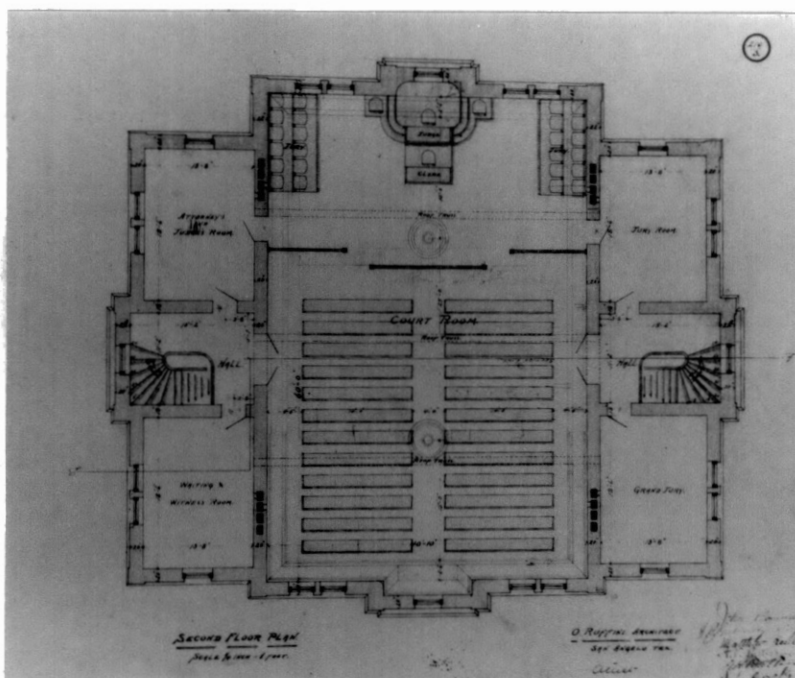
The courthouse drawings provided few dimensions and details (Figures 9 and 10). The drawings were often done in water colors, with different materials indicated by color coding. For example, dark blue was stone, brown was cut stone, and yellow was wood work (Figure 11).

The specifications for the courthouses were hand written and considered the property of the architects. The front page of the specifications stated that they were to be returned to the architect. Details would be considered vague and general by today's specification standards.



Source: Archives Division
of the Texas State
Library, Austin

Figure 9. Mills County Courthouse--
First Floor Plan



Source: Archives Division
of the Texas State
Library, Austin

Figure 10. Mills County Courthouse--
Second Floor Plan

The specifications for all the courthouses basically consisted of the same general information. They included conditions concerning the quality of materials and workmanship, the responsibility of risks, and the responsibility of the contractor and the superintendent. The best quality materials that were available were to be used. The workmanship was to be strong, durable, and neat. It is assumed that the quality of materials and workmanship depended largely on the county budget. Both materials and workmanship were to be approved by the superintendent.



- Source: Archives Division
of the Texas State
Library, Austin

Figure 11. Mills County Courthouse--
Longitudinal Section

The responsibility for risks were the contractor's. The contractor was responsible for injury to employees, carelessness of employees, and damage to the building from nature or other causes (Sutton County Specifications, 1891).

The superintendent controlled approval of workmanship and materials. He had the authority to dismiss any persons failing to meet specified requirements, and he could make alterations to the construction by orders from the commissioners (Sutton County Specifications, 1891).

Sterling County Courthouse

Sterling County consists of 914 square miles in southwest Texas. The county and the county seat were named for a pioneer buffalo hunter, W.S. Sterling.

The county was established March 4, 1891, when the legislature passed the decision to divide part of Tom Green County. Four months after the county was established, Sterling City became the county seat. With the creation of a new county, the need for a temple of justice evolved. On July 13, 1891, Oscar Ruffini was commissioned to draw plans for a courthouse (Figure 12).

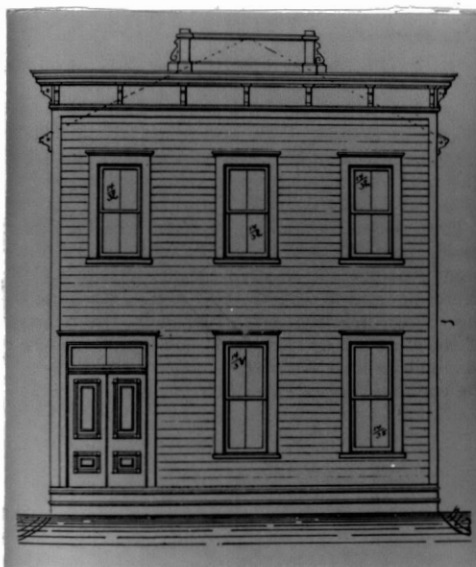
On August 10, 1891, the contractors Linan and Sandifer were accepted as contractors of the edifice. Their bid of 1800 dollars had secured the construction job of the two story wooden courthouse (Daniels, 1980).

The Interior Plan

According to the Sterling County Courthouse Specification (1891), the interior appeared to be as modest as the exterior was. The plan consisted of two floors which housed a courtroom, four offices, and a vault. Although this simple courthouse was not architecturally significant, it provided for the temporary housing of governmental functions until a new courthouse was erected in 1905. After the courthouse was replaced in 1905, it served as a hotel (Daniels, 1980).

The Interior Treatment

According to the specifications (1891), the first level had eleven-foot ceilings and the second level had nine-foot ceilings. The surface treatment was to be different types of wood. The ceilings and the walls were to be matched, beaded and center beaded pine. A plain eight-inch base was to be around the base of the walls. A simple pine flooring was to extend throughout the edifice. The interior doors were to be four-panel doors, with double doors at the courtroom entrance. The majority of wood work was to be finished with paint.



Source: Archives Division
of the Texas State
Library, Austin

Figure 12. Sterling County
Courthouse

The Exterior

The small wooden courthouse was specified (1891) to be twenty-four feet across the front and fifty feet deep. The structure was to total thirty feet to the top pediment.

The specifications (1891) also stated that the foundation was to be stone and the outer masking was to be Calcasieu Pine Timbers. The front wall treatment was to be beveled weatherboarding, while the other facades were treated with rough boxing. The finishing treatment was paint; the color selection was the superintendent's choice.

The roof was to be covered with wood shingles and tin. The tin shingles were to join the wooden roof shingles to the front wall of the structure.

This courthouse was the first of three for Sterling County. It was also in this courthouse that a number of denominations gathered to worship (Daniels, 1980).

Mills County Courthouse

Mills County consists of 734 square miles in central Texas. The county was named for a pioneer jurist named John T. Mills. Mills County was organized in 1887 with a division of Brown, Comanche, Hamilton, and Lampasas Counties.

On September 2, 1889, the commissioners of Mills County commissioned Ruffini to draw plans for a courthouse similar to the one in Paint Rock, Texas. The courthouse was built between 1889 and 1890 by the contractor John Cormack.

The courthouse was built in Goldthwaite and served the county until it burned in 1912.

The Interior Plan

One of the drawing of the structure shows the same basic plan which Ruffini later used in the Sutton County Courthouse (Figures 9 and 10). The corridors ran through the center of the building on the first level. The first level also employed offices for governmental functions and four vaults. The stairs were located on the east and west ends of the building. The second level housed a large centrally located courtroom in the main mass of the building. Four court related rooms were located in each corner of the pavilions.

The Interior Treatment

According to the Mills County Specifications (1889), the first and second levels had thirteen-foot ceilings, except for the courtroom, which had eighteen-foot ceilings. White painted plaster was used for the ceiling treatment in all areas except the courtroom. The courtroom ceiling was treated with matched, beaded and center beaded pine and finished with white paint.

The majority of surface treatments were specified (1889) to be different types of wood treatments. Most of the walls were treated with a matched, beaded and center beaded pine wainscoting with a cap mold. All the walls and

ceilings were painted white. The walls above the wainscoting were finished with plaster and painted white. The flooring was finished with pine flooring strips and stained.

The Exterior

The mode for this courthouse was the Second Empire (Figure 13). The courthouse employed high mansard roofs with crestings and other architectural features implemented in the Second Empire style.

Drawings of the courthouse show the dimensions to have been seventy-nine feet, ten inches across the front and sixty-eight feet, four inches deep. The height of the structure was to have been thirty-six feet to the top cornice and fifty feet to the tip of the highest mansard roof.

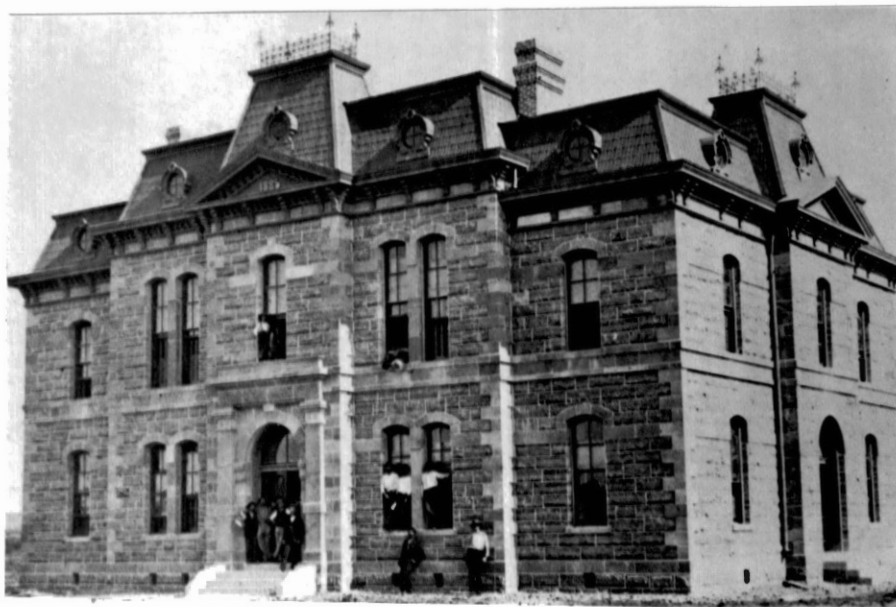
Native limestone was used for the outer masking of the courthouse. The stonework from the foundation to the watertable was quarry faced ashlar with marginal drafts cut on every stone. The stonework above the watertable incorporated quarry faced and pitched faced ashlar. Interesting contrasts of textures were executed through the use of different types of cut stonework in such accent features as the watertable, stringcourses, cornice of entrances, portico mouldings, pilasters, and second story facia. A number of accent features also incorporated marginal drafts. Galvanized iron was used for cornices, pediments, and dormers.

The building was composed of a central mass with pavilions on the sides of the central mass. The wall planes receded back two times from the front entrance and again at the pavilions. The pavilions employed lower cornices than the central mass. Decorative consoles supported the cornice.

Arched entrances were centrally located on every facade. The entrances were accented with projecting pilasters and entablatures. Large mansard towers with blue malleable iron crestings above the entrances created a strong statement.

Single or paired flat arched windows were centrally located on the different planes of each facade. Five heavily hooded dormers projected on the north and south, and three dormers projected on the ends of the building. Iron crestings around the towers and main mass are shown on the drawings (Figure 11), yet only crestings around the towers were employed.

According to the specifications (1889), the main mansard roof was to be covered with a patterned slate and the towers were to be covered with a cut patterned slate. It appears that the same patterned material was used for all parts of the roofs. The flat decks of the roof, decks of towers, and dormer and pediment roofs were to be covered with tin. The lines of the roof stepped down at the pavilion towers to the pavilion roofs, then stepped up at the main mass, and again at the main towers.



Source: Archives Division
of the Texas State
Library

Figure 13. Mills County Courthouse

Sutton County Courthouse

Sutton County consists of 1,493 square miles in southwest Texas. The county was named for the Confederate soldier John S. Sutton. The county was established in 1887 with a division of Crockett County. Three years later, the county became organized and Sonora became the county seat.

As with all new counties, a need for a courthouse to house county government evolved. Ruffini was commissioned to draw plans for the courthouse in 1891.

The courthouse was built on the land known as Courthouse Square. It was positioned on the side of a hill with

a main street running perpendicular to the front of the building. This positioning of the main avenue and the courthouse expressed the strength and importance that the county desired. The Courthouse Square was raised about three feet from the street level and was landscaped with large pecan trees. Both of these features added to the stateliness of the charming courthouse.

For the plans, specifications, and supervision of the courthouse, Ruffini was paid five percent of the contract price (Commissioners' Court Minutes, Sutton County, 1891). A.D. Garfford was employed as the contractor with a bid of 17,706 dollars (Commissioners' Court Minutes, Sutton County, 1891).

The Interior Treatment

The interior plan of this courthouse employed the same standard plan that was implemented in the Mills County Courthouse in Goldthwaite.

According to the specifications (1891), the first level had thirteen-foot ceilings and the second level had fourteen-foot ceilings. The ceilings were treated with a matched, beaded and center beaded pine. They were finished with paint.

The outer walls were composed of plaster and finished with white paint. Several rooms and the halls received matched, beaded and center beaded pine wainscoting. The

wainscoting was three feet in the halls and two and one half feet in the other rooms.

A simple pine flooring with a natural finish was used throughout the courthouse. The railings on the stairways consisted of two inch turned and square balusters with a molded cap and ball of pine. The stairways were also finished in a natural stain.

The Exterior

This charming courthouse exemplifies the same Second Empire mode that was used for the courthouse in Mills County. With some alterations, the courthouse still serves the county as its temple of justice (Figure 14).

According to the specifications (1891), the dimensions were seventy-nine feet, ten inches across the front and sixty-eight feet, four inches deep. The height was forty-six feet to the top of the highest mansard roof.

The courthouse has a square main mass and pavilions on two sides of the mass which continue with the design. The walls of the building recede from the front entrance, and again at the pavilions. The pavilions employ a lower cornice than the main mass.

The foundation and structure were built of native limestone, which was quarried near Sonora. The two chimneys are also of native stone. Contributing to distinctive features was the contrasting texture of ashlar masonry. Simple treatments of cut stonework were used for accent areas such

as the pilasters, the second story fascia cornice, quoins, stringcourses, friezed above pilasters, and frieze below the main cornice. The main cornice, brackets, pediments to the center projections, mansard and deck cornices, dormers, and hip holding were specified to be galvanized iron work.



Figure 14. Sutton County
Courthouse

Flat arched windows were centrally positioned in pairs on each of the facades. One notable difference about the window panes of this courthouse is the use of four panes of glass as opposed to the eight panes in the Mills County Courthouse.

Centrally positioned entrances were located on every facade. The entrances were recessed in porticos with forward projecting pilasters and pediment cornices. The mansard towers above each of the entrances provided visual prominence for the courthouse.

Heavily dormered windows were used in the original roof, similar to the ones in the Mills County Courthouse. The roofing material was originally stated in the specifications (1891) to be painted tin shingles. A two foot malleable iron cresting was to be implemented around the main mass and a three foot cresting around the towers. The specifications refer to several towers which would have made the roof line similar to the Mills County Courthouse. The several towers were probably employed and removed when other roof alterations were made.

Crockett County Courthouse

Crockett County is the seventh largest county in Texas, consisting of 2,794 square miles. The county is located in southwest Texas and was named for the famous Alamo hero David Crockett. The county was established in 1875 with a division of Bexar County. The county did not become organized until 1891, and Ozona became the county seat.

A small frame courthouse served the county until a need for a larger courthouse developed. Judge Davidson expressed his opinion that a "courthouse that would be distinctive and different from the usual type found in Texas" was needed to

express the government of Crockett County (Childress, 1976, p. 41). Davidson and Oscar Ruffini worked on choosing a suitable design for the courthouse from submitted plans and specifications (Childress, 1976).

Ruffini became the architect and superintendent of the courthouse. The Commissioners' Minutes (1891) state that he was paid three and a half percent of the building cost for being the architect and one and a half percent for being the superintendent.

The courthouse was built on the land known as Courthouse Square, which is located on the side of a small hill. A block of landscaped lawn precedes the courthouse on the front. The landscaped block separates the courthouse from the business section of Ozona. A small rock wall and railing encompass the front of the courthouse and half of each side of the building. The wall and railing enclose a small landscaped area (Figure 15).

The courthouse was erected between 1901 and 1902 at the cost of 30,000 dollars. The corner stone identifies Charles Schunm of San Antonio as the contractor.

The Interior Plan

The interior of this courthouse employed a slightly different plan than the other courthouses Ruffini designed. Corridors ran through the center of the building on the first level, with governmental offices housed there too. There is one main stairway in the far left corridor and a

smaller one in the County Judges Office in the front right corner pavilion. The second level courtroom was centrally located with several court related rooms on each of the sides of the courtroom.

The Interior Treatment

The ceiling heights were specified (1891) on the first level to be twelve feet, eight inches, while the second level was to be eighteen feet. The ceilings on the second level and on the porticos were treated with stamped metal. The courtroom ceilings employed a more decorative design than elsewhere. The ceilings throughout the courthouse were finished with a single color of paint except in the District Court Room, which had two colors (Crockett County Specifications, 1891).

A three foot oil finished wainscoting was used in the majority of rooms and a four foot wainscoting was used in the halls, the stairway located in the County Judges Office, and in the District Court Room. All of the wainscoting was matched, beaded and center beaded pine. The District County Clerks Office was the only room that did not incorporate the use of wainscoting. All areas not wainscoted were plastered and painted white.

A pine flooring was employed on the second level, and a mixture of cement and broken rock finished with eighteen inch square blocks was employed on the first level.

The Exterior

For his fourth and final courthouse, Ruffini continued with the Second Empire mode. This courthouse could probably be classified as Ruffini's most original work (Figure 15).

The present condition of the courthouse has suffered from expansion. One side of the structure has been cluttered with massive electrical equipment and cables, and concrete blocks cover a few of the window openings. The back of the edifice has suffered from additions finished in concrete blocks that detract from the native stone. The Another side of the courthouse has given up most of its portico to make interior rooms for courthouse functions.

The dimensions on the specifications (1891) state the front as being seventy-nine feet and the depth as sixty-five feet. The height of the structure is stated in the specifications (1891) to be thirty-seven feet to the top of the cornice, and fifty-four feet to the top of the main tower.

The courthouse began with a central mass and incorporated four corner pavilions. On all facades the main mass was built on two planes, with the entrances projecting forward. The corner pavilions protruded the most on all facades. The entrances were accented with the use of column-supported porticos, which extend the entire length of the main mass. The front entrance employed a domical mansardic roof which provided visual strength to the character of the edifice. The domical mansard originally housed a clock on each side.



Figure 15. Crockett County
Courthouse

The foundation and the structure were built of native limestone which was quarried near Ozona on the Meyers and Couch properties. The walls of the edifice were built of light colored quarry faced ashlar. Cut stone created a contrasting texture in such areas as the stringcourses, balustrade cap of porticos, and square parts of bases and caps of the columns. Galvanized iron was used for such things as cornices, pediments, and tops of towers.

The windows were centrally located on every facade, either singly or in pairs. A flat arch was employed on the first level windows and a Roman arch was used on the second level windows. Fanlights of colored glass above the center

windows on the second level provided a distinguished accent. The entrances were centrally located on every facade. Providing accents to the entrances were porticos with wrought iron railings.

The roof lines of this courthouse are more unusual than the other mansard roofs Ruffini implemented. The main mass had a low pitched roof; the pavilions had a very high pitched roof; and the center tower consisted of a domical mansard. The roofs of the towers were originally covered with Spanish tile and the rest of the roofs were covered with tin. All areas were originally painted red.

Summary

The courthouses that Oscar Ruffini designed reflected the cultural history of the people, economy and environment in a county. Whether he designed a wooden courthouse or a stone courthouse, he provided a edifice that housed a county's governmental functions.

The Sterling County Courthouse, a temporary edifice, was architecturally insignificant, yet it fulfilled the needs and hopes of the county. Even though the edifice has been razed, it should not be forgotten.

The Mills County Courthouse in Goldthwaite, Texas, has been replaced due to fire damage. This courthouse implemented the Second Empire mode. The symmetrical composition was built of contrasting textures of native stone.

The Sutton County Courthouse in Sonora, Texas, is a cousin in style and design to the courthouse in Mills County. Centrally located on the Courthouse Square it is a fine example of Ruffini's ability to handle the Second Empire style. Conventional plans of corridors through the center of the structure were employed. This type of arrangement divided the first level into four equal parts. The second level employed a symmetrical arrangement with a centrally located courtroom. Rough ashlar walls with contrasting cut stone accents emphasized the charm and character of the structure.

The Crockett County Courthouse in Ozona, Texas, was positioned on the side of a hill to provide a look of strength and dominance. Galvanized iron was used for a number of decorative features. A large domical mansard emphasized the front entrance of the courthouse. Designed on a symmetrical plan, the courthouse was built of native stone.

The stone courthouses Ruffini designed were not built on the grand scale that many other Texas county courthouses were, but, for the small populations of the three counties in the 1890's, they are truly justified in size and adornment. When these courthouses were built, they were generally the most prestigious structures in the county.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to show the role one architect, Oscar Ruffini, played in designing a few of the Texas courthouses in the late 1800's. The styles and plans which he implemented provided counties with temples of justice that expressed prosperity, pride, and patriotic idealism that the people of counties were seeking.

When Oscar Ruffini was in his twenties he moved to Austin, Texas, to practice architecture with his brother Fredrick E. Ruffini. He later moved to San Angelo, Texas, where he remained until his death in 1957. Ruffini designed numerous residences and private and public buildings for San Angelo and surrounding areas.

Ruffini's architectural influence generally did not extend beyond west central Texas, but his was some of the finest architecture in the area for the late 1800's and early 1900's. Because of his personal image and his architectural ability, Ruffini became a San Angeloan folk-hero. Yet, folk-hero or not, he architecturally expressed the character of the life and times of the area. Although he primarily implemented the Second Empire style for the

courthouses he designed, he incorporated a number of popular modes for his various architectural expressions.

Among his design accomplishments were four Texas courthouses. He designed the Sterling County Courthouse in Sterling City, the Mills County Courthouse in Goldthwaite, the Sutton County Courthouse in Sonora, and the Crockett County Courthouse in Ozona. Each of these courthouses related to the environment in which they were built. The use of native stone was employed for the facades of three of the courthouses. The interiors were designed with simplistic plans and materials anticipating the use and functions of the rural populations. The plans incorporated traditional placement of offices with central corridors running in each direction of the first floor and a centrally located courtroom with court related rooms on the sides of the second. The courthouses in Sutton County and Crockett County are the only edifices still standing and used for their original purpose of governmental functions. Even with alterations to these edifices, they maintain the charm and dignity of the Second Empire style.

The mode which Ruffini utilized in three of the courthouse designs was the Second Empire, the major characteristics being the mansard roofs, arched and dormer windows, and classical details. Ruffini may have employed the Second Empire mode not only for its success and popularity during the late 1800's but also for its stateliness and dignity to represent the government of the people.

Suggestions for Further Research

During the course of this study it appeared that a lack of documented information concerning nineteenth century Texas architects has been gathered. The lives and architectural contributions of a few selected architects have been dealt with in depth. Periodicals and books have been written about numerous architects' contributions to Texas architecture, yet there is a scarcity of material on the lives of the men who provided Texas with architecture. Architecture and architects of west Texas or anywhere in Texas needs to be documented. The writer recommends that further research be done on the men behind nineteenth century Texas architecture.

The further research may lead to a better understanding of the relationship between architects and their architectural designs. The life style or environment may have played a role in influencing the architect in the style he implemented.

Summary

The architecture of early Texas courthouses reflected the cultural history of its people, economy, and environment. The edifices were built as an expression of a community's needs, values, hopes, and beliefs in self-government. They served county governmental functions as well as multiple community functions.

Many of the late 1800's courthouses have been replaced by new edifices, have become too small for governmental functions, or have been razed. With the destruction of the courthouses, the people of Texas have lost examples of architecture and a part of history. The buildings played a major role in contributing to the community, county, and state history. The structures were often community focal points that expressed the life and times of a county's people.

Oscar Ruffini contributed a few courthouse designs to counties in Texas, and, thus, he contributed to Texas history. Whether these edifices are still in existence or razed, they provided the counties with expressions of assurance in self-government and hope for the future.

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