

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic County Courthouses of Oklahoma

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number See Continuation Sheets not for publication

city, town vicinity of

state code county code

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership

street & number

city, town vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Multiple locations - see continuation sheet

street & number

city, town state

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Oklahoma Comprehensive Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1983  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society

city, town Oklahoma City state Oklahoma

# 7. Description

See Continuation Sheets

## Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

## Check one

unaltered  
 altered

## Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The county courthouses of Oklahoma provide the locations for a unifying network of local government within the state. The thematic historic preservation survey of Oklahoma's courthouses examined each building with regard to its architectural, historic, and social value. The project included all those county courthouses that were originally built as courthouses prior to 1935, that have been used as such since and the building date, were found to fit the criteria of public architecture. This thematic project consisted of a total of fifty-two structures. Those that were built more recently were excluded, although a subsidiary listing of those courthouses built from 1935-1939 was provided for consideration of their subsequent inclusion in the thematic project. Some of Oklahoma's courthouses have been submitted to the State Preservation office previously as individual nominations or as part of a particular city's historic district. These courthouses were those of Beaver, Beckham, Carter, Ellis, Love, Okmulgee, and Texas counties. In order to keep the thematic project intact, these courthouses are included in this nomination.

Two Oklahoma courthouse buildings are already on the National Register: the Old Atoka County Courthouse and the Old Washington County Courthouse. The latter building is no longer used as the courthouse, but is included in the thematic nomination because of its integrity of design and its place in the city of Bartlesville as the courthouse until 1979. The Old Atoka County Courthouse is not included because of its brief utilization (1907-1913) as an actual county courthouse. Originally a Choctaw Nation courthouse, the building served the county for only six years before a new courthouse was built in 1913. The 1913 courthouse was subsequently replaced by a modern (post-1935) building. The Old Atoka Courthouse actually has served the community as a variety of commercial endeavors, and is currently a small department store. It is a two-story Plains Commercial building that does not fit the architectural format of the state's other county courthouses as public architecture.

This project was conducted under a grant issued to the Historic Preservation Office at Oklahoma State University in the summer of 1983. The preservation staff and history graduate students conducted the survey. Additional research was provided by John Wensorki, Karen Curths, Blane Mays, Danny Steelman, Lance Weisand, George Orey, Theresa Clemmons, all former Oklahoma State University history graduate students. Additional material was provided by Melvina Thurmon, John D. Northcutt, Dr. James Smallwood, and Jimmy Woodward. The researchers carried out an extensive windshield survey, visiting and photographing those courthouses which met the qualifying criteria. Each courthouse had to be at least fifty years old and still maintain its architectural integrity. Those courthouses which had been too altered by attached additions or exterior modernization were not included. A list of these extensively remodeled courthouses is attached as Appendix A. The surveyors obtained additional information regarding each courthouse from library research and telephone interviews with the county clerks of Oklahoma.

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Oklahoma is a state composed of a variety of landscapes. Stretching from the foothills of the Ozarks in the northeast to the dry prairies of the Panhandle, Oklahoma is a land of geographical contrasts. The northeastern region and the southern part of the state, where the Wichita, Arbuckle, and Kiamichi mountains rise, are areas of green, rolling ridges. The Red River forms the boundary with Texas to the South. To the north lie Kansas and Colorado. Arkansas and Missouri are Oklahoma's eastern neighbors. Oklahoma contains numerous lakes and rivers, concentrated primarily in the eastern half of the state, which enhance the beauty of the area and provide recreational and economic opportunities for Oklahomans. The western part of Oklahoma is flat and dry; as one travels west, the terrain becomes virtually treeless, a land of vast horizons. Cattle ranching, horse raising, farming, and petroleum production are some of the state's major industries. Oil wells and wheat fields abound.

The majority of Oklahoma's towns are small, rural communities. Population figures of the smaller towns range from less than one hundred to over thirty-five thousand residents. Tulsa and Oklahoma City, the two largest metropolitan areas, each have populations in excess of 360,000, and provide a cosmopolitan change of pace. Oklahoma City, the state capitol, had a 1980 population figure of 403,213, the largest in the state. Many Oklahoma towns developed as rural market centers. Others sprang up literally overnight as the result of land runs into newly-opened territories and as boom towns on the sites of lucrative oil fields.

The county seats of Oklahoma are usually centrally located within their particular counties. Although frequently not the largest town within the county, the fact that it is the county seat and therefore the site of the county courthouse adds much to the town's importance and prestige. Most Oklahoma county seats have preserved the tradition of a town square, which in turn descended from the European plaza. The courthouse usually fronts the town's "Main Street," or Main Street may lead to the "Courthouse Square." The courthouse is normally surrounded by fairly expansive grounds, attractively landscaped with trees and flowers.

The courthouse is always one of the most important and impressive buildings in the county. Usually three to four stories in height, county courthouses are notable examples of monumental, public architecture. The architectural styles of Oklahoma's courthouses run the gamut from the rather severe, unadorned Plains Commercial style to the elegant lines of Art Deco or eclectic combinations of classical architectural elements. The courthouses are constructed of brick, cut stone, stucco, or often a combination of such materials. Workmanship is usually quite good, although some of the courthouses are showing their age and are in need of major structural repair. Oklahoma was fortunate in that a number of distinguished architects and architectural firms were responsible for the design of the county courthouses. Perhaps the most renowned was Solomon, Andrew, Layton,

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who also took part in the design of the Oklahoma State Capitol. Other notable architects involved were Jewell Hicks, the partnership of Tonini and Bramblet, and C. E. Hair and Company. The unifying themes of this project arose from the courthouses themselves.

Many of the courthouses share similar elements of various architectural styles. Difficult to classify as pure examples of a single style, the majority of Oklahoma's courthouses exhibit some neo-classical features. Columns and pilasters very often add a stately order to the over-all design of the building. The southwestern corner of the state has a cluster of counties whose courthouses were built during the years from 1905 to 1926. The style of the courthouses in this area tends to be large and ornate, with architectural details drawn from Greek, Roman, Renaissance Revival, and Beaux Arts classicism, among others. With the exception of the cluster of southwestern courthouses, no regular pattern of architectural style emerges within the state; a plain, square courthouse may be located in a county which is next door to a county with a gradiose courthouse of eclectic style.

The mixed stylistic elements of Oklahoma's county courthouses are indicative of transitional architecture. A few exhibit the straight, simple lines of the Plains Commercial style. The majority exhibit the simplified classic detail popular during the mid-1920's. Other designs predict the elegant lines of Art Deco of the 1930's. The variety of styles apparent in this thematic survey of the state's courthouses provides a unique overview of the changing trends in public architecture. An interesting and revealing feature of several of the courthouses is the perpetual presence of seasonal decorations, for example the large, "Christmas Star" lights that are permanently in evidence on top of the courthouses in Osage and Washita Counties. These folk-art embellishments enhance the integral place of the courthouse within the surrounding community, and are perhaps indicative of the "small-town" atmosphere of many of Oklahoma's county seats. The buildings are dignified, yet down-to-earth. They are truly a vital element of the counties' existence.

The unifying themes of this project arose from the courthouses themselves. All of the county courthouses served, and most continue to serve, as the center of local government. Judicial, social, and community services are housed in the courthouse. Additionally, the physical presence of the courthouse lends importance and stability to the county seat. In each county seat the courthouse acts as a centralizing element of the downtown area. The main business district is often congregated around the courthouse. Other important buildings, such as the city hall or municipal building, may be located nearby. The courthouses of Oklahoma are vital centers of political and social service and furthermore serve as visual landmarks and symbols of the cohesive force of local, democratic government within the state of Oklahoma.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics-government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1890

Builder/Architect

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The county courthouses of Oklahoma are significant for their roles in the political, social, and architectural history and development of Oklahoma. The current seventy-seven counties of Oklahoma evolved in a variety of ways. The Organic Act of 1890 established a government for Oklahoma Territory and outlined seven counties. These were designated by number. Additional counties, added by subsequent land openings, were named using letters of the alphabet. Residents of these counties later voted to adopt proper county names. The frugal voters of "K" county simply changed the name to Kay, to avoid having to change the county's records and official documents. In 1901 the Secretary of the Interior formed three more counties when the Kiowa-Comanche and Wichita-Caddo reservations were opened to settlement.

The Enabling Act, which President Rossevelt signed on June 16, 1906, provided that Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory would enter the Union as a single state. The residents of the territories organized a state constitutional convention which first met in Guthrie November 20, 1906, and remained in session except for a few brief recesses until July 1907. One of the most difficult issues facing the Convention delegates was the determination of county lines for the state. Strong local interest resulted in controversy and rivalry over proposed new boundaries. Under the leadership of Charles N. Haskell, a delegate to the constitutional convention and later, first governor of the state, the committee in charge of forming the state's counties finally reached an agreement. The original territorial counties were sub-divided and some were again renamed. The committee also created new counties. In all, the Constitutional Convention formally established and named seventy-five counties. The later formation of Harmon and Cotton Counties increased the number to the present seventy-seven.

County government in Oklahoma involves the popular election of a number of officials. Each county's courthouse serves as the seat and focus of local administration. The courthouse is the physical building that houses the established form for governing diverse groups of people throughout the state. The style of the building may vary from county to county, but the essence of its function does not. The courthouse provides the place in which the local judiciary system metes out justice to the citizens of the county. Other governmental offices, such as those of the sheriff, the county clerk, the tax assessor, and the treasurer, are also located in the courthouse. In some counties, the courthouse contains the offices of such other integral community services as motor vehicle licensing, veterans' affairs, the local election board, and the county extension agency. The courthouse is invaluable as a political center and as a repository of a county's records. The county courthouse serves literally as an archive of the area's history.

The courthouse derives social significance from the impact that the building imparts to its surroundings. The courthouse symbolizes the power of government and lends prestige to the town designated as the county seat. The Constitutional Convention selected a county seat for each of the counties; however, many towns challenged the selections made. Indeed, a number of towns within particular Oklahoma counties fiercely contended for the honor and practical advantages of being chosen as the county seat. The first state legislature eventually provided guidelines for county seat elections in a bill that Senator J. Elmer Thomas introduced. Governor Haskell approved the bill

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in April 1908. The law declared that an election could be called by the governor if a county submitted a petition signed by 25 percent of the voters requesting the same. A majority vote could change the county seat unless the original seat was within six miles of the geographical center of the county.

If the original county seat was within the six-mile radius from the county's center, the law required a 60 percent vote for removal. The law also precluded the expenditure of funds for a courthouse or other permanent improvements before April 1, 1909, unless the county first held a county seat election. Once such an election determined the county seat, another election could not be held for the next ten years. Most of the elections went smoothly, although a few were quite lively and marked with political tensions. Once chosen as the site of the courthouse, a town could expect lucrative economic growth and an increase in population.

Visually, the courthouse serves as an easily-recognized and highly-visible landmark. It provides a focal point for the town and county in which it is located. Frequently built in the middle of a town square, the courthouse acts as a centralizing element of the downtown area. It is often an integral part of the downtown business district. The courthouse serves as the foundation edifice around which other buildings are constructed, although this is not always the case. Some of Oklahoma's courthouses are located in rather isolated grandeur, but wherever situated, the grounds surrounding the building are usually attractively landscaped. Benches and flower beds invite passersby to gather near a public water fountain or a statue of a war veteran. The courthouse is an important meeting place for both business and social matters.

The county courthouse gains architectural significance because it is usually a large, impressive building, often a fine example of a notable architectural style. Many of Oklahoma's courthouses are constructed in a version of the Plains Commercial style. Solid, foursquare buildings of brick or stone, three or four stories in height, they are imposing structures. Other courthouses exhibit the elegant lines of Art Deco styling. Still others are composed of intriguing, eclectic combinations of classical architectural elements. Romanesque, Neo-Classical Revival, Second Renaissance Revival, and Neo-Egyptian features blend in pleasing array.

A number of prominent Oklahoma architects, such as Solomon Andrew Layton, Jewell Hicks, C. E. Hair, and the partnership of Tonini and Bramblet, were each responsible for several of the courthouses within the state. Each architect tended to utilize a unique, identifiable style. For instance, Tonini and Bramblet often incorporated a curved outer facade on one side of their courthouses, usually the front or back of the building. The Tillman County Courthouse exhibits this feature. It has a bowed back wall, the curvature of which projects approximately fifteen feet beyond the straight wall line. The Payne County Courthouse, another Tonini and Bramblet design, presents a curved front facade. Still other Tonini and Bramblet courthouses are foursquare. All of their designs incorporate an elegant blend of simplified Neo-Classical architectural elements such as columns, pilasters, and pediments.

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Solomon Andrew Layton, one of the architects of the Oklahoma State Capitol Building, took part in the design of a number of Oklahoma's courthouses. These include the courthouses in Carter, Love, and Jefferson Counties. These buildings bear his characteristic stamp of sturdy construction and Neo-Classical styling.

Oklahoma courthouses are significant examples of monumental public architecture and as such are particularly worthy of preservation. Many of the courthouses exhibit transitional combinations of architectural styles. As a group, they present a sampling of the evolution of the architecture of public buildings in Oklahoma. The elaborate Neo-Classical Revival and Second Renaissance Revival styling of some of the courthouses built in the first two decades of the twentieth century gives way to the utilization of simplified classical detailing popular during the mid-1920's. Some of the courthouses built during the late 1920's predict the architecture of the Art Deco period.

Through their architectural heritage and their current role in local government, Oklahoma's county courthouses serve as a link between the state's colorful past and promising future. As they have been since statehood, the courthouses are today essential to the status of the county seats and the counties as vital, distinctive centers of community activity and politics. They are landmarks of practicality and beauty.



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- A Courthouse Conservation Handbook. Published by the Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation in cooperation with the National Clearinghouse for Criminal Justice Planning and Architecture. Washington, D. C., 1976.
- A History of Beaver County. Beaver County Historian Society, Inc., Vol. II, 1971.
- Across the Prairie. Vol. 2, Sentinel, Oklahoma: Schoonmaker, Publishers, 1981.
- Dickson, Jerry, (Ed). Prairie Fire. Elk City, Oklahoma: Western Oklahoma Historical Society, 1978.
- Harlow, Victor E. Oklahoma - Its Origins and Development, A History. Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Corporation, 1949.
- Hurst, Irvin. The 46th Star - A History of Oklahoma's Constitutional Convention and Early Statehood. Oklahoma City: Semco Color Press, Inc., 1957.
- Maxwell, Carolyn, (Ed). History of Tillman County, Vol. II. Tillman County Historical Society. Frederick, Oklahoma, 1978.
- McReynolds, Edwin C. Oklahoma - A History of the Sooner State. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954.
- Thach, Mrs. W. Thomas, Ed. Oklahoma Counties and Some of Their Courthouses. Oklahoma City: National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in Oklahoma, 1967.
- The Panhandle Herald, Special Edition, Vol. 37, No. 37. Guymon, Oklahoma, Thursday, August 25, 1927.

APPENDIX A

List of architecturally ~~change~~ courthouses:

Choctaw County 1964  
Ottawa County 1954  
Rogers County 1981

These courthouses were excluded because of extensive exterior remodeling.

List of courthouses built in the era of 1935-1939:

Cleveland 1937  
Custer 1935  
Grady 1935  
Latimer 1939  
Oklahoma 1937  
Woodward 1936

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Beckham County Courthouse

Location: Courthouse Square, Box 67, Sayre, Oklahoma 40, Beckham County 009

Owner: Beckham County Commissioners, P.O. Box 67, Sayre, Oklahoma

Description: Condition: good, altered, original site

The Beckham County Courthouse is a three-story structure, 65 feet east-west by 99 feet north-south, built of tan bricks and stone. The brickwork of the first floor is an alternating pattern of six raised bricks and one recessed brick, running in horizontal lines. A stone water table is above the first floor and each of the doorways on the north, east, and west sides have wide stone jambs. There is no entrance on the south side of the building. The east and west sides of the courthouse have two massive Tuscan columns above the entrances rising from the water table to the cornice.

The north and south sides have four stone pilasters flanked by two wider brick pilasters of the same style. A cornice covered in tan-painted copper sheeting surmounts the third floor. The cornice is ornamented with dentils and pearl moulding and supports a brick parapet topped with a stone edge. A clock dome rises from an octagonal base on the flat roof. The dome has flat panels for four clocks facing the four directions, but no clock faces. Twelve Doric columns support the dome roof, which is covered with copper and painted brown. The large dome is surmounted a miniature dome, also supported by twelve Doric columns.

Significance: 1911; Builder/architect: Layton, Smith, and Hawk/Oklahoma Quarries and Construction Company

The Beckham County Courthouse is significant because of its unique architecture and its importance to the community. Built in 1911, the structure is in very good condition and is one of the few courthouses in Oklahoma which features a large dome. It is one of the tallest buildings in Sayre and is a notable landmark of the area. The courthouse dome is lighted at night and is an impressive sight.

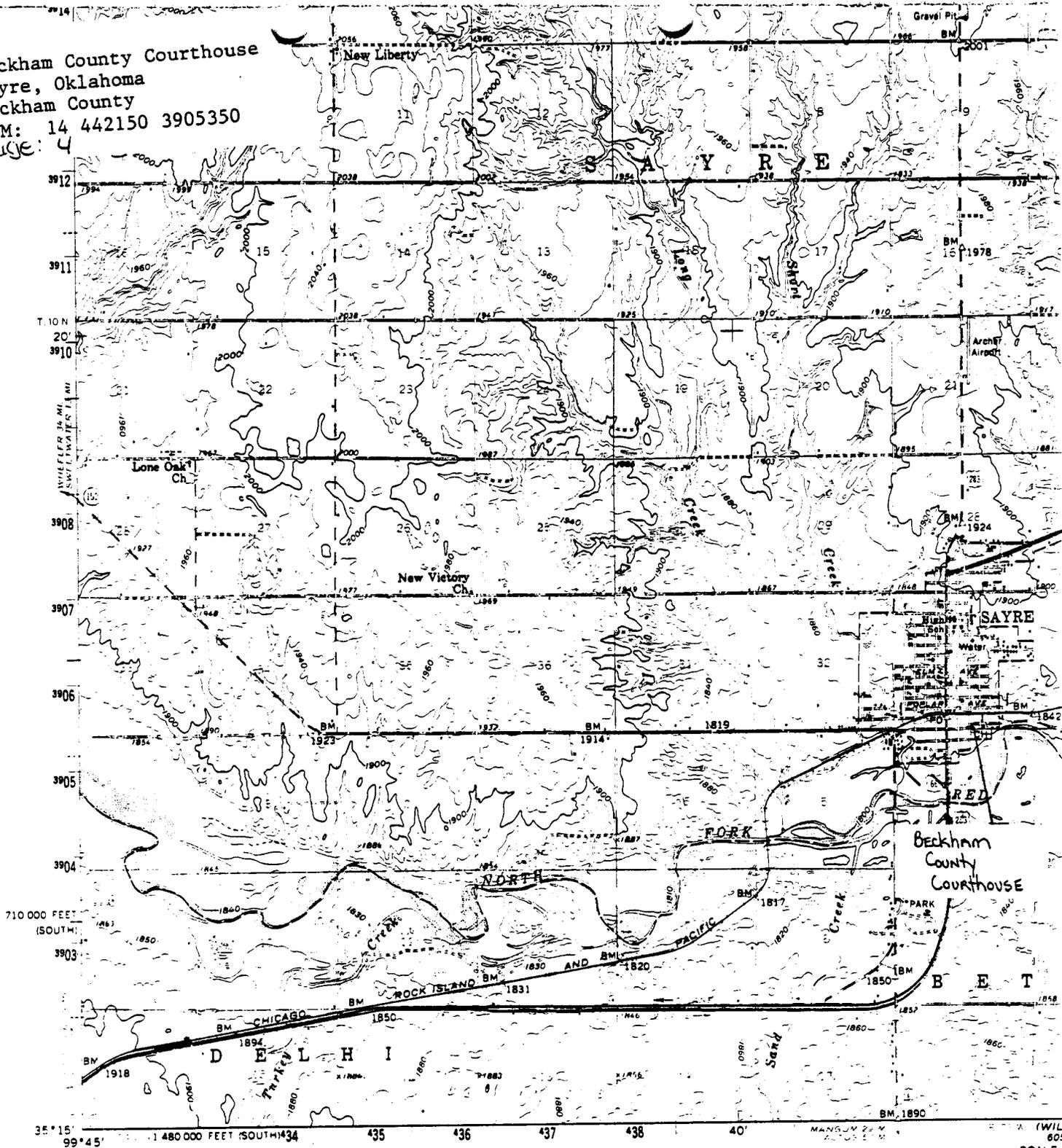
Acreage: 1 acre

Quadrangle: 1:62,500

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated is on Block 4, Couthouse Addition. The property is enclosed in a square 200 feet on a side, from a starting point on the NE corner of the intersection of Third and Walnut Streets go 200 feet North, then 200 feet east, then 200 feet south, and then 200 feet west back to the starting point.

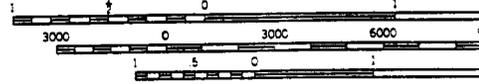
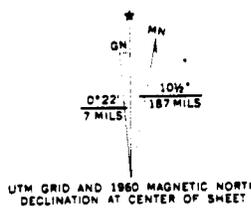
UTM: 14 442150 3905350

Beckham County Courthouse  
 Sayre, Oklahoma  
 Beckham County  
 UTM: 14 442150 3905350  
 PAGE: 4



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 6054 III

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
 Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Oklahoma Geological Survey  
 Topography from aerial photographs by photogrammetric methods  
 Aerial photographs taken 1958 Field check 1959-1960  
 Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
 10,000-foot grids based on Oklahoma coordinate system,  
 north and south zones  
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
 zone 14, shown in blue  
 Red tint indicates area in which only  
 landmark buildings are shown



CONTOUR INT  
 DOTTED LINES REPRESENT  
 DATUM IS ME

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NAT  
 FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVE  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MA