



## United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

The attached property, White County Courthouse, in White County, Arkansas, reference number 77000279, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the Keeper of the National Register on 08/03/1977, as evidenced by the FEDERAL REGISTER/WEEKLY LIST notice of Tuesday, February 7, 1978, Part II, Vol. 43, No. 26, page 5172. The attached nomination form is a copy of the original documentation provided to the Keeper at the time of listing.

  
Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places

9/12/2008  
Date

73-4-JOSO-33

NR 8-3-77

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL 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

White County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

## 2 LOCATION

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Court Square

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Searcy

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2

STATE

Arkansas

VICINITY OF

CODE

05

COUNTY

White

CODE

145

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

## CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT  
☒ BUILDING(S)  
☐ STRUCTURE  
☐ SITE  
☐ OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC  
☐ PRIVATE  
☐ BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS  
☐ BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED  
☐ UNOCCUPIED  
☐ WORK IN PROGRESS  
**ACCESSIBLE**  
☒ YES: RESTRICTED  
☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED  
☐ NO

## PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE ☐ MUSEUM  
☐ COMMERCIAL ☐ PARK  
☐ EDUCATIONAL ☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE  
☐ ENTERTAINMENT ☐ RELIGIOUS  
☒ GOVERNMENT ☐ SCIENTIFIC  
☐ INDUSTRIAL ☐ TRANSPORTATION  
☐ MILITARY ☐ OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Residents White County: County Judge

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Court Square

CITY, TOWN

Searcy

VICINITY OF

STATE

Arkansas

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

White County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Courtsquare

CITY, TOWN

Searcy

STATE

Arkansas

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

7

PAGE

1

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

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

Notable interior features include handsome stairways to the second (courtroom) level and beautiful ceramic tile (1" hexagon) floors.

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



# 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

## SPECIFIC DATES

1870-1912

## BUILDER/ARCHITECT

M. H. Baldwin

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

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

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

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

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

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

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

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

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

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

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

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

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

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

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

One of the most unusual cases tried in the courthouse involved a communal group of Cobbites in 1877. The group were disciples of Reverend Cobb, or the "Walking Preacher," as he preferred to be called. Cobb claimed that he received divine inspiration from God, and he arose each day before sunrise to summon the sun to rise. As a result of "true



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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

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

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

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

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

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

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Arkansas, Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1890.

Humorous History of White County, by Claude E. Johnson. (Searcy:1975).

Searcy, Arkansas A Frontier Town Grows up with America, by Raymond L. Muncy. (Searcy: Harding Press, 1976).

Searcy Daily Citizen 9/13/39.

White County Heritage, Vol. II, April, 1964; Vol. IV: Vol. IX October, 1971.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre.

UTM REFERENCES

A | 1, 5 | 6 | 1, 4 | 8, 3, 0 | 3, 9 | 0, 1 | 3, 0, 0 |

ZONE EASTING

NORTHING

B | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

C | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

D | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Dan Chapel, Architect & Donna DuVall, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

DATE

12/14/76

STREET & NUMBER

500 Continental Building, Main at Markham

TELEPHONE

501-371-2763

CITY OR TOWN

Little Rock,

STATE

Arkansas

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ☐

STATE ☐

LOCAL ☒

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Anne Bartley

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

12/14/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER



PH036223X  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

## DATA SHEET

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## NAME

\* HISTORIC

White County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

## LOCATION

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Court Square

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Searcy

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

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Arkansas

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White

CODE

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## CLASSIFICATION

## CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

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IN PROCESS

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## STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

YES RESTRICTED

YES UNRESTRICTED

NO

## PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER

## OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Residents White County: County Judge

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Court Square

CITY, TOWN

Searcy

VICINITY OF

STATE

Arkansas

72143

## LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

White County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Courtsquare

CITY, TOWN

Searcy

STATE

Arkansas

## REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

DESCR

EXCELLEN  
GOOD  
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## DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> F.R.	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

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## SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LAND	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LAW	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICAL	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1870-1912

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The largest number of architecturally significant courthouses in Arkansas are scattered over five counties. A structural symbol of American county courthouses serves as the center of local life. Often the largest and most costly building in a county, the courthouse is almost always a source of pride to the community and make use of its facilities.

White County was created by the Territorial Legislature in 1835, from parts of Pulaski, Independence, and Arkansas' thirty-fifth county. White County covers 1,000 miles at its creation, making it the second largest county in Arkansas. County court records date from May 23, 1835.

The David Crise farm near White Sulphur Springs, Arkansas, temporarily served as the first courthouse. The legislature established a five-man commission to locate the county seat. The commission did not locate a possible site, but it took no action. By 1838, sixty-five citizens petitioned the General Assembly to locate the courthouse. The commission located a site near the present location. John Howerton promised property for the courthouse, but he died before the deed of conveyance. The guardian appointed to the widow and children refused to sign the conveyance, and had to be selected.

In 1840, Crawford Walker, who married the daughter of Magness, an early pioneer of White County, donated land to the commission. Lots were sold, and the road was constructed. White County's first permanent courthouse was constructed southwest of the present courthouse. The first storey log structure that contained a 4 foot by 10 foot benches. The courthouse and furnishing cost \$138.50.

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## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE

MOVED DATE

## APPEARANCE

structure styled  
The later  
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sent "H" Plan, was  
this original build-  
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both the north and  
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## SIGNIFICANCE

## PERIOD

PREHISTORIC

1400-1499

1500-1599

1600-1699

1700-1799

X 1800-1899

1900-

ARCHAEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC

ARCHAEOLOGY-HISTORIC

AGRICULTURE

X ARCHITECTURE

ART

COMMERCE

COMMUNICATIONS

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

COMMUNITY PLANNING

CONSERVATION

ECONOMICS

EDUCATION

ENGINEERING

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

INDUSTRY

INVENTION

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

X LAW

LITERATURE

MILITARY

MUSIC

PHILOSOPHY

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

RELIGION

SCIENCE

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

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

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

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



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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

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

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

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

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

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CONTINUATION SHEET

The county rented space for a new courthouse could

In August 1869, County proposals would be accepted for the construction of a new courthouse. The county authorized \$25,000 for the construction. Architect, M. H. Baldwin of Searcy received the contract. Costs, however, far exceeded the estimate.

The new Courthouse, completed in 1878. The first storey was on the second storey. The vault but was destroyed. The courtroom was located at the top of the court. Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The courthouse additionally functioned as a court house, such as New Years, and court sessions.

The new courthouse was completed in 1878, four gas lamps and a new tin roof were installed. The original wooden fence was removed.

In 1912, the courthouse architect from Little Rock, Arkansas, designed a two-story brick, identical to the original. He flattened the high south elevations.

One of the most unusual groups of Cobb's work, Cobb, or the "Walking" group, claimed that he received the design before sunrise to

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

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

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

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

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

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

One of the most unusual cases tried in the courthouse involved a communal group of Cobbites in 1877. The group were disciples of Reverend Cobb, or the "Walking Preacher," as he preferred to be called. Cobb claimed that he received divine inspiration from God, and he arose each day before sunrise to summon the sun to rise. As a result of "true

UNITED STATES

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY

CONTINUATION SHEET

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

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

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

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

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

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



## MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Arkansas, Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1890.

Humorous History of White County, by Clara E. Johnson. (Searcy:1975).

Searcy, Arkansas A Frontier Town Grows up with America, by Raymond L. Muncy. (Searcy: Harding Press, 1976).

Searcy Daily Citizen 9/13/39.

White County Heritage, Vol. II, April, 1964; Vol. IV: Vol. IX October, 1971.

## GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre.

UTM REFERENCES

A 15 614830 3901300  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B                          
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C                          
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE

Dan Chapel, Architect & Donna DuVall, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

DATE

12/14/76

STREET & NUMBER

500 Continental Building, Main at Markham

TELEPHONE

501-371-2763

CITY OR TOWN

Little Rock,

STATE

Arkansas

## STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Anne Bartley

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

12/14/76

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8/3/77

ENTRY ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

7-27-77

## Missing Core Documentation

**Property Name**

White County Courthouse

**County, State**

White County,  
Arkansas

**Reference Number**

77000279

The following Core Documentation is missing from this entry:

☒ Nomination Form (includes photocopied SHPO and microfilm versions)

☐ Photographs

☐ USGS Map



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

White County Courthouse  
White Co., AR

- ☐ resubmission  
☐ nomination by person or local government  
☐ owner objection  
☐ appeal

Substantive Review: ☐ sample ☐ request ☐ appeal ☐ NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Working No. \_\_\_\_\_

Fed. Reg. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Due: \_\_\_\_\_

Action: ☐ ACCEPT 8/3/77

☐ RETURN

☐ REJECT

Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Recom./Criteria \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Discipline \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: ☐ technical corrections cited below  
☐ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

7. Description

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

- ☐ summary paragraph  
☐ completeness  
☐ clarity  
☐ alterations/integrity  
☐ dates  
☐ boundary selection

## 8. Significance

Period \_\_\_\_\_ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates \_\_\_\_\_

Builder/Architect \_\_\_\_\_

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- ☐ summary paragraph
- ☐ completeness
- ☐ clarity
- ☐ applicable criteria
- ☐ justification of areas checked
- ☐ relating significance to the resource
- ☐ context
- ☐ relationship of integrity to significance
- ☐ justification of exception
- ☐ other

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal boundary description and justification \_\_\_\_\_

## 11. Form Prepared By

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_\_\_ national \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

title \_\_\_\_\_

date \_\_\_\_\_

## 13. Other

- ☐ Maps
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_





Courthouse  
Searcy  
White Co.

1976

Form No. 10-301a  
(Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

White County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

CITY, TOWN

Searcy

VICINITY OF

COUNTY

White

STATE

Arkansas

**3 PHOTO REFERENCE**

PHOTO CREDIT

Bob Dunn

DATE OF PHOTO 1976

NEGATIVE FILED AT

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

**4 IDENTIFICATION**

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

View of south elevation

PHOTO NO.

1

INT: 2983-75





PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES



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CITY, TOWN

Searcy

\_\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

COUNTY

White

STATE

Arkansas

**3 PHOTO REFERENCE**

PHOTO CREDIT Bob Dunn

DATE OF PHOTO 1976

NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

**4 IDENTIFICATION**

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

view of south elevation in ca. 1878 photograph

PHOTO NO.

2





Courthouse  
Searcy  
White Co.  
1976,

Form No. 10-301a  
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**1 NAME**

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White County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

CITY, TOWN

Searcy

VICINITY OF

COUNTY

White

STATE

Arkansas

**3 PHOTO REFERENCE**

PHOTO CREDIT Bob Dunn

DATE OF PHOTO 1976

NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

**4 IDENTIFICATION**

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

View of east elevation

PHOTO NO.

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INT: 2983-75

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER





Courthouse  
Searcy  
White Co.  
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Form No. 10-301a  
(Rev. 10-74)

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TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

White County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

CITY, TOWN

Searcy

— VICINITY OF

COUNTY

White

STATE

Arkansas

**3 PHOTO REFERENCE**

PHOTO CREDIT

Bob Dunn

DATE OF PHOTO 1976

NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

**4 IDENTIFICATION**

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Viewed of west elevation.

PHOTO NO.

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INT: 2983-75



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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
PROPERTY MAP FORM**

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH MAP

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

White County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

CITY, TOWN

\_\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

COUNTY

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Arkansas

**3 MAP REFERENCE**

SOURCE United States Geological Survey, Judsonia

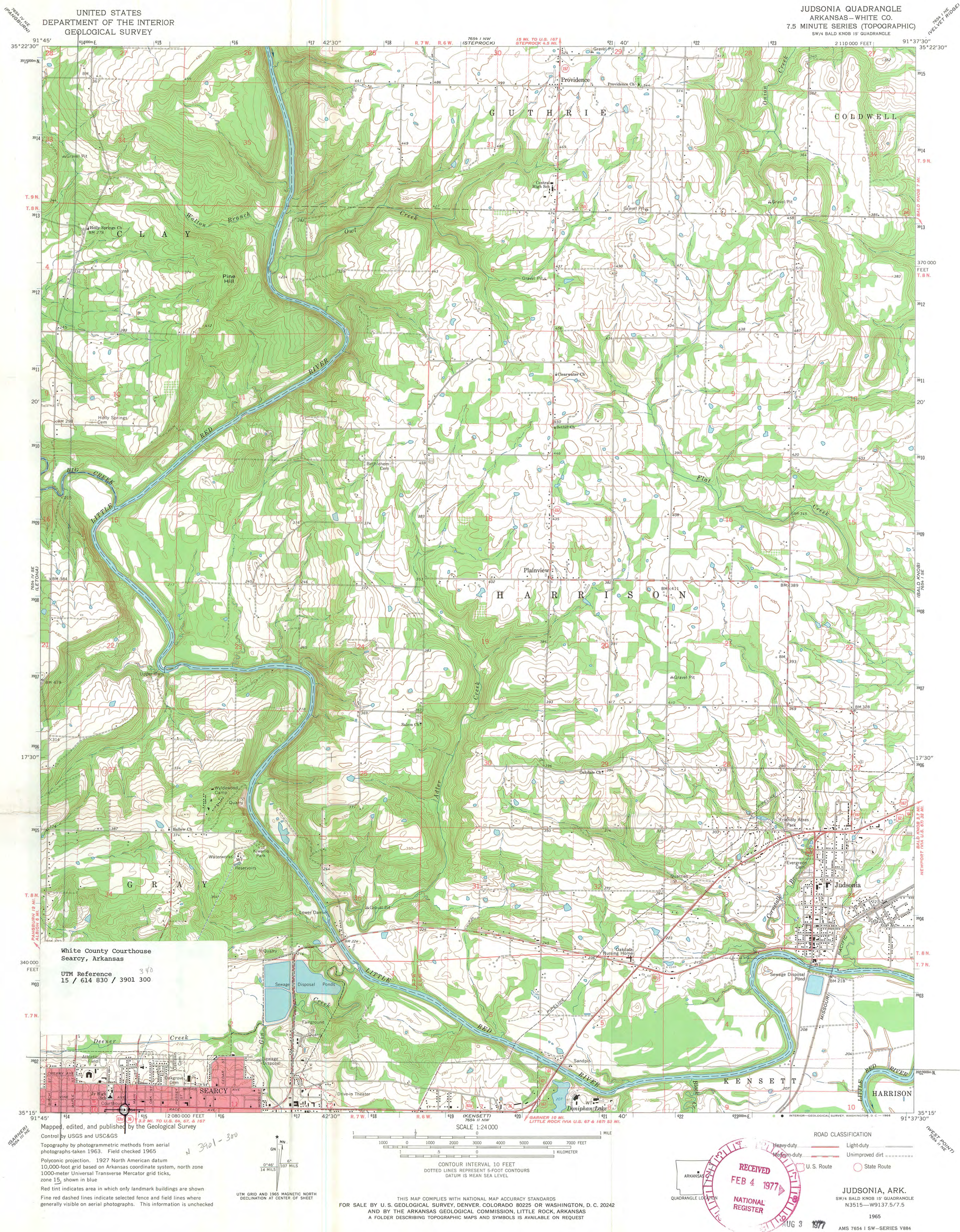
SCALE 1:24,000 DATE 1965

**4 REQUIREMENTS**

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS

1. PROPERTY BOUNDARIES
2. NORTH ARROW
3. UTM REFERENCES





White County Courthouse  
Searcy, Arkansas

UTM Reference  
15 / 614 830 / 3901 300

Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USC&GS  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
photographs taken 1963. Field checked 1965  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Arkansas coordinate system, north zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 15, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked

UTM GRID AND 1965 MAGNETIC NORTH  
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

SCALE 1:24,000  
CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
DOTTED LINES REPRESENT 5-FOOT CONTOURS  
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225 OR WASHINGTON, D.C. 20242  
AND BY THE ARKANSAS GEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Heavy-duty — Light-duty  
Medium-duty — Unimproved dirt  
U.S. Route — State Route



JUDSONIA, ARK.  
SW/4 BALD KNOB 15' QUADRANGLE  
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