

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1280

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1. Name of Property

=====

historic name Cleveland County Courthouse

other names/site number _____

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2. Location

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street & number 200 South Peters Avenue not for publication N/A
city or town Norman vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code OK county Cleveland code 027
zip code 73070

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Bob Deak
Signature of certifying official

10-23-00
Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is a

- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the
 National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the
 National Register
- removed from the National Register

Edna H. Beall 12/29/00

other (explain):

Bob

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

=====
5. Classification
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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u> structures
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> objects
<u>2</u>	<u>4</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

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6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: courthouse
GOVERNMENT correctional facility

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: courthouse

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE:Limestone
roof ASPHALT
walls STONE:Limestone
other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. Statement of Significance
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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Politics/Government
Architecture
Economics

Period of Significance 1940-1950

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8. Statement of Significance (Continued)
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Significant Dates 1940

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Vahlberg, Walter T., architect
Tankersley Construction Company, builder

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property One Acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	14	642860	3898340	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

N/A See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian, for the City of Norman

organization Savage Consulting date May 2000

street & number Rt. 1, Box 116 telephone 405/459-6200

city or town Pocasset state OK zip code 73079
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Additional Documentation
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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner
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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Cleveland County Commissioners, Mr. Leroy Krohmer, Chairman

street & number 201 South Jones telephone _____

city or town Norman state OK zip code 73069

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SUMMARY

The Cleveland County Courthouse, located in Norman, Oklahoma, is a striking Art Deco style building. Completed in 1940, the building was designed by Oklahoma City architect Walter T. Vahlberg. The Tankersley Construction Company of Oklahoma City erected the building. Constructed of limestone for both the foundation and walls, the building is three stories in height with a partial above grade basement. The roof is flat, covered with asphalt. Both the windows and doors are metal. The historic front doors are double, metal and glass with a metal design in the transom area. The majority of windows are modern replacement windows, frequently topped with an opaque third pane to fill the historic opening. The nonoriginal windows are hung; there are a few historic, metal, single light casement windows remaining on the third floor. The building is highlighted with fluted pilasters, an ornamented cornice and elaborate, abstract, low relief sculpture above the door and windows.

In addition to the replacement of the windows with nonoriginal, metal, hung windows, the building has been altered by the construction of a small addition and a large addition on the rear. A small (9'x9'), flat roofed, concrete block addition has been constructed on the approximate middle of the rear elevation. The addition has double, metal doors. It is not known when this addition was constructed. To the north of this, a flat roofed, two wall shelter has been constructed in front of a metal, slab, pedestrian door. In 1979, additional office space was constructed to the rear of the courthouse. The office addition faces west, opposite of the courthouse. Doubling the amount of available room, the new construction is attached to the original building through a one-story, concrete and glass, enclosed corridor on the far north corner of the west elevation. The two-story, concrete, Contemporary style office addition extends on both sides farther than the original courthouse. Although the addition is comparable in size to the original building, it is easily distinguished by its style and material. Further, because the addition is attached to the main courthouse by only a walkway located on the rear of the building, the impact on the courthouse's integrity is minor.

The setting of the courthouse has been altered with the construction of the modern, noncontributing Cleveland County Jail on the southwest corner of the

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block. The jail is a modern, Contemporary style, concrete building built in 1984. A noncontributing concrete and chainlink fence has been built just east of the jail, surrounding a parking lot located east of the jail and south of the office addition. On the northwest corner of the courthouse square, a noncontributing brick memorial with a small granite monument to the 45th Infantry was erected in 1999. A brick memorial walk, not included in the resource count due to its insignificant stature, has also been constructed to the front of the courthouse. Concrete benches have been placed around the original building, including four in the front, one on the south side and three on the north side. Two of the benches on the north side have been arranged around a landscaped oval to create a shaded sitting area. Although there are a total of eleven benches, they are counted as one noncontributing object due to their commonality and relative minor stature. Off the southeast corner of the building is the requisite, contributing flag pole with both the American and Oklahoma flags flying. The grassy area around the north, east and south sides of the courthouse has been landscaped fairly recently with concrete walkways providing access to the building from various points. The landscaping includes two concrete urns with small trees on the east side of the building. The landscaping elements, such as the urns, are also not included in the resource count due to their negligible significance.

Although the changes to the setting of the courthouse impact the overall integrity of the building, they do not destroy the building's ability to convey its historic significance. Prior to the construction of the new courthouse in 1940, the county jail was historically situated on the courthouse square. By 1944, the Oklahoma National Guard had constructed an armory building on the courthouse square and a courthouse annex had also been built on the site. It is unknown when the annex was removed. The armory was demolished in 1979 to make way for construction of the office addition. Thus, additional construction on the site is an historic feature of the Cleveland County Courthouse site. Additionally, the courthouse remains the focal point on all sides except for the rear elevation. The modern landscaping, including the benches, of the site also probably has historical antecedents. Further, the landscaping does not directly impact the building's integrity. Overall, the building retains the majority of integrity requirements, including location, design, material, workmanship, feeling and association. Thus, it is eligible to be listed on the

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EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The Cleveland County Courthouse is a three-story, limestone building with a partial above grade basement. Stylistically, the building is characterized as Art Deco, although the form of the building adheres closely to the Classical Revival style. The combination of the Classical Revival form with dominating Art Deco ornamentation was popular for public construction projects in the late 1930s and early 1940s, particularly for projects funded by the Public Works Administration and courthouses. The Cleveland County Courthouse was designed by Oklahoma City architect Walter T. Vahlberg, who was responsible for the design of several other buildings in Norman. The Tankersley Construction Company, also of Oklahoma City, was responsible for construction of the building, under the supervision of the Public Works Administration.

The Cleveland County Courthouse has a flat roof which has been covered with asphalt. The building features metal doors and windows. Historically, the courthouse windows were metal, single light casements but, at an unknown date, the majority of windows were altered to modern, metal, hung. The foundation of the building is limestone, matching the upper walls. On the northeast corner of the building's foundation is a blue granite cornerstone. The cornerstone was put in place in late March 1940 when the building was nearing completion. Sealed inside the cornerstone was a copper box which contained the 1939 golden anniversary issue of the local newspaper and other pertinent records. The cornerstone reads "FEDERAL EMERGENCY ADMINISTRATION OF PUBLIC WORKS/FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT/PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES/HAROLD L. ICKES/ADMINISTRATOR OF PUBLIC WORKS/CLEVELAND COUNTY COURT HOUSE/1939" on the east side. The north side of the cornerstone reads "BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS/HUGH ROBERTS, CHAIRMAN/J.T. WASHBURN, MEMBER/GEO. F. CHURCH, MEMBER/VIRGIL YOUNG, COUNTY CLERK/WALTER T. VAHLBERG, ARCHITECT/TANKERSLEY CONSTRUCTION CO./CONTRACTORS.

All four elevations of the building are divided vertically and horizontally in a form which is indicative of the Classical Revival style. All four elevations are also symmetrical, another feature of classicism. The vertical divisions of the building basically consist of the components of the classical order. This

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includes the base which is composed of the partial above grade basement. The first through third floors of the building serve as the column. This is capped by the building's large cornice which forms the entablature. In addition to the basic vertical division of the building into the components of the classical order, all elevations are divided horizontally into three bays. This consists of a larger, central bay which is flanked by narrow, side bays.

The ornamental detail on the north, east and south elevations is basically identical. Much of the decorative detail is carried around the edges of the west elevation but does not extend the entire rear elevation. The uppermost band of the building is slightly recessed and decorated with low relief, stone rosettes connected to each other by a set of vertical lines. Below this is a plain band which is level with the majority of the wall. Under this is another recessed band. This band is very narrow and fluted. This is followed by a large, flush band of limestone. Relatively plain, this band is ornamented by systematically placed, low relief, rectangular panels which contain a floral design. Additionally, the tops of the tall pilasters separating the horizontal bays of the elevations extend into this band. The pilasters are stepped so that the uppermost portion of these pilasters projects slightly from the flush band. The remaining, lower portion of the pilaster projects out further than any other parts of the walls. Centered within the uppermost portion of the pilasters are four, simple, vertical dado incisions which mimic the fluting of other elements of the building. On the sides of the uppermost portion of the pilasters are thinner, horizontal incisions. The remainder of these pilasters are unornamented except for the limestone block construction. The central bay of each elevation is also divided by fluted pilasters. These pilasters do not extend above the third floor windows.

Separating the third floor windows from the large, plain band above is another narrow, fluted band. Below this, there are three different sets of ornamentation separating the various windows of the first, second and third floors. The basement and first floor windows are separated by a stepped water table. Above the first and second floor windows in the narrow, flanking bays are rectangular panels with a low relief, abstract design with a center anthemion. Within the central bays of the east and south elevations, the third and second floor windows are separated by metal panels. The upper two floor

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windows on the north elevation are not divided as they provide light to the two-story courtroom. The metal panels between the third and second floor on the east and south elevation have been incised with an elaborate, abstract, Art Deco design. The second and first floor windows on the north, east and south elevations are separated by highly decorative, abstract, low relief, stone, panels. The first floor windows in the central bays are further ornamented by low relief capitals on the vertical members of the windows. The capitals extend into the elaborate, decorative panel above. The central vertical member is topped with an anthemion. The side members are topped by a more geometric design. Except for the stepped water table and limestone block construction, the partial above grade basement level is relatively unadorned.

With a significant set back from the street, the east elevation serves as the building's facade. Centrally located in the cornice are the incised letters spelling "CLEVELAND COUNTY." Visible above this, on the roof, is a blond brick box, which probably contains nonhistoric elevator equipment, and a metal vent. Various signals and antennae are located on the brick box. The dominating central bay of the facade contains the main entry and five sets of windows per floor. The main entry is located above grade on the first floor. The entry is accessed by a wide expanse of concrete stairs. The stairs are divided in the center by a metal railing. There are also metal railings located on either side of the stairs. Further flanking the stairs are low, stepped, limestone wing walls. The wing walls are decorated on the front by four, incised, rectangular, ornaments with a simple geometric design. Topping the wing walls are highly ornamental, Art Deco style, metal lights. The entry consists of a double, metal and glass, paneled door topped by a transom. The transom is ornamented with a metal, geometric filigree. Above the entry is a large panel with a low relief, stone panel. This panel has similar ornamentation as to that found above the first floor windows, however, it is much larger and elaborate. Like the first floor windows in the central bay, along either side of the door are simple pilasters, topped with elaborate capitals which extend into the ornamentation above.

The basement level windows in the central bay of the facade are short, metal, one-over-one, hung windows with recessed stone lintels and virtually no sills. Each set of windows on the basement level contains two identical windows. The

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first floor windows are one-over-one, hung windows topped with a third opaque pane. The windows are ornamented as described above. Similar to the basement, each set of first floor windows contains two identical windows. The second floor windows are also metal, one-over-one with an opaque pane above. However, each set of second floor windows consist of two narrow, fixed, windows flanking a larger, metal, hung window. All windows are one-over-one with an opaque pane above. Four of the five sets of third floor windows are the historic, single pane, metal, casement windows. The fifth set, in the northernmost corner of the central bay, are modern, metal, hung, one-over-one, windows. The original four sets of third floor windows consist of a large, double pane, central window flanked by single windows. The fifth set consists of a larger central window flanked by narrow windows.

The facade's narrow flanking bays are identical, except for the windows on the third floor. On each floor, there are two windows. The basement level windows match the windows in the central bay. The first and second floor windows are also the same, being one-over-one, metal, hung windows topped with an opaque pane. The third floor window in the southern bay are the historical, single light, metal casement windows. The northern bay of the third floor contains modern, metal, one-over-one, hung windows.

The southern elevation, like the northern, is narrower than the east and west elevations. There are no entries on the south side of the building. The center bay contains three sets of windows. The windows in the central bay match the corresponding windows on the east elevation, except for the westernmost basement window which is filled with vents. The vents appear to be historic. The windows on the southern elevation include short, one-over-one, metal, hung windows on the basement level; tall, one-over-one, metal, hung windows, topped with an opaque pane, on the first and second floors; and, the historic, metal, single light casement windows on the third floor. Both the basement and first floor windows are paired. The second floor windows consist of a large window flanked by narrow windows. On the third floor, the windows also consist of a large, double pane, central window flanked by single windows on the sides. The flanking bays of the southern elevation are very narrow. The side bays are nearly identical. On each floor of the bay there is only a single window. The basement level of the side bays have a single window

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matching the other basement windows. The first and second floor windows are metal, hung, one-over-one, topped by an opaque pane. On the third floor, the easternmost window is an single light, fixed window. The westernmost window is an historic, metal, single light casement window. Above this window is the historic limestone chimney. The chimney is ornamented with low relief and incised geometric designs.

The rear elevation of the Cleveland County Courthouse is relatively plain. Simple ornamentation has been applied to the narrow flanking bays. The central bay is devoid of any ornamentation. Within each of the narrow side bays, there are two windows on each floor. The basement windows in the northernmost bay have been removed to provide access from the original courthouse to the 1979 office addition. The southernmost basement windows include one, metal, one-over-one, hung window. The other opening has been infilled with wood and metal to allow for a vent. The first and second floor windows in the flanking bays are one-over-one, metal, hung windows with an opaque pane on top. The third floor windows in the flanking bays are the historic, single light, metal casement windows. The first, second and third floor windows in the narrow bays are separated by low relief, stone, panels identical to those between the corresponding windows on the other elevations.

The majority of windows in the central bay of the rear elevation are similar to those found elsewhere on the building. Within the central bay, at the basement level of the west elevation, there are two large, glass block windows and one above grade, metal, slab, pedestrian door. All of these openings are north of the concrete block addition. Sheltering the above grade, pedestrian door is a nonhistoric, two wall construction with a flat roof. On both the first and second floors, there are ten windows. However, not all of the windows are identically placed. The third floor has eleven windows, all of which are placed above a window on either the first or second floor. The window pattern in the central bay is basically two-two-three-two-two. On the first floor, the central window in the triple set is nonexistent. The second floor does not have the window in the double set just south of the triple set of windows. The windows on the first and second floors are one-over-one, metal, hung windows topped with an opaque, third pane. The six northernmost windows on the third floor are one-over-one, hung windows. The remaining five, located to the south

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of the west elevation, are the historic, single light casement windows. Present on only the west elevation, are seven attic windows. Centrally located and containing fewer windows than the first, second and third floors, the window pattern at this level mimics that of below, being two-three-two. The attic windows are metal, casement except for the southernmost window. The southernmost window is hung and contains a window air conditioning unit.

Centrally located on the rear of the building, is a modern, below grade, double, metal, slab door with a vent above. Just north of this, also below grade, is a single, oversize, metal, plank-like door with metal strap hinges. The doors are accessed by concrete stairs with a metal railing. Adjacent to these original entries on the north is a small, concrete block addition. It is unknown when this addition was added. The addition has a flat roof and small vents on the sides. On the west side of the addition are a double, metal, slab door and a single, metal, panel door. Because of its size and location, this addition does not impact the integrity of the courthouse. Additionally, various heating and cooling units have been installed between the historic courthouse and its 1979 addition. The units are located on both the north and south sides of the rear elevation.

Also attached at the rear of the building is a large, concrete, office addition. The front of the addition faces west, opposite of the courthouse. This addition is two stories in height with a basement. The majority of windows in the addition are fixed, with some hung. The doors are glazed slab. The addition is longer than the original courthouse. The office addition is attached to the courthouse via a relatively narrow, concrete and glass walkway located on the northernmost bay of the west elevation. The walkway is only one-story in height, although there is a stairwell located on the south side of the walkway which provides access to the addition's basement area. The addition was designed by Kaighn Associates and built by Barbour and Short between 1979 and 1980. The addition is Contemporary in style and materials. Thus, it is easily distinguished from the original building. Further, the attachment between the buildings is relatively small and located on the rear of the building. Although due to its scale, the addition adversely impacts the courthouse's historic setting, it does not diminish the building's overall ability to convey its historic character.

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The north side of the building is similar to the south elevation. There are no exterior entries on this elevation either. The arrangement of the windows in the flanking bays is the same as of that of the south elevation. However, the third floor windows are not the historic casement windows. Instead, there are metal, one-over-one, hung windows. The windows on the basement and first floors in the central bay on the north elevation are the same as those on the south elevation, except for the westernmost basement window. The westernmost basement window consists of half window, half vent. Setting the north elevation apart from the other elevations are the second and third floor windows. On the north elevation, these windows form a continuous band of windows. Historically, the three sets of windows lit the two-story courtroom. Currently, the uppermost portion of the windows are filled with opaque panes. The lower portion contains three panes of window glass. The windows are metal, hung. Each of the three sets of windows in the central bay consists of two narrow windows flanking a larger, central window.

Because of the courthouse's historic association with the entire block on which it is situated, the boundaries for the building include the whole block. However, the historic courthouse block upon which the building is centrally located contains several other resources besides the courthouse and its office addition. On the southwest corner of the block, a modern, noncontributing jail has been constructed. The jail is a Contemporary style, concrete building with narrow, glass block windows. A noncontributing, concrete and chainlink fence has been constructed to the east of the jail, around a parking lot. The fence provides secure parking for the jail. Directly north of the jail on the corner, a small, noncontributing, brick memorial was constructed in 1999. In the center of the brick memorial is a granite stone commemorating the 45th Infantry Division and the National Guard Armory formerly located on the site. Further impacting the setting of the block, has been the landscaping around the sides and front of the historic courthouse. An historic feature of this is the contributing flagpole which is located in front of the building to the southeast. Other landscaping work has included placing several concrete benches with corresponding vegetation in various places. The benches are counted as one noncontributing object, although there are a total of eleven benches on the block. Sidewalks providing access to the benches and around the building have also been constructed. Along the central, front walk of the

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building a brick, commemorative walk has been installed. The sidewalks and commemorative walk are not included in the property's resource count due their insignificant stature. Although cumulatively these changes adversely impact the courthouse's setting, they do not directly affect the building itself. The historic courthouse is easily distinguished. Further, the building retains its integrity of location, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association.

ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS

The historic courthouse has been altered by the replacement of the majority of its historic, metal, casement windows. The nonoriginal windows are metal, one-over-one, hung windows. On the first and second floors of the building, these windows are topped with a third opaque pane to completely fill the original window space. Although the replacement of the windows is not desirable, the original window configuration and pattern has been retained.

Additionally, the rear elevation has been changed by the construction of several additions. Centrally located on the west elevation is a small, nonoriginal, concrete block addition. Due to its size and placement, this addition does not impact the integrity of the rear elevation. Just north of this, a flat roofed, two wall shelter has been constructed around a pedestrian door. This shelter has minimal impact on the building's integrity. In 1979/1980, a larger, office addition was constructed to the rear of the courthouse. This addition is Contemporary in style. The two-story addition is constructed of concrete and is attached to the original courthouse by a relatively narrow, one-story, concrete and glass walkway. Although the scale of the addition is distressing, its style and construction material clearly differentiates the addition from the original building. Further, the addition is located to the rear of the courthouse and does not interfere with the view of the front or side elevations.

Other alterations to the original courthouse block have been described above. Although these alterations adversely impact the courthouse's historic setting, they do not impact the building's overall integrity. Overall, the Cleveland County Courthouse retains its integrity of location, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association.

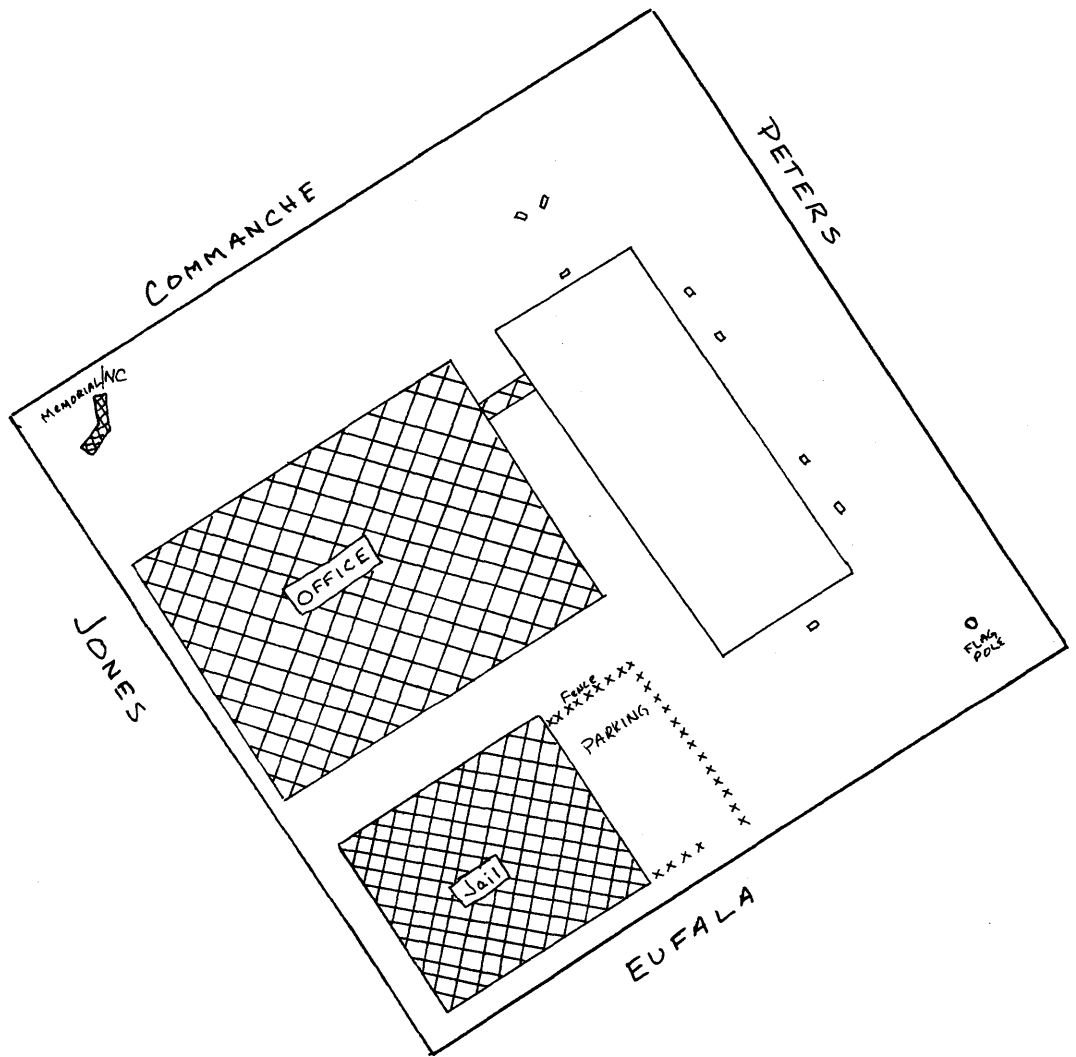
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CLEVELAND
COUNTY
COURTHOUSE
SQUARE



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SUMMARY

The Cleveland County Courthouse is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. Completed in 1940, the building was designed by Walter T. Vahlberg and constructed using monies provided by the federal government's Public Works Administration (PWA). The building's relatively brief period of significance, 1940 to 1950, reflects the completion of the building in 1940 through 1950, the current National Register fifty year mark. The building remains in use as the county courthouse, although there is now a separate jail on the courthouse block. As the county courthouse, the building is historically significant for its association with local politics/government. Additionally under Criterion A, the courthouse is historically significant for its association with the New Deal building program of the PWA. Under Criterion C, the courthouse is architecturally significant as an excellent example of an Art Deco style, public building in Norman.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Similar to many towns in central Oklahoma, Norman's origins date primarily back to 1889 and the first Oklahoma Land Run. However, Norman has a brief pre-1889 history as a stop along the branch line extended through central Oklahoma by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway beginning in 1884. The railroad station, and subsequently the city, was named for a government engineer who had camped in the vicinity of the present site of the town in 1872.¹ Although there were only a few railroad buildings on the site of Norman Station, one of the lasting impacts of the original railroad occupation of the site was the town's Original Townsite plat. Railroad officials took upon themselves the duty of preparing a townsite plat which reflected their interests. As such, unlike many Oklahoma towns, Norman's townsite does not follow the traditional grid pattern espoused by the federal government. Instead, Norman's townsite was

¹Institute of Community Development, University of Oklahoma, "Norman, the University City: Community Resources," (Norman, Oklahoma: Community Development Committee of the Norman Chamber of Commerce, 1949), 5.

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laid out in relation to the points of the railroad rather than a compass. Later development of Norman followed the traditional grid pattern, creating a noticeable jog between the original townsite and subsequent additions.

On 21 April 1889, the site that would become the town of Norman was open prairie except for the handful of railroad buildings. By nightfall, 22 April 1889, Norman had mushroomed to a town of five hundred citizens and numerous temporary shelters. The Santa Fe Railway turned over its plat to the first townsite company that arrived. Rather than remarking the lots of the new town, the townsite company embraced the railroad's development plans with construction quickly underway.

Although Congress provided regulations for the land run, they failed to authorize a territorial government for the Unassigned Lands. Over a year after the land run, Congress finally passed the Oklahoma Organic Act on 2 May 1890. This act organized the government of Oklahoma Territory, in addition to other important matters. Under the act, the first seven counties of the future state of Oklahoma were created. Cleveland County was one of these first seven counties created in Oklahoma Territory.² Norman was quickly designated the county seat of Cleveland County.

Norman experienced a relatively stable population growth through the first half of the twentieth century. By the time Oklahoma was officially granted statehood in 1907, Norman's population stood at 3,040. Three years later, the town's population stood at 3,724, a gain of nearly seven hundred residents. In 1920, Norman claimed just over five thousand residents. The 1920s proved be a major decade of growth for Norman. City population nearly doubled from 5,004 in 1920 to 9,603 in 1930. Gaining slightly less than 2000 residents in the ensuing decade, by 1940 Norman's population stood at 11,429. The 1940s also bought an explosion in the number of Norman residents so that by 1949, city population reached 20,180. It must be remembered, however, that these numbers

²Arrel Morgan Gibson, Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries, 2nd edition (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 176-178.

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did not accurately reflect the number of people actually living within the city due to the number of college students residing in the town on a temporary basis.³

Two major state institutions greatly influenced the maturation of the city throughout this time period, continuing to the present. The "most important factor in the growth" of the town was the location of the University of Oklahoma in the city. The University opened its doors in September 1892 in a building on Main Street. By 1948, over eleven thousand students attended the school which included nearly one hundred buildings on a main campus of nearly three hundred acres on the southwest side of Norman. The second state institution which affected the development of the town was Central State Hospital. Opened in 1915 in a previously privately owned mental institution, Central State Hospital became the state's largest mental treatment center by the late 1940s. In addition to operating its own farm and dairy, the hospital also ran canning plants, a laundry, mattress factory and furniture factory. In all by 1949, the hospital was valued at over four million dollars with 111 buildings spread over an area of 820 acres.⁴

Like all moderately sized towns, Norman required a number of public buildings to serve community needs, such as a city hall, county courthouse and federal building. Some needs, however, were met in a variety of temporary quarters until a permanent home could be established. The county courthouse was one of those needs housed in various buildings prior to the acquisition of a county-owned building. Between 1890 and 1893, county offices were located in rented buildings in downtown Norman.

In 1893, the Cleveland County Commissioners were presented with the deed to their first county-owned building. This building, an existing, two-story, brick building located in Block 37 of the Original Townsite, served the county

³Institute of Community Development, "Norman, the University City," 8.

⁴Ibid., 5.

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until about 1904 when a fire destroyed it. At that time, continued agitation over the site of the courthouse resulted in county officials purchasing the current courthouse block. Although a contract had been let to Strain and Kahoe for construction of a new building in early 1904, activity was halted by lawsuits seeking to prevent the construction of the new courthouse. With the suits finally dismissed by January 1905, county commissioners were faced with finding a suitable new contractor. In April 1905, the commissioners rejected all bids for the new building as being too high. The commissioners had set a limit of \$40,000. The original 1904 contract price had been \$35,000. The following month, May L. F. Lee of Oklahoma City submitted a bid of \$39,830 which was accepted by the commissioners. The new courthouse, designed by noted Oklahoma architect Solomon A. Layton, was completed by July 1906.⁵

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

By 1930, the 1906 courthouse was not meeting the needs of the community. This included the pressing need for a fire safe repository for county records. In May 1930, a plan to close the west entrance of the existing courthouse, construct a fireproof vault in the first floor lobby space occupied by the west entrance and move the offices of the county clerk and register of deeds into adjacent spaces was under consideration. At that time, the county commissioners believed that "It doesn't appear that a courthouse bond issue is feasible..."⁶

The following year, the local newspaper reported a proposal to build a new building to "guard records and give work." The proposal, just one of several employment and relief plans presented during the summer of 1931 as the Great Depression continued to escalate, called for the construction to be funded by a county bond issue. Building advocates characterized the existing courthouse as a firetrap and the vaults as unsafe. They warned that the county records could not be replaced if a fire were to destroy the building. Advocates also made

⁵The Norman (Oklahoma) Transcript, 9 June 1940.

⁶Ibid., 5 May 1930.

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the point that building materials were at their lowest prices in years. As such, it was maintained that "...a new structure could be built now at less cost than at any other time for years to come." However, Jim Corbett the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce courthouse committee, cautioned that committee had not "...definitely considered" the matter. Further, he indicated the committee had asked the county commissioners and the excise board to include funds to build fireproof vaults in the 1906 courthouse.⁷

The desire for a new building arose again in 1933. At that time, J.C. Todd, county commissioner, reiterated the need for a fire proof building. Todd stated "...should fire break out, the money necessary to quiet property titles alone would be much greater than the cost of a new building." Maurice Crownover, county treasurer, announced that a bond issue was possible because the county's bonded indebtedness was below \$100,000.⁸

The timing of the 1933 proposal was also favorable due to federal legislation then going into effect. In an effort to assist citizens in distress and stimulate the national economy during the trying times of the 1930s, President Roosevelt legislated twenty-nine different acts between 1933 and 1939. Collectively, these bills formed President Roosevelt's "New Deal" for the American people as pledged in his 1932 campaign speeches. The bills were structured to sustain various parts of the economy with the majority seeking to provide some type of relief for the unemployed. Prominent among these programs was the Public Works Administration (PWA), which was legislated in June 1933. Formally known as the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, the PWA was enacted to "prepare a comprehensive program of public works." In doing this, the PWA was intended to "create employment and aid industry by the construction of useful public works of enduring social value."⁹

⁷Ibid., 15 July 1931.

⁸Ibid., 9 June 1940.

⁹The Story of the PWA: Building for Recovery, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 1.

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Similar to other New Deal Era programs, the PWA relied on a partnership between the federal, state, county and city governments to stimulate employment. Local public bodies submitted applications to the PWA for the construction of desirable improvements. The PWA then reviewed the application to ensure that 1) the application was submitted by a public body which represented the people and that the project complied with applicable local, state and national laws; 2) the project was financially sound and the applicant was in a financial position to provide its share of construction costs; and, 3) the project was feasible from an engineering standpoint.¹⁰

Unlike other New Deal Era programs, most specifically the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the PWA was intended to stimulate private industry. By bolstering private industry, the PWA created an increase in private employment which helped to relieve the widespread local, state and national unemployment problem without resorting to the "dole." The WPA, in contrast, was aimed specifically at employing the jobless on worthwhile public work projects for which the workers received public relief money. The PWA made grants and loans to public bodies for the hiring of architects, contractors and laborers to construct useful public works. It did not provide direct relief to the unemployed in the sponsoring community.¹¹

Once an application was approved and the applicant agreed to build the project according to the rules and regulations of the PWA, the PWA gifted forty-five percent of the project costs outright to the sponsoring body. If the applicant had the legal authority to borrow money, they could also borrow the remaining fifty-five percent from the PWA but this was considered a loan which had to be repaid. Once the money was in place, the community solicited contracts for project construction by open, competitive bidding. The PWA remained a supervising participant in the project through construction. After the project was completed to PWA specifications, the PWA retained no control over the use

¹⁰Ibid., 1, 3, 6-7.

¹¹Ibid., 4.

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of the project.¹²

Although the PWA came into existence in 1933, concrete plans for a new Cleveland County Courthouse did not materialize at that time. In 1935, a new proposal for a combined city-county building went further than the previous plans. Harold Gimeno, noted local architect, designed a grand, three-story, Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival style building. The proposed building, to be built on the courthouse block, would measure 65 feet by 165 feet, and was to be constructed of Bedford stone. The estimated cost of the building was \$220,000. Nearly half of the cost, \$99,000, was to be obtained through a PWA grant. The remaining \$121,000 was to be split between the city and county based on the amount of allotted space. The city would be responsible for one-third of the remaining cost and the county would provide the final two-thirds.¹³

Within weeks of submitting the project to the PWA, local officials received word that the project was not acceptable. State PWA officials, fearing possible litigation over a combined building project and eventual denial by Washington officials on that basis, indicated the city and county must submit plans for separate buildings. Although Gimeno developed new plans for separate buildings according to the PWA's specifications, the project for a new courthouse once again failed to proceed. The necessary county bond issue to raise the remaining estimated cost of the building could not be called for without a petition signed by one-sixth of the voters. The county was unable to proceed because it lacked the list of legal voters who could sign the petition.¹⁴

Although the county commissioners requested that Aubrey Moses, county attorney, file a request with state PWA officials to renew the county's application in

¹²Ibid., 3-4 and 8.

¹³The Norman Transcript, 29 August 1935.

¹⁴Ibid., 26 September 1935, 29 September 1935, 4 October 1935 and 9 October 1935.

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1936, progress on a new courthouse did not come until 1938 due to the inability to vote on a bond issue. In July 1938, PWA officials approved a grant of \$94,000 for construction of a county courthouse and jail. The following month, petitions for a courthouse bond issue with the required six hundred signatures were turned into the county attorney. An election concerning the issue was then set for 27 September 1938.¹⁵

By the end of August, a local courthouse committee met with Oklahoma City architect, Walter T. Vahlberg, concerning the new building. Vahlberg was a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and had been "...connected with the architectural profession since 1913." Vahlberg, a practicing architect in Oklahoma since 1922, also designed the Union building at the University of Oklahoma, the First Christian Church, as well as schools in Norman and Oklahoma City, among various other resources. The Cleveland County commissioners had contract with Vahlberg in early 1938 to prepare the preliminary plans. Vahlberg's plans for the Cleveland County Courthouse called for the new building to measure 118 feet long and 73 feet wide. The building would be built "...exactly in front of the existing courthouse." The estimated cost of the building was \$209,090. Of this, \$3,500 was for floor coverings; \$8,500 for fixed equipment such as counters, judges stands, jury boxes and court pews; \$3,500 for "loose equipment" such as filing cabinets; \$12,000 for jail equipment; \$21,500 for plumbing and heating; and, \$8,050 for electrical work.¹⁶

Following approval of the bond issue by Cleveland County voters in late September 1938, building plans progressed rapidly. The Tankersley Construction Company of Oklahoma City received the building contract as they submitted the lowest bid. First ground was broken on the construction of the new courthouse on 17 December 1938. Work on the building proceeded smoothly until May 24,

¹⁵Ibid., 21 February 1936, 14 August 1938, 29 August 1938 and 9 June 1940.

¹⁶Ibid., 29 August 1938, 30 August 1938, 27 August 1939 and 9 June 1940.

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1939. At that time, work was shut down when Vahlberg rejected the building's stone as being discolored. Work resumed after new stones were received, which took two months. This halt in work slowed completion of the building, originally scheduled for October 1939, through early 1940.¹⁷

Cold weather again slowed work on the building through much of late 1938 and early 1939. At the end of March 1940, the building's cornerstone, containing a copy of the local newspaper's anniversary issue and other papers, was in place. Delays in shipping of the building's furniture further postponed completion of the building to PWA satisfaction until June 1940. By the ninth of June 1940, the county offices, except for the jail, had moved into the building. The opening of the building to public inspection held up the movement of prisoners to the new county jail until 11 June 1940.¹⁸

Between 1933 and June 1939, the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works (aka PWA) worked as a separate federal agency. On 1 July 1939, while the Cleveland County Courthouse was under construction, the PWA was consolidated with the Federal Works Agency under Reorganization Plan No. I of 1939. Under the Federal Works Agency, work continued under the name Public Works Administration. In the same reorganization plan, the Federal Works Agency also incorporated the Works Progress Administration (renaming it the Works Projects Administration), Public Buildings Branch of the Procurement Division, Public Roads Administration and the United States Housing Authority.¹⁹ The Federal

¹⁷Ibid., 27 August 1939.

¹⁸Ibid., 11 January 1940, 29 January 1940, 16 February 1940, 31 March 1940, 2 May 1940, 6 May 1940, 26 May 1940, 28 May 1940, 9 June 1940 and 11 June 1940.

¹⁹C.W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown, Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture of Projects Constructed by Federal and Other Governmental Bodies Between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the Assistance of the Public Works Administration, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), preface.

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Works Agency continued in operation until 30 June 1949 when it was abolished and the agency functions transferred to the General Services Administration.

Between June 1933 and March 1939, the PWA funded projects in 3,069 of the nation's 3,071 counties, including the Cleveland County Courthouse. These projects ranged from conservation projects, electric power plants, sewage disposal and waterworks projects, and construction of school buildings, hospitals and numerous public buildings. Total, the PWA was allotted over 2.4 billion dollars. This money was made available by appropriations or sales of securities by the National Industrial Recovery Act, Emergency Appropriation Act for Fiscal Year 1935, Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of 1935, Deficiency Revolving Fund, First Deficiency Appropriation Act of 1936 and Public Works Administration Appropriation Act of 1938. Of the 2.4 billion dollars allotted, the PWA expended nearly 1.7 billion dollars by February 1939 and had obligated all but 15 million of the remaining 751 million dollars on a variety of projects nationwide.²⁰

In terms of public buildings, 4,287 buildings were constructed using allotments from the PWA. Of this, 1,492 were buildings for administration, legislative, judicial and general governmental purposes built in partnership with cities, counties and states. This included 295 courthouses, 206 city and town halls, 101 fire stations, 12 combined fire and police stations, 15 police stations, 126 jails and prisons and 130 other city, county and state administrative and office buildings. In outright gifts, the PWA granted over a hundred million dollars for the construction of city, county and state government buildings. It also loaned nearly 18 million dollars towards the total estimated cost of over 313 million dollars.²¹

In Oklahoma, the PWA undertook 302 projects with non-federal partners. The total estimated costs of these projects was just under 52 million dollars. The

²⁰America Builds: The Record of PWA, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939); 264 and 272.

²¹Ibid., 283-291.

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PWA allotted nearly 39 million of the total projected cost. The projects ranged from the construction of hospitals, schools, waterworks, sewage disposal, electric power plants and government buildings.²² Some of the larger PWA projects in Oklahoma, besides the Cleveland County Courthouse in Norman, included the construction of the municipal complex in Oklahoma City, consisting of the Municipal Building, County Courthouse and Jail (NR-1992) and the Municipal Auditorium (now called the Civic Center); Ardmore Municipal Building; Garfield County Courthouse in Enid (NR-1984); Ponca City Library; Oklahoma Military Academy Field House and Auditorium in Claremore; the Doctors' and Nurses' Quarters at the Indian Hospital in Talihina; and, the Cushing Municipal Light and Power Plant.²³

Although not having the widespread economic impact of other New Deal Era programs, such as the Works Progress Administration, the PWA was an important component of the efforts to stimulate the economy during the Great Depression. Aimed specifically at aiding private enterprise, the PWA helped boost employment in the private section with the employment of professionals, such as architects and engineers, to wage-earners, such as skilled and unskilled construction workers. This, in turn, helped to relieve the number of dependent persons on the "dole." Between June 1933 and February 1939, the Department of Labor revealed that PWA projects provided nearly 2 billion hours of employment at construction sites and an additional 4 billion plus of indirect labor employment in private industry.²⁴

Beyond stimulating the area industry and economy, the construction of buildings like the Cleveland County Courthouse also facilitated the workings of numerous county governments across the state and nation. Similar to various other types of public buildings, such as schools, many Oklahoma government buildings had

²²Ibid., 285 and 269-271.

²³Short, Public Buildings, 28, 30, 58-59, 104, 132, 232, 166, 390 and 505.

²⁴The Story of PWA, 5-6.

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become obsolete or, in some instances, were nonexistent. Due to their inability to procure sufficient funds, especially during the trying economic times of the Great Depression, many counties and towns were not able to construct the necessary improved facilities. However, with the assistance of such New Deal programs as the PWA and WPA, several city halls, jails and county courthouses were constructed to improve the quality of local government in many Oklahoma towns.

The construction of new county courthouses allowed the respective community government to function with a new efficiency. The improved facilities centralized the seat of county government and also allowed for an expansion of county records and services. Additionally, the new buildings enhanced the community identity. The county courthouse, often the identifying building of the county, was critical to the county and local towns self-image.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Cleveland County Courthouse is architecturally significant within Norman as an excellent example of an Art Deco style, public building. The courthouse is the only public building in downtown Norman designed in the Art Deco style. Other historic public buildings in downtown include the Norman Public Library and the United States Post Office. The library is an Italian Renaissance style building, while the United States Post Office building is a federally-designed, Classical Revival style building. The Norman city offices are housed in a modern, Contemporary style building.

The building is also architecturally significant as the only historic county courthouse in Norman. The 1906 courthouse, situated on the location, or thereabouts, of the 1979 office addition, was torn down in the early 1940s by WPA workers.²⁵

Although the form of the Cleveland County Courthouse adheres very closely to the Classical Revival style, the building is classified as Art Deco due to the

²⁵The Norman Transcript, 6 May 1940.

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prominent Art Deco style ornamentation. This ornamentation is a defining feature of the building because it is the dominant visual characteristic of the building. The Classical Revival form of the building is not readily apparent unless the courthouse is studied in some detail.

The combination of Art Deco style ornamentation and a Classical Revival form was popular in the late 1930s/early 1940s for public buildings, particularly those funded with PWA monies. Similar in style, although definitely not identical, to the Cleveland County Courthouse is the Grady County Courthouse in Chickasha, Oklahoma. Thus, while the combination of the Art Deco style with the Classical Revival form is not unique to the Cleveland County Courthouse, it is noteworthy for its appeal and its brief popularity.

Overall, the Cleveland County Courthouse is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places for its association with local politics/government as the seat of county government. Further, the building is representative of the efforts of the PWA to stimulate the local, state and national economy during the Great Depression. Architecturally, the building is an excellent example of an Art Deco style, public building built in the late 1930s/early 1940s.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Block 7, Original Townsite of Norman, southeast 1/4 of the southeast 1/4 of Section 30, Township 9 North, Range 2 West.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries include the entire historic courthouse block on which the building is situated. Although additional nonhistoric resources have been constructed on the block, the significance of the area as the courthouse block binds the building with the block. All resources on the block, except for the small, brick memorial on the northwest corner, are associated with county government in Cleveland County. The brick memorial recognizes the 45th Infantry, of which county residents were members of, and the now demolished, National Guard Armory historically located on the site.