

The Business of Architecture in Late Nineteenth-Century Texas

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Texas in the late nineteenth century was a land of opportunity for architects. Frederick Ernst Ruffini, best remembered as the designer of Old Main (1882-89) for the University of Texas, told a colleague back East that "The South is the coming country for the young man who wants to do business that will make money easily and rapidly."¹ A study of how architects such as F. E. Ruffini and his brother Oscar won commissions and conducted the business of architecture shows how a new emphasis on stylish building in the booming Texas economy fostered an emerging professionalization in architecture. The Ruffinis and other young architects came to Texas seeking to build profitable practices, and their optimism proved well founded.

The Gilded Age was a time of expansion in Texas and across the nation. Expenditures in the United States for new construction, including private residential, nonresidential, and public buildings, more than tripled in the years between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century.² In Texas, a generation of bankers and merchants emerged to serve the growing economy. Businessmen needed banks, stores, offices, and homes. The Panic of 1873 near the end of Reconstruction slowed business activity, but thereafter the economy boomed. Cattle, lumber, and cotton barons fueled the demand for fashionable buildings throughout the state. The extension of rail lines increased real estate values and spurred expansion into West Texas.

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¹Frederick Ernst Ruffini to J. Samuel Brown, June 12, 1885, Oscar Ruffini Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas.

²U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Part 2, Series N 70-77, Expenditures for New Construction in Current and Constant (1929) Dollars.*

Railroad track mileage grew from 583 miles in 1870 to 3,244 in 1880. The amount tripled to almost 10,000 miles in 1900.³ Existing Texas cities as well as new towns along the railroad lines grew dramatically. The state's population nearly doubled between 1870 and 1880 and had nearly doubled again by 1900. The urban population was growing even faster than the population as a whole. Galveston and San Antonio in 1870 were the only Texas cities with populations over 10,000. By 1900, 11 cities, including Houston, Fort Worth, Dallas, and Austin, exceeded the 10,000 figure. The demand for new construction, especially for public buildings, escalated with the population and the economy.⁴

Public buildings, commercial buildings, and fashionable residences in this era began to require more skills than the traditional builder-contractor could offer. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, changing tastes for more elaborate historical revival styles in conjunction with new technologies—cast iron and structural steel members, and heating, plumbing, and electrical systems—necessitated specialized knowledge to integrate the practical and aesthetic aspects of building. Architecture began to establish itself as a profession and a new breed of young architects appeared. Trained through apprenticeship, they identified themselves not as mechanics or craftsmen, but as professional architects and businessmen. The first generation of architects in Texas arrived in the 1870s and were mostly young men, in their twenties. The most prominent included W. C. Dodson, Alfred Giles, Eugene T. Heiner, Jasper N. Preston, Nicholas Clayton, James E. Flanders, James Wahrenberger, and F. E. and Oscar Ruffini. All came to Texas in the 1870s except for Dodson, who arrived shortly after the Civil War, and Wahrenberger, a native Texan. J. Riely Gordon, the only Texas architect of the late nineteenth century to achieve a national reputation, arrived in 1887. By the 1880s there were perhaps 50 men in

³Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876-1906* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), 11; Billy M. Jones, *The Search for Maturity, in the Saga of Texas Series*, ed. Seymour V. Connor (Austin: Steck-Vaughn Co., 1965), 107.

⁴Rupert N. Richardson, Ernest Wallace, and Adrian N. Anderson, *Texas, The Lone Star State*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 329. *The Texas Almanac 1984-1985* (Dallas: A. H. Belo, 1983), 338, gives the following figures compiled from U.S. census data:

Year	State population	Percent increase	Urban population	Percent increase
1870	818,579	35.5	54,521	104.9
1880	1,591,749	94.5	146,795	169.2
1890	2,235,527	40.4	349,511	138.1
1900	3,048,710	36.4	520,759	49.0

the state calling themselves architects, and they began to organize a professional society.⁵ Texas offered plenty of opportunity for these young architects.

Several Texas architects specialized in public buildings, particularly courthouses. F. E. Ruffini designed 11 courthouses in only nine years. J. Riely Gordon designed at least 15 courthouses between 1890 and 1902. Giles designed 12, Heiner designed at least 13, and Dodson nine. Texas officials between 1871 and 1900 increased the number of counties in the state from 148 to 243. Many of the counties already existing in 1870 built new public structures, while the newly formed counties—most of them in West Texas—needed schools, jails, and courthouses. A flurry of courthouse building began in 1881, when the Texas state legislature approved the sale of bonds to finance new construction of public buildings. Between 1870 and 1899, 213 Texas counties had built a courthouse. Some counties built more than one. Altogether, 81 county courthouses were built in the state during the 1870s, 123 during the 1880s, and 94 during the 1890s—an astonishing total of 298 lucrative courthouse building contracts.⁶

To architects, courthouse work was the most profitable and prestigious. The county courthouse was an important symbol of representative government and social stability, not only in Texas but throughout the nation. County officials of the Gilded Age generally erected the most elaborate structure they could afford because they wanted to convey an image of prosperity and dignity. As a reporter wrote in the *Houston Daily Post* in 1880, "The public buildings of a state are its most pronounced features, and by them the character and genius of the people are largely judged by outsiders."⁷ While the ornamental variations of Texas county courthouses were endless, many shared a similar look. Architects developed a standard courthouse plan because all courthouses served the same functions. Practitioners modified their standard plan to suit the tastes and budgets of particular counties. Thus, the visual similarity of the

⁵Hank Todd Smith, *Since 1886: A History of the Texas Society of Architects* (Austin: Texas Society of Architects, 1983), 2-4, 17. F. E. Ruffini died in 1885, several months before the Society's founding.

⁶Willard B. Robinson, *Gone From Texas: Our Lost Architectural Heritage* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1981), 217; Mavis P. Kelsey, Sr., and Donald H. Dyal, *The Courthouses of Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993).

⁷From the *Houston Daily Post*, printed in the *Fort Worth Daily Democrat*, December 4, 1880, quoted in Robinson, *The People's Architecture*, 191.

same architect's design for different counties was not unusual and did not indicate a lack of vision or skill on his part.

The decision to build a courthouse and other county buildings rested with the county judge and the court of commissioners. Newly organized counties in the western regions of the state required new courthouses and jails, but some counties in more settled regions replaced old buildings in the late nineteenth century. Population growth, a deteriorating structure, or a combination of both necessitated new construction. Occasionally, fire or some other disaster destroyed an existing but serviceable courthouse, prompting officials to commission a new building.

To help them decide what sort of courthouse to build, the commissioners traveled to adjoining or nearby counties to examine other structures. The trips gave them ideas regarding architectural styles and functional requirements. In talking to the commissioners in other counties, officials also learned which builders and architects were competent and reliable. Some states, Michigan and Missouri among them, required the employment of professional architects. Considering, however, the imprecise definition of the nascent profession, one doubts that competence of design was assured by this requirement. Texas counties were free to engage either architects or their rivals, the builder-contractors, by direct commission or by competition.

Most counties preferred competitions that gave the commissioners a chance to compare several designs without paying a fee for each one. Courts usually employed one of two methods: a single competition or separate competitions for design and construction. In the first method, the commissioners court advertised for design proposals and bids in one package. The advertisement—appearing in the *Galveston Daily News*, the *Austin Daily Democratic Statesman*, and other major newspapers—stated the proposed cost, size, and other particulars. Builder-contractors, also called simply contractors, appeared before the court on the specified date and each man explained his proposal.

Builder-contractors were not professional architects, but a few were talented designers. Some submitted original plans, but as competition with architects increased in the 1870s, more and more contractors began to use the plans of trained architects. Some contractors stole or copied designs. Reputable contractors, however, purchased plans from an architect. Some architects authorized contractors to present their designs when counties used the one-step method. Once the contract was awarded, the commissioners court usually appointed a supervising architect to insure that the contractor followed the proposal and that all building was executed in a "workmanlike manner." The supervising architect received a monthly salary of about \$150 and expenses.

The second method was a two-step process. First, the court advertised for design proposals. Architects and contractors then appeared before the court on the specified date. Normally, the commissioners made their selection the same day. Architectural merit was just one consideration; salesmanship also played a major role in who was awarded the contract. The winner received either a lump sum or 3½ percent of the contract price. If it chose an architect, the court usually appointed him to supervise construction and he received an additional 1½ percent plus expenses. If it chose a contractor's design, the court still appointed a supervising architect. Next came the second step of this process, in which the court advertised for construction bids for the chosen design. A few weeks later the court opened the bids and made the award. If a contractor's design had been chosen, the contractor submitted a bid, but that was no guarantee he would get the job to execute the design.

Because it was so profitable, many Texas architects deliberately sought public work. Courthouses, jails, and schools generally cost more to erect than commercial or residential structures, thus generating a larger fee. The usual 3½ percent commission for a \$30,000 courthouse, for example, would be twice as much as for a \$15,000 mansion. Architects, not surprisingly, cultivated relationships with the county commissioners courts.

Heiner, Giles, and the Ruffinis learned to work the system. They scanned the newspapers to see which counties were planning to build and actively pursued these business leads. The following letter from F. E. Ruffini to Judge James F. Cooper, Blanco County, in October 1884, was typical:

Having been informed that your county intends building a new courthouse, I take the liberty of presenting my card and soliciting your patronage. I have been making the design and plans for public buildings a specialty, and can guarantee you faithful services and reasonable charges; referring you to counties for which I furnished plans as to above.

Please inform me as to probable cost, size and materials for construction, of your proposed building, also when your Hon. Court intends to take further steps in the matter. If desired, I will visit your city and personally exhibit plans and designs, at any time you may set.⁸

They crisscrossed the state to present drawings and proposals to the courts that used the two-step process. The architects' sophisticated de-

⁸F. E. Ruffini to James F. Cooper, October 27, 1884, Oscar Ruffini Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University.

signs, combined with the willingness to travel to remote locations by rail, stagecoach, hired rigs, and on horseback, helped win jobs that otherwise may have gone to nonprofessionals.

The trips could be grueling ordeals. "Traveling is tedious and unpleasant," F. E. Ruffini told his wife Elise.⁹ The best mode of transportation, he believed, was private conveyances. The quality of food and accommodations varied. The fare at the train stations was "very bad, enough so to make almost anyone sick."¹⁰ The dining cars were, in his opinion, an improvement. While on the road, Ruffini and other practitioners kept their drawings in a metal tube and other papers in pocket memorandum books. They often carried large sums of money as well. Courts paid fees in cash and at set intervals advanced money for payment to the contractors. Elise Ruffini sewed a concealed pocket into one of her husband's shirts to hide up to several hundred dollars in cash.¹¹ Despite the inconveniences and dangers, seeking commissions in remote locations paid.

The career of Eugene T. Heiner illustrates the importance of searching out business far from home. Working from a Houston office, Heiner roamed southeastern Texas designing and supervising the construction of courthouses and jails. Like many of his contemporaries in Texas, he had acquired experience in the Midwest. He arrived in Houston in 1877 and soon won a commission for the Galveston County Jail (1878) in Galveston. In a career spanning more than 20 years, Heiner designed at least 13 courthouses and several jails. Most of his courthouses, exemplified by the Falls County (1888) edifice in Marlin, were distinguished by a central clock tower and intersecting Mansard roofs of rather steeper pitch than those favored by his colleagues. His design for Runnels County (1888-89) was erected in Ballinger, a small town about 80 miles south of Abilene. Oscar Ruffini from nearby San Angelo was the supervising architect. The building still serves Runnels County, but with a radically altered roof line. Closer to home were courthouses for Wharton (Wharton, 1888-89), Walker (Huntsville, 1888), Brazoria (Angleton, 1897), Jefferson (Beaumont, 1892), and Lavaca (Hallettsville, 1897) counties. The Lavaca County Courthouse, designed in the Romanesque Revival style and showing Heiner's characteristic clock tower and intersecting roofs, still stands. In Houston, Heiner's work included the A. E. Kiesling Drug Store (1875) in the French Second

⁹F. E. Ruffini to Elise Weitz Ruffini, September 19, 1880, private collection belonging to Ernst F. Ruffini, grandson of F. E. Ruffini, Phoenix, Arizona.

¹⁰F. E. Ruffini to Elise Weitz, October 12, 1878, *ibid.*

¹¹F. E. Ruffini to Elise Weitz Ruffini, April 25, 1880, *ibid.*

Empire style, the three-story T. W. House Bank (1889), and the impressive Sweeney and Coombs Opera House (1890).¹²

Alfred Giles, like his colleagues, pursued work both near and far from his home base. He was born in England in 1853 and, at the age of 17, decided on a career in architecture. Giles supplemented his practical experience with courses in architecture at King's College, London. He emigrated to the United States at the age of 20, and after a brief time in New York, traveled to San Antonio. Finding the climate agreeable to his delicate health, Giles decided to stay and at the age of 23 began his own practice. Within a few years he became San Antonio's leading architect, designing mansions, stores, offices, and numerous other types of buildings. Although courthouses accounted for relatively few of his commissions, he was one of the most successful courthouse architects—designing 12 such structures and remodeling two others over the course of his 43-year career. He carried on an active practice until a few months before his death in 1920. The El Paso County Courthouse (El Paso, 1885-86) with its Mansard towers and two-story gallery was perhaps the most picturesque of Giles's courthouse designs, while those of Gillespie (Fredericksburg, 1882), Presidio (Marfa, 1886), and Caldwell (Lockhart, 1894) counties are the finest extant examples of his courthouse style.¹³

F. E. and Oscar Ruffini also cast their lot in Texas. The brothers, born in 1851 and 1858, respectively, were the sons of German immigrants who had settled in Cleveland, Ohio. Despite the Italian surname, the Ruffinis

¹²Stephen Fox, "The Houston Buildings of N. J. Clayton," *The Houston Review* 9 (1987): 8; Willard B. Robinson, *The People's Architecture: Texas Courthouses, Jails, and Municipal Buildings* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1983), 59, 134-136, 157, 174, 277; Robinson, *Gone From Texas*, 124, 155, 166-167, 223; Kelsey and Dyal, *The Courthouses of Texas*, under various counties. Heiner designed courthouses in the following counties: Galveston (Galveston, addition to Nicholas Clayton's 1875 courthouse, 1881-82), Falls (Marlin, 1886-88), Austin (Bellville, 1888), Walker (Huntsville, 1888), Runnels (Ballinger, 1888-89), Wharton (Wharton, 1888-89), Jasper (Jasper, 1889), Colorado (Columbus, 1891), Brazos (Bryan, 1892), Jefferson (Beaumont, 1892), Matagorda (Bay City, 1895), Brazoria (Angleton, 1897), and Lavaca (Hallettsville, 1897).

¹³Mary Carolyn Hollers George, *Alfred Giles: An English Architect in Texas and Mexico* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1972), 1-2, 73-86; Robinson, *The People's Architecture*, 82-84, 86; Kelsey and Dyal, *The Courthouses of Texas*, under the various counties. Giles also designed several buildings in northern Mexico. During the 1880s, Giles designed courthouses in eight counties: Gillespie (Fredericksburg, 1882), Bexar (San Antonio, 1882-83, remodeling), Guadalupe (Seguin, 1883), Wilson (Floresville, 1884), Kerr (Kerrville, 1885), Kimble (Junction, 1885), El Paso (El Paso, 1885-86), and Presidio (Marfa, 1886). He continued to build courthouses during the following decades, in Caldwell (Lockhart, 1894), Goliad (Goliad, 1894), Webb (Laredo, 1909), Kendall (Boerne, 1909-10, remodeling), Brooks (Falfurrias, 1914), and Live Oak (George West, 1919) counties.

were thoroughly German American in their cultural identity. Their father was a successful furrier, but the boys chose architecture and each began an apprenticeship at the age of 14. F. E. Ruffini later worked as an assistant for practitioners in Boston and New York. In Indianapolis in 1873 and 1874, he worked for the highly regarded Edwin May, designer of the Indiana State Capitol (1881-88). Oscar Ruffini, upon completion of his apprenticeship, found employment in Cincinnati and Evansville, Indiana, and in St. Louis worked for the renowned civil engineer and architect Francis D. Lee.

When it came to career and business, F. E. Ruffini left little to chance. As he gained experience in the East and Midwest, he assessed professional prospects in various parts of the nation and at the age of 25 decided to seek his fortune in Texas. Early in 1877, he went to Austin where he soon made the acquaintance of Jasper N. Preston, one of the state's leading architects. The men entered into a partnership.¹⁴ Using Ruffini's design, they won the Williamson County Courthouse competition, but for unknown reasons, while the Georgetown building was still under construction, Preston and Ruffini dissolved. Ruffini established an independent practice in the summer of 1878.¹⁵

F. E. Ruffini became the most prolific courthouse architect in the state from the late 1870s until his untimely death in 1885 at the age of 34.¹⁶ He designed a total of 11 courthouses (and five jails) in nine years.¹⁷ Most

¹⁴*Austin Daily Democratic Statesman*, February 15, 1877, 4.

¹⁵F. E. Ruffini to Elise Weitz, August 18, 1878 (earliest dated example of Ruffini's letterhead), Ernst F. Ruffini collection. Regarding the Preston-Ruffini partnership, there was apparently some conflict over the Williamson County Courthouse. Ruffini reported in a letter to his wife (September 14, 1880, Ernst F. Ruffini collection) that the Williamson County judge said he did not want to work with Preston again. Why the judge was dissatisfied remains a mystery.

¹⁶He died just one month after the death of his wife, who had recently given birth to their third child. Ruffini's sister and brother-in-law, Clara and Ernest Kershaw of Cleveland, Ohio, raised the children.

¹⁷Robinson, *The People's Architecture*; Willard B. Robinson, *Texas Public Buildings of the Nineteenth Century* (Austin: Amon Carter Museum by the University of Texas Press, 1974); and Kelsey, *The Courthouses of Texas*, for the extant buildings. F. E. Ruffini designed courthouses for the following counties: Williamson (Georgetown, 1877-79), McCulloch (Brady, 1877-79), Gregg (Longview, 1878), Rusk (Henderson, 1878-79), Navarro (Corsicana, 1880-82), Robertson (Morgan, later Franklin, 1880-81), Hays (San Marcos, 1880-82), Hopkins (Sulphur Springs, 1882), Blanco (Blanco, 1885-86), Callahan (Baird, 1885-86), and Concho (Paint Rock, 1885-86). Only three survive. The Concho County structure in Paint Rock is in an excellent state of preservation and remains the official courthouse. The Blanco County building survives, although it has been superseded by a later courthouse in Johnson City. The Robertson County Courthouse is still in use, but is marred by an unfortunate remodeling during the 1920s in which the towers and Mansard roofs were removed. He also built jails for Comal (New Braunfels, 1878-79), Robertson (Franklin, 1881), Limestone (Grosbeck, 1881), Collin (McKinney, 1882), and Burnet (Burnet, 1884-85) counties.

courthouse architects dominated a region, but Ruffini's structures were scattered through central and northeastern Texas. One of the most highly regarded was the buff-colored brick Navarro County Courthouse (Corsicana, 1880-82). The handsome three-story corner pavilion plan building enhanced his reputation and helped Ruffini obtain additional public work, including the Main Building of the University of Texas at Austin (1882-89), known as "Old Main."

Giles and F. E. Ruffini met in 1881 in Fredericksburg where they competed to design the Gillespie County Courthouse. Ruffini may have hoped that his fluency in German would give him an edge in Teutonic Fredericksburg, but the commissioners court preferred Giles's proposal and awarded him the design contract and a \$50 first prize. Giles asked that the commissioners give the prize money to Ruffini instead, in recognition of his skill and ability. The Gillespie County Courthouse was Giles's second public structure in West Texas, the first being the Bandera County Jail, completed in 1881.¹⁸

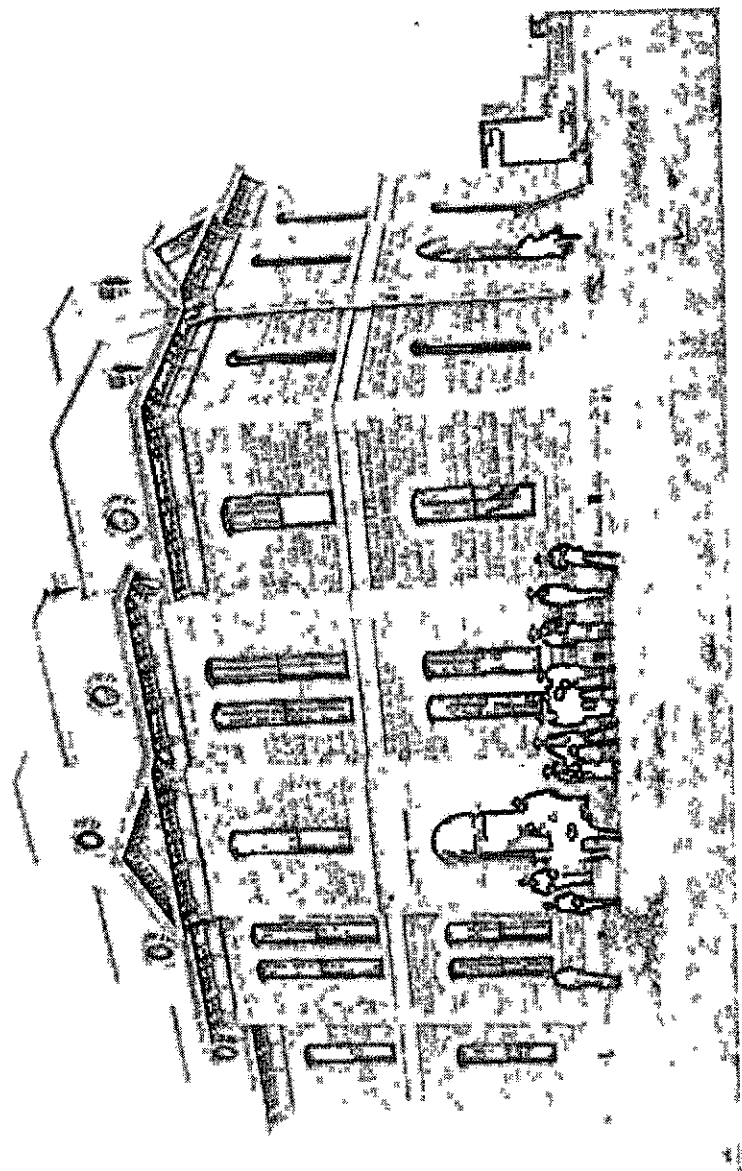
Although courthouse and jail work offered financial rewards, county work meant headaches. To be the intermediary between a commissioners court and a contractor required diplomacy and firmness. In a hearing before the El Paso County Commissioners Court in 1885, Giles was accused of failing to fulfill his duties as supervising architect. The court removed Giles as superintendent of construction and charged him with fraud, but a grand jury investigated and cleared him.¹⁹ In 1884 and 1885, F. E. Ruffini endured a protracted battle with the court in Burnet County over the erection of the county jail. The affair exasperated Ruffini and exemplifies the lack of consensus by nonprofessionals on the role of the professional architect.

When the Honorable J. A. Crews, Burnet County judge, first contacted him in February 1884, F. E. Ruffini was in Austin completing the first pavilion of Old Main for the University of Texas. The structure represented the high point of his career, but Ruffini was ready to move forward. Burnet County, which did not consult any other architect, sought Ruffini to design a new jail. The Burnet County Commissioners Court awarded the construction contract to J. T. Woodard, a local politician and contractor who bid \$9,365 for materials and labor.²⁰ Not only did Woodard fail to meet the deadline, he

¹⁸George, *Alfred Giles*, 74.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 82-83.

²⁰F. E. Ruffini to J. A. Crews, February 26, 1884, Oscar Ruffini Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University; Burnet County Commissioners Court Minutes, Vol. B (Burnet County Minutes), April 8, 1884, 232.



Concho County Courthouse, by F. E. Ruffini, 1885-86. Photo courtesy Archives Division—Texas State Library.

proved incompetent to carry out the job. Ruffini made regular inspections and reported flaws and defects to the court.

As the work dragged on, Ruffini reiterated his unwillingness to accept the building until all defects were rectified, but the court did not want to alienate Woodard, an important local figure. "The supervision of this Burnet Jail contract, has been the most disagreeable experience of my professional career," F. E. Ruffini exploded.²¹ He told the judge that for several months he had tried to protect the interests of the court, but "I have reaped nothing but abuse from the contractor, the enmity of his bondsmen, and even the distrust of the Hon. Court..."²² Such were the perils of architectural practice. Despite the conflict and poor construction, the Burnet County Jail stands yet today as one of the best examples of nineteenth-century jail architecture in the state.

As Ruffini struggled with the Burnet County Court, he simultaneously dealt with difficulties in Blanco County. The Blanco County Commissioners Court accepted his design for a new courthouse, but did not yet have the money to pay for its construction. Only after selecting the design did they seek approval of a tax levy and bond sale. Once the levy passed, Ruffini accepted the task of selling the bonds to raise the necessary funds and eventually found investors. This commission was his first courthouse in a West Texas county.²³

The Blanco structure was the culmination of Ruffini's courthouse designs. It resembled his earlier works, but the Mansard towers over each entry and the circular dormers made the Blanco County Courthouse a simple but elegant structure. Architecturally, it showed F. E. Ruffini at his best. Although his Navarro County Courthouse was larger and more elaborate, the Blanco design was more creative. It was in fact a loose adaptation of the Tom Green County Courthouse going up in San Angelo, with Oscar Ruffini supervising the construction. Oscar had worked up a duplicate set of plans based on a design by W. W. Larmour and sent them, along with a photograph, to F. E. Ruffini back in Austin. The Blanco courthouse was not in any way a copy of the San Angelo structure, but a creative adaptation. F. E. Ruffini seems to have been influenced by the deep Mansard roof, deeper than those of his previous courthouses, and the strong shadows cast by the corner pavilions of the Tom Green building. Borrowing

²¹F. E. Ruffini to J. A. Crews, May 23, 1885, Oscar Ruffini Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University.

²²*Ibid.*

²³F. E. Ruffini to Oscar Ruffini, April 14, 1885, Architectural Drawings Collection, Architecture and Planning Library, the General Libraries at The University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

ideas and details from the work of other architects was not considered unethical.

Four other courthouses based on the Blanco example eventually graced the landscape of West Texas. F. E. Ruffini reworked the Blanco design for Callahan (Baird, 1885-86) and Concho (Paint Rock, 1885-86) counties, while Oscar Ruffini later altered the design for the courthouses in Mills (Goldthwaite, 1889) and Sutton (Sonora, 1891) counties. The Concho County Courthouse is the best preserved example of a Ruffini courthouse in the "Blanco style."

F. E. Ruffini did not live long enough to see the completion of the Blanco, Callahan, and Concho courthouses. After his brother's death, Oscar closed F. E.'s Austin office and returned to his work in San Angelo. Oscar Ruffini continued to live in San Angelo even after the completion of the courthouse, becoming the first professional architect to permanently settle in West Texas. Following F. E. Ruffini's example, Oscar pursued courthouse and jail work, and while he did not design as many public structures as his brother, Oscar Ruffini became a competent courthouse architect in his own right.

Oscar added height to the Blanco design for the Mills County Courthouse in Goldthwaite. Two years later, the Sutton County Commissioners Court selected his proposal, also based on the Blanco prototype, for a courthouse for the newly organized county. Z. D. Gafford and August Balfanz of San Angelo won the construction bid.²⁴ Oscar's experience in Sutton County provides insight into architectural practice and the respective roles of architect, contractor, and craftsman. The contractors employed 10 stonemasons, including two men who traveled over 150 miles to accept the jobs. Craftsmen often worked away from home, and the men probably roomed in the local hotel or at a boarding house. Stonework could be dangerous; one mason, E. Mazinke, lost part of his left index finger when a stone fell and severed the finger at the first joint.²⁵

As the courthouse neared completion, the *Devil's River News* lavished praise on all involved: "...before you know it, Sutton County will own the neatest courthouse of any county west of Colorado [City], San Angelo not excepted. Mr. O. Ruffini, the architect who planned this building is certainly a master hand at his business...."²⁶ The same issue praised

²⁴"\$40,000 for Public Buildings in Sonora the Capital of Sutton County," *Devil's River News*, February 14, 1891, transcribed by JoAnn Palmer, Sutton County Historical Society, Sonora, Texas.

²⁵*Devil's River News*, untitled updates, May 2, November 7, 1891.

²⁶*Ibid.*, December 12, 1891.

Balfanz as a "thorough workman" and predicted that the courthouse "will last beyond our life time." And so it did. The Sutton County Courthouse, with a slightly altered roof, stands as a tribute to the beautiful and serviceable design of F. E. Ruffini, to the competency of Oscar Ruffini, and to the skill of the craftsmen.

Oscar Ruffini built a second courthouse in 1891. Sterling County, with barely 1,000 inhabitants, commissioned a two-story frame building, which looked more like a private dwelling than a county capitol. The actual construction cost of \$1,800 probably made it one of the least expensive courthouses in the nation at the time. After the county erected a new and more stately building in 1905, the old frame building became a hotel.²⁷ His final courthouse design was a stone structure built in 1902 for Crockett County in Ozona. Ruffini incorporated a pavilion plan, making the building his most original courthouse design. He employed neoclassical porticos and fanlights in windows of the central pavilions. The Crockett County Courthouse is still in use today.

In addition to courthouses, jails also comprised a substantial portion of the work of Heiner and the Ruffinis. Commissioners courts employed the same processes to secure jail plans and contracts as they did for courthouses. The typical late nineteenth-century jail and sheriff's residence in Texas was a two- or three-story building of stone or brick. Many resembled a fortress or medieval castle, but Heiner and F. E. Ruffini preferred a more refined look. The residence and office of the Harris County Jail (1890) by Heiner looked like a French Second Empire mansion.²⁸ Except for the unadorned blockhouse at the rear, the building appeared to be a stately home. F. E. Ruffini employed the Italianate mode for all of his jail projects. His Burnet County and Collin County (1882) examples have been preserved. Oscar Ruffini's first jail, built in 1884 in San Angelo for Tom Green County, featured a crenelated top, giving it a castle-like appearance. A sawtoothed cornice topped a later addition, but Oscar employed the same heavy lintels and pointed window hoods he had used on the original section. Oscar's other jail was a simple blockhouse and guard's room built for Menard County in 1890.

For many county officials, erection of a courthouse or jail was their first experience of working with a professional architect. As designing and supervising architects, practitioners thus educated public clients of

²⁷Beverly Daniels, ed., *Milling Around Sterling County: A History of Sterling County* (Canyon, Texas: Staked Plains Press, 1976), 22-23.

²⁸Robinson, *Gone From Texas*, 217.

the practical wisdom of engaging trained professionals. Salesmanship, initiative, and knowledge of design and engineering enabled Texas architects to elbow aside the builder-contractors in the realm of public architecture. Their willingness to seek work far from home spread their influence throughout the state. Although they put business considerations ahead of artistic concerns, these architects designed structures of enduring beauty. Despite occasional difficulties with commissioners courts and other public clients, they upheld standards and furthered the cause of professional architects in Texas. Their contribution to Texas served not only to enrich the built environment, but also to establish architectural practice as a legitimate endeavor and pave the way for a new generation of professionals.