

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Clay County Courthouse, Western District

Other names/site number: Site #CY0024

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

### 2. Location

Street & number: 800 West 2nd Street

City or town: Corning State: Arkansas County: Clay

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

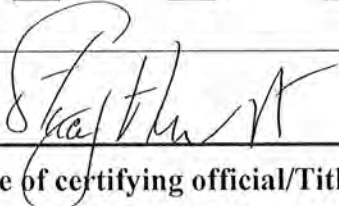
I hereby certify that this X nomination     request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     statewide   X   local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

  X   A     B     C     D

 _____ <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b> <u>Arkansas Historic Preservation Program</u> <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	<u>7-13-18</u> _____ <b>Date</b>
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In my opinion, the property <u>   </u> meets <u>   </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ <b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>Title :</b>	_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### 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

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register           

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER/New Formalism

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, CONCRETE, TAR

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Clay County Courthouse, Western District, is a one-story brick building located on the courthouse square in a residential neighborhood south of the commercial core of Corning. The main entrance faces southeast and the building's façades are all symmetrical in design. The one-story building rests on a cast-concrete foundation and is topped by a flat roof. A raised section in the center of the building denotes the courtroom and clerestory windows allow light to enter the space. The building is fenestrated by metal-frame windows throughout. The fact that the building is located on an entire city block allows for generous lawns around the courthouse. Sidewalks allow access to the rear and front entrances and a small plaza is located in front of the building's main entrance. In addition to the courthouse, the site also contains a war memorial and memorial for police officers that lost their lives in the line of duty.

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### Narrative Description

The Clay County Courthouse, Western District, is a one-story brick building located on the courthouse square in a residential neighborhood south of the commercial core of Corning. The courthouse square is bounded by 2<sup>nd</sup> Street on the southeast, Chestnut Street on the southwest, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street on the northwest, and Market Street on the northeast. The building was designed by the architectural firm of Donnellan & Porterfield and was built by Emmett Crittenden and the Cox

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Lumber Company, Inc. The building was built in 1966-1967 and replaced the previous courthouse, which burned in 1963.

The main entrance faces southeast and the building's façades are all symmetrical in design. The one-story building rests on a cast-concrete foundation and is topped by a flat roof. A raised section in the center of the building denotes the courtroom and clerestory windows allow light to enter the space. The building is fenestrated by metal-frame windows throughout. The fact that the building is located on an entire city block allows for generous lawns around the courthouse. Sidewalks allow access to the rear and front entrances and a small plaza is located in front of the building's main entrance. In addition to the courthouse, the site also contains a war memorial to the south of the building and a memorial for police officers that lost their lives in the line of duty in front of the main entrance.

### ***Front/Southeast Façade***

The front façade of the building is symmetrical in its composition and is oriented around the building's main entrance. The building's entrance has two metal-framed, plate-glass doors with a rectangular transom window above. On either side of the entrance are four large plate-glass windows with opaque panels below. The entrance and the windows that flank it are recessed from the rest of the façade. Above the recessed section of the building is the southeast side of the raised section that is the courtroom. The courtroom is devoid of fenestration on the southeast side and has a projecting eave.

The central section of the courthouse is flanked on each side by two projecting sections that are covered in brick. Each projecting section is decorated with eight projecting concrete fins and is devoid of fenestration. The north projecting section also has the building's cornerstone which reads "CLAY COUNTY / COURT HOUSE / WESTERN DISTRICT / ERECTED - 1966."

### ***Side/Southwest Façade***

The southwest façade of the courthouse is also symmetrical in its arrangement. The recessed central section is fenestrated by thirteen five-pane metal-framed windows. The bottom pane in each window is a hopper sash. The left nine windows are evenly-spaced, but closer together than the right four windows, which are also evenly spaced.

The central section of the southwest façade is flanked on each side by brick-faced projections. Each projection has seven projecting concrete fins. The western projection also has a southeast-facing five-pane metal-framed window that matches the other windows on the façade. The eastern projection has a northwest-facing metal door.

Above the recessed central section is the clerestory for the central courtroom. The courtroom section has a brick base that is topped by concrete beams and roof slab. Five, single-pane, stationary, pentagonal windows provide light into the courtroom space.

### ***Rear/Northwest Façade***

The building's rear façade is mostly symmetrical in its arrangement with a recessed central section. The central section is fenestrated by six metal-framed windows. All of the windows

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have bottom panes that are hopper sashes. Five of the six windows are five-paned windows and the sixth window (fourth from the left) is only three panes. The central windows are flanked on each side by entrances with metal doors with windows in the top half that are flanked on each side by sidelights. Above the recessed section of the building is the southeast side of the raised section that is the courtroom. The courtroom is devoid of fenestration on the southeast side and has a projecting eave.

The recessed central section is flanked on each side by projecting brick-faced sections of the building. Each of the brick-faced projections is devoid of fenestration and is decorated with eight projecting concrete fins.

### ***Side/Northeast Façade***

The northeast façade of the courthouse is also symmetrical in its arrangement. The recessed central section is fenestrated by twelve five-pane metal-framed windows. The bottom pane in each window is a hopper sash. The left nine windows are evenly-spaced, but closer together than the right three windows, which are also evenly spaced. The central section of the northeast façade is flanked on each side by brick-faced projections. Each projection has seven projecting concrete fins and they are devoid of fenestration.

Above the recessed central section is the clerestory for the central courtroom. The courtroom section has a brick base that is topped by concrete beams and roof slab. Five, single-pane, stationary, pentagonal windows provide light into the courtroom space.

### ***Interior***

The interior arrangement of the courthouse has the central courtroom under the raised section of the building, and it is accessed off the main lobby of the building. The central courtroom is surrounded by the county offices and other secondary spaces, such as restrooms and utility spaces.

### ***Monuments***

The courthouse grounds has two monuments, both of which are non-contributing due to age, that honor different groups of people. The larger monument honors county war veterans and was dedicated on Memorial Day, 1988. It is located to the south of the courthouse and consists of a central granite obelisk surrounded by a circular concrete plaza with four granite benches. The concrete plaza is surrounded by bushes and is approached by a sidewalk from the southeast. The smaller monument is a granite tablet near the courthouse's front entrance that honors police officers that died in the line of duty.

### ***Integrity***

The Clay County Courthouse, Western District, retains excellent integrity from the time of its construction in 1966-1967. Changes to the courthouse have been minimal since it was built. The interior of the courthouse also has had minimal changes since the time of its construction in the mid-1960s. The largest changes to the courthouse site have been the installation of two memorials and the installation of a back-up power generator. However, the original New Formalism design of Donnellan & Porterfield is still present. In addition, the setting of the

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courthouse, a residential neighborhood south of Corning's commercial core, still reflects the setting of the courthouse at the time of its construction.

## 8. Statement of Significance

### 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 grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1966-1968

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1966-1967

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Donnellan & Porterfield, Architects

Cox Lumber Company, Inc., Builder

Emmett Crittenden, Builder



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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Clay County Courthouse, Western District, which was designed by the firm of Donnellan & Porterfield and built in 1966-1967, is a significant example of modern architecture in Corning. When it was built, the building was a significant departure in design from the previous Clay County Courthouse in Corning, which was a building with Romanesque Revival influences designed in 1899 by the state's premiere architect, Charles Thompson. The current building, with its long low design and heightened central section delineating the courtroom space, and strict symmetry in the façade, illustrates influences of the New Formalism style of architecture.

Like the previous courthouse in Corning, the current courthouse has been the center of Clay County government for the Western District since the time of its construction. As a result, the Clay County Courthouse, Western District, is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A**. Although the building does continue to play a significant role in the government and politics of Clay County, the period of significance ends in 1969 due to the fact that the building's role in politics/government does not meet the threshold of exceptional significance.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY**

Settlement began in the area that became Clay County in 1832 with the arrival of John J. Griffin, who settled along the Black River. Although few people came to the area before 1850, from 1850 until the outbreak of the Civil War settlement in the area increased tremendously. By the early 1870s, the population of the area was sufficient for the establishment of Clay County on March 24, 1873. Although it was originally called Clayton County, the name was changed to Clay County by an act of the General Assembly on December 6, 1875. The portion of the county comprising the eastern district was taken from Greene County while the western district was taken from Randolph County.<sup>1</sup>

Clay County's first county seat was established at Corning and court began on May 16, 1873. However, in 1874 the idea of moving the county seat to Boydsville, a more central location, was looked at, and after receiving a majority vote, the county seat was moved. (Because there was so much resistance to it, it was again voted on in 1877, but the result was the same.)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*. Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889, pp. 191-192.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

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Although Boydsville was more centrally located, the people in the western part of the county found it hard to reach Boydsville. As a result, consideration was given to dividing the county into two districts and having two county seats. The legislature approved an act on February 23, 1881, that divided Clay County into two districts with county seats at Corning and Boydsville. (Today, the western district county seat remains at Corning, although the eastern district seat was relocated to Piggott in 1891.)<sup>3</sup>

Although the Cairo & Fulton Railroad was given the right to build a railroad through the Corning area in the 1850s, the Civil War postponed the line's construction until the early 1870s. On February 5, 1873, the first train southbound from St. Louis arrived in Corning. The origin of the town's name is not clear – it was either named for H. K. Corning, an official of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad Company, or for H. D. Corning, an engineer for Mandeville and Allen, the construction company that built the line through the area. However, once Corning was established, it was incorporated in August 1877 and it grew rapidly, having a population of almost 400 by 1880.<sup>4</sup>

By the late 1880s, Corning was a thriving community, and it was described in Goodspeed's *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas* as follows:

Corning, the seat of justice for the Western district...and on the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad, was established in 1873. It contains the court house and jail, six general stores, two drug stores, one grocery, three saloons, one livery stable, four hotels, one stave factory, two cotton gins with grist mills attached, one wagon shop, one blacksmith shop, two shoe shops, three church organizations – Methodist Episcopal, South, Christian and Baptist – with but one church edifice, belonging to the Methodists, one school house, postoffice [sic.], and a population of about 600. It also contains a lodge each of Masons, Good Templars and Triple Alliance.<sup>5</sup>

Although the timber industry was the first industry in the Corning area, by the early twentieth century, the economy of the area changed. The timber industry waned and there was an increase in farming in the area. The state's program to drain swamplands reached northeast Arkansas during the 1910s, which it was believed would boost the agricultural economy of the area, but it unfortunately coincided with the fall of farm prices and land values and the increase in land and ditch taxes after World War I.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Cochran, Franklin H. "Corning (Clay County)." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=850>.

<sup>5</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*. Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889, pp. 191-194.

<sup>6</sup> Cochran, Franklin H. "Corning (Clay County)." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=850>.

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The improvement of U.S. 67 through Clay County during the 1920s and 1930s eased Clay County's reliance on the railroad for transportation. The 1930s, after the Depression, brought other changes to Corning with the establishment of a state fish hatchery in 1938 and the Rural Electrification Administration bringing electricity to remote parts of the county in 1939. World War II had little effect on Corning's economy, but the 1950s and 1960s brought some light industry to the area. In recent years, however, as the reliance on truck and automobile transportation has grown, Corning's commercial area has shifted away from the historic commercial core to the U.S. 67 corridor.<sup>7</sup>

The development of the Clay County Courthouse in Corning was a bit unusual when compared to many courthouses across the state. Rather than being located in the commercial heart of Corning, the courthouse square was located south of downtown in a mainly residential section of the city. The first Sanborn map for the area, which was completed in 1908 and only shows part of the courthouse square's surroundings, illustrates that it was mainly surrounded by dwellings with the exception of a couple of hay warehouses and the county jail. Surprisingly, there were several vacant lots that surrounded the courthouse square, and many still existed when the last Sanborn map was completed in 1937.<sup>8</sup>

The previous courthouse, which was built in 1899, was designed by noted Arkansas architect Charles Thompson who designed many courthouses across the state, and his design showed some influences of the Romanesque Revival style. The brick building had a tower at one corner, and featured some arched windows around the tower and main entrance area. However, the previous courthouse met its end on January 25, 1963, when the building was largely destroyed by fire. The *Clay County Courier* reported that:

Fire destroyed the Clay County Court House at Corning in a spectacular Friday evening blaze, but valuable records preserved in the fireproof vault came through relatively undamaged. The fire, discovered at approximately 5:15 p.m. was believed to have originated in the north section of the courthouse near the license bureau. The flames quickly spread throughout the building in a spectacular blaze which brought complete destruction to the building within a period of four hours. ...

The building continued to smoulder [sic.] the following day and the tower on the courthouse building was removed by carefully placed small charges of dynamite Saturday afternoon as a safety measure.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, the fire that destroyed the courthouse in Corning should not have been a surprise since both courthouses in the county had actually been condemned prior to the fire. As was reported: "The Grand Jury had already condemned the jails and courthouse in both districts

<sup>7</sup> Cochran, Franklin H. "Corning (Clay County)." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=850>.

<sup>8</sup> Sanborn maps for Corning, Arkansas, 1908, 1914, 1927, and 1937.

<sup>9</sup> "Fire Destroys Courthouse; Plan To Rebuild Started." *Clay County Courier*. 31 January 1963, p. 1.

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before the fire. They found the heating facilities outdated, the wiring dangerous and the ceilings and walls were damaged by weather. This report stated that the courthouse could burn at most any time and destroy many vital records. The report had no sooner been completed when the courthouse in the Western district was destroyed by fire."<sup>10</sup>

By the time that the fire that destroyed the courthouse in Corning had been reported in the newspaper, a seven-member courthouse committee had already been appointed and work had already begun on making plans to replace the building. The newspaper reported that "offices were set up and records moved early this week to the newly constructed K. and M. office building as a temporary measure until which time as new facilities are constructed." In addition, "The Area Redevelopment Administration has matching funds available for construction of this type. Piggott earlier had engaged Raney Investment Company, of Little Rock, to handle the proposed bond issue and had engaged the architectural firm of Swaim and Allen to draw up plans for a courthouse for the eastern district. The Corning committee then contacted the same firm to draw up plans for a similar structure here. Total estimated cost of the Corning Courthouse is \$400,000..."<sup>11</sup>

By mid-February, the courthouse planning committee met with William Allen and Carl Brunck of the architectural engineering firm of Swaim, Allen, Wellborn and Associates. It was reported that "Allen and Brunck submitted tentative plans to the group for a single story, square, slightly elevated structure with overall building dimensions of 112x112 feet. Steps lead up to a 16 foot walkway which surrounds the building. ... Acting with speed, the firm completed the plans on Sunday, arrived in Corning on Monday and the committee gave tentative approval to the plans that afternoon." Two sets of blueprints had been completed by the firm, one set was for display in the lobby of The Corning Bank while the other set would be submitted with the application for federal funds.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time that the plans were underway to construct the new courthouse in Corning, work was underway to clear the courthouse square of the remains of the old building. The county's creativity in having the site cleared actually netted the county a profit. The *Clay County Courier* reported:

The City of Corning will net approximately \$2,000 in clearing the courthouse site, according to Mayor E. W. Cochran. The City is paying workers at the rate of a penny per brick for cleaning operations and in turn selling the useable building brick at seven cents per brick. ... The soft brick are selling at three cents per brick.

<sup>10</sup> "Two Courthouse and Jail Issue Face Clay County Voters July 9<sup>th</sup>." *Clay County Courier*. 20 June 1963, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> "Fire Destroys Courthouse; Plan To Rebuild Started." *Clay County Courier*. 31 January 1963, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> "Architect Meets With Planning Group: Preliminary Drawings Are Approved." *Clay County Courier*. 14 February 1963, p. 1.

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Even the debris is being sold at a profit, \$2.50 per load, to be used as filler. The City has contracted with a trucker to haul it away for \$2.25 making a profit of 25 cents per load.<sup>13</sup>

By the summer of 1963, a special election had been set for July 9<sup>th</sup>, and it was reported that “the vote will cover levying a tax, not to exceed four mills, to accomplish: 1. Construction and equipping of a new courthouse at Piggott at a cost to the county of approximately \$310,000 with matching funds from the Federal government. ... 3. Constructing and equipping a new courthouse in Corning for the Western district at an estimated cost of \$214,000.”<sup>14</sup> The federal government had ruled that aid could only be given to one courthouse in the county so “the people in the Eastern district will be the ones who benefit from the government aid plan, because of larger area, population and assessed valuation.”<sup>15</sup>

News reports leading up to the July vote indicated that sentiments in the county towards the construction of new courthouses were mixed. Those opposed to the proposed courthouses felt “that the courthouses, as proposed, are just too rich for the county’s blood” and further described them as “unrealistic and marble monuments and an insult to the county.” Those in favor of the construction, on the other hand, “acclaim[ed] them as a tribute to the future growth of the county, and showplaces with functional use.” The *Clay County Courier* also noted that “some observers have said that this might be the Western District’s only chance to build a courthouse and that failure of this to pass the first time would spell doom for another chance.”<sup>16</sup>

Once the votes had been tallied after the July 9<sup>th</sup> election, it was found that the measure had been defeated by more than a two-to-one vote. After the special election, it was reported that:

Most people in the county apparently feel that there is a definite and positive need for two courthouses, but expressed the feeling that \$600,000 structures are not warranted in a county with a sagging economy. ...

On the other hand, advocates of more spending point out that a courthouse is a “once in a lifetime” structure. They point out that it should be constructed well enough to last a lifetime and that spending additional money on the structure will reduce maintenance costs as well as satisfying future requirements.

Still others are of the opinion that one courthouse in the County should be sufficient to serve the entire county.<sup>17</sup>

Also, by the end of July 1963, the site of the courthouse in Corning had almost been totally cleaned up of the building’s debris. The *Clay County Courier* reported:

<sup>13</sup> “City Clears Court Site At A Profit.” *Clay County Courier*. 6 June 1963, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> “Courthouse Election Set For Both Districts July 9.” *Clay County Courier*. 13 June 1963, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> “Two Courthouse and Jail Issue Face Clay County Voters July 9<sup>th</sup>.” *Clay County Courier*. 20 June 1963, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> “Election Is July 9.” *Clay County Courier*. 4 July 1963, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> “Clay County Voters Reject Plans To Build Courthouses and Jail.” *Clay County Courier*. 11 July 1963, p. 1.

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Sale of bricks from the old courthouse at Corning has grossed the City of Corning more than \$3,000, according to Mayor E. W. Cochran. He said that the net to the city will approach \$2,000 with some \$1,100 having been paid out in labor for cleaning the brick. He said there are some 20,000 brick at the courthouse grounds yet, but that all of these had been sold as well as the fill dirt and broken brick which he said is bringing \$1.00 per load. Mayor Cochran estimated that the grounds would be cleaned up completely within approximately one more month.<sup>18</sup>

After the defeat of the proposal in July 1963, the newspaper in Corning was silent on the issue until November 1965 when the *Clay County Courier* carried the headline "Courthouse Elections Scheduled December 21." The article reports further that:

Clay County voters will have an opportunity to vote for construction of a new courthouse in Corning and a new courthouse in Piggott on December 21. County Judge Carl Ermert filed three separate orders with the County Clerk last Friday in the initial attempt to bring the issue to vote. A two mill tax is proposed to build a \$120,000.00 courthouse in Corning and a \$180,000.00 courthouse for Piggott with \$50,000 earmarked for equipment and supplies.

The three special orders filed by the County Judge:

- Declared the need for two courthouses.
- Named Harold Porterfield as the architect and
- Set-up provisions for an election and set for [sic.] the conditions of the election.<sup>19</sup>

By early December, it was reported that "Architects Porterfield and Donellen [sic.] are now working on final plans for the two buildings." It was further reported that "The courthouse in Piggott, built in 1899, is unsafe and the vaults are filled beyond capacity." With respect to the situation in Corning, the *Clay County Courier* reported:

The records, which are vital to the people of that district are not safe from destruction by fire or natural causes. Neither are they safe from theft or pilferage. Probate and Chancery court is conducted in [the] Corning Masonic Lodge building. Circuit court and courts requiring juries are conducted in empty store buildings or what ever [sic.] room may be available. These conditions are unsatisfactory and certainly do not lend dignity to the long established customs of court procedure. All the judges have advised that they cannot move their courts to another district but

<sup>18</sup> "Sale of Bricks Over \$3,000 From Courthouse." *Clay County Courier*. 25 July 1963, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> "Courthouse Elections Scheduled December 21." *Clay County Courier*. 11 November 1965, p. 1.

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they can refuse to hold court until reasonable facilities are provided.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the article, the newspaper included renderings of both courthouse buildings on the top of the front page.

Unlike the vote on the bond issue in 1963, the vote in 1965 overwhelmingly approved the measure, although it was not unanimous in both districts. The article in the December 23, 1965, edition of the *Clay County Courier* reported:

Clay County voters, Tuesday, endorsed the \$350,000 bond issue to build two courthouses with a landslide majority. The vote was particularly heavy in the Western district where 1408 voters voted for construction of the \$120,000 building to be located in Corning. The 10 to 1 positive vote in the western district overcame the rejection of the issue by the eastern district with 671 voting for while 1341 voted against construction. Despite the political splits and factions in the eastern district, the western district vote was heavy enough to sweep victory for both sides of the county and resulted in approval of the issue which will build a \$120,000 courthouse in Corning to serve the western district and a \$180,000 courthouse to serve the eastern district.<sup>21</sup>

Once the bond issue passed in December, planning for the construction of the courthouses could go on in earnest. In late January 1966, it was reported that "County Judge Carl Ermert said that he hoped construction would start on the two county courthouses no later than June 1. Donnellan [sic.] and Porterfield plan to have detailed plans for the two buildings ready in April and bids will be taken upon approval of the detailed plans."<sup>22</sup>

When the new courthouse in Corning was designed, the architects went in a very different direction stylistically when compared to Charles Thompson's previous design. The style that Donnellan & Porterfield chose for the Clay County Courthouse, Western District, shows influences of the New Formalism style that was in vogue from the mid-1950s through the mid-1970s. The style was used by three main architects, Minoru Yamasaki, Philip Johnson, and Arkansas-native Edward Durell Stone, and it was Stone's 1954 American Embassy in New Delhi, India, that is often considered to be the first example of the style. The New Formalism style combined decorative elements and design concepts from classical styles with new materials and technologies often incorporated in the International Style.<sup>23</sup>

New Formalism was most often used for cultural, institutional, and civic buildings that were high profile buildings. In Arkansas, it was most often used for banks, even in small towns, where

<sup>20</sup> "Courthouse Vote Slated On Tuesday, December 21." *Clay County Courier*. 9 December 1965, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> "Bond Issue Passes." *Clay County Courier*. 23 December 1965, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> "Courthouse Construction Targeted for June First." *Clay County Courier*. 27 January 1966, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Information on New Formalism found at: <http://www.fullertonheritage.org/Resources/archstyles/formalism.htm>.

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even small branch banks may exhibit characteristics of the style. Characteristics of the style include having an achievement of modern monumentality; the use of traditionally rich materials, or man-made materials that mimic the richness of natural materials like travertine, marble, or granite; buildings set on a podium; smooth wall surfaces; an embracing of classical precedents, such as arches, colonnades, columns, and entablatures; and having a formal landscape that might use pools, fountains, and plazas.<sup>24</sup>

Donnellan & Porterfield employed several New Formalism characteristics in their design for the Clay County Courthouse in Corning. The building used cast concrete, for example, that could have been meant to mimic a more luxurious material. In front of the courthouse, the design has a small plaza with benches, and the front façade is also emphasized in the fact that it is approached by a larger number of sidewalks and employs more glass than the other façades. In addition, the fact that the courthouse took up the block and was designed with a raised center section delineating the courtroom also gave it the modern monumentality that was a hallmark of the style. Finally, the Clay County Courthouse, Western District, also exhibits the strict symmetrical façade that was also characteristic of the style.

Although the target date for the beginning of the construction of the courthouses was June 1<sup>st</sup>, construction was delayed. It was reported in the *Clay County Courier* in mid-April that:

Judge Ermert reported that the architect estimated that the plans will be completed for both courthouses by May 15, and following this the plans will be submitted for bid. Bids will close approximately 30 days after the plans are delivered with actual construction of both courthouses to start simultaneously at both locations with a completion date targeted for the spring of 1967.

During May and June further preparations will be made at the Corning location with dead trees to be removed and the old foundation removed in preparation for the building program.

Cornerstone ceremonies will be held at both locations at the appropriate time.<sup>25</sup>

Bids for the construction of both courthouses were received on June 24, 1966, and the contract was ultimately awarded to Cox Planing Mill and Lumber Company. The contract for the two buildings was for \$334,449.00, which included "the construction of the two buildings, heating, complete air conditioning, plumbing, furnishing courtrooms and counters and desks for county offices." The contractor was given 400 calendar days to complete the work, and by the end of June 1966 the contractor had already started making preparations for the projects.<sup>26</sup>

The construction of the courthouse in Corning was far enough along by October that the building's cornerstone could be laid. It was reported in the *Clay County Courier* that:

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> "Records Are Moved As Eastern District Readies For Construction Program." *Clay County Courier*. 14 April 1966, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> "Cox Lumber Company Wins Courthouse Bids." *Clay County Courier*. 30 June 1966, p. 1.



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The cornerstone for Western Clay County's new \$150,000.00 court house was laid on Wednesday morning of this week with County Judge Carl Ermert, Attorney Bryan J. McCallen and Don Baker on hand to officiate. Placed inside the white marble cornerstone at the southeast corner of the building were three copies of the *Clay County Courier* dated December 9, December 15 and December 23, 1965.

...  
...[Judge Ermert] said that when the concrete floor was completed with wiring and plumbing, the building was 30 percent completed – this was about two weeks ago and work is now progressing according to schedule on laying the outside walls which are of brick. Ermert said that [the] completion date is tentatively set for early spring but this date will, of course, depend upon the weather until the outside is completed.

Inside the building, when completed, will be a bronze plaque which will have engraved the name of the architects, contractor and county officials. This plaque will be put in place at the formal dedication of the new court house.<sup>27</sup>

Construction of the courthouse in Corning was delayed over the winter late in 1966 and early in 1967. However, the construction was also delayed while crews waited for the installation of six panels of pre-stressed concrete roofing. The roofing was finally installed in late March 1967, and it was also reported that "some of the window frames have been installed and work is expected to progress at a much faster pace now that the weather will be more dependable." The article further reported "that the outside brick walls and the roof will probably be completed within two weeks and there are still hopes of holding the June term of court in the new building even though construction may not be completed at that time."<sup>28</sup>

Even though it was hoped that the building would be far enough long that court could be held in the new courthouse in June, it was announced in June that the date for moving into the new building would likely be in August. An article in the *Clay County Courier* on June 22<sup>nd</sup> gave an update on the status of the construction. It reported:

Work in process this week: Hanging of suspended ceilings, inside painting which is 50 percent completed, installing heating and plumbing and completion of woodwork and cabinet building in the various offices. Yet to be started is floor finishing. All plaster work on the inside has been completed.

All outside work on the building is completed and a group of boys, employed by the National Youth Corps program, spent a

<sup>27</sup> "Western District Courthouse Cornerstone Is Laid Wednesday." *Clay County Courier*. 6 October 1966, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> "Six Concrete Roof Panels Installed at Courthouse." *Clay County Courier*. 23 March 1967, p. 1.

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week working on the court house grounds. They picked up all the building scraps and cleaned out underbrush which had been neglected during the construction period.<sup>29</sup>

The move into the new courthouse occurred on August 30, 1967, and it occurred “without a hitch using members of the Road crew and courthouse officials.” The newspaper also reported that “Despite the fact that moving was underway, business was conducted as usual and [Deputy County Clerk Bill] Pond reported that he issued a marriage license to a happy couple who were then married by the Judge.”<sup>30</sup>

Once the new courthouse in Corning was finished, a celebration to dedicate both of the new courthouses was scheduled for Friday, October 20, 1967. Corning’s courthouse would be dedicated in the morning while the courthouse in Piggott would be dedicated in the afternoon. The schedule for Corning’s courthouse celebration, as reported in the *Clay County Courier*, was:

The Western District Court House, on South Second Street in Corning, will be dedicated at 9:00 a.m. and the program follows:  
9:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m., Open House, Tour Building, Refreshments; 11:00 a.m., Presentation of Colors by Boy Scouts; Invocation; Introduction of Guests, Master of Ceremonies, Attorney Bryan J. McCallen; Special Remarks; Brief History of Clay County, Judge Ermert; Address, Honorable Carlton Harris, Chief Justice of Arkansas.<sup>31</sup>

According to the *Clay County Courier*, approximately 200 people attended the dedication of the courthouse in Corning. Chief Justice Harris in his dedicatory remarks “stressed the importance of a strong local government and encouraged interest of local persons in law enforcement. He had much praise for citizens of Clay County for their decision to maintain the two county seat system of government and provide new court houses for both sides of the county. He also complemented [sic.] the beauty and general appearance of Corning’s new court house.” Those distinguished guests who attended the dedication included “County and district officials, former county officials, lawyers, the building committee members, contractor and architects.” The article in the newspaper also included a lengthy description of the courthouse and its features.<sup>32</sup>

Since its dedication in 1967, the Clay County Courthouse, Western District, has been an important part of the county’s government. As the main court and office building for the western part of Clay County, the Clay County Courthouse, Western District, represents the center of county government for the area. The Clay County Courthouse, Western District, also represents a good example of a building illustrating the influences of the New Formalism style of

<sup>29</sup> “August Moving Date Anticipated At Western District Court House.” *Clay County Courier*. 22 June 1967, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> “Happiness is Moving Day...” *Clay County Courier*. 31 August 1967, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> “County Court House Dedications Scheduled for Friday, October 20.” *Clay County Courier*. 12 October 1967, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> “Chief Justice Harris is Court House Dedication Speaker in Ceremonies.” *Clay County Courier*. 26 October 1967, Second Section p. 1.

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architecture. Since its dedication in 1967 the Clay County Courthouse in Corning has remained an important part of the county's architectural heritage.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY**

After World War II, especially during the 1950s, the International style was often the choice for civic and commercial buildings. However, when Arkansas native Edward Durell Stone designed the American embassy in New Delhi, India, in 1954, he did not feel that the International style was appropriate for the building. Rather, he executed a twist of classical elements that used the modern materials and technologies that had been employed in the International style, and New Formalism was born. As Virginia McAlester writes in the second edition of *A Field Guide to American Houses*:

...New Formalism concentrated on updating, rather than re-creating, Classical forms, providing a visible and theoretic distinction from the Neoclassical style. An overall massiveness is achieved through a concrete-block-like structure set on an elevation and typically crowned with a flat slab roof. Wall surfaces, commonly made of stone, brick, and marble, are normally smooth and unadorned; columns generally take on a slender and attenuated form.<sup>33</sup>

When the Clay County Courthouse, Western District, was built, it represented a new direction in the architecture of downtown Corning. Most of the other buildings in downtown Corning were late nineteenth or early twentieth century commercial buildings exhibiting vernacular commercial styles of the era. Even today, New Formalism architecture in Corning is rare, and the Clay County Courthouse is the only civic example of the style.

The Clay County Courthouse in Corning designed by Donnellan & Porterfield employed several New Formalism characteristics in its design. The building used cast concrete, for example, that could have been meant to mimic a more luxurious material, and the cast concrete also enhances the look of the building's flat-slab roof. In front of the courthouse, the small formal plaza with benches, planters, and several sidewalks is also a characteristic of the style and its formal composition. The Clay County Courthouse in Corning also reflects New Formalism's hallmark characteristic monumentality through its raised center section delineating the courtroom. Finally, the Clay County Courthouse, Western District, also exhibits the strict symmetrical façade that was also characteristic of New Formalism.

Although the building went in a very different direction architecturally from the previous courthouse, the Clay County Courthouse in Corning, like the previous courthouse, has been significant in the politics and government of Clay County's Western District, a role that it continues to play today. The residents of the Western District continue to conduct their county

<sup>33</sup> McAlester, Virginia Savage. *A Field Guide to American Houses, Second Edition*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013, p. 664.

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business at the Clay County Courthouse, Western District. Due to the fact that it plays a significant role in the politics and government of Clay County, the Clay County Courthouse, Western District, is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A**.

---

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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“Courthouse Construction Targeted for June First.” *Clay County Courier*. 27 January 1966, p. 1.

“Courthouse Election Set For Both Districts July 9.” *Clay County Courier*. 13 June 1963, p. 1.

“Courthouse Elections Scheduled December 21.” *Clay County Courier*. 11 November 1965, p. 1.

Clay County Courthouse, Western District

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“Courthouse Vote Slated On Tuesday, December 21.” *Clay County Courier*. 9 December 1965, p. 1.

“Cox Lumber Company Wins Courthouse Bids.” *Clay County Courier*. 30 June 1966, p. 1.

“Election Is July 9.” *Clay County Courier*. 4 July 1963, p. 1.

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“Sale of Bricks Over \$3,000 From Courthouse.” *Clay County Courier*. 25 July 1963, p. 1.

Sanborn maps for Corning, Arkansas, 1908, 1914, 1927, and 1937.

“Six Concrete Roof Panels Installed at Courthouse.” *Clay County Courier*. 23 March 1967, p. 1.

“Two Courthouse and Jail Issue Face Clay County Voters July 9<sup>th</sup>.” *Clay County Courier*. 20 June 1963, p. 1.

“Western District Courthouse Cornerstone Is Laid Wednesday.” *Clay County Courier*. 6 October 1966, p. 1.

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

Clay County Courthouse, Western District  
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**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** CY0024

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Approximately 2.4 acres.

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

1. Zone: 15                      Easting: 716585                      Northing: 4031517

Clay County Courthouse, Western District

Clay County, Arkansas  
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2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting :	Northing:

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Block 93 of the Young's Addition to the City of Corning, Arkansas.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This boundary contains all of the property historically associated with the property.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Ralph S. Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator  
organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program  
street & number: 1100 North Street  
city or town: Little Rock state: AR zip code: 72201  
e-mail: ralph.wilcox@arkansas.gov  
telephone: (501) 324-9787  
date: January 26, 2018

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Clay County Courthouse, Western District  
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### **Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### **Photo Log**

Name of Property: Clay County Courthouse, Western District

City or Vicinity: Corning

County: Clay County

State: Arkansas

Photographer: Mason Toms

Date Photographed: April 25, 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 11 . Southeast façade of the courthouse, looking northwest.
- 2 of 11 . Detail of the cornerstone, looking northwest.
- 3 of 11 . Southeast and southwest façades of the courthouse, looking north.
- 4 of 11 . Southwest façade of the courthouse, looking northeast.
- 5 of 11 . Southwest and northwest façades of the courthouse, looking east.
- 6 of 11 . Northwest façade of the courthouse, looking southeast.
- 7 of 11 . Northwest and northeast façades of the courthouse, looking south.
- 8 of 11 . Northeast façade of the courthouse, looking southwest.
- 9 of 11 . Commemorative plaques in the courthouse lobby, looking northwest.
- 10 of 11 . War Memorial, looking northwest.



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11 of 11 . Police Memorial, looking north.

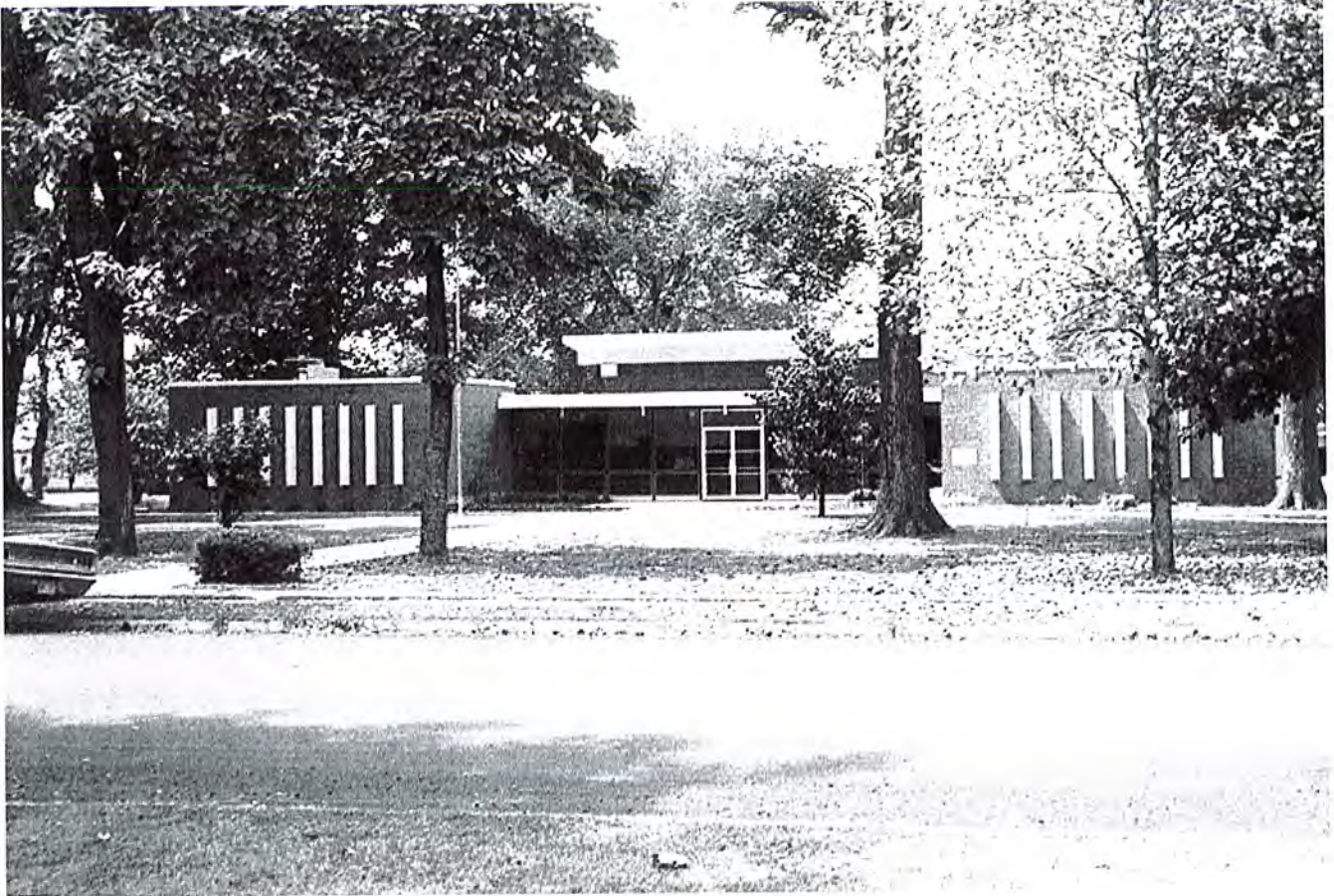


Figure 1: Clay County Courthouse, Western District, looking northwest, c.1975. From *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Found at: <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/media-detail.aspx?mediaID=573>.

Clay County Courthouse, Western District  
Name of Property

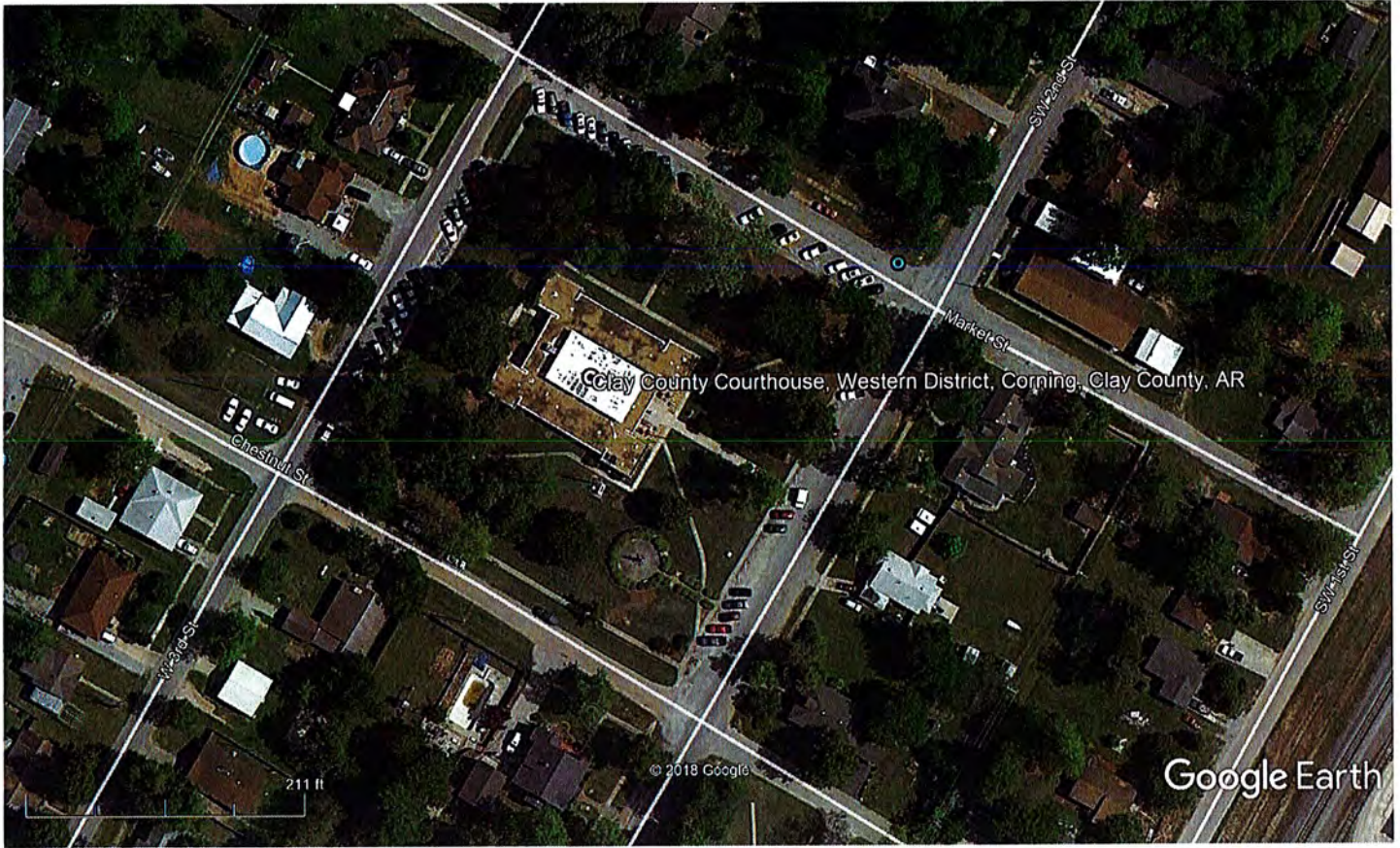
Clay County, Arkansas  
County and State



Figure 2: Rendering of the Clay County Courthouse, Western District. From the *Clay County Courier*, 9 December 1965, p. 1.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



|-----211 feet-----|

Clay County Courthouse, Western District  
Corning, Clay County, Arkansas

15 716585E 4031517N



North



|-----1075 feet-----|

Clay County Courthouse, Western District  
Corning, Clay County, Arkansas

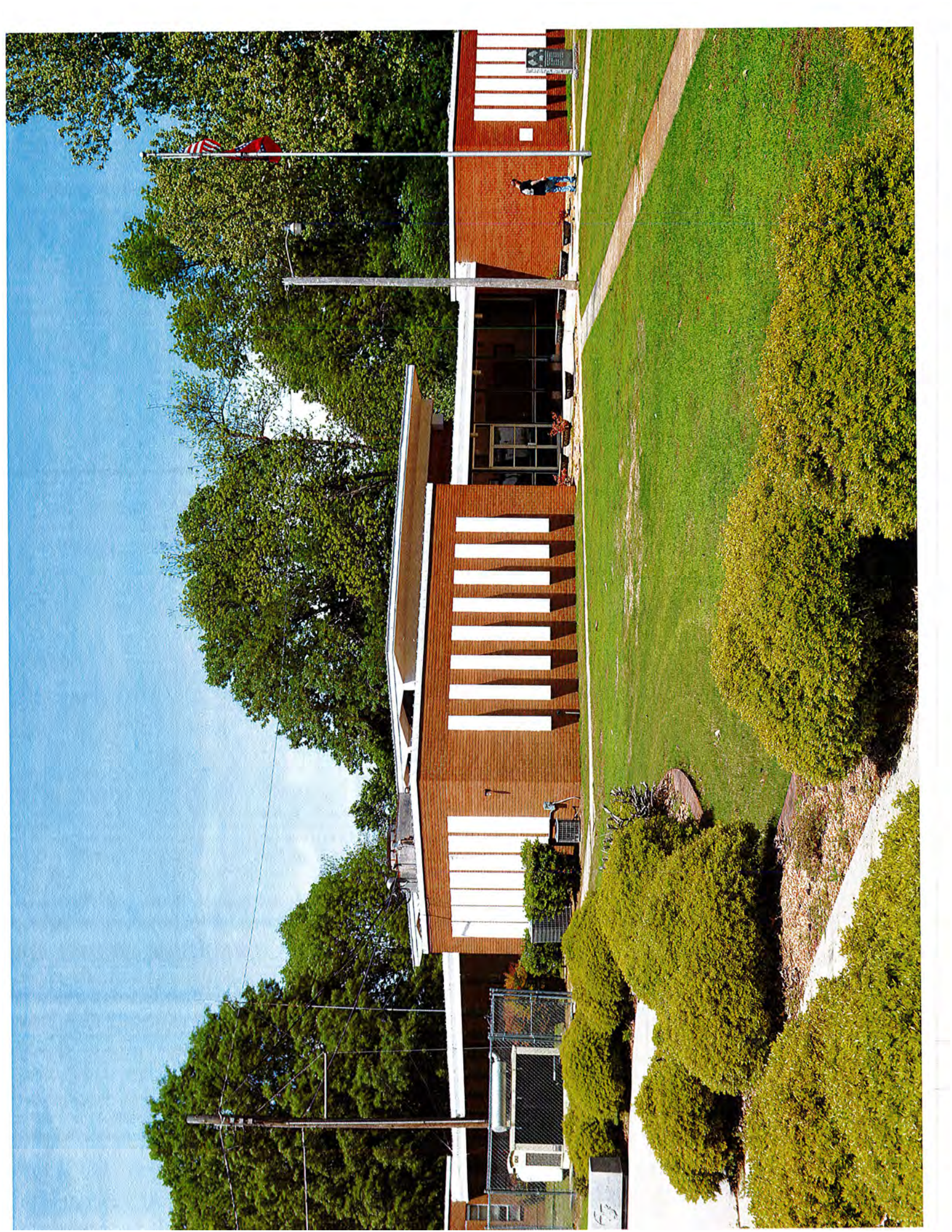
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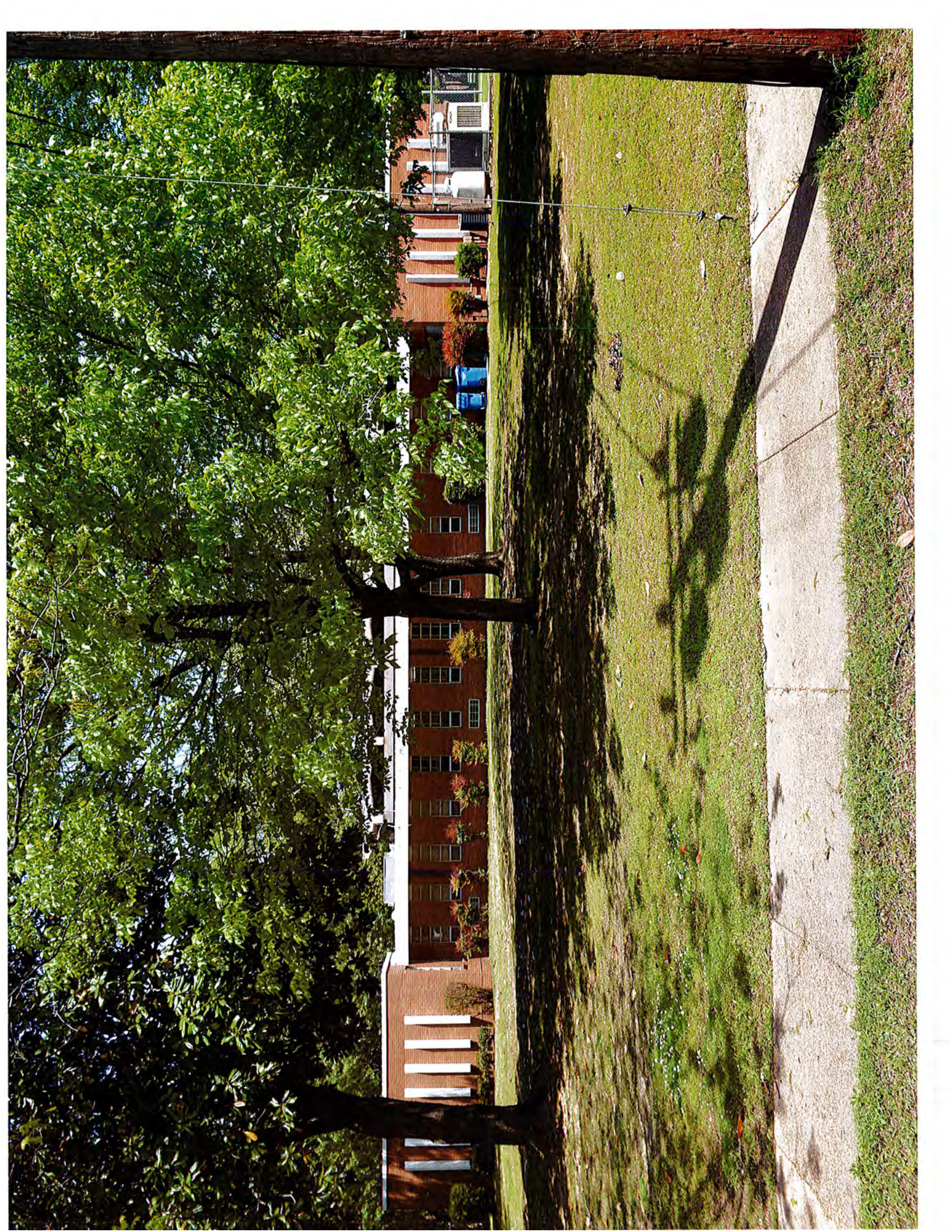


North

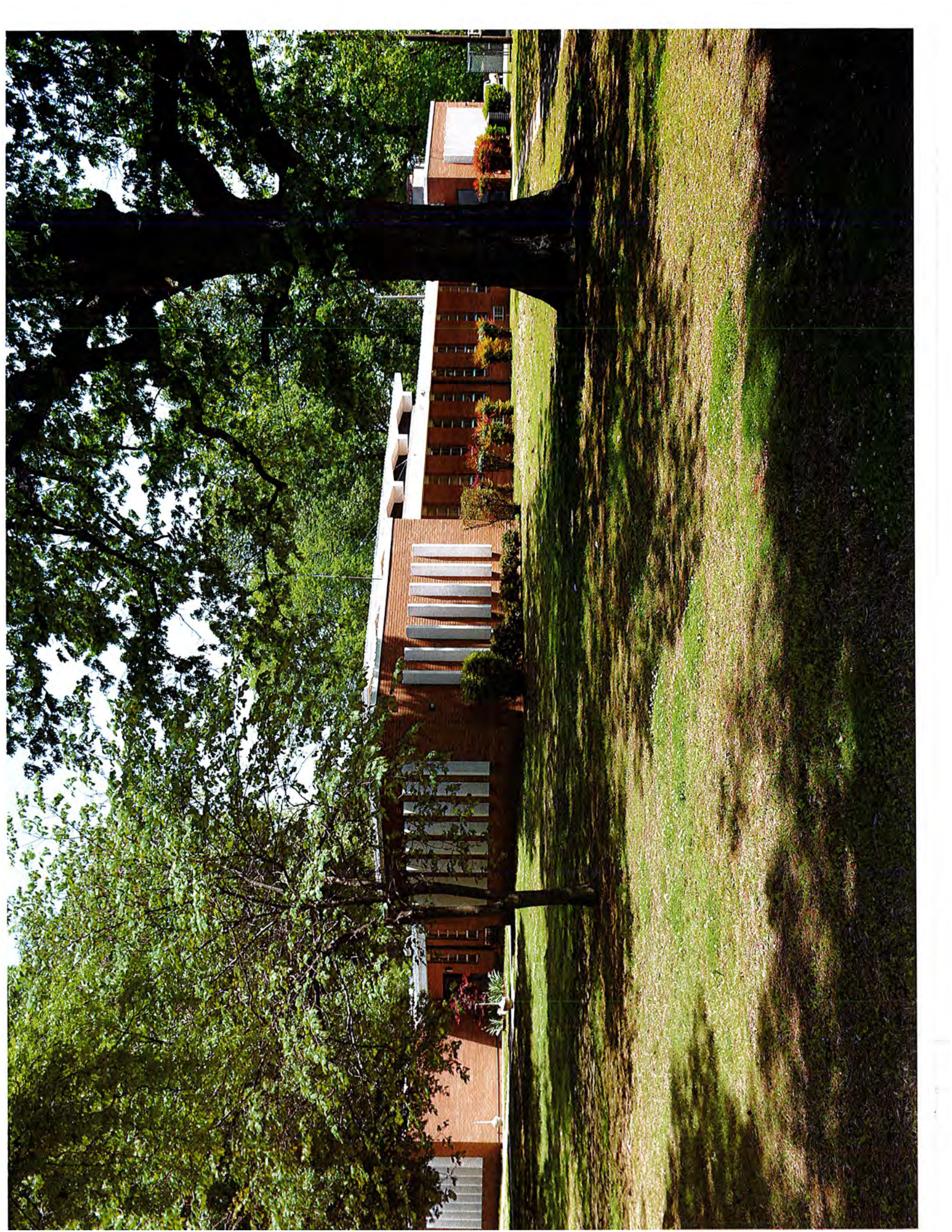


CLAY COUNTY  
COURT HOUSE  
WESTERN DISTRICT  
ERECTED-1966















CLAY COUNTY 1  
COURT HOUSE 9  
WESTERN 6  
DISTRICT 6

COUNTY JUDGE

CARL L. ERMERT

COURT HOUSE COMMITTEE

BEN M. BAKER

BRYAN McCALLEN

ARCHITECT

DONNELLAN & PORTERFIELD

CONTRACTOR

COX LUMBER COMPANY, INC.

AND

EMMETT CRITTENDEN

FIRST COUNTY OFFICIALS TO  
OCCUPY NEW COURT HOUSE

1967 - 1968

JUDGE  
SHERIFF  
CLERK  
CIRCUIT CLERK  
TREASURER  
ASSESSOR  
SUPT. OF SCHOOLS

CARL ERMERT  
BURNES W. DALTON  
BOYCE MCLESKEY  
DOUG BATEY  
E. P. (PINKNEY) SEAY  
VERNON MORGAN  
L. D. ROBINSON

DEPUTIES

SHERIFF  
CLERK  
CIRCUIT CLERK  
TREASURER  
ASSESSOR  
COLLECTOR

NOEL TURNER  
W. T. POND  
DENZIL WRICHT  
JESS WATSON  
WOODROW EDDINGTON  
JAMES RHODES

WESTERN DISTRICT



DEDICATED ON MEMORIAL DAY  
MAY 30, 1988

WORLD WAR I  
1914 - 1918  
THE GREAT WAR  
THE WAR TO END ALL WARS  
THE WAR OF THE AIR  
THE WAR OF THE SEA  
THE WAR OF THE LAND  
THE WAR OF THE SKY  
THE WAR OF THE WATER  
THE WAR OF THE FIRE  
THE WAR OF THE EARTH  
THE WAR OF THE HEAVENS  
THE WAR OF THE UNDERWORLD  
THE WAR OF THE UNIVERSE



*To honor the memory of our police  
officers who gave their lives in  
service of their community.*

- Dan Stanfield 1841-1914
- Tom Green 1892-1948
- Boug Buey 1923-1972
- Glen Archer 1926-1972
- Troy Key 1924-1972
- Bill Pond 1915-1973