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**TEXAS FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS DOCUMENTARY FILM CAPTURES
ARCHITECTURAL, CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORIC TEXAS COURTHOUSES**

First of Two Episodes of *The Golden Age of Texas Courthouses* Premieres on HoustonPBS

HOUSTON, April 19, 2004—Texas Foundation for the Arts announced today that the first episode of *The Golden Age of Texas Courthouses*, a new two-part documentary film series that provides a close-up view of the Lone Star State's remarkable collection of historic county courthouses, will premiere on KUHT-TV-HoustonPBS on Monday, April 26, 2004, at 8:30 p.m. (check local listings).

Produced by Houston-based Texas Foundation for the Arts in association with Sunset Productions, the first episode of *The Golden Age of Texas Courthouses* takes viewers on a cinematic journey into the history of these symbols of justice, independence and Texas heritage—many of which date back to the 1800s—and the lasting mark that these historic courthouses have made on the Lone Star State.

“The county courthouses of Texas, most of which are still community focal points, are the backbone of current and future Texas generations,” said Kim Lykins, executive director of Texas Foundation for the Arts. “The importance of preserving these historic treasures as an irreplaceable link in Texas history and heritage is a central theme in *The Golden Age of Texas Courthouses*.”

Courthouses were among the first permanent structures in many Texas counties. They were often the grandest building in town, and many Texas communities grew up around them. Their location and design helped create each county's unique identity, and those courthouses that remain are lasting symbols of the regional rivalries that shaped the state.

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Texas has more historic courthouses than any other state and one of the largest collections of Victorian architecture in the country. Today, more than 225 county courthouses are at least 50 years old—201 of which remain in active government use—and close to 80 were built before the turn of the 20th century. A total of 102 Texas courthouses are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, 111 are Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks and 91 are State Archeological Landmarks.

"Texas courthouses represent some of the finest works of public architecture in the state," said Stephen Fox, adjunct lecturer, architecture at Rice University and the University of Houston. "The 'golden age' of courthouse construction began in 1881 after the Texas legislature authorized counties to issue bonds to build new courthouses. Favorite architectural styles included Second Empire, Victorian Romanesque, Classical, and Modernistic."

At nearly three years in the making, Texas Foundation for the Arts has traveled the state of Texas, gathering video footage and searching for the intriguing stories that surround these buildings. The first 30-minute episode of *The Golden Age of Texas Courthouses* includes interviews from Dr. Virginia P. Bernhard, historian and professor of history at the University of St. Thomas; Dr. Stephen Fox; Dr. Mavis P. Kelsey, author of "The Courthouses of Texas"; John Nau, chairman of the Texas Historical Commission; and architect Kim Williams, whose Austin firm specializes in historical restorations.

Courthouses highlighted in the first episode of *The Golden Age of Texas Courthouses* include:

- **Bexar County Courthouse:** Completed in 1892 in San Antonio, Texas, and made out of red granite, this is the largest county courthouse in Texas.
- **Ellis County Courthouse:** Built in 1897, legend has it that during construction, a German stone mason carved progressively uglier faces on the façade of the building due to his steadily deteriorating relationship with a local girl.

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- **Goliad County Courthouse:** Built in 1894 in Goliad, Texas, the “hanging tree” standing next to this recently restored courthouse is a reminder of the swift justice meted out on the Texas plains.
- **Mason County Courthouse:** The second floor of this 1909 building in Mason, Texas, features a dormitory where the all-male juries of the era could be sequestered overnight.
- **Shelby County Courthouse:** Built in 1885 in Center, Texas, by an Irish architect who modeled it after Irish castles of his homeland. A trap door next to the judge’s bench allowed the judge to make a quick escape after rendering an unpopular verdict.
- **Shackelford County Courthouse:** Opened in 1884 in Albany, Texas, the courtroom floor slopes toward the bench so that everyone had a view of the judge—and the judge could see everyone in the courtroom.

Additional featured courthouses include Atascosa, Bell, Comal, Coryell, Dallas, Denton, El Paso, Franklin, Gonzales, Hood, Lavaca, McLennan, Milam, Nueces, and Presidio.

The Houston law firm of Fulbright & Jaworski, LLP (www.fulbright.com), is the lead sponsor of the two-part series, with additional underwriting provided by the Goliad Economic Development Corporation; Tom Green & Co. Engineers; The Albert and Ethel Herzstein Charitable Foundation; J.T. Michel, Ltd.; George P. Mitchell; Munns Manufacturing; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (www.mfah.org); North Country Slate; Sparks, Larosche & Associates, Inc.; Strake Foundation; and The Williams Company A.I.A., Austin (www.twcaia.com).

After airing on HoustonPBS (www.houstonpbs.org), the first episode will be made available to all PBS stations in Texas. The second episode will be completed later this year.

Texas Foundation for the Arts

Founded in 2001, Houston-based Texas Foundation for the Arts is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to promoting a positive environment for the growth of the visual and performing arts throughout the state of Texas and beyond. For more information on Texas Foundation for the Arts and its programs, visit www.texarts.org.

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