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You Be the Judge: An In-Depth Look into the History of the Nacogdoches County Courthouse



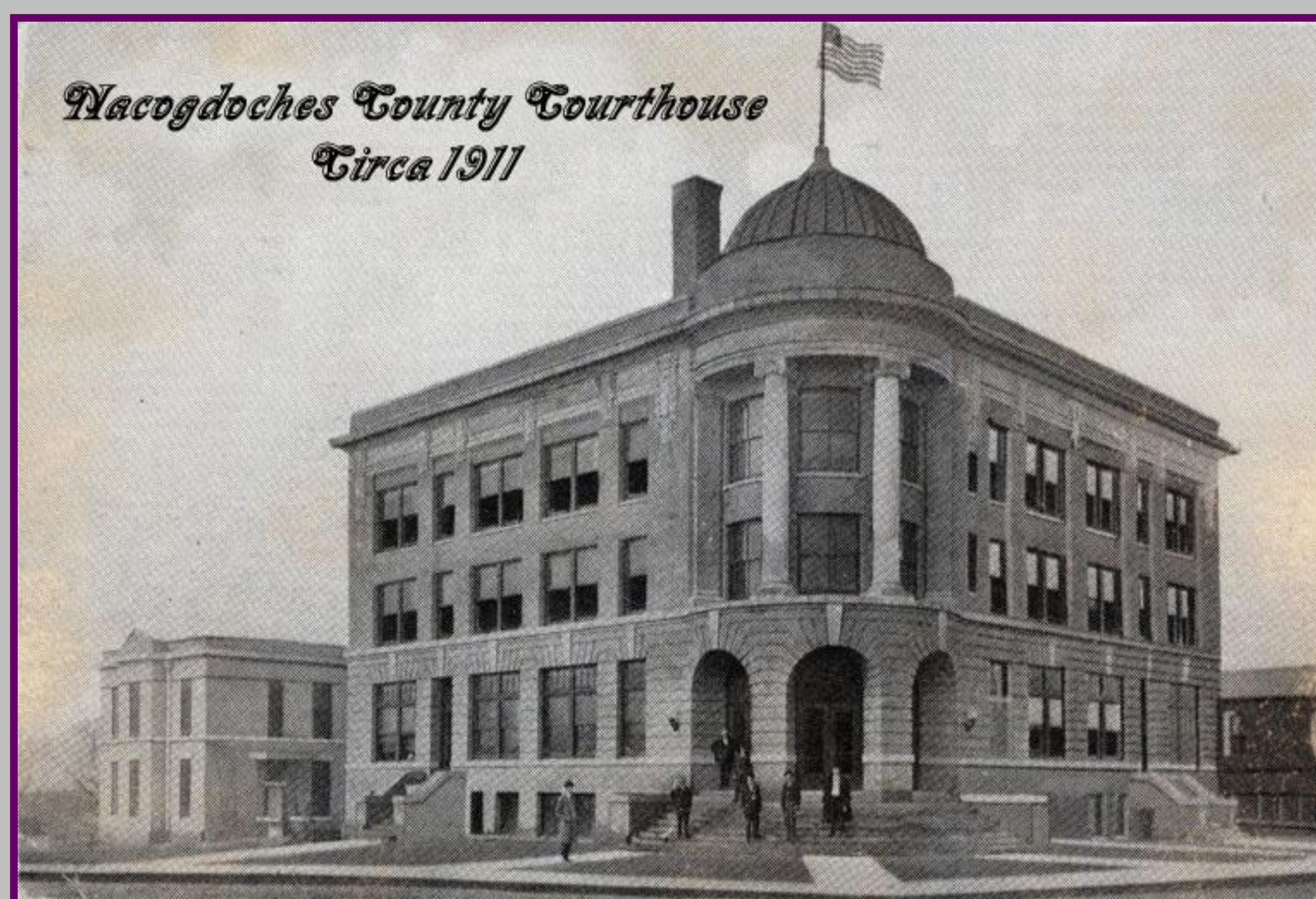
The first Nacogdoches County courthouse was the Old Stone Fort. This vernacular structure built in 1779 was also known as La Casa Piedra due to the Spanish rule over Texas which would continue for the next thirty years. It is easy to see the Spanish influence evident in the architecture of the Stone Fort; walls "made of brick similar to that used in the adobe houses of Spaniards".



To better suit the town and its people a new courthouse was built downtown. This courthouse as seen in George Crockett's sketch was a clear depiction of Gothic architecture and Second Empire Baroque as seen by the unique roof shape with iron work at the top. After a fire almost destroyed the west end of downtown it was proposed that a new courthouse be built on the south side. Painting of the Third Courthouse. George, Crockett.

No Picture on Record

The County's next courthouse, utilized between 1840 and 1827, was a vernacular wooden structure. This courthouse did not last long on account of poor conditions which led to frequent recesses from the court.



The fourth Nacogdoches County Courthouse was constructed in the early twentieth century and was "completed and ready for acceptance" as of November 29, 1912. This structure was of Greek revival; an architectural style popular during the 18th and late 19th centuries. This style becomes readily apparent with the presence of Doric pillars prominent at the courthouse's entrance. Unfortunately this courthouse, like the previous one, would quickly begin to deteriorate.



This final courthouse was built in 1960. The most noticeable element of the courthouse is the red tile roof, a great reflection of the Spanish Eclectic style popular between 1915 and 1940. Another aspect of the Spanish Eclectic style is the asymmetrical build to the building which can be seen in the placement of windows and archways. There is also greater emphasis upon this style as seen by the narrow archways towards the entrance of the building. The only elements that do not appear to fit with the Spanish style of architecture are the wider archways and casement windows located on the side of the building and under the red tiled shed roof. These arches show off more of an Italianate style that was popular between 1840 and 1845. The casement windows, a window style popular during the 17th century, act as a replica of this original style thus bringing a sense of formality to the building.

While interning at the Nacogdoches County Courthouse I became fascinated with the building and its architecture. I soon discovered the current courthouse on West Main St. was only one of five courthouses to be built in the Nacogdoches area. I wanted to learn more about the architectural history of the buildings and the significance of that architecture's time period.

The Nacogdoches County Courthouse is a courthouse that is a representation of the people who lived in the city as well as a reflection of the cities within the county. It is the home to the great resting place of many Spaniards who helped to establish a settlement recognized as the "Oldest Town in Texas." Although there will eventually come at time for the next courthouse to be removed and another to be constructed, this current courthouse is a great symbol of pride and devotion brought forth by the people of Nacogdoches and their brethren before them.

This research can be a stepping stone for those wishing to study the architecture of other courthouses in East Texas. This project may be the stepping stone towards a career in historical preservation or public history.

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