



Wanted: Historic County Jails of Texas (Clayton Wheat Williams Texas Life Series)

Edward A. Blackburn Jr.

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Along with the settlement of the Texas frontier came rustlers, public drunks, gunfighters, and other outlaws. A jail in which to incarcerate the lawbreakers was thus often the first public building raised in a new town.

Later, as government developed, public buildings—notably county courthouses and jails—assumed not only practical but also symbolic importance. The architecture of these buildings in the nineteenth century reflected the power and status with which the community imbued the government; many of the same architects applied the aesthetic standards of the day to both. In later years, the safety and at least limited comfort of the prisoners became concerns and jails were remodeled or abandoned to other uses in favor of modern, more utilitarian structures.

In this heavily illustrated guide to the historic county jails of Texas, Ed Blackburn Jr. takes readers to each of the 254 counties in the state, presenting brief histories and of the counties and their structures that housed their criminals. He provides general information about the architecture and location of the buildings and, when possible, describes the present uses of those that have been decommissioned.

Interviews with local officials, historians, and newspaper publishers have yielded colorful anecdotes for many of the jails. Revealing photographs of many of the old jails have been gathered from local and archival sources, and Blackburn himself has taken pictures of extant buildings. Together, these words and images not only provide a survey of the way Texans have housed their criminals, but also, with the aid of thumbnail maps of county locations, offer residents and tourists throughout the state a guide to a fascinating aspect of architectural and cultural history.

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