

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

United States Post Office and Court House

Greensboro, Guilford County, GF0034, Listed 10/29/2014
Nomination by United States General Services Administration, Public Buildings Services
Photographs by Christopher Hetzel, December 2006



Overall view from West Market Street



Overall rear view from West Friendly Street

**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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name United States Post Office and Court House
Other names/site number L. Richardson Preyer Federal Building

2. Location

Street & Number 324 W. Market Street Not for Publication N/A
City or Town Greensboro Vicinity N/A
State North Carolina Code NC County Guilford Code 081
Zip Code 27401

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date _____
Federal Preservation Officer, U.S. General Services Administration
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain): _____		

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)

- x 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.
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
x C 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 a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Politics/ Government

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Period of Significance

1933

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Dates

N/A

Architect/Builder

James A. Wetmore, acting supervising architect of the U.S. Department of Treasury
Murphy and Olmsted
George H. Rommel Construction Co.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 8 Continuation Sheets.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 9 Continuation Sheets.

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 #

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository:

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property 1.4 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	608644	3992729	3			
2				4			

 See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Located in the central business district of Greensboro, the United States Post Office and Court House is bounded on three sides by West Market Street to the south, North Eugene Street to the west, West Friendly Street to the north, and a historic Methodist Church is located directly to the east. The property is identified as Guilford County Tax Parcel Number: 0000672.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

The boundary reflects the original parcel acquired in 1929 for the United States Post Office and Court House in Greensboro as well as a subsequent 1975 quit claim deed from the City of Greensboro for a strip along North Eugene Street.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title	U.S. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service; Erica Kachmarsky & Christopher Hetzel, Architectural Historians		
Organization	ICF Jones & Stokes, on behalf of GSA	Date	8/2009, rev. 7/2014
Street & Number	811 W. 7 th Street, Suite 800	Telephone	213.627.5376
City or Town	Los Angeles	State	CA Zip Code 90017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

Photographs

Representative photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name	U.S. General Services Administration, Southeast Sunbelt Region (Region 4)		
Organization	Southeast Sunbelt Region (Region 4)	Telephone	404.562.0671
Street & Number	77 Forsyth Street, Room 450		
City or Town	Atlanta	State	GA Zip Code 30303

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. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

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Description¹

General

Built in 1931, the United States Post Office and Court House in Greensboro, North Carolina, is a five-story masonry building containing 128,653 gross square feet. The building also includes a fully occupied basement. Resting on a Mt. Airy, North Carolina, granite base, the exterior walls and ornamentation of this Art Deco style building are Indiana limestone. Set on a lot measuring approximately 210 x 280 feet, on approximately 1.4 acres, the structure is one of the landmark buildings in the Greensboro central business district and faces the county government facilities.

Boundary Justification

The United States Post Office and Court House is bounded on three sides by West Market, North Eugene, and West Friendly streets. The building has a small surface parking lot located along its east side. The old and new county courthouse complex is located to the south across West Market. The surrounding area is composed of buildings low and mid-rise in height. A Methodist church is located directly to the east of the building.

Exterior Description

The United States Post Office and Court House illustrates the rectilinear qualities and decorative motifs associated with the Art Deco style, along with strong classical overtones. Elements of the Art Deco style exhibited by the United States Post Office and Court House include its predominately rectilinear ornament in low relief with a flat front plane. Verticality, another characteristic of the Art Deco style, is also an element of the building, emphasized by its recessed windows and the oblong blocks and rectangular projections composed symmetrically around the front entrance.

The building has a spread footing foundation and bearing wall structure. Raised on a granite base with exterior walls finished in limestone, it is rectilinear in shape with its narrow sides on the north and south. The south (primary) elevation contains fifteen bays with the five central bays projected, defining the main entrance at the base level. Also containing fifteen bays, the north elevation only differs slightly from the south elevation. Divided into three sections, the west elevation contains nineteen bays on the first and second levels and twenty-one bays on the third, fourth, and fifth levels. The central portion of the building is crowned with a low hip roof. The three bays on both ends are slightly projected with the central portion of the upper two levels being recessed. Similar to the west elevation, the end bays of the east elevation are slightly projected and the central portion of the upper floors is recessed. The loading dock is located on the ground level of this elevation. The east elevation is articulated with chimneys in the fourth and tenth bays and a bridge connection to the central area from both ends. Decorative buttresses are used to define the bays.

The main entrance is on the south elevation with auxiliary entrances on the north and west elevations. The building is 202 feet 8 inches long at the west and east elevations and 150 feet 4 inches at the north and south elevations. Entrances were constructed on three facades: the south, the north and the west (for the postal lobby). At the present time, the south entry is used as the main entry; the west entry is closed because the building no longer functions as a post office, and the north entry, basement level, is used on a limited basis.

¹ Much of the architectural description of the building was adapted from the *Historic Building Preservation Plan: F. Richardson Preyer Federal Building, Greensboro, North Carolina* (Washington, DC: U.S. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, 2001).

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South (Primary) Elevation

The five bay projected entry pavilion at the south elevation provides the main entry to the building. Granite steps and Crab Orchard, Tennessee, stone terraces lead up to the three bay entrance, defined by the use of pilasters and stone tracery. Three sets of aluminum replacement doors are crowned by the original cast aluminum transom grilles. The reveals of the doors are carved polished granite with low relief carving. The ornamentation consists of panels delineated by vine motifs at the sides and paterae bands running horizontally. Within each panel is a carved federal shield.

The three bay entry pavilion projects slightly from the plane of the facade. The continuous fretwork band above the first floor also appears on the entry pavilion, with the incised words "United States Post Office and Court House" at the center in Art Deco style lettering. To the east and west of the entry pavilion are carved, open stone grilles. The grilles consist of a geometric pattern with the letters USA at the top and GNC (Greensboro, North Carolina) at the bottom. Two stone carved plinths rest on stone cheek walls that frame the entrance stairs and project from the building wall immediately below the open stone grilles. The plinths, featuring the lotus motif flanked by the scroll motif on each side, rise eight feet and provide ornamental lighting for the elevation, as each supports five glass and metal lanterns

Buttresses and pilasters define the upper levels of the entrance. The second and third floor levels are set-off by four fluted engaged pilasters with carved caps featuring the lotus motif flanked by the scroll motif. Carved panels between the pilasters feature a lotus design separated by unornamented shields. The reveals of these second and third floor recessed windows feature elongated carved panels with a fretwork band accented with beads and interspersed with lotus flowers. The carved panels at the top of the reveals feature alternating geometric and paterae motifs.

Between the pilasters are aluminum spandrels separating second and third floor windows. The spandrels feature the seals of the Treasury Department, the Post Office Department, the Department of Justice, the War Department, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Labor. The fourth floor level of the entrance pavilion consists of a three bay setback delineated to the east and west by projected triangular pilasters.

At the fourth floor, the central two pilasters terminate in carved eagles' heads atop federal shields. Carved panels between the pilasters feature chevron motifs divided by upright volutes, and a lotus band at the bottom. Carved keystones featuring the diamond motif lie at the center of each panel. The attic level of the building is setback from the fourth floor level. The attic level features three open limestone grilles centered above the fourth floor's window bays and terminates in a band of glyphs at the parapet.

West Elevation

The west elevation reveals the U-shaped plan of the building. Windows along this elevation reveal the basement level. The first floor extends across this elevation from south to north. The second and third floors are expressed as projecting pavilions, and the fourth floor is revealed to the east above the second and third floors as the back of the plan. The basement level is Mt. Airy granite. The limestone exterior walls rest on a molded granite water table. Ornamentation on the west elevation is similar to that of the south elevation. The same fretwork band as on the south elevation runs above the third floor level. The lotus panels also appear at the cornice above the fourth floor

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level, separated here by carved keystones. Second and third floor windows here have the same aluminum spandrel design as on the south elevation.

The third building entrance is located on the west elevation. This entrance is detailed similar to the north and south entrances but at a smaller scale. Stone pavers lead to the west elevation entry. Framed by stone tracery, the replacement pair of aluminum doors are contained in a granite surround with paterae on the panels. The elaborate pediment features a lotus flanked by heavy floral carving with palmette acroterions. The reveal is ornamented by a single carved band of overlapping disks. Open, geometric granite grilles flank the pair of entry doors. In the three bays immediately above the doors, to their north, and to their south, are open limestone and geometric grilles. The three bays are separated by fluted pilasters with a paterae motif at their caps.

The central seven bays of the recessed wall are delineated by pilasters with carved lotus-motif panels at the third and fourth floor levels. Decorative terra cotta and antefixae from the terra cotta roof are revealed at the fourth floor level on this elevation. The antefixae feature a painted single lotus motif.

North Elevation

The north elevation is ornamented the same as the south elevation except for a few differences. The central projected entry pavilion features only one pair of aluminum replacement entry doors with its original cast aluminum transom. The pair of doors is accessed by two flights of granite stairs with stone terraces because it is located on the second level. Two stone plinths surmounted with glass globes sit on the cheek walls at the first floor level.

The polished granite surround is the same as that on the west elevation, and the reveal features the same carving. The main difference between the north and south facades occurs in the entry approach and the door surround detailing. On this elevation the door is surmounted with a pedimented lintel and a paterae or rosette ornament is carved into the granite surround.

Furthermore, the north elevation's projected pavilion includes carved stone grilles flanking the entrance. The grilles consist of a stylized tracery pattern. Above the grilles are carved panels with the federal shield in the center, flanked by bundled axes.

Finally, this main, central stair is flanked at the basement level by single-leaf aluminum replacement entry doors leading into the north basement lobby.

East Elevation

The east elevation is the location of the original postal loading dock and currently serves as parking and entry area for employees. Similar to the west elevation, the three end bays at both ends of the east elevation are projected and the central portion of the upper floors is recessed. The central portion, at the location of the main, original courtroom, is also projected. There is a bridge connection at both sides, from the north and south end bays, to this projection. The elevation is articulated with chimneys at the fourth and tenth bays. Decorative buttresses are used to define the central five bays.

The original postal loading dock is on the first floor level. The concrete loading dock with wood bumpers extends across the area between the projecting north and south end pavilions. Steel staircases at the north and south ends

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of the loading dock lead to the basement. A non-original limestone-clad elevator shaft rises from the northeast corner of the loading dock. There is an original aluminum-clad metal marquee at the loading dock with a paneled ceiling. The ceiling is ornamented by chevron and patera motifs on the beams.

Ornamentation on this façade includes carved panels at the cornice which feature the lotus motif. The panels of the recessed area of the cornice are divided by carved keystones with scroll work and a diamond pattern. Six corbelled buttresses divide the windows at the center pavilion façade. The buttresses have denticulated triangular caps above foliate and palmette carvings.

The bridge connections at the north and south ends of the central projection are simply ornamented, with flat pilasters dividing the windows. The recessed panels beneath each window have plain roundels. The areas beneath the bridge connections are filled with non-original masonry.

Windows at the courtroom third floor level, are two-over-two aluminum double hung windows hung in pairs with two-light transoms over each window. Windows in the bridges are three-over-three double hung sash. The east elevation retains many original features and finishes; however, it is more utilitarian in its function.

Roof

The roof consists of a skirt roof on the north-south connecting wing and flat roofs on the projecting pavilions at the east and west, and on the north-south projecting entry pavilions. The terra cotta antefixae terminate the terra cotta tile skirt roof. The flat portions of the roof are flat seam metal.

Fenestration

All windows are double hung aluminum sash and are original, except for a small number replaced after a fire on the second floor. The aluminum-plated window spandrels include a diagonal grid with stars superimposed. Basement level windows are three-over-three double hung sash and have wrought iron grilles. First floor windows are three-over-three double hung sash with three-light hopper-style transoms. Second and third floor windows are two-over-two double hung sash and are hung in pairs. Fourth floor windows are three-over-three double hung sash.

Lighting

A distinctive feature of the south, west, and north elevations is the light standards, which differ at each elevation. All have tall, massive hexagonal limestone bases with hexagonal bronze lights with opaque glass at the top. South elevation standards rest on granite cheek walls at the main entry. Each panel of the base features a carved fluted, Ionic column design with a lotus motif panel above. West elevation standards rest on a granite base at the entry. Center panels feature carved palmette motifs. Corners have an unembellished shaft. North elevation standards rest on granite cheek walls at the first floor level entrance. The granite bases have panels featuring a palmette and scroll motif and corner pieces are fluted with a palmette motif at the top.

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Interior

While the interior of the building has been renovated, the original character of many of the spaces has been retained. The first floor lobby areas, upper floor corridors, and third floor courtroom and office within the judge's suite retain much of their original character-defining features and fabric.

First Floor

Main (South) Lobby

When the building was constructed, the main lobby on the first floor was U-shaped, with the long corridor running north to south and short corridors running east to west and terminating at lobbies at the north and south entries. The west entry was located in center of the long north-south corridor. After the U.S. Post Office reduced its presence in the mid-1960s, the original U-shaped lobby was drastically altered. The northern portion, which connected the north entry lobby to the remainder of the lobby, was removed and the finishes either covered-over or removed entirely. The original north and south entry vestibules and lobbies remain.

The U.S. Post Office retained half of the original workspace and the remaining L-shaped lobby wrapped around this space in the southern portion of the building. When the U.S. Postal Service moved out completely in 1990, sales windows were closed and the former workspace was converted into court space. A significant amount of original finishes remain in the north and south entry vestibules with the L-shaped south lobby retaining some original finishes.

The additional decorative finishes on both the exterior and interior of the south entry mark it as the main entry. The entry vestibule itself is an interior "storm" vestibule sitting in the center of the entry foyer at the central entry door. It is composed of aluminum panels with decorative aluminum cresting. The ornamentation is expressed as a stylized branch and leaf pattern. The vestibule sits on a base of Dark Cedar Tennessee marble. Floors throughout the south lobby are terrazzo (called "marble mosaic" on the original plans) with black marble and white Georgia marble chips predominating. Walls are clad with St. Genevieve Golden Vein marble to full heights at the south entry foyer. Pilasters of the same marble line the corridor walls at the east-west corridor. Walls of the east-west corridor are now plaster. Originally, these walls were lined with postal boxes and sales windows.

The ceiling of the south lobby is one of the building's most distinctive features. The flat plaster ceiling features a cornice with several layers of molding. The lower level consists of a zig-zag pattern with a band of lotus above. The horizontal planes are detailed with a curvilinear pattern, highlighted in red and blue. This pattern forms a border on either side for a rectilinear pattern having gold stars within. An astragal molding of the bead and reel motif is next, framing a rectilinear border. A gilded lotus band is on the uppermost portion of the cornice. The ceiling of the east-west portion of the south lobby is spanned by marble-encased beams. Original, suspended light fixtures remain in the entry lobby. These fixtures are hexagonal, cylindrical aluminum-framed fixtures ornamented by a stylized rosette motif.

St. Genevieve Rose marble columns with Egyptian capitals featuring the gilded papyrus motif separate the south entry foyer from the main lobby. Simple, unornamented St. Genevieve Golden Vein marble pilasters grace the walls at intervals. The original west entry area to the lobby features fluted marble pilasters with caps ornamented with the palmette and scroll motif.

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Original aluminum surrounds remain at doorways within the south entry foyer. On the east wall the surrounds encase an aluminum-paneled original bulletin board flanked by contemporary steel doors leading to the staircase. On the west wall the surrounds also encase an aluminum bulletin board flanked by an aluminum elevator door to the north and a wooden door leading to a small restroom on the south. This opening originally led to a telephone booth with a decorative aluminum door. All the aluminum surrounds feature the same cresting that is atop the aluminum entry vestibule.

Original aluminum framed wall sconces are located on the walls to the east and west of the entry foyer. These square fixtures feature a geometric frame accented by the rosette motif, with opaque glass. The fixtures are placed above the location of the original wall-mounted postal desks (six were called for in the original plans). Free standing postal desks were located throughout the lobby (four in the center and two against the wall). None of the postal desks remain.

No original doors remain. Flush wood panel doors open into the southeast offices from the east walls of the lobby. An entry consisting of double wood panel doors leads to Courtroom #1 at the west end of the lobby. Other lobby doors are flush wood.

The marble original south staircase is located to the east side of the entry foyer. Both its walls and baseboards are Pink Tennessee marble. Landings are ornamented by geometric patterns executed in 4 inch by 4 inch ceramic tile.

The south and west lobbies exhibit original features and finishes and include many of the distinguishing characteristics of the building.

West Entry Lobby

The original west entry has a smaller, though similar, entry vestibule to the south entry. Entrance is from a first floor doorway and the interior vestibule encompasses the marble stairs leading to the main level of the lobby. The walls and ceiling here are the same as in the south entry foyer. There is also an original suspended light fixture in the west foyer. A distinctive feature of the west entry foyer, indeed of the entire building, is the stained glass window mounted on the west wall of the foyer. The aluminum framed window features twenty-five opaque glass panes in the center with a border of a buff and gold vine pattern.

North Entry Lobby

The entry vestibule also retains full-height marble walls but, most significantly, retains the original ceiling and suspended light fixture. The plaster panel ceiling features cornice work with glyphs, fretwork, broad glyphs, bead and reel, lotus, glyphs and an interior band of gilded lotus; all executed in metallic paint. The original suspended fixture is octagonal, elongated, aluminum-framed with opaque glass. Double aluminum replacement doors provide entry to the building.

The original north entry lobby, though no longer connected to the remainder of the original lobby, retains many original finishes. At the present time, the north lobby is not used as a building entry. It is connected to the south, main lobby area by a twisting hallway. The lobby's floors are a terrazzo mix (called "marble mosaic" floor on the original plans) with black, white and grey chips. Walls are clad to full-height with St. Genevieve Golden Vein marble, selected for maximum graining. The baseboards are Dark Cedar Tennessee marble. Original plaster ceilings have

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been obscured by dropped acoustical ceilings. Original square, aluminum-framed wall sconces with the rosette motif grace the walls to the east and west of the main portion of the lobby.

The main north staircase opens onto the north lobby at the east side. It is a Pink Tennessee marble-clad staircase with Pink Tennessee marble at the inside wall and a man-made travertine finish on the outside walls. Landing floors are ornamented by 4"x 4" ceramic tile laid in geometric patterns.

The north lobby in the basement is located below the north lobby. Floors are the same 4 inch by 4 inch ceramic tile that appears in the corridors. The floors have Pink Tennessee marble borders. Walls are clad to full height with St. Genevieve Golden Vein marble. Ceilings are paneled plaster at the entry doors and corbelled plaster at the main portion of the basement lobby. The original marble staircase empties into the basement lobby at the east side and the elevator is on the west side.

Though the north lobby and the basement lobby are less detailed than the south lobby, these areas retain their original finishes.

Corridors

Corridors are located in the center of the first floor tenant space, running east to west; and at the east running north to south and connecting with the north lobby. Corridor floors are non-original white or light buff vinyl tile. Walls are clad with non-original vinyl covering and have a non-original wood chair rail and baseboard. Ceilings are dropped acoustical. The east-west corridor features a wood paneled entry into the U.S. District Court with wood double doors. Gilded raised letters on the entablature read "UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT/MIDDLE DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA."

Office Spaces

The first floor space consists of a large courtroom (#1), a smaller courtroom (#1A), and functionally-related office space. Neither courtroom is original to the building. Related offices, also finished with non-original materials, fill the remaining space. Typical office finishes include carpet, vinyl-covered partition walls with wood baseboard and trim, and an acoustical tile ceiling. The office space on the first floor is entirely non-original.

Courtroom #1

Courtroom #1 is located to the south in the space originally occupied by the post office work room. Floors are covered by carpet. Walls are wood panels and ceilings are acoustical tile. The center portion is raised with a carved wood frieze at its perimeter. Furnishings are also wood paneled. Brass chandeliers with semi-circular opaque globes are suspended from the ceiling.

Courtroom #1A

Courtroom #1A is smaller and has less detailing than courtroom #1. Floors are carpeted. Walls are clad to full-height with wood paneling. Furnishings are wood paneled. The wood paneled judge's bench is located in the northwest corner of the room. Ceiling is acoustical tile.

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Second Floor

Corridor

The second floor corridor extends between the north and south elevator lobbies. The building's corridors are not finished in ornamental materials. The corridor and lobbies retain some original features, including original floors and door surrounds, but their original appearance has been altered by wall and ceiling alterations. Pairs of fire doors have been added in the center of the corridor and near the north lobby. Second floor elevator lobbies retain the original Pink Tennessee marble floors and the Dark Cedar Tennessee marble baseboards. Walls are covered with non-original vinyl covering. In the north lobby, a non-original wood chair rail is added. Corridor floors are the original 4 inch by 4 inch ceramic tile with Pink Tennessee marble baseboards. The man-made travertine walls remain, although a wood picture rail has been added. The Dark Cedar Tennessee marble baseboard remains in the second floor corridor. Original plaster ceilings have been covered with acoustical tile ceilings. Non-original wood panel entry doors provide access to the second floor courtroom at the south end of the corridor.

Restrooms

Original restrooms are located at the north end of the corridor adjacent to the north elevator lobby. Though many changes have been made, many original finishes remain. Original plans call for 4 inch by 4 inch buff ceramic tile floors in the restrooms, similar to the tile in the corridors. Restroom floors are currently bright buff-colored 2 inch, elongated tiles laid in a basket weave pattern. Flooring borders are Pink Tennessee marble. Plaster walls have been covered with yellow 3 inch ceramic tile up to 7 feet. The Pink Tennessee baseboard is covered. Stall dividers are Pink Tennessee marble and original stall doors are paneled wood. Where original stall doors are missing, replications have been fabricated. The bathroom fixtures are not original except for a few towel bars.

Office Spaces

Office space on the second and third floors is located on either side of the north-south corridors and in the north and south wings of the elevator lobbies. On the second floor, a courtroom is located in the center, off the corridor, at the east side, beneath the original third floor courtroom. It is not original to the building.

Offices generally have been refinished and reconfigured over the years. Most of the interior office spaces have been altered with acoustical tile ceilings and fluorescent light fixtures. Typical office finishes include carpet, vinyl-covered original and added partition walls, and acoustical tile ceilings.

The judge's office related to the second floor courtroom has full-height wood paneling and ornamental finishes, including a dentilated oak band highlighting the cornice. This space is original to the building. Fluted oak strips delineate the wall panels. At the top of each panel are stencils executed in gold leaf. Motifs are various chevron and geometric designs. Surface-mounted fluorescent light fixtures have replaced original lighting.

The U.S. Marshals' space has two holding cells and vinyl flooring.

Original office finishes no longer in place include wood floors, base plinths, and trim; and plaster walls, ceilings, and window reveals. Original features that have been retained include door trim, brass hardware, some furnishings, and

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light fixtures. Many original fluted wood door surrounds remain. Others have been fabricated to match this original detailing. Some original wood panel doors remain, but most doors are replacements, flush paneled wood.

Courtroom

The second floor courtroom is not original to the building.

On the second floor courtroom's east elevation, the wall projects outward at its center. The north and south wings also project outward on their east. A "bridge" passageway located to the north and south of the courtroom connects the courtroom to the north and south wings of the building. The north passageway connects the U.S. Marshals' space and the prison area (via a steel staircase) to the northeast door of the courtroom; the south passageway connects the judge's office to the southeast door of the courtroom directly beside the judge's bench. The passageways have a 4 inch by 4 inch ceramic tile flooring field with marble border, plaster walls, and a flat plaster paneled ceiling. The south passageway's original flooring is covered with carpet.

Third Floor

Corridor

The third floor corridor runs north to south and connects the elevator lobbies. At the center, extending towards the west, is the courtroom entry lobby. The third floor corridor and court lobby exhibit their original features and finishes.

The elevator lobby floors are Pink Tennessee marble with Dark Cedar Tennessee marble baseboards. Ceilings are acoustical tile which are covering original flat plaster panels. Walls of the elevator lobbies and corridor feature a man-made travertine covering. The second, and particularly, the third floor corridors add to the character of the building with their original flooring and fluted door surrounds. Flooring of the corridor consists of a 4 inch by 4 inch ceramic tile field with Pink Tennessee marble borders and bands. The corridor baseboard is also Dark Cedar Tennessee marble and the walls are man-made travertine, which is heavily over-painted. Flush fluorescent lights lie within the acoustical tile ceilings. Original oak doors have been replaced by flush wood doors.

Office Spaces

Office space on the second and third floors is located on either side of the north-south corridors and in the north and south wings of the elevator lobbies. The original courtroom with its adjacent original court lobby is located in the center of the third floor space.

Offices generally have been refinished and reconfigured over the years. Most of the interior office spaces have been altered with acoustical tile ceilings and fluorescent light fixtures. Typical office finishes include carpet and vinyl-covered walls, both original and added partitions. The judge's offices generally have full-height wood paneling and more ornamental finishes than the other offices. The U.S. Marshals' areas have two cells and vinyl flooring.

Original finishes no longer in place include wood floors, baseboard plinths and trim; and plaster walls, ceilings and window reveals. Original features that have been retained include the door trim, brass hardware, some of the furniture, and light fixtures. Many original fluted wood door surrounds remain. Others have been fabricated to match the original. Some original wood panel doors remain, but most doors are not original, replaced with flush wood.

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On the east elevation, the main courtroom projects outward at the center of the elevation. The north and south wings also project outward to the east. A "bridge" passageway located to the north and south of the courtroom connects the courtroom to the north and south wings of the building. The north passageway connects the Marshals' and prison area (via a steel staircase) to the northeast door of the courtroom; and the south passageway connects the judge's office to the southeast door of the courtroom (beside the judge's bench). The passageways have 4"x 4" ceramic tile floors with marble borders, plaster walls and flat plaster panel ceiling. The south passageway original floors are covered with carpet.

Third floor courtroom

The original courtroom lobby for the federal court at the center of the third floor consists of two pairs of entry courtroom doors on the east wall and an open waiting area to the west. Floors are 4 inch by 4 inch ceramic tile with Pink Tennessee marble borders. Walls are man-made travertine with a Dark Cedar Tennessee marble baseboard. Ceilings are flat painted plaster with a molded plaster cornice. The original courtroom's entry on the east wall has two original sets of double doors. These original oak recessed-panel doors each have an oval float glass pane. Above the pair of doors is a five pane fixed transom. The door surrounds and plinths are Cardiff Green marble. An incised Cardiff Green marble panel reading "UNITED STATES COURT" lies above the transom. A mural between the two pairs of doors reads "We the People".

The courtroom retains a high degree of architectural integrity with regard to original features and finishes, and displays many features exhibiting craftsmanship. The original cork tile floor has been covered with dark green carpet. St. Genevieve Golden Vein marble, selected for maximum veining, clads the walls up to 4 feet with acoustical plaster walls above. Window surrounds are also St. Genevieve Golden Vein marble.

In addition, the same marble outlines areas of plasterwork on the west wall, mirroring the width and height of the windows across the room on the east wall. The baseboard is Cardiff Green marble. The plaster panel ceiling has ornate decoration. A narrow gilded fretwork band serves as a crown molding. The ceiling is divided into three panels. The lowest panel has a wide frieze featuring the chevron motif and is painted in three different colors of metallic paint. According to the original plans, this frieze was to have incised inscriptions at all four sides of the courtroom. It is not apparent if this was executed; however, at the present time the chevron motif is continuous and no inscriptions are visible. The middle panel is ornamented by a narrow band of glyphs painted in two colors of metallic paint. The soffit is ornamented at broad intervals by small painted plaques with the quatrefoil motif in three colors of metallic paint. The center portion of the ceiling is unadorned flat plaster. No original light fixtures remain.

The main entry doors for the courtroom are located on the west wall. The double doors are covered with Pantosote, a popular, vinyl-covering of the 1930s which imitated leather, with a fixed five panel transom above. Door surrounds are Cardiff Green marble. The surrounds culminate in a simple pediment with incised glyphs. Palmiform acroterions at the corners of the surrounds match those used for the north and west door surrounds on the building exterior. There are four single panel wood doors flanking the judge's bench. The backdrop behind the judge's bench is a flat plaster wall covered with red drapery. The original plans called for a silk velour drapery and a metal Department of Justice seal. The existing draperies have an aluminum U.S. Courts seal.

Original court furnishings consist of a paneled judge's bench, clerk's desk and jury box—all resting on a Cardiff Green marble base. The jury box is not original but was executed in the same design and finish as the original furnishings. Other original furnishings include the spectator benches.

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The original third floor courtroom is almost in its original condition. It represents a 1930s federal courtroom.

Judge's Suite

The third floor original judge's suite is located at the northeast corner. The suite is connected to the original third floor courtroom by the east "bridge" crossing into the northeast corner of the courtroom. The judge's office is little changed. The remainder of the suite has been altered.

The original wood flooring of the judge's office has been carpeted. The walls are paneled with oak to their full height. The plaster soffit is painted a medium brown with patera at intervals painted in teal and gold. Original oak doors have obscure glass panels in their upper portions.

The judge's office is intact with only cosmetic changes.

Fourth Floor

The original corridor remains at the north end with many original finishes intact. However, from the center of the corridor to the south end, the corridor was narrowed, causing the removal of original doorways. Original corridor and elevator lobby finishes include 4 inch by 4 inch ceramic tile flooring with Pink Tennessee marble borders. Walls are plaster with Dark Cedar Tennessee marble baseboards. Ceilings are non-original acoustical tile. Original wood doors with an elongated center panel of obscure glass remain at the north end of the corridor. Original door surrounds are fluted wood and encompass transoms, also with obscure glass panels.

Typical non-original office finishes include carpet, vinyl covered walls and acoustical tile ceilings. The fourth floor office space is utilitarian and has been altered over the years.

Basement and Attic

Corridors and Office Space

The basement of the building, originally and currently, includes office and service/mechanical space. A corridor runs from north to south in the center of the basement. The north end terminates in a marble entry door; the south end of the corridor terminates in a large, unadorned lobby space with painted plaster square piers at the south lobby. Service/mechanical areas are primarily in the east and northeast portions of the basement with office spaces filling the remainder of the spaces.

The north-south corridor is carpeted. Walls are painted plaster. The baseboard is vinyl. Ceilings throughout the corridor and office space are acoustical tile. Typical basement office finishes include carpeted floors and vinyl-covered walls, both original and added partitions. Some areas, such as the break room and the southwest corner areas have vinyl tile on the floor. Service/mechanical areas have concrete floors with either painted brick or concrete block walls, and flat plaster ceilings. Many original wood paneled doors remain in the place in the basement, especially at the south end. Non-original doors are flush wood.

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Attic space is exclusively utilitarian. A concrete staircase leads to the attic at the north and south ends of the building. The floors are concrete and the walls are painted brick. Ceilings reveal the concrete underlayment of the roof supported by steel I-beams.

The basement and attic are utilitarian in design and function.

Integrity

In addition to the alterations to the first floor in 1990, following the departure of the U.S. Postal Service, the United States Post Office and Court House underwent rehabilitation between 2005 and 2007 to update elevators and vacant office spaces. Despite these alterations, the character-defining architectural features of the building remain intact and the building retains a high degree of architectural integrity. The structure is in good condition and shows few signs of age.

The south, north, and west elevations are in nearly original condition, and exhibit a high degree of original features and finishes. The building's verticality and its rich detailing, particularly evident on the primary façades and public lobby areas, reflect the Art Deco style, an offshoot of modern design prevalent in the 1930s. However, the monumental massing, exacting symmetry, and "colonnaded" fenestration suggest the Simplified Classical architectural style, which combined influences of classical and modern design, becoming the favored style for federal buildings of the mid and late 1930s. All of the distinctive elements of its design, materials, and workmanship remain intact. The replacement of a small number of original window sashes and the original entrance doors does not significantly compromise the building's overall architectural integrity. The significant interior spaces, including the main lobby, courtrooms, corridors, and elevator lobbies, retain their historic configuration and original finishes. Over time, modifications have been made to some of the interior elements of the original building, primarily partition walls and changes to finishes in the office spaces. These changes are reversible and do not affect the overall integrity of the building.

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Significance

Summary Statement

The United States Post Office and Court House in Greensboro, North Carolina, is significant under Criteria A and C. In the area of Politics and Government, the building is significant as having been built as a direct result of the Public Buildings Act of 1926 and the early New Deal era effort to stimulate the economy and provide employment in the construction sector. The monumental building serves as a symbol of the federal presence in Greensboro, North Carolina. Architecturally, the building is a prominent example of the Art Deco style in Greensboro and of the craftsmanship and detailing associated with the style. The period of significance is 1933, the year that the building was completed, occupied and dedicated.

The passage of the Public Buildings Act of 1926 precipitated a period of federal building construction that was unprecedented in the United States. The Public Buildings Act specified that the Office of the Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury Department would be responsible for the design and construction of federal buildings. However, due to the failure of many of the nation's architectural firms in the Great Depression, the design of public buildings by independent firms was encouraged by the mid-1930s. The United States Post Office and Court House was designed by the Washington, D.C. architectural firm of Murphy and Olmsted, under the supervision of the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, in the Art Deco Style, tempered by elements of classicism.

Emerging in France in the years after World War I and stimulated by the Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes of 1925, the Art Deco style was widely used in America in commercial and governmental buildings in the 1930's. The Art Deco style is characterized by an emphasis on verticality, use of recesses and setbacks, vertical bays of windows, use of aluminum (or white metal) ornamentation, and highly stylized, flat relief decoration. Art Deco features of the United States Post Office and Court House include its predominately rectilinear ornament in low relief with a flat front plane and its verticality, emphasized by its recessed windows and the oblong blocks and rectangular projections composed symmetrically around the front entrance.

The site of the federal building has some local significance. The armies of General Greene and Lord Cornwallis are said to have fought in the vicinity of the site during the Revolutionary War. Prior to the construction of the federal building, the historic Sloan House, built of timbers from the original Guilford County Courthouse, stood on the site for more than 100 years. In later years, the house became the home of Greensboro's first mayor and other prominent citizens of Greensboro. Today, the site is at the edge of the downtown commercial area and directly across the street from the Guilford County Government complex.

The building was built as a federal post office, courthouse and office building. The people of Greensboro had anxiously awaited construction of a new, badly needed facility. Construction was begun in December of 1931, and when the building was dedicated on July 6, 1933, more than 5,000 people attended the ceremony. After the U.S. Postal Service moved out completely in the late 1980s, the entire first floor postal workspace was converted into federal courts and related offices. At the present time, the building serves primarily as a courthouse for the Middle District of North Carolina. It remains an active, visible symbol of the federal presence in Greensboro.

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Early Postal and Federal Court Services in Greensboro

Greensboro is located in Guilford County, North Carolina, the center of the Piedmont Triad region most often associated with the textile and furniture industry. The region has become a major distribution and transportation center, and is in close proximity to interstate highways and the Piedmont Triad International Airport. Greensboro was founded in 1808 and named in honor of General Nathanael Greene, who had commanded the Colonial forces at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse in 1781. When founded, no provision was made for a post office. Private carriers, stagecoaches, and the pony express generally handled mail and express. The only public buildings called for in the original municipal plan were a courthouse, jail, whipping post, and stocks.²

In 1865 a post office was located in a rented building on the south side of East Market Street. Shortly thereafter the post office was moved to the Yates building on South Elm Street. The offices of the judge and the United States Marshal were located in various rented quarters and the county courthouse was rented whenever the federal court was in session. In 1886 the federal government erected a two-story building at the southeast corner of Elm and Market Streets to accommodate the post office and federal court. At this time, Greensboro was a village with a population of 2,000. This structure served until 1905, when the building was enlarged by the addition of a third story.³

By 1920 Greensboro had grown into a city of 20,000 people and had completely outgrown its post office and federal court facilities. A committee of citizens headed by then-Mayor E.J. Stafford journeyed to Washington, D.C., to plead for a new building. While their efforts were unsuccessful in Washington, they inspired a demand that persisted throughout changing administrations and circumstances until Major Charles M. Stedman, representing the old Fifth District in the U.S. Congress, secured the appropriation for a new building shortly before his death in 1930. On July 6, 1933, the current United States Post Office and Court House was dedicated to serve the growing community of 57,000 Greensboro residents.⁴

Construction of the United States Post Office and Court House

The promise of a new federal building in Greensboro was proclaimed in local newspapers including the *Greensboro Daily Record* as early as 1923. In that year local officials recommended the construction of a building estimated at approximately \$600,000, and stated at that time such a structure was long overdue. A new building was necessary to house officials in Greensboro working for each branch of the federal government, including those working for the post office, federal court, internal revenue, marshal's offices, army, navy and marine corps recruiting, and railway mail service offices.

Local officials and community members began to debate the size and type of building that should be built, and hoped for a location in the central business district from which to conduct its federal business. There was a national precedent at the time, however, to build federal buildings away from the downtown core of communities. A 1923 article in the *Greensboro Daily Record* stated that in other cities the federal government had made no special effort to locate buildings on expensive sites in the middle of downtowns, but instead often selected sites a few blocks from the central

² "Address of Postmaster General at Dedication Ceremonies Here," *Greensboro (NC) Daily News*, July 7, 1933, 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

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business district.⁵ Noting this trend, the community began to consider potential locations for a new federal building that they hoped would be built soon, both within and just outside of its central business core.

Articles continued to be written regarding the possibility of a new federal structure being built for Greensboro, and yet it was not until 1931 that officials began to specifically consider site selection and what type of structure would best serve the community. The new post office that had long been regarded as a necessity for the community began to take shape, being described in the local press as a "strictly modern structure, designed to meet the present as well as future needs to the end that the public may receive the maximum of efficient service."⁶ Whereas articles in local papers were careful not to state a specific date for when a site would be selected and ground broken, decisions regarding what materials would be used were largely made by 1931 and were shared with the public, including the building's Indiana limestone cladding and ornamentation.

After considerable local lobbying and debate, the site selected for the property was the historic Sloan property (also referred to as the Logan property), along West Market, West Gaston and North Eugene streets. The new post office and courthouse building was to be situated just two blocks west of the old post office. Purchased for \$240,000, the dimensions of the lot were approximately 195 feet by 280 feet. When completed, the building would be 151 feet by 203 feet, the longer side being between Market and Gaston streets.

Ground was broken on December 14, 1931, eight years after local officials first sought a new federal building. Construction ensued at a frantic pace with builders from the George H. Rommell Construction Company busily preparing the site and making dramatic strides by early 1932.⁷ Work was to be completed by June 18, 1933, which required the services of an average construction crew of approximately 100 persons a month.⁸ The vast amount of material used in the building's construction is also of note: 730 tons of structural steel, 55 carloads of Indiana limestone, 12 carloads of Mt. Airy granite, 1,000,000 common bricks, and 50 carloads of terra cotta partition tiles.⁹

The imposing structure, costing \$585,000, was sufficiently completed by the end of May 1933 to allow the U.S. Post Office to move in.¹⁰ The contract was determined to be complete on June 19, 1933 and the building was occupied by the courts shortly afterwards. The finished building was quickly assessed by the public and the media and judged capable of meeting the needs of the community for several generations. City leaders accurately assumed that ever-expanding Greensboro would continue to grow in population and thus were pleased to find their new federal building was not only architecturally modern and beautiful, but also capable of providing modern services to the community that had been underserved for so long.

Subsequent History

In 1988, the building was renamed the L. Richardson Preyer Federal Building in honor of Lunsford Richardson Preyer (1919-2001), a former federal Judge, six-term U.S. Congressman and resident of Greensboro. In 1990, the U.S. Postal Service moved out of the building and the vacated spaces were rehabilitated for offices and a courtroom.

⁵ "Promise of New Federal Building in Near Future Means Much for the City," *Greensboro (NC) Record*, February 11, 1923, 1.

⁶ "Ground to Be Broken for Local Post Office in Middle of Summer," *Greensboro (NC) Daily News*, February 20, 1931.

⁷ "Post Office is \$1,000,000 Job," *Greensboro(NC) Record*, May 30, 1933, 2.

⁸ "New Federal Structure is Beautiful and Commodious," *Greensboro (NC) Daily News*, May 28, 1933, sec.2. p.7.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 7.

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Current tenants include the U.S. Courts, U.S. Marshals Service, Pretrial Services and U.S. General Services Administration.

Art Deco in Greensboro

In the early part of the twentieth century, downtown Greensboro was filled with activity. Local and regional retailers, wholesalers, banks and insurance companies, and the government began to construct large new stores and offices within the city core to serve a livelier market enhanced by the ever-expanding population. Whereas the proliferation of new suburbs attracted institutions and services such as churches, schools, grocery stores, and fire stations to the periphery of the community, the business life of Greensboro revolved around downtown. In the early days of the city's expansion, architectural styles chosen for nearly all of the downtown stores, hotels, banks, lodge halls, office towers, and government buildings were inspired by classicism, particularly the Renaissance and Neo-Classical Revival styles.¹¹

In the late 1920s and 1930s, however, Greensboro-area architects began to embrace the Art Deco style with the construction of a large number of Art Deco style buildings, including the Kress Building (1930), located at 212 South Elm Street, and the F.W. Woolworth Building (1929), located at 132 Elm Street. A full departure from classicism was not made, however, as even the Art Deco and Moderne style buildings erected during this period typically utilized a classical organization, stripped down to basic forms scribed with stylized ornament. Similarly, the monumental granite and limestone United States Post Office and Court House, displays a combination of classical symmetry with the sharp edge reliefs and abstract motifs of the Art Deco. As the influence of modernism and the economic pressures attending the Great Depression continued to grow, the buildings of the federal government displayed an increasingly pared down appearance, losing much of the ornamentation of that distinguishes the Greensboro building, while still displaying an affinity for classical symmetry and organization. This style, which is variously known as Simplified Classical, Stripped Classical or PWA Moderne, became the favored style of federal works projects in the mid and late 1930s. The U.S. Post Office and Court House, designed by the Washington, D.C. architectural firm of Murphy and Olmsted under the supervision of the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of the Supervising Architect, introduced Greensboro to this stylistic trend in 1930s federal works projects."¹²

Architects

Founded in 1911, the architectural firm of Murphy and Olmsted had its origins in the Office of the Supervising Architect. The partners, Frederick V. Murphy (1879-1958) and Walter B. Olmsted (1871-1937), had worked together in the office in the first decade of the twentieth century. Murphy attended classes in architecture at what is now George Washington University while working as a draftsman in the Office of the Supervising Architect. In 1905, Murphy left his position and studies in Washington, D.C., to attend the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, returning to the Office of the Supervising Architect in 1909. In 1911, he was invited to establish a School of Architecture at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. This same year he also opened his own practice with his colleague, Walter Olmsted. Olmsted had attended Alfred University and worked in an architectural firm in Elmira, New York, before coming to Washington, D.C. to take a position in the Office of the Supervising Architect.

The firm is best known for its religious, educational, military, and commercial buildings in Washington, D.C. Murphy's affiliation with Catholic University led to a number of commissions to design Catholic churches and

¹¹Marvin A. Brown, *Greensboro, An Architectural Record* (Greensboro, NC: Preservation Greensboro, Inc., 1995), 63.

¹²Ibid., 69.

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institutional buildings, including the Shrine of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church (1925) in Washington, D.C. At this time, the only other federal building the firm is known to have designed is the U.S. Post Office (1933) in Wellsville, New York. Both the Shrine of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church and the U.S. Post Office—Wellsville are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The firm remained intact until Olmsted's death in 1937. Murphy continued to practice for at least another decade with his new firm, Murphy and Locroft.¹³

Correspondence in the building file at the National Archives reveals that Murphy and Olmsted originally were hired in 1931 to prepare working drawings and specifications based upon a concept design or "sketches" prepared by the Office of the Supervising Architect. However, the firm's role grew throughout the project as the orientation of the building on the site changed and the program grew, requiring a fourth floor for additional office space. These changes necessitated substantial redesign, as well as the preparation of working drawings and construction documents. The depth of firm's involvement in the building's design is revealed in a January 6, 1933 letter in which the firm seeks authorization from the Supervising Architect to custom design light fixtures to better suit the style of the building than those already specified by the office.¹⁴

Historic Context--U.S. Post Offices, Courthouses and Federal Buildings designed and constructed by the Treasury Department, 1864-1939

Treasury Department Design, 1864-1896

The history of design and construction of Federal buildings falls into distinct eras typically defined by congressional authorizations for public buildings, the preferences of the Supervising Architect and the extent of involvement of private architects. In the nineteenth century, federal civilian facilities were designed and constructed by the U.S. Treasury Department and military facilities by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the U.S. Treasury Department primarily purchased existing buildings for its own use, typically custom houses and marine hospitals. Monumental buildings built for the U.S. Treasury Department at that time were designed in the Neoclassical style by Robert Mills, the Federal Architect, including the U.S. Treasury Building (begun 1836), U.S. General Post Office (1836), U.S. Patent Office (1839), and four U.S. Custom Houses at New Bedford, Massachusetts; Newburyport, Massachusetts; New London, Connecticut; and Middletown, Connecticut (1836).

In 1854, increasing demand for new federal buildings caused Secretary of the U.S. Treasury James Guthrie to create the Office of Construction. Captain Alexander H. Bowman from the U.S. Corps of Engineers was named Engineer-in-charge and Ammi B. Young was named Supervising Architect of the Office of Construction. Young had previously assisted Federal Architect Robert Mills until 1842 and served as Architectural Advisor for the U.S. Treasury Department in 1842-1852.¹⁵ Young remained in the position of Supervising Architect when it was formally established in the U.S. Treasury Department in 1864. Young designed about 70 buildings from 1853-1862, mostly two- to three-story structures in remote locations, with standardized designs reviving the appearance of Renaissance villas.¹⁶ Until the 1890s, the design of federal buildings tended to follow the favorite style of the Supervising

¹³ The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects, entry for Frederick Vernon Murphy, <http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/ahd1031859.aspx>; The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects, entry for Walter B. Olmsted, <http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/ahd1033248.aspx>, accessed July 3, 2014.

¹⁴ Records of the Public Buildings Service, Record Group 121, General Correspondence.

¹⁵ Lois Craig, ed., and the staff of the Federal Architecture Project, *The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics, and Symbols in United States Government Building* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1978), 99, 195.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

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Architect.¹⁷ Alfred B. Mullet was the most notable among the early Supervising Architects, serving from 1865-1874. Mullet designed in a variety of classical styles, but his most well recognized works, such as the State, War, and Navy Building (1871-1888), were designed in the French Second Empire style and often were monumental in scale.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the post of Supervising Architect was not particularly well paid, which meant that it did not attract prominent architects, and the heavy burden of work often meant that the federal buildings, especially outside Washington D.C., were designed by assistants and apprentices.¹⁹ The responsibilities of the Supervising Architect had grown from its inventory of 23 buildings in 1853 to 297 buildings in 1892, with 95 in the process of completion, but the office was criticized for cost overruns and construction delays.²⁰

In 1893, near the end of President Benjamin Harrison's administration, Congress passed the Tarnsey Act, which permitted the U.S. Treasury Department to contract out for private sector architectural services through competition or to continue design within the Treasury.²¹ Passage of the Tarnsey Act coincided with the successful construction and exhibition of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892-93. The Exposition was largely planned by one of Chicago's most influential architects, Daniel Burnham, who served as Director of Works. Featuring designs by Burnham & Root; Richard Morris Hunt; McKim, Mead & White; Adler & Sullivan; Peabody & Stearns; and George B. Post, it was so well received by the public that it would popularize the Beaux Arts and Neoclassical Revival styles for the design of monumental architecture for decades to follow. In 1893 and 1894, Burnham was elected President of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), which had long opposed the role of the Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury, and had lobbied for passage of the Tarnsey Act. In 1893, the AIA represented less than 20 percent of the nation's architects. In January 1894, Secretary of the U.S. Treasury John G. Carlisle of President Grover Cleveland's new administration announced that a new federal building in Buffalo, NY was to be designed by the Supervising Architect and not by a private sector architect. This caused a confrontation between Secretary Carlisle and the Burnham-led AIA that effectively stalled implementation of the Tarnsey Act until the McKinley administration took office in 1897.²²

Individual Design, 1897-1914

In 1897, President McKinley appointed Lyman Gage as Secretary of the U.S. Treasury. Gage was one of the financiers of and served as President at the World's Columbian Exposition. Gage was also a good friend of Daniel Burnham and was aware of the AIA's issues.²³ In 1897, Secretary Gage and the new Supervising Architect of the Treasury, James Knox Taylor, began implementing the Tarnsey Act, and the Beaux Arts and Neoclassical Revival style began to dominate the design of monumental federal buildings. The Colonial Revival style was also used for smaller scale buildings or where a more traditional American design was warranted. From 1897-1912, 35 buildings

¹⁷ Beth M. Boland, *National Register of Historic Places Bulletin 13: How to Apply National Register Criteria to Post Offices* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1994), 4-6.

¹⁸ Craig, *The Federal Presence*, 155, 162.

¹⁹ Thomas S. Hines, *Burnham of Chicago: Architect and Planner* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 126.

²⁰ Craig, *The Federal Presence*, 202.

²¹ Emily Harris, *History of Post Office Construction, 1900-1940* (Washington, DC: U.S. Postal Service, 1982), 3.

²² Hines, *Burnham of Chicago*, 127-133.

²³ *Ibid.*

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were designed under the provisions of the Tarnsey Act by some of the country's most prominent architects, including McKim, Mead and White; Albert Kahn; Cass Gilbert; and Daniel Burnham.²⁴

As stated in *National Register Bulletin 13*, "During the tenure of James Knox Taylor (1897-1912) as Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury, the federal government promoted the concept that government buildings should be monumental and beautiful, and should represent the ideals of democracy and high standards of architectural sophistication in their communities. Taylor preferred styles derived from classical or early American traditions. Believing that federal buildings should be built to last, he also emphasized the use of high quality construction materials. Private architects worked on many of the larger projects, while the Office of the Supervising Architect produced mostly smaller buildings, including many of the post offices. In either case, the buildings were individually designed; Taylor firmly resisted suggestions that designs be standardized."²⁵

In 1902, the first omnibus public buildings law was passed, which saved authorization time in Congress and allowed construction of vastly more Federal buildings. It provided an increased limit of cost on over 60 buildings and authorized approximately 150 new projects.²⁶ After an experiment by Taylor in 1903-1904, it was learned that smaller valued projects did not attract skilled architects. As a result, most post offices and federal buildings outside of major cities were designed within the U.S. Treasury Department after 1904.²⁷ Five of Taylor's Treasury-designed smaller buildings were published in 1907, in the architectural journal *The Brickbuilder*, illustrating his Neoclassical Revival and Colonial Revival designs for buildings costing under \$100,000.²⁸

Among the buildings designed and constructed during James Knox Taylor's tenure (1897-1912) were: Ellis Island Main Building (1898-1900, by Boring and Tilton); West Point improvements (by Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson); National War College Building, Washington D.C. (1903, by Stanford White); the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia (1898, by Cass Gilbert); U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Chicago (1905 by Henry Ives Cobb); Customhouse, New York (1901-1907, by Cass Gilbert); Federal Building, Cleveland (1905, by Brunner and Tryon); Federal Building, Cheyenne, Wyoming (1906, by William Dubois); and the U.S. Post Office or Farley Building, New York (1913, by McKim, Mead and White).²⁹ The vast majority of these buildings was designed in the Beaux Arts and Neoclassical Revival styles, and stressed the importance and permanence of the U.S. Government through their monumentality, prominent site selection, and quality of materials.

In 1911, a Congressional committee recommended that the Tarnsey Act be repealed because of "pork barrel" criticism and because the fees of private architects were considered greater than the cost for the same services rendered by the Supervising Architect.³⁰ In 1912, both the Tarnsey Act was repealed and Taylor resigned, signaling the beginning of the end of the emphasis on individual plan and design and high quality materials and construction used for federal architecture. In 1913-1914, however, Supervising Architect, Oscar Wenderoth continued to design federal buildings in the individual manner of his predecessor, typically in the Renaissance Revival style with arcaded loggias, but legislative action and policies were developing that would end this era.³¹

²⁴ Craig, *The Federal Presence*, 203.

²⁵ Boland, *National Register Bulletin 13*, 2.

²⁶ Craig, *The Federal Presence*, 239.

²⁷ Harris, *History of Post Office Construction*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁹ Craig, *The Federal Presence*, 230-243.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

³¹ Harris, *History of Post Office Construction*, 7.

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Standardized Design, 1915-1930

In 1913, an omnibus Public Buildings Act was enacted and the Public Buildings Commission was established, both of which sought to economize costs and led to the standardization of plans, specifications, and materials for different classes of Federal buildings. For example, while it authorized construction of a large number of public buildings, the Act stipulated that communities with postal receipts totaling less than \$10,000 per annum would not receive authorization for a new post office building.³² This policy culminated in 1915, when William McAdoo, Secretary of the U.S. Treasury and Chairman of the Public Buildings Commission, established a classification system for four classes of federal buildings. McAdoo's classes were differentiated by the value of post office annual receipts and the value of metropolitan real estate adjoining the proposed site. The higher the class, the higher the quality of design and materials allowed, including exterior facing, windows and doors, interior finishes, and ornament in public spaces.³³

Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo's Classification System for Federal buildings, 1915³⁴					
<i>Class</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Exterior</i>	<i>Windows and doors</i>	<i>Interior Finishes</i>	<i>Public spaces</i>
A	Include a first class post office with annual receipts exceeding \$800,000 and would be sited as part of a city development plan or on an important thoroughfare of a great city with adjacent property reaching the higher valuation of metropolitan real estate.	marble or granite facing; fireproof throughout.	metal frames, sashes and doors	Interior finish to include the finer grades of marble, ornamental bronze work, mahogany, etc.	monumental treatment, mural decorations; special interior lighting fixtures.
B	Include a first class post office with receipts between \$60,000 to \$800,000 with adjacent property improvements somewhat below the higher valuation of metropolitan real estate.	Limestone or sandstone facing; fireproof throughout.	Exterior frames and sash metal; interior frames, sash and doors wood	Exclude the more expensive woods and marbles. ornamental metal to be used only where iron is suitable.	Restricted ornament in public spaces.
C	Include a second class post office with receipts over \$15,000 or of the first class to \$60,000, with surrounding property values that of a second-class city.	Brick facing with stone or terra-cotta trimmings; fireproof floors, nonfireproof roof.	Frames, sashes and doors wood	Exclude the more expensive wood and marbles; the latter used only where sanitary conditions demand	Public spaces restricted to very simple forms of ornament.
D	Include a post office having annual receipts of less than \$15,000 with real estate values meeting only a limited investment for improvements.	Brick facing, little stone or terra-cotta used; only first floor fireproof.	Stock sash, frames, doors, etc., where advisable	Ordinary class of building, such as any businessman would consider a reasonable investment in a small town.	

In 1916, standardized plans were developed under the direction of Acting, Architect James Wetmore, and they typically retained the basic Beaux Arts and Neoclassical Revival style, massing, and plan, but with less detail on

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 9-10.

³⁴ Ibid., 9-10.

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smaller buildings.³⁵ In actuality, between 1913 and 1926, Congress authorized no new spending for public buildings.³⁶ The Public Buildings Act of 1926, also known as the Keyes-Elliott Act, was a general enabling Act that allotted \$100 million for federal buildings outside the District of Columbia. This Act allowed the Secretary of the U.S. Treasury and the U.S. Postmaster General to select towns and cities and specific sites for new buildings. As a result, a survey report was prepared in 1927 that listed towns and cities with no federal buildings, including 799 with annual postal receipts over \$20,000 and 1,512 with postal receipts between \$10,000 and \$20,000. The estimated cost of implementing construction was \$170,420,000, but the actual construction was delayed by economic conditions, including the stock market crash of 1929.³⁷

The Great Depression and Public Works Administration Design, 1931-1939

With the onset of the Great Depression, the architectural profession and construction trades were extremely hard hit by unemployment. On May 31, 1930, Congress amended the Public Buildings Act of 1926, with increased funding and further authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to contract with private firms and individuals.³⁸ To meet spatial requirements of the Treasury Department and the Post Office Department, the Hoover Administration and Congress increased funding for the Federal building program in 1928, 1930, and 1931, for a total of \$700 million.³⁹ The Federal Employment Stabilization Act of 1931, directed Federal construction agencies to prepare six-year building plans and increased appropriations for that year by \$100 million. As a result, 133 architectural firms were commissioned to design Federal Buildings in 1931, and this number increased to 301 by 1934.⁴⁰ This practice of commissioning private architects ended, however, on June 29, 1934, with an order that the Office of the Supervising Architect design all remaining Federal buildings.⁴¹

The Public Works Administration (PWA) was established in 1933 to oversee the planning and construction of public works projects throughout the nation. PWA projects included a wide variety of building types on the federal, state and local levels as well as structures such as dams and highways. As of February 28, 1939, the PWA federal building construction projects totaled 3,167 buildings at \$303,581,146.⁴²

Louis A. Simon was Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury from 1933-1939, but had been with the office continually since 1896. Simon had effectively directed the office during Judge James Wetmore's tenure (1915-1933) as Acting Supervising Architect, because Wetmore had no formal training in architecture.⁴³ Under the PWA and Simon's direction, government architecture in the 1930s was designed in either a simplified Classical Revival style, commonly known as Simplified Classical, "Starved Classicism," and "PWA Moderne," or in the Colonial Revival style, and often-featured murals or sculptures.⁴⁴

³⁵ Ibid., 11.

³⁶ Craig, *The Federal Presence*, 281.

³⁷ Harris, *History of Post Office Construction*, 13-14.

³⁸ Ibid., 17.

³⁹ Craig, *The Federal Presence*, 281.

⁴⁰ Harris, *History of Post Office Construction*, 15, 17, 19.

⁴¹ Boland, *National Register Bulletin* 13, 3.

⁴² U.S. Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works (PWA), *America Builds: The Record of the PWA* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939), 290, table 20.

⁴³ Craig, *The Federal Presence*, 328.

⁴⁴ Harris, *History of Post Office Construction*, 20, 25.

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Following the Columbian Exposition of 1893, classical architecture became the dominant style conveying the federal presence across the nation. During the 1930s, the need to provide government space, but save the cost of unnecessary ornament fit well with the principles of modernism being then introduced, stressing functionality, open plans with interchangeable work areas, and exterior surfaces in uninterrupted simple planes and volumes. However, the Supervising Architect's Office did not adopt the modernist vocabulary on the exterior, but held steadfast to references to classical architecture, albeit unelaborated in detail, to convey the underlying role of the U.S. Government. Today, typically it is this restrained classicism, rather than the correct Roman forms advocated by Jefferson, the Greek temples of Robert Mills, or the ebullient Beaux-Arts style of the early 1900s, that most Americans think of when they think of federal architecture.

Buildings and structures constructed during the PWA era that convey this restrained classicism, include: Hoover Dam (1933); U.S. Mint, San Francisco (1937); and U.S. Post Offices in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Waterbury, Connecticut; Norfolk, Virginia; Manchester, New Hampshire; and Memphis, Tennessee (1932 remodel).⁴⁵

Federal Works Agency Design, 1940-1948

The Reorganization Act of April 3, 1939, created the Public Buildings Administration as part of the Federal Works Agency (FWA), removing control of federal architecture out of the U.S. Treasury Department, and the title of Supervising Architect was abolished. According to National Register Bulletin 13, under FWA, "Although some variations to facades were allowed, standardized interior plans were well established by this time, and outlined in a publication entitled "Instructions to Private Architects Engaged on Public Buildings work under the Jurisdictions of the U.S. Treasury Department."⁴⁶ Federal building design and construction slowed during the war years.

General Services Administration, 1949-present

In 1949, the new U.S. General Services Administration was established, and absorbed the design function of the Federal Works Agency. The Public Buildings Act of 1949 allowed the Office of the Supervising Architect to rely on private architecture firms to carry out public building designs. When the Office employed its standard designs, the result was extremely utilitarian with the emphasis on stripped modern design, functionality, and automobile access. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, modernism became accepted and employed for federal buildings domestically as well as internationally.

Significance under Criterion A

The United States Post Office and Court House in Greensboro, North Carolina is significant under Criterion A as a structure that was built as a direct result of the Public Buildings Act of 1926, and as a symbol of the Federal presence in Greensboro. As Greensboro developed into a modern city, the federal government recognized the need for an efficient building to serve local citizens. This building was constructed under the auspices of the New Deal-era Department of the Treasury, which sought to create jobs in the construction industry on projects that would benefit local communities. The 1933 building also represents the importance of federal government services to the city of Greensboro and Guilford County. It was a source of civic pride and patriotism to county residents, symbolizing a permanent federal presence in Greensboro and Guilford County.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 280-287.

⁴⁶ Boland, *National Register Bulletin 13*, 3.

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The passage of the Public Buildings Act of 1926 precipitated a period of building construction that was unprecedented in the United States. The Public Buildings Act specified that the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury would be responsible for the design and construction of Federal buildings. Due to the failure of many of the nation's architectural firms in the Depression, the design of public buildings by independent firms was encouraged by mid 1930. Designed in 1931 by the Washington, D.C., architectural firm of Murphy and Olmsted under the supervision of James A. Wetmore, acting supervising architect, the United States Post Office and Court House was constructed from 1931-1933. The George H. Rommel Construction Company of Louisville, Kentucky acted as General Contractor. Due to the large size of the project, some 100 persons were employed on the site each month, a benefit to the community as it continued to struggle during the Great Depression.

The United States Postmaster General James A. Farley presented a dedication address when the building was opened on July 6, 1933, before an audience of 5,000. In his address, Farley spoke of the Great Depression and recent legislation that had been passed to enable communities to begin to rebuild and recover from their economic losses. The National Industrial Recovery Act, enacted in June 1933, would fund the enormous civic construction program managed by the PWA, in an effort to stimulate the economy. The Postmaster General discussed in great detail President Franklin Roosevelt's efforts to provide relief to communities, and introduced the opening of the long-overdue federal building in Greensboro as symbolic of the nation's attempt to recover from the Depression and ensure that the needs of communities like Greensboro, North Carolina, were being met.

Significance under Criterion C

The United States Post Office and Court House is significant under Criterion C as an example of the Art Deco style and of the craftsmanship and detailing of the period, then coming to a close. The massive granite and limestone structure combines the symmetry of classicism with the sharp edge reliefs and abstract motifs of the Art Deco style, reflecting a period of architectural transition seen both within the City of Greensboro as well as within federal architecture and foreshadowing the further reduction of forms and ornament that would come with modernism. While its neoclassical proportions and distinct column-inspired three part composition cling to the neoclassical tradition long favored for civic architecture, the reduction to sheer planes and highly stylized, low-relief ornament clearly reflect the growing influence of Modern Movement aesthetics.

Designed by a prominent Washington, D.C., firm, Murphy and Olmsted, under the supervision of the Office of the Supervising Architect and the building is representative of a large group of depression-era buildings designed for the federal government by regionally and even nationally prominent architectural firms in a massive effort to deploy construction projects across the nation and, also, to assist the hard-hit architectural profession.

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Photograph Log

Name: United States Post Office and Court House

Location: 324 West Market Street
City of Greensboro
North Carolina, 27401

Photographer: Christopher Hetzel, ICF Jones & Stokes

Date of Photographs: December 13, 2006

Location of Negatives: General Service Administration Headquarters, Office of Chief Architect

1. Exterior, South (primary) elevation; View: Northwest
2. Exterior, Perspective of South (primary) and East elevations; View: Northwest
3. Exterior, South (primary) elevation; View: Northwest
4. Exterior, South (primary) elevation; View: Detail
5. Exterior, South (primary) elevation; View: Detail
6. Exterior, South (primary) elevation; View: Detail
7. Exterior, South (primary) elevation; View: Detail
8. Exterior, South (primary) elevation entrance; View: Northeast
9. Exterior, South (primary) elevation entrance; View: Detail
10. Exterior, South (primary) elevation entrance; View: Detail
11. Exterior, Perspective of East (side) and South (primary) elevations; View: Northwest
12. Exterior, East (side) elevation; View: Northwest
13. Exterior, East elevation; View: West
14. Exterior, East (side) elevation; View: Southwest
15. Exterior, North (rear) elevation; View: Southwest
16. Exterior, North (rear) elevation; View: South
17. Exterior, North (rear) elevation; View: Detail
18. Exterior, North (rear) elevation; View: Southeast
19. Exterior, Perspective of North (rear) and West elevations; View: Southeast
20. Exterior, West (side) elevation; View: Southeast
21. Exterior, West (side) elevation; View: East
22. Exterior, West (side) elevation entrance; View: Northeast
23. Exterior, West (side) elevation; View: East
24. Exterior, West (side) elevation; View: Northeast
25. Exterior, Perspective of South (primary) and West elevations; View: Northeast
26. Exterior, South (primary) elevation; View: Northeast
27. Interior, South (main) lobby; View: West
28. Interior, South (main) lobby; View: Southeast
29. Interior, North elevation entrance; View: North
30. Interior, West elevation entrance; View: West
31. Interior, First floor East-West corridor featuring original ceiling, walls, floors, and details

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32. Interior, First floor East-West corridor featuring original ceiling, walls, floors, and details
33. Interior, Original south marble staircase to the east side of the entry foyer, clad in Pink Tennessee marble and base
34. Interior, Second floor corridor
35. Interior, Second floor corridor
36. Interior, Second floor lobby and corridor with original and altered features
37. Interior, Second floor Judge's Office
38. Interior, Second floor original restrooms at the north end of the corridor adjacent to the north elevator lobby
39. Interior, Third floor Judge's Office in the Judge's Suite
40. Interior, Third floor court lobby at center of third floor corridor
41. Interior, One set of double doors in court lobby at center of third floor corridor
42. Interior, Third floor courtroom
43. Interior, Third floor courtroom
44. Interior, Third floor courtroom
45. Interior, Third floor courtroom
46. Interior, Fourth floor corridor
47. Interior, Fourth floor corridor door with fluted wood door surround and transom and obscure glass panel