

**U.S. POST OFFICE
AND COURTHOUSE**

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

UNITED STATES
DISTRICT COURT

AN ARCHED NICHE FRAMES
THE JUDGE'S BENCH IN THE
CEREMONIAL COURTROOM.

ARCHITECTURE

A SKILLFUL EXAMPLE OF BEAUX-ARTS CLASSICISM, THE U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE IS INDICATIVE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S GOAL OF EXPRESSING DEMOCRATIC IDEALS THROUGH CLASSICALLY DERIVED ARCHITECTURE FEATURING



GRAND SCALE, SYMMETRY, AND REFINED DETAILS. THE SIX-STORY BUILDING ENCOMPASSES AN ENTIRE CITY BLOCK AND IS CONSTRUCTED OF STEEL AND CONCRETE CLAD IN RICH LOCAL MATERIALS—TEXAS PINK GRANITE AND TEXAS CREAM LIMESTONE. THE BUILDING IS POLYGONAL IN PLAN, CENTERED ON A CENTRAL LIGHT COURT. ITS

FACADE (SOUTH ELEVATION) EMPHASIZES A CENTRALLY RECESSED PORCH BEHIND A SCREEN OF SIX MONUMENTAL IONIC COLUMNS, RISING TO SUPPORT AN ENTABLATURE THAT CONTINUES ALL AROUND THE BUILDING.

AT THE FIRST STORY, THE PRINCIPAL APPROACH IS CREATED BY BROAD STEPS OF TEXAS PINK GRANITE SPANNING THE WIDTH OF THE BUILDING, LEADING TO THREE ARCHED ENTRANCES WITH KEYSTONES, ALTERNATING WITH FOUR RECTANGULAR WINDOWS WITH DECORATIVE METAL GRILLES. LIMESTONE MASONRY WALLS ARE ARTICULATED BY CHAMFERED JOINTS, RISING TO AN OVERHANGING STRINGCOURSE. THE LIMESTONE WALLS OF THE UPPER STORIES ARE SMOOTH IN CONTRAST, BUT ARE ALSO DIVIDED INTO SEVEN BAYS, FEATURING RECTANGULAR WINDOWS AT THE SECOND STORY, AND ELONGATED FENESTRATION FORMED BY VERTICALLY STACKED WINDOWS AT THE THIRD AND FOURTH STORIES. ABOVE THE ENTABLATURE, THE ATTIC (SIXTH) STORY IS SIMILARLY CLAD IN SMOOTH LIMESTONE VENEER WITH RECTANGULAR FENESTRATION FLANKED BY FLAT PILASTERS. AT THE EDGE OF THE LOW-PITCHED MANSARD ROOF, SIX DECORATIVE STONE ACROTERIA (URN-LIKE ORNAMENTS) ARE ALIGNED WITH THE PILASTERS AND COLUMNS BELOW.

ON THE INTERIOR, THE BEAUX-ARTS TRADITION OF GRAND ENTRANCES AND CIRCULATION AREAS IS BOLDLY EXPRESSED BY THE ENTRY AND POSTAL LOBBIES' RICH ARCHITECTURAL DETAIL

1932

CONGRESS APPROPRIATES FUNDS FOR THE U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE.

1935-36

THE BUILDING IS CONSTRUCTED.

1937

THE BUILDING IS CEREMONIALLY OPENED.



LEFT/INSET:
DETAIL OF "SAN
ANTONIO'S IMPORTANCE
IN TEXAS HISTORY"
BY HOWARD COOK.

ABOVE:
CEREMONIAL
THIRD-FLOOR
COURTROOM.

LEFT:
ENTRANCE LOBBY.

RIGHT/INSET:
GLASS-TOPPED,
BRONZE TABLES IN
THE POSTAL LOBBY.

1937-39

HOWARD COOK DESIGNS
AND EXECUTES THE
FRESCO MURAL, "SAN
ANTONIO'S IMPORTANCE
IN TEXAS HISTORY.

1999

COOK'S MURAL
IS RESTORED.

2000

THE BUILDING IS
INDIVIDUALLY LISTED IN
THE NATIONAL REGISTER
OF HISTORIC PLACES.

AND ORNAMENTATION. THE ENTRY LOBBY IS DISTINGUISHED BY A SERIES OF BRACKETED ENTRYWAYS CAPPED BY BLIND ARCHES WITH EGG-AND-DART MOLDINGS. LIGHT-COLORED ST. GENEVIEVE MARBLE COVERS THE WALLS UP TO THE SPRINGING COURSE. THE MOST VIBRANT FEATURE IS HOWARD COOK'S OUTSTANDING 16-PANEL MURAL, "SAN ANTONIO'S IMPORTANCE IN TEXAS HISTORY." THE MURAL IS A FRESCO, A TECHNIQUE OF PAINT APPLIED DIRECTLY OVER WET PLASTER, AND SPANS 750 SQUARE FEET, MAKING IT ONE OF THE LARGEST FRESCOES IN THE NATION. COOK'S MURAL EVOKES HISTORICAL EVENTS IN TEXAS, INCLUDING THE ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST CONQUISTADORS, THE SIGNING OF THE TEXAS DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE RAILROAD.



THE POSTAL LOBBY FEATURES ITS ORIGINAL BRONZE AND GLASS-TOPPED TABLES, WITH 41 BRONZE SALES WINDOW-BOXES CAPPED BY A CONTINUOUS BAND OF FRETWORK AND DIVIDED BY MARBLE DORIC PILASTERS THAT RISE TO A WIDE DENTILED CORNICE. THE FLOORS ARE TENNESSEE GOLDEN VEINED PINK MARBLE, WITH DARK CEDAR-COLORED MARBLE BASES, AND LIGHT-COLORED ST. GENEVIEVE MARBLE FOR THE WAINSCOT. ORIGINAL BRONZE LIGHT FIXTURES GRACE THE LOBBY IN A VARIETY OF DECORATIVE MOTIFS DEPICTING EAGLES AND SHIELDS.

THE CEREMONIAL COURTROOM, LOCATED IN THE SOUTH WING OF THE THIRD FLOOR, IS A LIGHT-FILLED TWO-STORY SPACE, FEATURING SIX BRONZE PENDANT CHANDELIERS AND DARK-STAINED WOOD FOR THE WAINSCOT AND ALL OF THE BUILT-IN FURNITURE, INCLUDING THE ORIGINAL JUDGE'S BENCH, WITNESS STAND AND CLERK'S DESK. TALL, PAINTED PILASTERS EXTEND FROM THE WAINSCOT TO A WIDE ORNAMENTAL PLASTER ENTABLATURE. THE JUDGE'S BENCH IS FRAMED BY AN ARCHED NICHE ENRICHED WITH WIDE, INTRICATELY DECORATED PLASTER ORNAMENT, MOLDINGS, AND GILDING, CONTRIBUTING TO THE IMPRESSIVE CHARACTER OF THE ROOM.

THE U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE RETAINS ITS CHARACTER-DEFINING DETAILS AND CRAFTSMANSHIP, AND CONTINUES TO CONVEY ITS SIGNIFICANCE AS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF A MONUMENTAL BEAUX-ARTS-STYLE PUBLIC BUILDING IN SAN ANTONIO.



BUILDING FACTS

ARCHITECT:
RALPH HAYWOOD
CAMERON AND
PAUL PHILIPPE CRET

CONSTRUCTION DATES:
1935-36

LANDMARK STATUS:
LISTED IN THE NATIONAL
REGISTER OF HISTORIC
PLACES
LOCATED IN THE ALAMO
PLAZA NATIONAL REGISTER
HISTORIC DISTRICT

LOCATION:
615 EAST
HOUSTON STREET

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE:
BEAUX-ARTS

PRIMARY MATERIALS:
TEXAS CREAM LIMESTONE,
TEXAS PINK GRANITE,
STEEL AND CONCRETE

PROMINENT FEATURES:
HOWARD COOK'S 16-PANEL
FRESCO MURAL
CEREMONIAL COURTROOM



LEFT/ABOVE:
DETAIL OF ARCHED
LOBBY DOORWAY
SURROUNDED BY
HOWARD COOK'S
MURAL.

LEFT:
THE MONUMENTAL
U.S. POST OFFICE
AND COURTHOUSE
FACES ALAMO PLAZA.



AS STEWARDS OF MORE THAN 400 HISTORIC PUBLIC BUILDINGS PROVIDING MORE THAN 50 MILLION SQUARE FEET OF SPACE, THE U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (GSA) IS PLEASED TO CELEBRATE AMERICA'S ARCHITECTURAL TREASURES THROUGH THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS HERITAGE PROGRAM.

HISTORICALLY, FEDERAL PUBLIC BUILDINGS WERE DESIGNED TO WELCOME THE VISITING PUBLIC AND TO CONVEY THE IMPORTANT ROLE THE GOVERNMENT PLAYED IN THE DAILY LIVES OF ITS CITIZENS. INTEGRATED INTO THE DESIGN OF MANY OF THESE BUILDINGS ARE INSCRIPTIONS AND WORKS OF ART DEPICTING THE CIVIL FUNCTIONS HOUSED WITHIN THEM. IT IS A TESTIMONY TO THE DURABILITY OF THESE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS THAT MANY OF THESE BUILDINGS CONTINUE TO SERVE THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY WERE ORIGINALLY BUILT, WHILE OTHERS DEMONSTRATE THE ABILITY OF HISTORIC PUBLIC BUILDINGS TO SERVE NEW FUNCTIONS. AS PART OF ITS COMMITMENT TO URBAN REINVESTMENT AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION, GSA IS WORKING TO MAINTAIN THE ARCHITECTURAL EXCELLENCE OF AMERICA'S PUBLIC BUILDINGS WHILE ALSO KEEPING THEM USEFUL, SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC. THROUGH GSA'S DESIGN EXCELLENCE, CONSTRUCTION EXCELLENCE, AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT/GOOD NEIGHBOR PROGRAMS, THE AGENCY CONTINUES THE TRADITION OF BUILDING TOMORROW'S PUBLIC LANDMARKS.

ABOVE:
DETAIL OF AN ORIGINAL BRONZE LIGHT FIXTURE IN THE LOBBY.

COVER:
MASSIVE ARCHED OPENINGS WITH DECORATIVE
METAL GRILLES MARK THE ENTRANCE.

ALL PHOTOS: GERALD MOORHEAD



U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ARCHITECT
CENTER FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS
PUBLIC BUILDINGS HERITAGE PROGRAM