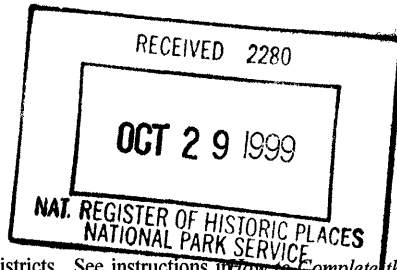


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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 10900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse

other names/site number: Judge Isaac C. Parker Federal Building

2. Location

street & number : 30 South Sixth Street NA not for publication  
city or town Fort Smith NA vicinity  
state Arkansas code AR county Sebastian code 131  
zip code 72901

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)

Constance Werner Ramirez  
Signature of certifying official

October 7, 1999  
Date

U.S. General Services Administration  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Cathryn A. Slater  
Signature of commenting or other official

July 20, 1999  
Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other, (explain:)

Signature of Keeper  
Patrick Andrews

Date of Action  
12/13/99

5. Classification

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

private  
 public-local  
 public-State  
 public-Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

building(s)  
 district  
 site  
 structure  
 object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
<u>GOVERNMENT</u>	<u>Post Office</u>
	<u>Courthouse</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
<u>GOVERNMENT</u>	<u>Courthouse</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: Limestone  
walls BRICK  
STONE: Limestone  
roof METAL: Copper  
other \_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description  
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets pp. 5-9.

**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.)

- 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.
- C** 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 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.)

Property is:

- 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)

- Politics/Government
- Architecture
- Economics
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Period of Significance**

1936-1949

**Significant Dates**

1937

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Simon, Louis, Supervising Architect, U.S. Treasury Department

Melick, Neal A., Supervising Engineer

Purcell, William T., Construction Engineer

Hughes, R. L., Superintendent of Construction

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

See Continuation Sheets pp. 10-15.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.) See Continuation Sheet p. 16.

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:

General Services Administration, Greater Southwest Region, Fort Worth, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 2.12 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

UTM grid with columns for Zone, Easting, Northing and rows 1-4. Includes a checkbox for 'See continuation sheet'.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.) See Continuation Sheet p. 17.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) See Continuation Sheet p. 17.

11. Form Prepared By

Form fields for name/title (Victoria Green Clow, Cultural Resources Project Manager), organization (Geo-Marine, Inc.), date (February 19, 1999), street & number (550 East Fifteenth Street), telephone ((972) 423-5480), city or town (Plano), state (TX), zip code (75074).

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.
- A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white 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.)

Form fields for name (General Services Administration, Greater Southwest Region), street & number (Fritz G. Lanham Federal Bldg., 819 Taylor St.), telephone ((817) 978-4229), city or town (Fort Worth), state (TX), zip code (76102).

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.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 7 Page 5

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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Description:**

Completed in 1937, the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is an attractive, Classical Revival, three-story brick structure. Located on South Sixth Street, in the first block east of Rogers Avenue, the building is situated in the municipal section of downtown Fort Smith. It faces the Art Deco-styled Sebastian County Courthouse and Fort Smith City Hall (combined building), which was also built in 1937. The Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse still functions as a district court and was recently renamed in honor of Judge Isaac C. Parker, one of the most famous frontier judges in American history. It is located just a few blocks from the original fort and barracks where the first federal court in Fort Smith (Judge Parker's court) was held, a site which is now a National Park. The current Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is also situated just a few feet away from where the previous post office and courthouse was built in 1889. That building was demolished in 1937, when the new federal building was put into service.

The Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse stands as a symbol of the continued federal presence in Fort Smith. It is also a part of the city's judicial legacy. Although additions were made to the structure in 1964, the historic character of the 1937 building has been retained. Original features such as terrazzo floors, marble wainscoting, and a simple fretwork frieze are still visible in the postal lobby area. The main courtroom retains the original oak wainscoting, a trabeated ceiling with stencil detailing, the oak judge's bench (seated in front of an ornamental pediment), the clerk's desk, and the jury box.

**Exterior Description**

The Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is a stately, three-story, Classical Revival building. A smooth limestone base supports the building's red brick-clad walls, which begin at the first-floor level. The red brick is laid in a common bond pattern. Extending from the top of the first floor of the primary (southeast) façade to just above the third floor (to the cornice) is a series of six engaged pilasters with Doric capitals. Decorative iron railings extend between the bases of the pilasters. A plain, five-inch limestone cornice and frieze sits above the pilasters, bordering the entire building. The entablature above the pilasters carries the following inscription.

UNITED STATES POST OFFICE AND COURT HOUSE

A copper-clad, hipped roof sits above the projected, central (pilaster) portion of the façade. This area was originally the location of a "widow's walk." Although still in place, aluminum siding currently obscures the widow's walk. The remaining roof consists of built-up tar and gravel.

Centered below the pilasters on the primary façade is the main building entrance. Limestone trim surrounds the three replacement storefront doors that lead into the postal lobby. Federal emblems are displayed on both sides of two of these doors. The front entry is dominated by a long, handicapped access ramp, which extends along the eastern side of the

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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Description: (continued)**

building. Its railing matches the iron rails set between the pilasters. Located near the doorway (at the base of the entry) is the building's corner stone. The stone is inscribed as follows.

HENRY MORGENTHAU JR  
SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY  
JAMES A FARLEY  
POSTMASTER GENERAL  
LOUIS A SIMON  
SUPERVISING ARCHITECT  
NEAL A MELICK  
SUPERVISING ENGINEER  
1936

The building's windows are generally single-hung, multipane, 12-over-12-light aluminum with limestone sills and lintels. However, a few of the original double-hung, multilight, wood-framed windows are still in place. There is a series of one-over-one, triple-hung (with false mutins) windows on the third floor of the southwest wing. These windows correspond to the location of the judge's suite.

As originally constructed in 1937, building footprint was a 151-foot-wide, rectangular structure. In 1964, an addition was added to each of the side elevations. The two-story additions project outward (about one window bay's length) from both the southeast (primary) and northwest (rear) building faces. The 61-foot-wide wings were designed to match the original building; both display brick façades with limestone trim. The wings house an additional courtroom (in the southwest wing), court offices, and other government offices. The rear building elevation is the location of the building parking area. A metal canopy, which abuts the building this face, provides sheltered parking. A fire escape is at the west corner of this elevation.

A large green lawn and plantings create an attractive frontage to the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. Vegetation includes a variety of shrubs and evergreen trees. Parallel paved sidewalks lead to the building's entrance, framing a narrow planting area. A flagpole is situated at the center of this planting area. Narrow green strips also line the northeast and southwest elevations. The northwest elevation is paved.

**Interior Description**

The interior of the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse originally consisted of several primary spaces including the postal lobby, main courtroom, judicial offices, tenant offices, and corridors. Other spaces were devoted to building services, restroom facilities, and the basement. Of the primary spaces, the postal lobby and main courtroom retain a higher

**United States Department of the Interior  
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**National Register of Historic Places  
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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Description: (continued)**

degree of integrity and are central to the building's historic function and role in the community. Additionally, these two areas were designed for the public and, as such, display architectural features and details that were not applied to other spaces.

While the building no longer serves as an active post office, the postal lobby still displays features of its original design. It stretches along most of the entire length of the first floor of the original building and is entered through three pairs of mill-finished, aluminum doors. Two entry vestibules, which were located at two of the doorways, have been removed. The entry doors open into a modestly designed postal box lobby and service window area. An aluminum-framed, glazed curtain wall divides the northeast end of the lobby area into a narrow corridor. This wall was added to prevent unauthorized access to the courtrooms and upper floors. Postal boxes are still displayed on the northwest wall. Although they are not the original boxes, they still convey the original function of the room.

The lobby's terrazzo flooring is composed of two-inch squares of alternating buff and gray tiles (black terrazzo and domestic travertine) set in a diagonal pattern. A polychrome terrazzo compass that emulates a rose ornaments the center of the lobby floor. The attractive design is composed of zinc letters and a variety of marble including Texas yellow marble (center and field), black marble (points), Middlebury white marble (outside border), and travertine marble (inner triangulated border). A 10-inch black marble border further accents the flooring.

The walls in the lobby are divided horizontally; the base and lower half are polished St. Genevieve golden vein marble. The upper half is plastered. An ornamental frieze is located at the juncture of the wall and ceiling. Construction documents indicate that the original ceiling was a plaster cove ceiling; a flat hung plaster ceiling is currently in place. The original light fixtures, which were likely suspended spherical globes, have been removed. Surface-mounted, four-inch-square, fluorescent fixtures are currently in place.

The main courtroom is the most lavishly decorated and retains the highest degree of integrity of all the interior spaces in the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. It is centrally placed on the third floor of the primary (southeast) elevation. The 40-foot by 60-foot courtroom is double-height. The room is entered through four sets of doors on the northeast and northwest walls. The doors are paneled oak with a diamond motif (inlaid banding of light and dark woods) on the upper panel. A narrow frame of dark wood inlay surrounds each doorway and supports an oak pediment.

Varying shades of light and dark wood enrich the design of the courtroom. The courtroom furniture, including the judge's bench, the jury box, and the spectator benches, is all made of oak. The courtroom walls are divided horizontally by oak-paneled wainscot and plaster acoustical tiles. The wooden wainscot is four feet high, wrapping around the lower half of the courtroom. Full-height windows interrupt the wainscoting on the southeast wall. The windows are framed in an inlay of dark and light wood.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Description: (continued)**

The courtroom's white, painted, acoustical plaster ceiling is trabeated; the beams are stenciled with a geometric pattern. This same type of detailing originally ornamented the courtroom of the Eastern Judicial District of Arkansas in the Little Rock U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in Pulaski County, Arkansas (built in 1933). Urn-type chandeliers are suspended from plaster medallions that occur at the intersection of the ceiling beams. A frieze that displays a modified egg and dart motif further ornaments recessed ceiling bays. An unusual pellet-styled cornice also borders the ceiling. Although covered by carpeting, the original cork tile flooring appears to be intact.

The focal point of the courtroom is the judge's bench. The bench sits on the southwest wall in front of a decorative surround composed of a wooden entablature and pediment supported by reed pilasters with chevron-style capitals. Below the entablature and between the pilasters is a full-height panel of matched, book-face burl wood veneer. In the center of the veneer is a medallion displaying the Great Seal of the United States. A dark wood inlay depicts the scales of justice in the pediment. Two additional large, full-height, fluted pilasters are located at both ends of the judge's bench, framing the previously described decorative surround.

The remainder of the space on the third floor consists of district court, probation, and other judicial offices. Although these spaces have been renovated over the years, some of the original wooden furnishings—doors, chair rails, furniture, and oak windowsills and bases—are still in place.

The second floor, which encompasses both the original and the two 1964 additions, has also been renovated and is largely contemporary in appearance. Most of the original finishes, with the exception of wooden window bases and windowsills, doors, and chair rails, have been removed. This floor currently provides office spaces for both the U.S. Attorney and the district court employees. A second courtroom is also located on the second floor in the southwest wing that was constructed in 1964.

**Alterations**

Although the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse has been altered through additions, the original design and character of the 1937 building are remarkably intact. In 1964, additions were constructed at both side elevations of the original structure. The two wings project out about one window bay's distance from the southeast and the northwest elevations of the building and are similar in design to the original façade. The majority of original, double-hung, 12-light, wood sash windows have been replaced with 12-light, single-hung, aluminum units. Twelve-light aluminum windows have also replaced original six-light, wood-paneled, double doors with four-light transoms that were displayed on the second floor of the projected portion of the southeast façade (between the pilasters). Contemporary, single-light, aluminum doors have replaced the entry's original doors. A handicapped access ramp has been added to the main (southeast) entry.



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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Description: (continued)**

Alterations to the interior of the building have been more extensive. In the first floor postal lobby area, aluminum-framed, glazed curtain walls have been installed, subdividing portions of the space. The entry vestibules have been removed. New fluorescent fixtures have been installed and the ceiling has been lowered. The original glass-topped, cast aluminum, postal desks are no longer in place (these have been moved to the new downtown location of the Fort Smith post office).

Renovations have also taken their toll on the second- and third-floor office spaces. The installation of dropped acoustical tile ceilings, partitioning, fluorescent lights, carpeting, and contemporary office furniture has resulted in the loss of both the volume and character of the original office spaces. Dropped ceilings and flush fluorescent lights have been added to the corridor areas, creating a similar effect.

The third-floor main courtroom has probably undergone the least amount of change. Features such as original finishes, oak furniture, and wood details still ornament the room. Both the judge's original brass lamps and the urn-type lighting fixtures, however, have been removed, and carpeting currently obscures the courtroom's original flooring.

Although the building has been altered by the addition of two wings and interior modernization, many of the primary elements of the building's original design and workmanship remain intact. The setting around the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse has also not been substantially altered. Its location across the street from the Sebastian County Courthouse and Fort Smith City Hall continues to reinforce the property's prominent role and government function. Finally, its continued use as a federal district court perpetuates the historical association and feeling of the building.

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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Statement of Significance:**

**Summary**

The Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A for its association with federal government construction programs designed to stimulate the economy during the Depression era and under Criterion C as a significant example of federal architecture during the early 1930s. Constructed in 1936-1937, the building is symbolic of the continued federal presence in Fort Smith. It is also a part of the city's judicial legacy, which began in 1871 with the designation of Fort Smith as the location of the western district court. This court became nationally known during the tenure of Judge Isaac C. Parker (1875-1896), "the hanging judge."

The design and construction of the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, like other public buildings built in the early 1930s, was part of the federal construction programs that were created to reduce unemployment during the Depression. Architecturally, the Classical Revival style of the Fort Smith federal building reflects the government's use of restrained classical architectural designs to evoke an appropriate image of the federal government. The period of significance for this property begins at the date of its design in 1936 and extends to 1949. The building retained its original historic functions for more than 50 years, and, as such, its significance extends to the 50-year mark.

**Historical Significance**

The early history of Fort Smith revolves around the fort built there in 1817. In 1816, General Thomas A. Smith, for whom the fort was named, selected Belle Point, a high sandstone bluff at the junction of the Poteau and Arkansas rivers, as the location for a military post. This post, which was located in Indian Territory, was one of the first military installations in the "raw" southwestern wilderness. The establishment of Fort Smith attracted settlers who began to enter the area in the late 1820s. Although the 13-year-old post was closed in 1830, the fort's abandonment was short-lived as plans for its reoccupation began around the time Arkansas gained its statehood status in 1836. During the fort's military occupation, which continued until 1871, the town of the Fort Smith grew. Its growth was precipitated by the presence of the military, the town's proximity to the navigable rivers, and the recent arrival of the railroad. By 1880, Fort Smith had a population numbering 3,000.

As the fort's military occupation ended in 1871, Fort Smith became the location of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas. The court held extensive power over its jurisdiction, which included Indian Territory. It not only had the authority to hear admiralty cases, minor criminal cases, and other limited case, it also held the same jurisdiction as the original U.S. Circuit Court (Arnold 1987). As a result, the court could entertain civil suits between citizens from other states and could try important criminal cases. The court's power was so significant that its criminal case decisions, with the exception of death penalty cases, could be not appealed until 1889. Death penalty decisions, however, could be appealed to the President of the United States. Appeals for civil cases tried in the Fort Smith court went directly to the Supreme Court (Arnold 1987).

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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)**

The western district court had been previously held in Van Buren, the county seat of Crawford County. When the court moved to Fort Smith, its first cases were heard in the Rogers Building by Judge William Story. In November 1872, the court was relocated to permanent facilities in one of the large brick buildings in the old fort. After only two years of service, Judge Story resigned under pressure of impeachment in 1874. Judge Isaac C. Parker, appointed by President Ulysses S. Grant, assumed office in May 1875.

It was during Judge Parker's tenure in Fort Smith that the court and community became the subject of national attention. In the first year of his term, Judge Parker convicted 15 people of murder, eight of whom were sentenced to be hanged. In September 1875, six of the men found guilty in Parker's court were publicly hanged. Newspapers from across the country carried stories of the event. It was through these articles that Parker became known as "the hanging judge." During his 21 years of service (1875-1896) as a western district judge, he tried 12,490 cases, found 454 people guilty, convicted 93 of murder or rape, and sentenced 92 to hang—of whom 79 were actually hanged (Patton 1992). In a history written by Judge Morris Arnold (a current judge of the western district court), he notes that it has been said that federal law concerned with rape and murder cases, developed by the Supreme Court in the late 1800s, is almost entirely based on appeals heard from the western district court cases. His statement suggests that Judge Parker's court had a significant impact on this body of law.

While Judge Parker was still serving as judge for the western district in 1886, the U.S. Legislature approved appropriations for the construction of a federal building in Fort Smith. The new building was to house both the western district court and the Fort Smith post office. Like the court system, the postal system was an important part of early life in Fort Smith. Mail service in the area had begun with the establishment of the fort; however, a postmaster was not appointed until 1829 when John Rogers, an early settler, assumed the position. Mr. Rogers operated the post office from a corner of his general store until 1855 (Fitzjarrald 1983).

Originally, mail service in the Fort Smith area was very slow. In the 1820s and 1830s, letters to eastern states could take from six weeks to several months to be delivered. This situation changed in 1858, however, when Fort Smith became a main stop on the overland mail route. The Southern Overland Mail Company operated the route, which began at the end of the railroad line in Tipton, Missouri. Its stops included Fort Smith, El Paso, Yuma, Los Angeles, and finally San Francisco. The company was contracted to provide mail delivery to locations across the country within 25 days of mailing.

In 1889, Fort Smith's first federal building was completed at a cost of \$100,000. The imposing Romanesque structure was designed and constructed by the Office of the Supervising Architect for the Department of the Treasury. Situated on the corner of Rogers Avenue and Sixth Street, the building had a brick-clad exterior and at least one tower. Romantic architectural features such as towers were commonly used in the design of public buildings during that era.

During its 47 years of service, several notable events occurred. In 1896, the western district court lost its jurisdiction over Indian Territory to courts in Oklahoma. In 1911, the post office, then under Postmaster Frank B. Bumgardner,

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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)**

provided the second authorized airmail flight in the country (Fitzjarrald 1983). The airmail event featured the delivery of some 25,000 specially stamped postcards that were flown from Fort Smith's League Park to the lawn of the federal building (a distance of four miles). President W. H. Taft, former President Theodore Roosevelt, then-future President Woodrow Wilson, and all state governors later received postcards from the event. The 1889 building remained in service until 1937, when the present Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was completed.

In 1936, Louis Simon, Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department finalized designs for the new Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. The building was to be built on the site adjacent to the 1889 federal building and would face South Sixth Street. The older facility would remain in use until the new structure was completed. Site preparation for the new building began in August 1936. James I. Barnes Construction Company of Springfield, Missouri, was the contractor, and R. L. Hughes acted as the firm's superintendent of construction. William T. Purcell served as the government's construction engineer, and Neal A. Melick was the government's supervising engineer. Interestingly, Mr. Melick served in the same capacity during the construction of the building that was built to house the Department of the Interior in Washington D.C., a much larger project, before assisting with the construction of the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse.

Erection of the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse continued through the winter of 1936 and the spring and summer of 1937. The building finally opened in September of that year. The final cost of the Classical Revival-style structure was \$375,000. The adjacent 1889 post office and courthouse was demolished shortly after it was vacated.

The construction of the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was part of a massive government public building program that was first initiated in 1926. The Public Buildings Act of 1926 authorized the office of the Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department to conduct a survey to identify towns with postal receipts over \$10,000 but lacking federal buildings. The act further provided appropriations for the construction of buildings in many of the communities identified by the survey. In 1928, appropriations allotted under the 1926 Public Buildings Act were increased in response to U. S. Post Office and Department of the Treasury reports indicating a need for more space. As the effects of the Depression began to be felt all over the country in 1930 and 1931, the government released additional funds for public building projects. In 1931, the Federal Employment Stabilization Act was passed to further stimulate the economy. This act permitted the president and congress to authorize additional appropriations for construction projects in order to facilitate employment and to carry out the provisions of the 1926 act.

The 1930 and 1931 legislation allowed the Office of the Supervising Architect to begin constructing post office and courthouse buildings in many areas of the country. The construction not only provided needed facilities but also created job opportunities in the building and architectural trades which were particularly affected by the Depression. In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt was sworn in as U.S. president and enacted legislation that continued pumping emergency funding into public building programs to stimulate the economy. One of Roosevelt's first actions was to pass the National Industrial Recovery Act, establishing the Public Works Administration (PWA) "to promote construction that was in the

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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)**

public interest.” After the Supreme Court declared the National Industrial Recovery Act unconstitutional in 1935, it was replaced by the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, which created the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The WPA (renamed the Work Projects Administration in 1939) was set up to undertake construction projects for the government, as well as to provide employment for unemployed artists and writers.

Fort Smith was the location of multiple PWA and WPA projects during the mid-1930s. Two of the city’s largest New Deal-sponsored projects were the improvements to the Fort Smith water supply system and the construction of the Sebastian County Courthouse/Fort Smith City Hall (which faces the current Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse on South Sixth Street; Patton 1992). One of the histories written about Fort Smith (Fitzjarrald 1983) suggests that the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was a PWA project. Newspaper articles reporting on the progress as well as the completion of the building, however, do not suggest its construction was carried out under one of these programs. It is conceivable that the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse could have been funded but not actually constructed under earlier appropriations or programs (such as the 1931 appropriations act). Whether directly part of the PWA or WPA projects or not, the construction of this building, as with other public buildings built in the 1930s, was part of the government’s efforts to combat unemployment during the Depression.

For more than 55 years, the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse functioned as Fort Smith’s main post office. Sometime in the mid-1990s, the post office was moved to a new facility in downtown Fort Smith. A number of postmasters served during the post office’s operation in the 1937 building. The building’s first postmaster was Lewis Friedman who been appointed to the position in 1933. Joseph A. Schnitzer succeeded Mr. Friedman in 1944 and served for a period of 10 years. Cooper Hudspeth served as postmaster from 1954 to 1964. Mr. Hudspeth was succeeded by Acting Postmaster Joseph Schnitzer, who held the position until 1965 when Ralph Blair was appointed. Jim D. Zaner succeeded Mr. Blair in 1980. In 1986, O. Bane Petrey, the last postmaster to serve in the building, was appointed.

While the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse has lost its postal function, it continues to serve as the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas. The first judge to serve in the building was Heartsill Ragon, who was appointed to the position in 1933. Judge Ragon served until his death in 1940. In 1941, President Roosevelt appointed John E. Miller to the court. Miller, who resigned his seat in the U.S. Senate to accept the appointment, had served as a U.S. Representative in Congress from 1930 to 1937 (Miller 1987). In 1937, he resigned his congressional seat after being elected in a special election to the U.S. Senate. Judge Miller served as judge for the western district until 1967, when he accepted Senior Status (similar to semiretirement). He continued to hear cases chosen at his discretion until 1979.

A number of judges have held court in the Fort Smith federal building since Judge Miller’s retirement. All of the judges who served in the building, while not having jurisdiction over a new frontier, are connected to that history through the court’s legacy. In honor of that legacy, Congressman Tim Hutchinson introduced legislation in June 1995 to change the name of the building from the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse to the Judge Isaac C. Parker Federal Building. On April 30, 1996, President Bill Clinton signed Public Law 104-137, marking the official renaming of the building.

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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)**

**Architectural Significance**

The Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was one of the many public buildings designed under the auspices of the Office of the Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department. For more than 75 years (1850s-1939), this office was responsible for the design and construction of public buildings such as customhouses, post offices, and courthouses. These buildings were not only designed to serve a federal function but to express the permanence and presence of the federal government in the cities and communities in which the buildings were located. Early in its history, the Office of the Supervising Architect employed a variety of architectural styles to convey this presence. In the 1870s and 1880s, Gothic and Romanesque styles were popular. At the turn of the century, however, classically inspired styles such as Greek Revival, Classical Revival, and Beaux-Arts began to predominate. These styles were thought to express democratic values and to reflect the government's assertion that "government buildings should be monumental and beautiful, and should represent the ideals of democracy and high standards of architectural sophistication in their communities"(Boland 1994:3).

While these ideals continued to be applied for many years, the expense of constructing "monumental and beautiful" buildings became a concern. In 1913, federal construction policy measured the cost of constructing post offices against both the postal receipts taken in by a city or community and the value of the real estate where the building was to be built. The evaluation of the cost of constructing public buildings coincided with a new architectural movement that promoted modernism. Both had similar effects on federal architecture—a "starved" classicism. Starved classical designs still employed many of the classical elements that defined styles of architecture such as Classical Revival, but the expression and amount of ornamentation were restrained. Façades became more simplified. Classical elements were angular and faded into the building faces. In the 1920s, particularly after the Public Buildings Act of 1926, starved versions of classical styles of architecture were employed rather than their more elaborate predecessors. While architects in the Office of the Supervising Architect resisted moving in the direction of totally modern designs, the starved classical approach was adopted because it still incorporated the classical elements that were thought to be expressive of the federal presence.

Architect Louis Simon, the Treasury Department's Superintendent of the Architectural Section from 1905 to 1933 and later Supervising Architect from 1933 to 1941, exercised considerable influence over the design of buildings constructed by the department during the starved classical period. Public buildings built during his tenure were impressive structures that were restrained in ornamentation but were not austere. The Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was typical of his office's designs for a federal building constructed for communities similar in size to Fort Smith. It was a stately, Classical Revival-inspired structure that displayed such classical features as engaged pilasters and Doric columns. These elements, however, were restricted to the main entry area. Simple limestone detailing was used to harmonize the design of the primary and secondary building faces. Other more decorative elements such as elaborate entablatures were not employed. The result of the restrained application of classical elements in the design of the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was an economical and attractive structure that reflected the permanence and presence of the federal government.

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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)**

As Supervising Architect, Louis Simon oversaw the design of the Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. Mr. Simon, an M.I.T. graduate, joined the office of the Supervising Architect in 1896 (Craig 1979). He succeeded Acting Supervising Architect James Wetmore in 1933 as Supervising Architect. Between 1935 and 1938, during the period when the Fort Smith building was constructed, he supervised the design of 748 federal post office and courthouse facilities.

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Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
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- Fort Smith Southwest American*. "Work Begins On New Post Office Project," 15 September 1936:1.
- "Crews Start Tearing Away Old Building," 14 September 1937:3.



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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is located at 30 South Sixth Street. It is bound on the northeast by Rogers Avenue and on the southwest by Parker Avenue. The northwest (rear) property boundary is Fifth Street. (No legal description for the city lot and block exists for this location.)

**Boundary Justification:**

All property lines are as they existed at the building's construction.

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**Fort Smith U.S. Post Office and Courthouse  
Sebastian County, Arkansas**

1. Fort Smith Post Office/Courthouse
2. Fort Smith, Arkansas
3. Victoria Clow
4. 16 November 1998
5. Geo-Marine, Inc., Plano, Texas
6. Southeast (front) elevation
7. Photo 1

Item numbers 1-5 are the same for all photographs. Item numbers 6 and 7 are listed below for each photograph.

6. 1964 addition, southeast and southwest elevations
7. Photo 2

6. Northwest
7. Photo 3

6. Northeast elevation
7. Photo 4

6. Pilasters, southeast elevation
7. Photo 5

6. Cornerstone
7. Photo 6

6. Exterior (hallway) doors into courtroom
7. Photo 7

6. Main courtroom, judge's bench
7. Photo 8

6. Main courtroom, judge's bench
7. Photo 9