NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

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OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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MAY - 8 1998 Historical Commission

NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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 an 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 Courthouse

other names/site number Frank M. Johnson, Jr. Federal Building

2. Location

street & number Church Street between Moulton and Lee Streets N/A not for publication

city or town Montgomery N/A vicinity

state Alabama code AL county Montgomery code 101 zip code 36104

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.)

Constance Werner Ramsey, Federal Preservation Officer 4/14/98
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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.)

Elisabeth Stanton Brown 4/22/98 - Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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 the Keeper: Carol D. Shull

Date of Action: 6-3-98

United States Post Office and Courthouse
Name of Property

Montgomery County, Alabama
County and State

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	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	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)

GOVERNMENT: Post Office
GOVERNMENT: Courthouse
GOVERNMENT: Government Office

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse
GOVERNMENT: Government Office

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th and 20th CENTURY REVIVALS:
Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Granite
walls Sandstone
roof Terra-Cotta
other Limestone

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

United States Post Office and Courthouse
Name of Property

Montgomery County, Alabama
County and State

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 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
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1932-1979

Significant Dates

1932-1933
1956; 1965; 1971

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

District Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr.

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Frank Lockwood, architect
James A. Wetmore, supervising architect
Algernon Blair, builder

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibilography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more 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 (GSA)
☐ Local government
☐ University
☒ Other Alabama Dept. of Archives and Hist

Name of repository:

United States Post Office and Courthouse
Name of Property

Montgomery County, Alabama
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property c.1 1/2 acres

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	56 48 90	35 82 05 0
2			
3			
4			

☐ See continuation sheet

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

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Linda Nelson / Cydney E. Millstein

organization Future Past / Architectural/Art Historical date February 26, 1996

street & number 4700 7th Court South / P. O. Box 22551 telephone (205)592-6610 / (816)363-0567

city or town Birmingham, AL / Kansas City, MO state _____ zip code 35222 / 64113

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name United States of America c/o General Services Administration

street & number 401 West Peachtree Street NW telephone 404-331-5129

city or town Atlanta state GA zip code 30365-2550

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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Description of Physical Appearance:

This is a five-story public building, constructed in 1932-1933 in the Classical Revival style for the United States Post Office and Federal Courts in Montgomery, Alabama. Since 1978 it has been occupied by the courts and Federal offices alone as the Post Office built a modern facility in another downtown location.

The building is constructed of pale buff brick on a granite base, clad in limestone on the ground story and plate sandstone above. It occupies the full length of the block between Moulton and Lee Streets on Church Street, looking down on Montgomery toward the river from an elevated landscape. On the east, Lee Street breaks and turns into S. Court Street, resulting in an irregularly shaped block; the Federal Building therefore has a distinctive siting on rising ground with its most highly decorated east face occupying the entirety of the Lee Street side of the block.

Though it appears massively rectangular from the Lee and Church Street sides, the building is in fact a U-shape with its base along Church Street. At the rear there is a two-story section filling in between the arms of the "U", the ground level of which is loading dock and service area. There is a penthouse, originally a weather station, atop the roof on the western (Moulton Street) arm, and on the eastern side a chimney and elevator housing are visible above the roof. The fifth story is behind the entablature and only has windows at the rear of the building.

The ground story of the building is of large ashlar blocks of limestone set with deep masonry courses to give the Classical rusticated appearance. To augment the look of rustication, the generally smooth-cut blocks have been patent-hammered, or vertically striated with thin grooves. From the second story to the eaves, the cladding is pale sandstone block. The interior court (i. e. inside the rear "U")is unclad brick. The roof is a shallow hip covered with red terra-cotta tiles.

The long principal facade is defined as an enframed central block, with end blocks defined by four attached Doric columns rising from the second story to the entablature, supported by the slightly projecting ground story wall and in turn supporting triglyph friezes surmounted by pedimented gables. Around the corner on the east (Lee Street) facade the ground-floor projection is deeper and extends almost across the entire end of the building, supporting here a colonnade of eight Doric columns and entablature thus creating, in effect, a high and shallow logia. On the west end there are no projections or columns, and the

bays are defined by fluted pilasters. Here the terrain slopes down toward the rear so that the basement is at ground level. The entire roofline cornice and the pedimented gables are richly molded and dentiled, the deep soffits decorated with rosettes and fluers-de-lis.

Upper windows are multipaned casements with transoms; those on the second story are crowned with gabled pediments and, along the long Church Street elevation, by moulded cornice lintels. At ground level the entries and windows are round-arched; seven windows form an arcade along the facade between the end projections and the entries are set in the projecting blocks, one each on the main facade (i. e., one at each end) and three in the east end making a total of five. The large round-head windows on the main floor are double-hung sash. All window framing is enameled metal resembling bronze; the present windows are 1978 replacements of the original steel casements.

The entrances are set in deep round-arched openings, each composed of bronze and glass double doors with a marble surround. Each of these is in turn set within a limestone pylon frame supporting a scrolled lintel and surmounted by an eagle on a plinth; the round-arched glassed tympanum behind is covered with decorative bronze grillwork. The surrounding segment stones are of a somewhat elongated shape and exaggerated size. Inscribed on each plinth is a different Latin motto of republican governance and civic virtue: *Macte virtute; Pro bono publico; Regnant populi; Festina lente; Favete linguis*. Large bronze lanterns flank all doorways while the other punctuating element in the entry blocks is the small rectangular grated windows set singly in the walls on either side of the doors.

The lofty L-shaped public lobby remains intact. The longer corridor along Church Street, 168 feet in length, was originally the postal service area; offices behind the old service windows are still in use. The floor is of inlaid Travertine marble with edges and wall bases of green Maryland marble; walls are of Ohio Briar Hill sandstone[1] and the ceilings are richly coffered plaster painted in gold leaf. Brass service windows and bronze grillwork remain. Giant lanterns (non-original) are suspended from the center of the ceiling, now lamped with fluorescent fixtures to cast a somewhat pale light. Interior portals on this floor are Roman-arched, one giving access to what was originally the Mail Room at the rear, now converted to a courtroom. The elevator bank is located near the base of the ell on the Lee Street side; the

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[1]"New postoffice to be ready for occupancy in early May," *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 30, 1933, 1.

elevator doors on this floor are of brass, with ten panels in bas-relief.

Finishings on the upper floors are generally the same from floor to floor; there have been renovations at various times from the 1970s, when the Post Office moved out, up until the last few years. In the corridors, floors are of terrazzo with marble edges, wall bases and thresholds; plaster walls rise above brown marble wainscot, in some cases with the recent addition of vinyl wallcovering. Office doors are of natural wood and reinforced translucent glass, with large working transoms above. The fifth floor corridor ramps up and down at either end, an interesting structural result of the suspension from overhead of the second floor District Courtroom. Corridors on the second floor, more elaborate than those above, have cove moulding with a row of dentiling beneath.

The showpiece of the interior is the United States District Courtroom on the second floor, from 1955 until 1979, the courtroom of Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr., and now presided over by Judge Myron Thompson. It is distinguished by several unusual features: the elaborate wooden ceiling in the Italian Renaissance style[2], repainted and reguilded in the early 1970s; the stone niche behind the judge's seat, painted with white stars on a blue field; and a rear balcony, an uncommon structure in courtrooms. In an effort to reduce noise, the floors are made of cork (now fully carpeted) and the walls of an acoustical plaster. The suspended globe light fixtures are of recent vintage.

The fourth-floor courtroom of the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals is smaller and paneled in the black walnut that also finished the walls of the judges' chambers and anterooms on both courtroom floors. Certain changes in the configuration of the second floor chambers, including partitions and entrances, have resulted in greater convenience for the occupants but in no way reveal their recent construction, having been finished exactly like the original rooms.

The siting of this building is particularly interesting for two quite different reasons. The first is physical: the rising terrain and oddly shaped trapezoidal block and convergence of bounding streets give the building a dramatic and commanding appearance even apart from its Classical dignity and impressive scale.

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[2]Ibid.

The second reason relates to the history of the site. From the mid-19th century the site had been occupied primarily by the Court Street Methodist Church, with other dwellings and outbuildings sharing the block out to its attenuated southern corner. By the late 1920s, however, the residential nature of the neighborhood was changing, with the supportive enthusiasm of the local papers: ". . . Lee and Moulton [Streets] have been drawn into the business area of the town with many improved establishments on them . . . and when . . . the new Federal building is constructed, a fresh spurt of development in that vicinity should occur."[3] With much regret and some conflict the congregation in early 1931 elected to sell the property to the U. S. Government for $114,000 and to build a new church in Cloverdale---a move that put them close to most, but not all, of their congregation at that time. The new Post Office represented an expansion of official and commercial Montgomery into once prosperous residential neighborhoods then in transition from the pressures of a growing city; this was a typical first step in the suburbanization of America's cities and their residents' desertion of the city's heart for more bucolic surroundings. For the Government, on the other hand, expansion of services demanded expanded and new facilities, so the pattern of urban change worked to the benefit of their need for more centralized locations.

At the present time, the built environment around the Federal Building is a mix of old businesses, both commercial and professional, some converted historic residences, some large modern institutional buildings such as the brutalist A T & T and, directly behind on the remainder of the block, the Greyhound Bus Terminal, which has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register because of its association with the American Civil Rights Movement.[4] The Federal Building itself and its grounds are very well-maintained, suggesting an attitude of pride and significance commensurate with its architectural distinction.

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[3]"Montgomery becomes a better looking town," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 22, 1931, 4.

[4]F. Lawrence Oaks. Letter to Audrey L. Entorf, GSA dated May 18, 1994.

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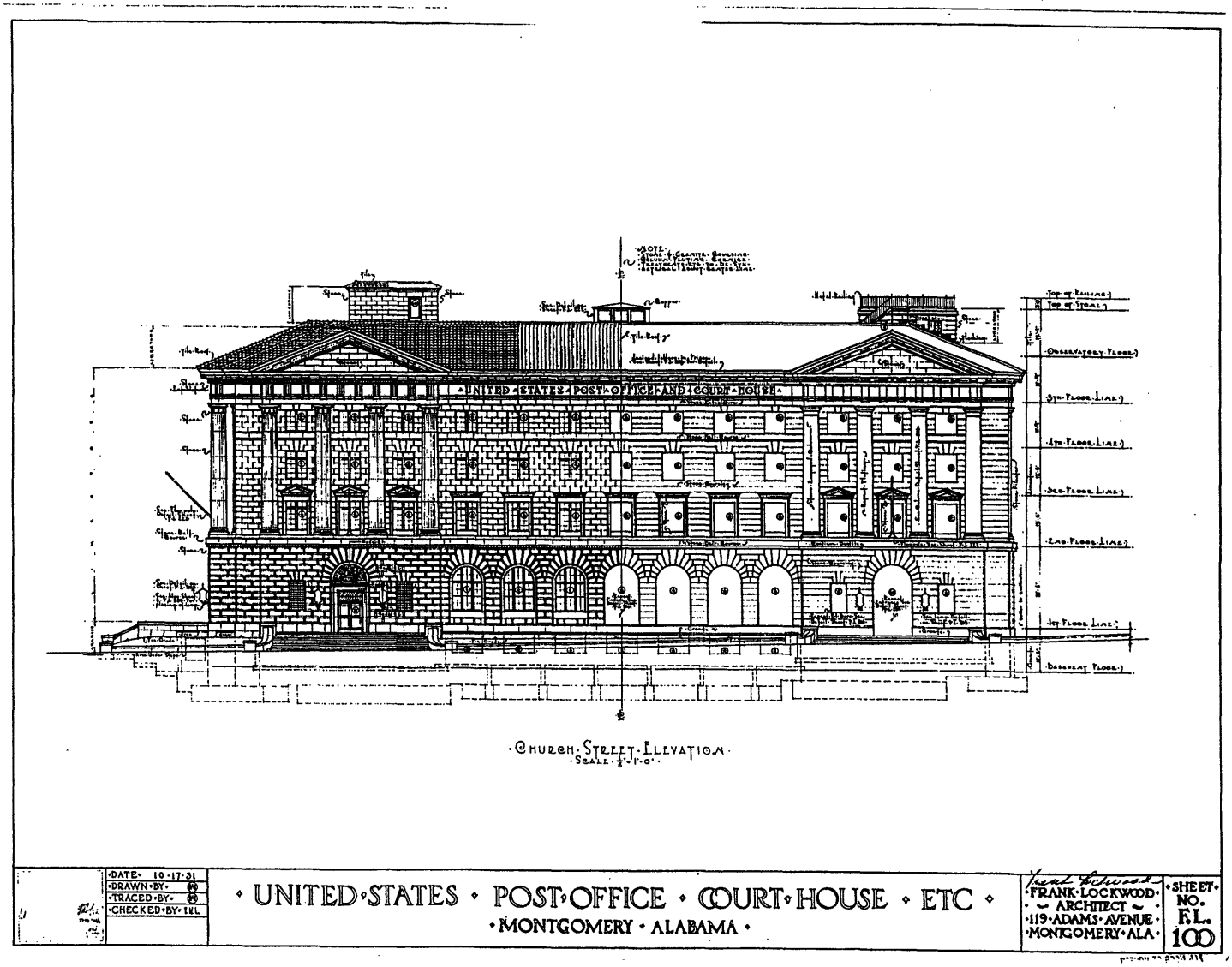
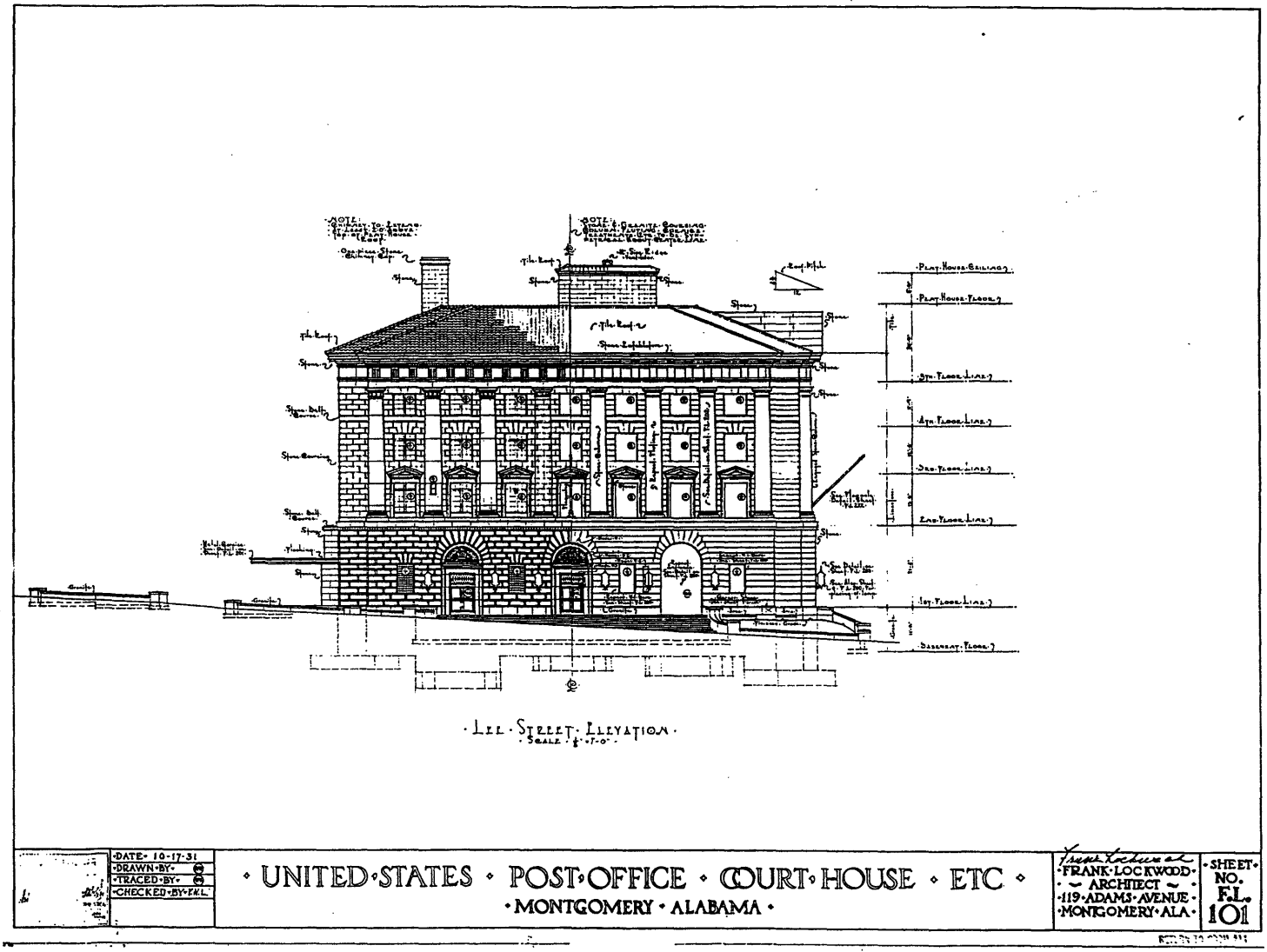
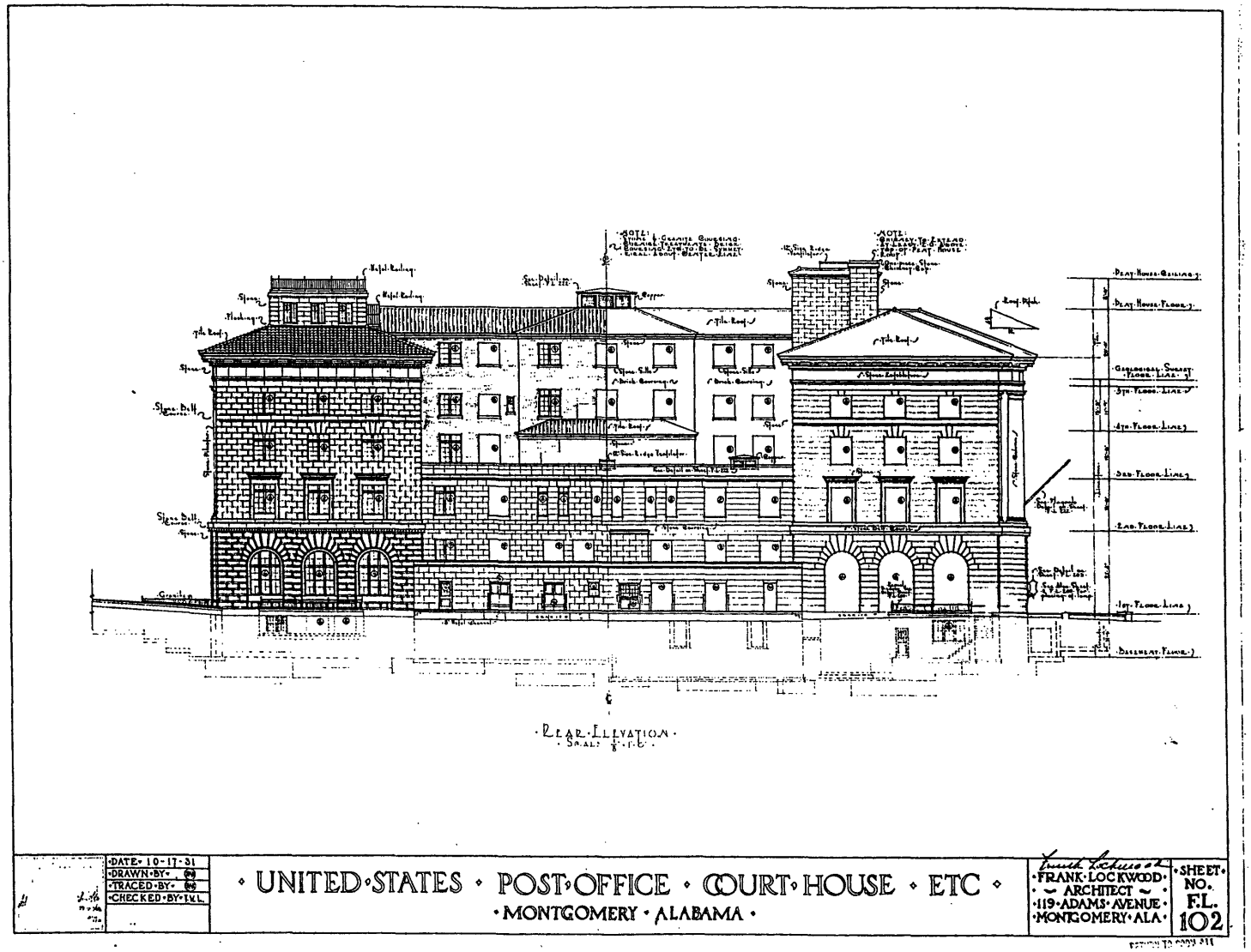
Church Street Elevation, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



Lee Street Elevation, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



Rear Elevation, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



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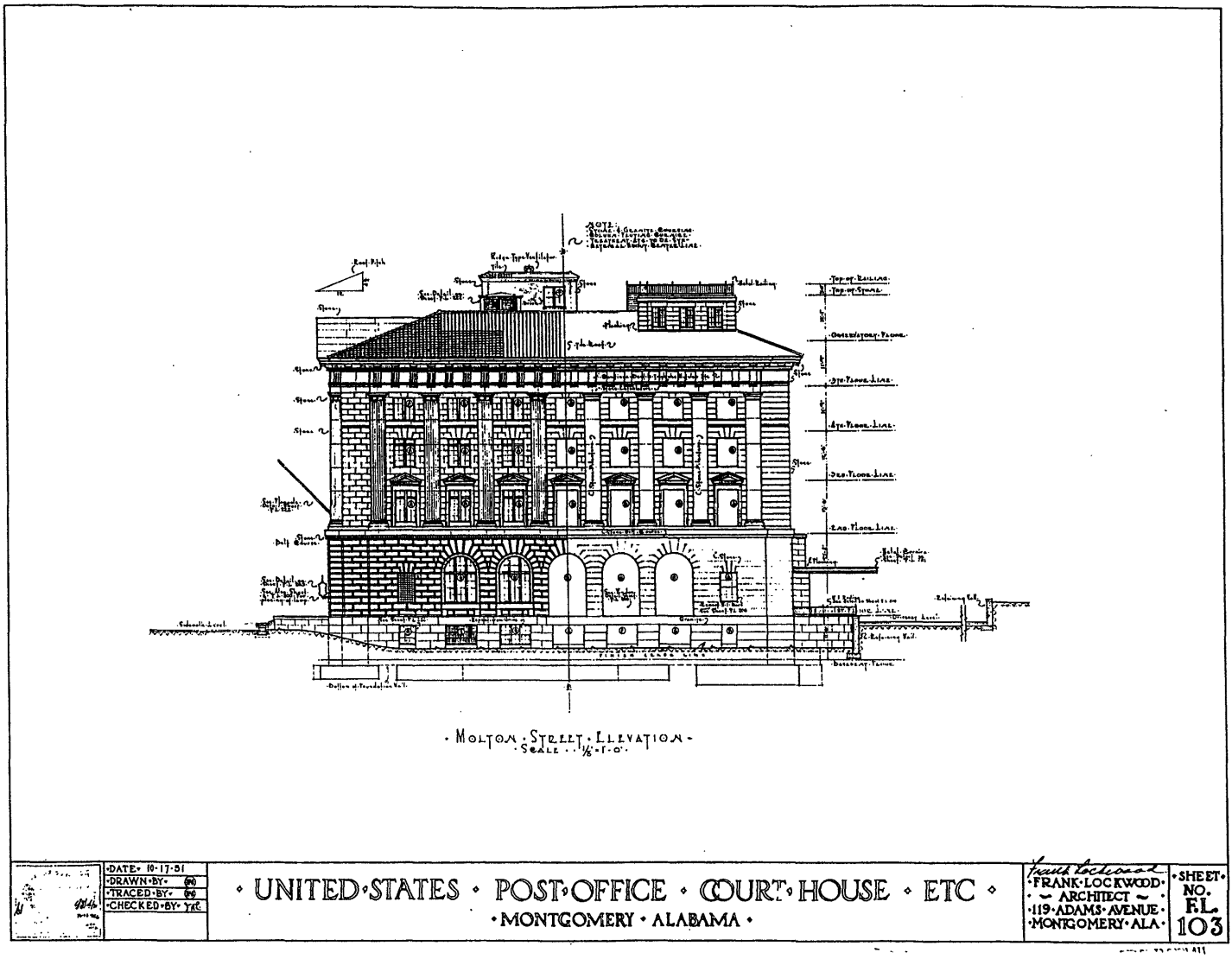
Molton Street Elevation, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



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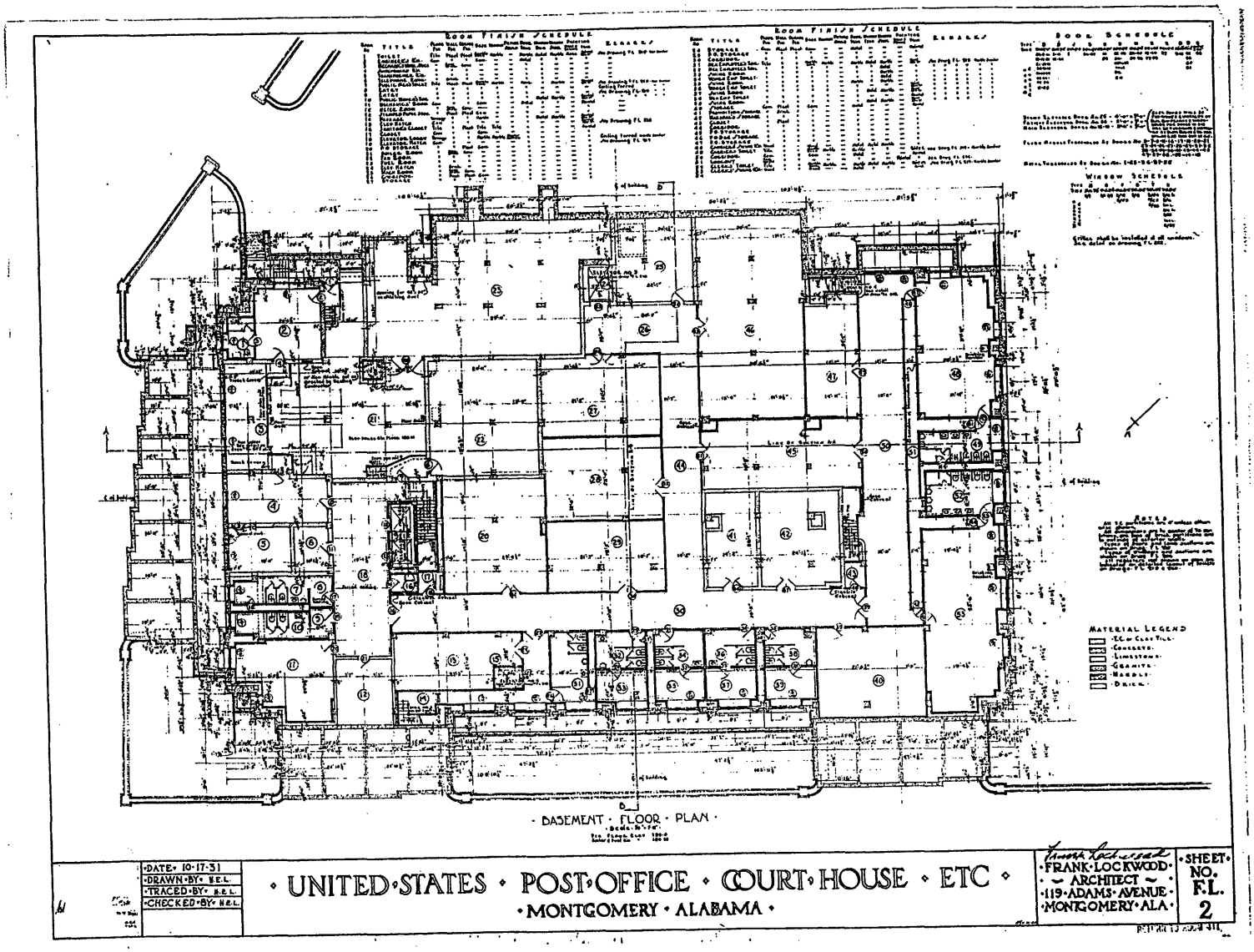
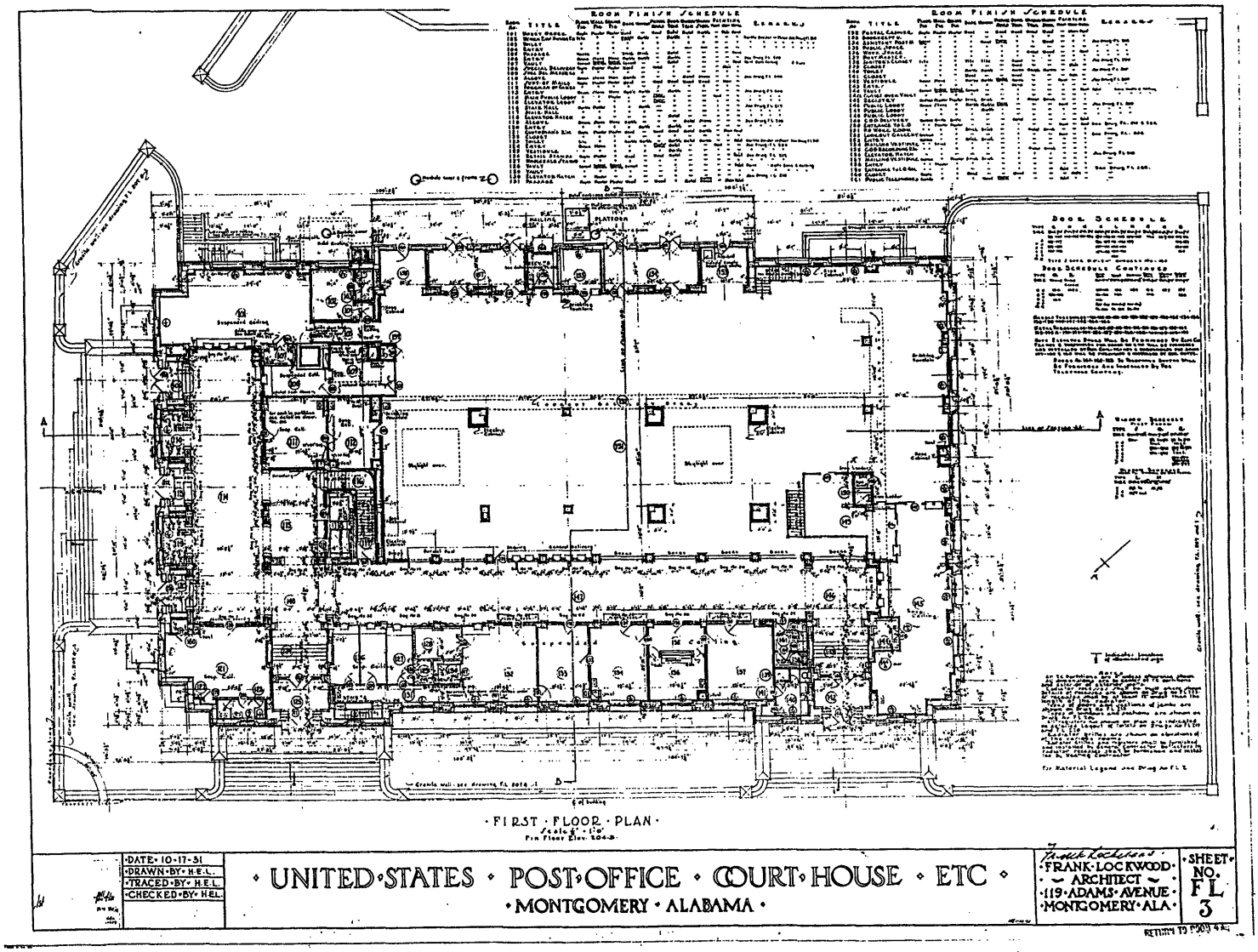
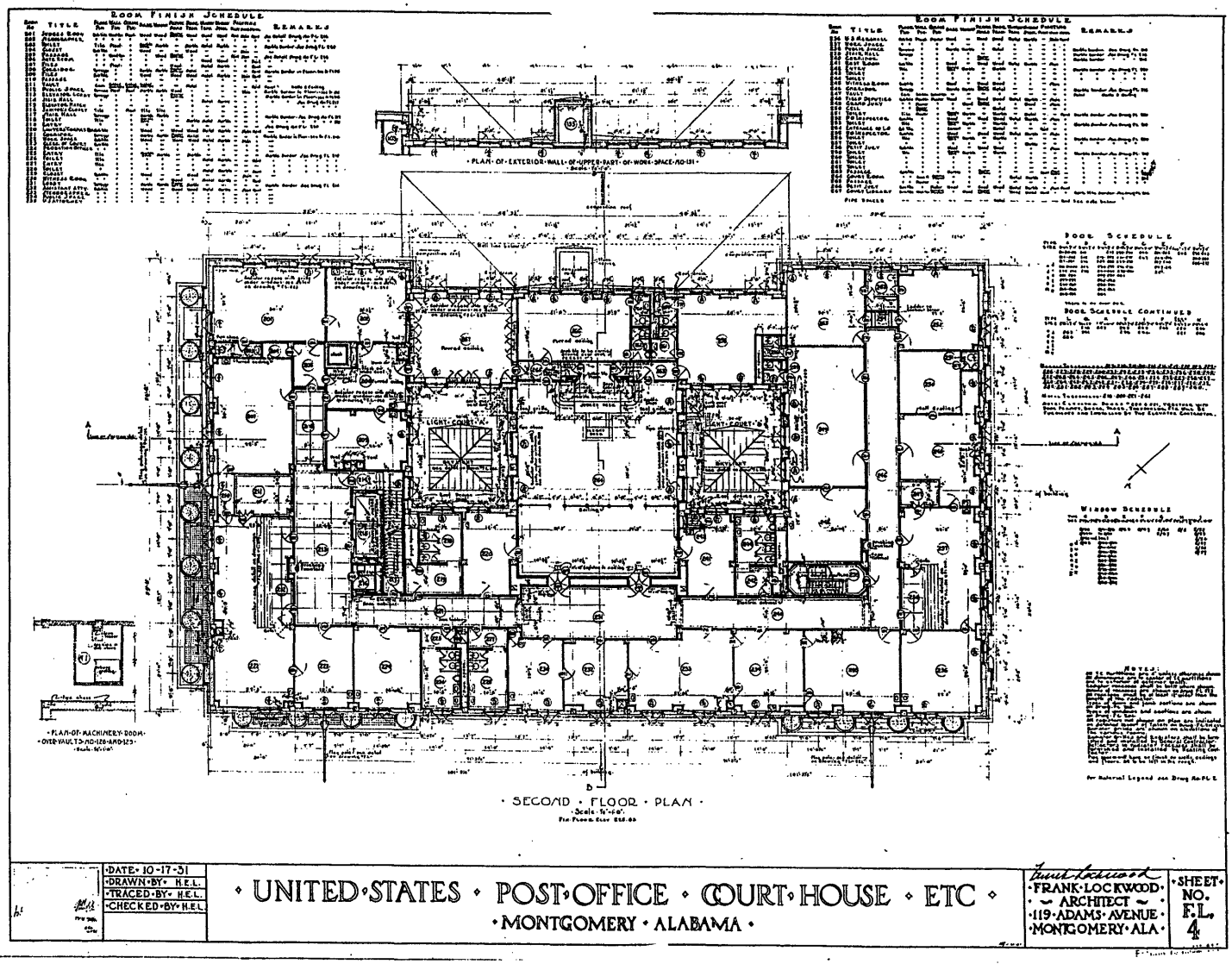
Basement Floor Plan, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



First Floor Plan, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



Second Floor Plan, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



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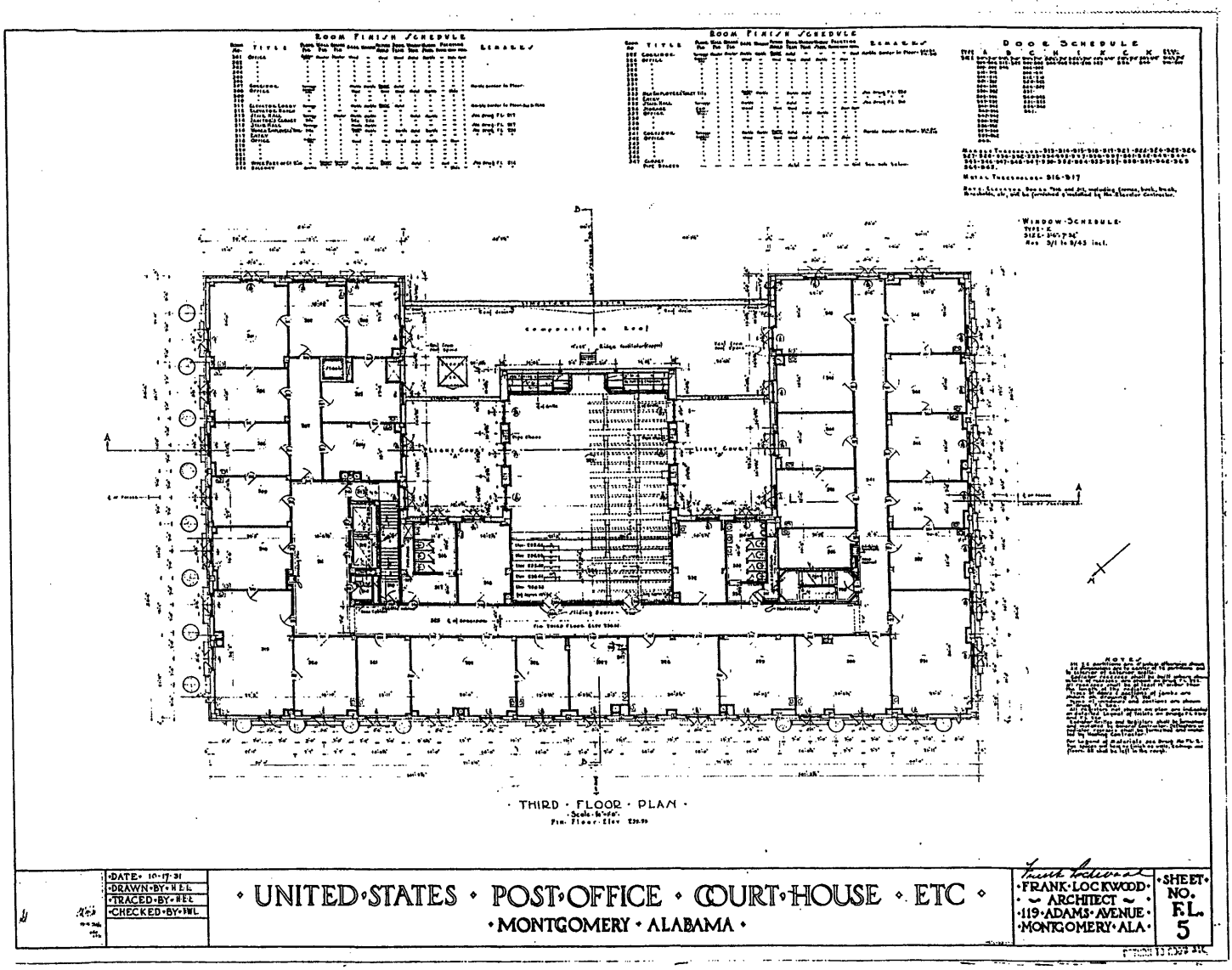
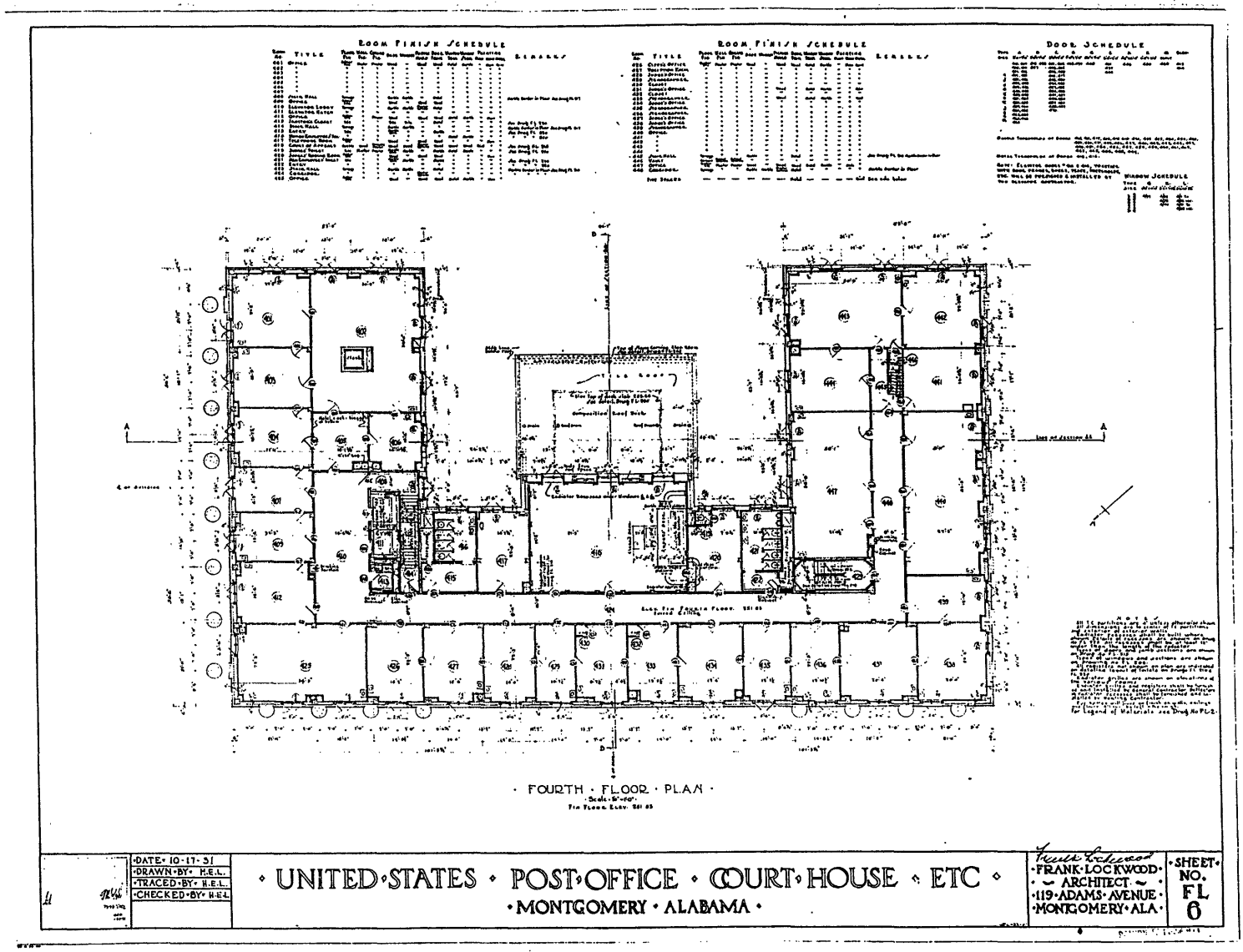
Third Floor Plan, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



Fourth Floor Plan, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



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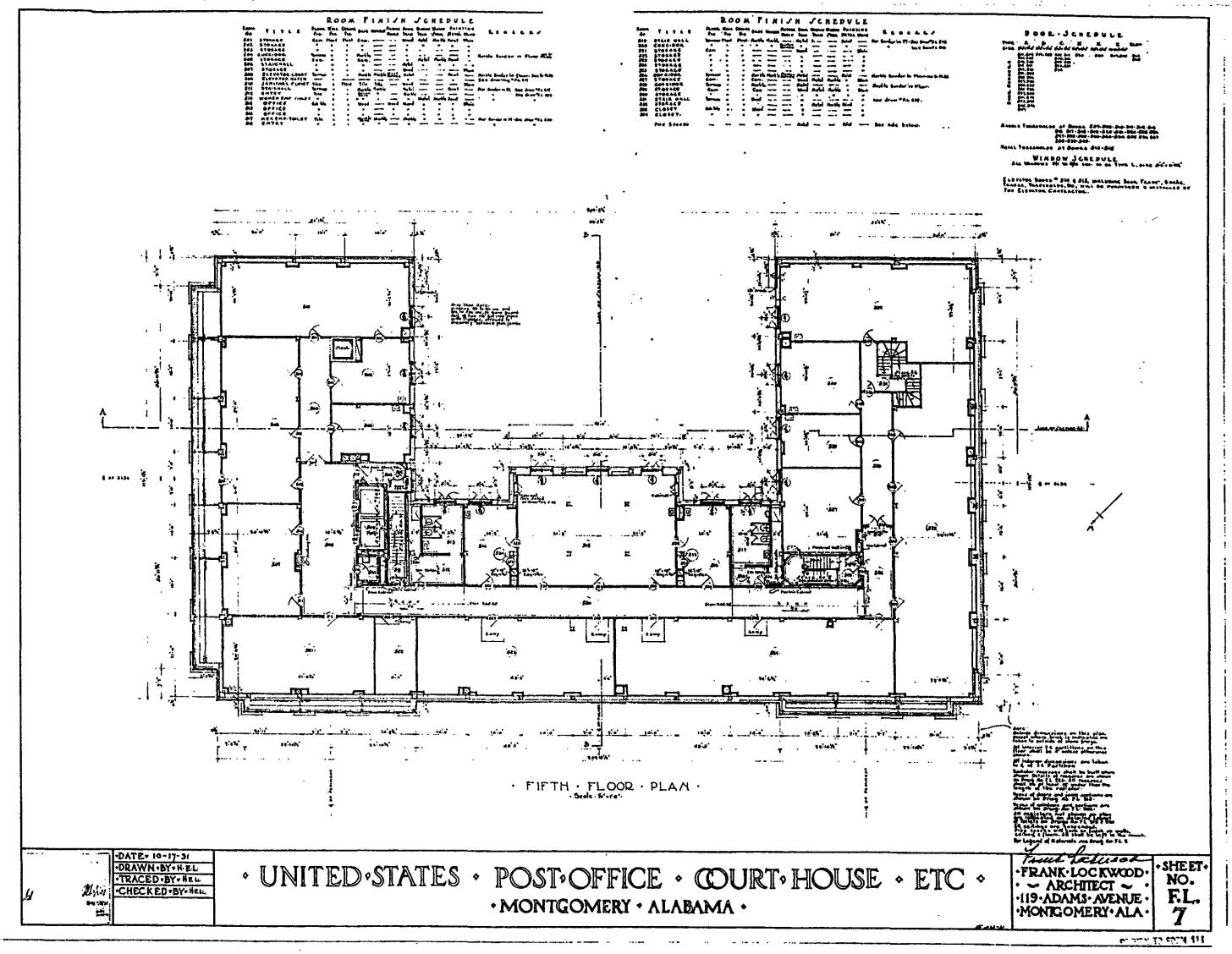
Fifth Floor Plans, from original plans, October 17, 1931.



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Summary:

The United States Post Office and Courthouse is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places based on Criteria B, its association with Judge Frank M. Johnson Jr. because of his momentous consequence to the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the remarkable decisions of enduring impact from his District Courtroom during the stated period of significance, 1955-1979; and Criterion C, its architectural distinction. It is important to note that a case could be made to nominate the property under Criterion A because of its close association with many significant decisions relating not only to the Civil Rights movement in Alabama and the South but to other aspects of Alabama's public infrastructure as well. However, since these decisions were in large measure those of Judge Johnson and since his importance to Alabama's recent history is so exceptional it is felt that a reading of his accomplishments here would more than justify the choice of his personal significance as a basis for nomination. In addition, because of Judge Johnson's lasting influence on Civil Rights legislation and the rights of other disadvantaged citizens, the property is of exceptional significance under Criterion Consideration G. Not incidentally, during the initial preparation of this nomination, on March 4, 1992, the United States Congress voted to rename the building the Frank M. Johnson Jr. Federal Building.

Elaboration:

Criteria B: Association with Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr.

The United States Post Office and Courthouse in Montgomery, Alabama, is significant for its association with Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr. during the years of his tenure as a District Judge for the Middle District of Alabama, to which he was appointed in 1955 and from which he ascended to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in 1979. Out of Judge Johnson's Courtroom issued some of the most significant decisions relating to civil rights in the history of this movement, many of them bearing subsequently on Federal rulings. As is described in the following narrative, seldom has a Judge at the District level had such a compelling influence on national policy and equity decisions.

A native of Winston County, Alabama (which disavowed slavery and voted to secede from Alabama when the Civil War erupted) and so accustomed to thinking contrary to local traditions, Frank Johnson was appointed by President Eisenhower to the District Court of the Middle District of Alabama in 1955, at the age of 37. Almost immediately began the series of decisions that were to propel him to national prominence amid local notoriety and no little difficulty. He became an instrument of change in Alabama's long and entrenched system of racial

discrimination and its poor support for the rights of other disadvantaged citizens such as mental patients and prisoners. He risked much personal comfort to demand equity and fairness for all citizens of Alabama, and, sometimes in concert with judges of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals and sometimes alone, he handed down decisions that, over time, have influenced most of the public policy areas in the State. He was called at one time the REAL Governor of Alabama, but over the years he has maintained a dignified reticence about his well-publicized stand-offs with Governor George Wallace. Jack Bass, an historian of the Civil Rights judges and their contributions, has written that "Wallace's attacks lasted almost fifteen years, a period in which Johnson placed Alabama's prison system, highway patrol, property tax assessment program, mental health agency, and public education system all under the Federal court's jurisdiction. Ultimately, he exercised more influence over public policy in that state than did Wallace, to whose attacks Johnson never responded."[5]

Racial turmoil in the Courts began the South after the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision; an endemically discriminatory culture raised every block it could against the intent of the law as interpreted by the Supreme Court to end separate-but-equal arrangements in the schools and other public facilities. It was a 1956 decision by Judge Johnson that struck down segregated seating in Montgomery's buses, giving the bus boycott its justification and launching the career of Martin Luther King, Jr. as a leader of his people. The legal significance of this decision was that it extended the principle inherent in *Brown* to other areas of public life.

A 1957 decision in *Gomillion vs. Lightfoot* resulted specifically in the rejection of a patent gerrymander in Macon County to exclude Tuskegee's black population from influencing local elections. Returned to Judge Johnson by the Supreme Court for his decision, the significance of the case was that it "moved the Supreme Court for the first time ever to determine that the federal courts should rule on a case involving political redistricting, thus opening the door to reapportionment."[6] Macon County was also the venue of other significant rulings, including opening jury lists to women and blacks and abolishing other obstructions to voting such as the poll tax.

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[5]Jack Bass. *Unlikely Heroes: The Dramatic Story of the Southern Judges of the Fifth Circuit Who Translated the Supreme Court's Brown Decision Into a Revolution for Equality.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 82.

[6]Ibid, 109.

The striking down of literacy tests progressed with Judge Johnson's order in 1961 that forced application of consistent standards for registering people to vote, a doctrine known as "freezing" the standards and one considered to be "the judiciary's most important contribution to effective enforcement of Negro voting rights."[7] Incorporated into the Voting Rights Act of 1965, this principle "served as the basis for suspending literacy requirements" in that legislation.[8] In fact, much of what he did after 1961 influenced the 1965 legislation: acting on the authority granted the courts by the Voting Rights Act of 1960, Judge Johnson by his boldness in setting precedents of interpretation "helped forge new doctrines that became the foundation for the 1965 Voting Rights Act."[9]

Perhaps his most famous civil rights case involved the order that allowed the march from Selma to Montgomery to proceed. Carefully weighing conflicting rights of assembly and protest versus the public's right of free passage on the highways, Judge Johnson made what in those days was called an "outrageous" interpretation (even by his admirers) and has since been called "one of those transcendent leaps of the imagination that sometimes shape human history."[10] Johnson balanced the right to assemble and demonstrate against the enormity of the wrongs against which people were assembling. By this proportional standard it was confirmed that there was no legal or moral way to deny the marchers' petition.

Interestingly for this nomination, Bass relates an incident when the marchers arrived in Montgomery on March 25, 1965. Circuit Judge Richard Rives, himself an important member of the group of judges who furthered civil rights causes in the South, telephoned Judge Johnson two floors below him and told him to come up and witness the fruits of his decision. This Judge Johnson did, and saw thousands and thousands of people streaming into Montgomery and heading for the Capitol---a much finer sight than the one Justice Department officials and FBI agents witnessed from the back of the courthouse in 1961 when the Freedom Riders were attacked at the bus station and one of the Federal people nearly beaten to death by the crowd.[11]

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[7]Ibid, 271.
[8]Ibid.
[9]Ibid, 267.
[10]Ibid, 261.
[11]Ibid, 259.

In 1971 another seminal case was decided in *Wyatt vs. Stickney*: Judge Johnson was able to use the established effectiveness of the injunction to demand minimum standards for services to mental patients, resulting from a class action suit brought on behalf of patients who were effectively "warehoused" and receiving no attention from state institutions. Likewise five years later in *Pugh Vs. Locke*, viewing substandard and even primitive conditions in prisons as cruel and unusual punishment, he effected the creation of acceptable standards in housing, food, and security. In early 1992, when a case came before the Supreme Court concerning the beating of a prisoner in Louisiana, the *Birmingham Post-Herald* editorialized that the Court was correct in finding for the prisoner under the Eighth Amendment and that the law's demands were "affirmed two decades ago when the barbaric conditions found in our state prisons caused then U. S. District Judge Frank Johnson to take control away from state officials."[12]

Criticized in some quarters for imposing detailed demands on institutions in an overly activist mode, Judge Johnson responded that he only did what the responsible state institutions and officials would not or could not do. He knew that if enforcement did not follow decisions, then the decisions might as well not have been made.[13] Jack Bass reports that Martin Luther King said about Judge Johnson that he was the man "who gave true meaning to the word 'justice'[14], an opinion based not only on the rulings themselves but on the Judge's careful philosophical weighing of the legal and equity issues involved. In 1969 Justice Hugo Black, ruling specifically in a faculty desegregation case, relied heavily on Judge Johnson's rulings and commented in his opinion that in five years of civil rights litigation Judge Johnson's "'patience and wisdom are written for all to see.' . . . Such an accolade for a district judge in a Supreme Court opinion is almost unheard of."[15]

In 1979 President Jimmy Carter appointed Judge Johnson to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which in 1980 was split to create the Eleventh Circuit due to the extremely burdensome workload of the Fifth. In 1992 he retired to Senior status, and the building in which he presided during his distinguished career was named after him. In summary of the significance of Judge Johnson's judicial career, still ongoing, Jack Bass commented that his "interaction with the Fifth

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[12]"Cruel and unconstitutional," Editorial, *Birmingham Post-Herald*, February 28, 1992.
[13]"Cursed and praised, retiring judge recalls storm," *New York Times*, November 8, 1991, B20.
[14]Bass, op. cit., 261.
[15]Ibid, 308.

Circuit Court of Appeals intensified the Court's lasting historical impact . . . [The Fifth Circuit's] response to cases involving unresolved issues of fundamental rights granted by the Civil War amendments to the Constitution made the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals an active and vital force in transforming the American South and reshaping the nation."[16]

Criterion Exception G:

Because of Judge Johnson's landmark decision-making involving civil rights, health care and prison reform from his District Courtroom located in the United States Post Office and Courthouse, Montgomery, Alabama (see above narrative, item number 8), Criterion Exception G is being invoked.

Criterion C: Architecture

The United States Post Office and Court House represents a superior example of government building, reflecting distinguished design, the best of materials and fine workmanship. It is an excellent example of the Classical Revival style of architecture influenced by the Florentine Renaissance. Characteristics of this style include the colossal scale of the facade, the highly articulated cornice, the graduated rustication from the ground story upwards and the highly articulated entrances set in semi-circular arches. The Federal Building embodies the American tradition of official buildings reflecting the classical ideals of republicanism inherited from Rome. It is finally an excellent example of the United States Government's building program in the Depression; both its exterior and interior, especially in the public spaces, present a level of craftsmanship, materials and finishing that reflects the best of the Government's building program at a time when the nation's towns and cities desperately need the confidence and excitement generated by the construction of major facilities in their midst.

Representative Lister Hill began the effort to secure a new Federal building for Montgomery in the mid-1920s and by 1929 the need for one had become acute, as Federal offices were scattered around the city, space was in short supply, and facilities outdated. Finally in 1930 Congress authorized funds for the construction of a new Post Office and Courthouse and the search for a site was begun. The Court Street Methodist Church site was purchased in January, 1931 at a cost of

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[16]Ibid, 19-20.

$114,000 and in March of that year the government named Montgomery architect Frank Lockwood to draw the plans.

Naming a local architect for such a Federal project was unusual, but Lockwood's distinction was such that it was a logical decision. The *Montgomery Advertiser* quoted contractor Algernon Blair to the effect that the government "had departed from the usual rule in calling in a local architect, and that the drafting of plans was usually left to staff men . . . [T]he selection of Mr. Lockwood was made solely upon the Montgomery architect's merit, [and] the choice was not made on a basis of competitive bidding as is the case in awarding of building contracts. Jacksonville and Atlanta are the only two Southern cities where such a plan has followed."[17] James A. Wetmore, the government's architect and designer of the 1921 United States Post Office in Birmingham (now the Robert S. Vance Federal Building), was named as supervising architect for the Montgomery project.

Plans were approved by the U. S. Treasury in June, 1931 and a protracted bidding process resulted in the selection of prominent Montgomery builder Algernon Blair to erect the building. The cornerstone was laid in a Masonic service on July 16, 1932 and the building was essentially finished, ahead of schedule, by the following May. The Post Office and Courts were moved overnight on June 4, 1933 without any interruption of service.

Though antedating the Public Works Administration's many contributions to official building in the nation, this structure does represent many of the government's principles of architecture and construction of its major facilities. There are here the obvious parallels with the architecture of the early Republic, with its Classical derivation and monumental scale. However, it might have been thought that in the twentieth century the dominance of Classicism should have been declining and in some areas of the nation, it was but in the traditional South the architecture of the past was still the favorite. Contemporary criticism of traditionalism was not a concern of the government of the PWA; "it was an operation that passed only on the worthiness of the project. The one exception was the Procurement Division of the Treasury, which did have architects on staff and designed some---not all---of the post offices and other Federal buildings."[18]

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[17]"U. S. engages Lockwood to plan postoffice," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 22, 1931, n.p.

[18]Richard Guy Wilson, ed. *Introduction to the De Capo edition of Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-*

Another policy of the Government was to use, insofar as possible, local building materials. This course was followed to a great extent in the building of the Post Office, except that in the architect's description of the building appearing in the Montgomery *Advertiser* of April 30, 1933, references to Maryland and Tennessee marble and Ohio sandstone indicate that a number of the decorative masonry finishes were imported from other states.

Frank Lockwood Sr. was nearing the end of a distinguished career when he designed the United States Post Office and Court House. In the first two decades of the century, he designed the wings of the State Capitol building and its interior remodeling. He designed collegiate, educational, commercial, social and official buildings in Montgomery and around Alabama; those in Montgomery include the Carnegie Library, Memorial Hospital, and First National Bank (now completely obscured by modernization). His buildings at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa include Smith, Morgan and Comer Halls, representing a major period of growth at the University. He was also a prolific residential designer. He is known for his fine sense of proportion, attention to detail, bold use of materials, and somewhat unconventional scaling (e. g., oversized capitals). Though some of this buildings in Montgomery have been razed or altered, many survive and attest to this skill and imagination. The United States Post Office and Court House is probably the grandest of his buildings now remaining in Montgomery.

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10. Geographical Data

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Verbal Boundary Description

Begin at intersection of NE Right-of-Way of Moulton Street and SE ROW of Church Street, thence NE along said SE ROW 300' to the SW ROW of Lee Street, thence SE along Lee Street 140' to W ROW of Court Street, thence S along Court Street 110' thence W 38', thence SW 208' to NE ROW of Moulton Street, thence NW along Moulton Street 200' to point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

This is the historic and present legal description of the property, as recorded in the Appraisal Department of the Montgomery County Courthouse, Montgomery, Alabama.

United States Post Office and Courthouse, Montgomery, Alabama

Key to Photographs

1. Main or east facade; view facing west, southwest

2. Detail of central bay, east facade; view facing west

3. East and north facades; view facing south, southwest

4. North facade; view facing southeast

5. West facade; view facing east, northeast

6. West and south facades; view facing east, northeast

7. South or rear facade; view facing north

8. South and east facades; view facing west, northwest

9. First floor public lobby; view looking northwest

10. Elevator lobby, detail of elevator; view looking west

11. First floor public corridor; view looking west

12. First floor public corridor; view looking east

13. United States District Courtroom, second floor; view facing southwest

14. United States District Courtroom, second floor; view facing northeast

15. United States District Courtroom, second floor; view facing south

16. United States District Courtroom, second floor; view of ceiling facing north

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 98000611 **Date Listed:** 6/3/98

United States Post Office and Counthouse--Montgomery	Montgomery	ALABAMA
Property Name	**County**	**State**

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

for **Signature of the Keeper** 6/3/98 **Date of Action**

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Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 8

This nomination is amended to include Ethnic Heritage--Black as an area of significance.

This amendment has been confirmed with the Federal Preservation office for the General Services Administration.

DISTRIBUTION:
National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)