Form No. 10-306 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 13 1983
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
~~United~~ ~~States~~ Post Office

AND/OR COMMON
Federal Building/U.S. Post Office (Downtown Station)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
522 ~~North~~ Central Ave~~nue~~ — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Phoenix — VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
na

STATE
Arizona 85001

CODE

COUNTY
Maricopa

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	X GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
	NA	__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: *(If applicable)*
General Services Administration Region IX

STREET & NUMBER
525 Market Street

CITY, TOWN
San Francisco — VICINITY OF

STATE
California 94105

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Maricopa County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
111 South Third

CITY, TOWN
Phoenix

STATE
Arizona 85026

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Phoenix Historic Building Survey

DATE
1979 — __FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY X LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
State Historic Preservation Office

CITY, TOWN
Phoenix

STATE
Arizona 85007

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
X EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	__RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Federal Building/Post Office (originally called the U.S. Post Office; called the Federal Building in this nomination) is situated within the sprawling urban setting of the desert city of Phoenix. It lies in a mixed-use neighborhood at the northern fringe of the central business district. North of the building is a neighborhhod made up of residential and commercial structures from the late 19th and early 20th centuries; south is downtown Phoenix, consisting primarily of low- and medium-rise commercial and institutional buildings of varying ages and styles. One block south, on the corner of Van Buren and First Avenue, is the U.S. Courthouse, a contemporary replacement of the original 1913 Courthouse, razed in 1961. North of the Federal Building across Fillmore Street is the Westward Ho Hotel, a fourteen story Spanish Baroque edifice built in the early 20th century as one of the city's landmarks. Directly across Central Avenue to the east is a renovated two-story commercial building attached to the Apache Hotel, a three-story flophouse. To the south and west are rows of one- and two-story attached commercial buildings, and northwest across the intersection is the U-Tote-M market and gas station. The Treasury Department had hoped when it acquired the site in 1931 that it would someday be in the heart of the business district, but the Federal Building today still lies in the periphery, in a neighborhood which is something of a commercial backwater frequented by transients.

The site encompasses the entire northern quarter of an elongated block - twelve city lots, and it has frontage along three streets: Central Avenue to the east, First Avenue west and Fillmore Street north. The building is set back from the sidewalks along the streets, typically for a federal structure of its time, giving it a more imposing countenance and distinguishing it from its commercial neighbors. Between the sidewalks (laid by the WPA in 1937) and the building is a small grass lawn; an evergreen hedge borders the lawn perimeter, and shrubs and palm trees are planted at intervals around the sides of the building. The main level of the Federal Building is raised several feet above street level and is accessed by broad concrete stairs on the east and west sides. Handicapped access is via a concrete ramp on the west side. Site furniture consists of the handrails for the stairs and ramp, and the requisite flagpole stands in the northeast corner, behind the hedge. The rear (south) of the site is taken up entirely by the large paved parking/loading area for the post office.

The building itself is massed as a two-story main section, 193'2" wide by 105'0" deep, joined at the rear by a smaller two-story rear wing, 126'2" wide by 59'10" deep. Supported by a structural steel frame with pan-type concrete roof and floor slabs, brick exterior walls and structural tile interior partitions, it is classed as a fireproof structure. The roof on the sections is basically flat, covered with composition roofing, with a partial, sloping outer edge over the main section which gives the impression of a hipped roof. This section is covered with red mission tiles and is bedded with a moulded and dentiled cornice. The rear wing was intended to be subordinate to the main section, and its flat roof is edged

by a plain parapet. The facade orientation is unusual for a federal building, because the formal front (north) facade is not also the main entrance; the public entries are situated on the east and west walls. The overall style of the Federal Building is best described as Mediterranean, although the architects have borrowed freely from a variety of revivalist sources; such eclecticism is typical for a public building designed by a private architectural firm in the early 1930s (see Addendum, Item 8), and it represents the type of classicism favored by the Treasury Department as appropriate for federal architecture.

The front facade is symmetrically organized, with large ornamental windows on either side framing the two rows of smaller windows. Those on the first floor feature decorative wrought iron grilles, with scrolled brackets and emblem pediments; the upper level windows are plainly enframed. The large end windows are framed by classical columned pediments made of cast stone (concrete). The east and west sides contain the main entrances to the public lobby and are identical reversed. Each entry features a double-leafed doorway with transom over (covered by a decorative wrought iron grille), framed by an ornamental columned pediment made of cast concrete. These entries are the focal points of the building, shifting the emphasis from the front facade to the sides. The east and west walls also display two rows of windows, with the lower level openings covered by wrought iron grilles and the upper level unembellished, and the rear wing has a similar fenestration pattern.

The east and west facades originally displayed "United States Post Office" in attached metal letters near the main entrances. These titles have been replaced with "Federal Building U.S. Post Office" in similarly attached letters. The cornerstone, set in the northeast corner of the building, reads:

Henry Morgenthau Jr.	Secretary of the Treasury
James A. Farley	Postmaster General
Louis A. Simon	Supervising Architect
Neal A. Melick	Supervising Engineer
Lescher and Mahoney	Architects
	1935

The interior spaces have undergone some changes of configuration and finishes, but the public spaces have retained their essential character. The main public lobby for the post office on the first floor extends the width of the main

section, with a row of offices on the north side for the Postmaster, Assistant Postmaster, money order registry and financial section, and the main postal workroom on the south side. This organization remains the same today, although the workroom has been cut down in size a bit by the addition of smaller post office box lobbies off of the main lobby. This long hallway is the most impressive space in the building, featuring most of its original finishes, including: red quarry tile floor with terrazzo borders, glazed terra cotta wainscot, moulded terra cotta wainscot cap and engaged columns, plaster walls and ceiling with moulded plaster crown, stencil-burned softwood lintels over door and window openings, dark stained wood vestibules at both ends, glazed terra cotta window and door surrounds, decorative iron bulletin boards and writing tables. Four murals are mounted in the four corners of the lobby; these were commissioned in 1938 by the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts as part of a New Deal program to aid struggling local artists and place original artwork into public buildings. The murals were executed by La Verne Black and Oscar E. Berninghaus, both of Taos New Mexico, after the two men were chosen from a competition - one of some 190 held around the country. Black's paintings, entitled "The Progress of the Pioneer," are triptychs depicting romanticized western scenes that are thinly veiled copies of Frederick Remington's style. Berninghaus' two paintings are titled "Pioneer Communications" and "Communication During the Period of Exploration." Both men's work reflect the Treasury's inclination toward somewhat romanticized versions of American historical or social subjects.

The main postal workroom still features its plaster walls and ceilings, wood block flooring and inspector's gallery overhead. The offices along the north side of the lobby, like the offices on the second floor, have undergone varying degrees of change, ranging from no change at all to major alteration of finishes involving addition of carpeting, wall paneling and suspended ceilings. The second floor is organized as a series of different-sized spaces aligned along an H-shaped hallway. These spaces enclose two light courts which provide thefirst floor workroom with natural light through large skylights in the roof.

Summary

The Federal Building/U.S. Post Office is sited facing north on a block end on the northern fringe of the central business district of Phoenix. Set back from the sidewalks in a small hedge-bordered lawn, the building is massed as a two-story main section with a sloped mission-tiled roof joined at the rear by a smaller flat-roofed rear wing. The overall style is best described as Mediterranean,

although the architects have borrowed freely from a variety of revivalist sources, as was typical for a federal building of the time. the front facade is organized symmetrically, with large ornamental windows on either side framing two rows of smaller windows. The public entries are, atypically, located on the building sides, beneath ornamental columned pediments. The Phoenix Federal Building has been maintained well, and the exterior appears today virtually original. The interior has undergone minor changes in space and finish, but these have been made with some sensitivity, and the original character of the public spaces is retained. As one of the city's major buildings, it is a prominent landmark - a sophisticated and well-preserved example of public architecture from the 1930s.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	X ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
__1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
X 1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	X POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES Designed: 1931-34
Built: 1932-36

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Lescher and Mahoney
Phoenix

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the Federal Building in Phoenix rests upon the building's intrinsic and representational values on a local level to the city. These values lie in three areas: architecture, art and politics/government. Architecturally the Post Office is representative of the eclectic revivalism which distinguished many federal buildings designed by private architects in the 1920s and 1930s. The building is a sophisticated and well-preserved example of its genre - a medium-scaled public building of the early thirties. Similarly the original murals in the lobby are locally important examples of the type of federally sponsored decorative artwork produced during the Depression. As art, the murals are less than stellar; as artifacts reflecting the social climate in which they were produced, however, they are important on a local scale as the city's only examples and, if viewed comprehensively, on a national scale as part of the widespread social realist art movement of the thirties and forties. Finally, the Federal Building represents Phoenix's part of an extensive federal building program initiated in the late 1920s by the Hoover administration - the forerunner to Roosevelt's Public Works Administration. As the only remaining post office building erected within the historic period, it was a source of pride for the townspeople and a locally prominent symbol of the federal government.

Addendum

In the winter of 1870-71 a new townsite about three miles west of the existing Salt River Vally settlement was surveyed by William A. Hancock. In what was to become the city of Phoenix, Hancock was the first postmaster, operating the post office in his store, which also served as the first county building. Phoenix later became the territorial capital in 1889, and later still the state capital; as the town grew the post office was housed in a series of rented spaces. This continued until 1913, when the U.S. Treasury Department completed the Phoenix Post Office and Courthouse, a three-story neoclassical edifice built on the corner of First Avenue and Van Buren Street. The new public building was one of hundreds authorized by Congress in an immense construction boom just after the turn of the century.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Addendum, Item 9

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.80

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	12	400220	3701960	B			
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Legal description: Lots 19-30, Block 1, Segers Addition to City Of Phoenix

Property is on the southwest corner of Central Avenue and Fillmore Street, with 270.01' frontage on Central Avenue and 289.99' frontage on Fillmore Street.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Clayton B. Fraser, Principal

ORGANIZATION
Fraserdesign

DATE
7 March 1982

STREET & NUMBER
1269 Cleveland Avenue Suite Two

TELEPHONE
303-669-7969

CITY OR TOWN
Loveland

STATE
Colorado 80537

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES ✓ NO ___ NONE ___

Ann D. Pritchett
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is ___National ___State ✓ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE J. WALTER ROTH

TITLE DIRECTOR, HISTORIC PRESERVATION GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION W Roth DATE 12 JAN 83

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

for Linda McClelland DATE 2/10/83

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

GPO 899-214

It had served as the city's main post office for nearly twenty years when Congress appropriated the funds for a new post office building in 1930, and the site selection process was begun. Reported the Arizona Republic in February 1931:

> Some 30 bids are being considered in Washington for a site for the new building. The site will be a city block long and almost a city block square and the building is expected to approach, if not rival, the size and splendor of the city-county administration building, as additional appropriations are made during its construction.
>
> The swift growth of Phoenix long ago outdistanced the present federal building and for years the federal government has been spending more than $20,000 yearly in rentals for branch departments here which it cannot house in the present building.

This signalled the beginning of a six-year process for construction of a building which the city would come to regard with mixed feelings of civic pride and disappointment.

The proposed new Federal Building was in reality part of an enormous federal building program undertaken by Congress and the Hoover administration in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this period some 1300 new civil federal buildings were erected, nearly doubling the number under the aegis of the Treasury Department. The program was initiated in 1926 with a Congressional authorization of $165 million over an eleven year period. The authorization was increased by $125 million in 1928 and, with the Depression worsening, by $330 million in 1930 and 1931. The total appropriation, including revenues from the sale of so-called obsolete structures which added $69 million, hovered at $700 million. According to Lois Craig in The Federal Presence: "In terms of establishing the image of the United States government, this program was the most important undertaken since the first few decades under the Constitution."

The massive construction effort was designed to serve three functions. First, it represented fiscal pragmatism and was calculated to reduce the rising rental costs incurred by a growing number of federal agencies in leased space. The program also afforded Congress the opportunity to distribute political presents in the form of post offices and courthouses, a type of logrolling it historically has found hard to resist. Finally, under the deepening shadow of the Depression, the building project was in the later years also a make-work project, intended to provide jobs for the local unemployed. A predecessor to the myriad New Deal programs, Hoover's building program was later absorbed within the Public Works Administration.

In March 1931 a site was chosen for the Phoenix building, one block north of the existing federal building. The land had been offered for $375,000 by a consortium made up of the Arcadia Investment Company, H.B. Wilkerson and the O'Connell Paint and Body Works. Facing the Westward Ho Hotel across Fillmore Street and bounded on the east and west by North Central and First avenues, the new Federal Building would lie just north of the central business district. With the site secured, Phoenix architects Lescher and Mahoney were commissioned to design a building. It had been planned as a six-story structure which would house all of the federal agencies in the city as well as the main post office; additionally the building would contain two federal courtrooms and all federal law enforcement facilities. A total of $1,080,000 had been appropriated to purchase the land and erect the building; the cost of the land, however, was far greater than had been anticipated, leaving only $705,000 for the building. Soon after final payment had been made for the site in September 1931, the Phoenix Chamber of Commerce began boosting for an additional $545,000 appropriation. The Arizona Republic hopefully reported in January 1932:

> Assuring Phoenix of a $1,250,000 federal building, housing all United States government agencies here, the senate yesterday passed its deficiency bill embodying an additional $545,000 appropriation for the projected structure, according to the Arizona Republic from the Associated Press in Washington, D.C.
>
> The additional appropriation, which increases the amount available for the building itself to $1,250,000, will enable plans for the building to be completed on the basis all federal agencies here having quarters in the structure. . . .Since it is assured that all federal offices will be contained in the new building, the problem has arisen as to what disposition the government will direct for the present building, First Avenue and Van Buren street.

While Phoenix officials tried to convince the Arizona Congressional delegation to use its influence to sell the existing courthouse to the city for use as the downtown public library and the newspapers continued to report that the additional money was right around the corner, the appropriation was caught in Congress. Lescher and Mahoney had been commissioned to design a six-story structure, but it was doubtful that it would be built. Bids for site excavation and construction of the foundations were let in March 1932, and the contract was awarded to a Texas firm, the Robert E. McKee Company of El Paso. McKee, low bidder with a bid of $26,200, was a large national contractor which had completed the Post Office and Courthouse in Tucson over a year before and had built several federal buildings throughout the Southwest.

As the foundations were nearing completion late in 1932, it began to dawn on the city that the long hoped for additional funds were not forthcoming, and officials reconciled themselves to the fact that the new building would only be three stories high. The architects completed the construction documents for a 1933 construction bid letting, but the project became mired in the Treasury Department as the design was reviewed, with all others pending at the time, by an architectural commission. The purpose of the review was to determine if money might be saved by revising the plans; the result in Phoenix was that the project was again delayed. The Treasury Department tried to appease the townspeople by stating that the building could be enlarged by adding more stories if funds were appropriated in the future, but by the time the project was ready to be rebid, it had undergone yet another design revision scaling it back to a two-story height. The facades on this latest design displayed an eclectic borrowing from Spanish and Mediterranean forms, a design approach that was common for public buildings of the time.

Actually federal buildings of the 1920s and 1930s exhibited a variety of styles. At one extreme were the designs of the Supervising Architect's (SA) office of the Treasury Department, which continued to advocate classicism as the appropriate symbolic expression for public buildings. The SA executed hundreds of buildings of varying scales with classical facades and detailing during the period. James A. Wetmore was the Acting Supervising Architect from 1915 to 1933. A graduate of the Georgetown University Law School, Wetmore was not himself an architect, the reason for the "Acting" before his title; stylistic direction for the office was given by the Superintendent of the Architectural Division Louis A. Simon, a stylistic traditionalist who later succeeded Wetmore as the Supervising Architect - the Treasury's last. At the other end of the spectrum were a number of architects in the avant garde of the private sector. Embracing the tenets of the emerging Art Deco and Moderne styles(and a decade later the International style), these architects designed public buildings relatively unembellished by ornamentation and austere when compared with their classical predecessors. Between the two extremes, architects designed with a wide range of stylistic expression, combining new forms with borrowed revivalist or vernacular forms or motifs or somehow compromising between the classical and modern trends to create what is today termed "starved classicism."

The Phoenix Federal Building in its last incarnation lay in this middle ground, neither avant garde nor neoclassical. With the completion of the revised construction drawings in late 1934, the project was put out for a second bid. The Treasury Department, ever mindful of the lowest bidder, awarded the contract

to the Great Lakes Construction Company of Chicago. Construction was commenced again on the building soon after and continued through 1935 and into 1936. On 29 September 1936 the Arizona Republic reported:

> The Phoenix post office yesterday opened for business in the new post office building, Central and Fillmore street. . . .The co-operation of all the agencies concerned made it possible for the post office to move into the new building with a minimum of confusion and delay, George H. Todd, postmaster and custodian of the new building, said.

Formal dedication ceremonies for the building were held on 14 November 1936. Again, the Arizona Republic:

> Recognition that the new $1,000,000 post office building at Central avenue and Fillmore street is inadequate even for the present needs of this growing city marked the consecration of the structure yesterday to the service of Arizonians.
>
> Speakers laid emphasis on the fact that the building should have been much larger, but stressed that it is yet "a milestone of progress." Distinguished visitors from Washington pointed to rocketing Phoenix postal receipts as a clear and accurate barometer reflecting the Arizona capital's steadily increasing population and business volume.

Arizona Senator Carl Hayden summed up the mixed feelings of frustration and pride over the new building in his keynote dedication speech:

> If it had been left to me, this building would have been larger, it would have been completed much earlier and it would have been located in the very center of mail delivery. I still believe that the then postmaster general, Walter Brown, paid too much money for this site. An entire block downtown could have been purchased at a saving of over $100,000, which would have left that much more money to go into the building. Time and the future growth of the city of Phoenix may prove that Mr. Brown was right, but up to now I think he was wasteful in the expenditure of public funds in that instance.
>
> While the building is not all that we wanted nor all that would have been done if mistakes had not been made, yet what did happen was through no fault of the officials of the Treasury Department. Like faithful servants they have done well with the talents placed in their hands.

After the dedication, the Federal Building settled into an uneventful service which continues to the present. The first floor continues to be occupied by the

post office, although it was demoted from main office to station status with the construction of a new facility in 1968. The original federal agencies which occupied offices in the building were: (basement) Agriculture Department, Army Recruiting Station, Civil Service Commission, Immigration and Naturalization Service and Navy Recruiting Station; (main level) Postmaster, Assistant Postmaster and Superintendent of Mails; (upper level) Agriculture Department Livestock Bureau and Biological Survey, Bureau of Public Roads, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Forest Service, Home Owners Loan Corporation, Indian Service, Post Office Inspector, Treasury Department and the Veterans Administration. Today the building houses offices of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Forest Service, National Park Service Youth Conservation Corps, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Departments of Labor and Agriculture, ACTION, U.S. Tax Court, U.S. Department of State and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The funds never did come for the additional stories on the building; it remains a two-story structure today in well preserved condition. Although not yet fifty years old, the Federal Building possesses exceptional significance - both historic and arhcitectural - which qualifies it for National Register status. It is a local landmark for the city, the only federal structure left from the historic period and an excellent example of classical eclecticism.

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