



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

01- 438

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
other names/site number Galveston Federal Building

2. Location

street & number 25th Street and F Avenue not for publication
city or town Galveston vicinity
state Texas code TX county Galveston code 167 zip code 77550

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.)

Rolanda Byn Camp Date 3.9.1
Signature of certifying official
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.)

Thomas Case Date 3-1-01
Signature of commenting or other official
TEXAS SHPO
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:)

Edson H. Beall Signature of Keeper Date of Action 4/25/01

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Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston County, Texas

Narrative Description

The Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse (federal building), built in 1937, is an attractive, seven-story (plus basement), limestone-clad structure with a partial seventh-floor mezzanine in the attic. Designed by prominent Houston architect Alfred C. Finn under the direction of Department of Treasury Supervising Architect Louis Simon, its Art Deco design is a significant example of 1930s New Deal architecture. This style is revealed in the central massing, the rectangular form, the vertical flow of the window bays, the decorative metal grilles, and the geometric details of the building.

Located on one city block fronting 25th Street (Rosenberg Avenue), the U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse holds a prominent position on the western edge of the Galveston Central Business Historic District. The district is a mixed-use historic district that contains residential, commercial, and religious buildings of various architectural styles.

Exterior

The Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse is a seven-story, rectangular plan with two rear wings, steel and concrete building with a basement and a service penthouse. The walls, which are clad in limestone, rise above the pink granite base. The windows are replacement aluminum windows that are very similar to the historic ones. The east elevation, the primary façade, is ten bays wide, divided into three areas by abstracted pilasters that extend from the third floor through the sixth floor at the main portion of the building. The two lower stories have entrances at the first and tenth bays. A stringcourse divides the two lower floors from the upper ones.¹

The upper five floors are on a two-story base with an ornamental stringcourse of projecting alternating panels (ten squares and six squares). Carved relief limestone eagles rest above the two main entrances. Incised pilasters flank the end window bays on each floor. The pilasters have stylized caps, composed of three pairs of incised rods. Between the

¹ Parts of the architectural description were taken from the *Historic Structures Report: United States Post Office and Court House, Galveston, Texas*. Prepared by Walk, Haydel, & Associates for the General Services Administration, 1988; and *Historic Building Preservation Plan, U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Galveston, Texas*. U.S. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, 1997.

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Narrative Description (continued)

pilasters is a panel featuring a United States shield. A limestone cornice is braced by limestone mutules. Below the cornice, centered on the façade are the words:

UNITED STATES
POST OFFICE CUSTOMHOUSE AND COURTHOUSE

The roof consists of red clay, Spanish barrel tiles. One full set of tiles continues upward to a parapet. The remainder of the roof is flat. Various modern weather equipment is located on the roof.

The main entryways on the east elevation are on the north and south ends. Granite steps, flanked by limestone cheeks with fluted panels and bands, lead to the main doors. The main doors are nonhistoric, double, aluminum storefront-type doors. Above each door is a four-panel transom window. The original exterior light fixtures flank the entries. They are flush-mounted, elongated, rectangular, bronze frames with scored bands, grouped in threes. The first floor windows have an elongated, central light and fixed sidelights, transoms, and hoppers. The windows on the other floors are similar, except they lack the hopper.

The north and the south elevations are mirror images. They are seven stories in height, and finished in a manner similar to the primary façade. Two-story wings project westward and continue the stringcourse along the roofline. The lower part of the building has nine bays: three on the main building and six on the wing. The upper portion has five bays. Incised pilasters flank the end window bays on each floor. Between the pilasters are two panels featuring a United States shield.

The west elevation, the rear of the building, is mainly a utilitarian area with a loading dock but displays many Art Deco architectural elements. The loading dock serves as the link between the two-story wings that extend from the center of the façade. The wings have a limestone stringcourse at the roof level. The stringcourse consists of a group of panels that alternate between ten and six squares. The north and south bays, above the third floor, have pilasters with stylized caps composed of three pairs of incised rods. Between the pilasters is a panel featuring a United States shield. A limestone cornice is braced by limestone mutules. On the north end of the roof is a limestone chimney. A handicap ramp has been added to the loading dock area. In addition, a one-story generator building is attached.

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Narrative Description (continued)

The corner stone located at the northeast corner of the east elevation is inscribed as follows.

HENRY MORGENTHAU, JR.
SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

JAMES A. FARLEY
POSTMASTER GENERAL

HOMER S. CUMMINGS
ATTORNEY GENERAL

LOUIS A. SIMON
SUPERVISING ARCHITECT

NEAL A. MELICK
SUPERVISING ENGINEER

ALFRED C. FINN
ARCHITECT

ANDREW FRASER
CONSULTANT

1935

Green spaces, plantings, sidewalks, and other landscape features characterize the site area immediately surrounding the building. Large lawn areas border the north, east, and south elevations. Plantings are present along these building faces. The west elevation serves as a service area with an adjacent paved parking area. There is a flag pole on east lawn.

Interior

Like many other federal buildings, the Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse has a rectangular footprint, with two wings on the west elevation. The upper five stories rest on a slightly larger two-story base. The first floor area was designed to accommodate the building's postal function. The sixth floor was allocated to the judicial function, and the seventh floor contained cotton classifying rooms. The other floors were designated as office space.

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Narrative Description (continued)

The postal lobby, the ceremonial courtroom, the public corridors, and the elevator areas were the most architecturally enriched of the interior spaces. This enrichment was largely a reflection of their public usage. The remaining interior spaces were designed for use as federal tenant offices and to accommodate a light court and maintenance and service areas.

The postal lobby, originally the most heavily trafficked of the public spaces, retains much of its historic fabric and integrity. Entry into the building is through the storefront doors that open into entrance vestibules. From the vestibules, the lobby runs from north to south along the west side of the first floor; the west side of the first floor was designated as the postal counter and postal work area. Flush wooden doors, surrounded by Campania Rose Tennessee marble with a fluted band top that rests on Dark Cedar Tennessee marble plinths, are at the north and south ends of the lobby. The elevators are located at the northeast end of the lobby, near converted office space, beneath an arched marble frame.

The lobby floors are dark green terrazzo with light gray terrazzo banding and brass divider strips at the lobby and the entrance vestibules. The walls are primarily Campania Rose Tennessee marble with a Dark Cedar Tennessee marble base. On the east and west walls is a series of vertical wooden fins above the marble panels that originally provided ventilation to the workers in the post office. On the west wall are contemporary cast-metal postal boxes. The ceiling is flat plaster with a fluted motif of three rods and an inner band of rectangles. A narrow, fluted band surmounts the frieze at the base of the ceiling.

Along the ceiling are eight plaster relief concentric circles with arrangements of 13 five-pointed stars accenting the circles. These served as bases for the nine hexagonal, bronze, Tiffany-style hanging fixtures, where now hang eight contemporary chandeliers with five trapezoidal opaque glass panels set within a white metal framework. Three of the four original postal tables remain in the lobby. They are rectangular, with beveled corners and fluting on the legs and cross brace, and rest on pink marble. A bronze plaque hanging on the east wall lists the officials involved in the planning and construction of the federal building.

The sixth floor courtroom is the original courtroom in the building. The courtroom is 35N6O-x-61N9O in an octagonal space. Entry into the courtroom is through two sets of walnut, double doors on the south wall. The walls are covered in walnut paneling resting on an 8-inch Dark Cedar Tennessee marble base. Two additional walnut doors are located on the north wall, and a single walnut door is on the east wall behind the judge's bench. Above each entry is a carved dark mahogany transom panel decorated with an "X" motif. Beneath the five windows on the south wall are five walnut radiator housings with marble. The floor still retains its original alternating light and dark brown cork tiles (12O-x-12O) on the west end (spectator area) of the courtroom. The remainder of the courtroom floor is covered in a modern burgundy

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Narrative Description (continued)

carpet. A walnut frieze featuring panels, with cut-out diamond shapes alternating with horizontal rods in groups of three, run along the entire perimeter of the courtroom.

The judge's bench on the east end serves as the focus of the room. Behind the judge's bench are three wood grilles that extend from the floor to the frieze. A pattern of four interlocking octagons with three central bars runs the length of the grilles. Bronze grilles are also on the west wall, and rectangular grilles are on the east wall. The ceiling is applied acoustical tile panels with a contemporary decorative plaster border.

Historic bronze fixtures and four pairs of bronze bowl lamps provide lighting in the room; however, the primary lighting is provided by 20 recessed can lights. The two bronze lamps with octagonal shades on the judge's bench are original. Most of the furnishings in the courtroom are historic. The walnut court rail rests on a Dark Cedar Tennessee marble base. The rail is ornamented with fluting on the top with vertical fluting at the intervals. Twenty of the original spectator benches with fluted bands are in the courtroom. The judge's bench, witness box, and clerk's desk all feature fluted ornamentation and rest on marble bases.

The corridors are the most historically intact of the remaining interior spaces. These corridors generally retain painted plaster walls, and most of the original flat plaster ceilings remain under the dropped acoustical ceilings. There are many of the original doors with an opaque glass and wood panel upper portion and transom. The door frames rest on marble plinths.

Alterations

Overall, the Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse retains a high degree of integrity in its setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. While modifications have occurred, they have not impacted the building's ability to convey its historic significance as a federal building nor its architectural significance as an excellent example of an Art Deco-style public building.

The interior corridor spaces retain most of their historic spatial plan and configuration. Much of the original detailing is intact, especially in the main vestibules, the postal lobby, the sixth floor courtroom, and the corridors. The perimeter offices have been modified to meet the needs of the different occupants; yet, much of the historic fabric still remains. Certain changes, however, have occurred to the exterior. The original cast-iron grilles over the entry doors and the doors on Rosenberg Avenue have been removed. The historic 30-foot wooden flagpoles have also been removed. The installation of mechanical equipment and the closure of the skylights on the rear wing constitute major changes.

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
-
-
-
-

Period of Significance

1937-1950

Significant Dates

1937

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

- Finn, Alfred C., Houston, TX—Architect
- Fraser, Andrew, Galveston TX—Consulting Architect
- Algernon Blair Construction Co., Montgomery, AL—Contractor
- Simon, Louis A.—Supervising Architect, U.S. Treasury Dept.
- Melick, Neil A.—Supervising Engineer, U.S. Treasury Dept.
- Farley, James A.—Project Director, U.S. Treasury Dept.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) See Continuation Sheets pp. 10-17.

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 pp. 18-19.

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, TX
 - Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, TX
 - Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX

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Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston County, Texas

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary

The Galveston U.S. Post Office, Courthouse and Custom House is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A for its association with the federal construction programs designed to relieve the economic emergency of the Depression years and under Criterion C as an excellent example of Art Deco architecture. From construction in 1937 through 1950 (the period of significance), the building provided both a federal presence in Galveston and federal services, including postal and legal. It was designed and constructed, as were other public buildings built in the 1930s, as part of the federal construction programs enacted to reduce unemployment during the Depression. Architecturally, the building is an excellent example of a form of Art Deco architecture known as "PWA or WPA Moderne" for its use in the design of public buildings during the 1930s.

Historical Significance

Background

Spanish explorer Juan de Grijalva discovered Galveston Island in 1519. Because of its natural harbor, the island became recognized as an important and highly accessible port of entry. Prior to European settlement, nomadic Karankawa Indians periodically occupied the island. The first European settlement was a French pirate community, established in 1816. Privateer Louis-Michel Aury was serving as governor of Texas for the revolutionary Mexican government at the time. He left the area the following year, and Cajun pirate Jean Lafitte took control of the island, where he established the pirate community Campeche. Lafitte drove out the Karankawa tribe; however, the United States Customs Department forced Lafitte to leave Galveston in 1821 after he accidentally raided an American ship. Galveston continued to serve as a major port, and Mexico established a new custom house in 1831.²

After Texas gained its independence from Mexico in 1836, the Texas navy made Galveston its home port, and the first Texas settlement on the island, "Saccarappa," was established. The following year, land speculator Michel Menard, who had earlier taken advantage of a loophole in the Mexican colonization law of 1825 and obtained a large proportion of the island, and nine others, formed the Galveston City Company. The company paid the Republic of Texas \$50,000 to secure the title for the entire island. That year, the town was officially named Galveston in honor of Count Bernardo de

² *Historic Structures Report: United States Post Office and Court House, Galveston, Texas.* Prepared by Walk, Haydel, & Associates for the General Services Administration, 1988, 13-14.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

G<lvez, the Spanish governor of Louisiana who had surveyed the entire Texas coast. In 1836, Galveston served as the temporary capital of the Republic of Texas.³

In 1837, the Republic of Texas declared Galveston a port of entry, and Gail Borden was appointed the republic's first collector of customs. At that time, a new custom house had been erected on 23rd and Strand streets but was destroyed in a hurricane two days after its opening. A new building was rebuilt on the same site. Because of the benefits of its port, Galveston continually drew people and businesses to the area and was officially incorporated in 1839.

A year earlier, the Republic of Texas established its first post office in Galveston in a small frame building on Strand (Avenue B) near 23rd Street. Michel Menard's brother, Captain Peter J. Menard, served as the first postmaster. Mail to Texas was received in Galveston and then taken to Matagorda on the mainland by ferry. Due to Galveston's growing size and increasing mail demands, the post office moved twice more during the days of the republic—once to a small structure on Postoffice Street, then to a one-story wooden structure on 20th and Postoffice streets, where it remained until 1861, well into Texas's statehood.⁴

In 1845, Texas joined the United States, and Galveston continued to grow. The railroad connected Galveston to the mainland in 1859, and a vehicular bridge constructed the following year allowed greater access to the island.⁵ By 1860, the population of Galveston stood at 7,307, second only to San Antonio. In 1854, congress authorized funding to secure a building site and construct a federal building to house a post office, courthouse, and custom house. Prior to this time, federal court sessions were held in a two-story frame building on the northwest corner of Postoffice and 21st streets. Although not begun until 1860, the building was completed on March 31, 1861, through the use of prefabricated parts brought in from the northeast.⁶

The Galveston Federal Building was the first nonmilitary building constructed by the federal government in Texas. Construction costs totaled \$146,617.31, not including another \$6,000 to purchase the building site. Supervising Architect of the Treasury Ammi B. Young designed the two-story brick building located on 21st and Postoffice streets. Judge John C. Waltrous held the first federal court sessions in this building in January 1861, but federal business ceased when Texas joined the Confederacy. The U.S. government reclaimed the building in 1865 after the Civil War.⁷

³ *Historic Structures Report: United States Post Office and Court House, Galveston, Texas.* Prepared by Walk, Haydel, & Associates for the General Services Administration, 1988, 15-17.

⁴ "Galveston's Postoffices," *Galveston Tribune*, 11 August 1916, 18.

⁵ *Historic Structures Report: United States Post Office and Court House, Galveston, Texas.* 1988, 17.

⁶ "United States Court House-Federal Building is Dedicated Here 107 Years Later." *Port Galveston*, May-June 1977, 3.

⁷ "United States Court House-Federal Building is Dedicated Here 107 Years Later." *Port Galveston*, May-June 1977, 3.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

After Reconstruction, Galveston continued to grow, and its needs outpaced the federal building. From 1874 to 1900, Galveston became one of the leading cotton ports in the world. With this expansion in business came a greater need for governmental office space. The first indication of the need for a new federal building occurred in the 1870s, when the Custom Department moved from the building as a result of inadequate space. By 1880, the city was the largest in Texas, with a population of 22,550. In 1882, the U.S. congress authorized the construction of a new federal building in Galveston. For the next few years, there would be a heated debate on the size of the new federal building. Finally begun in 1887 and completed in 1891, the new Richardsonian Romanesque-style federal building was the most expensive federal building in the state, costing \$254,797.50. The 1891 building, designed by Nicholas J. Clayton, with contributions from Treasury Department architects Mifflin E. Bell and his successor, Will A. Freret, was located between Avenues F and G, facing 25th Street.⁸

The 1891 federal building was one of the few structures to survive the devastating 1900 hurricane. After that storm, the city of Galveston entered a period of difficulty. In an effort to recover from the storm and to protect against another hurricane, the town labored to rebuild the town and construct new seawalls. Between 1900 and 1920, a decline in industry and railroad use hurt Galveston economically, and the beginning of a tourist industry in the 1910s was slowed by the advent of Prohibition. By the 1920s, however, the capacity of the 1891 building was quickly outpaced by the increased growth in governmental services. According to a 1931 newspaper article, the "need for a new federal office building here has been apparent for some time and many government agencies are now housed in private buildings."⁹

Construction

In an early attempt to obtain a new federal building in Galveston, the U.S. congress authorized in 1929 the construction of a new post office that would not exceed \$400,000, but the money was never appropriated.¹⁰ In 1931, Congressman Clay Stone Briggs again attempted to secure an appropriation—for \$750,000 this time—for the construction of a new federal building in Galveston; he met with failure.¹¹ Funding was finally appropriated a few years later, and likely was part of one of the New Deal projects enacted by the Franklin Roosevelt Administration to reduce unemployment through the construction of Public buildings.

⁸ Arthur F. Sanders, "Wrecking Will be Begun Soon." *Galveston Daily News*, 10 November 1935, 12; and *Lucky Landmark: A Study of a Design and Its Survival*, Historical Study 4, Washington D.C.: General Services Administration, n.d.: 74-77.

⁹ "Galveston will Get New Federal Office Structure." *Galveston Daily News*, 28 February 1931, 1.

¹⁰ "Texas to Get P.O. Buildings at 56 Points." *Houston Chronicle*, 7 April 1929, 1.

¹¹ "Galveston will Get New Federal Office Structure." *Galveston Daily News*, 28 February 1931, 1.

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Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
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Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

The Treasury Department, who administered federal building projects, selected Alfred Finn, a leading Texas architect, as the architect for the new Galveston federal building. On September 16, 1934, the citizens of Galveston received a glance at his tentative drawings of the new building in a *Galveston Daily News* article. The article described the building as:

. . . a seven-story structure, with exterior of face brick, stone trim, and Spanish tile roof. . . . [It would house offices for the] Postoffice, custom office, federal courts, war department—army engineers; navy—hydrographic office [*sic*]; agriculture, coast guard, commerce, civil service, internal revenue and employees compensation.¹²

The choice of brick as the exterior material for the building was the cause of some dissension. The Galveston Commercial Association and Galveston Chamber of Commerce requested the use of brick in order to provide more jobs and so that two local dealers could bid on the brick contract. U.S. Congressman J. J. Mansfield, however, declared he did not support the use of brick. He believed that the building should be monumental in its architectural style and that stone would be the only proper choice. Custom Collector Fred C. Pabst also supported the use of limestone. Furthermore, Mansfield argued that since 78 percent of the building would be brick anyway, the use of a limestone covering would not be that much more expensive. Although Mansfield withdrew his complaints after receiving pressure from the business community, the Treasury Department nonetheless eventually decided to use a limestone exterior rather than one of brick.¹³

On October 27, 1935, the Treasury Department awarded the construction contract for the new building to the Algernon Blair Construction Company of Montgomery, Alabama, for \$552,465.¹⁴ The citizens of Galveston and the civic leaders saw the new construction as more than a new building; they viewed the construction of the new federal building, as well as a new causeway, as an employment opportunity for hundreds of skilled and unskilled workers during the Great Depression.¹⁵

Since the site of the 1891 building was to be the site of new federal building, demolition of the old building began on November 26, 1935. A *Galveston Daily News* story described the demolition in melancholy terms and mentioned that “many Galvestonians are made sad by its [the 1891 federal building] passing.”¹⁶ The federal offices housed in the 1891 building moved temporarily to the old Galveston Tribune building until the completion of the new facility.

¹² “Galveston’s New Federal Building.” *Galveston Daily News*, 16 September 1934, 1.

¹³ “Federal Building Contract Approved.” *Galveston Daily News*, 6 October 1935, 1-2.

¹⁴ “Federal Building Contract Awarded.” *Galveston Daily News*, 27 October 1935, 1.

¹⁵ “Projects Sought Would Give Employment to Hundreds.” *Galveston Daily News*, 1 October 1935, 23.

¹⁶ “Tower of Postoffice Tumbles Down as Men Ruthless in Rushing Working of Demolition.” *Galveston Daily News*, 26 November 1935, 1-2.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

On January 1, 1936, ground was broken for the new federal building. Galveston Mayor Adrian F. Levy, Judge E. B. Holman, Postmaster Robert A. Lyons, Jr., and other local officials participated in the event.¹⁷ Not much is known about the construction period because of a lack of archival newspapers from 1936 to 1937. However, the new federal building opened in 1937.

Post-Construction

After its completion, the Galveston U.S. Post Office, Courthouse, and Custom House housed the post office on the first floor; postal inspectors on the second floor; various governmental offices on the third floor; the U.S. Customs Department on the fourth floor; a petit and grand jury space on the fifth floor; U.S. attorneys, U.S. marshals, and a courtroom on the sixth floor; and the cotton classifying rooms, the Bureau of Navigation, and the Bureau of Agriculture on the seventh floor. Over the years, the occupants of the offices would change, but the basic functions as a post office and a courthouse would remain the same.¹⁸

While the rest of the nation prospered in the post-World War II era, Galveston's economy remained depressed until the 1970s. In an effort to stimulate the economy, Galveston conducted a "modernization" project of the downtown buildings. This project consisted of renovating some buildings, razing others, and making the area more accessible to the automotive society. In 1968, as part of the downtown renovation work, the U.S. government acquired a parcel of residential land one block west of the post office and turned it into a 232-space automobile parking lot for the 1937 building. This construction served to make the federal building more accessible to the automobile-oriented society.

The Galveston U.S. Post Office, Courthouse, and Custom House has maintained its original character throughout its more than 60 years of continuous use and still functions today much the same way it did in the 1930s.

Architectural Significance

The Galveston U.S. Post Office, Courthouse, and Custom House was one of the many public buildings designed under the supervision 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 such public buildings as custom houses, post offices,

¹⁷ "Ground Broken for Federal Building." *Galveston Daily News*, 2 January 1936, 1-2.

¹⁸ *Historic Building Preservation Plan, U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Galveston, Texas*. U.S. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, 1997.

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Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
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Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

and courthouses. The buildings it created were not only designed to serve a federal function also 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. At the turn of the century, however, classically inspired styles such as Classical Revival and Beaux-Arts began to predominate. These styles were thought to express democratic values. Additionally, they reflected the federal government's view that "government buildings should be monumental and beautiful, and should represent the ideals of democracy and high standards of architectural sophistication in their communities."¹⁹

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 on which the building was to be built. Following the passage of the Public Buildings Act in 1926, the evaluation of the cost of constructing public buildings coincided with a new architectural movement that promoted modernism. As the nation entered into the Great Depression, the Treasury Department used restrained—or "starved"—versions of classically inspired styles of architecture in its designs. At the same time, private architects hired to design public buildings for the Treasury Department and other government agencies combined Beaux-Arts composition and symmetry with a form of ornamentation referred to as Zigzag Moderne.²⁰ The result of these two combined influences was a classically balanced version of Art Deco architecture known as "PWA or WPA Moderne." The terms "PWA" or "WPA" come from the extensive use of the style in government-sponsored public building programs during the 1930s. PWA or WPA Moderne has been described as:

. . . pristine, formally balanced compositions employing piers rather than columns, with windows arranged as vertical recessed panels, and smooth surfaces for interiors and exteriors. Smooth stone, polished marble, and granite often face these buildings which are sprinkled with stylized embellishments. Additional decorative features may include ornamental metal-work, restrained sculptural decorations, murals, and pictorial friezes.²¹

¹⁹ Beth Boland. *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*. National Register Bulletin 13. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division, 1994.

²⁰ Judith Singer Cohen. *Cowtown Moderne: Art Deco Architecture of Fort Worth*, College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1986, 14.

²¹ Judith Singer Cohen. *Cowtown Moderne: Art Deco Architecture of Fort Worth*, College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1986, 15.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 16

**Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston County, Texas**

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

While architects in the Office of the Supervising Architect resisted moving in the direction of totally modern designs, the federal government did not restrict the design, style, or material choices of consulting private architects. As a result, a significant number of federal buildings in Texas were designed in the Moderne style during this era. Like starved Beaux-Arts and Art Deco styles, Moderne architecture reduced classical ornamentation in favor of linear and geometric decorative features. The Moderne style suited federal buildings because it popularized the angular lines and severe forms that mirrored the authority of the United States court system.

The American Institute of Architects campaigned for the government to contract out the design of public buildings throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and the Galveston U.S. Post Office, Courthouse, and Custom House is an example of one of the cases in which a private architect was hired to complete the designs. Houston architect Alfred C. Finn designed the plans for the new U.S. courthouse, and the building's significance is strengthened by its association with this prominent state architect. Galveston architect Andrew Fraser served as consulting architect.

Alfred Charles Finn, the primary architect, was a very important Texas architect from the 1920s to the 1950s. Finn was a native Texan who by the mid-1920s had become Houston's leading commercial architect, designing skyscraper office buildings, hotels, retail stores, and theaters in the downtown business district. Finn designed many major buildings in Galveston and in Brenham. During the Great Depression, his firm obtained some of the most prominent publicly financed building commissions in Texas. Through the Public Works Administration, his office designed the Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall (1937), the twelve-story Jefferson Davis Hospital (1937), the Galveston U.S. Post Office, Courthouse, and Custom House in (1937), a twelve-building dormitory complex at Texas A&M College (1940), and the 570-foot tall San Jacinto Monument (1939). He was appointed to the board of Reconstruction Finance Corporation (FRA), and he later served as its secretary of commerce from 1940 to 1945. Subsequently, Finn became an architectural supervisor for the Federal Housing Administration. During World War II, Finn designed the 1,000-bed, 37-building U.S. Naval Hospital complex in Houston (1945). He was also active in the postwar building boom that occurred in Houston.²²

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. As Supervising Architect, Louis Simon oversaw the design of the Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse. Mr. Simon, an MIT graduate, joined the Office of the

²² "Finn, Alfred C." The Handbook of Texas Online. <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/>> [Accessed Wednesday, July 12, 2000].

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 17

**Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston County, Texas**

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

Supervising Architect in 1896. He succeeded Acting Supervising Architect James Wetmore in 1933 as Supervising Architect. Between 1935 and 1938, during the period when the Galveston building was constructed, he supervised the design of 748 federal post office and courthouse facilities.

The Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse served the community after its construction in 1937 until 1950, the 50-year mark mandated by the National Register. The building is a physical representation of federal government policies and practices at the community level. It is also a good example of federally designed, Art Deco-style architecture in Galveston. As one of the few extant historic buildings in the downtown area, the Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse recalls a period in the city's growth and development that is poorly represented in the city's built environment.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 18

Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston County, Texas

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"Texas to Get P.O. Buildings at 56 Points." *Houston Chronicle*, 7 April 1929, 1.

"Galveston will Get New Federal Office Structure." *Galveston Daily News*, 28 February 1931, 1.

"Galveston's New Federal Building." *Galveston Daily News*, 16 September 1934, 1.

"Projects Sought Would Give Employment to Hundreds." *Galveston Daily News*, 1 October 1935, 23.

"Federal Building Contract Approved." *Galveston Daily News*, 6 October 1935, 1-2.

"Federal Building Contract Awarded." *Galveston Daily News*, 27 October 1935, 1.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 19

**Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston County, Texas**

Bibliography (continued)

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“United States Court House-Federal Building is Dedicated Here 107 Years Later.” Port Galveston, May-June 1977: 3.

Galveston U.S. Post Office and Federal Building
Name of Property

Galveston County, Texas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)
15 325580 3242620

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.) **See Continuation Sheet p. 20.**

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) **See Continuation Sheet p. 20.**

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ed Salo, Historian; Angela Tiné, Cultural Resources Specialist; Victoria Green Clow, Cultural Resources Project Manager

organization Geo-Marine, Inc. date July 12, 2000

street & number 550 East Fifteenth St. 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.)

name General Services Administration, Greater Southwest Region

street & number Fritz G. Lanham Federal Building, 819 Taylor Street 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 10 Page 20

**Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston County, Texas**

Verbal Boundary Description

The Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse is situated on the entire block of Block No. 385.

Boundary Justification

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

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 11 Page 21

**Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston County, Texas**

Photographs

1. Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
2. Galveston, Texas
3. Victoria Clow
4. October 1999
5. Geo-Marine, Inc., Plano, Texas
6. East (main) 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. North elevation
7. Photo 2

6. West elevation
7. Photo 3

6. South elevation
7. Photo 4

6. Cornerstone, east elevation
7. Photo 5

6. Stylized caps composed of three pairs of incised rods, east elevation
7. Photo 6

6. Carved eagle detail over entry, east elevation
7. Photo 7

6. Fluted bands on entry cheek wall, east elevation
7. Photo 8

6. Postal lobby, view to the north first floor
7. Photo 9

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 11 Page 22

**Galveston U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston County, Texas**

Photographs continued

- 6. Postal lobby, view to the south first floor
- 7. Photo 10

- 6. Sixth-floor courtroom, view from the west wall
- 7. Photo 11

- 6. Sixth-floor courtroom, view from the east wall
- 7. Photo 12

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Galveston US Post Office, Custom House and Courthouse

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Galveston

DATE RECEIVED: 3/20/01 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/09/01
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 4/25/01 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/05/01
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 01000438

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 4/25/01 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



POST OFFICE UNITED STATES
CUSTOM HOUSE AND COURT HOUSE

U.S. Post Office, Custom House and Courthouse
Galveston, TX
Photo 1

1160343 0271 N-2



NOTICE
THIS PROPERTY
PROTECTED BY
ELECTRONIC
SURVEILLANCE

U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse

Galveston, TX

Photo 2

1073844 0271 N-3



U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston, TX
Photo 3

EO44344 0271 H-3



U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Court house
Galveston, TX
Photo 4

EO21344 0271 H-3

HENRY MORGENTHAU JR

SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

JAMES A FARLEY

POSTMASTER GENERAL

HOMER S CUMMINGS

ATTORNEY GENERAL

LOUIS A SIMON

SUPERVISING ARCHITECT

NEAL A MELICK

SUPERVISING ENGINEER

ALFRED C FINN

ARCHITECT

ANDREW FRASER

CONSULTANT

1935

U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Court house

Galveston, TX

Photo 5

1293843 0271 N-2



U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston, TX
Photo 6

1100344 0271 N-3



U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse

Galveston, TX

Photo 7

1350343 0271 N-2



U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston, TX
Photo 8

1320343 02/1 M-2



OUTGOING MAIL
DISPATCHES
WEDNESDAY THRU SATURDAY
LEAVES AT 5:45 P.M.
LEAVES AT 5:40 P.M.

OUT OF TOWN LETTERS
WELCOME

FILE

U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston, TX
Photo 9

LI10343 02/1 N-2



FOR MORE INFORMATION?
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AT WWW.USPS.COM
OR CALL 1-800-222-1811

U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston, TX
Photo 10

1149343 0271 N-2



U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston, TX
Photo 11

1020343 0271 N-2



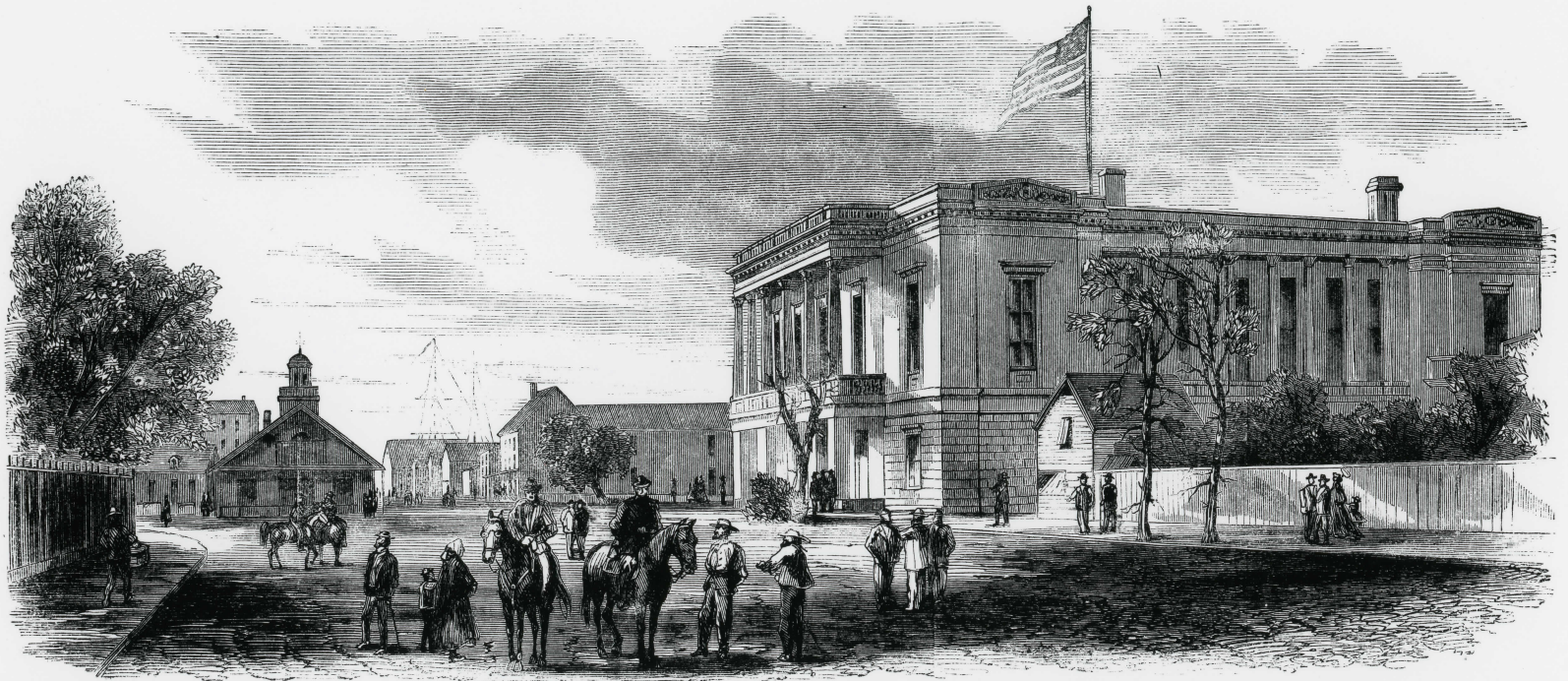
U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston, TX
Photo 12

1083343 02/1 N-2



U.S. Post office, Custom House, and Court house
Galveston, TX
Photo 13

1060545 0271 N-2



CUSTOM-HOUSE, GALVESTON, TEXAS.—SKETCHED BY THEODORE R. DAVIS.—[SEE PAGE 686.]

Custom House, Galveston 77-615-4

The Custom House, Galveston,
Texas, repossessed by the
United States after the Civil
War.
Harper's Weekly, October 27, 1866.

Galveston US post office, Custom House

Post Office, Custom House, and Courthouse
Galveston, TX
UTM 15/32 55801 3242620



PROVISIONAL MAP
Produced from original manuscript drawings. Information shown as of date of photography.

PRODUCED BY THE UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY CONTROL BY U.S.G.S. NOS/NOAA COMPILED FROM AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN 1987 FIELD CHECKED 1989. MAP EDITED 1994 PROJECTION 1994 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION 5'00" EAST VERTICAL DATUM NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929 HORIZONTAL DATUM NORTH AMERICAN DATUM OF 1927 (NAD 27) Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS/NOAA Chart 11324 (1992). This information is not intended for navigational purposes North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of any Federal and State reservations shown on this map
Gray tint indicates area in which selected buildings are shown
This map covers an active subsidence area. Evaluate relief and elevation information based on recent sources



SCALE 1:24 000
KILOMETERS
METERS
MILES

CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET
To convert meters to feet multiply by 3.2808
To convert feet to meters multiply by .3048

SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 1 FOOT

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY DENVER, COLORADO 80225 OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

1	2	3	1 Texas City
2	3	4	2 Port Bolivar
3	4	5	3 Flaker
4	5	6	4 Virginia Point
5	6	7	5 The Jetties
6	7	8	6 Lake Como
7	8		7
8			8

ADJOINING 7.5' QUADRANGLE NAMES
2994-231

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, hard surface Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface Unimproved road
Interstate Route U. S. Route State Route

GALVESTON, TEXAS
PROVISIONAL EDITION 1994

MAPSCO, INC. 29094-C7-TF-024
6353 CAMP BOWIE #101B
FORT WORTH, 76116 817731-1666