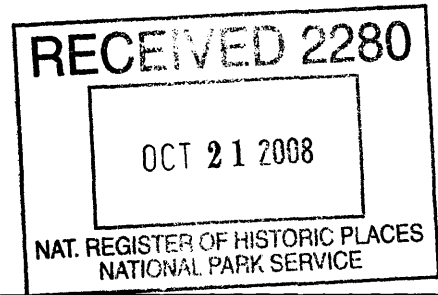


(Oct. 1990)

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



1136

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Roosevelt County Courthouse

OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: Roosevelt County Courthouse and Jail

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 100 W. 2nd Street

CITY OR TOWN: Portales

STATE: New Mexico **CODE:** NM **COUNTY:** Roosevelt **CODE:** 041

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A

VICINITY: N/A

ZIP CODE: 88130

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide x locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Katherine Stish

Signature of certifying official

15 October 2008

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

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.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

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): _____

for
Edson H. Beall

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

12-3-08

Date

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Public-local (county)

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	1	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	2 OBJECTS
	1	2 TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: *The Historic and Architectural Resources of the New Deal in New Mexico*

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: Government: courthouse

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: Government: courthouse

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Modern Movement: Art Deco

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION Concrete
WALLS Concrete
ROOF Asphalt
OTHER Brick

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-7).

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- 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 VALUE, 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: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Social History; Architecture

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1938-1939

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1938; 1939

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Robert E. Merrell, architect

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-8 through 8-11).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-12).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

- 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 (*Historic Preservation Division, Office of Cultural Affairs*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: approximately three acres

UTM REFERENCES Zone Easting Northing
 1 13 653280 3783820

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Block 16, Original townsite, Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the county courthouse.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: David Kammer, Ph.D.

ORGANIZATION: Consulting historian

DATE: June, 2008

STREET & NUMBER: 521 Aliso Dr. NE

TELEPHONE: (505) 266-0586

CITY OR TOWN: Albuquerque

STATE: NM

ZIP CODE: 87108

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS (see enclosed *Portales, New Mexico*, U.S.G.S. quadrangle map)

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-13)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS N/A

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Roosevelt County

STREET & NUMBER: 109 W. First Street

TELEPHONE: (575) 356-5307

CITY OR TOWN: Portales

STATE: NM

ZIP CODE: 88130

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National Park Service

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Section 7 Page 5

Roosevelt County Courthouse
Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

Description

Located in the center of Portales in a Shelbyville-style courthouse square, the Roosevelt County Courthouse is a four-story rectangular building. With multiple stepped planes denoting its upper floors, the reinforced concrete building exhibits a pyramid-like massing. Entries are centrally located along each of the facades with a curvilinear stairway leading to the slightly recessed entry of the principal southeast-facing façade. Suggestive of the building's Art Deco and modernistic design, engaged molded pilasters punctuate each section of the building, and grouped, paired, or single windows are set in bays with spandrels articulated with Zia motifs. Decorative metal grilles and metal door frames also denote each of the entries. Similar decorative elements appear in the frontispiece of the façade framed by fluted engaged pilasters and topped with a medallion design along the cornice. A cast stone bas relief of horsemen appears in a panel below. Changes to the building include the replacement of windows and of an outdoor staircase that led to the former third floor jail with an exterior vestibule offering access to the elevator, and repair to the exterior entry staircase. The building, however, continues to retain a high degree of integrity as to setting and location, design, materials and workmanship, conveying a strong feeling of a New Deal public works project.

The Roosevelt County Courthouse occupies an entire block of the Original Townsite plat in the center of downtown Portales. The county's earlier courthouse, constructed in 1903 when Roosevelt County was formed, previously occupied the same block. In order to accommodate citizens with county business, the grounds surrounding the new courthouse were reduced to permit parking and traffic circulation within the perimeter of the courthouse block. The remaining grounds are landscaped and include two small structures, a picnic gazebo and storage structure, and two objects, all dating within the last 25 years and considered noncontributing for this nomination (Photo1). Although U.S. 70 has been divided so that one-way traffic passes along two streets lining the courthouse, businesses along those streets as well as along the two other streets facing the courthouse contribute to the feeling of a center city courthouse square.

The building with the greatest massing and height within the central business corridor, the courthouse is a recognizable landmark with its stepped, pyramid-like upper stories and with its symmetrical pilaster-framed entries facing each of the adjacent streets (Photo 1). The basement, excavated to a depth of four feet, contains a concrete facing, and buff bricks face the first and second stories that are topped with a set-back molded concrete cornice. The third floor, site of the former county jail, and the fourth floor, initially a small medical ward for prisoners, step back significantly from the lower cube of the building, rendering the building's pyramid-like appearance while retaining the decorative details of the lower stories' concrete cornices. Engaged concrete pilasters punctuate the various elements composing each façade as well as each slightly projecting entry.

Double doors with hollow aluminum frames and one-half glazing and sidelights appear at each of the entries. Fixed transoms above the doors are decorated with a thunderbird motif grille. The principal entry with its slightly recessed doorway along the southeast façade is larger and more ornate than the other entries but

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Roosevelt County Courthouse
Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

nevertheless well-integrated into the overall composition of the building (Photo 2). Accessible from a symmetrical curvilinear staircase faced with a cast concrete wall, it consists of double doors flanked by sidelights designated as "stationary doors" in architect Robert E. Merrell's plans. A large fixed transom in three sections with a grille employing a thunderbird motif completes the entry. Two tiers of grouped windows broken by spandrels with a Zia motif and topped with a cast stone bas relief depicting horsemen with an Indian guide and a medallion design along the cornice complete the frontispiece. Other fenestration consists of columns of paired or single windows grouped within bays with similar decorative use of the Zia motif (Photo 3).

While the ground floor contains several county administrative offices as well as some mechanical rooms, the public spaces of the first and second floor reflect Merrell's use of decorative details as well as his historic sense of locale. Grey marble walls topped with a narrow beige plaster molding (now obscured by HVAC conduits in corridors but not stairways) line the walls of the central hall and main entry. Staircases leading to the main corridor are lined with hollow aluminum handrails attached to the wall with molded brackets and decorated with rosettes. First floor halls have terrazzo floors, and at the center of the hall in front of the staircase leading to the second floor courtroom, a five-color map of Roosevelt County rendered in marble chips is embedded across the floor.

The second floor courtroom with a seating capacity of 350 fills much of the second story with various related judicial offices surrounding it. The furniture is wood and the wall panels are oak veneer. As on the first floor radiators are covered with Art Deco inspired grilles. The third floor, site of the former county jail as well as the jailer's residence, consists of concrete floors and reinforced concrete walls with "tool proof bars." This area and the former prisoner medical ward on the fourth floor are now vacant.

As it approaches its 70th anniversary, the Roosevelt County Courthouse retains a high degree of integrity. In the mid-1990s, after consultation with the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, the county replaced the original metal casement windows in order to make the building more climatically efficient. Choosing Solex windows offering a double glaze, architects retained the earlier window dimensions as well as the same T-pattern of muntins in the original windows. During that same period a glass-encased vestibule offering handicapped access to the elevator was added at the northwest entry, replacing an earlier exterior metal staircase leading to the third floor jail (Photo 4). Neither of these additions, however, substantially detracts from the integrity of the building.

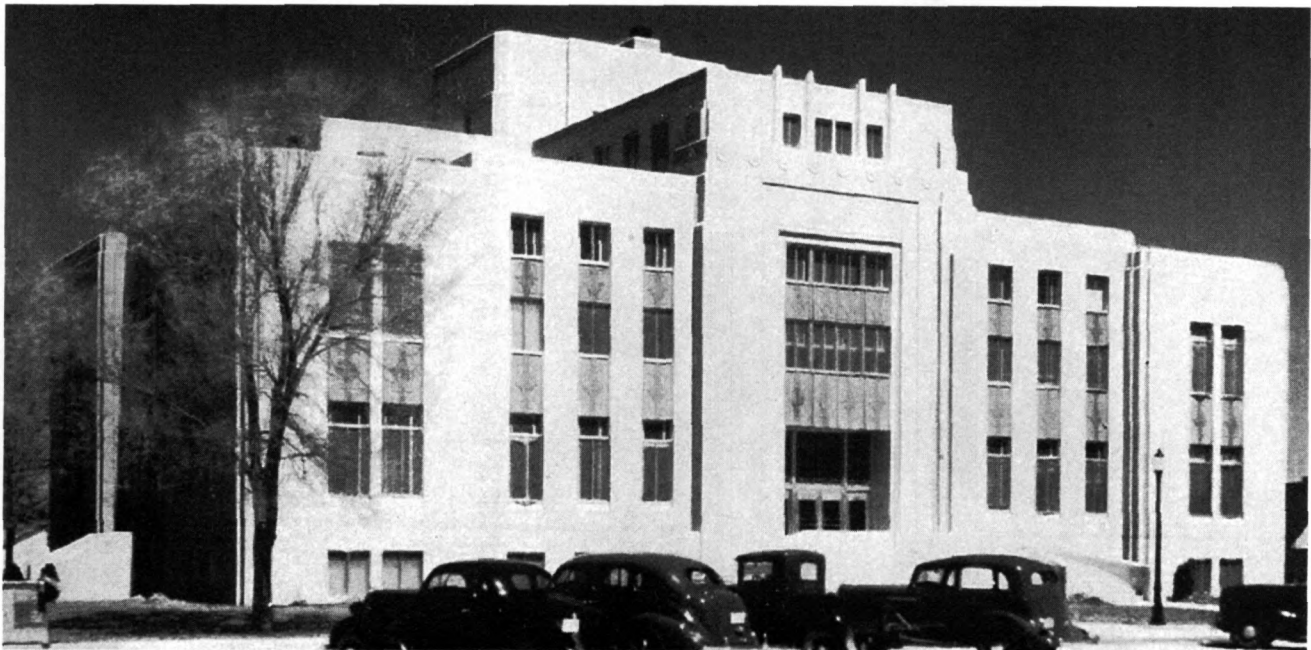
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Roosevelt County Courthouse
Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

Figure 7-1: Completed courthouse, c. 1939



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Roosevelt County Courthouse
Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

Statement of Significance

Shortly after its creation in 1903, Roosevelt County completed a two-story courthouse consisting of a frame construction with cement block walls. By the 1930s, many of the county's leaders felt that the building was inadequate, and in 1935 the county's Board of Commissioners applied to the Public Works Administration (PWA) for a grant to construct a new courthouse and jail. Although voters initially rejected a bond issue that would have added county funds to the Public Work Administrations (PWA) grant, in 1937 they approved a larger bond issue, and architect Robert E. Merrell supplied plans for a new courthouse. In December 1937 construction began, at times employing as many as 60 workers, with the new courthouse completed in January 1939. Funded, in part, with a grant from the PWA and a project that created jobs for some of the unemployed in Roosevelt County, the building is a good example of a New Deal public works project and is eligible under Criterion A. With its Art Deco and modernistic details, the building is architecturally significant and is eligible under Criterion C.

Context

Created from Chaves and Guadalupe counties in 1903 and named after President Theodore Roosevelt, the county developed quickly as a ranching and farming area. Much of the area's early prosperity was based upon the arrival of the Pecos Valley and Northeastern Railroad that linked the area to the Santa Fe Railroad in 1899 and permitted farmers and ranchers to ship their products to distant markets. Shortly after Portales was selected as the county seat, the Board of Commissioners undertook construction of a courthouse. Located just two blocks southeast of the railroad depot and occupying an entire block in the original townsite, the building with its four pedimented facades and four-sided clock tower emerged as the center of the growing community, with the surrounding grounds sites of public festivals and agricultural exhibits (*Portales Daily News* Sept. 6, 1937:1).

Despite the role that the courthouse square played in the life of the community, by the 1930s popular perception held the three-decade old courthouse to be a fire hazard. With inadequacies that included no heating system, no toilets, and no fireproof storage vaults for county records, leaders asserted that the building was "getting to a state of repair in which it will be condemned" (Roosevelt County Courthouse PWA file: np). Moreover, the County Jail, located several blocks from the courthouse was in "bad or worse repair than the Courthouse," and the Courtroom was "far too small and is ill arranged." Summarizing its evaluation of the courthouse, the report concluded that both it and the jail were felt "to be a reflection upon this progressive county."

To redress these inadequacies, the Board of Commissioners applied to the PWA for a grant to construct a new courthouse. During the New Deal several counties in New Mexico undertook courthouse construction or improvement projects under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), but more turned to the PWA.

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Roosevelt County Courthouse
Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

Generally more capital intensive and involving a larger scale of construction, PWA projects permitted skilled and semi-skilled workers who were not on work relief to perform specialized trade skills such as plumbing, steam fitting, carpentry and electrical work.

Since county courthouses, most often including jails, required these skills, in New Mexico ten counties constructed new courthouses, often with jails, using PWA grants and generally supplying additional funds through the sale of county bonds. In general, the PWA grants covered approximately 40-45% of the total building costs and the bonds the balance.

As early as 1935, Roosevelt County received approval of a PWA grant for about \$89,000 to undertake its courthouse and jail project. Moving ahead on the project, however, depended on county voters approving a bond issue. In September 1935 voters rejected the bond proposal by 120 votes with the greatest number of negative votes cast in the outlying communities of the county. Chagrined, county leaders accepted some of the blame for rejection, pleading over-confidence and failing to educate the voters as to the need for a new courthouse and jail. Coupled with these reasons was a general feeling that economic conditions in the county were so poor that voters were unwilling to assume a greater county indebtedness.

Working to keep the project alive, commissioners succeeded in convincing the state legislature to exempt Roosevelt County from a state requirement that two years elapse before a similar bond referendum could be put before voters. At the same time they requested that the PWA maintain approval for the project until such time that the county could "finance their portion of the funds" to complete the project (Roosevelt County Courthouse PWA file: np). By April 1937, the Chamber of Commerce, the *Portales Daily News*, and other civic leaders were advocating passage of the bond issue as the May election approached. To account for rising costs, the limits of the bond were raised from \$80,000 in 1935 to \$100,000. Assessing how circumstances had changed in two years, a newspaper article noted that "better conditions throughout the county with prospects for a good crop this year" made passage more likely (*Portales Daily News* April 6 1937:1). With the Chamber of Commerce offering voters transportation to the polls, on May 5, 1937 the bond referendum passed 1123-510.

Anxious not to lose PWA funding, by August the county had issued the new bonds and the New Mexico State Treasury had agreed to buy them. The following month the PWA approved initiation of the project, and the various departments and agencies housed in the old courthouse were dispersed around Portales. The county agent and school superintendent were housed at City Hall, the county treasurer and assessor at the Masonic Hall, the health department and WPA sewing room at the old post office, and the sheriff at the old city jail. Suggestive of the cooperation often found among New Deal agencies, a WPA project undertook the razing of the old courthouse. Salvageable materials were transported to the new fairgrounds, another WPA project, where they remain in use as a part of the livestock show barns.

Although it is unclear as to when the Board of Commissioners initially contracted with Robert E. Merrell to serve as the architect for the courthouse project, by October 1937 Merrell was completing the plans. Originally

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Roosevelt County Courthouse
Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

from Texas but having settled in nearby Clovis, New Mexico, Merrell had traveled in Europe during the 1920s and was familiar with the modernistic designs of Walter Gropius, Peter Behrens and other innovative designers (Breeze:69). Although some of Merrell's work made reference to popular revival styles, his most notable buildings, including the Clovis Hotel (1928-32) and the Curry County Courthouse (1936) reflected a modernism elaborated with Art Deco details. Working with a variety of materials including cast concrete, brick and aluminum, Merrell also found ways of incorporating a sense of place into his designs as with his use of Native American details in the Clovis Hotel and Zia motif in the Curry County Courthouse. He continued this practice in his design for the Roosevelt County Courthouse by including spandrels with stylized Zia symbols, aluminum grilles with thunderbird motifs, a bas relief depicting horsemen, and a map of the county embedded in the floor of the main corridor.

In November 1937, the Board of Commissioners received seven bids on the project and selected the C.S. Lambie Company of Amarillo, Texas with its lowest bid of \$167,217. In making the selection the commissioners agreed with the contractor's proposal to delay a decision on the installation of an elevator until the project had progressed sufficiently to determine whether any unforeseen contingencies might jeopardize the budget (*Portales Daily News* Dec. 1, 1937:1). Although office furnishings and equipment would finally raise the total cost of the project to \$198,164, few unanticipated costs arose, and the elevator was included (Non-federal PWA Projects Completed in New Mexico:2).

Over the next 13 months as the project moved to completion, between 30 and 70 workers under the supervision of R.K. Erhard labored at the work site with unskilled laborers drawn from the rolls of the Federal Employment Office in Clovis. The total cost of labor for the project was approximately 38% of the total budget and gave work relief to local citizens while providing Roosevelt County with a much-needed courthouse (PWA Grant Application:2). A 50 foot tower facilitated hoisting the concrete and tool-proof reinforcing beams that were installed above the second-story courtroom and around the third-story jail as well as for cell walls. Also included as a part of the jail were living quarters for the jailer, a kitchen to provide meals for inmates, and a small hospital room on the fourth, or "penthouse" floor.

By late summer of 1938 the exterior of the building was nearing completion and the county had contracted to purchase its furnishings from the Dorsey Company of Dallas. As the county fair approached, drawing farmers and ranchers to Portales, the *Portales Daily News* proclaimed that the new courthouse was "a monument to the progress of Roosevelt County." On January 5, 1939, the county celebrated the completion of the building with a parade that recognized the pioneers of the county, staging a square dance, fiddling contest, and basket lunch on the courthouse square.

The new building around which the celebrants gathered stood in marked contrast to its predecessor. Fireproof vaults had replaced the attic for the storage of county records; the building offered heating and amenities; a modern jail replaced the former jail located blocks away from the old courthouse. Perhaps most suggestive of the progress that boosters praised was the design of the new building itself. Necessarily massive to

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Roosevelt County Courthouse
Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

accommodate the expanded functions of a modern county courthouse, the building nevertheless reflected the aesthetics and local sensibilities of its designer, Robert E. Merrell. The use of stylized Zia and thunderbird motifs, the evocation of local settlement in the cast stone bas relief of horsemen, the cartographic depiction of Roosevelt County and its surroundings, and Merrell's use of Art Deco-inspired metal grilles throughout the interior resulted in one of his notable works.

Seven decades after its completion, the Roosevelt County Courthouse remains a significant building, both as a reminder of a PWA public works project and of Merrell's ability to merge modernistic design with details denoting his sense of place on the Llano Estacado. Civic leaders retain a high degree of pride in the landmark building and view it as a key element in a Main Street program to revitalize downtown Portales. Current plans include the conversion of the former jail to an exhibition venue for a photographic exhibit celebrating the New Deal.

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Roosevelt County Courthouse
Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

Bibliography

Breeze, Carla. *Pueblo Deco*. New York: Rizzoli Publications, 1990.

Burroughs, Jean M., ed. *Roosevelt County Heritage and History*. Portales, New Mexico: Bishop Printing Company, 1975.

Hicks, Gregory. "Roosevelt County Courthouse." Listed in the State Register of Cultural Properties, 1986.

Kammer, David. *The Historic and Architectural Resources of the New Deal in New Mexico*. Multiple Property Documentation Form prepared for the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, 1994.

Portales Daily News. Various issues, April, 1938-February, 1939.

Pratt, Boyd C., ed. "Directory of Historic New Mexico Architects." Unpublished manuscript, October, 1989.

"Profile of an Architect, Robert Merrell." *New Mexico Architecture* (July-August 1965:7, 20.)

Roosevelt County Courthouse PWA File. The file includes the application grant and various unpagged fact sheets regarding the courthouse construction project.

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Section Photo Page 13

Roosevelt County Courthouse
Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

Photographic Log

The following information pertains to all photographs unless otherwise noted:

Roosevelt County Courthouse

Portales, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

Photographer: David Kammer

Photographs taken: April 2008

Negatives on file with the Historic Preservation Division

Photo 1 of 4

East elevation, noncontributing object in foreground

Facing southwest

Photo 2 of 4

East entry detail

Facing northwest

Photo 3 of 4

East elevation detail

Facing west

Photo 4 of 4

West elevation, elevator shaft with exterior addition

Facing northeast