

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic ~~United States~~ Post Office and Federal Building

and/or common High Street Post Office; Federal Building

2. Location

street & number 135-149 High Street ___ not for publication

city, town Hartford ___ vicinity of congressional district 1st

state Connecticut code 09 county Hartford code 003

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name General Services Administration, Federal Building

street & number 450 Main Street

city, town Hartford ___ vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City and Town Clerk, Municipal Building

street & number 550 Main Street

city, town Hartford ___ vicinity of state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

State Register of Historic Places
title

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

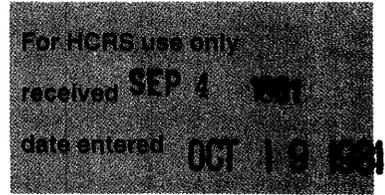
date 1981 ___ federal state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town Hartford ___ vicinity of state Connecticut

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Representation in Existing Surveys (continued)

Hartford Architecture, Volume One: Downtown. Hartford Architecture Con-
servancy, 1978.

Depository for Records: Stowe Day Memorial Library, 77 Forest Street,
Hartford, Connecticut.

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The United States Post Office and Federal Court Building in Hartford is a structure in the **Neo-classical style** designed by Malmfeldt, Adams, and Prentice, constructed from 1931-1933. Located on the west side of High Street in downtown Hartford, the building is near both rail and highway transportation facilities. Quadrangular in form, it fills entirely the block bounded by High Street, Foot Guard Place, Hoadley Place, and Church Street. The building is approximately 250 feet in length and 200 feet in width. The High Street facade and a portion of the side elevations on Church Street and Foot Guard Place are three stories in height. The rear and central portion of the building is of one story on a raised basement. Thus, the second and third stories are u-shaped in plan. (See Plan 1). The building is of steel frame construction resting on a granite foundation and water table. The exterior is sheathed in a light-colored, marble ashlar. Landscaping, limited to the High Street side of the building, consists of a curving, free-standing balustrade of granite with armillary spheres mounted at either end. A flagpole is set at the center of this composition.

The High Street facade of the Post Office Building consists of a central section flanked by projecting wings of somewhat lower elevation. The central portion of the facade is eleven bays in width. Marble pilasters separate the bays. Each pilaster is decorated with an incised five-pointed star. Between the bays, aluminium spandrels divide the casement windows of each floor. Spandrels between the first and second floors bear American eagles as represented on the great seal of the United States. Plain, recessed panels are found between the second and third floors. The frieze above both pilasters and windows bears the inscription:

Across unbounded reaches of the sky
Over long trails upon the land
By lakes by rivers and the trackless sea

In tempest and in calm by day and night
We speed at your command and bear
The tidings and the treasures of mankind.

Low-relief figures on horseback-in the act of transferring a message-divide the two halves of the inscription. At either end of the cornice perch aluminium eagles with uplifted wings. (Photograph 1).

The projecting wings at either end of the High Street facade contain monumental entrances approached by granite stairs. Fluted columns with modified Corinthian capitals frame the entrances. The capitals are embellished with stylized representations of the eagle on the great seal of the U.S. Between the bases of the columns, glass entrance doors are set in a one-story surround of polished black marble. The great seal, carved in the same material, is placed above the doors. A two-story grill of aluminium, with abstract leaves and stars, covers the casement windows which light the second and third floor lobbies. Blank walls on either side of the entrances have decorative ventilating grills set into the wall surface. Narrow pilasters at the corners have capitals forming part of a molded string course below which are incised stars. A plain frieze above the entrance columns and string course supports a projecting cornice with a cresting of palmettes and scrolls. (Photo-

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(graph 2).

The side elevations on Footguard Place and Church Street have nine bays of identical design to those of the High Street facade. The frieze, cornice, and cresting from the High Street entrances continue around the sides. (Photograph 3). The Church Street elevation has a raised basement with casement windows.

The rear of the Post Office consists of one story above a raised basement. The basement level has motor vehicle entrances on Hoadley Place. Grills of similar design to those over the High Street entrances afford ventilation to the basement, which is now utilized for parking. Factory windows on the first floor have been replaced with modern casement windows. A raised block with cresting contains ventilating equipment. (Photograph 4).

The High Street entrances to the Post Office lead to lobbies at each end of the building (Photograph 5). Terrazzo floors in the lobbies have an inset design representing Hartford, with a hart crossing wavy lines symbolic of water. (Photograph 6). The walls are of polished marble. Elevators occupy arched recesses. Opposite these, stairways with aluminium railings lead to the upper floor lobbies. (Photograph 7). The vaulted ceilings are painted blue with metallic gold stars applied to the surface. Suspended from the ceilings in each lobby are lighting fixtures with spheroid aluminium frames. (Photograph 5).

A long foyer with terrazzo flooring and marble walls connects the two lobbies. (Photograph 8). Inlaid floor designs represent letters prepared for mailing. Offices are located at either end of the foyer and between the foyer and the High Street facade, which it parallels. On the opposite side of the foyer was located working space for postal clerks. Windows for postal services have been filled in with marble matching that of the walls. Doors to offices and work spaces are of metal construction with octagonal panels. The foyer terminates at either end with two black marble columns inlaid with aluminium. Map murals between the columns depict the continents of the world. (Photograph 9). An ornamental plaster frieze with triglyphs and metopes continues around the entire foyer. The ceiling is of ornamental plaster with medallions bearing busts in low relief of Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. Aluminium and glass lighting fixtures repeat the star motif found elsewhere in the building. (Photograph 10).

The offices and work space on either side of the foyer were designed in a utilitarian fashion for maximum efficiency in postal operations. Special features included secret entrances and lookouts for Postal Inspectors observing operations in the work area. Renovations to the building in 1967 and 1980 have removed or obscured these features.

The second and third floors are similar in plan to the first. Stairways from the entrance lobbies lead to lobbies on each floor. A corridor connects the two lobbies on each floor. Extensions of the corridor provide access to the offices located on the north and south sides of the building. (see Plan 1). Corridor walls are plastered, with a marble dado. Ceiling heights in the second and third floor corridors have been lowered. A courtroom on the third floor with a curved ceiling and Georgian revival details was remodelled in 1967, causing loss of its distinguishing features.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below					
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)		

Specific dates 1931-1933

Builder/Architect Malmfeldt, Adams, and Prentice

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The United States Post Office and Federal Court Building in Hartford, built from 1931-1933, is an outstanding example of a major governmental building by the local architectural firm of Malmfeldt, Adams, and Prentice. Designed and constructed under the supervision of the Federal government, the Post Office exhibits close affinity to the work of Paul Phillipe Cret, exponent of "starved classicism." The building is distinguished by the monumental character of the facade, with its emphasis on massive entrances, by a carefully developed iconography, and by the outstanding quality of design and workmanship. (Criterion C). The U.S. Post Office and Federal Court Building also marks a significant change in the relationship between the Federal government and the architectural profession. Although the Public Buildings Acts of 1926 and 1930 had authorized the Treasury Department to retain private architects for Federal design work, few commissions were awarded. The Office of the Supervising Architect continued to be responsible for almost all Federal building design. The selection of Malmfeldt, Adams, and Prentice for the Hartford Post Office was unusual, being prompted by political pressure from Hartford legislators, and was subject to strict scrutiny by the Office of the Supervising Architect. Meanwhile, the architectural profession, led by the American Institute of Architects, continued to demand that design work be contracted to private firms. The ~~Public Works Administration~~, set up in 1933, responded to this demand by delegating a greater role to architects in private practice. The U.S. Post Office in Hartford was cited in The Architectural Forum as an example for private architects to follow in dealings with the Public Works Administration. Thus, the Hartford Post Office presaged the beginnings of an important shift in Federal policy. (Criterion A).

Malmfeldt, Adams, and Prentice skillfully treated the facade of the Post Office building. A central section divided by austere pilasters into vertical strips is contrasted with blank-walled, projecting wings at either end. The symmetry of the building is carefully maintained, and by lowering the height of the projecting wings, the architects compensate for the otherwise increased mass. Additional emphasis is lent to the wings by the monumental character of the entrances. This facade treatment is similar to the work of Paul Phillipe Cret, an architect who exerted tremendous influence on the design of public buildings in this period. The use of extremely simplified pilasters to articulate the facade is typical of Cret's work, and is evident in the Hartford County Building on Washington Street in Hartford, designed with Smith and Bassette in 1929. Location of entrances in well-defined wings or extensions at either end of the facade is also a common characteristic of "starved classicism," as Cret's work was often referred to. Many public buildings, including Post Offices, were built in this manner. Few were as successful as the Hartford Post Office, where the bold handling of the building's mass is evident.

The decorative scheme of the building is noteworthy, utilizing iconography

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to locate the building spatially, to define its function, and to proclaim its ownership. The armillary spheres mounted outside are representative of the celestial order, being ancient astronomical instruments. Inside, map murals at either end of the foyer represent the continents of the earth, while the symbolic representation of Hartford is set into the floors of the entrance lobbies. The frieze inscription and relief on the facade announce the task of the Post Office, to bear the "tidings of mankind." In the terrazzo floors of the foyer are set letters prepared for mailing, relating the more abstract sentiment of the inscription to the practical reality. The ownership of the building is indicated clearly by the proliferation of eagles above entrances, on capitals, and on the corners. Repetition of the star motif in grillwork, lighting fixtures, and ceilings reinforces the identity of the building, as do the medallions with Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln.

The design of these decorative details is thoroughly Art Deco in nature. All decorative motifs are rendered abstractly, in rectilinear patterns. The execution of the designs reveals careful attention to workmanship, yielding highly finished results.

The genesis of the High Street Post Office may be dated to 1926. In that year, editorials appeared in the Hartford newspapers decrying overcrowding at the existing Post Office on Central Row. The need for construction of a larger, more modern facility was evident, it was argued. Another rationale advanced was that the existing Post Office, built during the 1880s in the French Second Empire style, was an offensive reminder of the excesses of Victorian taste. Located on the grounds of the Old State House, the Post Office was viewed by the editorialists as an obstacle to the proper restoration of the older building.¹

A later editorial decried the use of Federal architects in the design of postal facilities, claiming that the results were insensitive to local needs and desires.² After considerable local agitation and pressure from legislators, the firm of Malmfeldt, Adams, and Prentice were retained to design a new Post Office on High Street. Although the Public Buildings Acts of 1926 and 1930 had allowed the hiring of private architects, very few such contracts were entered into, the majority of Federal design work being carried out by the Office of the Supervising Architect. The use of a local architectural firm was regarded as unusual, and was remarked on in the Hartford newspapers.³

The design work of Malmfeldt, Adams, and Prentice was subjected, however, to stringent requirements by the Office of The Supervising Architect. The specialized nature of the postal service necessitated careful planning of work space and the provision of private entrances, ladders, and look-outs to allow postal inspectors to observe unseen the activities of the employees. Construction began in 1931 and was completed in 1933. Meanwhile, the loss of commissions and the forced bankruptcy of many architectural firms in the Great Depression resulted in increasing pressure on the government by the American Institute of Architects to open Federal design work to private architects. Roosevelt's New Deal of 1933 created thousands of public commissions for architects, and materially weakened the Office of the Super-

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vising Architect, which was relegated to the Procurement Division of the Public Buildings Branch of the Treasury, losing its independent status.4.

In 1933, the September issue of Architectural Forum devoted most of the magazine to a series of articles on planning public buildings, for the benefit of architects undertaking federal contracts. The article featured photographs and plans of Post Offices to familiarize architects with the requirements of postal buildings. The High Street Post Office in Hartford was the first example given. Instructions were also prepared by the Office of the Supervising Architect for the use of private architects hired to do public building work. It is probable that experience dealing with private architects such as Malmfeldt, Adams, and Prentice was incorporated into the instructions. The previous experience of the Supervising Architect's Office with outside architectural firms was limited, and the recently completed Post Office in Hartford offered an excellent example of cooperation, besides incorporating the most recent advances in post office design. 5.

Footnotes

1. "Hartford's Overcrowded Post Office," Hartford Times, December 8, 1926.
2. "Hartford and Philadelphia Post Offices," Hartford Times, December 13, 1926.
3. "New Post Office and Federal Court Building Costing \$1,030,000 to be Ready for Opening March 25," Hartford Times, March 4, 1933.
4. Craig, Lois, and Federal Architecture Project Staff. The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics, and Symbols in United States Government Buildings. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, n.d. (1977), page 327.
5. "Post Offices," The Architectural Forum, September, 1933, pages 223-5. (In a series entitled "The Planning of Public Buildings.")

T. Merrill Prentice, surviving partner of the firm of Adams, Malmfeldt, and Prentice, was unable to give any information on the decision to award the design of the Post Office to a private architectural firm. He did state, however, that he and Adams were in partnership together in New York when informed about the opportunity to design the Post Office. The two went to Washington to secure the contract. Adams and Prentice then opened an office in Hartford in conjunction with Carl Malmfeldt, a local architect. Telephone conversation with T. Merrill Prentice July 31, 1981.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Craig, Lois and Federal Architecture Project Staff. The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics, and Symbols in United States Government Buildings. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1977.
"Hartford and Philadelphia Post Offices," Hartford Times, December 13, 1926.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1.72
Quadrangle name Hartford North Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000
UMT References **ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**
UTM NOT VERIFIED

A	1 8	6 9 2 7 9 0	4 6 2 6 6 1 0	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification
A complete boundary description may be obtained by reference to Map 419, Block 4, Lot 1 in the Office of the Hartford City Assessor.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dale S. Plummer, National Register Nominations Consultant

organization Connecticut Historical Commission date 7/28/80

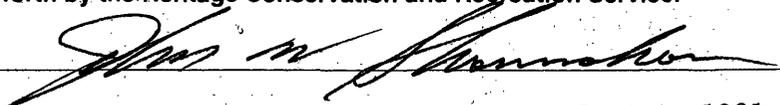
street & number 59 South Prospect Street telephone 566-3005

city or town Hartford state Connecticut

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:
 national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date July 1, 1981

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

 date 7/28/81
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:  date 10/19/81
Chief of Registration

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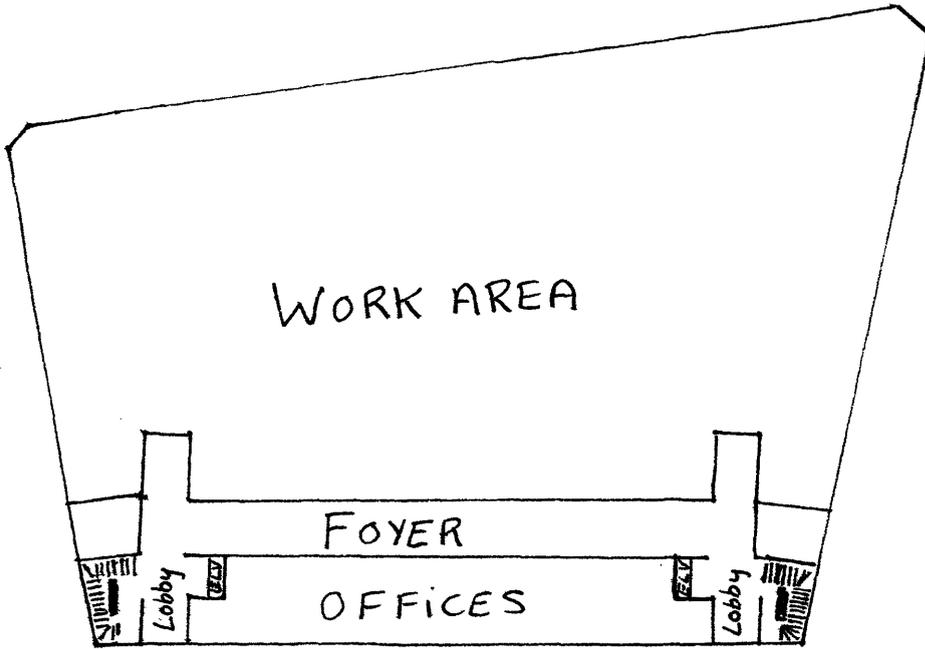
Major Bibliographical References (continued)

"Hartford's Dreams of Years Realized in New Government Structure," Hartford Times, March 25, 1933.

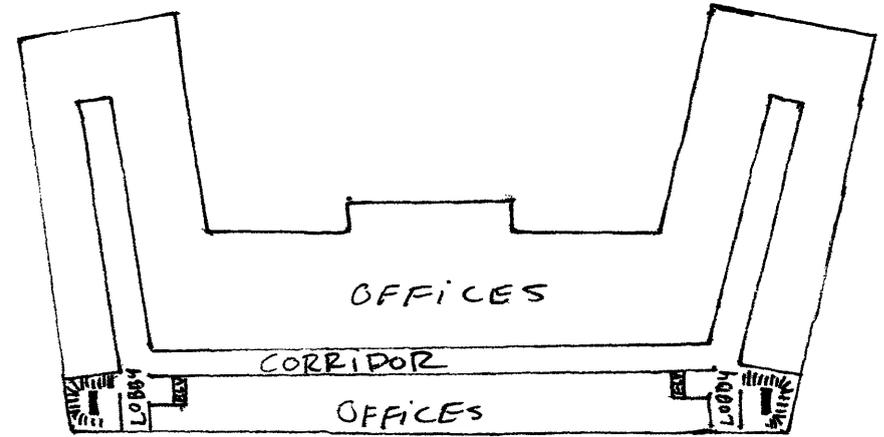
"Hartford's Overcrowded Post Office," Hartford Times, December 8, 1926.

"New Post Office and Federal Court Building Costing \$1,030,000 to be Ready for Opening March 25," Hartford Times, March 4, 1933.

"Post Offices," The Architectural Forum, September, 1933, pages 223-5. (In a series entitled "The Planning of Public Buildings").



First Floor



Second Floor



OCT 19 1981

PLAN 1

UNITED STATES POST OFFICE AND FEDERAL COURT BUILDING
HIGH STREET, HARTFORD, CONN.

NOT TO SCALE

D.S. Plummer 3/81