

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

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

For HCRS use only

received **NOV 24 1982**

date entered

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

**1. Name**

historic Jefferson County Courthouse

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number 716 21st Street North N/A not for publication

city, town Birmingham N/A vicinity of congressional district 6

state Alabama code 01 county Jefferson code 073

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<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 Jefferson County Commission

street & number 716 21st Street North

city, town Birmingham N/A vicinity of state Alabama

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Jefferson County Courthouse

street & number 716 21st Street North

city, town Birmingham state Alabama

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Jefferson County Historic Sites Survey; Downtown Birmingham Historic Sites Survey  
title has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1972, 1976; 1977  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Jefferson County Historical Commission; Birmingham Historical Society

city, town Birmingham state Alabama

## 7. Description

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

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Jefferson County Courthouse is a nine-story structure of granite and limestone designed in the Art Deco style by Holabird and Root of Chicago. Its east elevation, set close to the property line, looms over 21st Street. The west elevation fronts on Woodrow Wilson Park, the green space that terminates the city's major north-south axis, 20th Street. On the park side, wings projecting into the park create a courtyard entry that faces City Hall (1950) across long reflecting pools (1930s). The building's distinguishing features are its formal composition and bas-relief sculpture. It establishes its importance through an imposing manipulation of mass, proportions, and scale, exemplified in the restrained, monumental entry.

Bas-relief sculpture adds subtle and sometimes elegant decorative detailing to the facade. Particularly notable are the series of sculptures by Leo Friedlander symbolizing attributes associated with the seat of justice and cultural and political influences from the county's past. Over the west entrance the panels depict the Indians, the Spanish, the French, early American settlement, the Confederacy, and the English. Other panels of the building symbolize vigilance, power, justice, and mercy. Columns topped with the American motif of New World corn flank the main entrance. Handsome Art Deco lanterns also mark the entrances.

The building on the interior is essentially functional, many offices having been remodeled from time to time as needs required, but there are a few notable features. In the courthouse lobby, two 17 1/2-by-8-foot murals painted by well-known Chicago artist John Warner Norton depict a romantic conception of the agrarian Old South and the industrial New South. The brass elevator doors have industrial scenes in low-relief. In the county attorney's office is a 16-by-20-foot marble floor map of Jefferson County with roads delineated in bronze. It is said to have been made by artisans under the Works Progress Administration.

Adjoining the courthouse to the north is an annex built in 1963-64. It was designed by the prominent local architectural firm Charles H. McCauley Associates in the International style. Its materials, form and proportions, siting on axis, and overall restraint allow it to coexist comfortably with the main structure.

## 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/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1929-1932

**Builder/Architect** Holabird and Root; Jack B. Smith

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Jefferson County Courthouse is politically significant as the seat of county government since the early 1930s and architecturally significant as a major public structure designed by a leading Chicago firm of national reputation, Holabird and Root. Of particular note is the quality of the bas-relief sculptures on the exterior of the building (probably the finest in Birmingham) and the successful integration of sculpture and architecture. The inclusion of sculpture and painting as part of the original design reflects Art Deco attitudes about architecture and the importance of public buildings. Moreover, the decorative emphasis on local history and industry provide insight into the cultural concerns of the late 20s and early 30s and the city's image as the industrial leader of the South. Chicago sculptor Leo Friedlander was commissioned to design the bas-relief panels after Holabird and Root architect Jack Smith, a Birmingham native, had studied the county's history extensively. The county commission reviewed all designs, in one instance suggesting that a panel with an ocean liner in the background substitute motifs that had more meaning locally--smokestacks, blast furnaces, and electrical transmission lines.

The public lobby space on the main floor of the courthouse contains the most significant interior features, including the two John Warner Norton murals and the low-relief brass elevator doors depicting industrial scenes. The marble county map on the floor of the county attorney's office is also noteworthy.

The relocation of the courthouse to the 21st Street site in 1929 was a major factor in shifting downtown activity northward to what had traditionally been the residential section of the city. With the Birmingham Public Library (1927), it helped form the nucleus for the county and municipal complex that exists around Woodrow Wilson Park today.

The Courthouse Annex (1963-64) relates to the original building by materials, monolithic form and proportions, siting, and general restraint.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Marjorie L. White, Downtown Birmingham. (Birmingham: 1977); "Courthouse is Emblematic of County", May 24, 1931, Birmingham newspaper clipping; "Courthouse remains. City's Wall of Jericho," Birmingham Post-Herald, April 26, 1982.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.34

Quadrangle name Birmingham North

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

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Zone Easting Northing

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Downtown Birmingham. Block 22, parcels 2,3,4,5,6,7,8 . 250'x510'

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Alice M. Bowsher

organization Kidd, Wheeler & Plosser Architects

date July 28, 1982

street & number P. O. Box 11653

telephone (205) 251-0125

city or town Birmingham

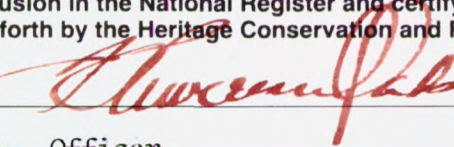
state Alabama

## 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.

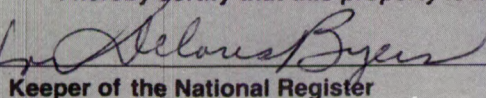
State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 11-10-82

For HCRS use only

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

  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 12/27/82

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

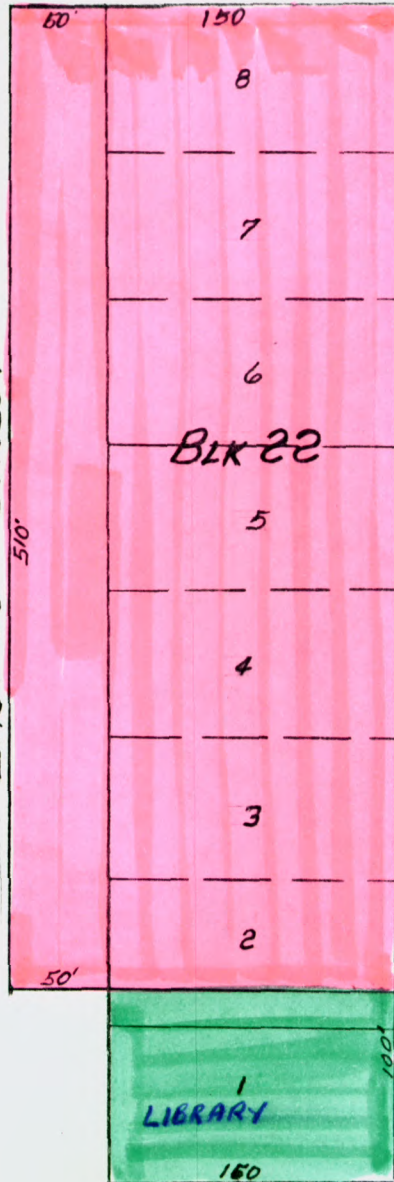
8<sup>TH</sup>

AVENUE

EAST 20<sup>TH</sup> STREET

STREET

21<sup>ST</sup>



PARK

AVENUE

Jefferson County Courthouse

1" = 100'