

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED FEB 29 1980

DATE ENTERED JUN 30 1980

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC ~~UNITED STATES~~ Post Office - (~~Front Street Station~~)

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

1 North Front Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Memphis

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

8th

STATE

Tennessee

CODE

COUNTY

Shelby

CODE

2 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 type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (if applicable)

STREET & NUMBER

Headquarters, Southern Region, U. S. Postal Service

CITY, TOWN

Memphis,

VICINITY OF

STATE

TN 38166

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Shelby County Register

STREET & NUMBER

Shelby County Office Building, 160 N. Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Memphis, Tennessee 38103

STATE

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

NONE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

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"/> MOVED	DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED			
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED				

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The United States Custom House, Court House, and Post Office Building has prominently marked the intersection of Madison Avenue and Front Street since 1876. Its appearance, however, has been significantly changed from its original design on the occasion of two different major additions and renovations. Thus the building today represents three buildings in one-- the original design of 1876, an addition of 1903, and the final remodeling of 1929-30.

Under the direction of Supervising Architect James G. Hill of the Treasury Department, a 3-story stone structure of Italian Villa style was erected beginning with the groundbreaking in 1876 and culminating with its first occupation by tenants in 1885. Flanked by two towers rising over 100 feet on the north and south ends, the building visually terminated the western end of Madison Avenue with its impressive facade. The original exterior masonry walls are still visible in the basement. Measuring 147' by 68', the Custom House emerged as a significant landmark along the developing "Cotton Row" of Front Street and as a reference point on the Mississippi River bluffs.

The east facade of the original building featured a slightly projecting center section topped by a pediment with a grouping of 3 rounded-arched windows on the 2nd/3rd levels and an arched 1st floor entrance. The rest of the facade had rounded-arched windows on the 1st/2nd floors and square windows on the 3rd floor. The roof was topped by an elaborate low balustrade.

In 1903 the Custom House was remodeled under the direction of Supervising Architect James Knox Taylor and a new wing in the same style as the original was added to the west of the original building almost doubling the building area. This wing is still visible and forms the center section of the west facade. An interior light well was formed between the west facade of the original building and the new addition. Included in the renovations were terrazzo floors; marble wainscoting, trim and borders, and a new elevator.

With the year 1929 came extensive plans for a remodeling of the Custom House which saw it virtually rebuilt in the Italian Renaissance Revival style as a cost of \$1,500,000. The Supervising Architect was James A. Wetmore. Responsible for the choice of the final building design was the powerful Tennessee Senator, Kenneth Douglas McKellar, a native Memphian.

This radical alteration involved the replacement of the original towers on the north and south by 3-story wings, as well as the construction of an entirely new east facade of limestone covering the pre-existing masonry facade. At this time granite steps were added to the main entrance on the east and 12" high bronze letters were placed high on the east facade reading "United States Custom House, Court House, and Post Office." The new Renaissance Revival style facades of 1929 show a striking resemblance to the palaces on the north side of the Place de la Concorde in Paris, designed in 1753-70 by J.A. Gabriel.

(Continued)

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The existing facades are limestone with rusticated stone jointing on the first floor. At this level are rounded-arched windows and glass doors with bronze frames and lunettes. These doors are elegantly detailed with bronze rosettes. At the bottom of each door is a bronze bas-relief of a Pony Express rider. Marking each side of the entrances are large Gothic lanterns. In front of the building is a large low-walled polished red granite memorial garden area inscribed to honor veterans of World War II and the Korean War. In 1960 this memorial replaced a large fountain of controversial modern design which had caused problems for postal workers inside the building because of the glare it created. The zero milestone from which all distances to and from Memphis are calculated is located in front of this memorial.

The second and third stories of the front facade are distinguished by paired Corinthian columns in the center section of the building. These are set away from the 2nd/3rd story facade thus forming a shallow porch and adding to the monumental quality of the building. This center section is flanked by 3-story wings on the north and south which protrude slightly beyond the columned center section. The 2nd/3rd story facades here feature Corinthian pilasters interspersed with windows. Ornate friezes occur above the 2nd story windows. The roof is defined by a low balustrade.

The front doors afford entrance into the monumental lobby via individual bronze and glass entrance vestibules with coffered bronze ceilings. The lobby walls and floor are Ross pink marble tile with a honed finish. The wainscoting is golden-veined Tavernelle, also with a honed finish with corridor floor borders of pink Tennessee marble. The lobby is graced by an elegant colonnade of paired and single marble Corinthian columns and pilasters with plaster capitals. The coffered plaster ceiling is distinguished by an intricate Greek fret around each coffer. Suspended art deco light fixtures illuminate the lobby. The west wall is punctuated by post office service windows, now closed. At the south end of the lobby a marble stairway ascends to the 2nd floor. Nearby is an elevator with its original bronze doors.

The remainder of the first floor is largely devoted to mail processing functions. Customer service activities, including sales windows and post office boxes are located in the north wing. At the rear of the first floor are loading docks with access to the service driveway, on the west side of the building. In the full basement are located the mechanical equipment rooms and other maintenance functions. The second and third floors are devoted to various Postal Service administrative offices. Interior office details originally included exposed ceiling beams of cherry, fireplaces, and private bath facilities for certain judges. On the third floor, in the center and oldest section of the building is located the former federal court room which features a high ornamented coffered ceiling.

(Continued)

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Other alterations occurred in 1965 with a \$750,000 remodeling job. Ceilings were lowered, central air conditioning added, the old maple wood floors were replaced with asphalt plank, and the ceramic tile 2nd/3rd story floors were replaced with terrazzo. Most offices received vinyl tile flooring. The plumbing and electrical systems were revamped, five skylights over the first floor were replaced by steel roof decking, and aluminum windows were added.

9 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 type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" 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				

Treasury Dept. Supervising Architects:
 1876--James G. Hill; 1903--James Knox

SPECIFIC DATES 1876; 1903; 1929-30 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Taylor; 1929-30--J.A. Wetmore

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

For almost 100 years since its artifact-filled cornerstone was laid July 1, 1879, the United States Custom House, Court House and Post Office has played an important role in the civic life of Memphis. Its significance stems from its associations with important historical figures and government functions and from its unusual architectural evolution of style. The present structure represents a superb local example of the Italian Renaissance Revival style applied on a grand, monumental scale to a public building on a prominent site at the heart of downtown Memphis. The original building has undergone two major additions and renovations in 1903 and in 1929-30.

Perhaps the most famous name associated with the Custom House was the powerful Senator from Tennessee, Kenneth Douglas McKellar, who served from 1926-1952. McKellar's office was located in the building during the last 10 years of his term. In 1929 McKellar personally asked the Supervising Architect of the Treasury, Col. James A. Wetmore, to have the renovation plans for the front facade reworked into a design of more elaborate detail. The end result of the 1929 addition apparently pleased McKellar for he indicated that its architecture fit in harmoniously "with that of the Shelby County Court House, the new Bank of Commerce and other ornamental buildings of the city." Other prominent Memphians having offices in the building included Judge John D. Martin and District Judge Marion Boyd.

In addition to providing offices for these well-known individuals, the Custom House through the years housed numerous federal agencies and offices including the Circuit and District courts, the Light House Inspector, the Secret Service, the Customs Inspector, the U.S. Engineers, the Weather Bureau and the Dept. of Agriculture. In recent years it has been occupied solely by the U.S. Postal Service.

Architecturally the building's significance is derived from its prominent role as a definer of urban space, visually terminating the west end of Madison Avenue with its imposing monumental facade. Originally an imposing twin-towered example of the Italian Villa style, the remodeling of 1929-30 transformed the building according to the ornamented Italian Renaissance style, modeled on the palaces of the Place de la Concorde in Paris. As an indication of the significance of this site, the zero milestone marker, from which all distances are calculated to and from Memphis, is located immediately in front of the building's main entrance.

The significance of the U.S. Custom House, Court House and Post Office lies in its century-long associations with the public life of the community, and also in its role as a monumental work of public architecture, symbolizing the dignity and power of the federal government.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Anderson-Smith, Mervin, Interview, June 1978

"Ask Bids Dec. 19 For Post Office: McKellar Lauds Design Chosen For New Building," The Commercial Appeal, November 14, 1929

(Continued)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2.51 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A | 15 | 768 | 366 | 3892950

B | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

C | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

D | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

see enclosed material - photocopy of legal description rec'd 6/17/80

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James F. Williamson, Jr.

July 17, 1978

ORGANIZATION

James F. Williamson, Jr., Architect

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

2004 Lincoln American Tower

TELEPHONE (901)

526-2800

CITY OR TOWN

Memphis, Tennessee 38103

STATE

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES

NO

NONE

Robert L. Sawyer
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

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

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

D. L. Warner *D. L. Warner*

TITLE Director, Office of Real Estate

DATE MAR 4 1980

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

W. Ray Luce
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 6/30/80

ATTEST: *Kristin J. O'Connell*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 6/19/80

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

"Post Office Building Gets Improvements," Press-Scimitar, August 20, 1965

"Post Office Exterior Will Be Remodeled," The Commercial Appeal, June 22, 1929

"Post Office To Be Host To Memphians," The Commercial Appeal, July 24, 1932

"The Custom House Corner Stone," Weekly Public Ledger, July 1, 1879

Hill, James G., Supervising Architect, Dept. of Treasury, "Working Drawings, Stone-Work, U.S. Custom House, Court House and Post Office," Architectural working drawings, July 22, 1880; Jan. 26, 1884.

Taylor, James Know, Supervising Architect, Dept. of Treasury, "Working Drawings, Extension: U.S. Custom House, Court House and Post Office, Memphis, Tennessee," Architectural working drawings, February 3, 1903.

Wetmore, J.A., Acting Supervising Architect, Dept. of Treasury, "Working Drawings, U.S. Custom House, Court House, and Post Office, Memphis, Tenn.," Architectural Working Drawings, October 5, 1929.



Photographic Documentation

United States Custom House, Court House and Post Office
1 North Front Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photographer:

Alan Karchmer
Architectural View
1703 Lincoln American Tower
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photograph Number:

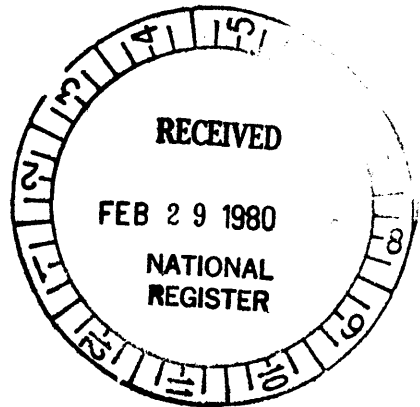
One

Date of Photograph:

June 1978

Description of View:

View of East and South Facades
from southeast corner of Front Street
and Madison Avenue



Photographic Documentation

United States Custom House, Court House and Post Office
1 North Front Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photographer:

Alan Karchmer
Architectural View
1703 Lincoln American Tower
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photograph Number:

Two

Date of Photograph:

June 1978

Description of View:

View of Front Facade, looking
west from Fourth Street along
Madison Avenue



Photographic Documentation

United States Custom House, Court House, and Post Office
1 North Front Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photographer:

Alan Karchmer
Architectural View
1703 Lincoln American Tower
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photograph Number:

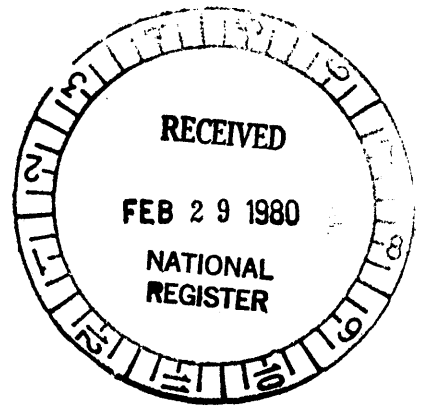
Three

Date of Photograph:

June 1978

Description of View:

View of North and West Facades,
looking southeast



Photographic Documentation

United States Custom House, Court House, and Post Office
1 North Front Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photographer:

Alan Karchmer
Architectural View
1703 Lincoln American Tower
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photograph Number:

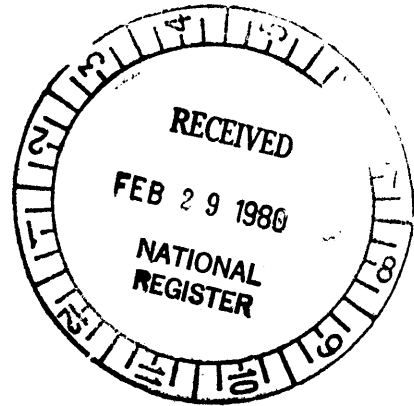
Four

Date of Photograph:

June 1978

Description of View:

Detail of Front Facade, looking
west



Photographic Documentation

United States Custom House, Court House and Post Office
1 North Front Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photographer:

Alan Karchmer
Architectural View
1703 Lincoln American Tower
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photograph Number:

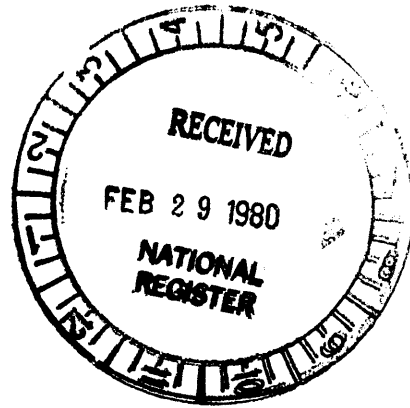
Five

Date of Photograph:

June 1978

Description of View:

Detail of Front Street entrance
showing bronze doors and Gothic
lanterns



Photographic Documentation

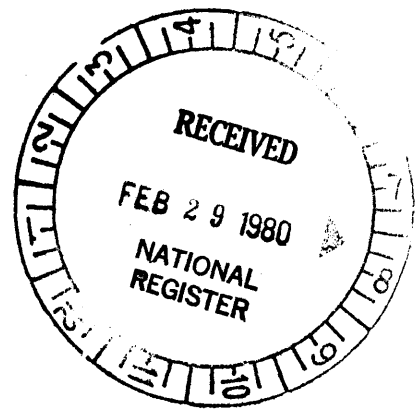
United States Custom House, Court House and Post Office
1 North Front Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photographer: Alan Karchmer
Architectural View
1703 Lincoln American Tower
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photograph Number: Six

Date of Photograph: June 1978

Description of View: Main lobby of building, looking south



Photographic Documentation

United States Custom House, Court House and Post Office
1 North Front Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photographer: Alan Karchmer
Architectural View
1703 Lincoln American Tower
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Photograph Number: Seven

Date of Photograph: June 1978

Description of View: View of interior light well,
showing partial west facade
of original building

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