

PH 036171x

DATA SHEET

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	JAN 21 1976
DATE ENTERED	JUN 3 1976

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

U.S. Post Office

AND/OR COMMON

Federal Building and Courthouse

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

1800 Fifth Avenue, North

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Birmingham

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

Sixth

STATE

Alabama

CODE

COUNTY

Jefferson

CODE

**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 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	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<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** General Services Administration

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

Region 4

STREET & NUMBER

1776 Peachtree Street

CITY, TOWN

Atlanta

STATE

Georgia

VICINITY OF

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Jefferson County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

716 North 21st Street

CITY, TOWN

Birmingham

STATE

Alabama

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

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"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" 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 U.S. Federal Building and Courthouse, originally the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, was completed in 1921 from designs executed in 1916 during the tenure of James A. Wetmore as Acting Supervising Architect of The Treasury (1915-1933). Occupying the block on the north side of Fifth Avenue between 18th & 19th Streets, the building extends for more than 375' along Fifth Avenue and along the side streets for about 165'. The principal (Fifth Avenue) facade includes a fourteen bay central colonnade flanked on either side by an entrance pavilion and wing. These wings extends back so that the entire mass of the building creates an attenuated U. The building was originally two stories high above a full basement. In 1940 a two storey addition was constructed, appearing as a one storey attic with a hipped roof, now surmounted by elevator penthouses and air shafts. The building is framed in steel and concrete, and constructed of brick bearing walls faced with white marble on the street facades and the back of the wings. The remainder of the rear wall is of light colored face brick. The pitched surfaces of the roof are slate covered; the flat area of five-ply composition roofing. Areaways furnishing light and air to the basement surround the building on all three street facades. They are concealed behind a balustraded marble wall whose piers parallel the bays of the building.

The central colonnade of the main facade is composed of fourteen freestanding, monolithic, unfluted Ionic columns. Each bay between the columns contains a roundheaded window on the first storey with two ten light casements and a rectangular window on the second storey of two eight light casements with a four light transom. The colonnade supports a simplified Ionic entablature, with unadorned architrave and cornice, which continues around the embellished parts of the building. The frieze contains applied gold letters reading, "Federal Building U.S. Courthouse." The third storey is treated as an attic storey. Above the colonnade the rectangular attic windows containing two eight light casements are largely hidden by a balustrade whose piers correspond to the columns below. A belt course surmounted by a parapet tops the entire building.

The entrance pavilions are symmetrically placed on either side of the colonnade. Each pavilion is approached by a broad flight of stone steps, flanked by stairwalls supporting cast metal post lamps. Each entrance is articulated by two engaged Ionic columns like those of the principal colonnade. Set within an arch the height of the others but with a wider surround, metal and glass doors have replaced the originals. The second storey window is identical to the other second storey windows, while on the third storey a comparable window is flanked by narrower ones of the same height. A flagpole surmounts each entrance pavilion. Each wing contains five bays identical to those behind the central colonnade and balustrade. A narrow vertical window

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

JAN 21 1976

DATE ENTERED

JUN 3 1976

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE 2

intervenes between the pavilion and these ranges of windows on both the first and second storeys. The second storey window is blind; a standard third storey window is placed off center above.

The Nineteenth Street (east) facade is composed of two three bay pavilions flanking a five bay colonnade. Six engaged Ionic columns comprise the colonnade, which is flanked by piers with narrow vertical windows on both storeys. The windows within the colonnade are identical to those of the colonnade on the principal facade. On the attic, a window identical to those of the principal facade marks each bay. In addition, a window is placed over each pier. The rhythm of solid and void is maintained because the parapet is balustraded only above the openings below. Surmounting the center and outer bays of the colonnade are circular roof dormers. Both pavilions are identical except for the third storey. The three bays of the pavilion project slightly forward to create a compound projection from the colonnade. The outer bays are comprised of windows identical to those of the wings of the principal facade. The entrance door, set within the central arch, is approached by a narrow staircase and is flanked by cast metal sconces. A circular roof dormer occurs in the central bay. The third storey windows of the northernmost pavilion are blank.

The Eighteenth Street (west) facade differs from the Nineteenth Street facade in that the attic of the northern pavilion is significantly higher, accommodating three recessed panels which surmount the blank windows. A shingled penthouse replaces the three dormers.

The rear (north) facade of the building is composed of two pavilions, three bays wide. The pavilions are embellished by the marble and cornice for only the first three bays along the east and west interior sides of the building. From that point the first storey fills the interior of the 'u' although three visible stories above reflect the massing of the wings. A covered loading platform projects out between the pavilions. The area between the pavilion and the loading platform served as driveways.

The building has undergone a considerable amount of remodeling. In 1927 the attic and Post Office work areas were remodeled, and in 1940 the Courtroom and offices. In 1903 the exterior of the building was cleaned and the trim painted, new roofing applied, three large skylights removed, and the interior repainted. The Courtrooms were also redecorated then. Alterations in 1972-73 have converted the former Post Office areas to additional courtrooms and offices. Nonetheless, the public spaces, many with vaulted ceilings marble floors and wainscots, have been preserved, as have the marble stairways.

Birmingham, Alabama

# 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 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 1916-1921

BUILDER/ARCHITECT James A. Wetmore

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Although the site was acquired in 1911-1913, and the original plans completed in 1916, work on the Federal Building was apparently halted by World War I. After the war the plans were revised to include the attic and end wings. The building was completed and occupied in September 1921 although the cornerstone had been laid on May 15, 1918. Much of the credit for securing the large building for Birmingham is given to Congressman, later Senator, Oscar W. Underwood who obtained the first appropriations and continued to seek increases as the size and cost of the building grew.

In both its huge size and eclectic classical style, the building is a precursor to the colossal Federal architecture of the following decade. By its scale, sleekness, and relative lack of embellishment, the building marks the transition from the pre-World War I dependence on Beaux Arts Classicism to the more austere, less personal classicism of the 1920's, '30's, and '40's. Thus the building demonstrates the conservative style of the day employed in a fashion ahead of its time.

Occupying a full city block, the building today holds a prominent position in downtown Birmingham. Because of its mass, material, and color, the building is a local landmark that remains a forceful statement of its architectural style, effectively balancing the new skyscrapers in the urban environment.

