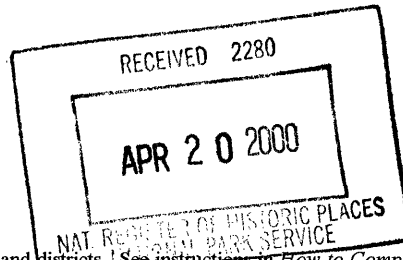


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



500

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

I. Name of Property

historic name: Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
other names/site number: Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse

2. Location

street & number: 707 Florida Avenue not for
publication
city or town Baton Rouge vicinity
state Louisiana code LA county East Baton Rouge Parish code 033
zip code _____

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Cozstance Werner Ramirez
Signature of certifying official

March 21, 2000
Date

U.S. General Services Administration

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.)

Jonathan Fricker
Signature of commenting or other official
Deputy SHPO, State of Louisiana

March 1, 2000
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:)

Edson R. Beall
Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5-18-00

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Contributing Noncontributing
 1 0 buildings
_____ sites
_____ structures
_____ objects
 1 0 Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

 N/A

 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: Post Office
 GOVERNMENT Courthouse
 GOVERNMENT Government offices

Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: Courthouse
 GOVERNMENT Government offices

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

 Modern Movement: Art Deco/Moderne

foundation STONE: Granite
walls STONE: Limestone

roof ASPHALT
other _____

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets pp. 5-10.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- 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 values, 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

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Politics/Government
- Architecture
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance

1932-1949

Significant Dates

1932, 1933

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Goldstein, Moise H., Architect
Wetmore, James A., Acting Supervising Architect, Treasury Dept.
Wagner, Fred H., Government Construction Engineer
Jensen, Jens Braae, Structural Engineer
Blair, Algernon, Contractor (Montgomery, AL)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets pp. 11-18.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.) See Continuation Sheet pp. 19-20.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

General Services Administration, Greater Southwest Region, Fort Worth, TX
LSU Archives, Hill Memorial Library, Baton Rouge, LA

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property _____

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>674850</u>	<u>3369830</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.) **See Continuation Sheet p. 21.**

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) **See Continuation Sheet p. 21.**

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Victoria Green Clow, Cultural Resources Project Manager
organization Geo-Marine, Inc. date September 1, 1999
street & number 550 East Fifteenth Street telephone (972) 423-5480
city or town Plano state TX zip code 75074

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name General Services Administration, Greater Southwest Region
street & number Fritz G. Lanham Federal Bldg., 819 Taylor St. telephone (817) 978-4229
city or town Fort Worth state TX zip code 76102

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 7 Page 5

**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Description:

Baton Rouge's historic U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is located in the 700 block of Florida Avenue, which is situated in the downtown area of Louisiana's capital City. The building functions in both a practical and visual capacity, enhancing the "federal" presence created by the complex of federal buildings located around the former site of the state penitentiary (which occupied the site from 1832-1917). Designed by New Orleans Architect Moise H. Goldstein, under the supervision of the Office of the Supervising Architect for the U.S. Treasury Department, the building's Art Deco style is reflective of the use of classically influenced modern styles of architecture in the design of public buildings during the 1930s. Today, the building retains a high degree of integrity and continues to serve as a symbol of the federal government in Baton Rouge.

Constructed in 1932 and dedicated in 1933, the attractive limestone-clad U.S. Post Office and Courthouse features a slightly projected central bay with four engaged, fluted ionic pilasters on the primary (south) elevation. The central fluted pilasters terminate at an architrave (between the second and third floors), which extends around the primary and secondary elevations of the building. Two additional engaged, fluted ionic pilasters enhance the corners of the south, east, and west façades. Decorative carved stone caps surmount all of the pilasters. Other embellishments include horizontally scored friezes with stars (above the two corner pilasters on the south, east, and west faces), a zig-zag motif displayed on the limestone parapet (central bay, primary façade), and carved limestone grilles which flank a three-dimensional, stone, spread eagle perched above the first-floor main entry of the primary building face. No major additions have been made to the structure and the primary interior spaces, the entry foyer and ceremonial courtroom, retain a significant level of historic fabric. Original interior features, such as terrazzo floors, Vermont Olive marble walls, cast aluminum paneled ceilings, suspended light fixtures, and ornamental stairwell, continue to grace the entry foyer. The main ceremonial courtroom, located on the second floor, still displays wood wainscot and plaster walls, trabeated plaster ceilings, and bronze-finished Gothic chandeliers. Despite the loss of the building's postal function and modifications to the interior, the Baton Rouge Post Office and Courthouse retains a high degree of integrity of setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is an impressive, three-story (plus basement and penthouse), Art Deco building. A granite base supports the structure's smooth-finished, flush joint, Indiana limestone-clad walls. Extending from the first floor of the central portion of the primary (south) façade to just above the second floor is a series of four fluted ionic pilasters with carved stone caps. The pilasters are engaged and are set on a slightly projecting central bay. Two additional fluted ionic pilasters (also engaged) are displayed on the corners of the south façade. Above the two end pilasters is a frieze of horizontal grooves separated by stars. Aluminum letters set over the four centralized pilasters read:

FEDERAL BUILDING AND UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 7 Page 6

**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Description: (continued)

An architrave visually separates the second and third floors of this and the other building faces. While not adorned with ionic stone caps, four fluted, engaged pilasters rise above the architrave (at the third floor level) along the central bays of the south façade. Two plain engaged pilasters also extend over the fluted pilasters that sit on the end of the south, east, and west elevations.

The south façade is further ornamented by the impressive entry, which is dominated by a three-dimensional stone eagle that sits above the central doorway. The central doorway also displays an elaborate, projected limestone surround that is bordered by an outline of raised stars and exhibits a palmette and anthemion motif on its cornice. The two doorways, located on either side of the central door, are set under attractive limestone grills (with geometric motif). Cast bronze grills depicting a wavy stalk motif on a diamond background are also visible in the transoms of the three entry doorways. The transoms and brass-framed, storefront type doors are separated by bronze, wave-patterned panels that further enhance the building's main entrance. Granite steps lead to the main entry.

All of the original aluminum casement windows on the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse have been replaced with bronze anodized aluminum windows. The first-floor windows are six-light in configuration with nickel alloy trim featuring a papyrus and rosette motif. The second-floor windows are two-over-two. Recessed limestone surrounds typify all of the windows on the south, east, and west elevations. Decorative limestone spandrels ornament the space between the first and second-floor windows, as does an incised wave motif that appears on the sill of the second-floor windows. Limestone spandrel panels depicting a triangular motif are also visible above the third-floor windows of these elevations.

The east and west façades are very similar in design to the primary building face. As described above, these elevations are ornamented by decorative limestone spandrels, an architrave, and engaged, fluted ionic pilasters (two on either end of the two building faces). Unadorned engaged pilasters are present on the central bays. Each façade is six bays in length. The building's keystone is located on the south corner of the west elevation. It reads:

OGDEN L. MILLS
SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY
MOISE H. GOLDSTEIN
ARCHITECT
JAMES A. WETMORE
ACTING SUPERVISING ARCHITECT

1932

A visually sensitive, handicapped access ramp has been added to the eastern corner of the entry terrace on the south elevation. The wrought iron fence's balustrade is duplicated in the design of the ramp's railing.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 7 Page 7

**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Description: (continued)

The north façade is stark in comparison to the other building faces. Originally designed as a loading zone for the post office, this building face continues to serve as a delivery and parking area.

Green spaces, plantings, sidewalks, and other landscape features characterize the site area immediately surrounding the building. Narrow lawn areas border the south, west, and east elevations. Plantings, including a variety of shrubs, are present along the building's south and east faces. The north elevation serves as a parking and service area and is completely paved. Other site features include original wrought iron lighting standards (south entry), a stock motif wrought iron fence (runs the length of the south, east, and west elevations), and a flagpole (located just west of the entry steps).

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

Like other federal buildings, the Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse has a rectangular footprint. The first floor area was designed to accommodate the building's postal function, while the second floor was allocated to the judicial function. As the post office's spatial needs increased, the post office abandoned the 1932/1933 building for a newly constructed post office (located directly across Florida Avenue) in the mid-1960s. The foyer of the former postal lobby, the ceremonial courtroom, and, to a lesser degree, the public corridors and the elevator areas are the most architecturally enriched of the interior spaces. This enrichment was largely a reflection of their public usage. The remaining interior spaces were designed for use as workrooms, federal tenant offices, maintenance and service areas, and to accommodate two light corridors.

While the building no longer serves as an active post office, the foyer of the postal lobby still displays features of its original design. The foyer, which is rectangular in configuration, is the most richly appointed space of the former postal area. Immediately inside the bronze doors is a security area that prevents unsecured access to the stairwell and elevator. The elevator located on the east wall displays replacement stainless steel doors. Newspaper accounts from the opening of the building describe the elevator doors as,

"Typifying modern modes of carrying the mail—by air, by land, and by sea—are decorations on the aluminum doors of the elevator to the right of the entrance. Carrying the words, 'U.S. Post Office and Courthouse,' the doors have impressionistic design showing a huge steamer, plying the ocean; a fast-traveling railroad train, its smoke curling up in a long flare in the distance; and, overhead, a plane sailing through the skies—all these carrying the mail."¹

The location of the original doors is not known; however, it is possible that they were removed when the post office relocated to another building.

¹ (Baton Rouge, LA) *State Times*, June 1, 1933, page 3.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 7 Page 8

**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Description: (continued)

A large, cased opening with marble surrounds penetrates the west wall of the foyer. This opening is symmetrical with the elevator on the east wall and provides access to the main staircase. The staircase itself is characterized by distinctive zig-zag patterned balustrades, square newels, and an oak handrail. It also displays pre-cast gray terrazzo risers and treads as well as green terrazzo panels at the landing. The stairwell walls are painted plaster.

The foyer's trabeated ceiling is likely the most striking feature of the building's interior. Long fluted beams separate cast aluminum ceiling panels. Square plates depicting an eight-point star divide the beams. Decorative bands featuring three different motifs border the ceiling panels. The outer band of the border displays a triangle and grape motif; the middle band is scored; and the inner band features a fretwork-and-coiled spiral motif. Suspended from the center of the ceiling panels are modernistic lighting fixtures characterized by elongated white bronze boxes encasing opaque glass panes. A long "column like" hinged door vertically divides each side of the fixture, providing easy access to the bulbs. Thin bronze rods hold the opaque glass, forming the corner between sides. The base and top piece of each fixture is enhanced by bronze inlay featuring an anthemion and palmette motif. Green and gray terrazzo flooring compliment the olive color of the marble walls. The green terrazzo field bordered by the gray mimics the trabeated pattern of the ceiling. These elements compliment the Art Deco character of the exterior.

The foyer walls are clad with full-height Vermont Olive marble with Verde Antique marble bases. Engaged pilasters are located at each corner of the north and south foyer walls and at the entry opening on the south wall. Caps with nickel alloy friezes embellished with wave, anthemion, and palmette motifs enrich the Vermont Olive pilasters. Two Verde Antique marble columns are engaged in the north wall. Once free standing, these columns have been incorporated into added portions of the north wall.

Since the Baton Rouge Post Office and Courthouse building lost its postal function, renovations to the former lobby area have resulted in the removal of the majority of its original fabric. The only remaining feature of the lobby is the terrazzo floor. The postal lobby originally extended the entire length of the first floor, east to west, and occupied roughly one-quarter of the first floor. It included 1,456 postal boxes and 56 postal drawers. The remaining floor space served as postal workrooms. Largely functional in design, the postal workrooms had wood block floors; plaster walls with wood wainscot base and trim; and a ribbed metal ceiling. The former postal lobby and workrooms now serve as a visiting judge's courtroom and magistrate's office. As a result, the form and plan of these spaces have been altered to accommodate new uses.

Like the foyer, the main courtroom retains a high degree of integrity. It is centrally located on the second floor facing the primary (south) elevation. It is entered through leather-covered double doors with brass kick plates. The room is doubled in height and has low wooden rails that separate the spectator gallery from the prosecution, defense, and judge's rostrum tables. The walls are divided horizontally by wooden wainscot and painted plaster. The wooden wainscot (eight feet in height) wraps around the lower half of the courtroom and has an antique marble base. Wooden boxes framing acoustical panels hang on the plaster walls. Tall, two-story windows interrupt the wooden wainscotting on the east and west walls. These

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 7 Page 9

**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Description: (continued)

windows feature four, float glass panels bordered on either side by 12-pane sidelights of amber glass. The amber glass displays an etched reed-like motif. The focal point of the courtroom is the judge's bench. The bench sits on the north wall in front of a decorative surround composed of a wooden panel with a corbelled pediment flanked by fluted panels. Neither the judge's bench and desk nor the jury box appears to be original.

The courtroom's painted, acoustical plaster ceiling is trabeated, with dark wood boxed beams. Gothic bronze-finished chandeliers, manufactured by the Northside Pattern and Foundry Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, are suspended from these beams. Although covered by carpeting, the original cork tile flooring appears to be intact.

Office space occupies the remainder of the second and most of the third floors. This space, for the most part, is defined by a series of perimeter office spaces opening into U-shaped corridors. These corridors surround a core area that includes the main courtroom, restrooms, service spaces, and two light corridors. The light corridors extend from the second floor to the third floor on either side of the courtroom, providing natural light into the hallways and courtroom. Renovation of these areas, particularly the offices, has resulted in the loss of original fabric. With the exception of some wooden furnishings—doors, chair rails, and furniture—the offices are more contemporary in appearance. The corridors, however, retain their original plaster walls and green terrazzo floors with gray terrazzo borders and Verde Antique marble base.

ALTERATIONS

Overall, the Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse retains a high degree of integrity of setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. While modifications have occurred, they have not impacted the building's ability to convey its historic significance as a federal building, nor its architectural significance as an excellent example of an Art Deco style public building. Modern development within its vicinity has also not detracted from the historic character of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. The addition of the Federal Courts building (east of the 1932/1933 building) and Post Office (south of the 1932/1933 building) has placed the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in a federal complex of buildings that serve an important role in providing federal services to the residents of East Baton Rouge Parish.

Alterations to the building have primarily been restricted to the interior. The loss of the building's postal function in the mid-1960s resulted in the removal of all of the original postal boxes, sales windows, and postal tables. Marble panels were added between the foyer and postal lobby, which engaged the once free-standing Verde Antique columns. The lobby and postal workroom were reconfigured to create a second courtroom and magistrate's office. The departure of the post office may also account for the replacement of the original elevator doors in the foyer, which displayed the different modes of transporting the mail.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 7 Page 10

**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Description: (continued)

Renovations have also taken their toll on the second- and third-floor office spaces. The installation of dropped acoustical tile ceilings, contemporary light fixtures and finishes, and carpeting has resulted in the loss of both the volume and character of the original office spaces. Dropped ceilings have also been added to the corridor areas, creating a similar effect. Additionally, a small section of the third-floor east corridor has been enclosed.

The second-floor main courtroom has not been significantly altered. Features such as original finishes, decorative windows, and lighting fixtures still ornament the room. Most of the original furniture, however, has been removed, and carpeting currently obscures the courtroom's original flooring.

Changes to the exterior of the building have been less extensive. The original metal casement windows have been replaced with bronze anodized aluminum units. The building's name and title on the cornice on the south façade has been changed from "U.S. Post Office and Courthouse" to "Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse." A handicapped access ramp was also added to the east end of the south elevation and a fire escape was added on the north elevation.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 8 Page 11

**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Statement of Significance:

SUMMARY

The Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with federal construction programs designed to relieve the economic Depression of the 1930s. It is also eligible under Criterion C as an excellent example of federal architecture from the early 1930s. From the start of construction in 1932 through 1949, the building provided a federal presence in Baton Rouge as well as many federal services, including postal and legal. Like other public buildings built in the 1930s, the design and construction of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse were also part of the federal construction programs enacted to reduce unemployment during the Depression. Architecturally, the building is an excellent example of Art Deco architecture.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The City of Baton Rouge was officially incorporated in 1817, although its history as an early French settlement precedes its incorporation by 100 years. In 1811, it became the seat of newly created East Baton Rouge Parish and the capital of Louisiana in 1849. For a period of time beginning during the Civil War, Baton Rouge lost its title as capital, first to Opelousas, then to Alexandria and, finally, to Shreveport². It regained its capital status in 1882.

Baton Rouge's postal history is known have begun as early as 1812, the year of Louisiana's statehood, when a Frenchman, James Chaveau, operated the first official U.S. Post Office somewhere in the city.³ He was succeeded by the following postmasters, some of whom served as acting postmasters: Isaiah Nelson, April 1813; James Converse, June 1813; Ezekiel Alexander, 1815; William White, 1818; Hugh Alexander, 1829; Abel Waddill, 1835; Moses Meeker, 1841; and Hugh T. Waddill, 1843. In 1846, George Pike, the first editor of the *Democratic Advocate*, became postmaster. He was succeeded by John C. LaNoue after serving a four-year term. Joseph McCormick, postmaster during the Civil War, was appointed in 1853. He was followed by Christopher Breckenridge, 1864; Orton Hackett, 1868; John O'Connor, 1869; Charles G. Pages, 1876; Alexander Smith, 1877; J.H.B. Schoonmaker, 1881; Alexander Smith, 1884; Abner Lawson Duncan Conrad, 1887; Oscar H. Forman, 1889; Alexander McGregor, March 1890; and Alexander Smith, October 1890.

The exact location of the post offices these men served in is somewhat unclear. However, it appears that most if not all of Baton Rouge's early post offices were operated in buildings that were rented, some of which also included space for other types of businesses. Several of the city's earliest post offices were situated on Third Street, which was a

² Hansen, Harry (editor), *Louisiana: A Guide to the State*. New York: Hastings House, 1971.

³ (Baton Rouge, LA) *State Times*, November 24, 1980.

United States Department of the Interior
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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 12

Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana

Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)

growing commercial/business area of Baton Rouge. The first of these was a building located at Florida Avenue and Third Street in an area known as Pike's Row, after former postmaster George Pike. The single-story brick building had elaborate ironwork and is thought to have been used by the government prior to the Civil War⁴. During the war, when Joseph McCormick was postmaster, the post office was located at Third and Laurel in a building that also operated as a bookstore⁵. Other locations included the Odd Fellows building (in the second block of Riverside) and the Hausey House, which was adjacent to the Elks Club on Third.

Report Number 409, presented to the U.S. House of Representatives, described the status of the Baton Rouge Post Office in February of 1890. According to the report, "the post office in Baton Rouge is graded second class, with rapidly increasing business, and is established in a rented building, subject to change of location with the change of the postmaster, often much to the discomfort of the business community and citizens generally."⁶ The Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, which presented the report, recommended that H.R. Bill 386 for the procurement of a public building in Baton Rouge be passed. It further cited problems with the housing of the Federal District and Circuit Courts as reasons why a new permanent facility should be provided. Specifically, it reported that the court had to hold sessions, at the discretion of the state's governor, in the Louisiana State Senate Chambers. "This temporary use of the senate chamber by the court is dependent upon State courtesy, and is unsatisfactory to the court officers in the dignified, careful, and proper discharge of their respective duties."⁷

In 1894, preparations for the construction of a federal building in Baton Rouge began at the corner of North Boulevard and Church Street. The government purchased the site from Dr. Jean Bertrand Duchain for the sum of \$14,500; the site was selected because of its proximity to the business section of Baton Rouge.⁸ Appropriations totaling \$100,000 were made to construct the new combination post office and courthouse. The three-story Renaissance Revival style building took nearly two years to complete. Designed by the Office of the Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury Department, the building featured an ornate exterior influenced by northern Italian Renaissance architecture.⁹ The handsome yellow brick and white marble structure displayed a row of white marble columns rising to the height of the entry vestibule and repeated on the second-story piano nobile. The third story is set within a massive frieze.

⁴ (Baton Rouge, LA) *State Times*, September 6, 1962.

⁵ *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, n.d.

⁶ "Public Building at Baton Rouge," House of Representatives Report No. 409, February 25, 1890.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ (Baton Rouge, LA) *State Times*, September 6, 1962.

⁹ Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, National Register Nomination, "Old Post Office," (June 1980).

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 8 Page 13

**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)

The new post office proved to be an important addition to Baton Rouge. During its use as a post office, such dignitaries as President William Howard Taft visited the facility. Other historical events such as the first official airmail flight between cities (New Orleans and Baton Rouge) also occurred. This event took place on April 10, 1912, and involved the delivery of eight to ten pounds of mail from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. The flight, which was sanctioned by the U.S. Postmaster General, was touted in local papers as an event of "National importance."¹⁰

The first postmaster to serve in the 1895 Post Office was Joseph E. Blouin (appointed in 1893). He was succeeded in 1898 by Alexander Smith, who also held the position prior to Mr. Blouin's appointment. A number of other postmasters served during the building's history. These included James B. Burnett, May 1902; Frank E. Posey, August 1902; Edward M. Burnett, 1910; Samuel Y. Watson, 1913; and Charles F.A. Brown, 1931.

By the early 1920s, the postal service had outgrown the North Boulevard post office. In an attempt to expand postal workspace in the building, the size of the postal lobby was decreased (with additional space being incorporated in the postal workroom). This was only a temporary fix. Additional space became such a necessity in the late 1920s that an annex was constructed at the north end of the building. This sufficed for a year or two until postal volume increased to the point that postal work could no longer be efficiently conducted in the turn-of-the-century building.¹¹

This spurred Congressman Bolivar E. Kemp (Sixth District), local officials, and the Chamber of Commerce to petition the government for the construction of a new federal building. Their attempts met success, and by late 1932, a site for the new U.S. Post Office and Courthouse had been selected. The site, located at the corner of Florida Avenue and St. Anthony (now Seventh Street), was owned by the city and used as a city park and community center. Prior to Baton Rouge's ownership, the property was held by the state, which operated a state prison there from 1832 to 1917.¹² Interestingly, during the Civil War, the prison was occupied by Union troops who caused extensive damage to the facility.

The Florida Avenue site was actually not the first piece of property investigated by the government. Consideration was originally given to a site located across the street from the former post office—now occupied by the Baton Rouge Municipal Building. A special committee of the city, however, decided that the property was too valuable to give to the government. So, the Florida site was suggested and accepted by the government. The city received the former post office property and building on North Boulevard in exchange for a portion of the city park (on Florida). The formal exchange of property took place at City Hall on May 31, 1931. J.W. Harrell of New Orleans, Assistant U.S. District Attorney, represented the government and H. Payne Breazeale, City Attorney, acted for the city.¹³

¹⁰ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, April 9, 1912.

¹¹ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, June 11, 1993, pg. 1.

¹² Wurtzburg and Hahn, *Hard Labor*, (New Orleans, Louisiana: Coastal Research, 1991).

¹³ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, June 1, 1933, pg. 3.

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**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)

Following the government's departure from the building in 1933, the City of Baton Rouge converted the former post office into its City Hall (a function which it retained until 1956 when it became the City Club), and the vacated City Hall became the municipal library. It has been speculated that the land transaction between the city and the government had a substantial effect on the development of downtown Baton Rouge.¹⁴

Construction of the new U.S. Post Office and Courthouse could not begin quickly enough for the citizens of Baton Rouge. An article appearing in one of the Baton Rouge papers suggested that the process of preparing drawings and letting contracts for the construction of the building, which was expected to take a year, was to simply to long. The article stated,

"We appreciate that plans for a post office the size of the one to be erected in Baton Rouge cannot be made by architects over night, and further that there are other cities besides Baton Rouge in which government construction is to be done. But the requirements for a post office building, such as is to be erected here are more or less standard. It would seem to us that it would not require a year, or any thing like a year to get the plans completed, and the work underway, and we sincerely hope that Congressman Kemp will use his good office to speed up this construction."¹⁵

Drawings for the new U.S. Post Office and Courthouse were completed and in place by December of 1931. New Orleans architect Moise Goldstein was responsible for the design of the building. He worked under the supervision of James A. Wetmore, Acting Supervising Architect, for the Office of the Supervising Architect, U.S. Treasury Department. Jens Braae Jensen served as the structural engineer and Fred H. Wagner was the government construction engineer. Algernon Blair of Montgomery, Alabama, was the contractor for the project. Prior to the initiation of construction in early 1932, the Community Club Pavilion, which was located on the former park property, had to be relocated 200 feet eastward of the building site. The total cost of the project was estimated to be \$400,000.

Construction proceeded rapidly once it was begun, and on July 13, 1932, the cornerstone of the new building was laid. The occasion was marked by "an impressive ceremony that included a program of inspirational talks" that was officiated by L.E. Thomas, New Orleans Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Masons of Louisiana.¹⁶ Other speakers included Congressman Bolivar Kemp and Mayor Wade H. Bynum.

¹⁴ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, September 6, 1962.

¹⁵ "New Post Office For Baton Rouge," n.d. (Article on file at the Louisiana State Archives).

¹⁶ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, June 1, 1933, pg. 3.

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**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)

The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was formally dedicated on June 1, 1933, on a ceremony held in the first floor of the newly completed building. The event, which was planned by the Chamber of Commerce,¹⁷ included several short addresses, the formal presentation of the building, and a musical performance by the Louisiana State University Orchestra.¹⁸ Honored guests included architect Moise Goldstein, who gave the main address of the evening. During his presentation, Mr. Goldstein stated,

"Your building is on a firm foundation and is planned to function efficiently. Those who work in receiving and distributing of the mail will be in bright and clear atmosphere with arrangements for their comfort. Thought has been put into simple, dignified design that avoids the eccentricities of the so-called "modern," but embodies the detail of the classic period with contemporary interpretation of this detail."¹⁹

The ceremony was well attended by government, post office, and city officials as well as a number of civic leaders. Postmaster C.F.A. Brown was responsible for presenting the building to Baton Rouge and Mayor Bynum. A person noticeably absent was Congressman Kemp whose efforts were acknowledged during the presentations. With his death on June 19, 1933, just days after the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse's opening, the building took on additional value as a symbol of his public service and contributions to the State of Louisiana.

Following its dedication, the building was opened for public inspection. The *State Times* article that appeared the next day reported, "thousands visited Federal Building after dedication."²⁰ The building was touted as "handsome" and marked with "strength and beauty."²¹

From a national perspective, the construction of the Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was one of a number of public building projects undertaken during the early part of the Depression. The Public Buildings Act of 1926 and subsequent appropriations associated with that act (1928, 1930, and 1931) provided the impetus for this and other building projects initiated before the creation of the Public Works Administration (PWA) and other New Deal programs. The 1931 Federal Employment Stabilization Act also contributed to the growth in the construction of public buildings during this period. This act permitted the President and Congress to authorize additional appropriations for construction projects in order to facilitate employment. Projects such as the Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse were important contributors to the country's economic recovery as one-third of the nation's unemployed were from the building trade.

¹⁷ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, May 16, 1933, pg. 11.

¹⁸ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, June 1, 1933, pg. 1.

¹⁹ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, June 2, 1933, pg. 9.

²⁰ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, June 2, 1933, pg. 1.

²¹ (Baton Rouge) *State Times*, June 1, 1933, pg. 3.

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**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)

The Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse has served the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish for over 50 years. During its history, eight postmasters have served in the building. These have included C.F.A Brown, 1931; Robert L. Pettit (Acting), 1936; Percy J. Laundry, 1937; Robert L. Pettit, 1938; Joe W. Bates (Acting) 1943; Mabel Bates (Acting), 1943; Murry B. McCarley, 1947; Ernest Roberts (Acting), 1953; and Alton L. Lea, 1953. Mr. Lea was the last postmaster to serve in the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse as the post office built a new facility across the street in the mid-1960s.

While the post office was the primary impetus for the construction of the Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, the building's court history has had a significant impact on the city of Baton Rouge. When the building was dedicated in 1933, the court was associated with the Eastern District of Louisiana, which was based in New Orleans. Judges were allotted four weeks every six months to hear cases in Baton Rouge. This limited "the allocation of judicial resources to the area and created a built-in delay in the court's docket."²² In 1971, a separate "Middle District" court was created to better address the legal needs of the Baton Rouge area.

The first judge to preside over the Middle District, Judge E. Gordon West, was instrumental in its creation. Appointed to the Eastern District in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy, Judge West had served as the resident judge to Baton Rouge since his appointment. While the resident judge of the Eastern District and later as the only judge of the Middle District (until 1979), Judge West heard a number of Civil Rights cases in Baton Rouge. One of the better known of these cases was a school desegregation case, "Davis vs. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board." Thurgood Marshall, who later became the first African American to be appointed to the Supreme Court, acted as one of the plaintiff's attorneys. The Davis case had a significant impact on the implementation of "Brown vs. the Board of Education" in the Baton Rouge area.

A number of other significant cases have been heard in the Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, including political corruption cases, state political disputes, civil litigation, and high-profile criminal cases. The Middle District court, as presided over by Judge John V. Parker and Judge Frank Plozola, remains an active and important part of the 1932/1933 federal building. Its judicial role has changed and shaped Baton Rouge, and the 1932/1933 federal building is symbolic of that history.

²² Chemay and Wilkinson, "1960's-Present: The Middle District: Civil Litigation". Unpublished paper on file with U.S. Middle District Court of Louisiana (Baton Rouge, Louisiana).

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**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was one of the many public buildings designed under the auspices of the Office of the Supervising Architect for the U.S. Treasury Department. For more than 75 years (1850s-1939), this office was responsible for the design and construction of such public buildings as custom houses, post offices, and courthouses. These buildings they created were not only designed to serve a federal function but to express the permanence and presence of the federal government in the cities and communities in which the buildings were located. Early in its history, the Office of the Supervising Architect employed a variety of architectural styles to convey this presence. In the 1870s and 1880s, Gothic and Romanesque styles were popular. At the turn of the century, however, classically inspired styles such as Greek Revival, Classical Revival, and Beaux-Arts began to dominate. These styles were thought to express democratic values and to reflect the government's assertion that "government buildings should be monumental and beautiful, and should represent the ideals of democracy and high standards of architectural sophistication in their communities."²³

While these ideals continued to be applied for many years, the expense of constructing "monumental and beautiful" buildings became a concern. In 1913, federal construction policy measured the cost of constructing post offices against both the postal receipts taken in by a city or community and the value of the real estate where the building was to be built. The evaluation of the cost of constructing public buildings coincided with a new architectural movement that promoted modernism. Both had similar effects on federal architecture—a "starved" classicism. Starved classical designs employed modern interpretations of the classical elements. Façades became more simplified. Classical elements, such as columns became pilasters. Other classically inspired details were more implied and faded into the building faces. In the 1920s, particularly after the Public Buildings Act of 1926, classically inspired modern styles of architecture were employed rather than more elaborate neo-classical designs.

The movement toward incorporating more modern styles of architecture in the design of public buildings is reflected in the Art Deco-style of Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. Architect Moise Goldstein alluded to this in his presentation at the dedication ceremony when he stated, "Thought has been put into simple, dignified design that avoids the eccentricities of the so-called 'modern,' but embodies the detail of the classic period with contemporary interpretation of this detail." Additionally, the building's austere but classically balanced design is exemplary of a Depression-era phase of Art Deco architecture known as PWA Moderne. Termed PWA Moderne for its use by 1930s government sponsored programs, the style was employed in the design of public buildings all over the country.

²³ Boland, Beth, National Register Bulletin 13: How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division, 1994).

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**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Narrative Statement of Significance: (continued)

While the American Institute of Architects campaigned for the government to contract out the design of public buildings throughout the 1920s and 1930s, it was largely unsuccessful except in a limited number of cases. Designed by New Orleans Architect Moise Goldstein, the Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was one of these unusual cases. Mr. Goldstein received his formal education from Tulane University (B.S. Engineering, ca. 1902) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.S. Engineering, ca. 1905). He also studied at the Academy of Rome. He designed a number of outstanding buildings, including the National American Bank Building (1928); Dillard University complex (1930-1958); Willow Street façade, Sugar Bowl Stadium, Tulane University (1959); New Orleans Civic Center and City Hall (1960); New Orleans Public Library (1958); and buildings for the Mertz Memorial Zoo, Audubon Park (1934). Mr. Goldstein was a partner in several architectural firms throughout his 55-year career.

As Acting Supervising Architect, James A. Wetmore oversaw the design of the Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. He served as Acting Supervising Architect for the U.S. Treasury Department from 1912 to 1913 and then from 1915 to 1933. The Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was one of more than a thousand buildings constructed during his tenure.²⁴ Mr. Wetmore began his career at the Treasury Department as a court stenographer. Although he later held the position of Supervising Architect, Mr. Wetmore was a lawyer and not an architect. Historical documents indicate that he approached his position as an administrator rather than as a designer. Louis A. Simon, Superintendent of the Architectural Division, assumed many of the architectural duties of the office, including the architectural direction of building designs. Mr. Simon, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) graduate, served in this position from 1905 to 1933, when he succeeded Mr. Wetmore as Supervising Architect.

²⁴ Withey, Henry F., and Elsie R. Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). (Los Angeles, California: Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., 1970).

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**Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana**

Verbal Boundary Description:

The Baton Rouge U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is situated on Florida Avenue and is bound by North 7th Street on the west and Laurel Street on the north. The property line of the new Federal Court Building forms the eastern boundary. The width of the property (east-west) is 384 feet and length is 326 feet (north-south). (No legal description for the city lot and block exists for this property).

Boundary Justification:

All property lines are as they existed at the time of the building's construction.