

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

MAR 25 1976

DATE ENTERED

SEP 29 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS*
*
1 NAME

HISTORIC

U.S. Court House and Post Office

AND/OR COMMON

Old Federal Building

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

201 West Commerce Street

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Aberdeen

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Mississippi

CODE

28

COUNTY

Monroe

CODE

095

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

 DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

 PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

 IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

 OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

 YES: RESTRICTED YES: UNRESTRICTED NO

PRESENT USE

 AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Monroe County Board of Supervisors

STREET & NUMBER

Monroe County Courthouse, Chestnut Street

CITY, TOWN

Aberdeen

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Mississippi

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Monroe County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Chestnut Street

CITY, TOWN

Aberdeen

STATE

Mississippi

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Works Projects Administration, Pictorial History of Mississippi Architecture

DATE

1938-1940

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS Mississippi Department of Archives and History

CITY, TOWN

Jackson

STATE

Mississippi

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" 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 Old U.S. Post Office and Court House in Aberdeen, Mississippi, is an impressive two-and-a-half story building in the Victorian Romanesque style embellished with Gothic and Classical details. Constructed of red pressed brick and grey stone with natural terra cotta decoration, the five-bay building faces north from its situation on the southwest corner of Hickory and Commerce streets in the commercial center of Aberdeen. Originally three bays deep, the Old Post Office and Court House was enlarged in 1931-32 with the addition of a sympathetically designed three-bay, two-story wing to the rear (south) of the original block.

The exterior surface of the building is divided and subdivided on all elevations by a variety of decorative string courses executed in brick and stone and punctuated by hood molds which follow the contours of radiating voussoirs above the round-arched windows and doors. The first floor level of the principal elevation consists of a five-bay arcade, the center three bays of which form an entrance loggia supported by stone pilasters and double columns with capitals carved in a low-relief foliate design. Four terra cotta masks mark the arch junctures above the column and pilaster capitals, and decorative cast iron lightposts flank the stone steps which extend the width of the loggia. Two of the three round-arched doorways which originally formed the main entrance behind the loggia arcade have been converted to windows, leaving one still-functional doorway centered between them. The carved stone capitals featured at the main entrance are repeated as impost blocks in the one-bay east entrance frontispiece, a massive brick composition with exaggerated corbelled brackets supporting a stone cornice.

The horizontality emphasized by the repeated string courses and arcades of the building's exterior is offset by the strong vertical statement of three prominent gables--two centered on the east and west elevations, and the major one asymmetrically positioned on the facade. Each of the three gable faces is divided into three segments by stone string courses that join stone cornices as they rise from carved stone base finials to more delicate peak finials. At the third, or half-story level, all three gables feature a row of closely spaced round-arched windows, above which three louvred rectangular openings serve as attic windows. The triangular peak segments of the gable faces are ornamented with inlaid terra cotta tiles on the facade and east elevations, and with rows of molded brick on the west.

Except for some original details, the interior of the Old Post Office and Court House is largely a reflection of its twentieth century growth, albeit with almost no real structural alterations to the original fabric. The first floor of the building houses a public lobby separated by counters from a large postal operations area that was extended with the 1931-32 addition. A staircase rises to the upper floors along the east wall, and a small stair behind the main one gives access to the finished basement which houses offices as well as storage and utility rooms. In 1962, the main stairway was enclosed and an elevator was installed adjacent to the stairwell. The second floor is occupied by the courtrooms and major offices, some of which still have their original cast iron mantels and other decorative fixtures in spite of some general remodelling at the time of the 1931-32 courtroom wing addition and a major renovation of the main courtroom in 1962. Additional offices, enhanced by their round-arched windows, occupy the third, or half-story level of the building.

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 checked="" 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 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 1885-1887, 1931-1932 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Mifflin E. Bell, supervising architect

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Prominently situated on the main thoroughfare in Aberdeen, the county seat of Monroe County, Mississippi, the Old U.S. Post Office and Court House has visually dominated the town's commercial center since it was completed in 1887. The massive Romanesque Revival structure still stands as the architectural grand finale of the Aberdeen business district, marking the point at which Commerce Street changes from a typical late-nineteenth century commercial row to a tree-shaded residential boulevard as it moves west through the town. As an imposing specimen of a late Victorian style of architecture that was only rarely adopted for Mississippi buildings, the Old U.S. Post Office and Court House possesses more than local significance. With only a handful of other public buildings statewide,¹ the Aberdeen structure links late-nineteenth century Mississippi architecture with the vanguard of American academic architecture of the period.

Construction of a federal building in Aberdeen was authorized by a Congressional act of March 3, 1885, which created a new eastern division of the North Mississippi Judicial District and established its court in the Tombigbee River town that had been the county seat of Monroe County since 1847. On June 30, 1885, the United States government paid \$4,000 to C. C. Heisen and wife for "Lots Nos. one (1) and two (2) in Block No. Eighty-five (85): Making altogether a tract fronting one hundred and thirty (130) feet on Commerce Street . . . and fronting one hundred (100) feet on Hickory Street" in "that part of the town of Aberdeen . . . known as New Aberdeen" (Deed book 47, p. 475). By September of that year, the site had been approved and a sketch of the proposed building prepared, according to the annual report of Supervising Architect Mifflin E. Bell to the Secretary of the Treasury (p. 9). By the time of Bell's next annual report, dated September 30, 1886, the plans for the building had been approved and working drawings made (pp. 4-5). On October 4, a contract for labor and materials to cost \$54,748 was entered into with the firm of McCarthy & Corbett;² and by September 30, 1887, Bell's replacement, William A. Freret, was able to report that the "building has been erected, work on interior finish is now in progress; bids invited for heating apparatus." The original act of authorization had limited the cost of the building's construction to \$75,000, but according to all local sources, the final cost exceeded the limit by about \$15,000. It is safe to assume that Mifflin E. Bell, who served as supervising architect until Freret's appointment in the summer of 1887, was largely responsible for the design of the U.S. Post Office and Court House in Aberdeen, whether or not he actually drew the plans for the structure.

The Old Post Office and Court House Building continued to function as originally intended until 1974, when the post office, federal court, and U.S. government offices were moved to new quarters. The abandoned structure was declared surplus property

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Peacock, Lucille. Historical Sketches of Aberdeen, Mississippi. Aberdeen, Miss.: Privately printed, 1961.
- Rollins, Bertie Shaw. A Brief History of Aberdeen and Monroe County, Mississippi, 1821-1900. Aberdeen, Miss.: Privately printed, 1957.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,6	3,5,7,0,4,0	3,7,4,3,6,1,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Elizabeth P. Reynolds, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

DATE

June, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 571

TELEPHONE

(601) 354-6218

CITY OR TOWN

Jackson

STATE

Mississippi 39205

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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elbert R. Williams

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

March 18, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
Acting	DATE <u>9/29/96</u>
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE <u>9/29/96</u>
ATTEST:	
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE

by the General Services Administration, and on August 8, 1975, title to the property was transferred to the Monroe County Board of Supervisors (Deed book 226, pp. 51-53). Plans to renovate the building and adapt it to house the facilities of the Monroe County Chancery Court, Board of Supervisors, and Superintendent of Education, are presently being implemented as part of a larger Monroe County American Revolution Bicentennial project entitled "Preservation and Renovation of Monroe County Courthouse Buildings, Aberdeen, Mississippi." The project is financed with Title X funds released by the U.S. Department of Commerce. In its new capacity, the Old U.S. Post Office and Court House Building in Aberdeen will once again serve the public as an important judicial, governmental, and social center, and a local architectural landmark will be preserved for the future.

NOTES

¹Jefferson County Court House, Fayette; Mississippi River Commission Building, Vicksburg; Old U.S. Post Office and Court House Building (now City Hall), Oxford; and Washington County Court House, Greenville.

²1974 telephone conversation with Historic Preservation Officer, General Services Administration, Washington, D. C. Location of the McCarthy & Corbett firm is unknown at this time.