

SG-2087

NPS Form 10-900

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center
Other name/site number: Houston Processing & Distribution Center, Houston P&DC, Houston Central Post Office, Downtown Houston Post Office, Barbara Jordan Post Office
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 401 Franklin Street
City or town: Houston State: Texas County: Harris
Not for publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following levels of significance:
 national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Mark Wolfe State Historic Preservation Officer 12/14/17
Signature of certifying official / Title Date
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register
- other, explain: _____

[Signature] 2/2/2018
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: GOVERNMENT/post office

Current Functions: VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification: MODERN MOVEMENT/New Formalism

Principal Exterior Materials: CONCRETE, STONE/Marble, GLASS, METAL/Aluminum

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7 through 11)

Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations: N/A

Areas of Significance: Politics/Government; Architecture

Period of Significance: 1962-1967

Significant Dates: 1962

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): N/A

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): N/A

Architect/Builder: Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, Architects; C.H. Leavell & Company of El Paso, Builder; Frederick A. Buxton, Landscape Architect

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 12 through 20)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheets 21 through 23)

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 (Texas Historical Commission, Austin)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency - USPS Archive, Washington D.C.
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library (HMRC)

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

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10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property: (see continuation sheet 24)

Coordinates: (see continuation sheet 24)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84:

Verbal Boundary Description: (see continuation sheet 24)

Boundary Justification: (see continuation sheet 24)

11. Form Prepared By

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Date: June 2017

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets 25 through 34)

Additional items (see continuation sheets 35 through 41)

Photos (see continuation sheets 5-6, 42 through 64)

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Photographs

Name of Property: Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center
City or Vicinity: Houston
County, State: Harris County, Texas
Photographer: SWCA Environmental Consultants
Date: April 2017, except as noted.

Photo 1

West elevation and south façade of administration wing. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 2

South façade of tower. Camera facing north.

Photo 3

East elevation of hyphen connecting administration wing to warehouse portion (left) and partial view of the eastern section of the south elevation of the warehouse portion (right). Camera facing northwest.

Photo 4

Eastern section of the south elevation of the warehouse portion showing some of the original 1936 postal service building. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 5

East elevation of administration wing and warehouse portion. Camera facing west.

Photo 6

North elevation of warehouse portion. Camera facing west.

Photo 7

North elevation of warehouse portion. Camera facing east.

Photo 8

West elevation of warehouse portion. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 9

West and south elevations of the warehouse portion (left) and west elevation of administration wing (right), brick hyphen visible. Camera facing east.

Photo 10

North and west elevations of administration wing from roof of warehouse portion. Camera facing southeast.

Photo 11

Plaza landscaping from the southeastern corner of the administration wing. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 12

Main entrance on the south façade of the administration wing with plaza in foreground. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 13

Interior, west elevator bank with original marble-clad columns. Camera facing northeast.

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Photo 14

Interior, west elevator bank lobby with curtain wall exterior and plaza in background. Camera facing southeast.

Photo 15

Interior, west elevator bank lobby original partition wall and marble clad column, view northwest. Some Postal Service signage and original terrazzo flooring visible.

Photo 16

Interior, ground floor lobby. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 17

Interior, ground floor lobby. Camera facing northwest. Original terrazzo flooring in the foreground on the left and original vaults in the background on left. The transition between the administration wing and the warehouse is visible in the background at center.

Photo 18

Warehouse interior.

Photo 19

Interior, second floor of eastern portion of the warehouse section. Camera facing south. This section of the warehouse housed on-site maintenance facilities and retains many of the original partition walls.

Photo 20

Interior, upper floor of administration wing. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 21

Interior, upper floor of administration wing. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 22

Interior, upper floor of administration wing. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 23

Detail, precast concrete screen.

Date: May 2013

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Narrative Description

The 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center (Houston P&DC), also known as the Barbara Jordan Post Office, is located at 401 Franklin Street in downtown Houston, Texas. The campus has two distinct resources: one building and one site. The building was designed by prominent Houston architectural firm, Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson. The formally landscaped front plaza, designed by Frederick A. Buxton, is raised above Franklin Street and meets the sidewalk with a blank embankment wall. The building is divided stylistically and by function into the low-rise administration tower and large warehouse. An example of New Formalist architecture, the austere administration tower is a five-story low-rise box-on-stilts supported with square marble clad columns, or *pilotis*. A floor-to-ceiling glass curtain wall shaded by a concrete screen perimeter creates a strong vertical emphasis. Both the curtain wall and use of precast concrete are hallmarks of the building technology characteristic of Mid-century modern architecture. The secondary warehouse is a two-story utilitarian box and is clad with buff colored brick and restrained ornamentation. The large, two-story brick clad mail sorting warehouse is attached to the north elevation of the administration wing and horizontally extends to the north, east, and west. Now vacant, the building functioned as a United States Post Office and mail sorting facility until 2015. The site and building retain a high level of historic integrity despite modifications over time.

Location and Setting

The Houston P&DC is nestled in the northwest corner of downtown Houston near the interchange of Interstates 45 and 10. The property is located north of Buffalo Bayou offering a unique vantage point of greater downtown. Other historic resources, namely the Main Street/Market Square Historic District (NRHP 1983) and the Merchants and Manufacturers Building (NRHP 1980) are visible from the site as well. The site is bounded by Smith Street to the east, Franklin Street to the south, Interstate 45 to the west, and the railroad tracks for the facility to the north.

Despite being positioned in northwest downtown Houston, the campus has a rather suburban design. Asphalt-surface employee parking lots are located on the east and west sides of the property. Customer parking is immediately east of the plaza, with the entrance to the lot appearing as a continuation of Smith Street, which runs perpendicular to Franklin Street. (Maps 2-4, Figure 5)

Plaza

The raised broad landscaped plaza was designed along the south elevation of the tower. A typical feature constructed during this time period, it marked a shift in the design of modern federal buildings and provided an exterior ceremonial or transitional space prior to entering the building. The base of the plaza forms a short concrete wall against the sidewalk of Franklin Street. The plaza and its low perimeter railing, which doubles as a continuous seating bench, is composed of concrete with visible quartz aggregate chips. (Map 5, Photos 1-2, 11-12)

The plaza, like the modern design of the building, uses predominantly rectilinear shapes in its design, and it is divided into four irregular sections. Planting beds are grouped in three types of regular grids. Each grid uses the same size of rectilinear planting beds. Though the beds are arranged to provide several pedestrian options, larger walkways provide a clear intentional pathway from the stairs on the east and west sides of the plaza to the center of the administration wing. The planting beds contain native vegetation, ranging from grass, shrubbery, and small trees to add dimensionality to the plaza.

The southeastern corner of the plaza is characterized by circular and rounded shapes interrupting the property's otherwise rectilinear forms. The anomaly presents itself as a circular bed of grass flanked by three irregular quadrants of grass. The center circle originally contained a concrete statue of the postal eagle, which was relocated to a different post office when

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the Postal Service sold the building in 2015. Each of the flanking quadrants contains at least eight concrete pedestals. There are presumably 50 in total to represent the states in the union.

The plaza's presence reflects the Third Principle of the Kennedy administration's 1962 *Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture*, which states that "special attention should be paid to the general ensemble of streets and public places of which Federal buildings will form a part. Where possible buildings should be located so as to permit a generous development of landscape."¹ The landscape adds monumentality by providing a grand entrance, and the vegetation makes it a more welcoming public gathering space.

Administration Wing / Office Tower

The administration wing/office tower served as the Postal Service's regional administration offices for southeast coastal Texas. Administrative offices for the on-site employees working in the warehouse were located in the eastern half of the warehouse portion.

Exterior

The primary (south) elevation of the five-story reinforced concrete administration wing faces Franklin Street. The New Formalist wing has a narrow rectangular plan and measures 198 feet in length by 99 feet in width. A vertical concrete screen surrounds each elevation simultaneously enhancing verticality and providing protection from the sun. The vertical concrete "fins" hover 2'-8" in front of the fixed, tinted floor-to-ceiling windows. The fins are bolted directly to the building's reinforced concrete frame. To enhance the clean, bright, and modern aesthetic, the exposed concrete fins were cast with white cement with large chips of white quartz aggregate. The fins were covered with a waterproofing paint in the 1990s. The same surface treatment is repeated in plaza details. The public entrance to the building is via the plaza on the south elevation. Two sets of glass, aluminum framed doors provide access to the lobby from the customer parking lot. (Figures 4-8, Photos 1, 2, 23)

The building sits on equally spaced, square white marble-clad columns or *pilotis*. The floor-to-ceiling aluminum framed first floor window wall is recessed behind the first row of columns allowing the tower mass to cantilever over and provide weather protection for the entrance. The concrete columns were originally clad with ¾" white marble panels. The original marble was replaced by similar 1/8" panels that also appear to be white marble. Four sets of automatic aluminum framed sliding glass doors provide entry into the building. These new motion sensor operated doors replaced the original hand operated paired aluminum framed glass doors. Though the south façade serves as the primary façade for the administrative wing, the presence of the concrete screen paired with the marble-clad colonnade creates a uniform appearance that makes locating the entrance more challenging, particularly given the lack of extant signage. (Photos 10, 12)

The building has a flat roof clad with a synthetic rubber material. Though the concrete exterior screen extends above the roofline to shield views of the mechanical units located on the roof, the single combined mechanical penthouse remains visible. The mechanical units are further screened by a wall of structural terra cotta blocks. (Photos 2, 10)

New Formalism is marked by abstracted and stylized Classical precedents applied to modernist buildings. Buildings in this style are typically monumental in scale to emphasize massing and relationships between components and systems. The buildings are also typically symmetrical with straight lines and geometric shapes creating the overall form of the building, both of which contribute to the monumentality of the building. Classical elements often found in New Formalist architecture include specific proportions, arches, stylized columns and entablature, colonnades, and raised podia.

¹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," from *Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space*, June 1, 1962. Accessed May 31, 2017, <https://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/136543>

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The administration wing's New Formalist design embodies the most common Classical elements found in the style. The smooth fins of the concrete screen provide the appearance of stylized columns. The proportions of the concrete screen to the tinted windows beneath also provide a sense of depth and add to the wing's monumentality. The utility penthouse, visible above the screen, creates a tympanum for the building without transitioning away from the rectilinear shapes used in the design. Furthermore, the colonnade made at the first floor continues the use of classical elements in the building's design. In addition, the building and plaza are physically elevated above street level emphasizing the property's overall monumentality and contributing to a metaphorical elevation of the building in the cultural milieu.²

Interior

The public interior spaces are open and expansive with few partitions beyond service spaces such as stairs, elevators, and restrooms. Separate lobbies on the ground floor are divided by open storefront glazing. Notable interior materials include terrazzo flooring and cove lighting. The upper floors have been gutted down to the original structure. Only the original window system, elevator banks, life safety stairs, and restroom locations remain in place. The restrooms have been altered since the building was constructed. Furniture, signage, and many other features denoting the building's use as a post office were removed when the Postal Service sold the building in 2015. Original marble-clad columns and partition walls on the upper levels will be restored during a planned rehabilitation of the building in the coming years. (Photos 13-17, 20-22)

Mail-Handling Facility / Warehouse

Exterior

The mail-handling facility/warehouse is located immediately north (rear) of the administration wing. As the shorter and wider portion of the building, the administration wing appears to bisect the warehouse. A brick hyphen connects the two portions of the building. The two-story warehouse has a rectangular plan and is 862-feet in length by 281-feet in width – a much larger footprint than the administration wing. The facility is utilitarian and constructed of concrete and brick with a flat roof. The warehouse sits on a recessed concrete and brick base and contains glass doors centered on the south elevation and on the southwest corner for employee access. Above the ground floor, the exterior walls are windowless. The windowless brick facades are punctuated by narrow inset vertical channels that complement the vertical emphasis of the administration building. Vents are regularly spaced along the north (rear) elevation near the roof line. (Figures 5-8, Photos 3-9)

Due to the administration wing's placement, the south elevation of the warehouse portion is divided into two parts: the east and west of the administration building. Visible on the 1960 site plan, the eastern half retains some elements of the former 1936 Post Office Parcel Post Building at this site, though it's unclear exactly how the 1936 building was incorporated since no historic photographs of it were located. The extant portions of the 1936 building appear to include the curvilinear wall on the east, a brick façade, and raised loading dock for moving mail onto train cars. However, the brick on the eastern half of the south elevation matches all of the other elevations of the warehouse portion, indicating that the 1936 brick was replaced during construction of the rest of the building. There are no interior features remaining of the original 1936 building.³ (Maps 11-13, Figures 5 & 7, Photos 4-5)

The west half of the mail handling facility is similarly utilitarian and constructed of concrete and brick. The north or rear elevation of the two-story warehouse is a continuous concrete loading dock covered with a canopy supported by concrete

² Kristen Brown, Grace Cynkar, Anna Mod, and James Steely, "DRAFT – Multiple Property Documentation Form, Modernist Commercial, Governmental, and Institutional Buildings in Houston, Texas, 1945-1976," January 2015, on file at the Texas Historical Commission, 19.

³ The 1936 post office is labeled "Existing U.S. Parcel Post" on the 1960 site plan (Figure 5).

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columns. This is where 18-wheeler trucks picked up sorted and delivered unsorted mail. Original signage to differentiate loading bays by the destination zip codes remain in place. (Photos 6-7)

Along the eastern elevation, a semi-circular vehicular driveway provides access to two covered parking spaces reserved for high-ranking postal employees, including the postmaster. A room beneath the driveway was used originally as a nuclear fallout shelter and has since been converted to a music recording studio. (Photos 3-5)

Interior

Inside the warehouse, the two sections form a continuous two-story space. The interior is predominantly structural columns with some CMU partition walls remaining in the eastern portion of the warehouse. There are additional expanded metal fence walls and partitions to separate public and private areas. When it was installed in 1962, the new equipment was “state-of-the-art” electronic mail sorting equipment. There were over 6 miles of conveyor belts operated by some 400 electric motors to move mail through the facility. A system of metal floor chutes connected the conveyor belts with immense truck doors to the loading dock where mail arrived for processing then departed for delivery. During early operation, mail also arrived by rail. The envelopes moved quickly through 4 Mark II Facer-canceler machines (the process of aligning letters so that all will have the address side facing the canceler, with stamps in a uniform position) which could post mark more than 120,000 letters per hour. A new parcel post separator machine was also installed that could sort 5,400 packages an hour. Some letter sorting was still conducted manually as the machines were not equipped to redirect improperly addressed or unreadable mail. Machinery was replaced over the years as newer versions became available, and all of the sorting machinery was removed when the Postal Service sold the building in 2015. (Photos 18-19)

Alterations

Alterations to the building under Postal Service ownership were minor, and most would be categorized as regular maintenance. These alterations include new doors on the loading docks, a new roof in 2005, new elevators in 2005, repairs to the basement following Tropical Storm Allison in 2001-2, lighting upgrades in 2008, and new cooling towers were installed in 2006.

More significant repairs also occurred. Asbestos abatement beginning in 1994 saw the vinyl asbestos flooring replaced with 8” vinyl composition tile (VCT). Restrooms and breakrooms were also upgraded in 1998 with the installation of new fixtures and employee lockers. As the Postal Service rearranged and removed equipment, holes spanning the two floors of the warehouse to pass through mail were also filled in with new concrete. On the exterior, repairs to the precast concrete screen from 1994 to 1997 required an elastomer coating to prevent additional spalling. However, the coating changed to the color of the vertical fins slightly, making the whole screen appear grayer than original. The original color is visible on the horizontal bars of the screen. The marble-clad *pilotis* were originally clad with a slab 3/4” thick. However, as the original backing material began to fail due to poor maintenance, the marble was replaced with a new 1/8” marble veneer in the same color as the original. Additionally, the east parking lot was repaved with concrete, replacing the original asphalt.⁴

Integrity

The site and building experienced both interior and exterior alterations over time. Minor alterations, based on work orders supplied by the United States Postal Service ranged from parking lot repairs, roof replacement, installation of new flooring, painting, and miscellaneous upgrades to electrical. A round concrete United States Postal Service emblem, originally centered on the primary façade, was removed. (Figure 4) Additional san-serif lettering on the building and on

⁴ Telephone conversation with Jason W. Beal, AIA, with PDG Architects, the firm responsible for all of the alterations 1994-2008. June 1, 2017.

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the embankment identifying the site as the UNITED STATES POST OFFICE has also been removed. The stylized postal eagle statue located in the plaza has also been removed and relocated to a different Houston-area post office. The buildings were used in their original capacities until the post office closed in 2015.

The administration wing has undergone alterations over the years related to routine upgrades and technological changes. The form and function of the interior remains the same and it retains its original terrazzo flooring and cove lighting. Updates include the replacement of the service counter, the glass entry doors, and the postal boxes. The upper levels of the administration wing have been stripped to the original structure and most of the flooring was removed. The original elevator lobby locations and window system are intact as are remnants of the original signage graphics in less prominent areas such as the fire exit staircases.

In the warehouse portion of the building, several original interior elements remain. Though the original machinery and equipment was removed, original concrete floors and CMU walls remain in place. Some elements, such as vinyl composition tile (VCT) flooring, have been replaced over the years. However, the warehouse space overall retains much of its original layout and color scheme. Pathways in the floor indicate separate rights of way for pedestrians and small industrial trucks, such as forklifts or trains of mail carts. On the eastern end of the warehouse, many smaller employee spaces including break rooms, a health clinic, locker rooms, and storage spaces remain. The warehouse interior also retains an original system of covered catwalks used by supervisors to monitor employees.

Despite these changes the Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center retains sufficient historic integrity. The building retains its integrity of feeling, location, and setting. Though no longer used as a post office, the building still conveys association with the function of the United States Postal Service—particularly the exterior signage and interior features in the warehouse portion. The integrity of design, materials, and workmanship is still present on the exterior of administration wing and both interior and exterior of the warehouse. Though the administration wing lacks many of its original interior features, the condition of the concrete screen, colonnade, window system, and overall form remain evident.

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Statement of Significance

The 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center (Houston P&DC), also known as the Barbara Jordan Post Office, served as the main distribution center for the City of Houston. The campus design features a New Formalist modern low-rise administration tower, an attached warehouse, and a raised and formally landscaped plaza along the southern edge of the property. The administration portion is an office tower on *piloti*. The two-story warehouse is attached to the rear and extends beyond the sides of the administrative tower. The building was designed by Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson, a significant Houston architectural firm, and the landscaped plaza was designed by Frederick A. Buxton. The Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A and C at the local level of significance. Designed to handle all postal operations including public counter and mailbox services, mail processing, parcel post, and administrative offices, the property is significant under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government for its association with the expansion of federal government services in Houston after World War II. The property is also architecturally significant under Criterion C as an exemplary New Formalist design shaped by President John F. Kennedy's "Guiding Principles of Federal Architecture." The design embodies symbols of grandeur and power such as massiveness, luminosity of materials, and columnar *pilotis*, commonly found in federal architecture throughout the nation's history. The period of significance spans from 1962 to 1967 to adhere to the National Register's 50 year threshold.

Early Houston Post Office Facilities

Little is known about postal services in Houston before the construction of the 1891 United States Post Office and Courthouse. While its build date is listed in 1891, it appeared on the 1890 Sanborn Map suggesting it was under construction when the map was created. Most federal buildings constructed between the 1850s and the 1890s were designed in an assortment of architectural styles under the direction of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury who greatly influenced the projects, and Houston's 1891 post office was no exception. Constructed at the corner of Franklin Avenue and Fannin Street, the Renaissance Revival building was designed by Will A. Freret who served as Supervising Architect during that time. As indicated on the 1896 and 1907 Sanborn Maps, the building continued to function as a post office but was later demolished.⁵ (Map 6 and 7, Figure 1)

Following the construction of the 1891 United State Post Office and Courthouse, Houston continued to grow providing the impetus for the 1911 Sam Houston Post Office at 701 San Jacinto Street. It's unclear exactly how long the two post office locations functioned simultaneously but the 1891 building was used as late as 1924. Plans were announced for the new post office in 1907 but due to several delays, the building wasn't completed until 1911. James Knox Taylor became the Supervising Architect of the Treasury in 1897 offering a fresh approach to federal design. Under Taylor, early 20th Century federal architecture reflected traditional influences including classical materials, often producing Classical Revival and Beaux-Art buildings. According to Taylor "...government buildings should be monumental and beautiful, and should represent the ideals of democracy and high standards of architectural sophistication in their communities."⁶ Taylor believed that federal buildings should convey dignity and a strong federal presence, and possess unique floor plans. Thus, the new gray limestone post office, designed in the Second Renaissance Revival style, indicated a break from earlier

⁵ 1890 Sanborn Map, page 4, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; 1896 Sanborn Map, page 2, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; 1907 Sanborn Map, page 2, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; "U.S. Post Office (1900), Houston, Texas," *Historic Federal Courthouses, Federal Judicial Center*, accessed June 15, 2017, <https://www.fjc.gov/history/courthouse/houston-texas-1891>.

⁶ Beth M. Boland, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*, National Register Bulletin 13. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington D.C., 1994, 3; Victoria Green Clow and Terri Gilbert, "Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Texas Historical Commission, 2001, 13.

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decades and served as a representative example of Taylor's philosophy. It was constructed to house the federal district court, a post office, and other federal offices. Mail facilities occupied the first floor, while the second and third were used for offices and a central two-story courtroom. During this period, it was typical for urban post offices to share a building with courts and other federal offices. The demand for more federal offices in Houston necessitated a sizable and almost seamless 1931 addition to the building. The building was later adapted to include the U.S. Custom House (NRHP 1974) and serves in that function today. It also houses several Department of Defense offices.⁷ (Figure 2)

As Houston grew, the demand for postal facilities and other federal services increased and a new building in which to house them was needed. The Sam Houston Post Office was in operation for 51 years until a new modern post office was constructed at 401 Franklin Street in 1962. During the same time, the General Services Administration commissioned what became the Bob Casey Federal Courthouse (extant) with a small onsite post office at 515 Rusk Street in downtown Houston. These facilities replaced the federal court functions of the 1911 Sam Houston Post Office building. (Figure 3)

During the tenure of the 1911 Sam Houston Post Office as the central Houston location, a parcel post building was constructed in downtown.⁸ Little is known about its construction and use, but the 1936 parcel post building was located just east of the 1934 Southern Pacific Passenger Station / Grand Central Station on the site of the 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office. As previously mentioned, parts of this building were incorporated into the 1962 warehouse portion. (Map 11-13, Figure 5 & 7, Photos 4-5)

The Evolution of 20th Century Federal Architecture

The 1913 Public Buildings Act was introduced in response to scrutiny over the handling of federal construction and specifically the management of projects by the Supervising Architect of the Treasury. The new policy established several restrictions which impacted federal construction and specifically post offices. To increase efficiency and productive use of public funds "...the Department of the Treasury instituted a classification system under which a post office's structural and ornamental qualities were functions of the value of real estate and postal receipts in the city where it was located. First class post offices in larger cities would still be monumental and elaborate, but for a small town, the standards specified an "ordinary class of building, such as any businessmen would consider a reasonable investment."⁹ In addition, unlike earlier federal designs, standardized floor plans were often utilized. This approach endured during the 1920s.

While emphasis on economy and standardization was even more prevalent in the 1930s, several federal buildings were constructed during the Great Depression. Beginning in 1933, the federal government expanded dramatically under President Franklin Roosevelt. In particular, public works programs, and specifically the Public Works Administration, aimed at stimulating the national economic recovery led to a significant increase in public construction. As a result, the U.S. Post Office Department constructed nearly three times the number of post offices during the 1930s as had been built in the 50 years prior. Funding was provided through several different programs and while rapid completion was emphasized, high quality design and construction was the primary goal. While the federal government initially hired

⁷"A Poorly Managed Bureau," *The Houston Post*, January 24, 1908; "Water Interferes: Water on Federal Building Delayed by Rains," *The Houston Post*, September 26, 1908; "Development Planned by Postmaster," *The Houston Post*, November 14, 1924; Beth M. Boland, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*, National Register Bulletin 13. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington D.C., 1994, 3; Wayne, Bell, "U.S. Custom House," National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form, Texas Historical Commission, 1974; "U.S. Post Office and Courthouse (1911)," *Historic Federal Courthouses, Federal Judicial Center*, accessed June 15, 2017, <https://www.fjc.gov/history/courthouse/houston-texas-1911>.

⁸ "\$276,000 Contract Hangs on Coin Flip," *The Marshall News Messenger* (Marshall, Texas), Friday, November 20, 1936.

⁹ Beth M. Boland, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*, National Register Bulletin 13. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington D.C., 1994, 3.

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private architects, most federal buildings were designed by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of the Supervising Architect between 1934 and 1939.¹⁰

As Modernism began to take hold in Europe with exploration of new materials and technologies, the style, its materials and new technologies did not enjoy widespread acceptance in the United States until after the World War II. Between the two World Wars there was a transition in architectural styles for public and private sector buildings that favored the restraint of ornament and an emphasis on clean lines and flatter surfaces. American New Deal buildings of the early 1930s remained Classical in style and composition yet minimal or abstracted ornamentation became more common as seen in the Art Deco, Art Moderne and Stripped Classic style buildings. These buildings mark the beginnings of Modernism and were widely accepted. Concurrently, more traditional revival styles were also popular, such as Spanish Colonial Revival (popular in the Southwest) and English Colonial Revival (popular on the East Coast) reflected a romantic regionalism, and were often adopted for public buildings such as libraries and post offices as well as houses and other private sector buildings.

By 1939, the Supervising Architect was no longer charged with overseeing federal designs and the responsibility was placed under the Federal Works Agency. This change prompted a new vision for 1940s public building design in which "construction of non-military buildings, especially post offices, was virtually at a standstill" signaling the start to war mobilization efforts. While military construction was the primary focus leading up to and during World War II, the Federal Works Agency assumed large scale planning efforts for federal construction after the war.¹¹

Federal Architecture in the Post-War Period

The unprecedented growth of the federal government during and after World War II led to a demand for space to house federal employees and thus a new federal agency to manage public construction. The General Services Administration (GSA) was created under the Public Buildings Act of 1949 and assumed all responsibility previously placed upon the Federal Works Agency. Once again Office of the Supervising Architect, now part of GSA, relied on design proposals from private firms for federal construction projects, but required post offices be designed within the parameters of specific standardized guidelines. Post offices after World War II were characterized by "clean lines and standardized designs for lobby windows, counters, lock boxes, and letter drops," and came with ample parking. Thus, interior design was determined by GSA guidelines, but private architectural firms had more discretion with the exterior design.¹² In 1954, post office design was moved from the GSA to the U.S. Post Office Department.¹³

As Modern architecture gained popularity in federal construction boom following World War II, a noticeable change occurred in building materials and style. Industrial fabrication shifted from the war effort back to the domestic market and large quantities of manufactured and mass-produced materials such as concrete, glass, and metal (especially aluminum), began to replace masonry and wood as dominant building materials. These new materials visually demonstrated a break from the prewar notions of stability and power as exemplified by masonry and stone, to a modern aesthetic whose

¹⁰ Beth M. Boland, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*, National Register Bulletin 13. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington D.C., 3-4.

¹¹ Beth M. Boland, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*, National Register Bulletin 13. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington D.C., 5.

¹² Beth M. Boland, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*, National Register Bulletin 13. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington D.C., 5; Andrew Schmidt, "Federal Office Building," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Texas Historical Commission, 2010.

¹³ Beth M. Boland, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*, National Register Bulletin 13. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington D.C., 5.

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materials represented post war freedom, innovation, and change as well as the hope and promise of the future.¹⁴ While President Harry S. Truman was initially skeptical of modern architecture, by the 1950s it had become the adopted style for U.S. government buildings—including postal facilities—nationally, and the American public widely embraced its new, forward-looking aesthetic.¹⁵

“Guiding Principles” Under President Kennedy

When President John F. Kennedy assumed office in 1961, he was displeased with the decayed appearance of Pennsylvania Avenue and made revitalization a goal. To do this, the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space was created “to advise the administration on immediate and long-term space needs, with particular attention paid to the Washington, D.C. area.”¹⁶ The committee eventually produced a *Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space* which included the “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture.”¹⁷ Open to interpretation by private architects, the guidelines offered a three-point architectural policy aimed at all federal architecture, not just post offices.

Kennedy’s 1961 “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture” called for thoughtful architectural design and attractive facilities that were simultaneously economical. Due to the U.S. Post Office Department’s growing reliance on private builders to construct facilities based on standard designs, its buildings of this period began to reflect government trends that emphasized economy over innovation and creativity. The International Style, for example, was a particularly simplified subgenre of Modernism that could be easily adapted with cheaper materials.¹⁸ The “Guiding Principles” also indicated that designs should consider “local and regional architectural traditions and influences.”¹⁹ This principle is evident in the character of the Downtown Houston Post Office.

While not specifically mentioned in post office manuals and standards, the more general “Guiding Principles” intended for all federal architecture encouraged deliberate site selection and ample landscaping as part of the overall design. Landscaping was an integral component of Modern design and the use of exterior plazas often replaced large, formal interior common areas and served as a formal exterior entrance or transition into the building.²⁰

The federal presence so far as it was expressed symbolically in 1960s government buildings, used by the general public, represented the business of big government and rather than as an extension of national pride. Around the same time, the distinction between federal and private style vanished. Only the official seal and perhaps the increased use of marble in lobbies distinguished the federal buildings from private buildings. Of the two popular business façades—the glass cage and the masonry box—the U.S. government preferred the masonry box with its sympathetic vestiges of public power marked by massiveness, luminosity of the marble, and columnar *pilotis*.²¹ Open interpretation produced mixed results, but

¹⁴ United States General Services Administration, *Growth, Efficiency and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s and 70s*. Office of the Chief Architect, Center for Historic Buildings, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵ United States General Services Administration, *Growth, Efficiency and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s and 70s*. Office of the Chief Architect, Center for Historic Buildings, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶ United States General Services Administration, *Growth, Efficiency and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s and 70s*. Office of the Chief Architect, Center for Historic Buildings, Washington, D.C., 42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ URS Group, Inc, *USPS Nationwide Historic Context Study: Postal Facilities Constructed or Occupied Between 1940 and 1971*, prepared for the United States Postal Service.

¹⁹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture,” from *Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space*, June 1, 1962. Accessed May 31, 2017, <https://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/136543>

²⁰ United States General Services Administration, *Growth, Efficiency and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s and 70s*. Office of the Chief Architect, Center for Historic Buildings, Washington, D.C., 42-45.

²¹ United States General Services Administration, *Growth, Efficiency and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s and 70s*. Office of the Chief Architect, Center for Historic Buildings, Washington, D.C.

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it's clear the "Guiding Principles" appear to have had an impact on a sheer number of Federal projects between 1960 and 1964, although the "Guiding Principles" were not linked to any funding program."²²

Postmaster Granville Elder and the Impetus for the Downtown Houston Post Office

The Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, commissioned by the federal government in an agreement with Houston Congressman Albert Thomas, is a notable local example of federal government involvement in post-WWII modern architecture nationwide.²³ The facility was constructed under Granville W. Elder, Houston's longest-serving Postmaster. Elder was appointed on October 1, 1947, by President Harry Truman on recommendation of Houston Congressman Albert Thomas. Thomas also was also a critical player in the effort to fund and construct the building and it became Elder's crowning achievement. Thomas entered Congress in 1937 with his colleague, Lyndon Baines Johnson, and served until his death in 1966.²⁴ A time-honored Congressional tradition, Thomas awarded major federal projects to freshmen and veteran members alike in Congress.²⁵ These projects included the new Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center (1962), the Bob Casey Federal Courthouse (1962), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Manned Spacecraft Center complex (began 1962). The 1958 Federal Reserve building is also located in downtown Houston and is considered a contemporary of the Houston P&DC. These all serve as tangible examples of federal expansion into Houston in the late 50s and early 60s as the city grew both in population and area and rose to prominence on the national stage.

Elder began as Postmaster for the Sam Houston Post Office at the 701 San Jacinto Street in 1922 (now known as the U.S. Custom House). Elder was an innovator and the first Postmaster to implement drive-in post office service during the Christmas holiday. The service area was equipped with postage meters and postal personnel and patrons could drive in, stop their cars, and hand the mail and/or packages to the mail clerk. Elder was also the first Postmaster in the South to inaugurate helicopter service flying from the city's airport to the roof of the Sam Houston Post Office downtown. He was instrumental in expanding mail service to new sections of growing Houston, and worked to eliminate duplicate street names in the city. He is also known for placing the new zip code map in telephone directories, increasing the number of mail collection boxes in the city, and starting the Houston Postal Credit Union in 1929.²⁶ Elder's goal was to make the post offices in Houston a great place to work for the employees and an efficient experience for postal patrons.

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The new Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center was constructed on a previously developed site in the northwest corner of Houston's original plat. The 1873 and 1891 birds' eye aerial maps of the city shows a small train depot on or near this same location. This is also corroborated by sheet 46 of the 1896 Sanborn Map showing the Houston and Texas Central Railroad (H&TC RR) Grand Central Depot north of Washington between 7th and 8th streets. (Map 8) The H&TC RR was purchased by Southern Pacific in 1883 and continued to operate under its own brand name

²² Ibid, 45.

²³ Brown, Cynkar, Mod, and Steely, "Multiple Property Documentation Form, *Modernist Commercial, Governmental, and Institutional Buildings in Houston, Texas, 1945-1976*," January 2015, p. 8. On file at the Texas Historical Commission.

²⁴U.S. Congress, "Albert Thomas", Electronic document: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=T000156>. Accessed 3 June 2013.

²⁵ McDonald, Archie P. "Albert Thomas", *Handbook of Texas Online*, electronic document: <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fth04>. Accessed June 2, 2013, published by the Texas State Historical Association.

²⁶ "Drive-In Post office One of Many Improvements by Houston's Postmaster", *Labor Messenger*, October 29, 1948, Houston, Texas.

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until 1927.²⁷ By 1907, a train shed was constructed on the north side of the Grand Central Depot. (Map 9) The 1924 Sanborn Map continues to show the Grand Central Depot and train shed on sheet 218 of volume 2. (Map 10)

On the 1924-1951 Sanborn Map, the 1934 Southern Pacific Passenger Station/Grand Central Station designed by Wyatt C. Hedrick appears to have replaced the earlier Grand Central Depot. The 1936 Post Office Parcel Post Building is visible to the east (right) of the station. The 1951 Sanborn Map shows the parcel post as an L-plan building, while the 1960 site plan shows the current rectangular form suggesting the configuration may have changed between 1951 and 1960. No historic photographs of the 1936 building were located.²⁸ (Map 11, Figure 5 & 7)

Much of this site was cleared for the construction of the 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office. Comparisons of the 1944 and 1978 historic aerials available in Google Earth demonstrate that the six southern-most rail tracks were removed to construct the P&DC warehouse portion of the building. The 1936 Parcel Post building remains in place but it's unclear exactly how it was incorporated into the warehouse portion of the 1962 post office (Map 12, Photos 4-5). While there is also some question of whether any historic train sheds remain within the warehouse, no evidence has been identified during the photo documentation of the building. Additionally, the construction of the parking lots and plaza took place partially on top of what was once Washington Avenue, so it difficult to determine whether the 1962 building lies north of the former street like the previous train depots. (Map 13)

Consistent with federal guidelines, new \$14,000,000 Houston postal facility was designed by local private firm Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson. It included a five-story office tower (administration wing) and two-story mail handling warehouse totaling approximately 498,000 square feet of floor space. The post office opened with limited service on June 8, 1962 and was in full operation on January 1, 1963. Designed with a standardized interior, the tower's first floor contained postal windows, post office boxes, and counter service for patrons. The second floor featured a cafeteria for the complex's approximately 1,500 workers. The third floor held the executive offices. The offices of the postal inspector and other postal administrative offices were on the fourth floor. The fifth floor contained offices for personnel, civil service, and training. The roof top level housed the mechanical penthouses.²⁹ The exterior design also reflected "Guiding Principles" emphasis on the incorporation of "local and regional architectural traditions and influences."³⁰ This principle was evident through the inclusion of the concrete screen, which provided valuable shading to the building in warm Houston summer temperatures.

Unlike its 1891 and 1911 predecessors which housed many federal services, the new centralized building was designed solely to handle all operations of the U.S. Post Office Department including public counter and box services, processing of first-class mail, parcel post, magazine handling, and administrative offices for the Houston postal region. Before the construction of this property, all three of these sorting processes were conducted at different facilities. At the time, Houston Postmaster Granville Elder said, "The office is designed to meet mail needs here for the next 20 to 25 years. We expect mail to be handled 20 percent faster and 20 percent more economically than it is now."³¹

C.H. Leavell & Company was financially responsible for the construction of the building. The company, in turn, would lease back to the federal government for use as a post office / sectional center. The lease agreement between the Leavell

²⁷ George C. Werner, "Houston and Texas Central Railway," accessed November 06, 2017, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/eqh09>.

Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Modified on March 20, 2017. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

²⁸ "Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick: An Inventory of their Drawings, Photographs, and Records: 1907-1969, 1991," *Alexander Architectural Archive, University of Texas Libraries*, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utaaa/00005/aaa-00005.html#series8>.

²⁹ Boland, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*, 5.

³⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," from *Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space*, June 1, 1962. Accessed May 31, 2017, <https://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/136543>

³¹ Murphy, Bernard, "Main Post Office Building Days End," *Houston Chronicle*, August 17, 1963, Houston, Texas.

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Company and the government consisted of a 30-year lease with options in favor of the federal government for one 10-year and six five-year renewable terms. The government would also have an option to purchase the property at the end of 10, 20, and 30 years, and at the end of each renewable option.³² The Postal Service took over the property in 1971 and retained ownership until it was sold to the current owner in 2015. The postal facility office tower's signature vertical panels of precast concrete, which texture the exterior's top five floors, were produced by Otto Buehner & Company of Denver and Salt Lake City. A company advertisement featured the "U.S. Central Post Office, Houston, Texas"—along with three other projects from New York City, Knoxville, and Detroit—in its "Mo-Sai Precast Concrete Facing and Curtain Wall" catalog in 1963.³³

When the 1962 downtown Houston Central Post Office and Processing and Distribution Center was completed, Elder and his team oversaw one of the most innovative and modern facilities in the country and one of only five selected to test new types of automated equipment. In 1959-1960, the U.S. Post Office introduced mechanical innovations around the country, including: the first American-built letter sorter; the first volume order for mechanization to Pitney-Bowes Inc. for production of 75 Mark II facer cancelers, facsimile mail, and the installation of Mailflo system of mail processing.³⁴ Elder and his Houston team succeeded, and his new postal facility became a leader not only in Houston but in the country. Elder worked in postal service for 42 years, serving 22 of those as Postmaster. He retired in October 1969 and in his retirement speech he summarized, "Postmasters never die, they just lose their zip."³⁵

The Downtown Houston Post Office was named in honor of Barbara C. Jordan in August 1984. Jordan (1936–1996) was a Houstonian, lawyer, educator, Texas State Senator, and U.S. Congresswoman (1973–1979). She was the first African-American Congresswoman from the Deep South and the first African-American elected in the 20th century to the Texas Senate (1966–1973). She was a leader of the Civil Rights movement, and a noted commentator during the Congressional Watergate hearings in 1974.³⁶

The Houston P&DC served as the Sectional Center Facility for the entire Houston area during its lifespan. Under the Postal Service's current organization, mail is taken first to a local postal branch. From the local branch, mail is taken to the Sectional Center Facility, or Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center. Under the Postal Service's organizational plan, each distribution center serves an area of at least three, 3-digit zip code prefixes. The Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center served all zip codes with prefixes ranging from 770-772.³⁷ This area constitutes everything within City of Houston limits in 2017, roughly bounded by Texas State Highway Beltway 8.³⁸ From the distribution center, mail is routed to a Network Distribution Center (NDC). The United States Postal Service closed the Houston P&DC in 2015.

³² "Contract let for new post office building," *Houston Chronicle*, September 3, 1960. Available at Houston Metropolitan Research Center.

³³ Freedman, Sidney, "Architectural Precast Concrete." Chapter in *Twentieth-Century Building Materials, History and Conservation*. Thomas C. Jester, ed. National Park Service, McGraw-Hill Companies, 1995, New York.

³⁴ URS Group, Inc, *USPS Nationwide Historic Context Study: Postal Facilities Constructed or Occupied Between 1940 and 1971*, prepared for the United States Postal Service.

³⁵ "Houston Postmaster Elder Resigning After 22 Years", *Houston Chronicle*, October 30, 1969, Houston, Texas.

³⁶ Odintz, Mark, "Jordan, Barbara Charline." Electronic document: *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fjoas>), accessed June 24, 2013, published by the Texas State Historical Association.

³⁷ "L005 3-Digit Zip Code Prefix Groups – SCF Sortation," United States Postal Service, December 8, 2005. Available at <https://pe.usps.com/Archive/HTML/DMMArchive20060108/L005.htm>, accessed May 30, 2017.

³⁸ "Overlay of Zip Codes for Houston, Harris County, Texas," accessed May 30, 2017.

http://www.zipmap.net/Texas/Harris_County/Houston.htm

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Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson

This famed Houston-based architecture firm was founded by Seth Irwin (Si) Morris and F. Talbott Wilson as F. Talbott Wilson and Irwin Morris in 1938. The two men had met at the Rice Institute (now Rice University), where they both studied architecture.³⁹ In its early years, the firm focused on residential design during Houston's housing shortage caused by rapid population growth. A series of residential projects, including their first project, Park Lane Apartments adjacent to Hermann Park, brought the firm to the attention of local land developer E. L. Crain. In 1940, Crain commissioned the firm to design several homes in the new Garden Oaks subdivision he was developing. Crain also helped the firm win the commission to design the Garden Oaks School in that same year.⁴⁰ In the brief period before World War II, Wilson and Morris developed their own subdivision, Crestwood. The firm's work came to a halt during World War II while both partners served in the military.

After World War II, Wilson and Morris reopened with new partner, B. L. Crain, becoming Wilson, Morris, & Crain. As Wilson, Morris, & Crain, the firm was best known for its club designs.⁴¹ During the 1940s and 50s, the firm designed clubs in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Lakeview, Texas, the Forest Club in Houston, a redesign of the interiors at the Houston Club, and a new building for the Houston Country Club.⁴² Their work on these club designs allowed the firm partners to meet several powerful Houston leaders, setting the firm up for many of their large institutional and governmental projects.

During the 1950s, Wilson, Morris, & Crain won commissions to build dormitories at the University of Texas, multiple colleges at Rice University, a residence for Gerald Hines as well as several commercial projects for Hines' development company, corporate headquarters for Southwestern Bell, Texaco, and Houston Lighting & Power, additions to the 1954 *Houston Post* building, the College of Education at University of Houston, and several other projects. These projects gave the firm some notoriety, and they soon became the local associate firm for projects designed by New York-based firm Skidmore, Owens, & Merrill (SOM) and renowned architect Philip Johnson.⁴³

The firm added Ralph Anderson as partner and became Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson in 1958. When Houston won a baseball franchise in 1961, the firm's history of large-scale projects and political connections helped the firm win the commission to design what would eventually become the Harris County Domed Stadium, commonly known as the Astrodome (NRHP 2014). The Astrodome gave the firm international recognition for designing the world's the then-largest open span and first indoor, air-conditioned stadium.

The firm's projects are best characterized by their use of materials to create visual depth, texture, and ornament. While some early modernist designs in Houston, most notably the Melrose Building (NRHP 2014) and Medical Towers (NRHP 2016) introduced brightly colored tile to add interest to the simplified forms of modern architecture, Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson focused on the application of materials to add depth to their designs. Their best known projects, including the Downtown Houston Post Office, *Houston Post* building addition, the College of Education at the University of Houston, and the Astrodome, introduce a variety of high quality, natural and manmade materials in neutral colors in order to highlight the thoughtfulness of their designs. Both the *Houston Post* building and the Houston Post Office demonstrate the firm's ability to combine commercial and industrial function within a single building while still creating distinct use zones. Their designs on the Houston Post Office and the Astrodome demonstrate Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson's ingenuity with concrete screens. Using new technology in pre-formed concrete, the firm's concrete screen designs play with depth and shadow to create color and contrast on their building exteriors.

³⁹ Barry Moore, "Building a Houston Practice: the Career of S.I. Morris," *Cite*, Winter 1999, pg. 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 30.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pg. 31.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.

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Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson's design of the post office is an excellent example of their work and represents the best of Houston's modernist governmental architecture by a local firm. The design continues to utilize the timeless symbols of grandeur and power, repeated in U.S. governmental architecture since the nation's inception: massiveness, luminosity of the materials, and columnar *pilotis*. However, Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson adapted these symbols and visual cues in their New Formalist design. The Houston P&DC's location on the edge of downtown at the interchange of I-45 and I-10 makes the building one of the best recognized and most prominent examples of New Formalism in Houston.

Frederick A. Buxton

Frederick A. Buxton was born in Fort Worth, Texas on April 17, 1926. After high school, Buxton enlisted in the Naval Air Force, and following his service attended Texas A&M University where he graduated with a degree in Landscape Architecture in 1950.⁴⁴ Buxton opened his own firm, Fred Buxton & Associates, in 1956.⁴⁵

Fred Buxton & Associates worked on dozens of high profile projects over the years, including Market Square Park (NRHP 1983), the Texas Medical Center 1961 master plan, and Guadalupe Mountains National Park. Buxton also worked on the Texas A&M Research Park, plazas at the University of Houston, the Shell Research Center, and the Fort Bend Tollroad Landscape Master Plan.⁴⁶ Buxton's firm also served as a launching point for many well-known Houston-based designers including Lanson B. Jones and Charles Tapley, as well as local preservationist Bart Truxillo.⁴⁷ Multiple sources note that Buxton is best known for his use of water conservation systems in his designs.⁴⁸

Buxton died on February 27, 2005. At the time of his death, Buxton was a registered landscape architect with the State of Texas, a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects, and a member of the American Planning Association, and he had received more than thirty local, state, and national awards for his work.⁴⁹

Summary

The Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center is nominated under Criteria A in the area of Politics/Government as a tangible representation of rapid federal government expansion and specifically postal services in Post-War Houston. Between 1962 and 2015, the building served Houston residents as the main distribution center housing all postal operations including public counter and mailbox services, mail processing, parcel post, and administrative offices. The property is also nominated under Criterion C as an intact example of New Formalist government architecture influenced by President John F. Kennedy's "Guiding Principles of Federal Architecture" and as an example of the work of noted Texas architects, Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson. The period of significance is 1962-1967.

⁴⁴ "Frederick Arthur Buxton," Legacy Obituaries. *Houston Chronicle*, March 3, 2005. Accessed November 7, 2017 <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/houstonchronicle/obituary.aspx?n=frederick-arthur-buxton&pid=3238102>

⁴⁵ "In Memoriam: Fred Buxton, RLA, ASLA," Landscape Online. Accessed November 7, 2017 <http://www.landscapeonline.com/research/article-a.php?number=5136>

⁴⁶ "Frederick Arthur Buxton," Legacy Obituaries. *Houston Chronicle*, March 3, 2005. Accessed November 7, 2017 <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/houstonchronicle/obituary.aspx?n=frederick-arthur-buxton&pid=3238102>.

⁴⁷ "Frederick A. Buxton," Pioneer Information, The Cultural Landscape Foundation. Accessed November 7, 2017 <https://tclf.org/pioneer/frederick-buxton>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Frederick Arthur Buxton," Legacy Obituaries. *Houston Chronicle*, March 3, 2005. Accessed November 7, 2017 <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/houstonchronicle/obituary.aspx?n=frederick-arthur-buxton&pid=3238102>.

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Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 16 acres

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 29.767131° | Longitude: -95.366026° |
| 2. Latitude: 29.766278° | Longitude: -95.362415° |
| 3. Latitude: 29.765064° | Longitude: -95.362759° |
| 4. Latitude: 29.764851° | Longitude: -95.363362° |
| 5. Latitude: 29.765474° | Longitude: -95.366188° |
| 6. Latitude: 29.766152° | Longitude: -95.365991° |
| 7. Latitude: 29.766226° | Longitude: -95.366277° |

Verbal Boundary Description: All of BLK 16, 17, 18 & PT BLKS 1-4 & PT BLCKS 15, 19, 24-27 & TR 5A BLK 28; PTS of Washington & Allen Streets, NSSBB, Houston, Harris County, Texas.

Boundary Justification: The boundary contains all the property historically associated with the nominated resources.

Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 1: Harris County, Texas

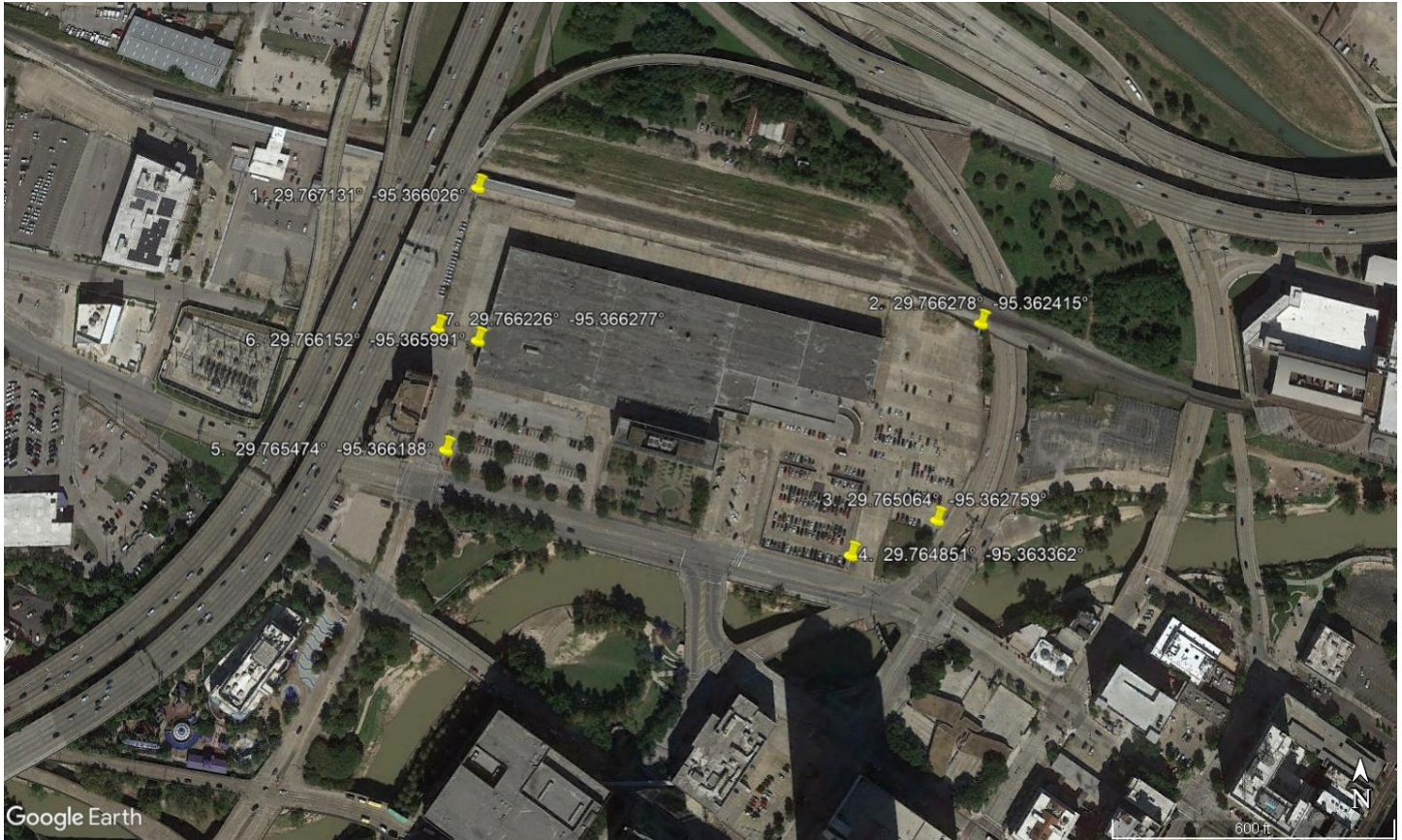


Map 2: Google Earth Map, Accessed May 18, 2017



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 3: Google Earth Map, Accessed December 13, 2017



- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 29.767131° | Longitude: -95.366026° |
| 2. Latitude: 29.766278° | Longitude: -95.362415° |
| 3. Latitude: 29.765064° | Longitude: -95.362759° |
| 4. Latitude: 29.764851° | Longitude: -95.363362° |
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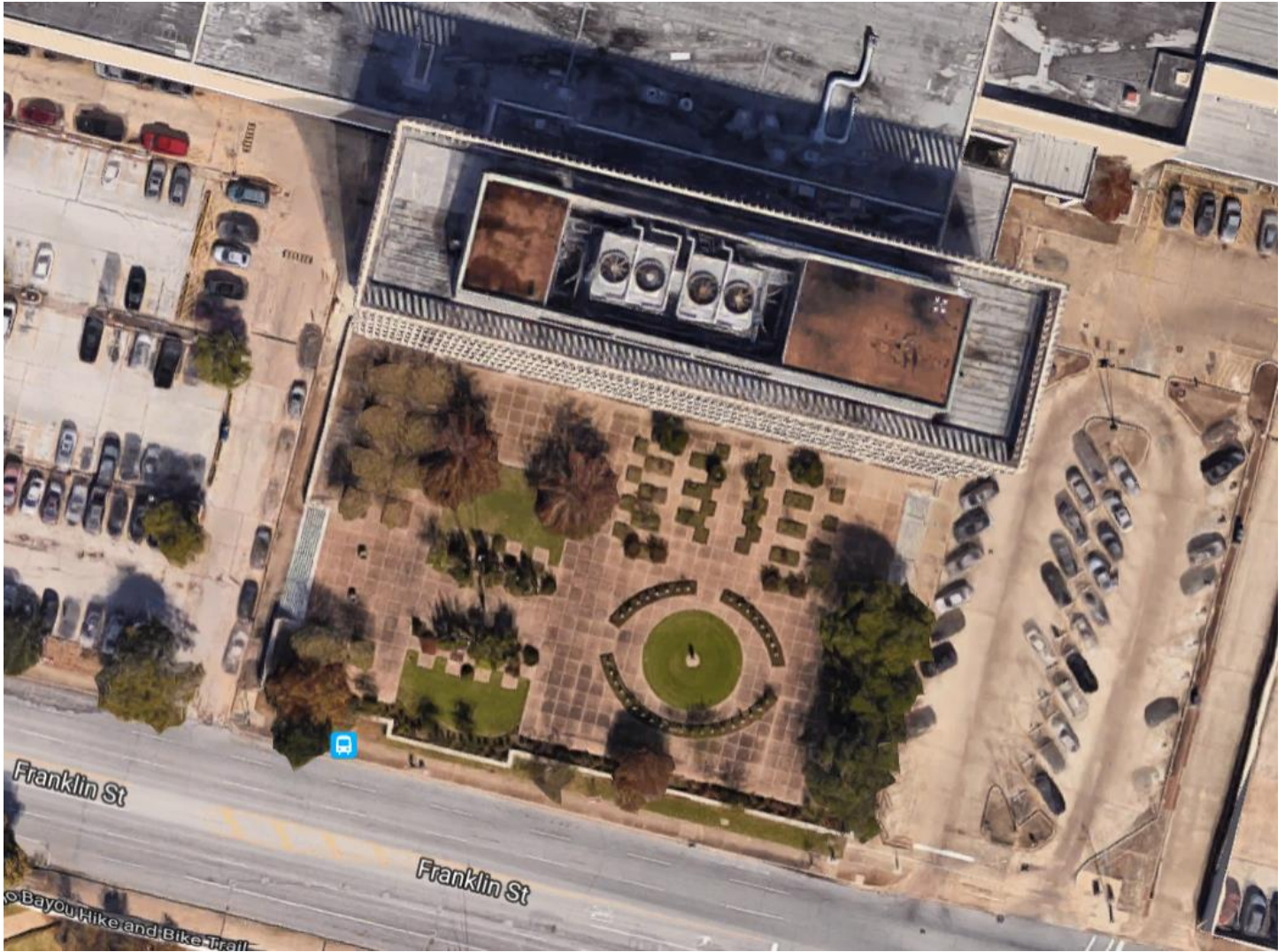
Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 4: Map showing current legal parcel which serves as property boundary. *Courtesy Harris County Appraisal District.*



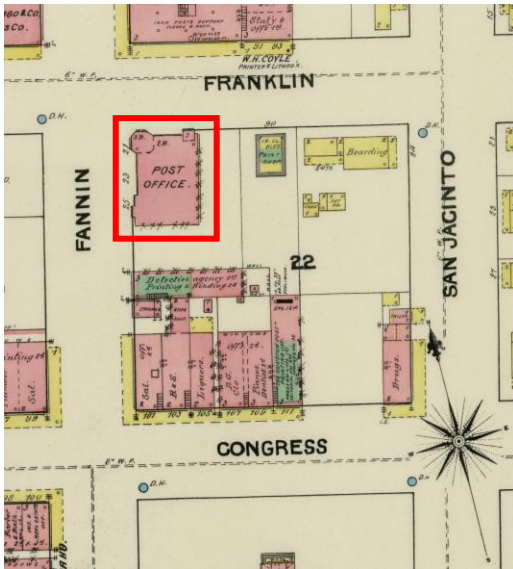
Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 5: Google Map showing landscaped plaza design. Accessed June 20, 2017.

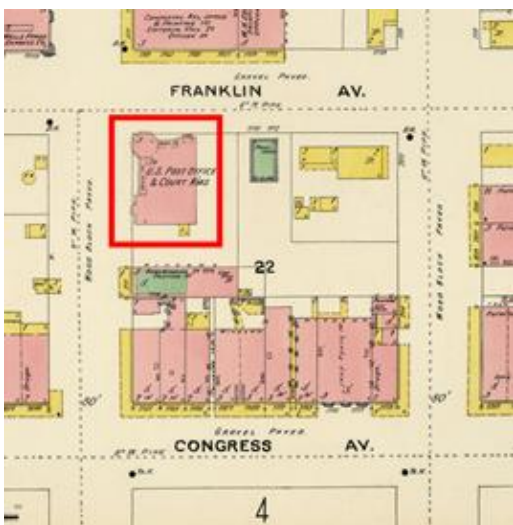


Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 6: 1890 Sanborn Map, sheet 4, showing United States Post Office and Courthouse likely under construction at corner of Franklin Avenue and Fannin Street in Houston. *Courtesy Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.*

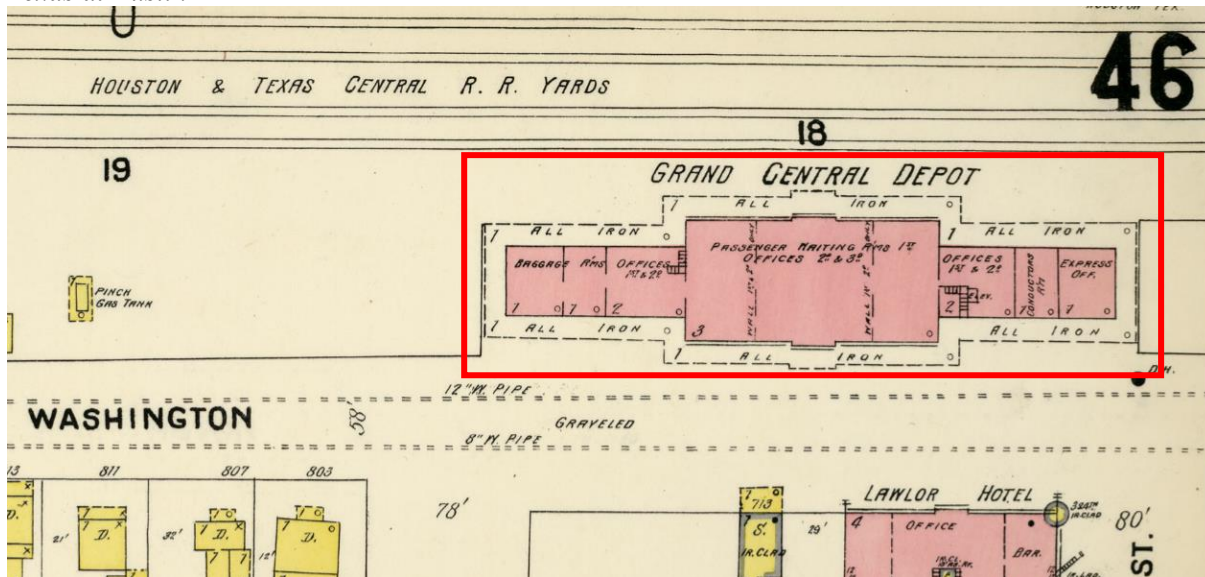


Map 7: 1896 Sanborn Map, sheet 2, showing 1891 United States Post Office and Courthouse at corner of Franklin Avenue and Fannin Street in Houston. *Courtesy Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.*

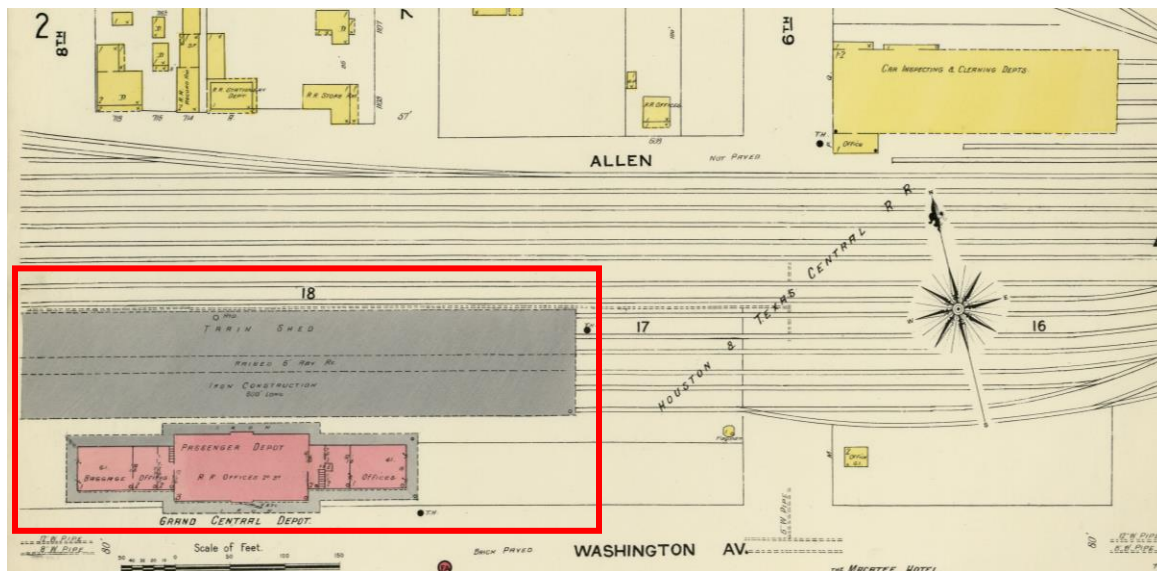


Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 8: 1896 Sanborn Map, sheet 46 showing existence of Houston and Texas Central Railroad Grand Central Depot on or near site of 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office. *Courtesy Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.*

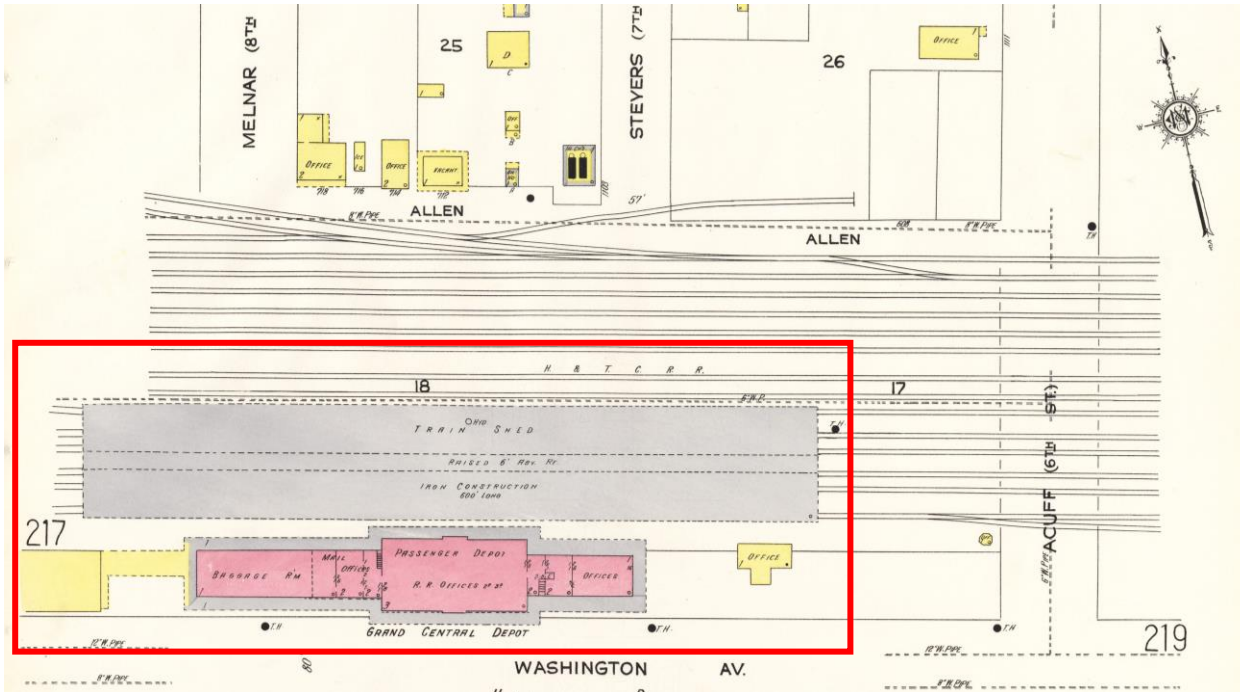


Map 9: 1907 Sanborn Map, volume 2, sheet 3, showing Houston and Texas Central Railroad Grand Central Depot and Train Shed on site of 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office. *Courtesy Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.*



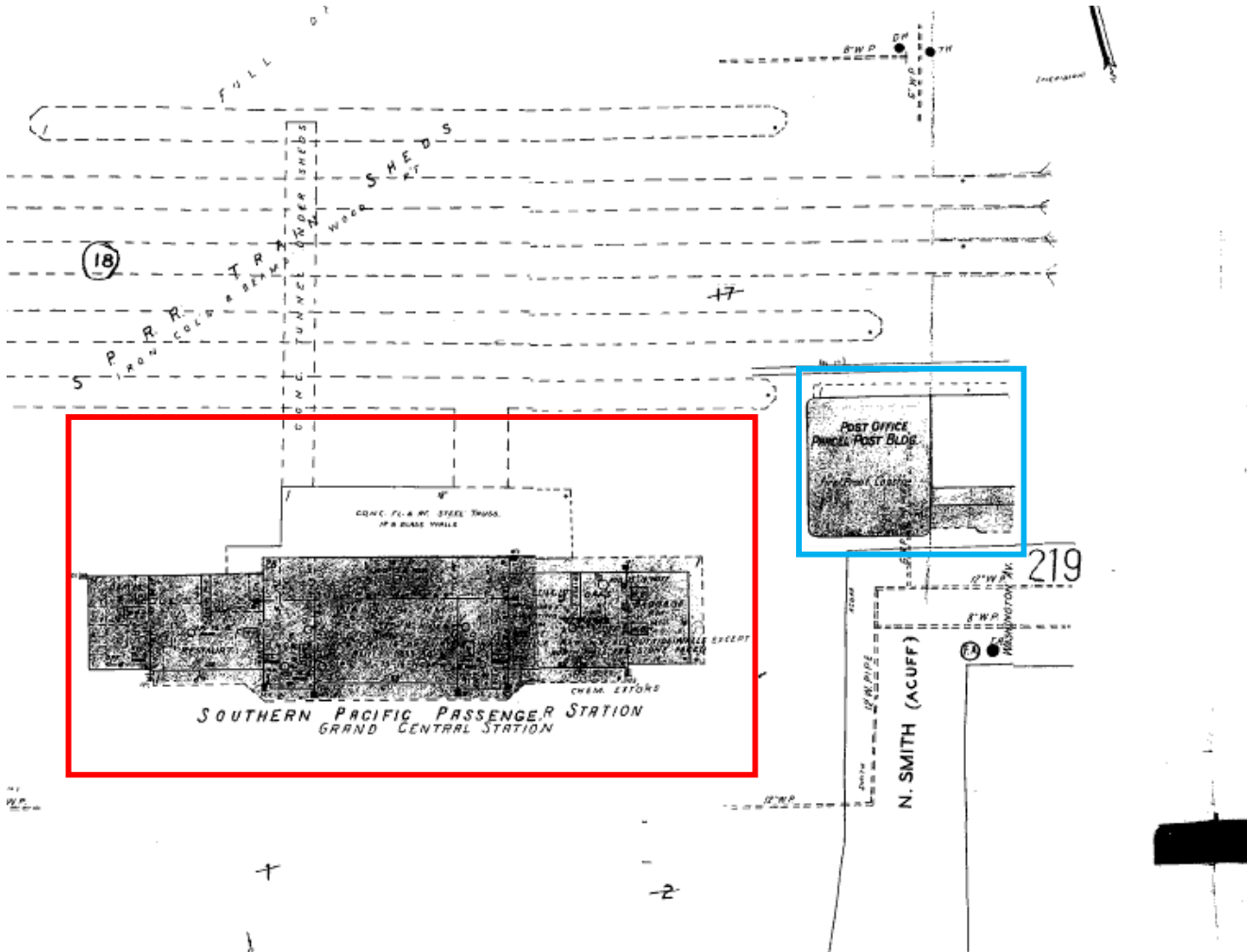
Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 10: 1924-1950 Sanborn Map volume 2, sheet 218, showing Houston and Texas Central Railroad Grand Central Depot and Train Shed on site of 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office. *Courtesy Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.*



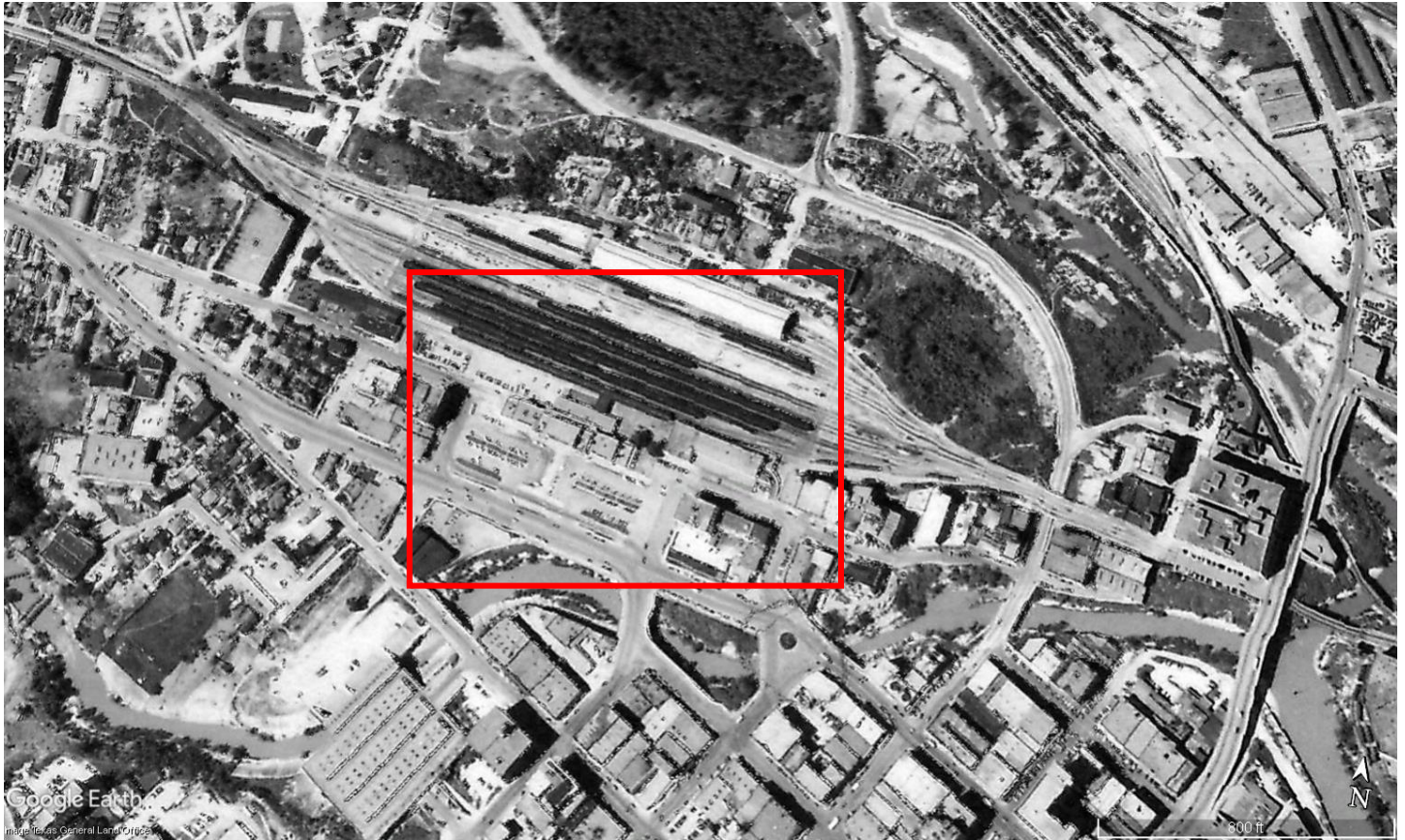
Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 11: 1924-1951 Sanborn Map volume 2, sheet 218 showing 1934 Southern Pacific Passenger Station / Grand Central Station in red which replaced the earlier Grand Central Depot. It seems likely the entire depot was demolished leaving no part of the building to be incorporated into the 1962 post office. The 1936 Post Office Parcel Post Building is outlined in blue. *Courtesy ProQuest Digital Sanborn Maps*



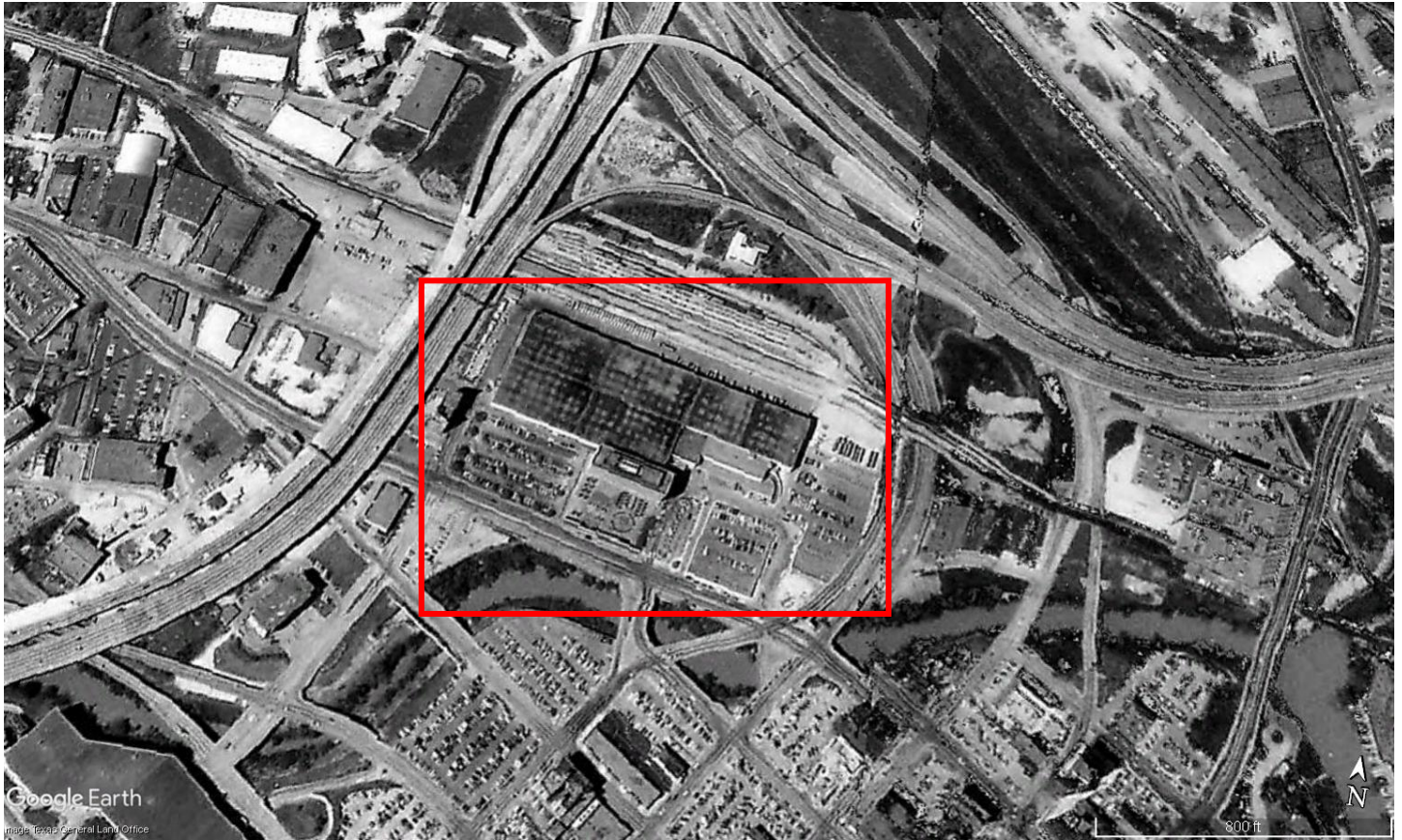
Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 12: 1944 Google Earth Historic Aerial showing site of 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office. The Southern Pacific Passenger Depot is visible at center and the 1936 parcel post building is visible on the right.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Map 13: 1978 Google Earth Historic Aerial showing 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 1: 1891 United States Post Office and Courthouse at the corner of Franklin Avenue and Fannin Street pictured in 1900 (demolished). Supervising Architect, Will A. Freret. *Courtesy National Archives.*



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 2: 1911 United States Custom House, 701 San Jacinto Street, Houston, Texas, 1910s. *Courtesy National Archives.*



Figure 3: Extant 1911 United States Custom House (Sam Houston Post Office), 701 San Jacinto Street, Houston, Texas in June 2008. *Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.*



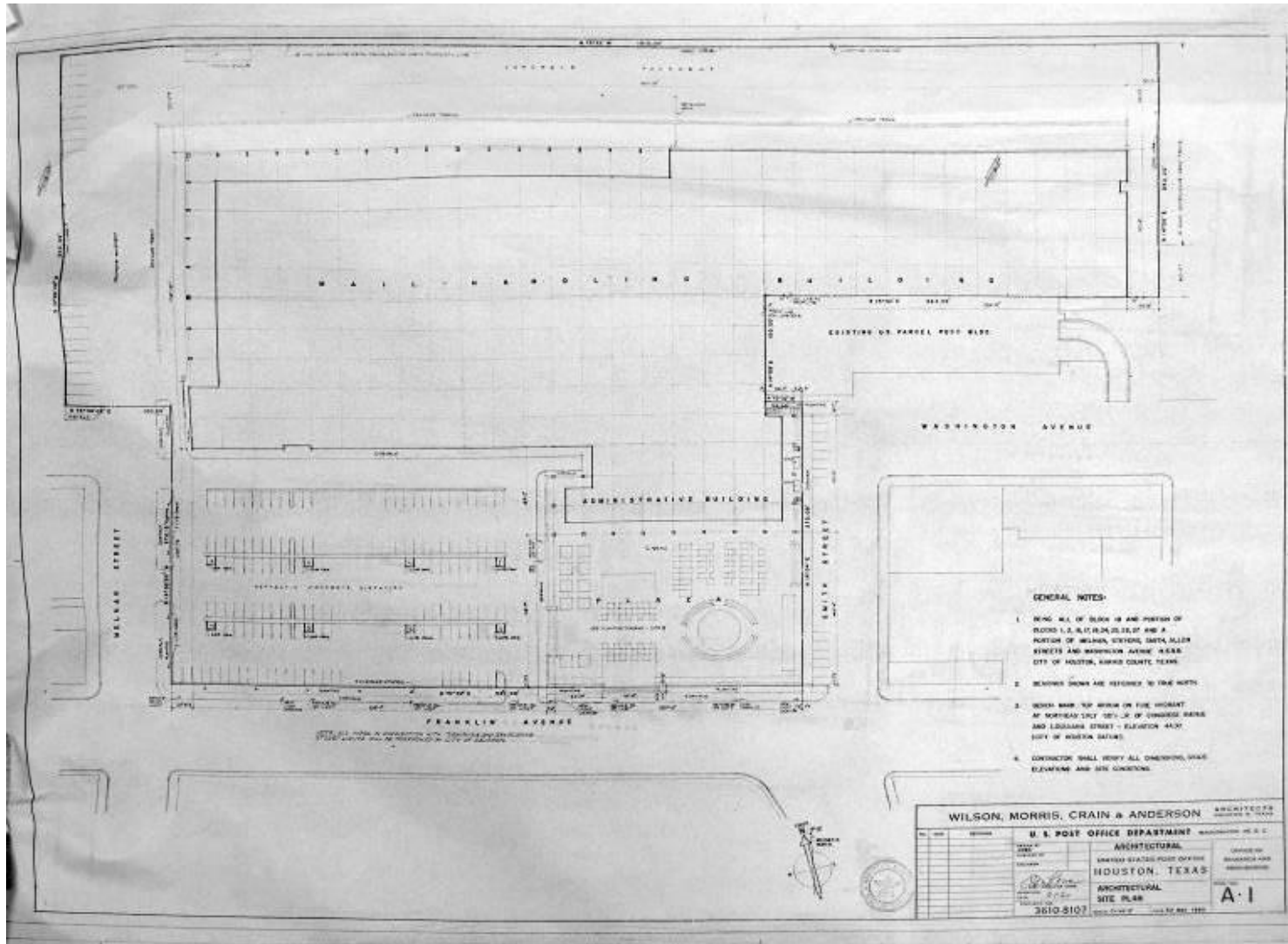
Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 4: Postcard showing 1962 Downtown Houston Post Office, date unknown. View northeast. Photo courtesy Randy Pace.



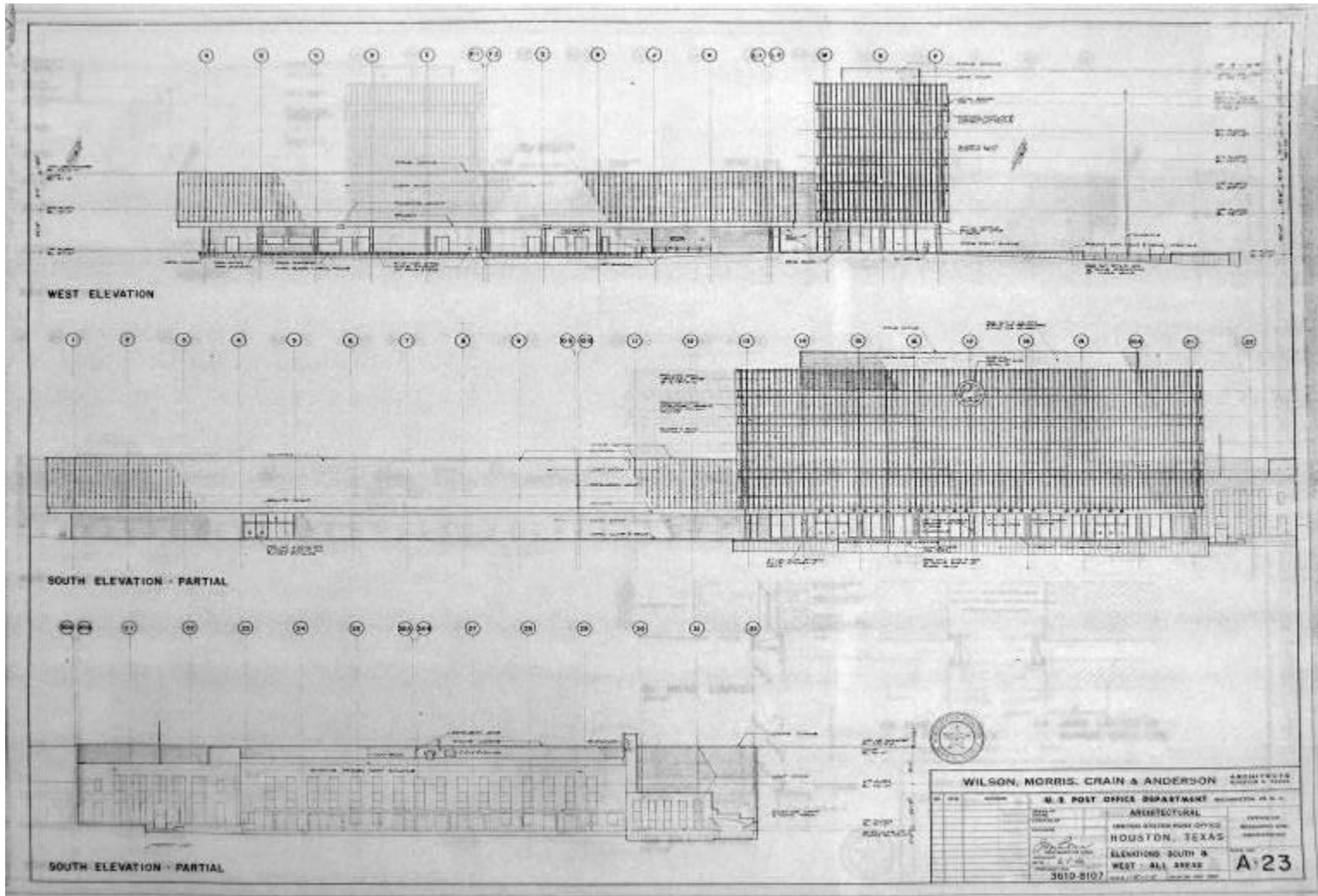
Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 5: Site Plan, June 1960. Note "Existing U.S. Parcel Post" portion visible at right.



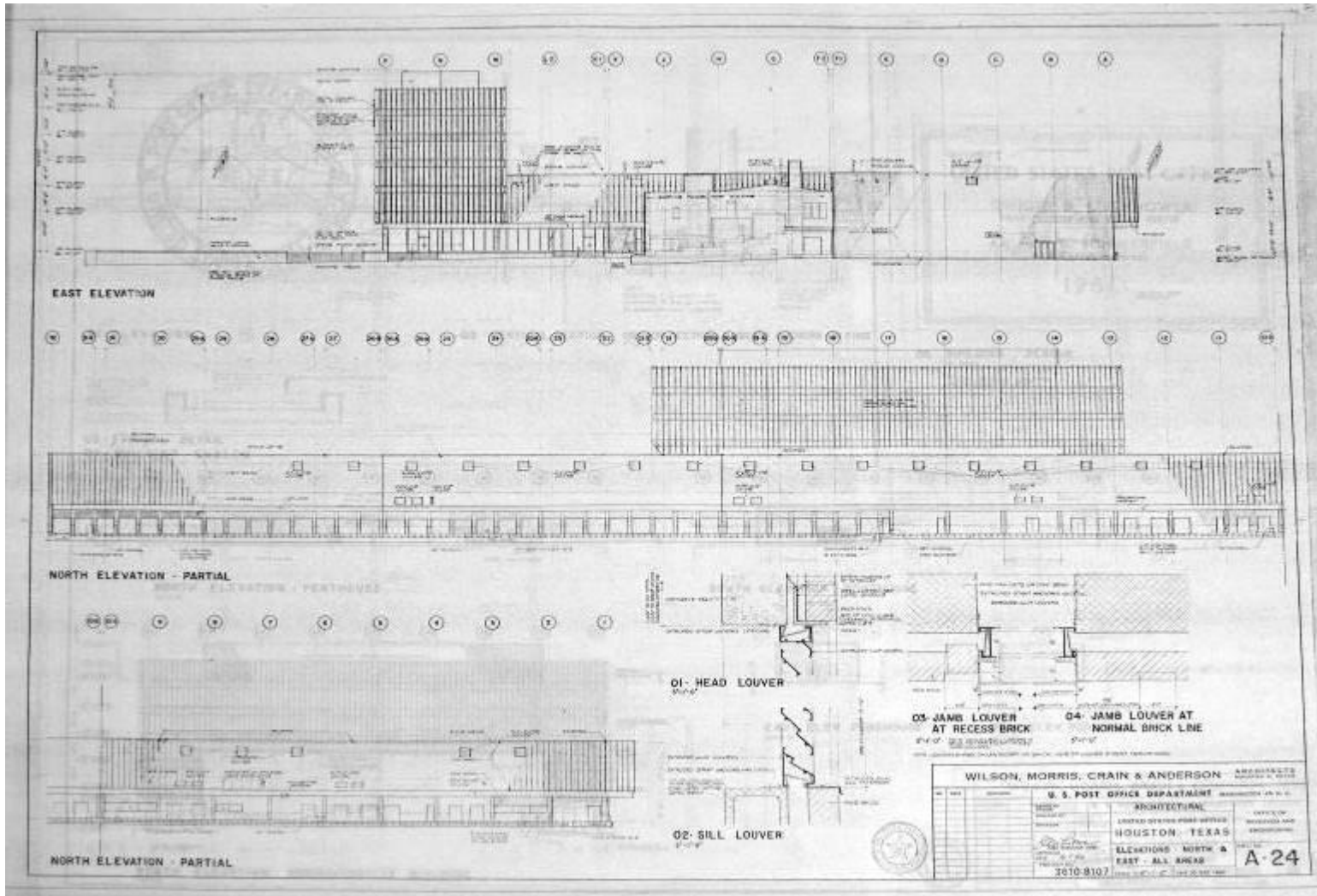
Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 6: West and South Elevations, June 1960



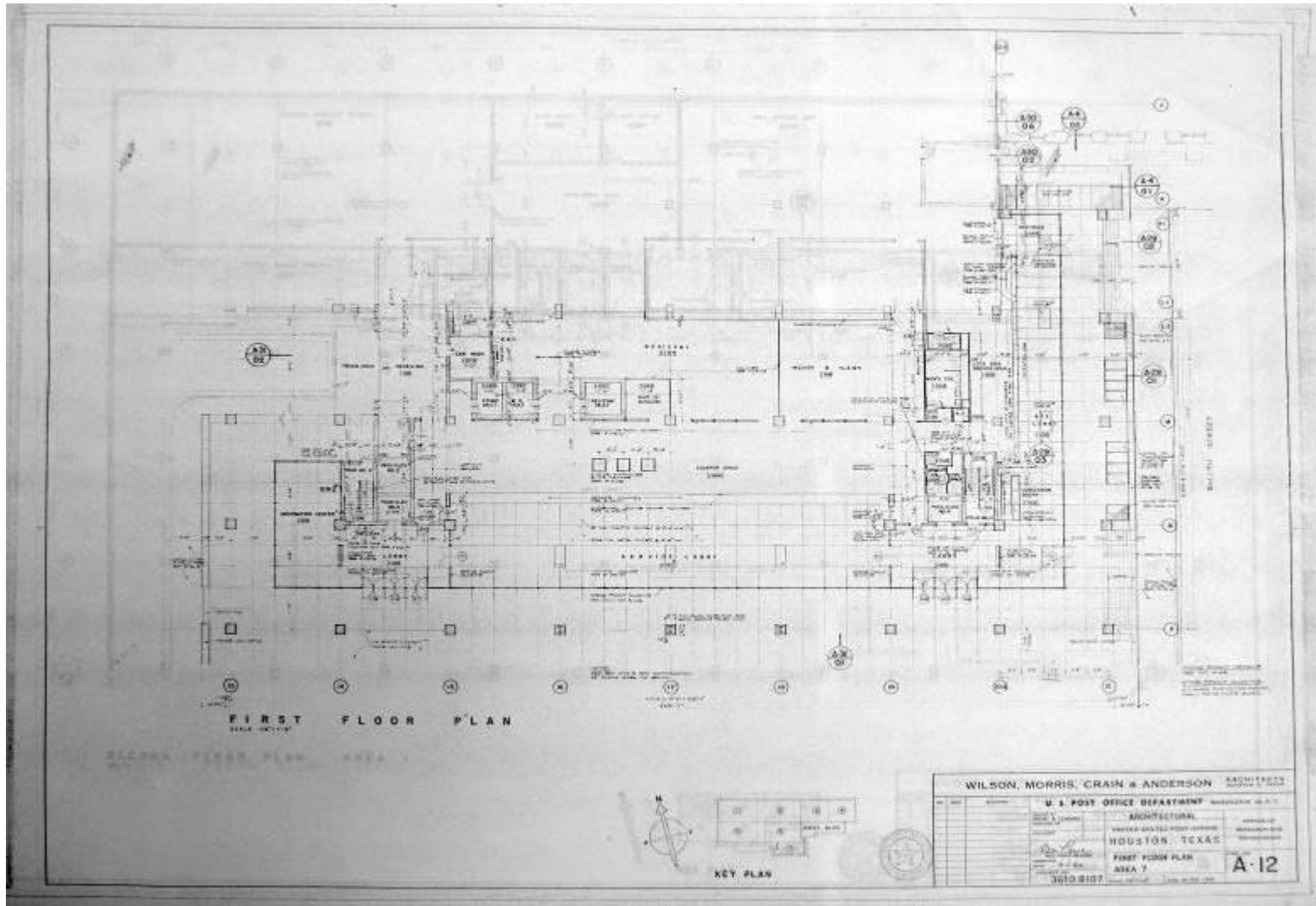
Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 7: North and East Elevations, June 1960



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 8: First Floor Plan, June 1960



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photographs

Photo 1

West elevation and south façade of administration wing, camera facing northeast.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 2

South façade of tower, camera facing north.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 3

East elevation of hyphen connecting administration wing to warehouse portion (left) and partial view of the eastern section of the south elevation of the warehouse portion (right). Camera facing northwest.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 4

Eastern section of the south elevation of the warehouse portion showing some of the original 1936 postal service building. Camera facing northwest.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 5

East elevation of administration wing and warehouse portion, view west.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 6

North elevation of warehouse portion, view west.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 7

North elevation of warehouse portion, view east.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 8

West elevation of warehouse portion, view northeast.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 9

West and south elevations of the warehouse portion (left) and west elevation of administration wing (right), brick hyphen visible. Camera facing east.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 10

North and west elevations of administration wing from roof of warehouse portion, view southeast.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 11

Plaza landscaping from the southeastern corner of the administration wing, view southwest.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 12

Main entrance on the south façade of the administration wing with plaza in foreground, view northwest.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 13

Interior, west elevator bank with original marble-clad columns, view northeast.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 14

Interior, west elevator bank lobby with curtain wall exterior and plaza in background. Camera facing southeast.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 15

Interior, west elevator bank lobby original partition wall and marble clad column, view northwest. Some Postal Service signage and original terrazzo flooring visible.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 16

Interior, ground floor lobby, view northeast.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 17

Interior, ground floor lobby, view northwest. Original terrazzo flooring in the foreground on the left and original vaults in the background on left. The transition between the administration wing and the warehouse is visible in the background at center.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 18

Warehouse interior.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 19

Interior, second floor of eastern portion of the warehouse section, view south. This section of the warehouse houses on-site maintenance facilities, and retains many of the original partition walls.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 20

Interior, upper floor of administration wing, view southwest.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 21

Interior, upper floor of administration wing, view northeast.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 22

Interior, upper floor of administration wing, view northwest.



Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo 23

Detail, precast concrete screen.



























STATES POST OFFICE



NOTICE

WARNING FOR
ELEVATOR

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WINDY LIGHT
DEEP EGGY LEMON COOLERS
DEEP EGGY SPICY LEMONADE
DEEP EGGY BAKERSHOP
HOT WOMA TIGER
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing and Distribution Center

Multiple Name: _____

State & County: TEXAS, Harris

Date Received: 12/19/2017 Date of Pending List: 1/29/2018 Date of 16th Day: 2/13/2018 Date of 45th Day: 2/2/2018 Date of Weekly List: _____

Reference number: SG100002087

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 2/2/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center is locally significant under National Register Criteria A and C in the areas of Politics/Government and Architecture. The 1962 complex serves as a significant representation of the federal government's rapid expansion in post-War Houston, and in particular the Postal Service's efforts to bring innovative and efficient modern services to its clients. Between 1962 and 2015, the building served Houston residents as the main distribution center housing all major postal operations and administrative offices for southeast coastal Texas. The property is also significant as an intact example of New Formalist government architecture influenced by President John F. Kennedy's "Guiding Principles of Federal Architecture" and as an example of the work of noted Texas architects, Wilson, Morris, Crain, & Anderson.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept NR Criteria A and C

Reviewer Paul Lusignan Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2229 Date 02/02/2018

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories



TO: Edson Beall
 National Register of Historic Places
 Mail Stop 7228
 1849 C St, NW
 Washington, D.C. 20240

From: Mark Wolfe, SHPO
 Texas Historical Commission

RE: Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas

DATE: December 14, 2017

The following materials are submitted:

	Original National Register of Historic Places form on disk.
X	The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the National Register of Historic Places nomination of the Downtown Houston Post Office, Processing, and Distribution Center, Houston, Harris County, Texas
	Resubmitted nomination.
X	Original NRHP signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
	Multiple Property Documentation form on disk.
	Resubmitted form.
	Original MPDF signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
X	CD with TIFF photograph files, KMZ files, and nomination PDF
	Correspondence.

COMMENTS:

- SHPO requests substantive review (cover letter from SHPO attached)
- The enclosed owner objections (do) (do not) constitute a majority of property owners
- Other:

