

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

**National Register of Historic Places
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Continuation sheet De Baca County Courthouse Item number 1-3, 7

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De Baca County, Fort Sumner
County Courthouses of New Mexico

1. Name: De Baca County Courthouse
(County Courthouses of New Mexico)
2. Location: 500 Block Avenue C
Fort Sumner, New Mexico
3. Owner: De Baca County Commission
Box 347
Fort Sumner, New Mexico 88119
7. Description: The Span. Colonial Revival Style De Baca County Courthouse is a rectangular shaped, two and a half story building with T-shaped circulation. Located on a sloping Shelbyville style court square, this courthouse exerts commanding presence over the surrounding residential and commercial environs. It was designed by architects Kerr and Walsh, of El Paso.

This two and a half story, blond brick and concrete building has a truncated hipped roof of mixed color clay tiles, and a chimney projecting from the northwest corner. Projecting brick quoins delineate the corners of the building, and a thin concrete molding visually separates the first and second floors. Windows are 2-over-2 double hung wood sash with concrete lug sills. The main access to the building is up one flight of stairs and under a classically detailed portico. Columns on the landing are of cast concrete with small floral decorations on the capitals and frieze. Above the entablature is a decorative balcony with iron railing. The entrance has double wood paneled doors with six light half glazing, sidelights and transom. The original architectural plans for the building, which are preserved in the courthouse, show more elaborate detailing over the east entry consisting of an arched, multi-light transom with curvilinear details.

The interior of the building is detailed with vinyl tile floors, plaster walls and ceilings, and cast wainscot. Doors throughout the building are wood paneled with a half light and transom above. Wall murals on the second floor which depict the history of the county were painted by Vernon Hunter in 1934. The first mural depicts the county from 1865-1907 and shows Fort Sumner as a military base, with local ranchers and Indians in apparent conflict. The family of Lucien Maxwell is pictured in this mural in front of a large, Folk Territorial Style farmhouse. Another mural entitled "The Last Frontier" depicts the railroad, the New Mexico/Texas state line, and early frontiersmen working, gambling and

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fighting a fire in the Opera House in 1907. The last mural shows a wheat farmer in the foreground, with industrialization rising quickly on the horizon. The county hopes to restore and repair these murals in the near future.

The courtroom in this building is located on the second floor and has been modernized, with only a few original light fixtures remaining. The jail is in the basement.

The De Baca County Courthouse has no elevator or handicap entrance, but these additions are being considered. The building is in good condition with only minor remodeling.

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8. Significance: The De Baca County Courthouse in Fort Sumner, New Mexico meets National Register Criterion C as a good, sober Spanish Colonial Revival design, and as the most prominent and best architect-designed building in the county.

In New Mexico during the 1920s and early 1930s, away from the Pueblo Revival enclave around Santa Fe, many public buildings--post offices, town halls and libraries--were designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. Often in New Mexico and elsewhere in the Southwest, the Baroque possibilities of the style were played down in favor of the style's more formal, Classical side. In a sense, these buildings, including the De Baca County Courthouse, are in the long American tradition of Classical public buildings, but in Hispanic, Southwestern garb of light colored brick (or stucco) and orange tile roofs. The banded podium, projecting-brick corner quoins and cast stone entrance details of the courthouse carry the underlying Classical image. The firm Kerr and Walsh of Amarillo, Texas which designed the De Baca Courthouse, may have include Anton F. Kerr who designed the imposing Neo-Classical Revival Tom Green County Courthouse in San Angelo, Texas in 1928.

The De Baca County Courthouse is easily the most prominent building in Fort Sumner. It is the largest building, one of the few architect-designed structures, and has a commanding site on a hillside overlooking the commercial area and main highway to the south and west. The commercial buildings which predate the courthouse are utilitarian structures of stone or brick. Many of the subsequent, surrounding buildings adopt light colored brick or tile accents: the International Style city hall built about 1965, for instance, uses a light-orange brick similar to the courthouse. The city's residences are modest one-story buildings, most frame stucco, a few adobe. Many represent simple Hispanic and Anglo-American vernacular house types. Some have limited Bungalow style detailing, while a few from the 1920s and 1930s adopt Mediterranean or Pueblo Revival styling.

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9. Major Bibliographic References:

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Robinson, Willard. The People's Architecture: Texas Courthouses, Jails and Municipal Halls. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1983.

Smithson, J. Vernon. "History of De Baca County." WPA File #194, June 8, 1936. New Mexico Archives and Record Center, Santa Fe.

Sanborn Map Company. "Ft. Sumner, N.M." Maps dated 1931.

Whisenhunt, Donald. New Mexico Courthouses. El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1979.

Wilson, Chris. "Ft. Sumner, N.M." Field notes on file NMHPD.

10. Geographical Data: the nominated property consists of all of Block 34 of the Depot Addition of Fort Sumner.

Quad Name: Fort Sumner, N.M. Quad Scale: 1:24,000

UTM Reference: 13 569525 3814570

Acreage: approximately 2.5 acres.