

U.S. POST OFFICE & COURTHOUSE
DESIGNATION REPORT
CITY of DALLAS



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Cultural Significance

When Uncle Sam's mail first arrived in Dallas, it was delivered at John Neely Bryan's cabin. That was in 1846, but Bryan had already been acting as postmaster for the Republic of Texas, and the Post Office was the log cabin he had built on the banks of the Trinity when he founded Dallas in 1842. Annexation of Texas was completed early in 1846 and on May 22, Bryan was officially appointed Dallas' first postmaster, and the mail was carried by pony express and stage until the first railroad came to Dallas in 1872, twenty-six years later.

Postal service improved somewhat when Charles H. Durgan was appointed postmaster, November 12, 1846. He moved the office to his store on the west side of the Court House square and provided cloth pouches alphabetically labeled, for the distribution of mail. It was serve yourself for the customers.

When Thomas f. Crutchfield was named postmaster for the first time June 25, 1850, he moved the Post Office to his inn on the north side of Main Street at Houston. He was kept busy running Dallas' first hotel, so his wife ran the Post Office. Locally she was recognized as Dallas' first and only postmistress. Crutchfield was appointed to another term in 1852 and again in 1855.

During Civil War years, war news came via pony express and the service was uncertain. Harvey Sheppard was the Confederate postmaster and served from 1862 to 1865. Following the war, Dallas' postmasters were Union men. Probably the most picturesque was Anthony Banning Norton, who came to Texas from his native Ohio in 1855. He published newspapers and entered politics. He served in the Texas Legislature, and in 1860 Governor Sam Houston appointed him Adjutant General. Because of his Union sympathies, he absented himself from Texas for the duration of the war but returned after the war and settled in Dallas. In youth he made a vow not to shave or cut his hair until Henry Clay was elected president of the United States and he kept it unto his death, his flowing mane and long beard then snow white.

By 1880 Dallas' population had increased to 10,385 and the postmaster, Dr. Arch M. Cochran, had to hire four carriers. The office was then on the south side of Main near Market Street, but more space was needed. Jean Priot owned the 50 x 100 foot lot on the corner of Sycamore (Akard) and Elm Streets, the present Sanger-Harris corner across from the Dallas Federal Savings and Loan Building, and put up a two-story brick building, 80 x 50. He had paid \$1,600.00 for the lot in 1875 and leased the ground floor of this building to the Post Office Department in 1884 for \$300.00 a year.

The Priot Building was only a temporary location however; the Post Office Department had determined to move further uptown and acquire a permanent site for a Post Office and Federal Building. In 1883 a lot facing 120 feet on Commerce Street, 120 on Main and 200 on Ervay, present site of the Mercantile Bank, was bought for \$11,346.95. When the Mercantile Bank bought the site in 1940 it paid \$607,000.00.

John H. Cochran was postmaster in 1889 when the first unit of the new Federal building was completed. It was an imposing gray stone building with a prominent clock tower. This Commerce Street unit was completed in 1893, and by 1904 it had been duplicated at the Main Street corner, with the principal entrance on Ervay. Federal offices and Court rooms were on the second and third floors.

Dallas now had one of the finest Federal buildings in the entire South, but it was soon outgrown. In anticipation of Dallas' continued growth, the Post Office Department bought a site for a New Federal Building on April 18, 1914. At that time the Texas and Pacific tracks were still running down Pacific Avenue. The site was an entire block bounded by Bryan, Ervay, Federal and St. Paul Streets. The price was \$222,100.00. Practically all mail was carried by railway passenger trains and was handled at trackside through a one-story brick building known as the Jackson Street Post Office adjoining the Union Terminal Station. This Jackson Street Post Office was the scene of one of the most daring and sensational robberies in Dallas' history. On January 14, 1921, a gang held up the clerks and carried off \$2,738,000.00 in cash and Liberty Bonds. The bandits were local men led by a scion of a prominent Dallas family. One postal clerk was killed and two wounded. One of the bandits was fatally injured in attempting to get away and confessed.

By 1930 the present Federal Building was completed and the Post Office and Federal Courts moved in. For several years terminal mail was handled at a rented building on Young Street at Market, but late in 1937 the Terminal Annex, built to replace the Jackson Street building, was completed and occupied. Since then the only expansion of facilities has been the establishment of many sub offices. But now the mail depends only partly on the trains, as the airways, trucks and motor bus lines carry much of the mail.

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Architectural Significance

The United States Post Office and Courthouse, located at the corner of Ervay and Bryan Streets, was designed in 1928 and constructed between 1929-1930. The building is five stories tall and constructed of reinforced concrete with an Indiana limestone facade. Designed by James Whitmore of the Federal Bureau of Architecture in Washington, the post office is an example of an Italian Revival style of architecture with neo-classical influences. As a civic monument the structure is also representative of the architecture espoused by the "City Beautiful" movement which appealed to the nation during the early 1900's. The post office is characterized by a flat roofline emphatically crowned at the eaves by a projecting stone cornice, other elaborate horizontal coursing, tall windows with thickened mullions, and arched windows headed by keystones - all representative of the Italian Revival style. The south facade is further enlivened by recessed bays that occur above the first level, thereby creating three distinct wings: Neo-classical influences can be found at the first level in the rusticated limestone facade laid with deep joints to give the appearance of massiveness, and strong horizontal lines. Cornices are finely detailed and the moldings are crisply drawn. The neo-classical influence makes the post office appear more stately than exciting, and more "correct" rather than daring.

The building is faced in a cream colored Indiana limestone, reminiscent of the light and bright palette of the City Beautiful movement. The first level does exhibit the rusticated finish while the upper levels are plain in this respect. Ornamental entrance doorways with columns occur on the St. Paul and Ervay Street fronts. A colored stone cornice surrounds the top level of the post office and an ornamental colored band or belt course is located below the fourth level windows. Perhaps the most colorful detailings are the terra cotta murals that serve as spandrels between the windows of the upper two levels. The murals depict in salmon-colored figures on a field of blue the progress of postal transportation from pony express to air mail.

There are two murals in the interior of the Post Office, one over the Ervay Street entrance and one over the St. Paul Street entrance. The west mural on the Ervay Street side has for its basic design an ornamental map of Dallas, in light brown, with the Trinity River running diagonally across it. The east mural on the St. Paul Street side shows a map of Texas, on a light brown field, with directions indicated by a compass. The general designs for these murals were furnished by supervising architects in Washington. Murals will always remain Government-owned and preserved in accordance with an agreement between the Postal Service and the National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution. (U.S. Postal Service Report, 1980).

The Five story United States Post Office and Courthouse in downtown Dallas is an architectural resource for a variety of reasons. Like the courthouse and the town halls of the past, a post office tells a city where its center is, and thus provides a much needed sense of place. Dallas' downtown Post Office fulfills this need while also providing a sense of pedestrian scale and light and air in an area proliferated with skyscrapers. And as a civic monument, the Post Office represents architecture that was to last for all time - grand in scale, monumental, symmetrical with simply appointed detailing - a noble form of architecture.

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Designation Merit

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|--|---------------|--|---------------|
| A. Character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City of Dallas, State of Texas, or the United States. | <u> X </u> | H. Embodiments of elements of architectural design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship which represent a significant architectural innovation. | <u> </u> |
| B. Location as the site of a significant historical event. | <u> </u> | I. Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites, or areas which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on historic, cultural, or architectural motif. | <u> </u> |
| C. Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city. | <u> X </u> | J. Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the city. | <u> X </u> |
| D. Exemplification of the cultural, economic, social, or historical heritage of the city. | <u> X </u> | K. Archeological value in that it has produced or can be expected to produce data affecting theories of historic or prehistoric value. | <u> </u> |
| E. Portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style. | <u> </u> | L. Value as an aspect of community sentiment or public pride. | <u> X </u> |
| F. Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen. | <u> X </u> | | |
| G. Identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city. | <u> </u> | | |

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Recommendation

The Landmark Survey Task Force requests the Historic Landmark Preservation Committee to deem this proposed landmark meritorious of historic recognition as outlined in city ordinance 19-A.

Date:

Further, this task force endorses the preservation criteria, policy recommendations, and landmark boundary as presented by the Dept. of Urban Planning staff.

Chairman, Landmark Survey Task Force

Michael Stevens

Historic Preservation Coordinator
Department of Planning and Development

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Preservation Analysis

STRUCTURE

- 1. Surface Materials X
- 2. Fenestration and Portals
 - a. style,type X
 - b. o/w ratio X
 - c. rhythms X
 - d. placement X
- 3. Trim and Detailing
 - a. style X
 - b. unique trim or detailing X
 - c. structural members
- 4. Roof
 - a. style,form
 - b. slope X
 - c. materials
- 5. Design Concepts
 - a. stylistic demands X
 - b. functional concepts
- 6. Utilities
 - a. design X
 - b. placement X
- 7. Signs
 - a. style,design X
 - b. placement X
- 8. Exterior Connections
 - a. design
 - b. penetration points

SITE

- 1. Prohibited Structure Areas
 - a. approach
 - b. view corridors
 - c. site feature protection
 - d. vertical additions
- 2. Access/Egress
- 3. Adjacent R.O.W.'s
 - a. existing treatment X
 - b. proposed changes X
- 4. Landscaping
 - a. existing plant removal X
 - b. new plant selection X
 - c. site design X
- 5. Site Fixtures
 - a. furniture
 - b. sculpture,art
 - c. paths
 - d. utility units X
 - e. signs X
- 6. Lighting
 - a. exteriors X
 - b. grounds

COLOR

- 1. Surface Materials X
- 2. Trim and Details X
- 3. Roof
- 4. Utilities X
- 5. Signs X
- 6. Site Fixtures
- 7. Accent Color

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Land Use Analysis

Proposed zoning change:

from: CA-1
 to: No Change

Recommended use variances:

 No Change. However, there is the
 possibility of incorporating an office
 tower.