

Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District
Name of Property

Phillips County, Arkansas
County and State

NR 1/24/07

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District

Other Name/Site Number: PH0427

2. Location

Street & Number: County Road 353 South of U.S. 49

Not for Publication: NA

City/Town: Poplar Grove

Vicinity: X

State: AR County: Phillips Code: AR107 Zip Code: 72366

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public-Local

Category of Property: District

Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District
Name of Property

Phillips County, Arkansas
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Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing Noncontributing

<u>3</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u>1</u>	<u> </u> sites
<u>1</u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u>4</u>	<u>0</u> Total

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

Name of related multiple property listing: "An Ambition to be Preferred: New Deal Recovery Efforts and Architecture in Arkansas, 1933-1943"

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. See continuation sheet.

Cathie Martin 11/22/06
Signature of certifying official Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
State or Federal agency and bureau

Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District
Name of Property

Phillips County, Arkansas
County and State

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
 ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the
 National Register
 ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the
 National Register
☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: GOVERNMENT Sub: correctional facility

Current : VACANT/NOT IN USE Sub:

7. Description

Architectural Classification: MODERN MOVEMENT/International Style

Materials: foundation Concrete roof Concrete
walls Concrete other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance:

SUMMARY:

The Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District contains a main jail building constructed of concrete with a large concrete block section at the rear, two additional concrete block jail buildings, a cast-concrete water tower, and a concrete foundation pad, all of which contribute to the district. The complex is no longer in use and is heavily overgrown, but still reflects its original use as a county prison farm.

ELABORATION:

The Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District contains a main jail building constructed of concrete with a large concrete block section at the rear, two additional concrete block jail buildings, a cast-concrete water tower, and a concrete foundation pad, all of which contribute to the district. The complex is no longer in use and is heavily overgrown, but still reflects its original use as a county prison farm.

MAIN JAIL BUILDING

The Main Jail Building is a two-story, cast concrete structure built by the Works Progress Administration and designed in the Plain Traditional style of architecture with strong International style influences. It faces west toward County Road 353 at the northwest corner of the complex.

The first floor of the front or west façade has a doorless opening with a windowless fenestration to its immediate south. A belt course runs across the façade about mid-way up the first story. Above the door is a half-circular concrete porch roof, which is supported by metal struts affixed to the concrete wall on the second story. Two side-by-side windowless fenestrations pierce the wall above the porch roof. A thick belt course runs from the southern edge of the porch roof to the corner.

Continuing east from the corner is a windowless fenestration followed by blank concrete. The façade then turns south and is fenestrated by a single barred window.

The southern façade is pierced by four barred windows before turning north, where the area has a single barred window, then veers east with a blank concrete wall, then north with a wall with a single metal door, then east again, where it is pierced by a single metal door followed by two barred windows. It then turns north where a concrete square protrudes from the façade, then east where two additional barred windows provide fenestration.

The rear or east façade is fenestrated by two barred windows.

The north façade, going from the east corner to the western end, has two barred windows, a steel door, a blank wall inset area, and four additional barred windows. It then cuts to the south, where it is fenestrated by four barred windows, then east where there is one additional windowless fenestration.

The interior of the two-story section of the building is largely featureless and the second floor, which held the jailer's lodgings, is gone, apparently destroyed by fire. The rear section includes several cells and other rooms. The overall building is in fair condition and still strongly reflects its original use as a detention facility. It contributes to the district's historic integrity.

JAIL BUILDING ONE

Situated southeast of the main building, Jail Building One is a flat-roofed, square cinder-block structure resting atop a continuous cast-concrete foundation. Beginning from its northern corner, its front or western façade features two barred windows, two steel doors, and a third barred window. The south façade is fenestrated by three barred windows. From its southern corner, the east façade features two barred windows, a steel door, and another barred window. The north façade is fenestrated by three barred windows. Jail Building One is in good condition and contributes to the district's historic integrity.

JAIL BUILDING TWO

Jail Building Two is located south of Jail Building One. It is a square, flat-roofed cinder-block structure resting atop a continuous cast-concrete foundation. From its northern corner, it features a barred window, a steel door and a second barred window. Its southern façade features a barred window and a steel door. Its east façade is blank. Its western façade features a steel door and a barred window. Jail Building Two is in good condition and contributes to the district's historic integrity.

CONCRETE FOUNDATION

To the southeast of Jail Building Two is a long, rectangular concrete pad that served as a foundation for an unknown building. It is a contributing site to the historic district.

WATER TOWER

South of the concrete foundation is a three-story concrete water tower. The tank sits atop a square concrete pad that is supported at all four corners by concrete legs that are braced on each side with two concrete cross braces. The square tank is topped by a pyramid roof with an access hatch at the very top. The water tower is in excellent condition and contributes to the integrity of the historic district.

INTEGRITY

The Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District has excellent overall integrity. While all three of the jail buildings have suffered from deterioration and vandalism, they all retain high degrees of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, reflecting their historic role in incarcerating Phillips County convicts. The water tower is virtually unchanged since its ca. 1937 construction, and exhibits all seven elements of

Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District
Name of Property

Phillips County, Arkansas
County and State

integrity. While part of the site is now used to hold gravel for county road projects, it is still located in a heavily agricultural area, reflecting its setting as the county penal farm.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Local.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA

Areas of Significance: LAW; POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Period(s) of Significance: ca. 1937-1957

Significant Dates: ca. 1937

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Works Progress Administration

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above:

SUMMARY:

The Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** with **local significance** by virtue of its associations with the Works Progress Administration and its role in the legal history of the county and under **Criterion C** with **local significance** as the best example in the county of a concrete jail structure exhibiting a restrained interpretation of the International style of architecture. The nomination is being submitted under the multiple-property context "An Ambition to be Preferred": New Deal Recovery Efforts and Architecture in Arkansas, 1933-1943.

ELABORATION:

Phillips County was created by an act of the Arkansas territorial legislature on May 1, 1820, and named after Sylvanus Phillips, a pioneer settler and one of the original owners of the site of Helena. Soon after Phillips County

was created, the county seat was established at Helena, which was named after Sylvanus Phillips' daughter, and in 1821 Nicholas Rightor, an early settler and surveyor, laid out the town of Helena on land belonging to Sylvanus Phillips and William Russell.

According to the *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas*, a sturdy jail was a local priority from the earliest days of the county. The first structure built for county use was a two-story log building that housed a court room above and a jail below, which were soon replaced by a frame courthouse and an adjacent log jail. This structure burned down as the Civil War loomed and was replaced with a two-story brick structure in 1860.

By the 1930s, a county penal farm had been established near Poplar Grove where county convicts would work in the fields during the day and sleep in their cells at night. The location might have been selected because Poplar Grove was a thriving railroad town at the turn of the century, boasting six general stores, four churches, cotton gins and grist mills, and schools serving both white and black children.

After the Great Depression hit, Phillips County's government faced the same fiscal difficulties as did most others in the state and in 1935 applied for Works Progress Administration funding to make improvements at the county farm. The penal farm had been in existence since the nineteenth century and the existing wooden buildings there needed to be replaced. W.P.A. Project #54-354, approved on September 26, 1935, set aside \$2,213 to "build [a] detention home for county convicts." The *Helena World* reported on June 18, 1936, that "There are 21 [WPA] projects approved but not yet started up . . . [including] the detention home on the county farm." The problem likely was insufficient funding, as the WPA approved an additional \$3,375 to "construct [a] Concrete Building for use as a County Detention Home [on] County owned property" on August 30, 1936. The result was an imposing cast-concrete structure, reflecting a restrained interpretation of the stark International style of architecture, accompanied by a pair of more generic cinder-block cell buildings. These buildings served the county farm until it was closed down in 1973.

Now abandoned and overgrown with weeds, the Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District stands today as a reminder of the county's law enforcement history and of the efforts of the Works Progress Administration to ease the effects of the Great Depression. It remains the best example of the International style of architecture on a public building anywhere in Phillips County.

The Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** with **local significance** by virtue of its associations with the Works Progress Administration and its role in the legal history of the county and under **Criterion C** with **local significance** as the best example in the county of a concrete jail structure exhibiting a restrained interpretation of the International style of architecture. The nomination is being submitted under the multiple-property context "An Ambition to be Preferred": New Deal Recovery Efforts and Architecture in Arkansas, 1933-1943.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890.

Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District
Name of Property

Phillips County, Arkansas
County and State

WPA Central Office Files, 1935-1937, Arkansas History Commission.

Helena World, June 18, 1936.

Phillips County Judge Don Gentry, interview with author, August 28, 2006.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- ☐ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

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C D

Verbal Boundary Description:

Part of the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 4, Township 2 South, Range 3 East.

Phillips County Penal Farm Historic District
Name of Property

Phillips County, Arkansas
County and State

Boundary Justification:

This boundary includes all of the standing structures associated with the Phillips County Penal Farm that retain sufficient integrity to reflect their period of significance plus sufficient adjacent land to reflect their agricultural setting.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Mark Christ/Community Outreach Director

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: August 28, 2006

Street & Number: 1500 Tower Bldg., 323 Center St. Telephone: (501) 324-9880

City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201

























