

NR listed 6/5/91

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Old Post Office

other names/site number Mena City Hall

2. Location

street & number 520 North Mena Street

not for publication N/A

city, town Mena

vicinity N/A

state Arkansas

code AR

county Polk

code AR 113

zip code 71953

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Cathy A. Boyd
Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

Date

9-29-91

State or Federal agency and bureau

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 the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government/Post Office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government/City Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Wood Panelling

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

Summary

The Old Post Office (now the Mena City Hall), located at 520 Mena Street and constructed in 1917, is a two-story, brick masonry post office structure specifically designed for that purpose by Treasury Department architect James A. Wetmore. Its design reflects a synthesis of both American Colonial and European Classical influences, a combination that was popular throughout America at the time and which remained popular until the Second World War.

Elaboration

The Old Post Office is a two-story, brick masonry public institutional structure designed in a synthesis of the Colonial Revival and Classical Revival styles. Its plan is fundamentally rectangular and interrupted only by the pedimented front porch and a slightly projecting central bay opposite. A single, square brick chimney rises through the rear slope of the shallow gable roof on the second story. The gable roof is covered with composition shingles while the flat roof behind the parapet surrounding the top of the first floor is built-up tar. The walls are constructed of buff brick and all is supported on a continuous brick foundation. A full basement extends beneath the structure.

The western or front elevation is symmetrically-divided into a central entrance bay flanked by four identical window bays. The central, wood-panelled entrance bay consists of a double-leaf entry surmounted by an arched transom, all of which is deeply set into an arched wood recess trimmed with moldings and a keystone. Flanking the entrance are two four-over-four wood sash windows, set into rectangular openings trimmed with ornate wood detailing. Above each window is a pressed tin panel ornamented with a swag motif. The pedimented, wood front porch features a coffered ceiling and is supported by four evenly-spaced round wood columns. The porch floor and staircase are constructed of stone. The walls to either side of the entrance bay are each lighted with two rectangular, nine-over-nine wood sash windows, ornamented with concrete keystones, and above which is a raised brick parapet with regular balustraded openings. The walls around the raised, second story behind are lighted with low, horizontal three-over-three sash windows.

The northern and southern elevations are virtually identical. The same balustrade as seen on the front elevation continues around the roof of these elevations also. A single nine-over-nine wood sash window to the west and two more identical windows placed to the east flank a wood panelled bay that is lighted with a large, central arched window flanked by two vertical two-over-two wood sash windows. The central arched window consists of an upper, arched sash containing twenty-six panes above a rectangular fifteen pane sash below. These windows are separated by slightly-raised wood pilasters and the outside windows are surmounted by milled wood panels. Above this bay the brick parapet is broken by an open,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2

ornate wood balustrade.

The eastern or rear elevation is composed of two nine-over-nine wood sash windows on either side of the slightly-projecting central bay facing onto the loading dock. The second story of the central bay is lighted with three horizontal, three-over-three wood sash windows that are separated by smaller, vertical two-over-two wood sash windows. The wall below is symmetrically-organized around a raised, central, arched double-leaf entry with a multi-pane transom that is accessed via the concrete loading dock. A single vertical, four-over-four wood sash window is placed to either side of this entry, and two more single-leaf entries at grade are placed at either side of the bay.

Exterior details of note include the elaborate wood entrance bay, with its Classical, pedimented porch, and delicate, Colonial leaded glass fanlight. Also of note are the wood window bays in the northern and southern elevations, with their wood panelling and arched windows. A delicate dentil course continues around the cornice of the pediment and the entablature that surrounds the building beneath the brick parapet, and the parapet itself is punctuated with regular openings in the brick that are filled with an elegant, curving, Colonial Revival turned balustrade.

The interior of the building is relatively simple - as was typical for a post office of the period - with the exception of the lobby. The elaborate fanlight over the exterior entrance is echoed by a simpler Colonial fanlight above the double-leaf doors that open directly into the lobby itself. The foyer between these sets of doors features a vaulted plaster ceiling, and wood trimmed bulletin boards and panelled walls in the Classical Revival vocabulary. The lobby itself retains its original wood doors with four-pane transoms that originally led into the various postal processing and service areas. The trim above the panelling between these doors, as well as some of the original panelling, survives here also. All of the ceiling moldings remain, and are noteworthy for the delicate dentil course that matches that of the exterior entablature. As was also typical for post offices of the early twentieth century, the staff offices and work spaces upstairs and away from the lobby are simpler and less detailed. Such more functional details as vented "peepways" (for monitoring postal employees, and particularly those that handled money) and simple, fixed metal ladders for private access to the peepways, as well as the original slate bathroom stalls and ceramic bathroom fixtures do remain.

Apart from the filling of some of the original doorways within the lobby that originally led to employee offices, the Old Post Office remains intact and appears as it did when it was constructed in 1917.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 1

Summary

Criterion C, local significance

The Old Post Office is eligible under Criterion C with local significance as the best surviving example of a public/institutional building in Mena designed in the Classical tradition with Colonial Revival influences. It remains largely intact, with only minor interior alterations, and now houses the Mena City Hall.

Elaboration

The city of Mena, Arkansas (the county seat of Polk County) grew quickly after the arrival of the Kansas City-Southern Railroad in 1896, and by 1910 it became evident to local residents that a larger facility was required. Subsequently, Representative Ben Cravens, representing the Fourth Congressional District of Arkansas, secured the passage of a bill in Congress on June 25 of that year authorizing the purchase of a site in Mena for the purpose of erecting a new post office. Three years later, Representative Cravens obtained the passage of another bill authorizing the federal appropriation for the construction of the building itself, the cost of which was not to exceed \$50,000. On February 21, 1917, the U. S. Treasury Department finally advertised for bids on the construction of the building, which was awarded on March 8th of that year to Richardson Engineering and Construction Company of Bainbridge, Georgia at a contract price of \$40,700. Ground was broken on May 16th and the cornerstone laid on October 10th.

The rendering of the post office building that appeared in the Mena Evening Star the day the cornerstone was laid depicts a design that was significantly larger, more detailed overall and certainly more expensive than the building as it was finally constructed; and yet, this was far more the rule than the exception in public commissions at the time, as it remains today. What is nevertheless extraordinary about the rendering is that the design for a public post office from this period was ever so detailed. Part of the reason for the seven-year delay in letting the contracts for the construction of this post office probably had a good deal to do with the fact that the U. S. Postal Service was radically changing its attitude toward post office construction during this interim. That this attitude was changing first became evident within the language of the omnibus Public Buildings Act of 1913, which limited new postal construction only to communities whose postal receipts totaled more than \$10,000 per year. The same year Congress established the Public Buildings Commission to develop a scheme for the construction of all authorized public buildings, as well as a standardized way to determine the size and project the cost of the construction.

The recommendations of this commission reflected a strong shift away from excessive cost of any kind in public construction and toward economy in general. One of the ways recommended for controlling these costs was the adoption of standardized building design

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

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

instead of a new, original design for each post office building required. The standardization would be based on community size and mail volume, and a set of standardized plans would be established for each case, with minor modifications allowed to adapt the structure to individual site restrictions. This approach toward post office design represented a fundamental change in the Treasury Department's earlier attitude toward the symbolism of the public building, which held that public construction should express democratic ideals and greatness through grand architectural expression and monumentality, typically via the Classical idiom. After 1915, public construction throughout the United States became more restrained and functional, reflecting this new concern with economy in every sense of the word.

Thus the elaborate original design for the Mena's Old Post Office is surprising. Even if one argues that the design dates from 1910, when this entire project was formally put into motion, the fact that the structure as-built - though certainly not as detailed as the rendering - retained a significant amount of its intended detail is significant. Furthermore, it is known that in his 1917 annual report, James Wetmore, the Acting Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department and the architect of the Mena Post Office, endorsed the new standardization and classification system first drafted by Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo and extolled its fairness and usefulness in the field. Some participation by local residents in the selection of brick color is documented, and thus they may have had some hand also in the preservation of some of the ornamentation as it was first conceived the architect, but this is unknown.

Mena's Old Post Office stands as the finest example of an early twentieth-century public institutional building with such erudite Classical and Colonial Revival stylistic influences within the city. It is therefore nominated under Criterion C with local significance.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

Bibliography

Deed Records, Polk County Courthouse, Mena, Arkansas.

Mena Star, Mena, Arkansas: February 29, 1914; October 10, 1917; October 19, 1917; August 29, 1971.

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1917

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Wetmore, James

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

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property Less than one

UTM References

A

1	5
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3	8	6	4	6	0
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3	8	2	7	4	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description Beginning at the point formed by the intersection of the eastern edge of N. Mean St. with the northern edge of Maple St., proceed easterly along said edge to a point formed by its intersection with a perpendicular line running along the building's eastern elevation; thence proceed northerly along said line to a point formed by its intersection with a perpendicular line running along the building's northern elevation; thence proceed westerly along said line to a point formed by its intersection with a perpendicular line running along the eastern edge of N. Mena St.; thence proceed southerly along said line to the point of See continuation sheet beginning.

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes all the property historically associated with this resource.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kenneth Story, Architectural Historian/Shirley Goodner, Historian

organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 4/10/91

street & number 225 East Markham, Suite 300 telephone (501) 324-9346

city or town Little Rock state Arkansas zip code 72201



WEST OFFICE
M. A. ARCHER

PROCEEDED BY P. ZELNER
JANUARY, 1991

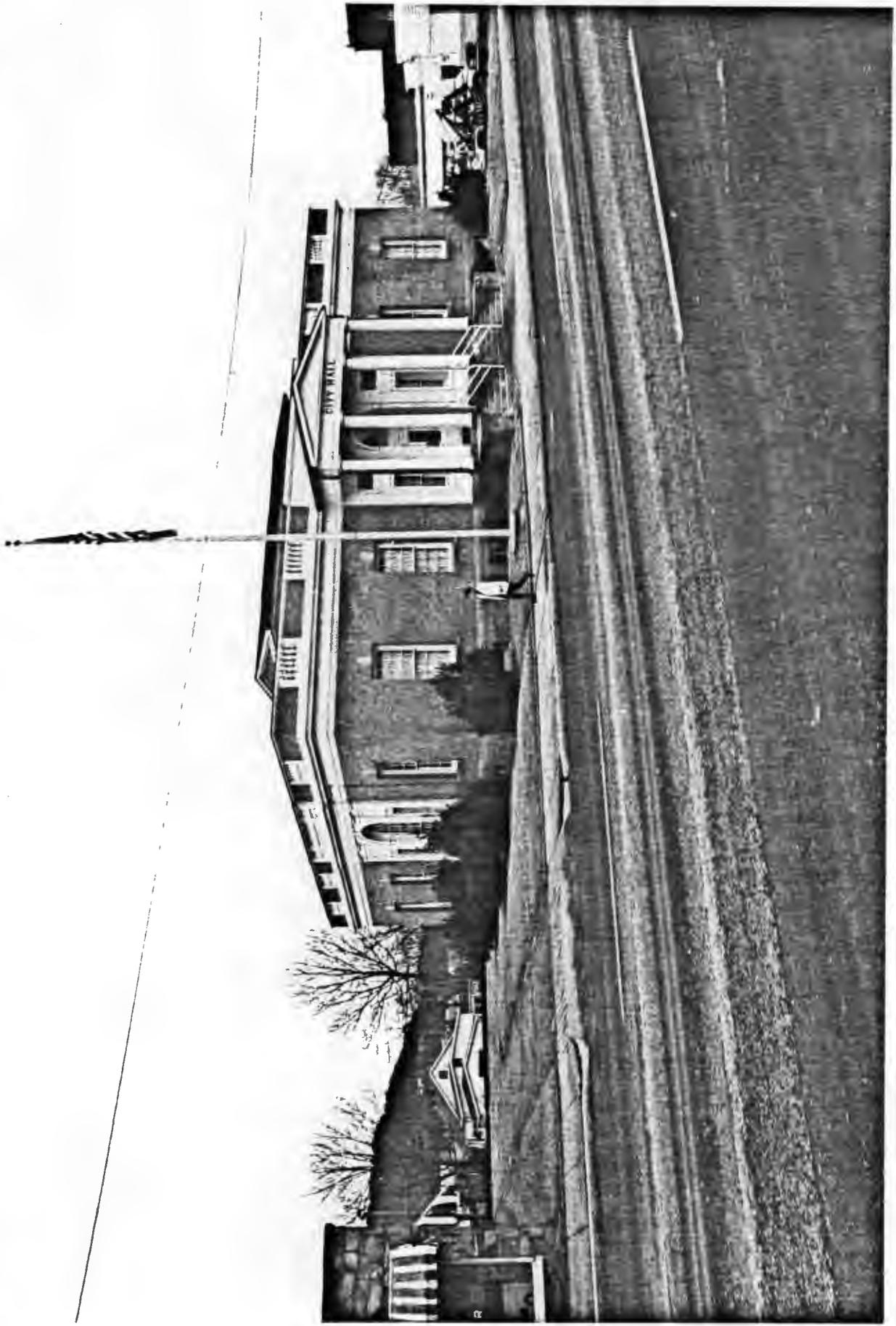
NEGATIVE ON FILE AT ANPP
VIEW FROM WEST



HANMER



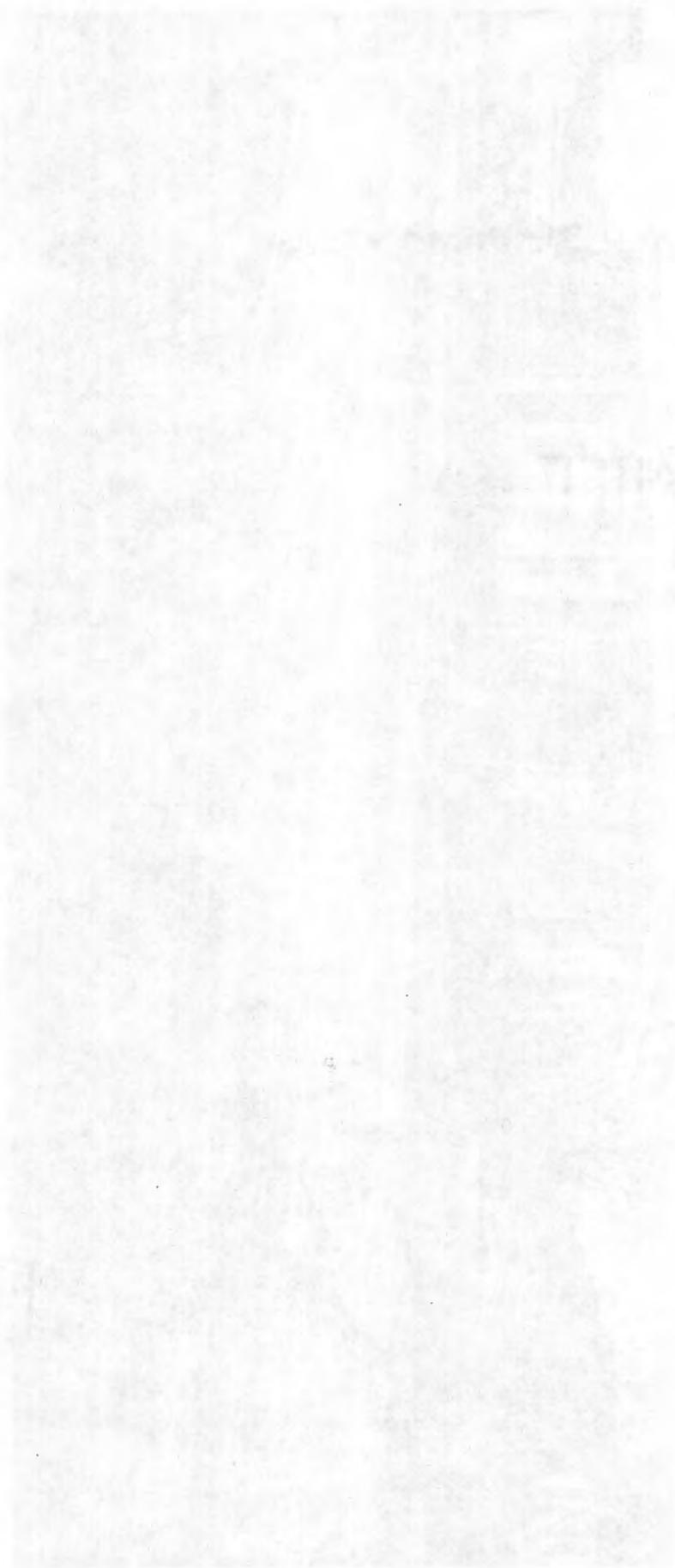
HANMER



OLD POST OFFICE
MILL, ARKANSAS

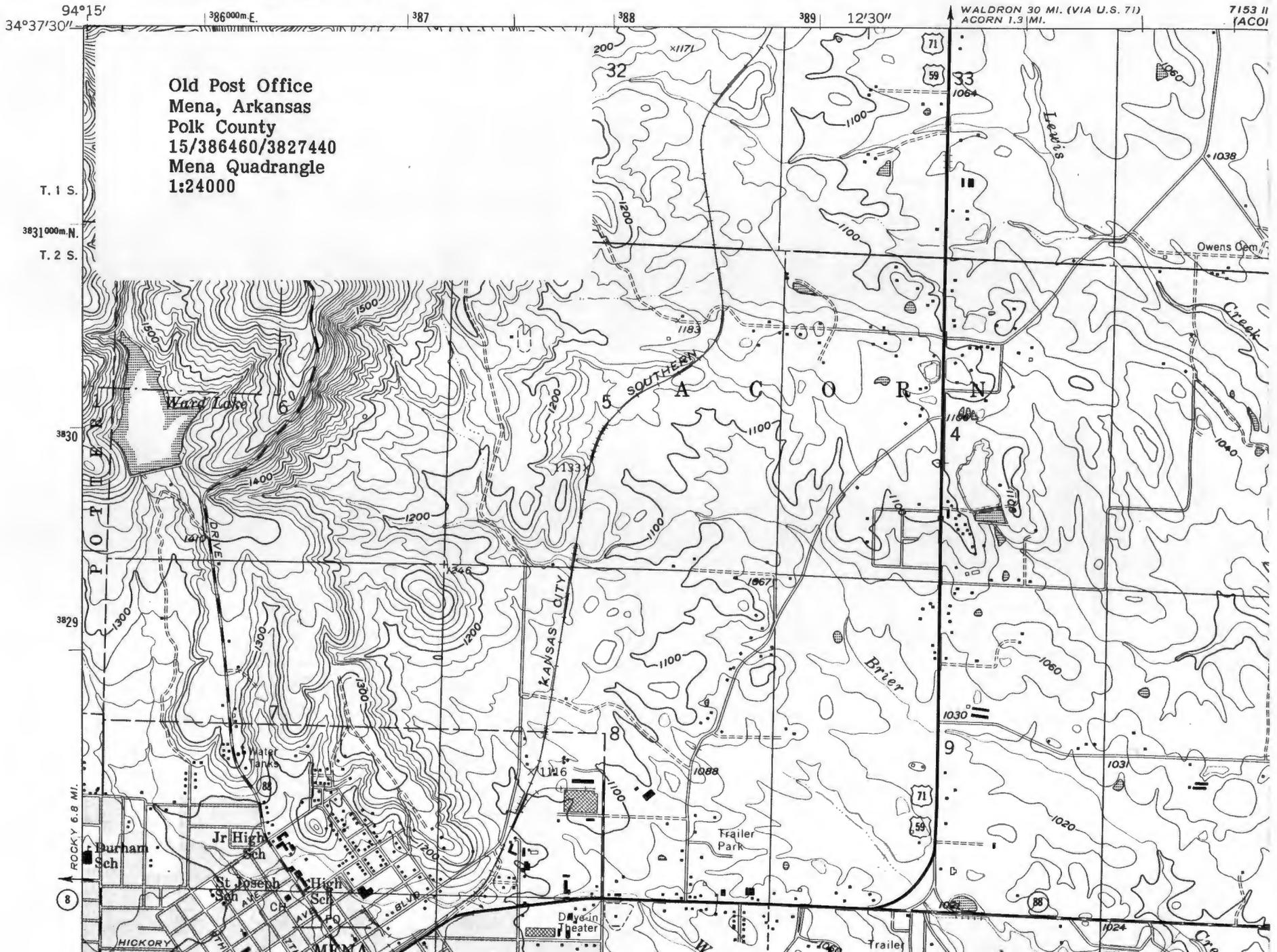
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JANUARY, 1991

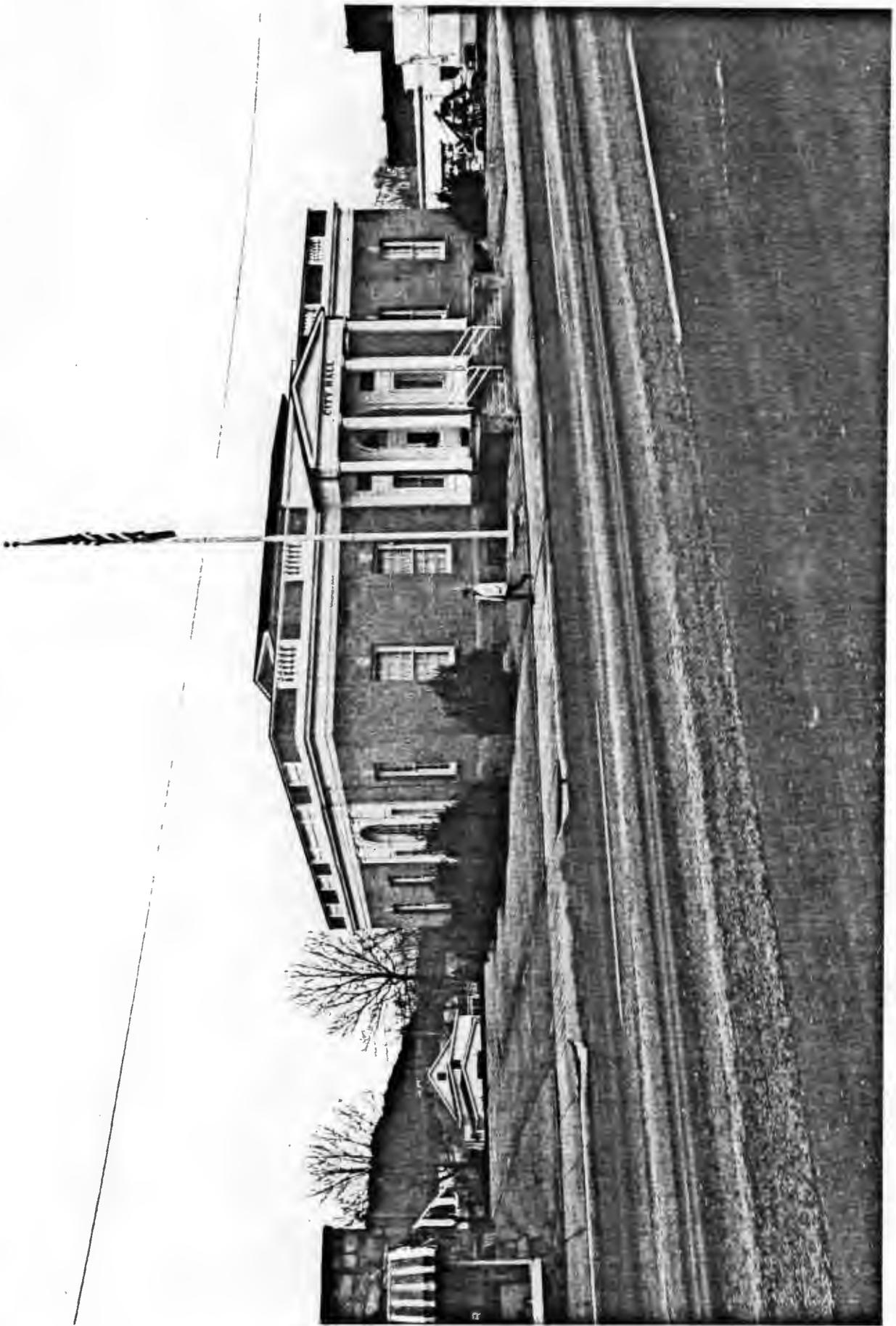
NEGATIVE ON FILE AT AHPP
VIEW FROM NORTHWEST



(RICH MOUNTAIN)
THE LINE

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

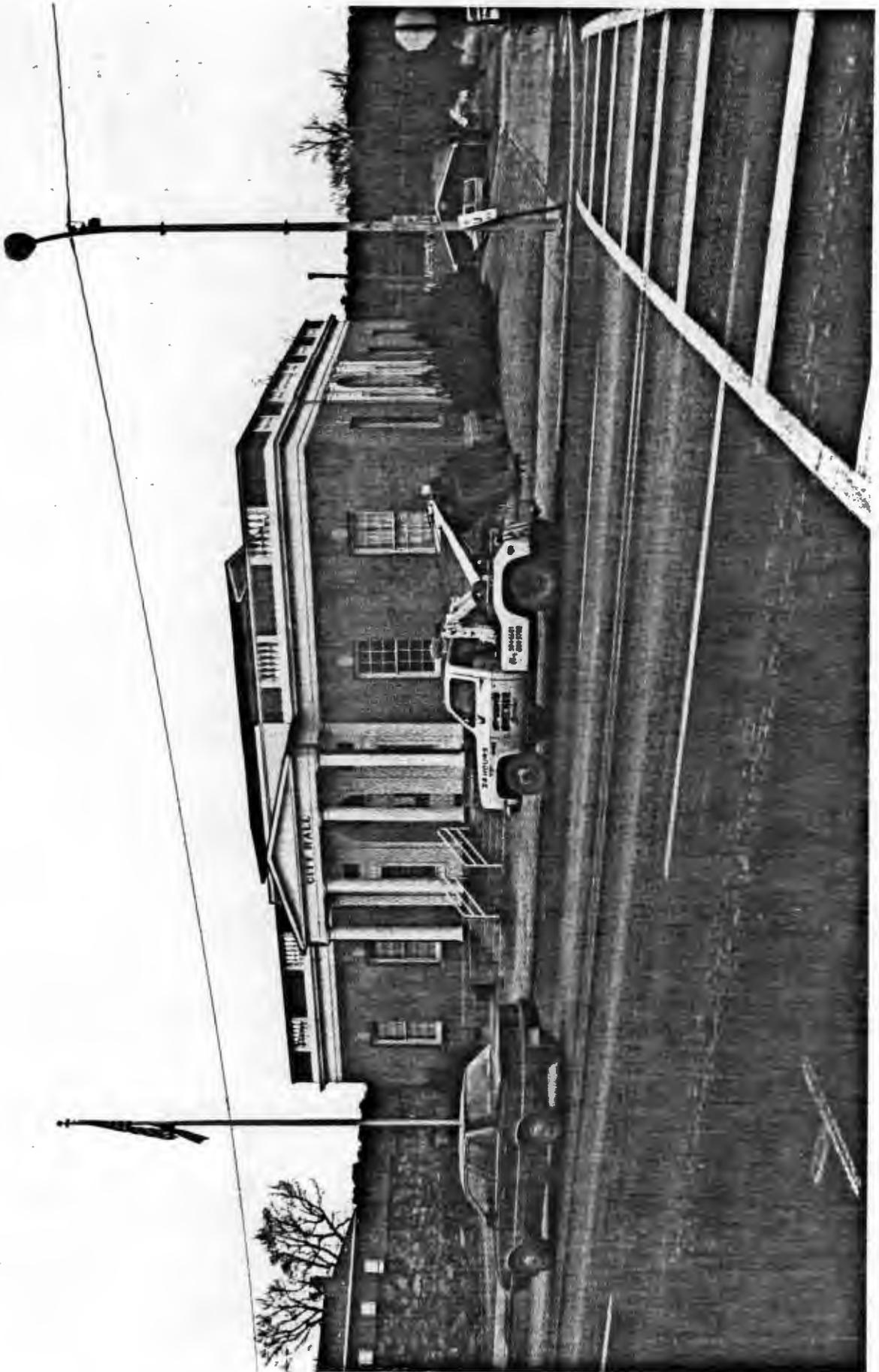




POST OFFICE
M... , ARKANSAS

POSTMARKED BY P. D. D...
JANUARY, 1991

NEGATIVE ON FILE AT AHPP
VIEW FROM NORTHWEST



WEST OFFICE
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY P. ZORNER
JANUARY, 1991

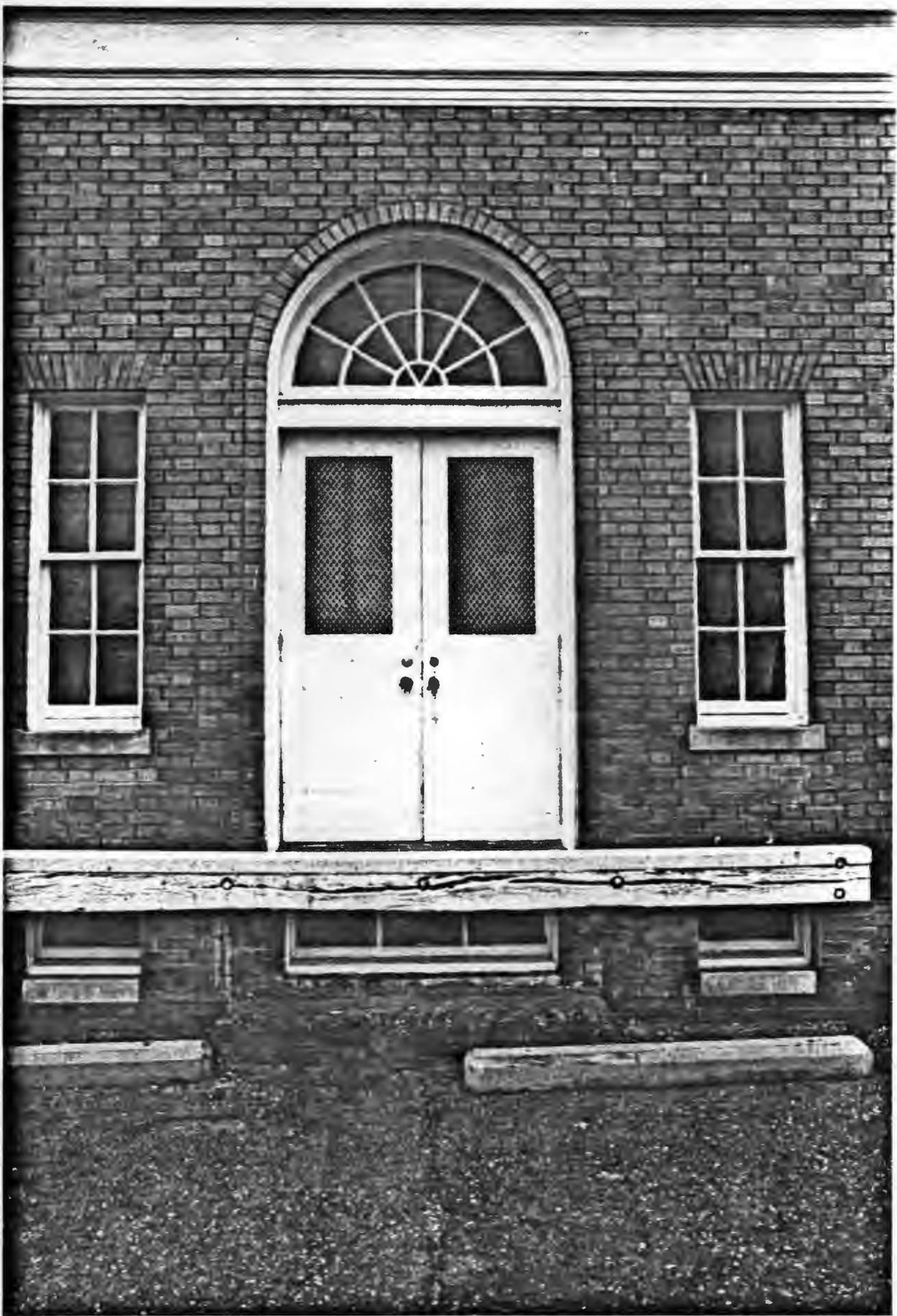
NEGATIVE ON FILE AT
VIEW FROM SOUTHWEST



JDD POST OFFICE
MEXICO, ARIZONA
PHOTOGRAPHED BY D ZOLLNER
JANUARY, 1991
NEGATIVE ON FILE AT AHPP
EXTERIOR WINDOWS DETAIL



POST OFFICE
MORNING, ARKANSAS
PRODUCED BY P. ZOLLNER
JANUARY, 1991
NEARBY ON THE AT ANPP
FRONT ENTRY DETAIL



JOE POST OFFICE
1920A, ALKANSAS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY D. ZOLLNER
JANUARY, 1991

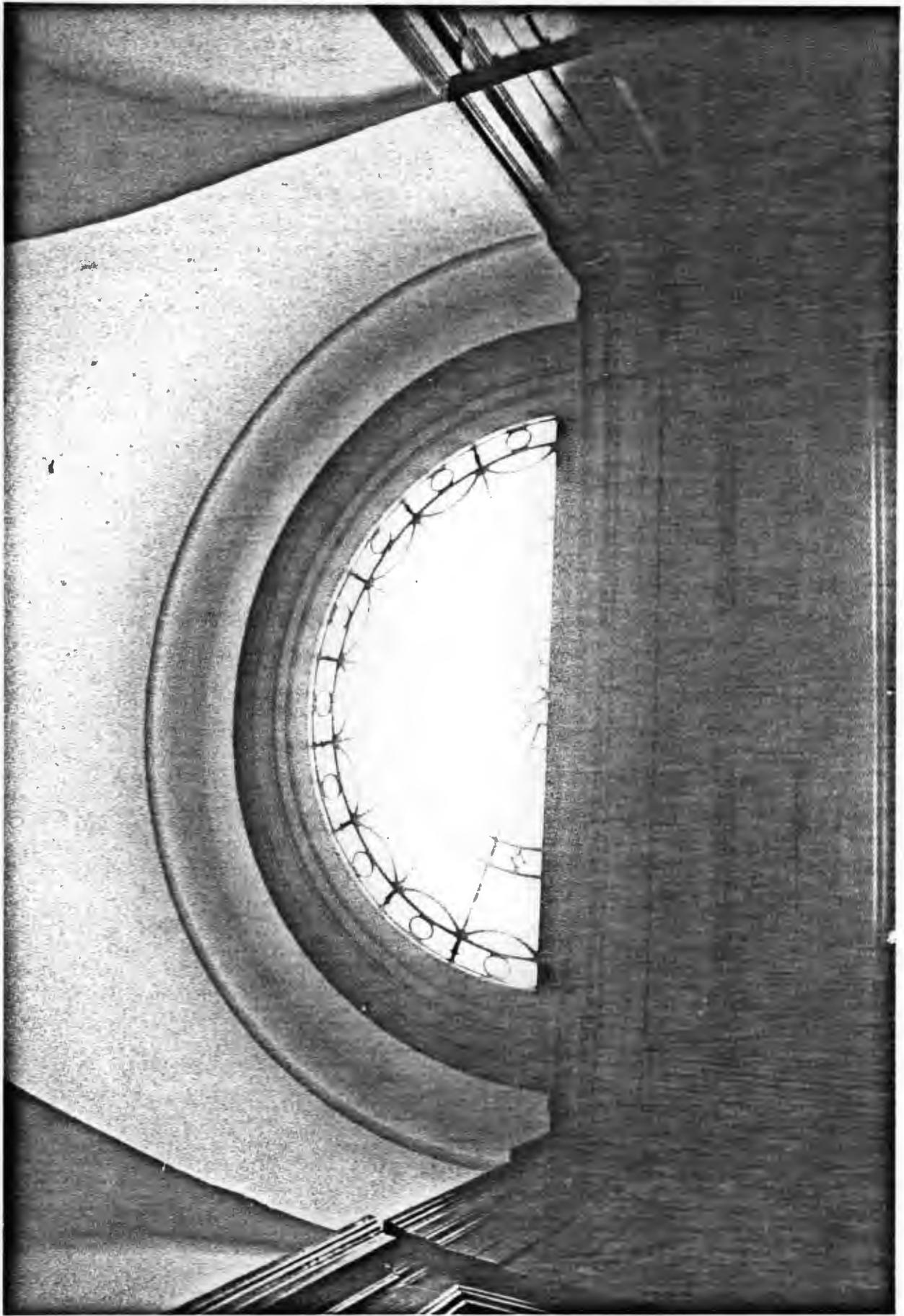
NEGATIVE ON FILE AT ANPP
VIEW OF REAR ENTRANCE



POST OFFICE
MORNING, ARKANSAS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY P. ZOLLNER
JANUARY, 1991

NEGATIVE ON FILE AT AHPD
DETAIL OF INTERIOR FURNITURE & ENTRY



POST OFFICE
MORAN, MEXICO
PHOTOGRAPHED BY P. ZORNICK
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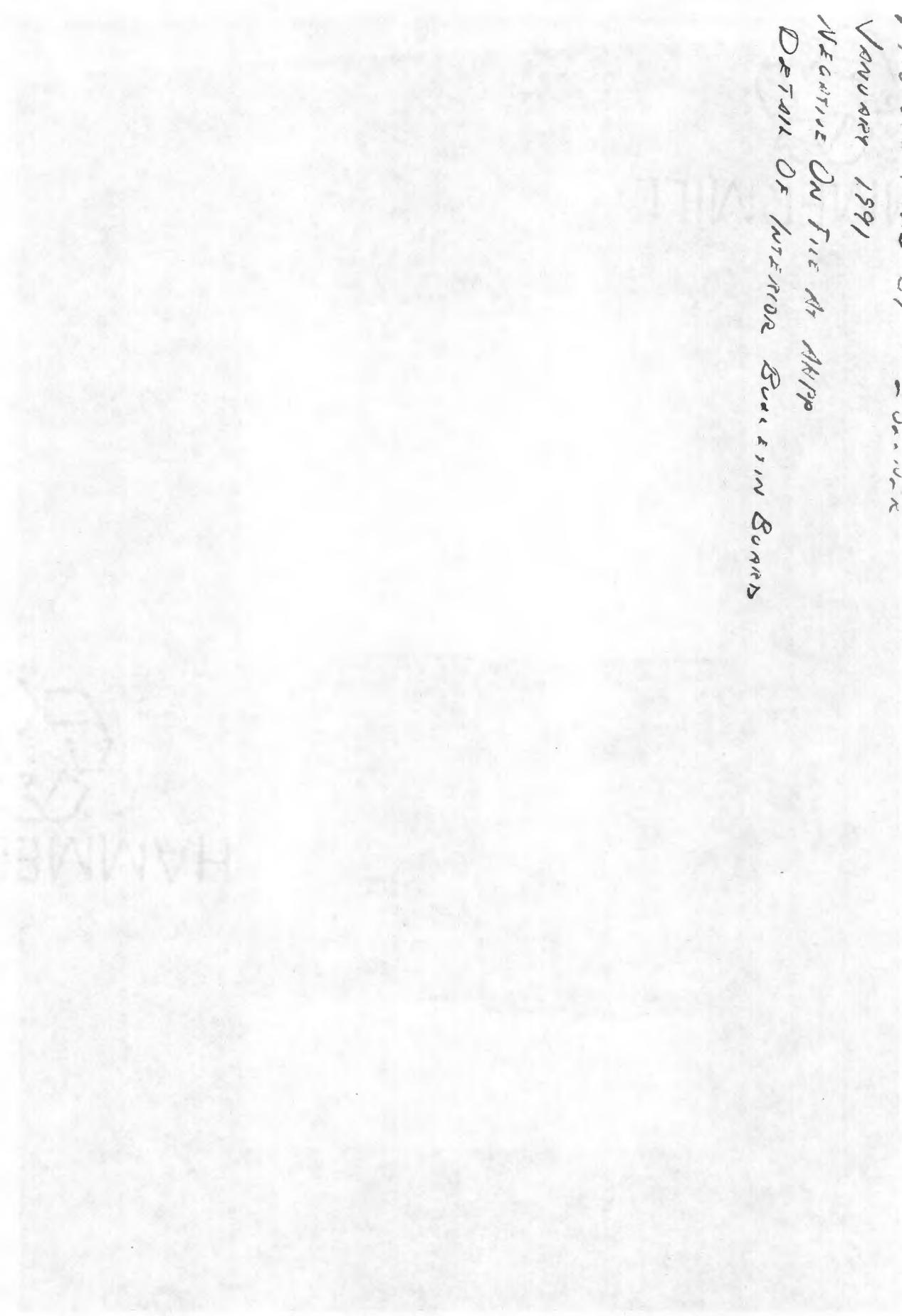
BULLETIN

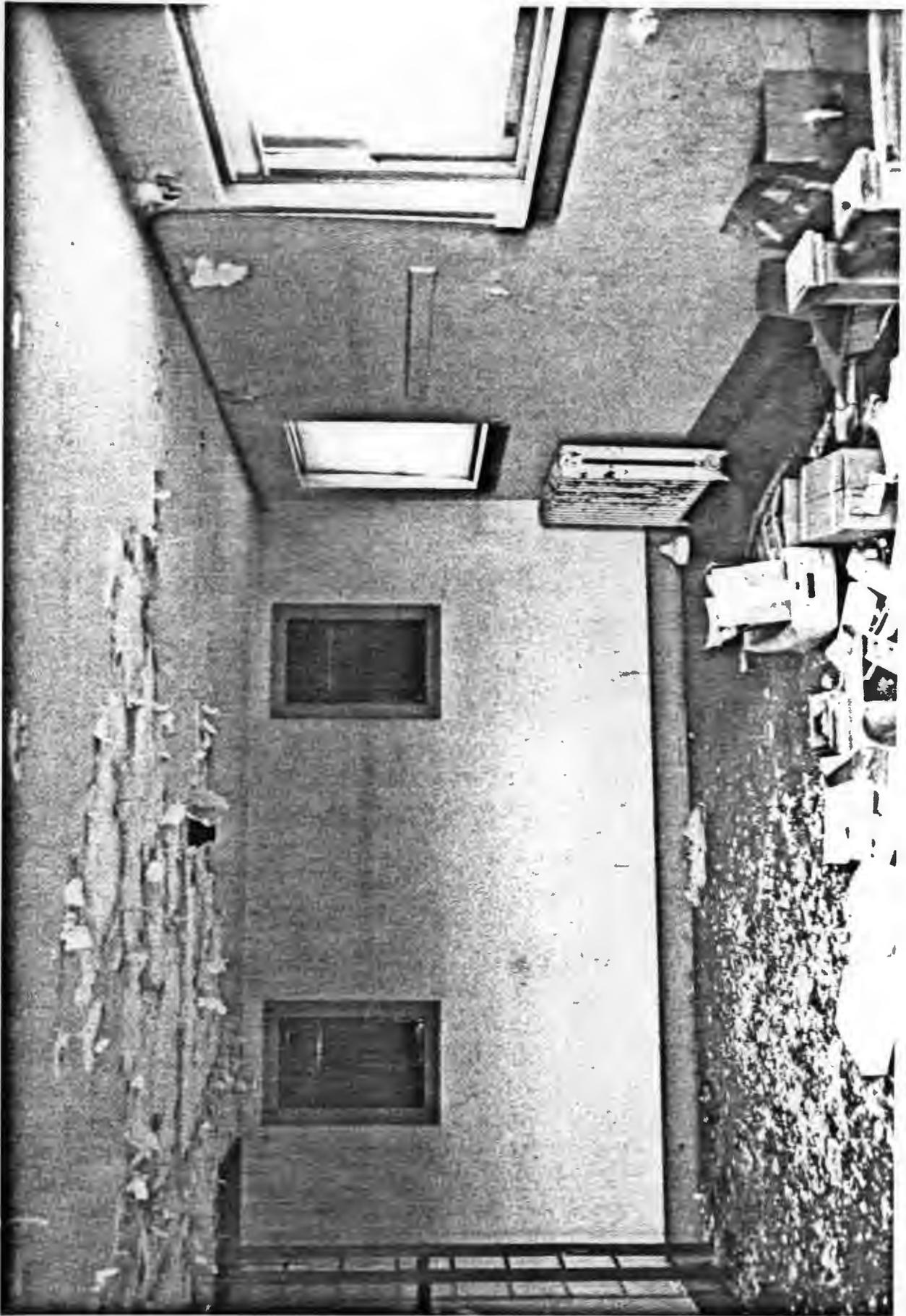


Post Office
Arkansas

Photographed by 2000
January 1991

Carried on file at AKPP
Detail of Interior Business Boards





Post Office
M...A, Arkansas

Photographed by P. J. Turner
January, 1991

Negative on file at AHPP
Upstairs Bouncing Room Detail