

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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse

Other names/site number: Helena Federal Building, Site #PH0469

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 617 Walnut

City or town: Helena-West Helena State: AR County: Phillips

Not For Publication:  Vicinity: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 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     statewide   X   local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

   A    B   X   C    D

<p><u>Martha Miller</u></p> <p><b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b></p> <p><u>Arkansas Historic Preservation Program</u></p> <p><b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	<p><u>12/3/14</u></p> <p><b>Date</b></p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property <u>   </u> meets <u>   </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p><b>Signature of commenting official:</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>
<p><b>Title :</b></p>	<p><b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this 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:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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>          </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register           

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/government office

GOVERNMENT/post office

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/government office

GOVERNMENT/post office

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, STONE

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is located in downtown Helena-West Helena across Court Square Park from the Phillips County Courthouse. The building is typified by its clean and efficient character, which is typical of a Modern-style Federal building built after World War II. The building exhibits characteristics of the International style with its flat roof without a ledge, metal windows set flush with the outer wall, smooth wall surfaces with no decorative detailing at the doors and windows, and its asymmetrical façade. The red brick, granite, and limestone building stands three stories tall and also includes a penthouse. It has a rectangular footprint with the north side of the building faced in gray stone and the larger southern portion of the building is clad in brick. Batesville limestone was used for the window sills, cornices, copings, and the east chimney cap. Windows are aluminum awning. The roof is flat with built up roofing. A concrete parking lot for the building is located on the south end of the site.

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### Narrative Description

The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is located at 617 Walnut Street, Helena, Phillips County, Arkansas. It sits on a one-acre tract on the southwest corner of Walnut Street and Perry Street. Immediately to the north of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse are a used car lot, single family

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residences, small office buildings, and a retail pharmacy. To the south is a vacant lot. To the west are several churches and the Phillips County Museum and Library. To the east is Court Square Park opposite the Phillips County Courthouse. (The previous Federal building used to stand on the northeast corner of Porter and Cherry streets, south of the Courthouse.)

The design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is typified by its clean and efficient character, which is typical of a Modern-style Federal building built after World War II. The building exhibits characteristics of the International style with its flat roof without a ledge, metal windows set flush with the outer wall, smooth wall surfaces with no decorative detailing at the doors and windows, and its asymmetrical façade. The prominent northeast corner of the building is dominated by the stone portion of the building, which is taller than the rest of the building. The red brick, granite, and limestone building stands three stories tall and also includes a penthouse. It has a rectangular footprint with the north side of the building faced in gray stone and the larger southern portion of the building is clad in brick. Batesville limestone was used for the window sills, cornices, copings, and the east chimney cap. Windows are aluminum-framed awning windows with four panes of glass each. The roof is flat with built up roofing. A concrete parking lot for the building is located on the south end of the site.

#### ***Front/East Façade***

The east elevation is the location of the building's primary entry and faces Walnut Street. The brick portion of this façade is marked by an aluminum canopy which spans the length of the first floor window bays. Fifteen aluminum-framed plate-glass windows with porcelain panels below extend to the building's main entry at the first floor level. The main entry is marked by a granite faced section with two aluminum U.S. seals and a storefront entry with geometric patterned decorative panels. The second and third floors are punctuated by ten window bays along the brick-faced portion of the façade. Each window bay is fenestrated by a four-pane, aluminum-frame awning window.

The east façade of the stone-faced portion of the building is devoid of fenestration. At the first-floor level are metal letters saying "FEDERAL BUILDING / UNITED STATES POST OFFICE / UNITED STATES COURT HOUSE." Below the letters is the cornerstone which reads "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA / DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER / PRESIDENT / 1959."

#### ***Side/North Façade***

The building's north elevation faces Perry Street. Two thirds of the building's façade is clad in gray stone. The remaining western third is faced in brick. The stone section is a story taller because of the added height of the roof penthouse. A large vent constructed of decorative concrete block is present at the penthouse level. A single door sheltered by a canopy with aluminum fascia is present at the eastern end of the elevation; another entry is situated at the opposite western end. It has double doors and is set just west of another canopied section with a brick enclosure. The building's chimney stack extends from above this second canopied section to just above the penthouse level. The aluminum-framed, four-pane awning windows are evenly spaced on the western two-thirds of the building face, and includes four on the stone section (three on the first floor) and two on the brick section.

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***Rear/West Façade***

The west elevation or rear elevation abuts a service alley and is clad in brick. It has two secondary employee doors, a roll-up garage door, and seven aluminum-framed, four-pane awning windows on the first floor. Near the north end of the building, in between the first and second floor, are four metal louvers. The second and third floors have ten aluminum-framed, four-pane awning window bays that are symmetrically placed except for a single steel window located in between the first and second floors in the fourth bay from the building's north end. In addition, in between the first and second bays from the north end is a large metal duct that scales the second and third floors.

***Side/South Façade***

The south elevation is the location of the postal loading dock and parking area. This building face is clad in brick and defined by the loading bay that runs two-thirds of its length. To the east of the loading dock is a group of three aluminum-framed, four-pane awning windows. Windows on the second and third floors are evenly spaced except at the west corner of the third floor where the bay is blank. The second floor has eight windows and the third floor has seven windows, and all of the windows are aluminum-framed, four-pane awning windows.

***Integrity***

The U.S. Post Office Courthouse remains an example of a mid-century designed Federal building built for a rural American community. Despite its age and constant Federal use, the building has had no major renovations. According to General Service Administration records, alterations have generally been isolated to handicapped accessibility improvements (exterior ramp and restroom accommodations) and the replacement of some of the interior light fixtures.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

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**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1959-1961  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1959-1961

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Architect/Builder**

Edward F. Brueggeman, Architect

Elmer A. Stuck & Associates, Architect

O'Brien and Padgett Construction Co., Builder

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion C**. The Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is a good example of the commercial work of two noted Arkansas architecture firms, Edward F. Brueggeman and Elmer A. Stuck and Associates, and is one of the few large-scale buildings in Helena that exhibits characteristics of the International style. The combined post office and courthouse was erected at a time when Federal office space was in high demand nationally after World War II and new facilities were necessary to accommodate this need. Its style was indicative of the Modern Movement with clean lines and being void of the unnecessary trappings of ornamentation. This design approach and the almost complete reliance on private architects by the federal government for development of new federal facilities typified this era in the federal public building program. As a consequence, the Helena building was a part of the post-war national trend where an increased need for federal facilities combined with a modern efficient approach to design and the use of private architect resulted in the construction of a number of public facilities across the country.



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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY**

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 c.1821 Nicholas Rightor, an early settler and surveyor, laid out the town of Helena on land belonging to Sylvanus Phillips and William Russell.<sup>1</sup>

By 1836, there were several people conducting business at Helena, including John J. Bowie, F. H. Cosset and George W. Fereby, and the town had "about half a dozen business houses...at that time." In addition, William B. R. Hornor, mentioned among the early pioneer settlers, was a lawyer and kept a hotel in Helena at a very early day. B. A. Porter, another of the pioneers, engaged in the lumber business about the year 1836 and erected a saw-mill at Helena."<sup>2</sup>

By 1840, the population of Helena had grown to 250 people, and although the town continued to grow through the 1840s and 1850s, it was at a slow pace. In 1860 the city's population had only grown to 800 people. After the Civil War, Helena's population grew much quicker and by 1880 the city boasted 3,652 residents, and by 1890 the population was estimated to be 5,000 people.<sup>3</sup>

The growth in Helena's population also meant that the city had a lot more commercial establishments than the "half a dozen business houses" that it had in 1836. A description of the city in 1890 showed that:

[Helena] contains at this writing, Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, four schools, cotton-seed oil mills, lumber mills, cotton gins and compress, planing mills, a foundry and machine shop, an opera house capable of seating 800, three banks, gas-works, two express offices, two railroad depots, ferry-boats for crossing the river, many stores of all kinds, several wholesale houses, four weekly and one daily newspaper, and all the other attributes of a city of its size.<sup>4</sup>

Helena's newspapers included "the *Helena Weekly World*, a nine column folio...established in 1870, ...the *Helena Daily World*, a seven-column folio...established in 1871, ...the *Helena*

<sup>1</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas*. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890, p. 739.

<sup>2</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas*. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890, p. 746.

<sup>3</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas*. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890, p. 747.

<sup>4</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas*. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890, p. 747.

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State...established October 19, 1889...[that] is a seven-column quarto [that] is published every Friday." In addition, two African-American papers were published, which included the "Southern Review, an eight-column folio...published by the 'Benevolent Church Aid and Relief Society,'" and the "People's Friend, a six-column folio [that] is published weekly..."<sup>5</sup>

As Helena grew, and as the U.S. District Court grew in Arkansas, it soon became necessary to establish a U.S. Courthouse in Helena. The Helena Division for the U.S. District Court, Eastern District, originated in 1871, first under the Western District of Arkansas and then in 1877 under the Eastern District when it was expanded to include both Little Rock and Helena. Until 1961, the Eastern District had two judgeships. A third was created during that year when Pine Bluff was added as a location of the court. In 1978, the number of judgeships within the district was increased to five. Today, there are six judges assigned to the district, five of which are active. Court locations include Little Rock, Batesville, Jonesboro, Pine Bluff, and Helena. Of these, Helena is the second oldest location of the state's Eastern District court.<sup>6</sup>

The first U.S. Courthouse and Post Office was built in Helena c.1890 at the northeast corner of Porter and Cherry streets. The western half of the block, Block 19, was open space, according to the January 1887 Sanborn Map for Helena, but the courthouse was in place by April 1892, and was the only building on that half of the block. The building that was built was a 2 ½-story brick building with a hipped roof on a raised basement that employed elements of the Romanesque Revival style. The first building was completed in 1893 following designs prepared by the Treasury Department's Office of the Supervising Architect under the direction of Will A. Freret. The design of the building gave it a grand and solid appearance, which was important. However, as has been written in *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s* "In the past, the symbolism of public buildings was important, and formal, hierarchical sequences of ceremonial spaces were common."<sup>7</sup>

The U.S. Circuit Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas met in the building at Porter and Cherry streets from 1897 until that court was abolished in 1912. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas met there until 1961, when the new federal building was ready for occupancy. Between the construction of the 1893 building and the 1961 building, the population of Helena (including West-Helena) doubled; however, much of this growth happened after World War II, and it necessitated the construction of a new building beginning in the late 1950s.<sup>8</sup>

The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse located at 617 Walnut Street, Helena, Phillips County, Arkansas, was the second combined post office/courthouse to be built in Helena. According to

<sup>5</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas*. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890, p. 747.

<sup>6</sup> Federal Judicial Center. "History of the Federal Judiciary, U.S. District Courts for the Districts of Arkansas." [http://www.fjc.gov/history/home.nsf/page/courts\\_district\\_ar.html](http://www.fjc.gov/history/home.nsf/page/courts_district_ar.html) (accessed February 7, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, Judith H., and Stephanie S. Foell. *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s*. Washington, DC: U.S. General Services Administration, 2003, p. 30, and Sanborn Maps for Helena, Arkansas, January 1887 and April 1892.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, Douglas. Appraisal Report for the Helena Post Office and Courthouse. Report submitted to the General Services Administration by Douglas Hall and Associates. November 10, 2010.

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the Phillips County Assessor's records, there were two separate deeds conveying parts of these lots to the United States of America for the purpose of erecting the new Post Office and Courthouse. The first Warranty Deed was dated January 24, 1959, from M. O. Raspberry and Mary Helen Raspberry to the United States of America. The second Warranty Deed conveying part of the subject lots was dated April 14, 1959, from Elizabeth Houston to the United States of America. The lots purchased were improved with several one to two story frame buildings, a two-story brick apartment building, and associated garages. These structures were promptly removed to allow for the construction of the new federal building. At the time, two service stations (Lion Service Station and Pure Oil Station) were located directed across the street from the building site at the intersection of Perry and Walnut streets.<sup>9</sup>

The design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was approved by the government on May 1, 1959. The 1959 building plans indicate that the first floor was built to serve the post office, with the postal lobby, postal work room, postmaster and assistant postmaster offices, postal employee locker rooms, and equipment/mechanical rooms, and storage. The second floor included office space for probation, a grand jury room, and unassigned office space. The third floor served the U.S. District Court, providing both office space and the courtroom.<sup>10</sup>

The three-story brick, granite, and limestone Post Office and Courthouse building was designed by Edward F. Brueggeman of Little Rock, Arkansas, and Elmer A. Stuck & Associates Architects of Jonesboro, Arkansas, in 1959. Elmer A. Stuck was a native of Jonesboro and at the time of his death in July 1978 was a senior member of the architectural firm of Stuck, Frier, Lane, Scott and Beisner, which had offices in Jonesboro and Little Rock. Stuck graduated from Washington University at St. Louis. Before establishing his own firm, Stuck spent time working with noted Arkansas architect John Parks Almand, and designed the Medical Arts Building while working for Almand.<sup>11</sup>

He was a significant architect in the Jonesboro area. His designs in the Jonesboro area include the Craighead County Courthouse, Jonesboro City Hall, Craighead County Jail, Jonesboro Public Library, and many of the buildings on the Arkansas State University campus. In addition, "Mr. Stuck was past Board member and president of the state Architect Licensing Board and a corporate member of the American Institute of Architects. He was a former director and officer of the Arkansas chapter of AIA. He recently was elected member emeritus of the AIA."<sup>12</sup>

Architect Edward F. Brueggeman, the other architect involved in the design of the Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, headed the Little Rock architecture firm of Brueggeman, Swaim, and Allen. The firm, prior to becoming Swaim & Allen & Associates in 1950, began as

<sup>9</sup> Hall, Douglas. Appraisal Report for the Helena Post Office and Courthouse. Report submitted to the General Services Administration by Douglas Hall and Associates. November 10, 2010, and Sanborn Maps for Helena, Arkansas, February 1950.

<sup>10</sup> Architectural Plans for the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Helena, Arkansas. Prepared by Edward F. Brueggeman (Little Rock, AR) and Elmer A. Stuck & Associates Architects (Jonesboro, AR), 1959. Plans on file at the Southwest Region (7) of the General Services Administration.

<sup>11</sup> "Elmer A. Stuck, Architect, Dies at Age 78." *Arkansas Gazette*. 13 July 1978, page unknown.

<sup>12</sup> "Elmer A. Stuck, Architect, Dies at Age 78." *Arkansas Gazette*. 13 July 1978, page unknown.

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Brueggeman and Swaim in 1933 and became Brueggeman, Swaim, and Allen, in 1936. Edward Frederick Brueggeman was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 8, 1905. He was educated in Asheville, North Carolina, and while in high school there he worked for Asheville-architect D. J. Dreyer. After high school Brueggeman took a course in architectural designing at Washington University in St. Louis before working for the St. Louis firm of LaBeaum and Klein. He stayed with LaBeaum and Klein until 1928 when he moved to Little Rock to join Thompson, Sanders, and Ginocchio, and he stayed there until he opened his own firm in the 1930s.<sup>13</sup>

Brueggeman's partner, Guy Winfield Swaim, Jr., was born in Little Rock in 1906. After attending school in Little Rock, Swaim attended Castle Heights Military Academy at Lebanon, Tennessee, and then received his Bachelor's of Architecture degree from Alabama Polytechnic Institute. From 1926 until 1929, Swaim worked for John Parks Almand during his summer vacations. He also worked for Petter and McAninch in 1931 and Thompson, Sanders, and Ginocchio in 1932.<sup>14</sup>

Brueggeman and Swaim practiced together until William Samuel Allen joined the firm in 1936. Allen attended Little Rock College earning his bachelor's degree in 1927 and his master's degree in 1929. Even before graduation, in 1922, he began working for Sanders and Ginocchio and remained with the firm until 1936 when he joined Brueggeman and Swaim. The firm of Brueggeman, Swaim, and Allen became Swaim and Allen in 1953 when Brueggeman left to open his own practice, and James Clay Wellborn became an associate in the firm in 1954.<sup>15</sup>

The process to construct the building began in May 1959 with the solicitation of bids by the General Services Administration (GSA). An article in the May 8, 1959, *Helena World* reported:

Invitations for bids from the General Services Administration on the new Federal building here have been issued by the Dallas Regional Office of the GSA.

The office said it would accept the bids until 3 p.m. on Thursday June 4<sup>th</sup>.

The new face brick and limestone building will be located on the west side of Walnut Street between Porter and Perry Streets. It will be three stories tall with the first floor devoted to postal activities, the second floor to various governmental agencies for offices and the third the federal District Court.

The building will be air conditioned and the upper floors will be served by elevators.

<sup>13</sup> Witsell, Charles and Gordon Wittenberg with Marylyn Jackson Parins. *Architects of Little Rock: 1833-1950*. Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2014, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> Witsell, Charles and Gordon Wittenberg with Marylyn Jackson Parins. *Architects of Little Rock: 1833-1950*. Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2014, p. 106.

<sup>15</sup> Witsell, Charles and Gordon Wittenberg with Marylyn Jackson Parins. *Architects of Little Rock: 1833-1950*. Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2014, pp. 108-109.

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The \$900,000 structure is scheduled for completion late in 1960 or '61 and will be constructed in the middle of the block with parking areas on each side.

The site is now occupied by two houses, an apartment building and the Delta Butane Gas Company's office building. Two of the pieces of property involved have been paid for by the government and condemnation proceedings have been filed in Federal Court to set a price on the other two.<sup>16</sup>

The results of the bids were announced in the June 12, 1959, edition of the *Helena World*, which reported that "The O'Brien and Padgett Construction Co. of Memphis, Tenn. submitted an apparent low bid of \$713,445...on a contract for the construction of the new federal building here." The article also reported that "The Dover Elevator Co. of Cincinnati submitted an apparent low bid of \$24,342 for installing elevators in the building." Furthermore, "The Florsheim Co. of Shreveport has the second low bid of \$753,000 on the general contract." The GSA must have been pleased with the bids since they had estimated that it would cost \$920,000 to construct the building.<sup>17</sup>

Once the construction company had been selected, work began on the building soon after. By July, it was announced that Boyd McCarley of Helena would supervise the work for O'Brien and Padgett. The Delta Butane Gas & Fertilizer Company building had already been razed, but the houses had yet to be removed.<sup>18</sup> The houses had been removed and construction began in August with the *Helena World* reporting:

The first foundation piling for the new \$900,000 post office and federal building here was driven early this afternoon by the Raymond Concrete Pile Company.

That is the same firm that drove the foundation piling for the multi-million-dollar steam generating plant being constructed below the Helena Crossing by Arkansas Power and Light Company.

A total of 38,000 feet of piling will be driven on the site on Walnut Street between Perry and Porter. The hollow steel piles will be filled with concrete.<sup>19</sup>

Driving of the foundation pilings was completed by early October 1959 and "construction officials said that work would now proceed on the pouring of the concrete for the first floor,

<sup>16</sup> "Bids Are Invited On New Helena Federal Building." *Helena World*. 8 May 1959, p. 1: Unfortunately, during the construction of the building, there is no explanation of the apparent relocation of the building to the north end of the site, eliminating the northern parking lot. The construction of the Mississippi River Bridge and the Arkansas Power and Light power plant, which were going on at the same time, received much more news coverage in the *World*, apparently eliminating much coverage of the Federal Building's construction.

<sup>17</sup> "Memphis Firm Low Bidder For Helena New P.O." *Helena World*. 12 June 1959, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> "Work To Start Soon On New PO Building." *Helena World*. 17 July 1959, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> "First Piling Driver This Afternoon On Federal Building." *Helena World*. 25 August 1959, p. 1.

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along with installation of pipes for plumbing and water.”<sup>20</sup> Progress continued with the frame of the building in May of 1960 followed by the cladding of the brick exterior skin in November of that year. Photographs indicate that the building was substantially complete by July 1961.

While the new Federal Building was under construction, the GSA also had to work on the disposal of the 1893 Federal Building. It was reported in the February 10, 1961, *Helena World* that

The General Services Administration of the Federal Government will open bids on March 14<sup>th</sup> in Dallas, Texas, on the old Federal building and post office here.

Located on the corner of Cherry and Porter Streets, the building is soon to be replaced by a new million-dollar structure now being erected on Walnut, between Perry and Porter.

The property includes a three story and basement masonry building with a front footage of 165 feet on Cherry and 131½ feet on Porter.

...

The City of Helena had requested that the property be turned over to the city as “surplus government property” but its request was turned down.

However, city officials indicated they were still interested in acquiring the property and had filed another request.<sup>21</sup>

On June 3, 1961, it was announced that the dedication of the new Federal Building in Helena would take place on July 27, 1961. The *Helena World* reported on July 23, 1961, that the “Federal Building on Walnut between Perry and Porter, will be dedicated by Congressman Gathings. On hand will be John L. Moore, Administrator, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C.; John F. Dee, Regional Director of the Post Office Department, St. Louis, and other government officials.”<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the dedication of the new Federal Building was just one of three dedications that occurred in Helena that day; the other two being the Mississippi River bridge and the new Arkansas Power and Light plant. The *Arkansas Gazette* reported:

A holiday atmosphere prevailed here today as Helena and West Helena dedicated nearly \$60,000,000 worth of construction to public service.

There was a band concert, a parade and extensive speech making to celebrate the formal opening of a \$14,000,000 Mississippi River Bridge, a \$44,000,000 Arkansas Power and Light Company steam electric generating plant and a \$1,100,000 post office-federal building.

<sup>20</sup> “Pile Driving Work Is Completed For New Post Office.” *Helena World*. 4 October 1959, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> “Government To Sell Old Post Office Properties Here.” *Helena World*. 10 February 1961, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Young, Jack M. “Twin Cities Preparing For Gigantic Celebration Here Starting Early Thursday.” *Helena World*. 23 July 1961, p. 1.

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Thousands of persons ventured into the sweltering heat to watch and to listen. The celebration lasted all day, the crowd moving from one dedication site to another.

...

In mid-afternoon the dedication scene shifted to the new post office and federal building that is replacing a structure in use since 1893.

Representative E. C. (Took) Gathings (Dem., Ark.), whose Northeast Arkansas district includes Phillips County, made the principal address.<sup>23</sup>

The new building was described pretty extensively in the *Helena World* on July 26, 1961. The article stated:

The majestic new three-story Federal building on Walnut, between Perry and Porter Streets, replaces a structure put into operation here in 1893 and which has long since outlived its usefulness.

The new building will house not only the Post Office – on the first floor – but other various government agencies such as the U. S. Engineers, Farmers Home Administration, Internal Revenue Service, Recruiting offices, Federal District courtroom and its attendant offices, including a detention room for prisoners, and the like.

Most of the various government offices have been scattered around Helena in rented facilities.

When built in 1893, the present federal building was considered one of the most modern in the state. It even had its own sewage disposal system that ran to the Mississippi River. Flood waters forced the closing of that drain.

Originally mail was brought to the present post office in horse and mule-drawn wagons and dumped through a chute into the basement. There it was sorted and sent to the first floor via a “dumb waiter.” In later years most of the mail was sorted in West Helena and then brought to town.

The new post office will have twice the floor space of the present one and will have unloading docks at the rear where mail trucks can be easily loaded or unloaded.

A new system will be used for post office boxes. The smaller boxes will be opened with a dial combination, instead of by a key. There will be over 700 boxes in the new office, as

<sup>23</sup> “3 Dedications Set July 27 For Helena.” *Arkansas Gazette*. 4 June 1961, p. 2A, and Foreman, Gene. “Festive Air Marks Helena Dedication Of 3 New Facilities.” *Arkansas Gazette*. 28 July 1961, pp. 1A-2A.

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compared to only 568 in the present post office. In addition, there is space for installed another hundred or more boxes.

Four different size boxes will be available in the new post office, as opposed to only three in the present one.

Work on the new federal building was delayed for almost six months because of the steel strike in 1959 and still isn't scheduled to be occupied by the various agencies until early in August.

The late John I. Moore, Helena attorney, headed a Chamber of Commerce committee that worked several years to have the new structure erected. A special resolution adopted by the chamber is contained in the corner stone of the new building paying tribute to Mr. Moore.

Rep. E. C. Gathings sought several times to have funds for the new building incorporated in Post Office appropriation bills before he finally succeeded under the Republican administration. He will make the dedicatory address tomorrow.

At one time, Mr. Moore said that the *Helena World* was the only local support he had in his untiring efforts toward securing the new building.

The present structure was sold at public auction – by written bids – early this year to the Helena Federal Savings & Loan Association. No plans have yet been announced for future use of the building.<sup>24</sup>

Once the building was dedicated, the job of moving the post office and the other agencies began, and would take the rest of July and a part of August 1961. The *Helena World* reported:

The Helena Post Office has started moving into its new facilities on Walnut Street and expects to close down the old office at Noon tomorrow, according to Ray McCarty, assistant postmaster.

The “go-ahead signal” to start the move was given yesterday afternoon by regional officials here for the dedication of the new million dollar federal building.

Other government offices are expected to start moving into the structure early next week.

The Post Office will occupy virtually the entire first floor. Stamp machines and p.o. boxes will be in service in the new building Saturday afternoon as soon as the move is completed.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> “New Federal Building Replaces Structure Placed in Service '93.” *Helena World*. 26 July 1961, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> “Post Office Plans To Start Moving This Weekend.” *Helena World*. 28 July 1961, p. 1.



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The combined post office and courthouse was erected at a time when Federal office space was in high demand nationally after World War II and new facilities were necessary to accommodate this need. Locally, the population of Helena had experienced significant growth after the war and space in the 1893 Post Office and Courthouse had likely become an issue. The new facility was designed by a private Arkansas-based architectural team selected by the General Services Administration. Its style was indicative of the Modern Movement with clean lines and void of the unnecessary trappings of ornamentation. This design approach and the almost complete reliance on private architects by the federal government for development of new federal facilities typified this era in the federal public building program. As a consequence, the Helena building was a part of the post-war national trend where an increased need for federal facilities combined with a modern efficient approach to design and the use of private architect resulted in the construction of a number of public facilities across the country.

Since the time of its dedication in 1961, the Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse has remained a modern landmark in downtown Helena. The building is one of those Federal buildings whose architecture reflected solid application of new technologies and building systems and remains an excellent example of this era in the Federal public building program.

Today, the Post Office continues to operate on the ground floor. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern Division of the Eastern District of Arkansas utilizes a courtroom on the third floor and has offices in the building. U.S. Probation also occupies a small amount of space on the third floor. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) maintains a county office on the second floor.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY**

The Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse represented a significant departure from the other Federal building that had been built in Helena. Unlike the 1890s building, the architecture and design of the new Helena Federal Building was not based on historical precedents. Rather, it was based on the modern International style, with its characteristic flat roof, bands of windows, and smooth, unornamented wall surfaces. However, the design of the Helena Federal Building represented not only a departure from the design of other Federal buildings, it also was a new style for downtown Helena, and it is still a style that is not well represented in the city, especially on such a large scale.

The Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was erected at a time when Federal office space was in high demand nationally after World War II and new facilities were necessary to accommodate this need. The building also shows the influence of the Public Buildings Act of 1959 which consolidated federal building under the newly established General Services Administration (GSA) and permitted private firms to undertake public work. As a result, the Helena Federal Building ended up being designed by two significant private Arkansas-based architectural firms selected by the GSA, Edward F. Brueggeman of Little Rock and Elmer A. Stuck and Associates of Jonesboro. The design of the Helena Federal Building by locally-known architects reflected the GSA's practice at the time, which was that the "GSA tended to

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commission buildings designed by internationally and nationally recognized architects in larger cities, and buildings by locally known architects in smaller cities and towns."<sup>26</sup>

The design that was developed by Stuck and Associates and Brueggeman was consistent with modern office facilities of the time. Its façades, defined by brick, stone, and uniform windows, reflected a growing trend in which Federal buildings began to more closely resemble their commercial counterparts. As Robinson and Foell note in their book,

One of the most noticeable changes in Modern architecture was the diminishing distinction between public and private buildings. In the past, the symbolism of public buildings was important, and formal, hierarchical sequences of ceremonial spaces were common. However, the Modern era ushered in an emphasis on functionalism, and the economy of interior space reflected this new design mode. Grand lobbies were absent from Modern designs; instead, plazas served as exterior gateways to sites, while the use of transparent building materials served to visually unite exterior and interior spaces.<sup>27</sup>

This trend, however, did not necessarily have a negative impact on Federal building program. While it did create an inventory that did not necessarily exude the Federal presences that older Federal Buildings did, some of the new 1960s era Federal buildings were impressive examples of modern architecture in their own right. The Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is one of those Federal buildings whose architecture reflected solid application of new technologies and building systems. Today, the Helena Federal Building remains an excellent example of this era in the Federal public building program. As a result, the Helena Federal Building is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion C**.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, Judith H., and Stephanie S. Foell. *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s*. Washington, DC: U.S. General Services Administration, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, Judith H., and Stephanie S. Foell. *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s*. Washington, DC: U.S. General Services Administration, 2003, p. 30.

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Name of repository: General Services Administration

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Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): PH0469

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of Property Approximately 1.25 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 34.528841 | Longitude: -90.587723 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 4. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |             |                 |                   |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 15 | Easting: 721402 | Northing: 3823436 |
| 2. Zone:    | Easting:        | Northing:         |
| 3. Zone:    | Easting:        | Northing:         |
| 4. Zone:    | Easting :       | Northing:         |

**Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)**

Old Helena Lots 226 through 228.

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**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This boundary encompasses all of the land historically associated with the property.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Ralph S. Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator  
organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program  
street & number: 323 Center Street, Suite 1500  
city or town: Little Rock state: AR zip code: 72201  
e-mail: ralph@arkansasheritage.org  
telephone: (501) 324-9787  
date: July 23, 2014

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse

City or Vicinity: Helena-West Helena

County: Phillips

State: Arkansas

Photographer: Ralph S. Wilcox

Date Photographed: July 23, 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 8. Detail of the main entrance, looking west.
- 2 of 8. Detail of the medallions to the south of the main entrance, looking northwest.
- 3 of 8. Detail of the building name and cornerstone, looking northwest.
- 4 of 8. East façade of the building, looking southwest.
- 5 of 8. North façade of the building, looking southwest.
- 6 of 8. North and west façades of the building, looking southeast.
- 7 of 8. South façade of the building – and an errant Mockingbird – looking northwest.
- 8 of 8. South and east façades of the building, looking northwest.

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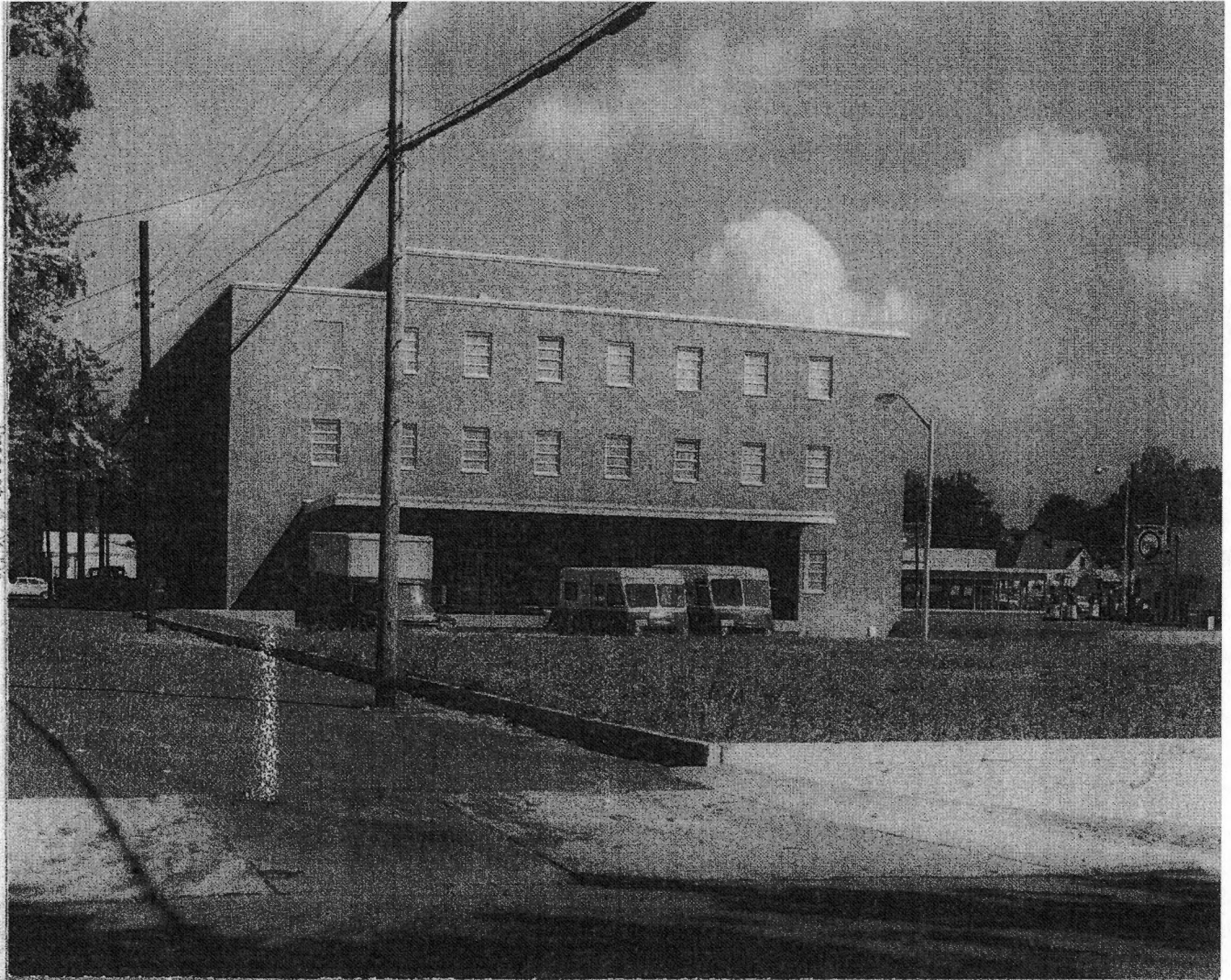


Newly completed U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, View from Intersection of Perry and Walnut St., Helena, Arkansas (GSA EDOCs Photo 13645; Photo dated July 1, 1961).



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Photograph of South Elevation, Postal Loading Dock, U.S. Post Office and Courthouse,  
Helena, Arkansas (GSA EDOCs Photo 13666; circa 1961).

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View of main entry, U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Helena, Arkansas (GSA EDOCs Photo 3958; unknown date).

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**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.



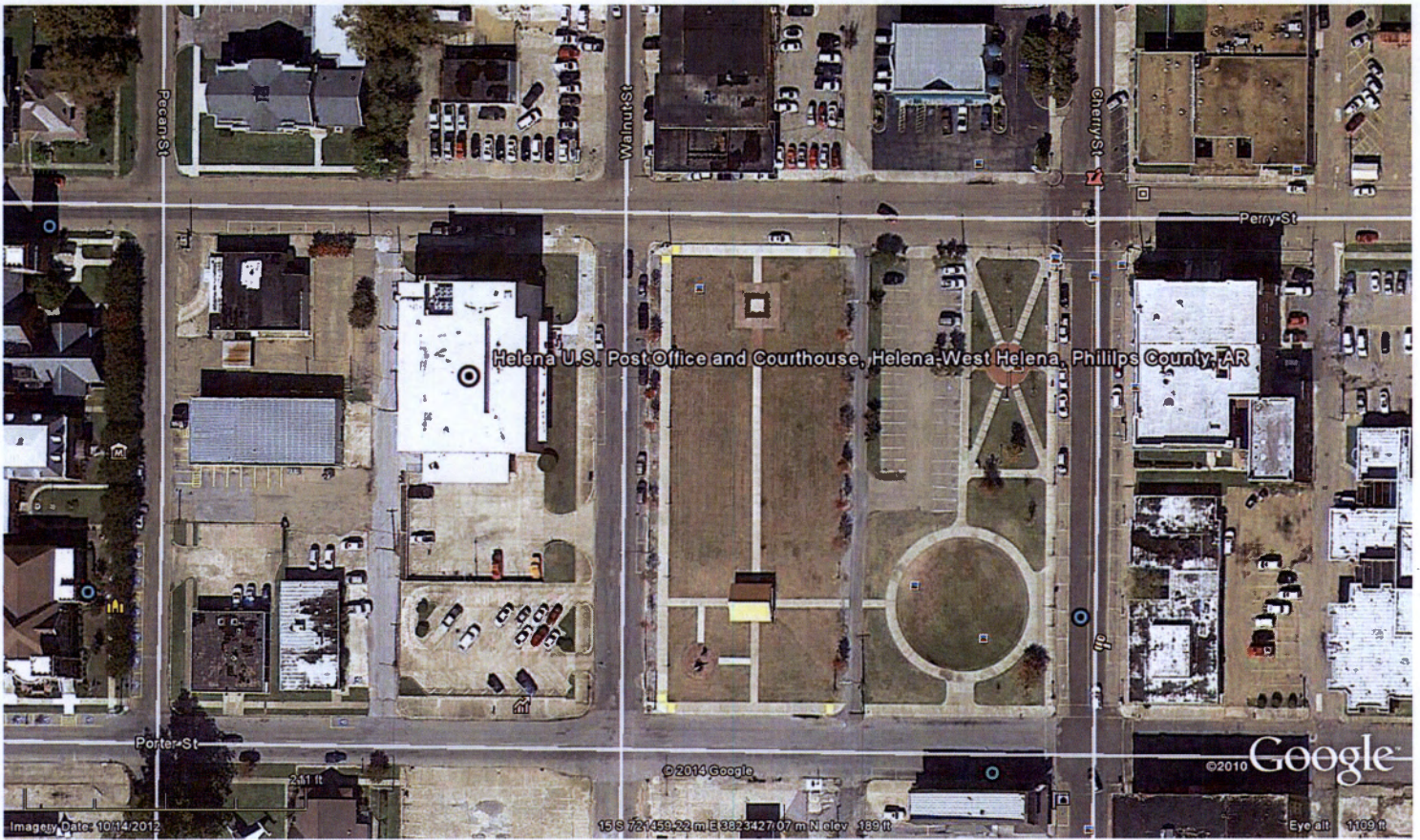
Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse

Helena-West Helena, Phillips County, Arkansas

|-----539'-----|



North



Helena U.S. Post Office and Courthouse

Helena-West Helena, Phillips County, Arkansas

|-----211'-----|



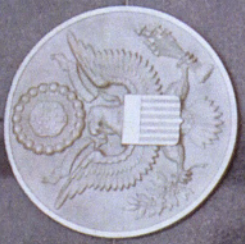
North

FED  
UNITE  
UNITE



CAUTION  
STAND CLEAR  
OF DOOR





FEDERAL BUILDING  
UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
UNITED STATES COURT HOUSE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER  
PRESIDENT

1959





FEDERAL BUILDING  
UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
UNITED STATES COURT HOUSE

