

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Fort Smith Masonic Temple

other name/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: 200 North 11th Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Fort Smith

vicinity: N/A

state: AR

county: Sebastian

code: AR 131

zip code: 72913

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

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

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

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification
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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.

Cathryn A. Byrd _____ 10-12-92
Signature of certifying official Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
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

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5. National Park Service Certification
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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

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6. Function or Use
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Historic: SOCIAL Sub: Meeting Hall

Current: SOCIAL Sub: Meeting Hall

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:

Art Deco
Egyptian Revival

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation Stone roof Asphalt
walls Stone other N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1927-1929

Significant Dates: N/A

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Mann, George R.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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X See continuation sheet.

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: _____

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>15</u>	<u>371180</u>	<u>3916560</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

____ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ____ See continuation sheet.

Beginning at a point formed by the intersection of the southeastern edge of 11th Street with a perpendicular line formed by a line running parallel to the building's northeastern elevation and located 25 feet to the northeast thereof, proceed southeasterly along said line for a distance of approximately 200 feet to its intersection with a perpendicular line running parallel to the building's southeastern elevation; thence proceed southwesterly along said line for a distance of approximately 200 feet to its intersection with a perpendicular line running parallel with the building's southwestern elevation; thence proceed northwesterly along said line for a distance of approximately 200 feet to its intersection with a perpendicular line running along the southeastern edge of 11th Street; thence proceed northeasterly along said line for a distance of approximately 200 feet to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification: ____ See continuation sheet.

This boundary includes all of the property historically associated with the resource that retains its integrity.

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

Name/Title: Kenneth Story, Architectural Historian
Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: October 12, 1992
Street & Number: 323 Center Street, 15th Floor Telephone: (501) 324-9880
City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201

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Summary

The Masonic Temple is two stories in height with a full basement, of stone masonry and steel construction, and designed in a clearly Art Deco-influenced version of the Egyptian Revival. The entire building remains in a remarkable state of preservation, with its exterior and virtually all of its vast interior spaces retaining their original appearance. It is in very good condition.

Elaboration

The Masonic Temple in Fort Smith, Arkansas is two stories in height with a full basement, of stone masonry and steel construction, and designed in a clearly Art Deco-influenced version of the Egyptian Revival. It features a roughly symmetrical rectangular plan, with the axis running from the central, recessed western or front entrance to the entrance on the eastern or rear elevation. There is but one visible chimney, rising above the parapet roof near the eastern or rear elevation. The flat roof with its raised parapet is covered with a built-up/tar roofing system, and its stone walls rest upon a continuous stone foundation.

The northwestern or front elevation is composed of a large, projecting central bay that anchors the facade, with the lower walls to either side being stepped back from the street. The flat roof entrance bay is composed of two flat rectangular pilasters framing a recessed, central entrance bay that is in turn framed by a pair of fluted pilasters that separate it from the two flanking recessed window bays. The double-leaf entrance is framed by a flat, post and lintel entrance molding that is ornamented only by the masonic symbol above the door and a narrow band of stylized geometric detail near the top. The three recessed bays each contain a single eight-over-eight sash window on the second story, while the two outside bays each also contain a single window on the first floor. The wall near the top of each of the recessed bays is decorated with a stylized floral panel, as are the lintels above the two first-story windows. A broad band of spiral decoration extends across the frieze above the recessed bays, and the parapet above is blank with the sole exception of the inscribed words "Masonic Temple." The pair of sphinxes that rest upon the flanking stoops complete the bay. The two set-back walls to either side are more simply decorated, with the same band of combination paterae/swag decoration running along the cornice frieze and the same stylized floral panel above the first-story windows as seen within the entrance bay. The third set-back wall to the southwest -- containing the aisle next to the auditorium on the first floor and the auditorium wall itself on the second floor -- is blank with the exception of the floral panel above the windows, the fluted band near the cornice that is also ornamented with the same paterae, and the vertical, geometric screens that cover the

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second-story auditorium windows.

The southwestern elevation is anchored by the end of the auditorium within, which is accessed via three symmetrically-placed entrances that are set into a slightly-projecting, single-story entrance bay. The stairwell is flanked by large, stone lanterns set atop stone stoops. The double-leaf entrances provide access to the auditorium behind. Each entrance features a panel directly above that contains a lantern emitting light, and a central circular decoration directly above. Both the projecting entrance bay and the cornice of the wall above are decorated with a band of the same floral/swag detail seen earlier. A single vertical window lights the wall to either side of the entrance bay.

The northeastern elevation features the same bands of detailing around the cornices, and is otherwise regularly fenestrated on both floors, the only exception being the single story section to the northwest that is lit by only a single window placed toward the southeast. The southeast or elevation features no setbacks of any kind, and is irregularly fenestrated on both floors, in part due to the fact that a number of smaller rooms are concentrated near the rear of the building. A total of two entrances access the first floor, and this elevation otherwise features no significant decoration.

The interior contains a total of fifty separate rooms, including the first floor lobby. The entire interior is decorated in what can best be described as a Middle Eastern aesthetic. The entrance lobby ceiling is supported upon elaborate square columns, each side of which is decorated with a fluted panel near the bottom and a sloping chevron pattern above. The fluting and chevrons are painted with gold leaf, and connected by a decorative field of light blue. A recessed arch at the rear of the lobby is flanked by gold leaf, fluted pilasters and filled with a decorative metal screen in front of opaque glass panels. Curving stairwells that rise the second floor to either side of this recessed arch are accessed through shouldered Moorish arches, and a double-band of lotus flower cornice moldings -- painted in gold leaf and dark pink -- runs around the ceiling throughout.

To the north side of the lobby is the Blue Lodge room, the walls of which are painted in a subtle wave pattern, with a band of lighter color at the top, and bands of increasingly darker white below, stopping at the floor. The entrance to the room is covered by a large balcony, supported upon four large, round stone columns. The balcony is accessed via a three-quarter turn stairwell the risers of which are each decorated with the name of a virtue or educational discipline. Most of the other rooms at this end of the floor have always been reserved for administrative use, and thus are less elaborately ornamented.

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To the south side of the lobby are other parlors and reception areas, but most noteworthy is the large auditorium. The impressive stage area contains a large platform, a series of original, suspended electrical stage lights, and dozens of original painted theatrical backdrops that can be raised and lowered mechanically. The upper corners of the square proscenium arch are ornamented with elaborate coil and spiral patterns leading up to a pair of faces set within an elaborate central cartouche. Two large decorative screens flank the walls to either side of the stage, the recessed ceiling panels above are stenciled with an elaborate diaper pattern, and the decorative beams that separate them feature scrolled brackets at their intersection with the wall and are also elaborately stenciled with the lotus flower and other Middle Eastern motifs.

Of the several rooms on the second floor, by far the most elaborate is the Grotto room. It features large, curved brackets that are placed upon massive round columns and covered with lavish, colored decorative patterns, as are the wall surfaces, decorative ceiling beams and the panel directly above the double-leaf door. The uppermost half-story also contains another meeting room that contains similar decoration as seen in the Blue Lodge room discussed earlier, but is noteworthy for its barrel vaulted ceiling.

With the exception of the replacement of several of the exterior windows, the Masonic Temple has suffered remarkably few alterations, and remains largely as it appeared when it was constructed.

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Summary

Criterion C, statewide significance

The Masonic Temple in Fort Smith, designed by the Little Rock architect George R. Mann in 1927 and completed by 1929, survives as one of the state's few known examples of the Egyptian Revival style of architecture. It is also architecturally significant for the stylized Middle Eastern architectural influences that are especially evident in the decoration of the inside of the building. It is thus eligible under Criterion C with local significance as the finest example of this style in the city of Fort Smith.

Elaboration

The first European settlement in the vicinity of what is now known as Fort Smith, Arkansas dates from October or November of 1817 with the establishment of the federal military post, initially named Fort Belle Point (there had been disorganized and sporadic European settlement in the area previous to this time, but no organized communities resulted). The junction of the Poteau and Arkansas Rivers, selected by Major Stephen H. Long, topographical engineer, offered significant strategic advantages over other sites in the vicinity, not the least of which was its underlying layer of stratified sandstone, providing a solid foundation for the construction of a fort and buildings.

The original purpose of the fort was the protection of the western border of the United States territories against attacks from the Native American residents of the newly-created Indian Territory, located in what is now known as Oklahoma; however, after the forced migrations of the Creek and Cherokee Indians from their ancestral homelands east of the Mississippi River that occurred during the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the fort's primary directive shifted to keeping the peace between the newer Indian tribes and such older tribes as the Osage, the Choctaw and the Quapaw that had lived in this area for some time. The resulting hostilities between neighboring tribes was of sufficient magnitude to prompt the War Department to convert what had been a temporary fort facility into a permanent facility as of 1825, after the signing of the Choctaw treaty, though the actual purchase of the land for the new fort and the actual construction thereof did not occur until 1838.

The instability of the Indian situation discouraged any organized attempts at the establishment of an associated community adjacent to the fort for some time, particularly while it was a temporary facility with military personnel subject to ordered withdrawal at any time. Thus it is not surprising that the platting of the adjacent city of Fort Smith and the selling of lots for new

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construction did not begin until this fort was officially made permanent, thereby insuring the relative security of new settlers in the town.

Highlighted by the excitement that attended the preparations of several parties to proceed westward to the California Gold Rush of 1849, the pre-Civil War history of the city of Fort Smith was largely that of its role as a major embarkation point for traders, settlers and other adventurers heading west to such destinations as Santa Fe in the Mexican territory, to California, and to other forts further west. The downtown growth along Garrison Avenue, the principal commercial thoroughfare, largely reflected this activity, as it abounded with general mercantile stores, livery stables, and other such retail enterprises. During this period Fort Smith witnessed the establishment of its first newspaper, the *Herald*.

It was not until after the Civil War that such institutions as public schools, churches and dependable postal service arrived in the city of Fort Smith (the fact that the federal government officially closed the fort as an active military garrison in 1871 attests to the city's firm state of security by this time). Though the city had always been served by the Arkansas River, and later by several stage lines that connected Fort Smith with other cities in the midwest and southwest, the city grew dramatically with the arrival first of the Little Rock-Fort Smith Railroad in 1876, and then with the arrival of the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad in 1883. This trend was only increased by the discovery in 1901 of natural gas fields to the east of Fort Smith, thereby providing a source of dependable and cheap fuel that made the establishment of industrial enterprises feasible. Smelters, glass factories, furniture factories, steel and iron works, and reputedly the largest sorghum in the world all located in Fort Smith as a result. The city also became a major agricultural trade center, serving as the transportation hub for the wide variety of produce grown throughout the length of the surrounding Arkansas River valley.

It was this transformation of Fort Smith from a rough, frontier town to a secure, civilized city full of the comforts and conveniences of civilization that provided the backdrop for the growth of a number of fraternal and social organizations. Among them were the Elks' Club, the Progress Club, the Germans' Athletic Club, and the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, or the Masons. The order of Freemasonry traces its origins to sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, and Scotland and England in particular, where the fraternal organization grew around the existing masons' lodges (functioning much as the crafts guilds had operated throughout Europe during the Medieval and Renaissance periods) when they began accepting non-stonemasons as members. Freemasonry had become an order no longer tied to the craft of stonemasonry by the early eighteenth century, and was first brought to America in the process of British colonization.

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It was Albert Pike, the famous teacher, lawyer, and soldier, that brought Freemasonry to Arkansas in the 1850's. Though he resided in Little Rock, Albert Pike was in fact indirectly involved in the establishment of the first Masonic organization in Fort Smith. Pike introduced what was then known as Cryptic Freemasonry to Arkansas in 1853 and held the title of Deputy Inspector General for Arkansas of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry for the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States. Through his authority he granted the power for the establishment of the first Masonic council in Little Rock, called the Occidental Council. The last of the first five councils, the Osiris Council, was organized on November 23, 1858 in Fort Smith (the other three being Camden, Monticello and Friendship) under the supervision and authority of Albert Pike himself.

The turbulence that attended the Civil War and Reconstruction interrupted the active pursuit of Freemasonry throughout the state, though the individual councils met after the war and continued to grow on a more independent basis thereafter. The records of the Osiris Council in Fort Smith were lost in a fire that destroyed the earlier temple in 1919, and thus the history of this particular council prior to that time remains largely unknown. However, it was that fire and the obvious need for larger quarters -- necessitated by the dramatic growth in the various member groups that come under the over-arching authority of the Scottish Rite organizations -- that motivated the membership to explore the idea of the construction of a new temple. Beginning in 1920, a group of prominent Masons within the Fort Smith chapter began plans to initiate fundraising efforts. By 1928, their efforts were sufficiently successful to appoint a building committee to carry out both site selection and the selection of an architect. George R. Mann of Little Rock was engaged, with the local firm of Haralson and Nelson of Fort Smith employed as assistant architects; Gordon Walker of Little Rock served as the contractor. Completed and dedicated in 1929, the final cost of construction, including furnishings, equipment and grounds, came to \$385,000.

The low, horizontal aspect of the exterior, created through the combination of the blocky, symmetrical massing and the organization of virtually all of the decorative detail into bands and distinct panels, is typical of the Art Deco style as practiced on a national scale, and as such the Masonic Temple stands as the finest example of this style in the city of Fort Smith. However, the glory of this building is its interior, with its wealth of Egyptian and Minoan architectural detailing and ornament.³ The combination of these styles into a cohesive design is both

³The origin of the selection of this generally Middle Eastern theme is not certain, though it probably stems from the Masons' belief in the beneficence of a spiritual life to mankind without dictating what form that spiritual life should take, instead leaving that to the choice of the

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remarkably successful and unique; for these reasons the Masonic Temple is eligible under Criterion C with statewide significance.

individual. The fact that the west's three major religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) trace their genesis to the eastern Mediterranean made the choice of this particular architectural and decorative vocabulary the most inclusive of those various faiths, and thus the most symbolic of this belief.

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Bibliography

Barto, Stephen, *Stone Marks in America and their Origin, 1790-1860*, North Atlantic Region Curatorial Paper, November, 1980.

Goodspeed *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northwestern Arkansas*, (Chicago and Nashville: 1891).

Mapes, Ruth B., *Old Fort Smith*, (Little Rock, 1965).

The New Masonic Temple, Fort Smith, Arkansas, Commemorating the Dedication on September 16, 1929.