

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Sebastian County Courthouse/Ft. Smith City Hall

other name/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: 100 S. 6th Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Fort Smith

vicinity: N/A

state: AR county: Sebastian code: AR 131 zip code: 72901

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public-local

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

| Contributing | Noncontributing |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| <u>1</u> | <u> </u> buildings |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> sites |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> structures |
| <u>1</u> | <u> </u> objects |
| <u>2</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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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:

Art Deco
Other

Other Description: W.P.A. Moderne

Materials: foundation Concrete roof Asphalt
walls Stone other _____

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: Statewide.

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1937 _____

Significant Dates: 1937 _____

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A _____

Architect/Builder: Nelson, Bassham and Wheeler/
Manhattan Construction Company

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: Approximately 1.5

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|---------------|----------------|---|-----------|-------|-------|
| A | <u>15</u> | <u>370480</u> | <u>3916540</u> | B | <u>15</u> | _____ | _____ |
| C | <u>15</u> | _____ | _____ | D | <u>15</u> | _____ | _____ |

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

Beginning at a point formed by the intersection of the southwestern edge of Rogers Avenue with the southeastern edge of 6th Street, proceed southwesterly along the latter edge to its intersection with a perpendicular line formed by the northeastern edge of Parker Street; thence proceed southeasterly along said line to its intersection with a perpendicular line formed by the northwestern edge of 7th Street; thence proceed northeasterly along said edge to its intersection with a perpendicular line formed by the southwestern edge of Rogers Avenue; thence proceed northwesterly along said edge to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

This boundary includes the entire courthouse square upon which this building was originally constructed.

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

Name/Title: Kenneth Story, Architectural Historian

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

Date: 04/07/93

Street & Number: 323 Center Street, Suite 1500 Telephone: (501) 324-9880

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

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Summary

The Sebastian County Courthouse/Ft. Smith City Hall, located at the corner of 6th and Rogers Streets in downtown Ft. Smith, is a four-story, cut stone and cast concrete masonry courthouse building designed in a stripped-down version of the Art Deco style that was quite popular for federal public works projects during the 1930's. Constructed in 1937, its boxy, symmetrical massing is augmented by the stylized Classical ornament clustered around the entrances, within the panels between the windows on each floor, and along the cornices of the stepped-back roof.

Elaboration

The Sebastian County Courthouse/Ft. Smith City Hall, located at the southeast corner of 6th and Rogers Streets in downtown Ft. Smith, is a four-story, cut stone and cast concrete masonry courthouse building designed in a stripped-down version of the Art Deco style that was quite popular with such federal public works projects during the 1930's. Its plan is almost completely symmetrical -- consisting of the lower, flanking wings that contain the courtrooms and the slightly taller central section that supports the fourth story jail section -- the only exceptions being the asymmetrical placement of the two stone chimneys and the single utility tower, all of which rise through the flat roof of the jail section. The flat roofs throughout are covered with a built-up tar system, the walls are faced with cut stone, and the raised basement is set behind a continuous foundation constructed of rusticated cast concrete.

As the grid of streets in downtown Ft. Smith are laid out on a diagonal with respect to north and south -- the principal east-west thoroughfares actually running more northwest to southeast and the north-south thoroughfares running southwest to northeast -- the four facades of the Sebastian County Courthouse/Ft. Smith City Hall building face the forty-five degree intervals between the principal points of the compass. This makes the principal facade -- facing South 6th Street -- the northwest elevation. It is a total of seventeen window bays in length, with three bays each in the projecting wings, another four to either side of the central, slightly-projecting entrance bay, and three across the entrance bay itself in the two stories above the monumental, projecting entrance enframement below. The basement windows on this elevation are uniformly eight-pane stationary windows. The projecting wings are actually only two stories in height, as they contain the taller courtroom spaces on their second stories. Nevertheless, the windows that light the first floor throughout this elevation are of the combination type, with the pair of eight-pane casements being set below a pair of smaller, square, four-pane fixed windows. The windows that light each of the next two stories above on the central section are identical, each of which contains the pair of eight-pane casements set below two horizontal, two-pane fixed windows. The three second

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story windows on each of the projecting wings consist of two pair of eight-pane casement windows, one atop the other, that are separated by a horizontal band of decorative metal trim. The raised and set-back jail section atop the central section is nine window bays in length, with each opening covered by decorative screens that mask the security equipment behind. The projecting stone entrance below is stepped forward (serving as a unique counterpoint to the step-back of the overall composition), with the entrance enframingent being taller than the flanking moldings to either side. The double-leaf recessed entrance is flanked by two full-height single-pane sidelights and surmounted by a tall, three-pane fixed transom grouping consisting of one larger central pane flanked by two narrower panes, all of which is fronted by an original, decorative metal screen. The signage on the tall, flat lintel above the entrance reads "COURT HOUSE/CITY HALL" and is flanked by two slightly-raised paterae from which hang the elaborate metal and glass lanterns that flank the entrance. The lintel is supported upon two broad pilasters with shallow fluting.

The southeast elevation opposite is virtually identical, the only differences being the insertion of decorative concrete panels between the pairs of eight-pane casement windows at the rear of the courtrooms in the projecting wings, the attachment of metal gutters to the wall on these same wings, and a reduction of the decoration along the cornices and on the wall surfaces.

The southwestern and northeastern elevations are simpler, and also virtually identical. Nine window bays in length, the elevation is composed of a single slightly set-back window bay at each end and seven window bays between on each of the upper two floors, while the raised basement is fenestrated by three fixed eight-pane windows on either side of the projecting stone entrance bay. The first floor windows are identical to those seen on the first story of the northwestern and southeastern elevations, and the second story courtroom windows are identical to those seen on the second story of these courtroom wings on the northwestern elevation. The entrance bay is formed by two large, stylized Classical consoles that rise from the ground and are curved at the top, giving the illusion that they curve backward. Between these enframing forms, the panel above the entrance is filled with two panels of stylized Classical vegetal decoration, carved in shallow relief, that are separated by a third, narrower panel and surmounted by a smaller, horizontal band of similar carving. A row of incised cornice detail completes the top of the entrance bay. The recessed entrance doors are framed by a deep, beveled band of typical stylized, Art Deco detail consisting of alternating circle and chevron motifs. The modern, aluminum double-leaf entrance is surmounted by a double-pane fixed transom.

The significant exterior details include the ornamental metal cresting running along the cornice of the jail section, the stylized cornice molding that adorns the tops of both the main central

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section and the lower courtroom wings, the various ornamented paterae, shields, animal figures and inset panels that are placed near the cornices and between storys (almost always at the visual intersection of principal architectural elements), and the elaborate projecting entrance bays, with their wealth of detail displayed on the entrance lintels, their elaborate, ornamental moldings around the entrances, and their signage.

The interior, and the lobby spaces and courtrooms in particular, are even more elaborate. The lobby directly behind the front entrance is accessed via a concrete staircase that leads to a central lobby space created by the intersection of the two perpendicular hallways that provide access to the various offices and courtroom spaces. The lobby walls are faced with marble and visually anchored by slightly-projecting pilasters with shallow, incised vertical molding that recalls the fluting of Classical columns. The plaster ceiling is coffered, and the floor at the intersection of the hallways is highlighted with a large pattern of a star set into a circle -- all created with terrazzo flooring -- that at its center contains the letter "S" superimposed over the letter "C", with both being flanked by a smaller letter "F" on one side and the letter "S" on the other (the first pair of letters being the first two letters of Sebastian County and the last pair being the first letters of Fort Smith). This pattern is surrounded by alternating light and dark tile squares that form a checkerboard pattern. Also of note are the stylized, almost Egyptian metal elevator doors within the lobby and the cylindrical hanging lights of frosted glass and decorative metal that hang within the courtroom.

The Sebastian County Courthouse/Ft. Smith City Hall has suffered only the refinishing of a few of its offices within and the replacement of its original exterior entrance doors with modern aluminum doors. Otherwise it is unaltered and in excellent condition.

Also included in the nomination is the Confederate Monument, a granite shaft topped with a bronze statue of an infantryman located on the northern corner of the courthouse square. It was placed here after War Department officials objected to its installation at the National Cemetery in Ft. Smith because its inscription did not recognize the contribution of the Federal soldiers also interred there.

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Summary

Criterion C, statewide significance

The Sebastian County Courthouse/Ft. Smith City Hall is eligible under Criterion C with statewide significance as the most pure example of a Public Works Administration Art Deco building within the city of Ft. Smith. Its characteristic symmetrical massing and composition, and its stylized Classical detailing -- inside and out -- firmly establish this building as the finest example of this architectural style in the city, and probably within the entire county.

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

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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 mill 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.

Though Sebastian County had been created by an act of the Arkansas General Assembly and signed by Governor John Seldon Roane on January 10, 1851, the permanent site of the county seat remained in contention both before and after the Civil War. The first courthouse, located near the geographical center of the county at Greenwood, was constructed in 1856-57 and was a two-story wood frame structure (prior to this court was held in private residences). The county seat was moved to Fort Smith the following year, and returned to Greenwood two years later by majority vote of the county residents. In 1861, a compromise was reached by which the county would be divided into two judicial districts, with dual county seats located at both Greenwood and Fort Smith. This situation was reversed again in 1864, with Fort Smith again serving as the sole county seat, and restored again one year later. This exact sequence of events occurred again in 1868 and 1871, respectively, and was finally put to rest by the Constitutional Convention of 1874 which inserted into the new constitution a provision stipulating the division of the county into two judicial districts, with separate county courts, separate revenue, and separate fiscal responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the individual courts within each district.

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The county courts for the northern judicial district of Sebastian County were held in a series of mercantile buildings in downtown Ft. Smith until the late 1880's, when the "new" courthouse was constructed. It was a brick structure with a stone foundation and featured a tower that rose 148 feet. Like the current structure, this building was designed to shelter the activities of both the county and city governments, with the city occupying the entire first floor and the county occupying those above. Presumably this building grew decrepit, or the city and county activities outgrew the space allotted within this building, as by 1937 the earlier courthouse/city hall was demolished and the current building was constructed on the same site.

Designed by the architects E. Chester Nelson, Bassham and Wheeler, and erected by the Manhattan Construction Company, the new courthouse/city hall was a Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works Project (No. Arkansas 1057R) and was therefore one of the many public works projects constructed by President Roosevelt's Federal Emergency Relief Administration during the Great Depression. The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 and the subsequent advent of such federal public works programs as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) brought new courthouses -- and many other public facilities -- to the state in the following decade. The WPA -- an organization that hired unemployed adult men and women to work on a variety of public projects throughout the nation -- was established by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his administration as part of the federal response to the dire economic circumstances brought upon the American people by the Great Depression. The WPA was but one of many such public works organizations instituted by the Roosevelt Administration and managed under the aegis of the umbrella agency in charge of all such public works efforts, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA); others included the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the short-lived Public Works and Civilian Works Administrations (PWA and CWA), and such regional projects as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Rural Colonization Projects in Arkansas established at such places as Dyess, Clover Bend and Plum Bayou. Among its various other projects, the WPA constructed or repaired a number of county courthouses throughout the state, and the Sebastian County Courthouse/Ft. Smith City Hall was erected as part of this statewide effort.

Like many of these FERA-constructed county courthouses around the state, the Sebastian County Courthouse/Ft. Smith City Hall was designed in a variant of the then-popular Art Deco style that has become known as W.P.A. Moderne. Noted for their stripped-down simplicity while adhering to the typical Art Deco qualities of symmetry, balance and an abstract stylizing of Classical detail and ornament, these courthouse projects provided many a county with a new, modern courthouse while also employing large numbers of local unemployed men in its construction. This building, however, stands as one of the most elaborate and ornamented of this particular style. Its handsome metal roof cresting, concrete and stone cornice and entrance carving, and

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relatively expensive materials both inside and out elevate this building above most of its more pedestrian contemporaries around the state. The local significance of its rich original design is only enhanced by its remarkable state of preservation and the obvious care with which both the city and the county maintain the structure. Clearly, it remains the finest example of this particular sub-type of the Art Deco in the city of Ft. Smith and is thus eligible under Criterion C with statewide significance.

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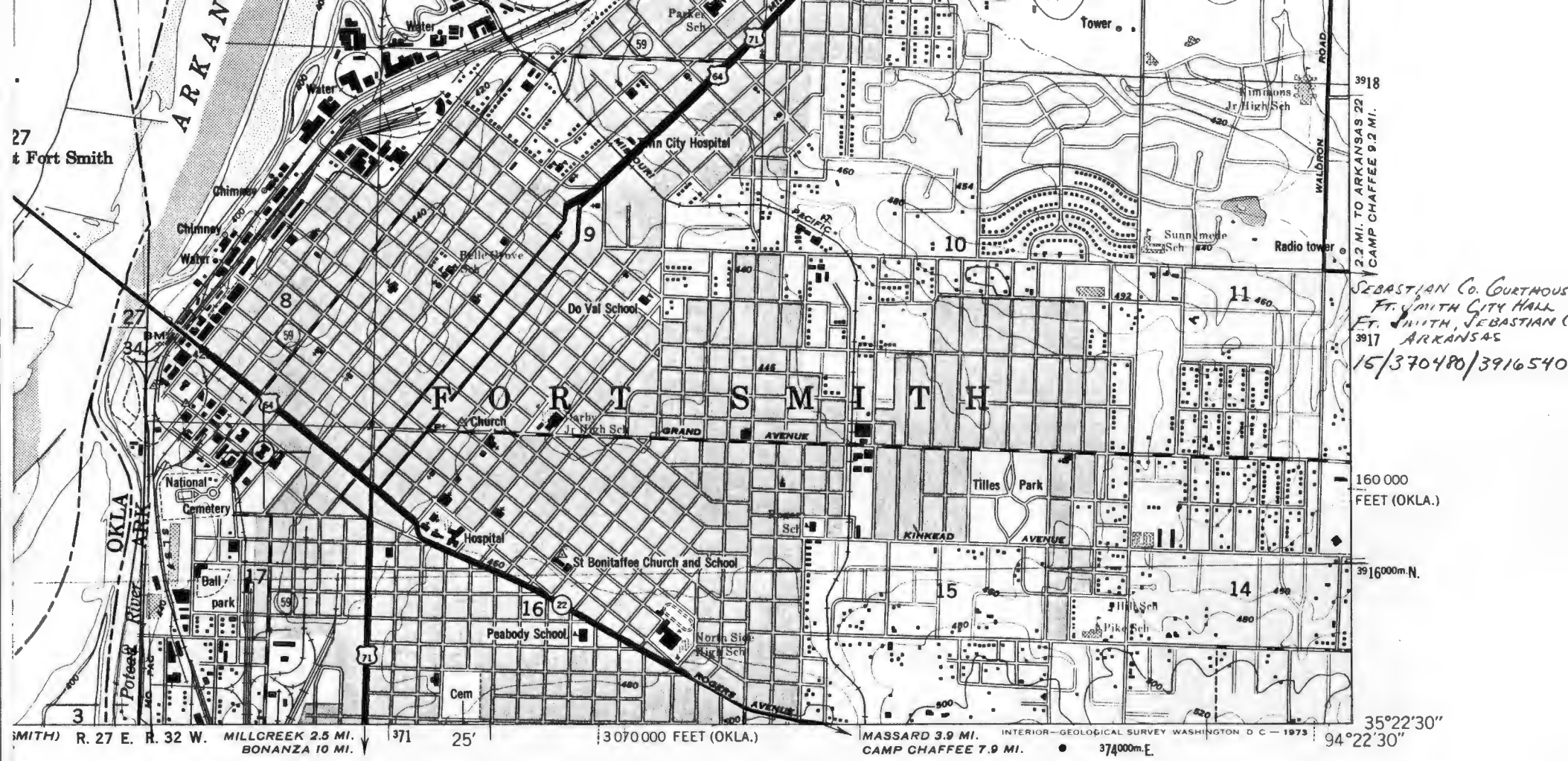
Bibliography

Gill, John and Marjem. *On the Courthouse Square in Arkansas*. Copyright 1980.

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

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

Workers of the Writer's Program. *The WPA Guide to 1930's Arkansas*, with a new introduction by Elliot West. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1987 (original copyright 1941).

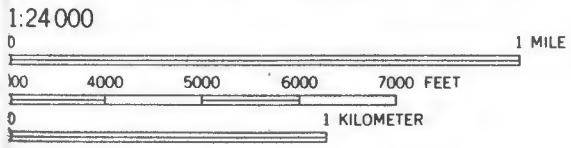


SEBASTIAN CO. COURTHOUSE
 FT. SMITH CITY HALL
 FT. SMITH, SEBASTIAN CO.
 3917 ARKANSAS
 15/370480/3916540

160 000
 FEET (OKLA.)

3916000m N.

35°22'30"
 94°22'30"

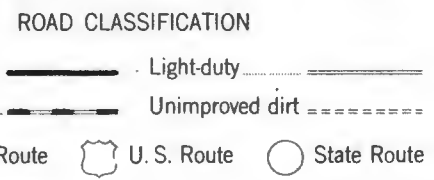


VERTICAL INTERVAL 20 FEET
 HALF-INTERVAL CONTOURS
 MEAN SEA LEVEL



NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
 COLORADO 80225 OR WASHINGTON, D. C. 20242,
 DENVER, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72201,
 TULSA, OKLAHOMA 73069
 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Revisions shown in purple compiled by the Geological Survey from
 aerial photographs taken 1971. This information not field checked
 Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

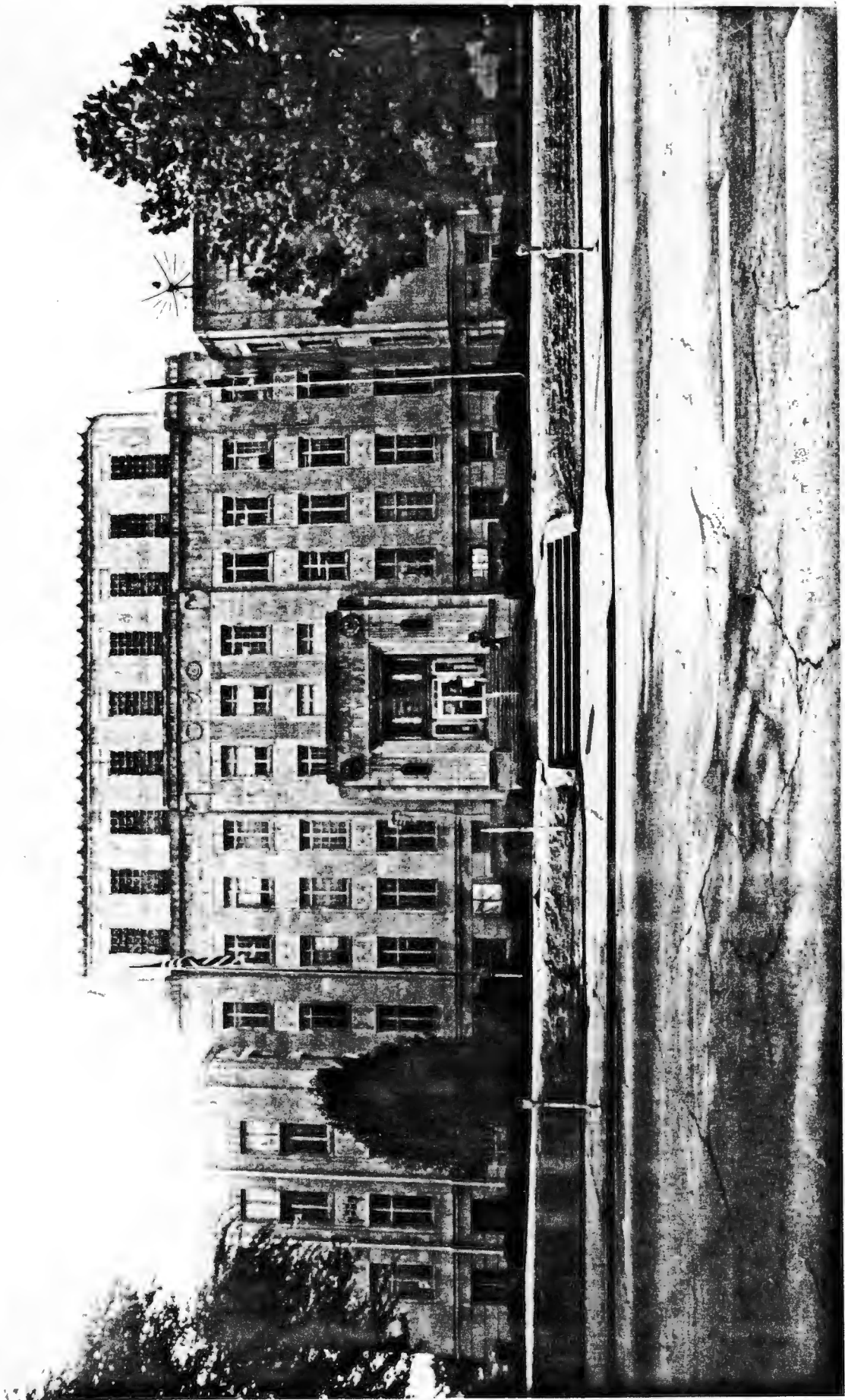


FORT SMITH, ARK.—OKLA.
 NW/4 VAN BUREN 15' QUADRANGLE
 N3522.5—W9422.5/7.5

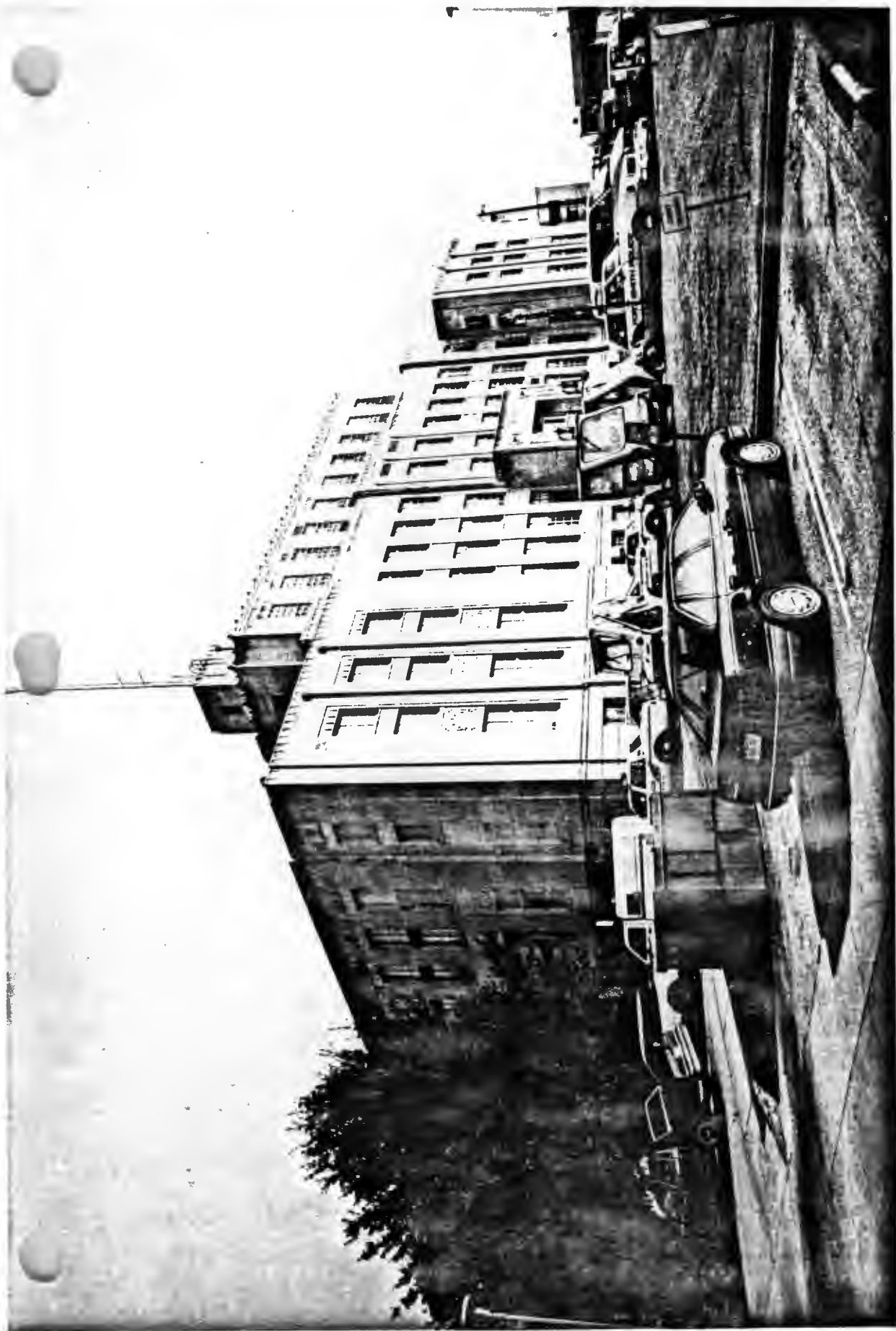
1947
 PHOTOREVISED 1971
 AMS 7154 IV NW—SERIES V884

(BARLING)
 7154 IV SE

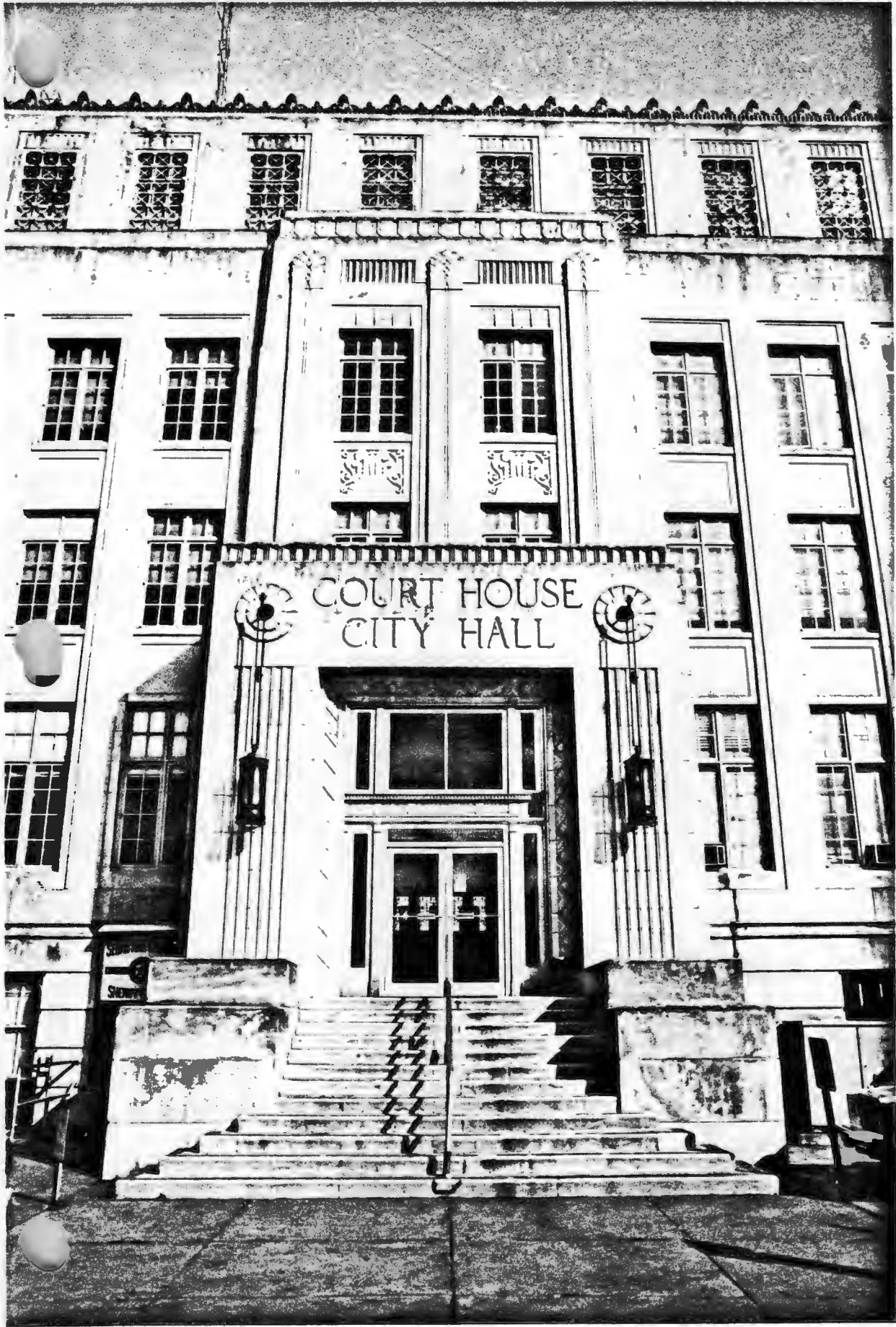




1. 1000 V. 1000/1000
F. V. 1000 - 1000
RECORDED BY T. THOMPSON
AUGUST 1992
NEGATIVE ON FILE
V. 1000 FROM WEST



RECEIVED IN S. C. 4/17/92
T. WILSON, J. B. STINE & ASSOCIATES
MEMPHIS, TENN.
AUGUST, 1992
NEGATIVE ON FILE AT JAPP
V. E. FROM YOUTH



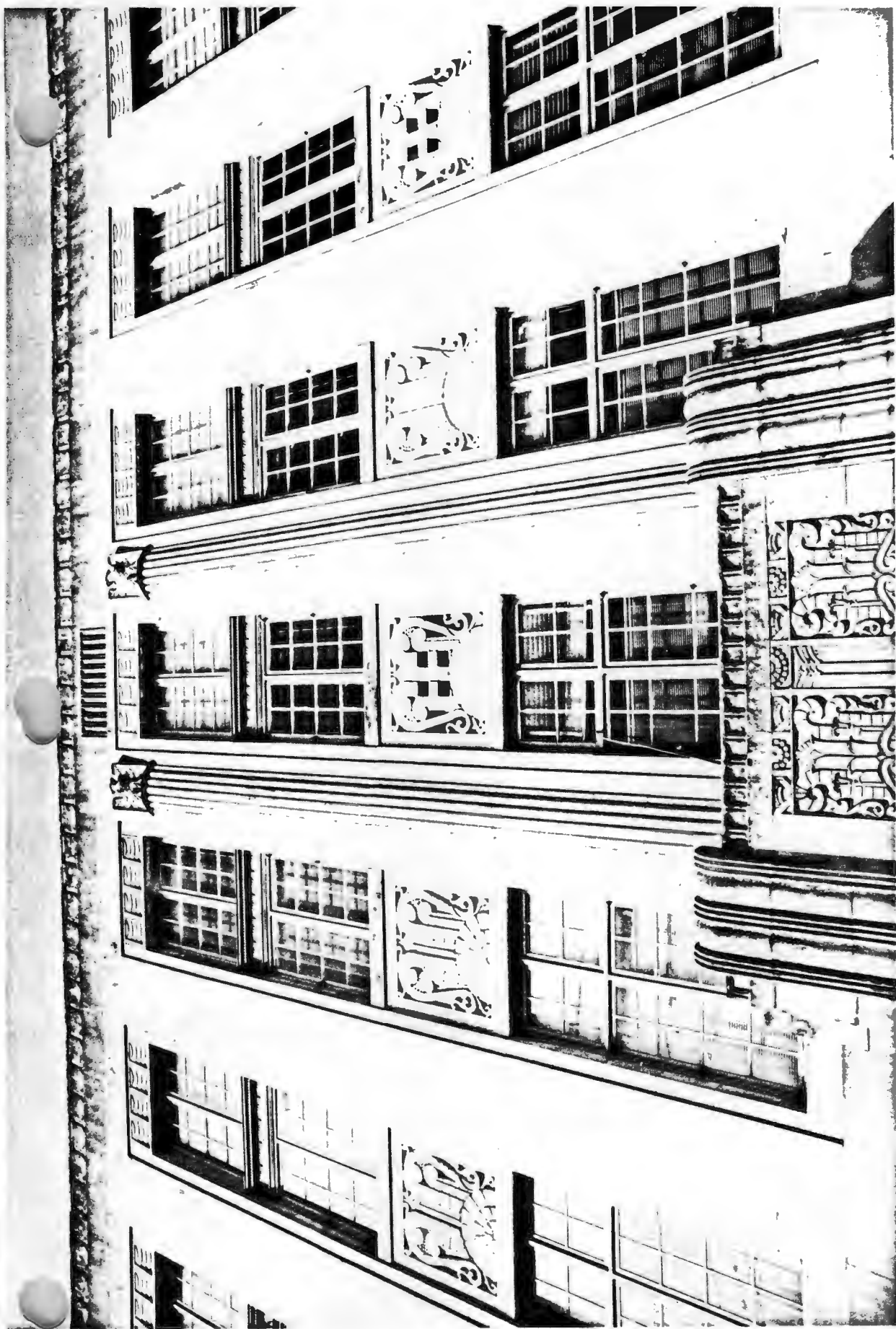
W. L. WILSON, VISITATION & REVISION
MOTOR PIEDER T. P. WILSON
AUGUST, 1992
NEGATIVE ON FILE AT APPP
ENTRANCE DETAIL



VERSION 3 OK/F- WINTH CAMP LARK
FT WINTH, VERMONT, APRIL 1985
PHOTOGRAPHS BY T. FISHER
AUGUST, 1992
NEGATIVE DUPLICATE
EXTERIOR & INTERIOR VIEWS



WESTMAN R. CH/FT WITH COPY
FT. WORTH, WESTMAN R. AUGUST 1992
PHOTOGRAPHED BY T. FERRISON
AUGUST, 1992
NEGATIVE DV T. F. - K. APP
VIEW FROM SOUTHEAST



MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR
FROM: [illegible]
SUBJECT: [illegible]
AUGUST, 1992
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]



SECTION 8. (X) - (Y) - (Z) - (A) - (B) - (C)

WEST POOL

WEST POOL

DETAILS OF REFINANCE AGREEMENT