



# **United States Post Office & Courthouse**

## City of Pittsburgh Historic Landmark Nomination

Prepared by Preservation Pittsburgh



412.256.8755  
1501 Reedsdale St., Suite 5003  
Pittsburgh, PA 15233  
[www.preservationpgh.org](http://www.preservationpgh.org)

July, 2019.



# INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY HISTORIC NOMINATION FORM

**HRC Staff Use Only**

Date Received: .....

Parcel No.: .....

Ward: .....

Zoning Classification: .....

Bldg. Inspector: .....

Council District: .....

**Fee Schedule**

Please make check payable to *Treasurer, City of Pittsburgh*

Individual Landmark Nomination:	\$100.00
District Nomination:	\$250.00

**1. HISTORIC NAME OF PROPERTY:**

United States Post Office & Courthouse

**2. CURRENT NAME OF PROPERTY:**

Joseph F. Weis Jr. U.S. Courthouse

**3. LOCATION**

- a. Street: 700 Grant St.
- b. City, State, Zip Code: Pittsburgh, Pa. 15209
- c. Neighborhood: Downtown

**4. OWNERSHIP**

- d. Owner(s): United States of America (Donna Andrews, Regional Historic Preservation Officer, GSA)
- e. Street: 100 S. Independence Mall West, Suite 415
- f. City, State, Zip Code: Philadelphia, Pa. 19106 Phone: (215) 446-4570

**5. CLASSIFICATION AND USE – Check all that apply**

<u>Type</u>	<u>Ownership</u>	<u>Current Use:</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Private – home	<u>Courthouse</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> District	<input type="checkbox"/> Private – other	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Site	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public – government	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public - other	_____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Place of religious worship	_____

**6. NOMINATED BY:**

- a. Name: Matthew W.C. Falcone for Preservation Pittsburgh
- b. Street: 1501 Reedsdale St. #5003
- c. City, State, Zip: Pittsburgh, Pa. 15233
- d. Phone: (412) 256-8755 Email: mfalcone@preservationpgh.org

**7. DESCRIPTION**

Provide a narrative description of the structure, district, site, or object. If it has been altered over time, indicate the date(s) and nature of the alteration(s). (Attach additional pages as needed)

*If Known:*

- a. Year Built: 1934
- b. Architectural Style: Neoclassical/Stripped Classical
- c. Architect/Builder: Trowbridge & Livingston/Aronberg-Fried Co., Booth & Flinn Co.

Narrative: See attached.

**8. HISTORY**

Provide a history of the structure, district, site, or object. Include a bibliography of sources consulted. (Attach additional pages as needed.) Include copies of relevant source materials with the nomination form (see Number 11).

Narrative: See attached.

**9. SIGNIFICANCE**

The *Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 11, Historic Preservation, Chapter 1: Historic Structures, Districts, Sites and Objects* lists ten criteria, at least one of which must be met for Historic Designation. Describe how the structure, district, site, or object meets one or more of these criteria and complete a narrative discussing in detail each area of significance. (Attach additional pages as needed)

The structure, building, site, district, object is significant because of (check all that apply):

- 1.  Its location as a site of a significant historic or prehistoric event or activity;
- 2.  Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspects of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
- 3.  Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship;
- 4.  Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
- 5.  Its exemplification of important planning and urban design techniques distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design or detail;

6.  Its location as a site of an important archaeological resource;
7.  Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
8.  Its exemplification of a pattern of neighborhood development or settlement significant to the cultural history or traditions of the City, whose components may lack individual distinction;
9.  Its representation of a cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, sites, structures, or objects that may or may not be contiguous; or
10.  Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.

Narrative: See attached.

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#### 10. INTEGRITY

In addition, the ordinance specifies that “Any area, property, site, structure or object that meets any one or more of the criteria listed above shall also have sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration”. (Attach additional pages as needed)

Narrative: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 11. NOTIFICATION/CONSENT OF PROPERTY OWNER(S)

##### *1.3(a)(2) Community information process.*

*Preceding submission of a nomination form for a District, the Historic Review Commission shall conduct at least one (1) public information meeting within or near the boundaries of the proposed district, which shall include at least one (1) member of the Department of City Planning and one (1) Commission member, to discuss the possible effects of designation. Notice shall be given to the owners of property in the proposed district in accordance with Section 1.3(b) below. The final public information meeting shall be held no more than six months before the nomination form is submitted.*

##### *1.3(a)(1)(a) Subsection F.*

*In the case of a nomination as a Historic District, by community-based organizations or by any individual, but in either event the nomination shall be accompanied by a petition signed by the owners of record of twenty-five (25) percent of the properties within the boundaries of the proposed District.*

- Please attach documentation of your efforts to gain property owner’s consent.-

\*\* The nomination of any religious property shall be accompanied by a signed letter of consent from the property’s owner.



12. PHOTO LOGS: *Please Attach*

13. BIBLIOGRAPHY: *Please Attach*

14. NOMINATION FORM PREPARED BY:

a. Name: Ben McNealy for Preservation Pittsburgh

b. Street: 1501 Reedsdale St. #5003

c. City, State, Zip: Pittsburgh, Pa. 15233

d. Phone: (412) 256-8755 Email: ben.mcnealy@gmail.com

e. Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



# HISTORIC NOMINATION – INSTRUCTIONS

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR FILLING OUT THE NOMINATION FORM

1. Indicate the original name of the property if it is currently known by a different name; e.g. Union Station.
2. Indicate the current name of the property
3. Indicate the street address for the property. For districts, attach a separate sheet listing the street address of each property included in the nomination and a clear street map of the area showing the boundaries of the proposed district.
4. Indicate the owner of the property and his or her mailing address. For districts, attach a separate sheet listing the owner of each property and his or her mailing address.
5. Check the classification as indicated.
  - a. **“Historic Structure”** means anything constructed or erected, the use of which requires directly or indirectly, a permanent location on the land, including walks, fences, signs, steps and sidewalks at which events that made a significant contribution to national, state or local history occurred or which involved a close association with the lives of people of nations, state or local significance; or an outstanding example of a period, style, architectural movement, or method of construction; or one of the last surviving works of a pioneer architect, builder or designer; or one of the last survivors of a particular style or period of construction.
  - b. **“Historic District”** means a defined territorial division of land which shall include more than one (1) contiguous or related parcels of property, specifically identified by separate resolution, at which events occurred that made a significant contribution to national, state, or local history, or which contains more than one historic structure or historic landmarks, or which contains groups, rows or sets of structures or landmarks, or which contains an aggregate example of a period, style, architectural movements or method of construction, providing distinguishing characteristics of the architectural type or architectural period it represents.
  - c. **“Historic Site”** means the location of a significant event, a prehistoric or historic occupation or activity, or a building or structure whether standing, ruined or vanished, where the location itself maintains historical or archaeological value regardless of the value of any existing structures.
  - d. **“Historic Object”** means a material thing of historic significance for functional, aesthetic cultural or scientific reasons that may be, by nature or design, moveable yet related to a specific setting or environment.
6. Indicate the person(s) responsible for the nomination. Please note: According to the Historic Preservation Ordinance:

*“Nomination of an area, property, site, or object for consideration and designation as a Historic Structure, Historic District, Historic Site, or Historic Object may be submitted to the Historic Review Commission by any of the following:*

- a. The Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh
  - b. A Member of the Historic Review Commission
  - c. A Member of the City Planning Commission
  - d. A Member of the Pittsburgh City Council
  - e. The Owner of Record or any person residing in the City of Pittsburgh for at least one year (for the nomination of a Historic Structure, Site or Object)
  - f. A signed petition of 25% of the owners of record (for the nomination of a Historic District)
7. Write a physical description of the nominated property or district. Include the following information as applicable:
- architectural style(s)
  - arrangement of architectural elements
  - building materials
  - method(s) of construction
  - visual character
  - street pattern
  - density
  - type and arrangement of buildings
  - topography
  - history of the development of the area
8. Provide a narrative history of the structure, district, site, or object. Include the following information when available:
- History of the development of the area;
  - Circumstances which brought the structure, district, site, or object into being;
  - Biographical information on architects, builders, developers, artisans, planners, or others who created or contributed to the structure, district, site, or object;
  - Contextual background on building type(s) and/or style(s);
  - Importance of the structure, district, site, or object in the larger community over the course of its existence.
  - Include a bibliography of all sources consulted at the end. Where historical information is uncertain or disputed, reference sources in the text.
9. Listed below are the categories and criteria for historic designation as set forth in the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance. Describe in detail how the structure, district, site, or object meets one or more of the criteria. According to that legislation in Section 1.4 of the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance, *Criteria for Designation*, a building must meet at least one of the following criteria in order to be designated:
1. Its location as a site of a significant historic or prehistoric event or activity;
  2. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspects of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
  3. Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship;
  4. Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;

5. Its exemplification of important planning and urban design techniques distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design or detail;
  6. Its location as a site of an important archaeological resource;
  7. Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
  8. Its exemplification of a pattern of neighborhood development or settlement significant to the cultural history or traditions of the City, whose components may lack individual distinction;
  9. Its representation of a cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, sites, structures, or objects that may or may not be contiguous; or
  10. Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.
- 10.** In addition, the ordinance specifies that “Any area, property, site, structure or object that meets any one or more of the criteria listed above shall also have sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration.”
- 11.** The nomination must be accompanied by evidence that the nominator has made a good-faith effort to communicate his or her interest in the historic designation of this landmark or district to the owner(s) of these properties. Describe how this was done, and attach evidence that the owner(s) of the nominated landmark or of the properties within the nominated district have been informed of the nomination. This may include a copy of a notification letter with a mailing list, a letter confirming phone calls, or a petition signed by affected property owners.
- 12.** Clear photographs of the nominated buildings or districts should accompany the nomination form. The applicant shall include photographs of all elevations of an individual building and its setting, or the front elevation of each building in a district. In the case of closely spaced buildings or rowhouses, several buildings may be included in one photograph. Each photograph must be labeled with the street address of the building(s) and the month and year the photograph was taken.
- 13.** Copies of major supporting documents should accompany the nomination form. Such documents may include, but are not limited to:
- historic photographs;
  - historic and contemporary maps;
  - historic or contemporary texts describing the subject property or district;
  - historic or contemporary texts describing people, places, or events that comprise the historic context of the subject property or district.
  - Oversized materials (such as architectural drawings) and materials too fragile to copy may be accepted.

**PLEASE NOTE:** It is the responsibility of the nominator to provide the Historic Review Commission and its Staff with information sufficient to fairly evaluate the nomination. **Incomplete nomination forms will not be accepted. Fee must be included. Nominations must be submitted in both electronic and hard-copy format.**

**CHECKLIST: Weis Courthouse**

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- #1-6 Nomination Form:** Address, Ownership, Classification, Nominator Info.
  - #7: Description
  - #8: History
  - #9: Significance
- #10 Integrity**
- #11 Consent of Property Owners**
- #12 Photographs of Property:** numbered and labeled
- #13 List of Supporting Documents**
  
- Fee**
- Hard-Copy nomination**
- Electronic nomination (Word Format for text).**

# **United States Post Office & Courthouse**

## **Historic Nomination Form**

### **Addendum**

## Individual Property Historic Nomination

Attachment to Form: United States Post Office and Courthouse, 700 Grant St., Pittsburgh, PA 15219

### Individual Property Historic Nomination Form

Historic Name: United States Post Office and Courthouse  
Current Name: Joseph F. Weis, Jr. United States Courthouse  
Location: 700 Grant Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
Neighborhood: Central Business District  
Ownership: General Services Administration  
Type: Structure  
Historic use: GOVERNMENT/post office  
GOVERNMENT/courthouse  
GOVERNMENT/government office  
Current Use: GOVERNMENT/courthouse  
GOVERNMENT/government office

## 7. Description

Year Built: 1934  
Architectural Style: Neoclassical/Stripped Classical  
Architect: Trowbridge & Livingston  
Builder: Aronberg-Fried Co., Booth & Flinn Co. (foundation)

### Narrative

#### *Site and overall appearance*

The U.S. Courthouse (Photo. 1) is a monumental, ten-story building occupying a full city block on the east side of Grant Street between Seventh Avenue and what is now the Martin Luther King Jr. East Busway. To the rear, the property is bounded by the former Pennsylvania Railroad tracks, which run in an open cut below grade level en route to the Panhandle Tunnel. The building footprint is almost rectangular, though a portion of the east side angles outward to follow the curve of the railroad tracks. The building is approximately 525 by 145 feet, extending to 190 feet at the north end. It is of steel frame construction with stone cladding.

Spatially, the building is organized into two main volumes: a four-story base, which occupies the full site, and a six-story upper section which is set back about 85 feet on the north and south sides. The fifth floor extends over the lower volume but is set back about 8 feet behind the cornice line, giving it a reduced visual presence. Similarly, the tenth floor is set back above the cornice line of the upper section. The building has four interior light courts starting at the fourth floor, two in the central section which serve floors 4–10, and two in the base which serve only the fourth and fifth floors. The two light courts in the upper section were originally open to the east side starting at the fifth floor, giving the upper floors an E plan conforming to the large courtrooms inside. In 2001–06, the light courts were filled in with a glass-walled addition containing additional courtroom space. The entire building rests on a raised basement level whose height above grade varies from a full story at the north end of the building to only a few feet at the southeast corner on Seventh Avenue.

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### *Grant Street facade*

The main facade of the building faces Grant Street. It is symmetrically organized around two large, subtly projecting entrance pavilions (Photos. 2 & 3) which extend the full height of the building and are capped with pyramidal hipped roofs. Projecting cornices above the fourth and ninth floors divide the facade into two sections with contrasting treatments. The lower volume is dominated by 13 two-story arched windows with ornamental bronze grilles, which are divided into a 2–9–2 grouping by the two entrance bays. Each of the three sets of arched windows is flanked by one bay on either side consisting of single-story rectangular windows. Smaller rectangular windows continue on the third and fourth floors and are aligned with the arched windows on a 2:1 basis.

The upper volume is vertically oriented with eleven bays separated by pilasters. Each bay has a triple-height window spanning the sixth through eighth floors, enhancing the sense of verticality, with verd antique spandrel panels separating the floors. Single-story windows are used on the fifth and ninth floors. The bays of the upper volume, like those on the third and fourth floors, are aligned with the arched windows on the lower floors. The pilasters are minimally adorned with simple plinths and capitals and each has a decorative roundel placed above. The entrance bay sections each have a single large triple-height window with a bronze grille spanning the sixth through eighth floors and a small, pedimented window on the fifth floor, flanked by two pilasters on each side.

The raised basement level is faced with Maine granite up to the bottom of the arched windows and topped with a semicircular molding. The granite section is punctuated by 13 small rectangular windows, which are aligned with the arched windows above, and two small subsidiary entrances. The remainder of the building is clad in Indiana limestone, with smooth-faced rustication on the first three floors and plain surfaces elsewhere. The two main entrances on Grant Street are set in large arched openings which are of a similar height to the arched windows and have the same type of bronze grillwork. The entrance doors are set in between fluted pilasters in an ornamental surround capped by a bronze eagle and shield motif. Larger eagles also appear at the top of each entrance archway. A frieze panel just below the cornice carries the inscription "Post Office and Courts of the United States of America" along with ornamental sculpted elements drawing on classical symbolism: the sword and scales of justice, the caduceus, representing service, and the fasces, the symbol of judicial authority.

### *Other facades*

The north, south, and east facades have the same arrangement of stone cladding as the front and generally continue similar fenestration patterns. The south elevation (Photo. 4), facing Seventh Avenue, is symmetrical and has an entrance archway identical to those facing Grant Street (Photo. 5), though without the frieze, flanked by one arched window on either side. This entrance opens onto the space which formerly housed a branch post office until 2014. The grade level along Seventh Avenue slopes upward so that only a few feet of the basement level are exposed at the rear.

The north facade (Photo. 6) continues the fenestration pattern of the main facade with seven of the arched windows. The raised basement is largely windowless but does contain, toward the rear, the portal through which trains originally entered the building. Since the removal of the train tracks in the 1970s it has been closed off into individual parking entrances. Just beyond the north wall of the building is a ramp leading to the sub-basement parking level.



## Individual Property Historic Nomination

Attachment to Form: United States Post Office and Courthouse, 700 Grant St., Pittsburgh, PA 15219

The rear elevation faces the railroad tracks and, further up the hill, Bigelow Boulevard. It has two arched windows at the south end, with paired rectangular windows used elsewhere. The upper part of the facade is split into three sections because of the building's E shape but is otherwise similar to the front with triple-height windows on the sixth through eighth floors separated by pilasters. In between the three wings of the E are glass-walled additions built into the light courts during the 2001–06 alterations. At ground level, a ramp leads from Seventh Avenue up to a parking and loading dock area which is positioned above the railroad tracks and opens onto the second floor. The east façade (Photos. 7-9), which faces the M.L.K. Jr. Busway, largely reflects the composition of the west façade although a series of seven arched-windowed openings take the place of the large arched entranceway.

### *Interior*

The interior of the building contains ten above-grade floors, three below-grade floors, and a penthouse. The space was historically divided into two main uses: the post office, occupying floors 1–3 as well as the track-level basement, and the courthouse and federal office facilities on floors 4–10. In the lower section of the building, the most notable interior spaces are the north and south entrance lobbies, which open onto Grant Street at the basement level, and the first-floor hallway which was originally the post office waiting area. The south lobby has a maximum height of almost three full stories, with a high groin-vaulted ceiling over the entrance doorway and lower coffered ceilings elsewhere. The walls are faced with pink Alabama marble with decorative pilasters and dentil courses, and several original light fixtures are present. At the rear of the lobby, a first-floor hallway with an ornate groin-vaulted terra-cotta ceiling with gold leaf trim is visible overhead. Once covered by an acoustical tile drop ceiling, the original ceiling was restored during the 2001–06 renovations and part of the hallway floor was cut away to give a better view of the ceiling from the lobby.

In the upper part of the building, the most notable interior spaces are the five original ceremonial courtrooms—Courtrooms 4 and 6 on the sixth floor, and Courtrooms 1, 2, and 3 on the eighth floor. Each courtroom spans two stories, with upper galleries on the sides, and contains original Circassian walnut paneling, built-in wooden furnishings, and decorative plaster ceilings. Fine architectural details are also present in the judges' chambers and jury rooms, which contain paneled walls, decorative moldings and ceilings, fireplaces, and other features. Two notable 1930s murals are also present in the courtrooms: *Steel Industry* by Howard Cook in Courtroom 1, and *Pittsburgh Panorama* by Stuyvesant Van Veen in Courtroom 3. Several other, smaller courtrooms were added between the 1950s and 1970s and typically contain more modern finishes with wood veneer paneling and acoustical tile ceilings.

Other notable interior spaces in the building include original corridors and stair and elevator lobbies, which are typically finished with marble wainscoting, bronze handrails, terrazzo floors, and plaster walls and ceilings. Original doors, window frames, sashes, and bronze grilles remain throughout the building. Many of the interior office spaces were refinished with modern materials during the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, often obscuring or removing original finishes.

## Individual Property Historic Nomination

Attachment to Form: United States Post Office and Courthouse, 700 Grant St., Pittsburgh, PA 15219

### 8. History

In 1926, President Coolidge signed into law the Public Buildings Act, which authorized funding for new federal buildings throughout the country. The following year, Pittsburgh was identified as one of 120 cities in which new government buildings should be constructed.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the city was in need of a new post office. The existing facility, a five-story granite building at Fourth Avenue and Smithfield Street, had taken a decade to build and was too small almost as soon as it opened in 1891.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the city's population had more than doubled. After the post office began accepting parcels in 1913, the old building was unable to deal with the increase in mail volume and a second facility, the Ferry Street Terminal, had to be established to handle the parcel post and other lower priority mail. This situation was both inefficient and expensive, as the government had to pay \$76,000 annually to lease the eight-story terminal building.<sup>3</sup>

A report by the Joint Commission on Postal Service in 1922 described the situation:

The main office has been found to be much overcrowded, but a measure of temporary relief has been afforded by the lease of a building known as the Ferry Street Station. The relief afforded, however, is not more than temporary, and there is necessity for the erection here of another post-office building to provide for the growth not only of the post office but other Federal bureaus and departments, numerous of which are now paying money rental owing to lack of space in the Government buildings.

Fortunately there is an appropriation available for the acquisition of a site, and the site for which provision has been made meets every requirement of the Postal Service. It is strategically located both as to the Pennsylvania Railroad (in fact, it is part of the station property of that company) and to the business center of the city. The Pennsylvania Railroad transports 75 per cent of all the mail arriving and departing at Pittsburgh, and direct track connections are practicable with the proposed site, with ample room for the loading and reloading of cars in the basement of the proposed building on track level.<sup>4</sup>

Local leaders were well aware of the issues with the existing facilities. In fact, serious efforts to build a new post office had begun as early as 1906.<sup>5</sup> In 1919, after various false starts, the U.S. government bought part of the site described in the Sterling report for \$950,000.<sup>6</sup> At the time, the property was occupied by the old freight warehouse of the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad, more commonly known as the Panhandle Route. Part of the building was demolished in 1925 when Grant Street was realigned to remove a discontinuity in the roadway at Seventh Avenue (Figure 2). Afterwards, the remaining land was not large enough for the post office and an adjoining parcel had to be obtained.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sack, Leo R., and Fleming, Roscoe B., "Bill Passed to Congress: Mellon Approves Four-Story Pittsburgh Federal Building Over Protests," *Pittsburgh Press*, January 18, 1927, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Love, Gilbert, "The House That Stamps Built: Old Postoffice Result Of 20 Years Of Squabbling, Bickering," *Pittsburgh Press*, October 2, 1934, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>"U. S. Pays Rent, Tax Owed City," *Pittsburgh Press*, December 11, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Sterling, *Report of the Joint Commission on Postal Service Submitting Recommendations Relative to Postal Facilities at Brooklyn, N. Y., Philadelphia, Pa., Pittsburgh, Pa., Buffalo, N. Y., Detroit, Mich.*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1922.

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<sup>5</sup> "Boulevard Property Favored: Site Nearest Union Station Is First Choice of Committee for Postoffice," *Pittsburgh Post*, November 24, 1906, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ginter, Robert M., "Treasury Buys Postoffice Site for Pittsburgh," *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, August 1, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> "\$2,050,000 Alloted for Buying Postoffice Site Here: List Sum for Purchase of Added Strip from P. R. R.," *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, June 6, 1926, p. 1.

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The additional property, also owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad, was purchased in 1926 for \$1.2 million, bringing the total land cost to just over \$2 million.<sup>8</sup>

In 1927, it was announced that a new \$3 million post office had been approved for Pittsburgh. The initial plan was for a five-story structure which would house only postal facilities, with the federal courts and other departments remaining in the old building. Reportedly, concern over noise from the train station was one of the main factors in this decision. The modest scale of the proposal came as a disappointment to members of the Chamber of Commerce, who were hoping for “a different sort of structure—one symbolic of Pittsburgh’s progress and industrial importance.” Victorian buildings like the old post office were decidedly out of fashion by the 1920s and did not project the modern image the city’s business leaders wanted. As a compromise, federal officials planned to give the building a reinforced foundation which would allow for additional stories to be added in the future.<sup>9</sup>

Fortunately for the concerned businessmen, Representative Stephen G. Porter shared their sentiments and was able to lobby the Treasury Department for a more imposing edifice. By December 1927, it was being reported that new building would house all of the city’s federal offices in one place, as the Chamber of Commerce hoped: “the internal revenue office, the immigration service, department of justice, prohibition enforcement organization, United States marshal and the Federal courts” in addition to the post office. In order to accommodate the change of plans, the building would be expanded by several stories, and soundproofing would be added in order to protect the courtrooms from outside noise.<sup>10</sup> The commission for the building’s design was awarded to the New York architectural firm of Trowbridge & Livingston, best known for its stately Neoclassical designs for prominent financial institutions like J.P. Morgan & Company. This decision was probably influenced by Treasury Secretary Andrew W. Mellon, a Pittsburgh native who had worked with the firm previously on the Mellon National Bank Building (1924). The architects began preparing preliminary sketches in 1928, and an appropriation of \$6.4 million was authorized for construction of the building.<sup>11</sup>

Even though funding and a site had been secured, it took several years for the project to get under way, much to the agitation of city business leaders. With the onset of the Great Depression, Mellon and President Hoover sought to speed up government building programs in order to boost employment.<sup>12</sup> The architects’ plans still had not been finalized, so the Treasury Department decided to take separate bids on the foundation in order to get the project started faster.<sup>13</sup> Even still, it was not until March 16, 1931, that construction finally began.<sup>14</sup> The Booth & Flinn Company of Pittsburgh won the contract to

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<sup>8</sup> “Option on Site Of Postoffice Is Exercised,” *Pittsburgh Press*, July 25, 1926, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Huntley, Theodore A., “City Refused Postal Plant It Wants But Gets Building,” *Pittsburgh Post*, January 18, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Huntley, Theodore A., “New Postoffice Here to Be Begun in 1929,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 30, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> “U. S. Plans High Building Here,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 19, 1928, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> “Construction of Postoffice Here Included,” *Pittsburgh Press*, March 23, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> “See No Delay on Postoffice: Asking Bids Will Not Be Held Up, Says Treasury,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 7, 1931, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> “Begin Federal Building Today: Work on Foundation Will Start This Morning,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 16, 1931, p. 15.

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build the foundation, a formidable task (requiring excavations up to 90 feet deep) which was not made any easier by a strike lasting from April to June. Nevertheless, the project was ready to move on to the next phase by the end of the year.<sup>15</sup>

The contract for constructing the building itself was awarded to the Aronberg-Fried Company, of New York. Work began with erection of the steel frame, followed by pouring the concrete floors and then putting the stone into place for the exterior walls.<sup>16</sup> The beginning of the stone work was marked by a ceremony to lay the granite cornerstone on July 8, 1932. Former U.S. Representative James Francis Burke was allowed to do the honors, in recognition of the fact that he had been the first to request funding for a new post office back in 1907.<sup>17</sup> Although construction of the new building proceeded smoothly at first, it was soon delayed by a succession of strikes, walkouts, and other labor disputes that halted the work for more than six months in total. Nevertheless, the building continued to rise, and its exterior was substantially finished by the spring of 1933 as seen in a photo published in the *Post-Gazette* (Figure 12).<sup>18</sup> Once the exterior walls and roof were completed, it took another year to finish the inside of the building.

The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was officially dedicated at 10:30 a.m. on October 13, 1934, with several thousand in attendance despite the chilly, windy weather. Postmaster General James Farley, a Roosevelt appointee and the president's former campaign manager, traveled to Pittsburgh to deliver the keynote address, arriving fashionably late to an approximation of a ticker tape parade— "a shower of torn newspapers and telephone directories [coming] down from adjoining office buildings."<sup>19</sup> With the midterm elections (which would be the first referendum on Roosevelt's New Deal policies) just a few weeks away, the event could not escape becoming politicized. Republican Senator David A. Reed, no doubt hoping to bolster his own reelection bid, had issued a statement earlier in the week accusing Farley and the Democrats of unfairly trying to take credit for the project and not doing enough to help Pennsylvanians. Farley was unable to resist responding to this provocation in his dedicatory address, issuing a withering rebuke which the *Pittsburgh Press* reported had a "bombshell-like effect" on those in attendance.<sup>20</sup> (Reed was not reelected.) After Farley's speech, the Post Office was accepted on behalf of the city by Mayor William McNair. The public was then invited inside, where they were shown around by 150 uniformed postal service employees and viewed displays illustrating various activities of the federal government.<sup>21</sup>

The new building was the largest structure in downtown Pittsburgh, with around 600,000 square feet of floor space and room for 3,000 employees. The *Pittsburgh Press* reported that the building contained 15,000 tons of steel, 60,000 cubic yards of concrete—enough to build a sidewalk from Pittsburgh to Wheeling—and over 16,000 stone blocks, along with 1,126 doors and 1,200 windows.<sup>22</sup> The basement

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<sup>15</sup> "Contract Let on Postoffice Building Here," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 23, 1931, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> "Iron Work on New Federal Building Going Up Rapidly," *Pittsburgh Press*, June 13, 1932, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> "Corner Stone Is Set for New U. S. Building," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 9, 1932, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> "Completing Federal Building," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 23, 1933, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Love, Gilbert, "Farley Talks at Postoffice," *Pittsburgh Press*, October 13, 1934, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Love, Gilbert, "Farley Flays Reed in Talk at Dedication," *Pittsburgh Press*, October 14, 1934, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> "New Federal Building Open This Morning," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 13, 1934, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Love, Gilbert, "The House That Stamps Built: New Postoffice Is Largest Building In Pittsburgh's Triangle," *Pittsburgh Press*, October 3, 1934, p. 23.

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level was connected directly to the railroad, with four tracks allowing 28 rail cars to be loaded or unloaded simultaneously, and the rear loading dock had room for 47 mail trucks. An elaborate system of chutes and conveyors allowed mail to be moved quickly from floor to floor. In an effort to keep the mail secure, the building also had a network of tunnels allowing hidden postal inspectors to watch the employees below—even in the washrooms (Figure 14).<sup>23</sup>

The process of moving some 40 federal agencies into the building lasted more than a month. The postal service moved into its quarters in late November,<sup>24</sup> followed by the U.S. District Court a month later after the conclusion of its November term.<sup>25</sup> The last agency to move was the Internal Revenue Service, which waited until January in order to avoid transporting records that were set for disposal at the end of the second quarter. Other tenants covered a wide spectrum of government agencies, including the Public Health Service, Customs Service, Secret Service, Bureau of Narcotics, Veterans Administration, Division of Investigation (FBI), Immigration and Naturalization Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Weather Bureau, Bureau of Ordnance, Chemical Warfare Service, Interstate Commerce Commission, Civil Service Commission, and Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. The building also housed the headquarters of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Reserves as well as offices associated with the courts including the U.S. Attorney, U.S. Marshals, and federal probation officer.<sup>26</sup>

In 1935, three large 20-by-10-foot murals were commissioned for the courtrooms on the eighth floor. A contest was held to select the artwork, with the winning designs chosen by a local committee and then sent to the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture for final approval. About 40 entries were received.<sup>27</sup> For Courtroom 1, the committee selected *Steel Industry* by Howard Cook of Taos, New Mexico (Figure 18). The painting depicted several of the key steps in steelmaking, beginning with ore and coal mining in the lower section and moving on to the smelting and open hearth processes, ingot pouring, and rolling operations in the upper part. Cook based the workers in the painting on drawings he had made during his travels in the American South. He decided to add a layer of complexity to the project by executing it as a fresco, painting directly on the wall using techniques he had studied in Mexico. This restricted him to working on the mural while court was out of session and also meant that he needed to hire a plasterer, which he paid for out of pocket since the artists received a flat rate of \$3,283.33 with no expenses included. Cook's commitment to craft impressed the Section officials, and his work was selected as the best mural of 1937 by the Architectural League of New York.<sup>28</sup>

Local artist and Carnegie Tech professor Kindred McLeary's piece *Modern Justice* was chosen for Courtroom 2 (Figure 19). Now lost, the painting depicted "a dramatic, pale, large-scale figure of Justice, a sword held in her right hand as if ready to cut down the anti-social members of society, massed on the left-hand side of the panel, while on the side of the scales in her left hand are clustered the workers,

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<sup>23</sup> Love, Gilbert, "The House That Stamps Built: Inventions To Speed Handling Of City's 1,500,000 Letters A Day," *Pittsburgh Press*, October 4, 1934, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> "Postal Activities Moving To New Federal Building," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 23, 1934, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> "U. S. Moves Courts into New Building," *Pittsburgh Press*, December 26, 1934, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Love, Gilbert, "The House That Stamps Built," *Pittsburgh Press*, October 5, 1934, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> "Forty Murals Meet Judges," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 17, 1935, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Feder, Louise Howard, *New Deal Murals in the Pittsburgh Post Office and Courthouse*, Carlisle, Pa.: Dickinson College, 2010.

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producers, the genuinely social members of the community.”<sup>29</sup> The painting was reportedly removed from the courtroom in the early 1950s after falling off the wall in the middle of a trial. A search was conducted in 1978, but failed to locate either the mural or anyone who remembered what had happened to it.<sup>30</sup> The building was thoroughly searched again during the renovations in 2001–06, including removing the plaster behind the judge’s bench, but no evidence of McLeary’s painting was discovered.<sup>31</sup>

For the third mural, the local committee selected *Death and Life* (Figure 20) by 24-year-old Stuyvesant Van Veen of New York, but his depiction of Justice “befuddled” by an intractable class struggle (with socialism suggested as the solution) was deemed too radical by the government representatives. Van Veen was invited to modify the design, but instead chose to submit a new work, *Pittsburgh Panorama*, which depicted the city framed by the Westinghouse Memorial Bridge (Figure 21).<sup>32</sup> This design was accepted, though unbeknownst to the officials, Van Veen had still managed to get the last word by subtly shaping the Monongahela River and the steel mills on its banks to resemble a hammer and sickle.<sup>33</sup> After receiving the contract, he spent more than a year completing the work, much to the irritation of the Section officials as the other two murals had already been in place for some time. They were even more annoyed when Van Veen took it upon himself to deliver and install the finished painting personally, without government approval, and only notified them after the fact with a flippant telegram. Nevertheless, he was paid for his work and it remained in place.

Besides the addition of the murals, the building saw relatively few changes during the pre-war era, though various agencies were shuffled in and out as the federal government presence in Pittsburgh continued to expand. Between 1955 and 1970, a variety of alterations were made to the upper floors including the addition of several smaller courtrooms to accommodate the growing needs of the District Court. Air conditioning was installed in the building in 1963.<sup>34</sup> A year later, several agencies including the Weather Bureau and Internal Revenue Service moved across the street to the newly completed, 23-story Federal Building, while the Food and Drug Administration took over the space on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor vacated by the Weather Bureau.<sup>35</sup>

The lower floors continued to house the Post Office until 1983, though the downtown location, ideal for deliveries by train, was not so convenient in the era of truck-based service. The train tracks were removed from the basement in 1974 and it was converted to an additional parking area. Eventually the

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<sup>29</sup> “Federal Mural Wins Approval,” *Pittsburgh Press*, August 26, 1935, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> McCarron, James, “Story Of Capital Cover-up Leads To Mural Mystery Here,” *Pittsburgh Press*, April 23, 1978, p. A-18.

<sup>31</sup> Pitz, Marylynne, “Legacy of FDR’s public art program proves indelible,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 20, 2009, p. A-1.

<sup>32</sup> Naylor, Douglas, “Courtroom Picture Now Omits ‘Class Struggle,’” *Pittsburgh Press*, September 1, 1937, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Chamberlain, Betty, “Censorship Some Day?,” *American Artist*, February 1975, vol. 39, issue 391, p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> “U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Pittsburgh, PA,” U.S. General Services Administration [Online]. Available: <https://www.gsa.gov/historic-buildings/us-post-office-and-courthouse-pittsburgh-pa>. [Accessed November 28, 2018].

<sup>35</sup> Rodgers, James, “41 Federal Agencies Moving, To Be ‘Home’ By Christmas,” *Pittsburgh Press*, November 1, 1964, sec. 3, p. 2.

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Post Office moved to a new facility on the North Side,<sup>36</sup> although a smaller branch office remained in operation until 2014.<sup>37</sup> The departure of the Post Office left a large section of the building vacant, which was ultimately built out as additional office space between 1988 and 1991. Work on the fourth floor was evidently not completed, as it was reportedly still in a gutted condition in 2000.<sup>38</sup>

The building saw its largest modifications yet in 2001–06, when an \$87 million renovation and expansion was completed by Shalom Baranes Associates. Part of the project involved filling in the existing light courts on the east side of the building with a 32,000-square-foot, glass-walled addition containing six new double-height courtrooms. The north and south lobbies were also renovated, and the south lobby was expanded with a cutout added to the ceiling to reveal the groin-vaulted terra cotta tile ceiling of the hallway above. In 2015, the building was renamed in honor of Joseph F. Weis Jr. (1923–2014), a Pittsburgh native and recently deceased Senior Judge on the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.<sup>39</sup>



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### 9. Significance

1. *Its location as a site of significant historic or prehistoric event or activity;*

The property does not meet this criterion.

2. *Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archeological, or related aspects of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;*

The property does not meet this criterion.

3. *Its exemplification of an architectural type, style, or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship;*

The U.S. Courthouse is one of Pittsburgh's best works of late Neoclassical architecture, exemplifying the transition from traditional to modern building forms during the early to middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the design consciously evokes Classical traditions with its orderly, symmetrical stone facade, it also looks to the future with modern steel-frame construction and Art Deco design elements. The building is characterized by a very high quality of design, materials, and workmanship; the *Pittsburgh Press* reported upon its completion that it was "designed to last for centuries,"<sup>40</sup> and it remains in excellent condition today.

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<sup>36</sup> Stolberg, Mary, "Moving Days: Main Post Office Leaving Downtown For North Side Site," *Pittsburgh Press*, May 25, 1983, p. B-1.

<sup>37</sup> Ove, Torsten, "Federal courthouse post office to move," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 14, 2014, p. A-8.

<sup>38</sup> Ove, Torsten, "Federal courthouse was designed to be a postal center," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 9, 2000, p. B-6.

<sup>39</sup> Ove, Torsten, "Ceremony Nov. 20 to rename federal courthouse in honor of Judge Weis," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 21, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Love, October 3, 1934.

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Neoclassical architecture in the United States reached its peak between 1890 and 1915, and remained popular especially for large public buildings through the 1930s (the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., completed in 1941, is often regarded as the one of the last major examples). Like the Beaux-Arts style, it was based on design principles espoused by the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, which drew on Greek and Roman traditions while emphasizing symmetrical, hierarchical forms. Both styles were popularized in the U.S. in large part by the “White City” created by Daniel Burnham et al. for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Compared to Beaux-Arts buildings, those in the Neoclassical style are distinguished by a more restrained ornamentation, less frequent use of projecting and recessed wall surfaces, and simpler rooflines.<sup>41</sup>

The U.S. Courthouse was designed in the mid-1930s at the tail end of the Neoclassical style’s popularity, a transitional period when Art Deco was beginning to take over as the style of choice for large public buildings. As such, the building exemplifies a sparer, more modern manifestation of the Neoclassical style, sometimes referred to as “Stripped Classical.” The building’s design conveys a sense of dignity through the use of high-quality materials and elegant simplicity rather than ornate decoration. Columns, a staple of classical architecture, do not appear, but are suggested by pilasters and an arcade of arched windows. Art Deco influences can be seen as well, particularly the use of setbacks, the strong vertical lines of the upper volume, and the stylized ornamentation.

Stylistically comparable buildings in Pittsburgh include the Allegheny County Office Building (1931), Mellon Institute (1937), and Buhl Planetarium (1939), as well as earlier structures like the City-County Building (1917) and Trowbridge & Livingston’s own Mellon National Bank Building (1924), though none matches the scale of the U.S. Courthouse. It is an impressive work of architecture.

4. *Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history of development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;*

The U.S. Courthouse is a notable work by Trowbridge & Livingston, one of New York City’s best-known architectural firms during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Courthouse is one of three notable commissions the firm completed in Pittsburgh, along with the Mellon National Bank Building (1924) and Gulf Building (1932). All three structures are unique in scale and style; the Mellon Bank is Neoclassical, the Gulf Building is boldly Art Deco, and the Courthouse represents a transition between the two. The Courthouse is particularly notable as one of the few large public buildings designed by the firm; the other most notable example is the Oregon State Capitol (1938).

Trowbridge & Livingston was established in 1894 by Samuel Beck Parkman Trowbridge (1862–1925) and Goodhue Livingston (1867–1951). The firm was known for their Neoclassical designs, which earned them a number of prestigious commissions in New York like the St. Regis Hotel (1904), Bankers Trust Building (1912), and J.P. Morgan Building (1913). The latter two buildings, both located at the intersection of Wall Street and Broad Street, were iconic designs which were synonymous with their respective financial institutions. The J.P. Morgan Building in particular was so

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<sup>41</sup> Whiffen, Marcus, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*, Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1969, pp. 166-171.

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well known that its owners did not feel the need to provide any exterior signage.<sup>42</sup> No doubt hoping to emulate these prestigious Wall Street firms, Andrew Mellon commissioned Trowbridge & Livingston in 1922 to design the headquarters for his own Mellon National Bank, in collaboration with his nephew Edward Mellon. Later, as Treasury Secretary, Mellon likely influenced the Treasury Department's decision to hire the same firm for the Courthouse project.

5. *Its exemplification of important planning and urban design techniques distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design or detail;*

The property does not meet this criterion.

6. *Its location as a site of an important archaeological resource;*

The property does not meet this criterion.

7. *Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;*

The U.S. Courthouse is significant due to its association with Depression-era federal work relief programs enacted by Presidents Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt's New Deal programs especially were of unprecedented scope and impact, putting people to work on a huge variety of public works projects that reshaped the built landscape in cities and towns throughout the United States. The Courthouse is part of the enduring legacy of these programs.

Construction of the building began in 1931 as a federal work relief project under the Hoover administration. Hoover, like Roosevelt, believed public works projects would boost employment and stimulate the economy. However, he was also firmly committed to keeping a balanced budget and was not willing to significantly increase government spending on new projects. Since the Pittsburgh building was already funded, Hoover and Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon worked to get it started as quickly as possible. Although Hoover did eventually authorize an increase in public works spending, his efforts were dwarfed by the massive New Deal programs enacted after Roosevelt took office in 1933. For this reason, examples of completed federal relief projects dating to the Hoover administration are relatively rare.

The Courthouse project employed more than 400 workers during its three years of construction, though the work was halted several times by strikes and other labor disputes. It also stimulated the Pittsburgh economy indirectly through the use of locally produced steel, glass, and aluminum.<sup>43</sup> The building required 15,000 tons of structural steel, enough to keep its supplier, the Fort Pitt Bridge Company, operating for three months.<sup>44</sup> The end result of the project, in addition to the obvious economic benefit, was an attractive and functional building the community could take pride in. With the huge expansion of federal public works spending under Roosevelt, similar projects would be undertaken throughout the United States, leaving a substantial built legacy that endures to the present.

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<sup>42</sup> "23 Wall Street," *Time*, September 24, 1923.

<sup>43</sup> Love, October 3, 1934.

<sup>44</sup> "Fort Pitt Bridge Co. Given Contracts for Postoffice Building," *Canonsburg Daily Notes*, December 26, 1931, p. 1.

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Although the building itself was not a New Deal project, it is associated with the New Deal through the two courtroom murals created in 1936–37 under the auspices of the Treasury Department’s Section of Painting and Sculpture. Established in 1934, the Section was one of four New Deal arts programs which provided work for American artists while bringing cultural enrichment to the public via high-quality art installations. Unlike the other programs, the Section did not award commissions based on need, but selected artworks via open competition with the goal of finding the best work for each space. It commissioned more than 1,400 murals and sculptures which were installed in post offices and other public buildings throughout the country.<sup>45</sup>

The two murals in the U.S. Courthouse are *Steel Industry* (Figure 18) by Howard Cook (1901–1980) and *Pittsburgh Panorama* (Figure 21) by Stuyvesant Van Veen (1910–1988). Both artists are well known for their mural work and completed other New Deal commissions in addition to the Courthouse paintings. Cook’s mural, depicting steelworkers and miners at work in Pittsburgh’s most famous industry, is a fresco which he painted directly on the courtroom wall using techniques he had studied in Mexico. As Mexican artists like Diego Rivera were leading the field of mural painting at the time, this training gave Cook’s work an authenticity that was valued by the Section. *Steel Industry* was recognized as a significant work upon its completion and was awarded a Gold Medal by the Architectural League of New York as the best mural of 1937. Afterward, Cook was able to capitalize on his growing reputation with a number of other large projects including the well-known San Antonio Post Office murals.

Van Veen’s mural, a stylized depiction of the city framed by the Westinghouse Bridge, is a second design which he created after his original entry, *Death and Life*, was found too radical by Section officials. The artist expressed his anger over the situation by subtly concealing a hammer and sickle motif in the revised artwork, reflecting his socialist sympathies. Prior to creating the mural, Van Veen had established a reputation as something of a prodigy, becoming the youngest artist to show a painting in the Carnegie Institute’s prestigious Annual Exhibition at age 19. However, the Section officials found him difficult to work with and refused to give him any further commissions, which prevented him from reaching the same career heights as Cook. Despite this, he was still recognized as a skilled muralist during his lifetime and was honored with a membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1972.

The two Courthouse murals are part of a legacy of 94 artworks in Pennsylvania commissioned by the Section between 1934 and 1943. Not all of these works have survived; in fact, a third mural in the U.S. Courthouse is among those no longer extant. Of the Pennsylvania commissions, only one other mural is located in Pittsburgh: *History of Squirrel Hill* (1942) by Alan Thompson, installed in the Squirrel Hill Post Office.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the Courthouse murals are an important part of Pittsburgh’s New Deal legacy.

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<sup>45</sup> Feder, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> “A Common Canvas: Pennsylvania’s New Deal Post Office Murals,” State Museum of Pennsylvania [Online]. Available: <http://statemuseumpa.org/common-canvas/>. [Accessed December 5, 2018].

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8. *Its exemplification of a pattern of neighborhood development or settlement significant to the cultural history or traditions of the City, whose components may lack individual distinction;*

The property does not meet this criterion.

9. *Its representation of a cultural, historic, architectural, archeological, or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, sites, structures, or objects that may or may not be contiguous;*

The property does not meet this criterion.

10. *Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh;*

Occupying a full city block on Grant Street, one of downtown Pittsburgh's busiest and most architecturally distinguished corridors, the U.S. Courthouse is a well-established landmark of the surrounding area. Once downtown's largest building, the Courthouse conveys a feeling of the established presence and influence of the federal government in Pittsburgh, which is strengthened by two other current and former federal buildings on the opposite side of Grant Street.

## 10. Integrity

### *Location*

The building retains a high degree of integrity of location, as it occupies its original site at Grant Street and Seventh Avenue.

### *Design*

The exterior of the building exhibits a high integrity of design. The largest change to the exterior of the building was the construction of two infill additions inside the light courts on the east side of the building in 2001–06. While these glass-walled additions are of undeniably modern construction, they harmonize with the existing building and do not detract from its overall appearance. In addition, they are only visible from the rear of the building. Other minor alterations include closing in the portal on the north side of the building where trains once entered the basement (Figure 23), and installation of air handling equipment on the roof. With these exceptions, the exterior of the building remains almost exactly as designed by Trowbridge & Livingston.

The integrity of the building's interior is moderate to low, though some of the most important spaces retain their original appearance—especially the five ceremonial courtrooms on the sixth and eighth floors. Many of the lobby, hallway, and stairwell areas also retain their original designs. However, much of the interior office space has been altered and reorganized during the building's history.

### *Setting*

The building retains moderately high integrity of setting. It maintains its historical relationship with the Pennsylvania Railroad Station, though the train tracks that once connected the two buildings have been removed, and an underground tunnel has been closed off. The streets, ramps, and railroad tracks

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around the building retain their original alignments. The adjacent streetscape along Grant Street also retains considerable integrity, with many neighboring buildings remaining from the Courthouse's original period of construction including the Gulf Building (1932), Federal Reserve Building (1931), and Koppers Building (1929). The presence of the William S. Moorhead Federal Building (1964) along with the Courthouse and the Federal Reserve Building conveys a strong feeling of the historical presence of the federal government on this section of Grant Street even though the Federal Reserve Building has been converted to a hotel. Other newer buildings exist in the vicinity, most notably the 64-story U.S. Steel Tower (1971), but the overall feeling of Grant Street as a street of imposing office and government buildings remains intact.

### *Materials and workmanship*

The exterior of the building exhibits high integrity of materials and workmanship. The exterior limestone and granite walls retain their original appearance and ornamentation, and the original doors, windows, and decorative bronze grilles remain in place throughout the building. Cleaning and repointing of the stonework has kept the exterior of the building in good condition.

The interior retains moderate to low integrity. Original finishes and hardware exist in many areas of the buildings, particularly the ceremonial courtrooms, judges' chambers, jury rooms, hallways, stairwells, and lobby areas. However, many other areas of the building have been refinished with modern office materials and furnishings and no longer convey any historical feeling.

### *Feeling*

The Courthouse retains high integrity of feeling. Its overall appearance and purpose are much the same today as they were in 1934, and the presence of two other current or former federal buildings in the immediate vicinity conveys a strong sense of the government's historical presence.

### *Association*

The building retains moderately high integrity of association as it still fulfills two of its three main historical functions, housing the United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania as well as the offices of various other agencies of the federal government. The original ceremonial courtrooms and other historic interior spaces are used in the same way today as they were in 1934. The building no longer houses the Post Office nor many of the agencies that once had offices there, though agencies have moved into and out of the building continuously throughout its history.

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### Supporting documents

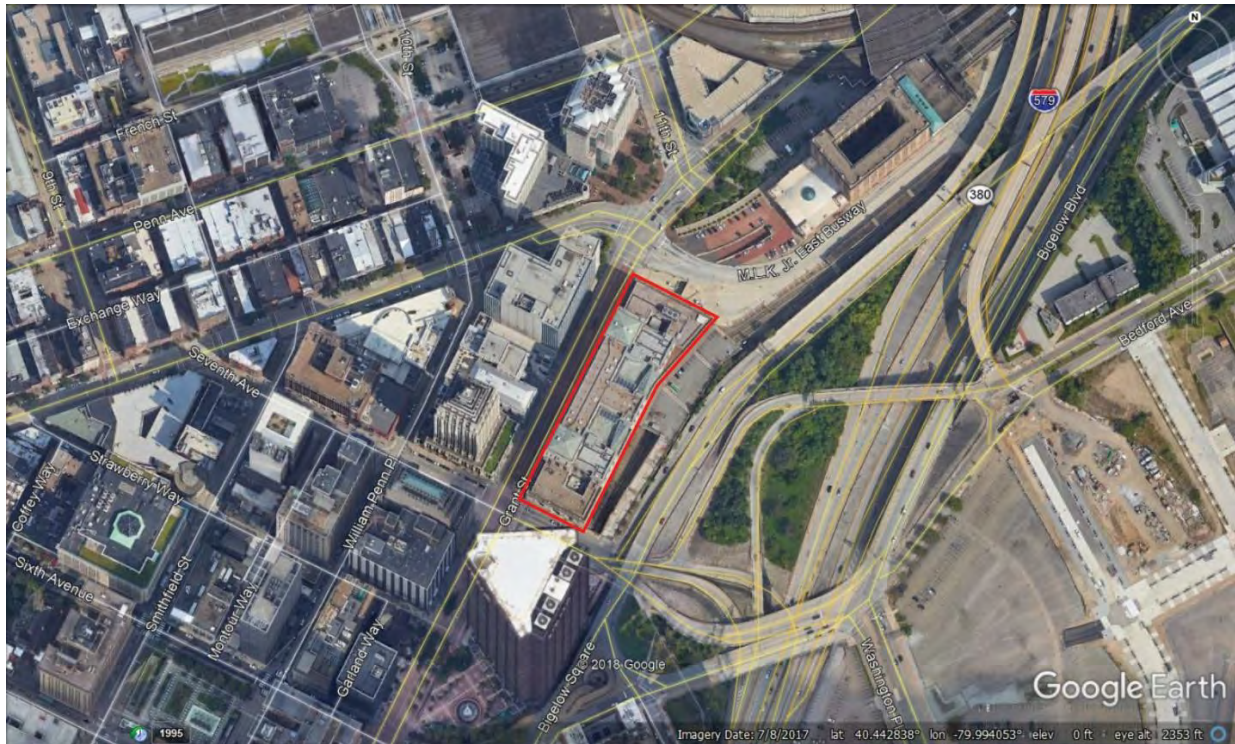


Figure 1. Site map, 2017. Google.



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Figure 2. Real estate plat-book of the city of Pittsburgh, vol. 1, plate 6B. G. M. Hopkins & Co., 1923. Via Historic Pittsburgh.



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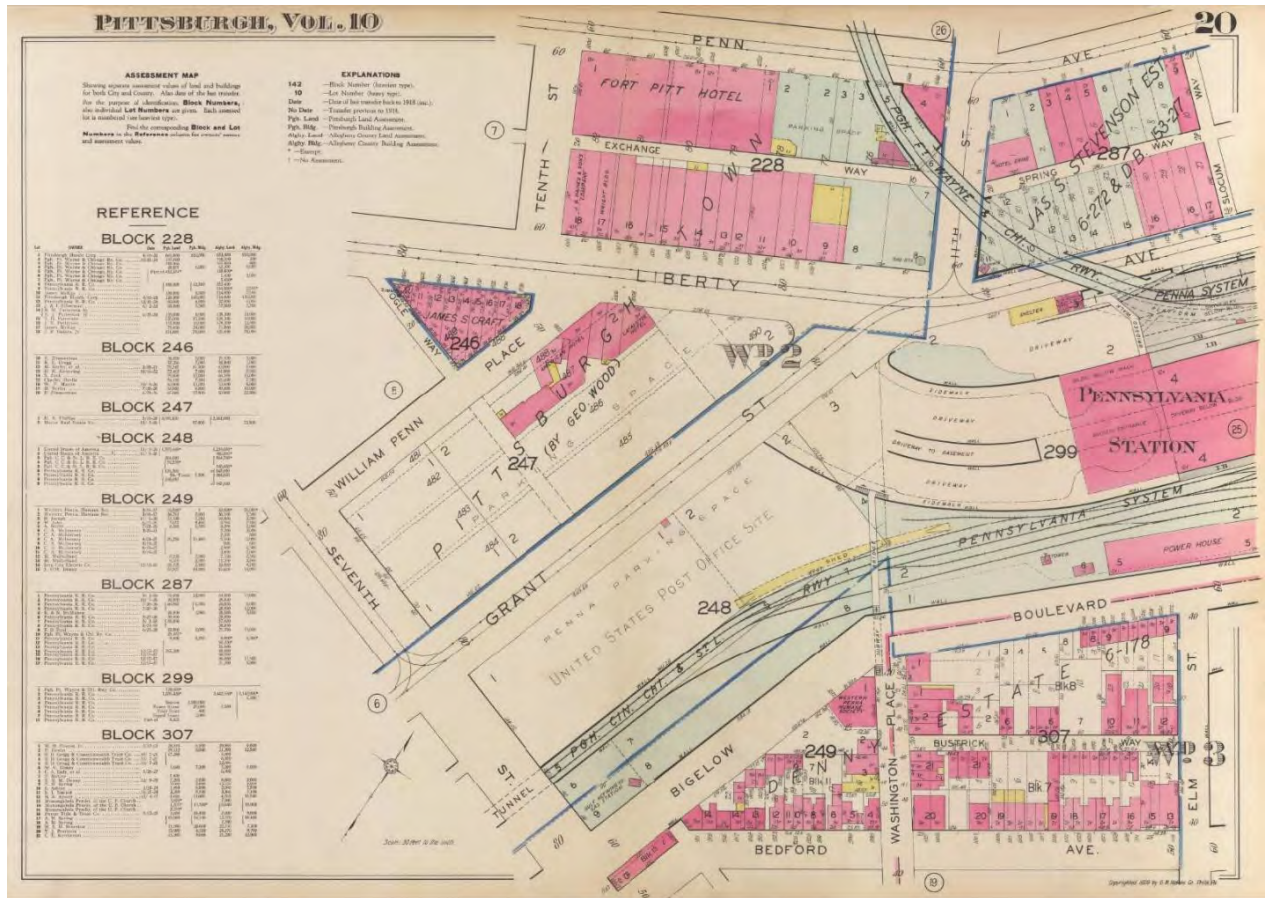


Figure 3. Assessment plat-book of the city of Pittsburgh, vol. 10, plate 20. G. M. Hopkins & Co., 1929. Via Historic Pittsburgh.

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Figure 4. The proposed site before the Grant Street realignment, 1925. *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, July 12, 1925, p. 3.



Figure 5. The proposed site after the Grant Street realignment, 1926. *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, June 6, 1926, sec. 3, p. 12.

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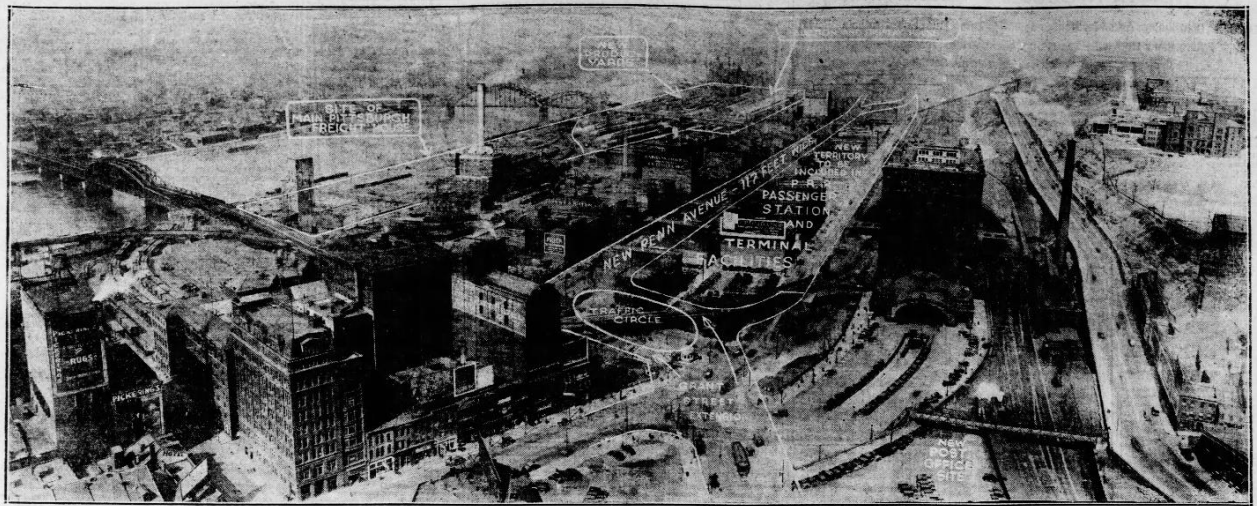


Figure 6. Planned projects in the vicinity of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station, including the Post Office site at bottom. *Pittsburgh Press*, April 14, 1929, p. 88.

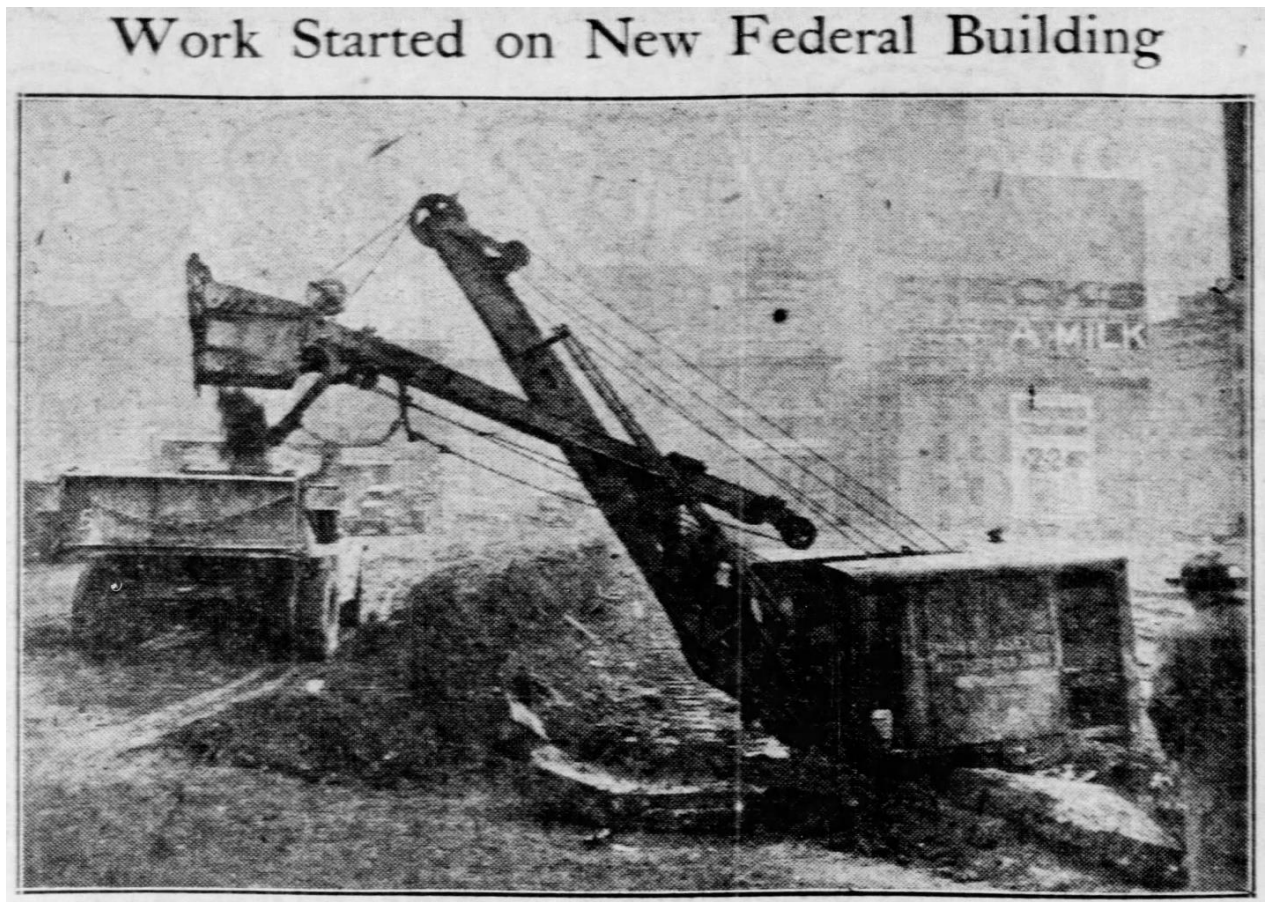


Figure 7. Preliminary site work begins. *Pittsburgh Press*, March 8, 1931, p. 36.



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Figure 8. Architect's rendering of the building. *Pittsburgh Press*, September 13, 1931, sec. 7, p. 1.

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Figure 9. Foundation under construction. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 23, 1931, p. 13.

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Figure 10. Work progressing on the steel frame. *Pittsburgh Press*, June 13, 1932, p. 12.

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Figure 11. Cornerstone laying ceremony, July 8, 1932. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 9, 1932, p. 13.



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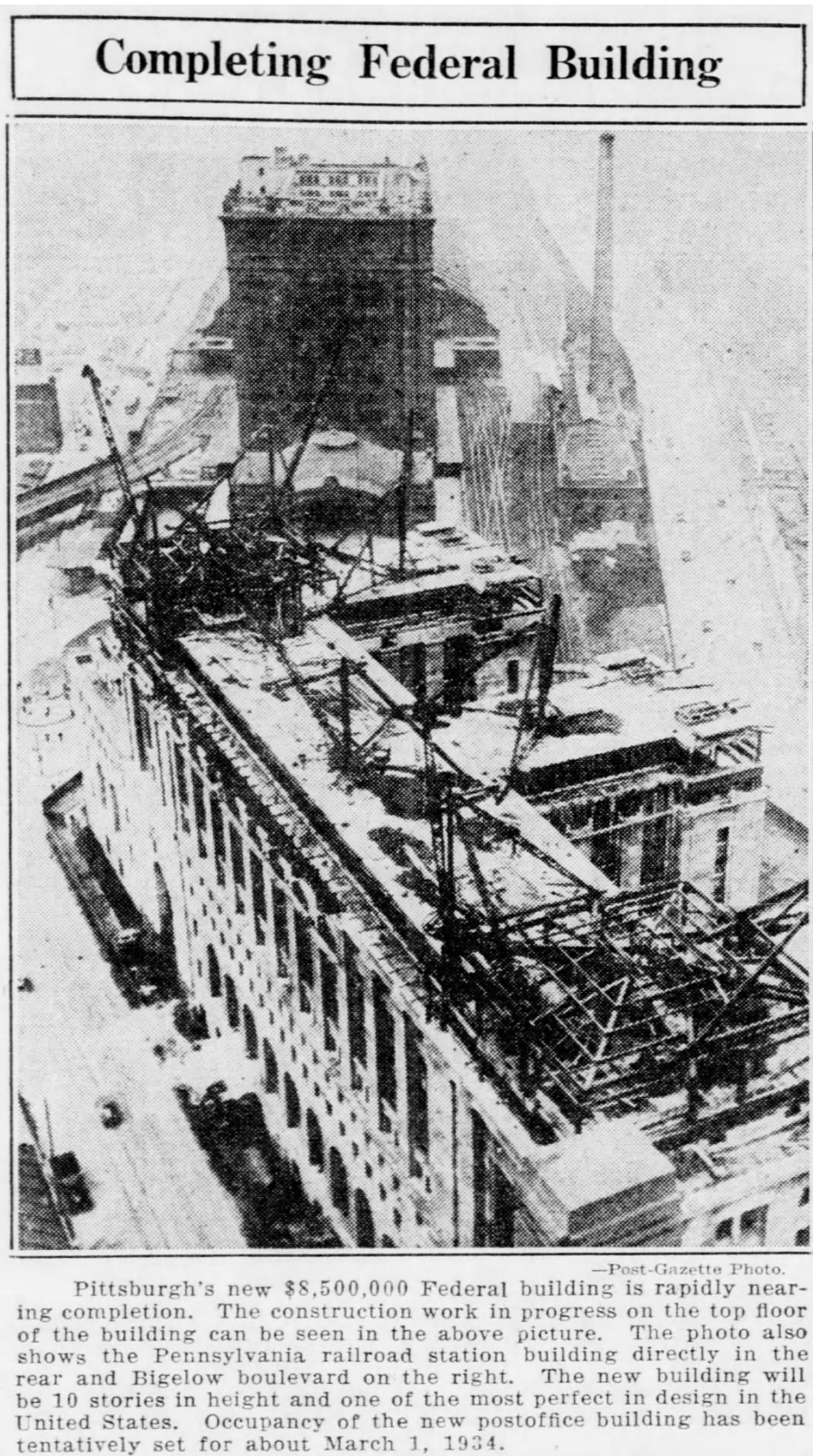


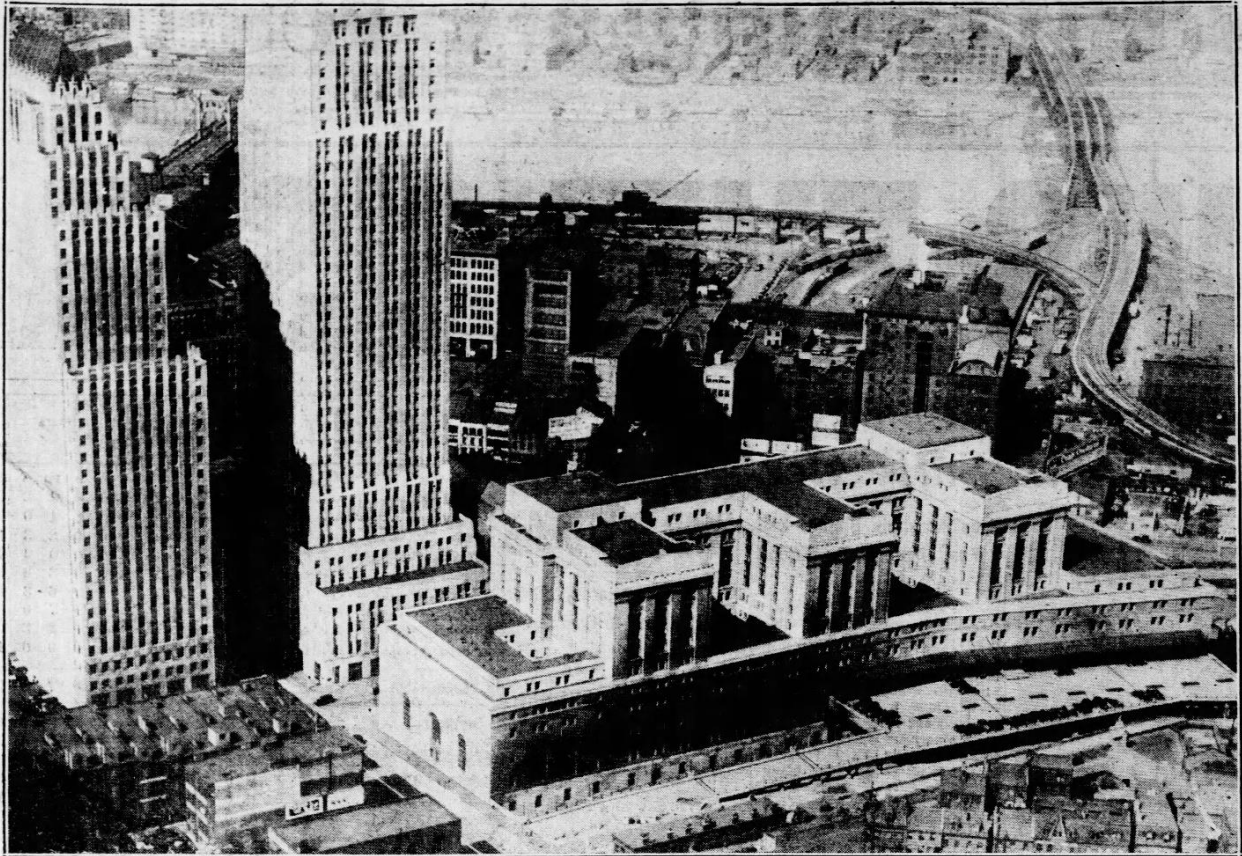
Figure 12. The Post Office and Courthouse nearing completion in March 1933. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 23, 1933, p. 21.



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***Pilot Photographs Pittsburgh's \$8,000,000 Postoffice—To Be Dedicated Saturday***



How Pittsburgh's new \$8,000,000 Federal Building looks from the air. The picture shows its neighbors, the Gulf and Koppers Buildings, and the Allegheny River in the background.

The damage that has already been done to the rear of the structure by smoke from trains passing beneath it is evident in the photograph.

The building will be dedicated Saturday morning, although none of the 40-odd agencies that will occupy

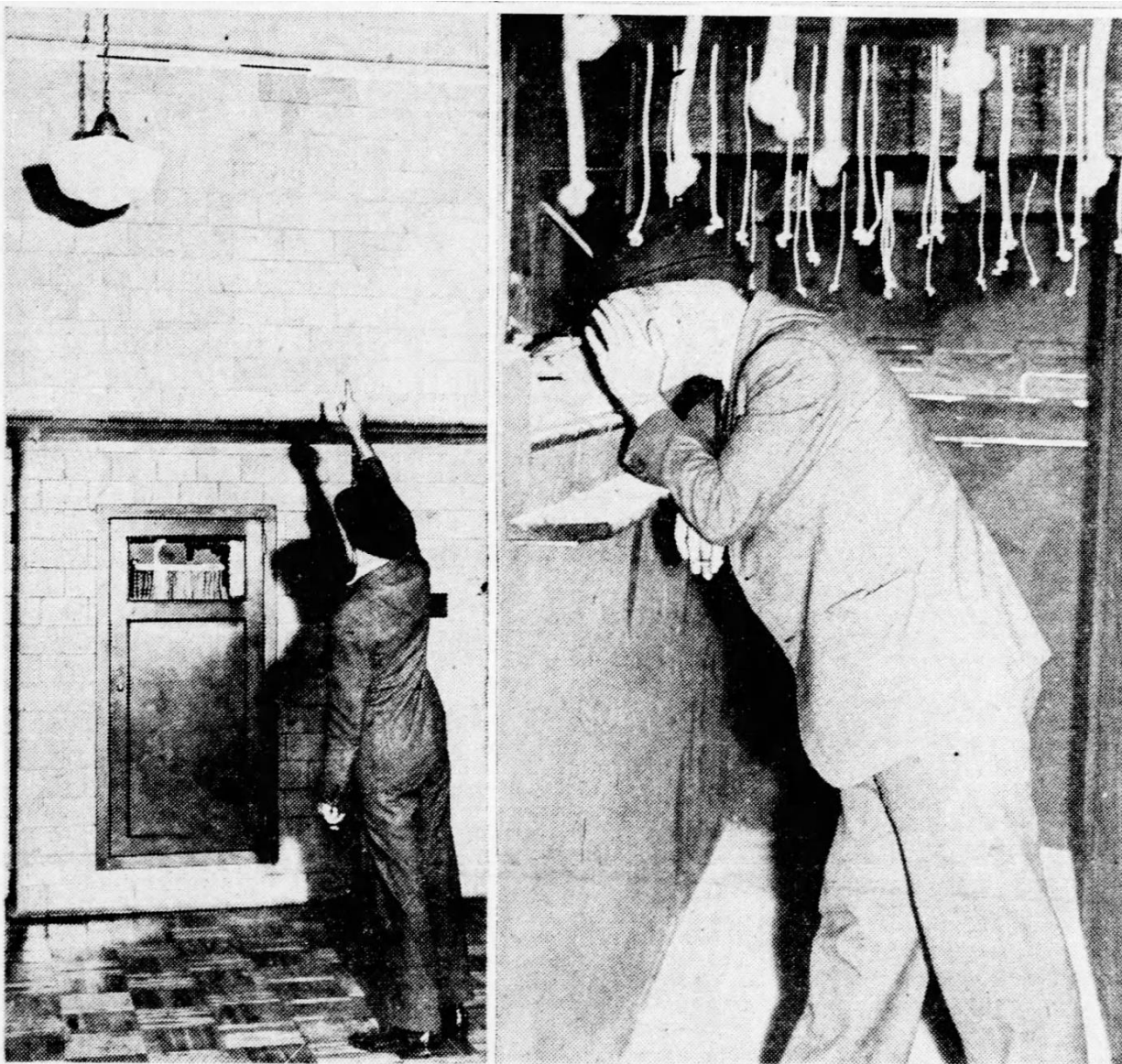
it are yet in their quarters. Postmaster General James A. Farley will speak.

The picture was taken by Lieutenant Verne L. Hubbard of the Three Hundred Twenty-fourth Observation Squadron, Army Air Corps Reserve.

Figure 13. Aerial photo of the building taken by Verne L. Hubbard shortly before its dedication.  
*Pittsburgh Press*, October 8, 1934, p. 2.

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—Post-Gazette Photos.

Pittsburgh's new postoffice has some elaborate grill work, and some beautiful architecture, members of the Building Owners' and Managers' Association discovered yesterday when they were taken on a tour of the building, but they also found that it has the most modern peeping system—tunnels with a secret entrance from which postal inspectors can watch the mail workers at any time without fear of detection. The picture

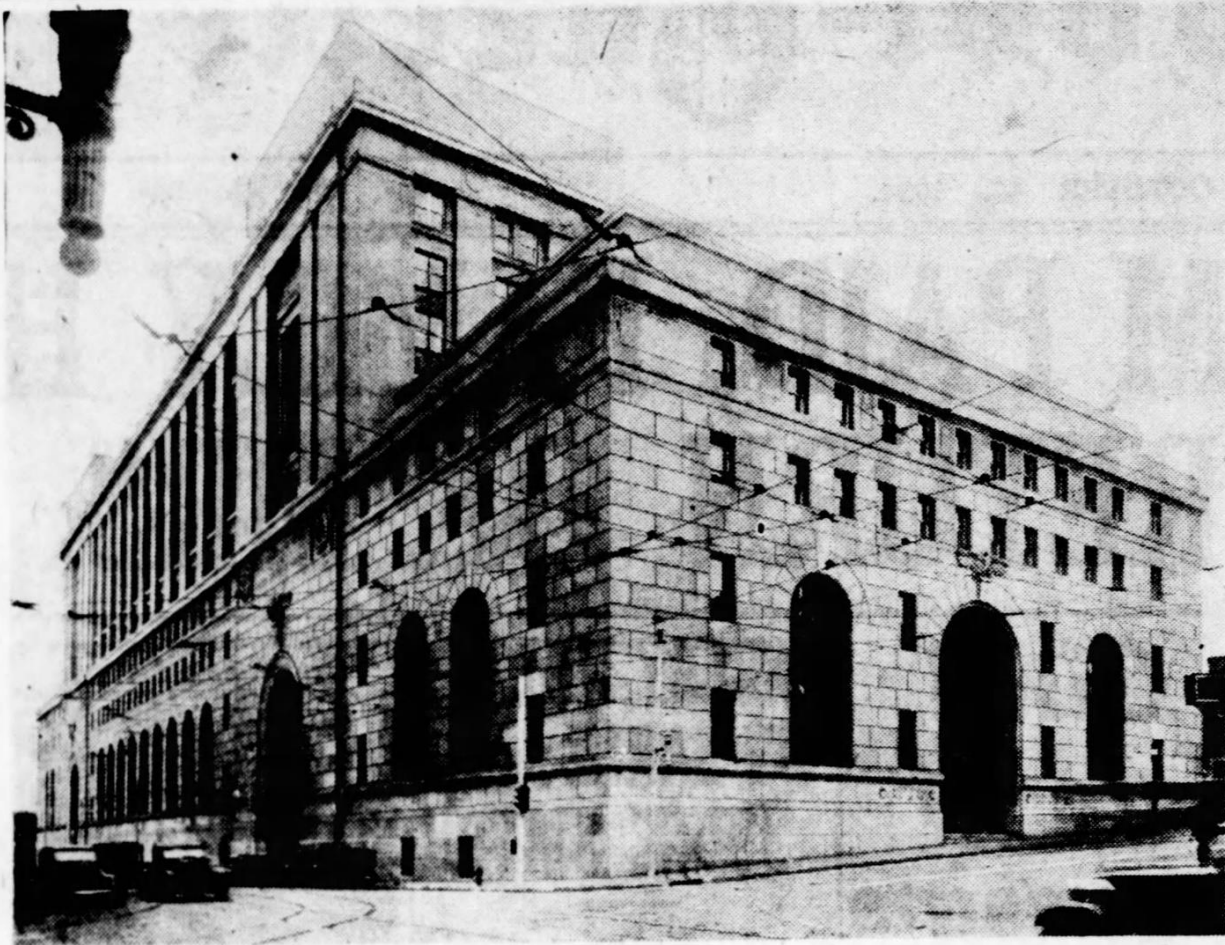
above shows the grill work at the general delivery window, while below two pictures illustrate the way inspectors may watch the men at work. The picture at the left shows a man pointing at the slot near the ceiling from the floor of the sorting room, while at the right he is looking through the same slot from the inside of the tunnel. It is pitch dark inside—hence the knotted ropes to warn one of approaching turns.

Figure 14. Surveillance tunnels inside the Post Office. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 11, 1934, p. 13.

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## New Federal Building To Be Dedicated Today



Ready to be open for inspection by the public at noon today, Pittsburgh's new postoffice and Federal building will be dedicated at exercises

—Post-Gazette Photo.  
scheduled to begin at 10:30 o'clock this morning. Postmaster General Farley and Admiral Peoples of the treasury department will be main speakers.

Figure 15. The completed building. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 13, 1934, p. 2.



Figure 16. "Touchdown!" cartoon by Cy Hungerford. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 13, 1934, p. 8.



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Figure 17. Post Office dedication. *Pittsburgh Press*, October 14, 1934, p. 2.

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Figure 18. *Steel Industry* mural (1936) by Howard Cook. Photo by Carol Highsmith, 2007, via Library of Congress (public domain).

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Figure 19. *Modern Justice* mural (1936) by Kindred McLeary. Photo from National Archives (Feder, 2010).



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Figure 20. *Death and Life* (1935), original contest entry by Stuyvesant Van Veen. Facsimile from National Archives (Feder, 2010).



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Figure 21. *Pittsburgh Panorama* mural (1937) by Stuyvesant Van Veen. Photo by Carol Highsmith, 2007, via Library of Congress (public domain).

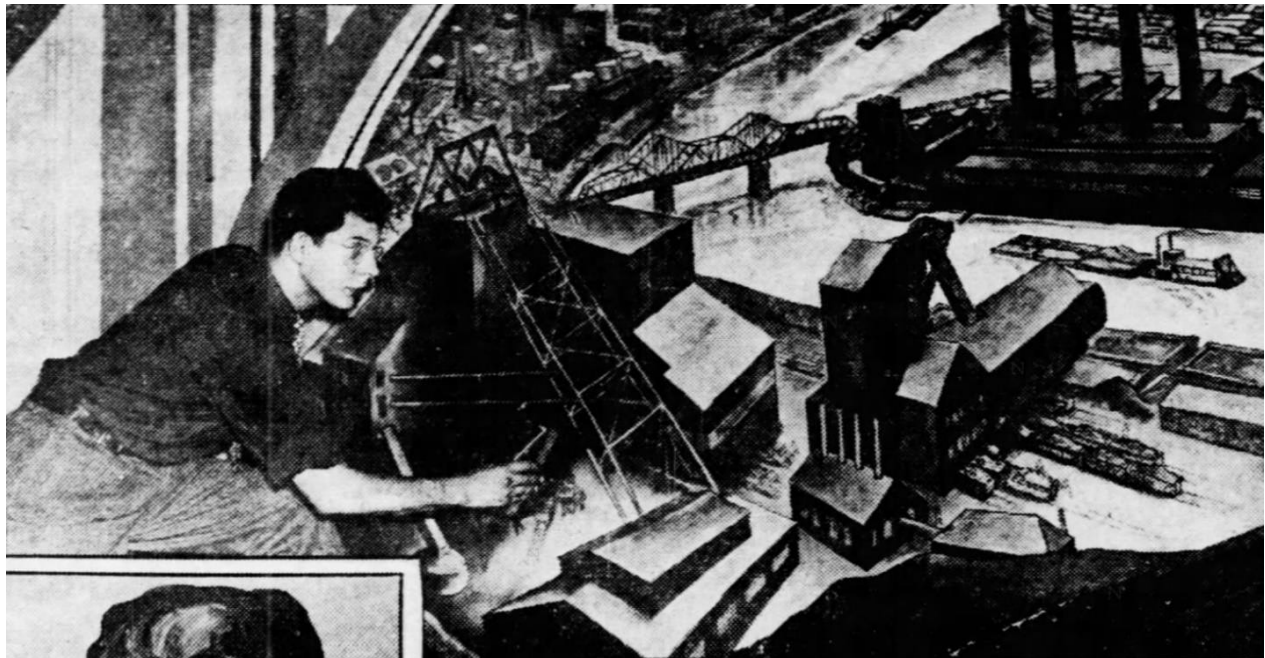


Figure 22. Stuyvesant Van Veen completing his unauthorized installation of the *Pittsburgh Panorama* mural in Courtroom 3, September 1937. *Pittsburgh Press*, September 1, 1937, p. 9.

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Figure 23. Photo from July 1971 with the original train entrance visible at left. Robert G. Pflaum Photograph Collection, University of Pittsburgh.

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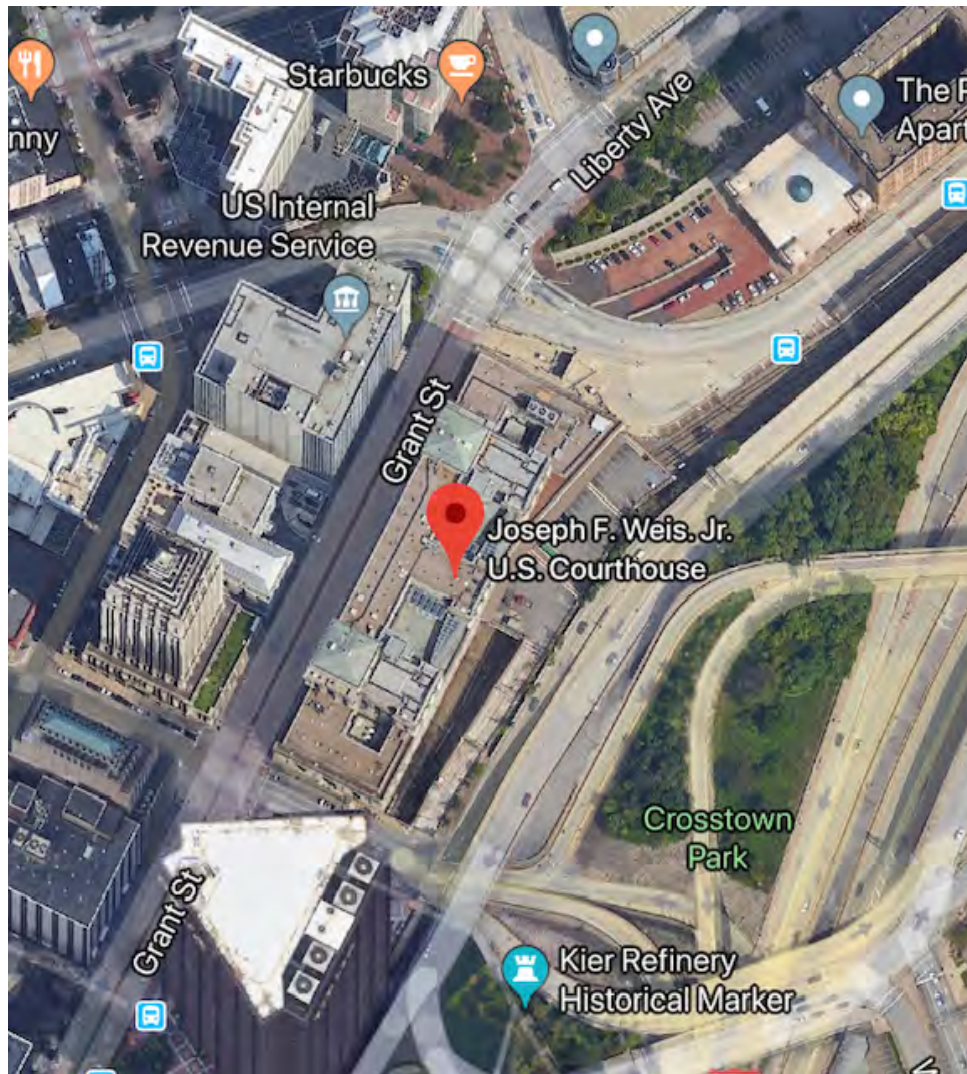
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**Photo Log**

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**Site Areal**

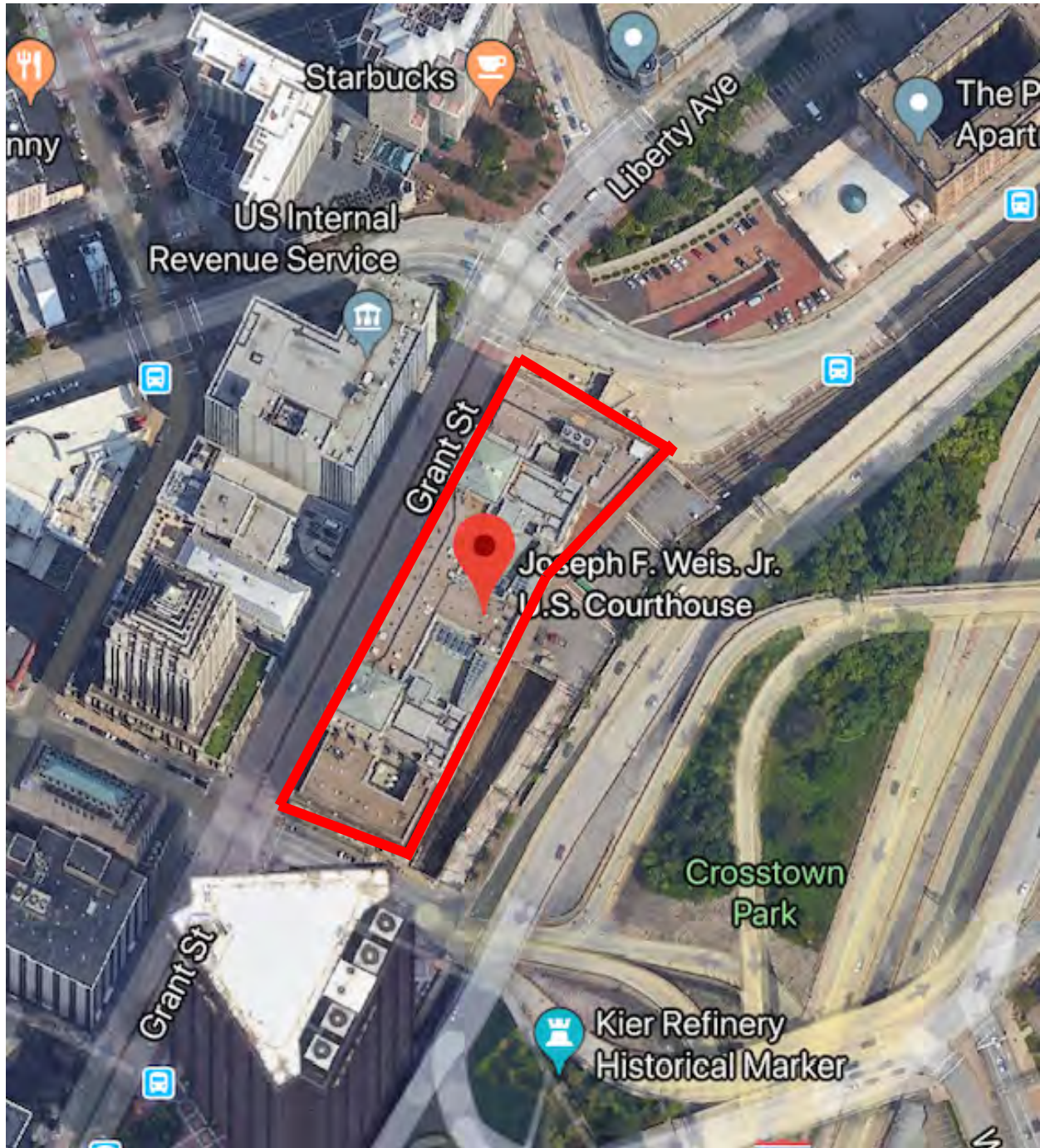




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**Site Boundaries**

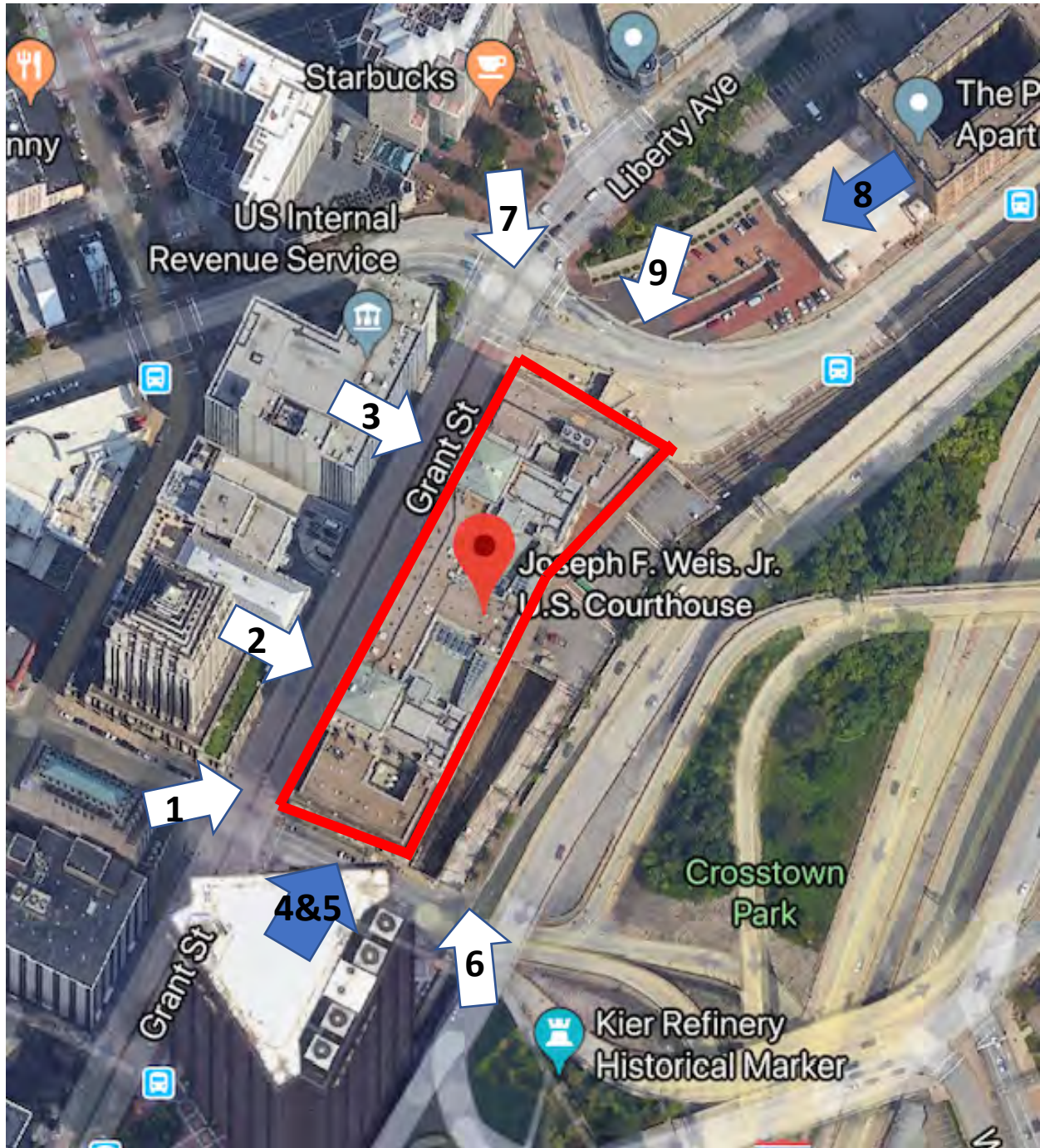




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**Site Photo Key**



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Photo. 1. *Weis Courthouse, Seventh Ave. & Grant St. Street Façades*, July 2019. Source: Matthew W.C. Falcone.



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Photo. 2. *Weis Courthouse, Grant St. Façade, Main Entrance Detail*, July 2019. Source: Matthew W.C. Falcone.

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Photo. 3. *Weis Courthouse, Grant St. Façade, Secondary Entrance Detail*, July 2019. Source: Matthew W.C. Falcone.



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Photo. 4. *Weis Courthouse, Seventh Ave. Façade*, July 2019. Source: Matthew W.C. Falcone.

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Photo. 5. *Weis Courthouse, Entrance Detail, Seventh Ave. Façade*, July 2019. Source: Matthew W.C. Falcone.

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Photo. 6. *Weis Courthouse, Seventh Ave. & Bigelow Blvd. Facades*, July 2019. Source: Matthew W.C. Falcone.



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Photo. 7. Weis Courthouse, Grant St. & M.L.K. Jr. East Busway facades, July 2019. Source: Matthew W.C. Falcone.

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Photo 8. *Weis Courthouse, M.L.K. Jr. East Busway façade as seen from the Pennsylvania Rotunda, July 2019. Source: Matthew W.C. Falcone.*

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Photo. 9. Weis Courthouse, M.L.K. Jr. East Busway facade, July 2019. Source: Matthew W.C. Falcone.