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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name El Paso U.S. Courthouse
other names/site number El Paso Federal Building

2. Location

street & number 511 East San Antonio Avenue not for publication
city or town El Paso vicinity
state Texas code TX county El Paso code 141 zip code 79901

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Rolando Bernal Camp 3.9.1
Signature of certifying official Date
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Chunlan 3-1-01
Signature of commenting or other official Date
TEXAS SHPO
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other, (explain): _____

for Edson H. Beall 4/25/9
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

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

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
<u>GOVERNMENT</u>	<u>Courthouse</u>
<u>GOVERNMENT</u>	<u>Government offices</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
<u>GOVERNMENT</u>	<u>Courthouse</u>
<u>GOVERNMENT</u>	<u>Government offices</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls STONE: Limestone

roof ASPHALT

other _____

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets pp. 5-7.

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas

Narrative Description

Introduction

The historic El Paso U.S. Courthouse (also known as the federal building) is located in the 500 block of East San Antonio Avenue. The building establishes a strong and tangible presence for the federal government in downtown El Paso. Constructed in 1936, the Moderne building features restrained Classical elements and is similar in style, construction, and size to federal buildings across both Texas and the country. The building was designed by a team of architects: Percy McGhee and Guy L. Fraser of El Paso, Texas, and Thomas P. Lippencott of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, under the supervision of the Office of the Supervising Architect for the U.S. Department of Treasury. No major additions have been made to the building, and the primary interior spaces on the first level, including the south lobby with its large mural on the north wall, retain a significant amount of historic fabric. Original interior features such as terrazzo floors, Art Deco hardware, paneled doors with transoms, and period light fixtures are still in place throughout the building. Despite minor interior modifications, the El Paso U.S. Courthouse retains a high degree of setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Exterior Description

The El Paso U.S. Courthouse is an impressive 5-story (plus basement) Moderne building with Classical elements. The building is clad in buff-colored limestone with matching terra cotta ornament and coping, cast aluminum spandrel panels, and steel windows.¹

The primary (south) façade has a series of regular fluted piers extending from corner to corner with narrower bays at each end and a wide, solid center entrance. The windows on the first floor are steel casement windows grouped into three units with the center unit having six lights of equal size and each side unit having three lights of equal size to the center unit. The second-, third-, and fourth-floor windows are double-hung and are also separated into three units. The center window is 4/4-light and both side windows are 2/2-light. The fifth story has no exterior windows creating an architrave into which incised is the building name:

United States Court House

The primary entries were historically at both the north and south façades with the north entry being secondary and the south entry most prominent. Pink granite stairs lead to nonoriginal colored concrete landings with patterned terrazzo. Intact original hollow metal doors and frames with large glass lights, aluminum grills, and cast aluminum plaques stand within limestone portals with carved ornaments centered on both the north and south façades. These façades are identical except for the wider, more solid center entry on the south bracketed by cast aluminum sconces. A matching lantern is suspended within the north entry portal.

¹ Waggoner, J. David, and Charles D. Sterkx. *Historic Preservation Plan: U.S. Courthouse (El Paso, Texas)*. Prepared for the General Services Administration, Fort Worth, Texas, 8 November 1993.

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El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas

Narrative Description (continued)

The east and west façades are shorter and identical with the exception of the raised services entry on the west side near the north end. This framed opening between piers is surmounted by a limestone spandrel with bas-relief ornament and "United States Customs" incised above. The window configuration is the same as that on the north and south façades.

The site immediately surrounding the building is small with few green spaces. A small parking lot along with war memorials fills the west side. The south side provides the main public entry including a recently added handicap access ramp and has the only significant green space on the site. The north entrance, always secondary, now functions as the employee entrance.

Interior Description

The El Paso U.S. Courthouse has a rectangular plan that is biaxially symmetrical. Rooms are arranged on either side of an interior corridor around two light courts. Historic spaces include the first-floor north and south lobby and corridor, fourth-floor main courtroom, and, to a limited extent, tenant offices.

The first-floor lobby area provides a strong circulation sequence and retains much of its historic material and detail. The main lobby on the south side is joined to the smaller north lobby by a wide, well-proportioned corridor with a vaulted ceiling and high arched head openings at either end. Original entry doors remain on both sides of the corridor, with original hardware designed by the architect. Above the entry doors in the north and south lobbies is a large, single-light transom. The floor is a patterned terrazzo with a Westfield Green marble base. A St. Genevieve Golden Vein marble wainscot with a shaped cap runs throughout the lobby and terminates into matching stone surrounds at the cased openings. Cornices, originally stenciled with ornament, crown the plaster walls. In the south lobby, original light fixtures hang from plaster medallions in the coffered ceiling. A mural painted by artist Tom Lea, Jr., is present on the north wall of the south lobby. The mural is 53 feet long by 11 feet high and depicts 14 figures from southwestern history. Other original features are also present in the south lobby, including a tenant mail chute on the west wall.

The main courtroom on the fourth floor is the only historic courtroom in the building. It is centrally located between the 2-light courts. This 2-story space restates the design of the building's exterior with tall windows repeated between regular piers. Above the 4-foot-high, wood wainscoting, various sections of the shaped acoustical panels give the impression of cut stones forming beams and fluted pilasters. The beams are divided into three lengths by plaster ornaments; the pilasters have shaped plaster capitals with a leaf motif. At the three center bays, tall stained glass windows with a tartan grid open to the light courts. A plaster head panel with an Egyptian figure caps each window. The windows are centered on the interior, nonstructural bays expressing the overriding importance of this space. The courtroom's leather-clad doors retain original hardware that was designed by the architect and is similar to other doors throughout the building. The original chandeliers with opaque bottoms still hang. The judge's bench, the jury box, and the audience seats have a reeded motif compatible to the interior and exterior pilasters.

The fourth-floor circulation lobby, located outside of the main courtroom, also remains intact. The original suspended light fixtures, patterned terrazzo floor, plaster walls, cornice, and ceiling continue to enrich the space.

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**El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas**

Narrative Description (continued)

Other historic spaces, primarily tenant offices, retain historic fabric such as plaster walls and ceilings, original doors, and terrazzo floors. In the northeast and southwest corners of the fourth floor are suites housing the original judge's chambers with wood wainscoting and coved plaster cornices. The clerk's office retains original finishes and remains in its original location west of the main entry, providing direct access to the public and reinforcing the historic plan of the building.

Alterations

Overall, the El Paso U.S. Courthouse retains a high degree of integrity of setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. While modifications have occurred, they have not impacted the building's ability to convey its historic significance as a federal building nor its architectural significance as an excellent example of a Moderne public building with Classical influences. Alterations have primarily been restricted to the interior.

Renovations have caused the circulation lobbies on the second and third floors to become smaller in order to gain office space for the functions adjacent to them. The easternmost third of these two lobbies has been enclosed with gypsum board partitions and a suspended acoustical ceiling. The corridors have also been modified and contemporary finishes added.

The two light courts have been significantly altered. The ground floor level of the east light court has become a functioning courtroom. The west light court has not been maintained well but retains a landscaped courtyard with the ground surface at its original location between the ground floor and basement. Large heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) chases, clad in cement fiberboard, have been added to both light courts. The original brick-face walls have been covered with cement plaster. The 17 remaining skylights on the roof have been enclosed.

The exterior of the building has been largely unaltered. A limestone, handicap access ramp has been installed at the south elevation entrance, and the north entrance has been restricted to employee use only. The loading dock on the west side's services area has been lowered and the green spaces have been relandscaped.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Politics/Government
- Architecture
- Art
-
-
-
-

Period of Significance

1936-1950

Significant Dates

1936, 1938

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

McGhee, Percy, Fraser, Guy L.; El Paso, TX; Lippencott, Thomas P., Philadelphia, PA—Architects

Simon, Louis A.—Supervising Architect, U.S. Department of Treasury

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more 8sheets.) See Continuation Sheets pp. 8-13.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.) See Continuation Sheet p. 14-15.

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

Name of repository:

General Services Administration, Greater Southwest Region, Fort Worth, TX
El Paso County Library, El Paso, TX

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**El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas**

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary

The El Paso U.S. Courthouse is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at the local level of significance for its association with federal construction and art programs designed to relieve the economic depression of the 1930s. The courthouse is also eligible under Criterion C at the local level of significance in the area of Architecture as an example of Moderne design with Classical Revival elements. An integral part of the building is its WPA mural for which the courthouse is recognized in the area of Art.

From 1936, when construction was completed, through the present time, the building has provided a strong federal presence in El Paso by housing federal services. Like other buildings built in the 1930s, its design and construction were part of the federal construction programs enacted to reduce unemployment during the Depression. The first-floor lobby still displays a mural designed to beautify public buildings and to develop American art while, at the same time, building community pride by representing regionally significant themes.

Historical Significance

The City of El Paso, although settled much earlier, was officially founded in 1852. It was also in this year that the new town had its first postmaster, Franklin Coontz. Coontz chose to call the town Franklin. During the mid-1850s, while Franklin was becoming a prominent stage stop, the Army established a series of forts along the stage trails in an effort to protect early travelers. It was also during this period that the Butterfield Overland Mail arrived. In 1858, General Anson Mills conducted the first survey of the town and found the streets to run not parallel or perpendicular to each other but, in relation to corrals, saloons, and other existing buildings, in a confusing pattern that still exists today. It was Anson Mills who suggested that the name of the town be changed to El Paso.

Progress for El Paso was abundant in 1881 and it was a year of firsts for the frontier community. The first Southern Pacific and Santa Fe trains came to town and the first post office was built. The Mexican Central Railroad also laid tracks there and the Western Union Telegraph Company obtained a charter. The once sleepy village of several hundred inhabitants quickly became a flourishing community, and in 1883, El Paso became the seat of the county.

This growth led county commissioners to construct a new courthouse on the corner of San Antonio and Overland streets in February of 1884. The courthouse was built in the Renaissance style and was completed in January 1886. Local historians suggest that it housed El Paso's lone court as well as offices for the district attorney, the sheriff, the tax collector, the federal court, and federal offices.² Prior to the occupation of the 1886 building, the federal government and the U.S. District Court rented space in the Monarch Building in the 400 block of El Paso Street.

² *El Paso Times*, 15 January 1995.

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El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

The federal government's use of the new courthouse was short lived. In 1892, El Paso's first federal building was erected on Mills and Oregon streets. It was one of three, 4-story buildings in El Paso at the time of its construction and was considered a skyscraper compared to most of the buildings in the town.³ For a number of years, this building's tenants included the post office, the customs department, and the federal court.

As the century turned, El Paso evolved from a frontier town into a modern municipality with significant transportation, commercial, and industrial resources. Its population doubled twice during the first two decades, and this growth led to the construction of a new post office. In 1911, Congressman W. R. Smith of the 16th District requested funds for this purpose.⁴ Five years later, the government acquired land at the corner of Mills and Stanton streets and constructed an impressive Beaux-Arts-style building designed by the Office of the Supervising Architect. While the post office abandoned the 1892 building on Mills and Oregon streets for its new facility, the earlier building continued to provide federal services including serving as the site of the U.S. District Court.

By 1925, El Paso's population had reached 77,650. During the 1920s, the city enjoyed new economic opportunities as a tourist gateway to Mexico and as a location of major oil refineries and manufacturing plants. As the Depression loomed near in 1929, plans were underway to construct a new modern federal building. Space in the 1892 building was limited, and several federal agencies including the U.S. Weather Bureau and the U.S. Immigration Service were renting space at nongovernment facilities.

According to newspaper reports, the government initially considered purchasing property at Santa Fe and El Paso streets⁵ This transaction appears to have either fallen through or appropriations failed because the next reference for selecting a site for the new federal building occurs in 1932. Over a several month period in late 1932 and early 1933, various sites throughout the city were examined.⁶ Asking prices for property ranged from \$75,000 to \$414,500.

The site selected was the block north of the existing courthouse and east of city hall bounded by Kansas Street on the west, San Antonio Avenue on the south, Campbell Street on the east, and Myrtle Street on the north. The asking price for the 1.0-acre site was \$230,000.⁷ That same year (1933), the team of architects, Percy McGhee and Guy L. Fraser, both of El Paso, and Thomas B. Lippencott of Philadelphia, was contracted by the Treasury Department to design the new building.

Appropriations in the amount of \$690,000 were secured for construction in 1934.⁸ Like many public building projects, the construction of the El Paso U.S. Courthouse provided employment opportunities during economic hardship and served as a positive indication of better times to come. As a federal undertaking, it further served as a powerful symbol of the permanency and security of the United States.

³ *El Paso Herald Post*, 22 September 1932.

⁴ National Register Nomination for the U.S. Post Office, El Paso, 1984.

⁵ *El Paso Times*, 13 February 1929.

⁶ *El Paso Herald Post*, 17 October 1932.

⁷ *El Paso Herald Post*, 3 January 1933.

⁸ *Austin American Statesman*, 3 June 1934.

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El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

In April of 1935, the government's contractor, Robert E. McKee Construction Company, began work at the site.⁹ By April of the following year, the new 5-story building was sufficiently complete for federal tenants to begin the arduous process of moving into the modern facility.¹⁰ Following the government's departure from the 1892 federal building, the Oregon and Mills street property was sold to S. H. Kress and Company and was subsequently demolished.¹¹

The completed federal building was touted by local newspapers as having all the modern conveniences of the day, such as intercommunicating telephones that were attached to the regular office telephones and allowed offices to communicate without the need for a switchboard.¹² The building also had three elevators and several large vaults that were able to withstand the shock of dynamite. The courtrooms were designed so that no outside noise could be heard, but acoustically treated so that someone speaking in a low voice could be heard throughout the room. Special offices for the U.S. Weather Bureau were put on the fifth floor. To the irony of the bureau, these offices had no outside windows and could not be reached by either passenger elevator.

Twenty-eight government agencies occupied the new federal building, which had space for some 300 offices. Housed on the first floor were the Collector of Customs; the Special Customs agents; the Secret Service, Narcotics, and Customs agencies; the Customs appraisers; the Navy Recruiting Station; the Alcohol Tax Unit; the Public Health Service; and the Organized Reserves. The second floor was occupied by the International Boundary Commission, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Reclamation Service, and plant quarantine. Several agencies/offices were located on the third floor, including the U.S. Commissioner, the U.S. District Attorney, the Referee in Bankruptcy, and the U.S. Immigration Service Division Headquarters. The U.S. Courtrooms, the U.S. Marshal's Office, and the U.S. Probation Office were housed on the fourth floor. Finally, the U.S. Customs Patrol, the U.S. Weather Bureau, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture occupied the fifth floor.

⁹ *El Paso Times*, 3 April 1935.

¹⁰ *El Paso Herald Post*, 1 April 1936.

¹¹ *El Paso Times*, 30 December 1936.

¹² *El Paso Herald Post*, 4 February 1936; *El Paso Times*, 28 April 1936.

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El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

Mural

The El Paso U.S. Courthouse was constructed at the end of the Depression years and benefited from other federal programs designed to renew national optimism and provide jobs for the unemployed. The development of murals inspired by regional history and culture that were to be displayed in public places was one such program. Murals were introduced in the United States in 1876 but were primarily utilized on the East Coast until the Works Progress Administration (WPA) began promoting them in the 1930s. The U.S. courthouse building was the first in El Paso to benefit from the program. The first federal New Deal arts program was the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP); the PWAP, however, was intended to provide only short-term relief to unemployed artists. It ended in June 1934 but was replaced in 1935 by the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) and the Federal Art Project (FAP). The latter program operated under the WPA and was the largest of the new government programs, providing art to state and municipal institutions and governments. Although funded by the WPA, TRAP operated under the Treasury Department and employed artists to decorate federal buildings built and administered by that department. Under this program, artists completed 89 murals, 65 sculptures, and 10,000 easel paintings.¹³

A year before TRAP, the Treasury Department had a nonrelief arts program known as the Section of Painting and Sculpture. This program later evolved into the Section of Fine Arts. The new section was the program primarily responsible for the murals and sculpture found in post offices throughout the country and was often known simply as "the Section." Its intent was to create art that reflected the themes and style of the American scene. Buildings selected for art were chosen by the Section staff, who conferred with the project's architect, and then submitted proposals to the procurement division. Since about one percent of construction monies would be used for funding a building's art, projects near or at construction budget were not candidates. Commissions were awarded through regional competitions in which artists submitted anonymous sketches.

The Section selected El Paso artist Tom Lea, Jr., from the competition held for artists in eight states. The mural, an oil on canvas entitled "Pass to the North," depicts characters typical of the early history of Texas. They include: U.S. Army men, a Franciscan priest, a rancho, a Spanish explorer, Apache Indians, early pioneer settlers, a rancher, a prospector, and a town sheriff.¹⁴ Lea sketched full-size studies in charcoal of models wearing costumes from sources like Hollywood and Texas rodeos. Inscribed above the door in the center of the mural are the words "O Pass to the North-Now the Old Giants Are Gone-We Little Men Live. Where Heroes Once Walked the Inviolable Earth."¹⁵

Lea began sketching the mural in 1937 and was awarded the contract in June of that same year. An exhibit of the work was displayed to the public in the El Paso library in November 1937. Actual work on the courthouse mural began with the installation of the canvas in December. Lea began painting in January and continued until July 1938, sometimes spending 12 to 16 hours a day working.

¹³ Christ, Mark. *Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art*. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1998.

¹⁴ Craver, Rebecca, and Adair Margo. *Tom Lea, An Oral History*. El Paso, Texas: Texas Western Press, The University of Texas at El Paso, 1995.

¹⁵ Unknown, "Lea Steps Down From Scaffold Courthouse Murals Finished," n.d.

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El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

Architectural Significance

The El Paso U.S. Courthouse was one of the many public buildings designed under the supervision of the Office of the Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department. For over 75 years (1850s-1939), this office was responsible for the design and construction of public buildings, including custom houses, post offices, and courthouses. The buildings created were not only designed to serve a federal function but to express the permanence and presence of the federal government in the cities and communities in which the buildings were located. Early in its history, the Office of the Supervising Architect employed a variety of architectural styles to convey this presence. At the turn of the century, however, classically inspired styles such as Classical Revival and Beaux-Arts began to predominate. These styles were thought to express democratic values and to reflect the government's assertion that "government buildings should be monumental and beautiful, and should represent the ideals of democracy and high standards of architectural sophistication in their communities."¹⁶

While these ideals continued to be applied for many years, the expense of constructing "monumental and beautiful" buildings became a concern. In 1913, federal construction policy measured the cost of constructing post offices against the city or community's postal receipts and the value of the real estate where the building was to be built. The evaluation of the cost of constructing the public buildings coincided with a new architectural movement that promoted modernism. Both had similar effects on federal architecture—a "starved" classicism. Starved classical designs still employed many of the classical elements that defined styles of architecture such as Classical Revival, but the expression and amount of ornamentation were restrained. Façades became more simplified. Classical elements were angular and faded into the building faces. In the 1920s, particularly after the Public Buildings Act of 1926, starved versions of Classical Revival and other classical styles of architecture were employed rather than their more elaborate predecessors. While architects in the Office of the Supervising Architect resisted moving in the direction of totally modern designs, the starved classical approach was adopted because it still incorporated the classical elements that were thought to be expressive of the federal presence.

The Moderne style of architecture became popular after 1930 and is characterized by elements inspired by the streamlined industrial designs of ships, airplanes, and automobiles. The horizontal emphasis and smooth surfaces of the style are meant to imply the seamless movement of an air stream over the design.¹⁷ The El Paso U.S. Courthouse exhibits the horizontal massing, smooth surfaces, and flat roof associated with the Moderne style.

The movement toward incorporating more restrained classical and modern styles of architecture in the design of public buildings is reflected in the El Paso U.S. Courthouse. The building's Moderne design with Classical influences is very practical. It displays architectural elements characteristic of the Moderne style combined with Classical elements such as fluted pilasters and stylized friezes. While not as elaborate as other classically styled government buildings, such as the El Paso U.S. Post Office, the design of the U.S. Courthouse is a good example of a public building constructed in the Moderne style with restrained Classical features. Its design is reflective of architectural movements adopted by the Treasury Department to convey the permanence and presence of the federal government at a local level.

¹⁶ Boland, Beth. *How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*. National Register Bulletin 13. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division, 1994.

¹⁷ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, New York: Knopf, 1997, p. 465.

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**El Paso U.S. Courthouse
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Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

The American Institute of Architects campaigned for the government to contract out the design of public buildings throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and the El Paso U.S. Courthouse is an example of one of the cases in which a private architect was hired to complete the designs. The U.S. courthouse building was designed by a team of architects: Percy McGhee and Guy L. Fraser of El Paso, Texas, and Thomas P. Lippencott of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, under the supervision of the Office of the Supervising Architect. Percy McGhee was a prominent El Paso architect who designed a number of public, university, and private buildings in the region, including the Doña Ana County Courthouse, the El Paso County Coliseum, and 10 major buildings at Texas Western (now the University of Texas at El Paso). Less is known about L. Guy Fraser who partnered with McGhee after 1929.

For more than 30 years, the El Paso U.S. Courthouse continued to house many of the federal agencies that moved into the building in 1936. However, as the needs of the U.S. District Court expanded and other tenant agencies grew, the 1936 building became cramped. In 1969, several agencies left the building, another courtroom was added, and many of the offices were refurbished. Over the last 20 years, agencies have continued to vacate the 1936 building. While this has occurred, the federal building continues to serve its primary historic function, that of a U.S courthouse. It also retains much of its original fabric, particularly in public interior spaces and on the exterior. As such, the building continues to exemplify the federal government at the local level and is reminiscent of Depression-era public building projects. Additionally, it remains an excellent example of a Moderne building with Classical Revival influences and is worthy of listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas

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Brand, Anna, Margaret Irby, and Erin Humphrey. *History of El Paso County*. El Paso Public Schools, 20 November 1950.

Craver, Rebecca, and Adair Margo. *Tom Lea, An Oral History*. El Paso, Texas: Texas Western Press, The University of Texas at El Paso, 1995.

Christ, Mark. *Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art*. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1998.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Knopf, 1997.

Waggoner, J. David, and Charles D. Sterkx. *Historic Preservation Plan: U.S. Courthouse (El Paso, Texas)*. Prepared for the General Services Administration, Fort Worth, Texas, 8 November 1993.

Newspaper Articles

El Paso Times, "The Condemnation Land for U.S. Building," 13 February 1929.

El Paso Herald Post, "City's First Pretentious Office Building to Pass," 22 September 1932.

El Paso Herald Post, "U.S. Offered 29 Sites for E.P. Building," 17 October 1932.

El Paso Herald Post, "U.S. Selects New Federal Building Sites," 3 January 1933.

El Paso World News, "Designers of Bldg. Named," 20 February 1933.

El Paso Herald Post, "U.S. Offered 29 Sites for E.P. Building," 17 October 1933.

Austin American Statesman, "Federal Courthouse for Austin Before Congress for Vote," 3 June 1934, p. 1.

El Paso Herald Post, "'Art' Lost in New Federal Plan," 4 August 1934.

El Paso Times, "Ready to Start Work on New Federal Building," 3 April 1935, p. 1.

El Paso Herald Post, "Boundary Commission May Occupy Old Federal Building," 21 January 1936, p. 6.

El Paso Times, "Glass in New Federal Building will Cost Government \$5000," 25 January 1936, p. 18.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 15

**El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas**

Newspaper Articles (continued)

El Paso Herald Post, "Federal Vault Will Withstand Dynamite Shock," 4 February 1936, p. 3.

El Paso Herald Post, "Start Moving U.S. Offices on April 5," 1 April 1936.

El Paso Herald Post, "'Lost Floor' in New Building; No Windows in U.S. Offices," 27 April 1936, p. 12.

El Paso Times, "New Device in U.S. Offices," 28 April 1936, p. 5.

El Paso Herald Post, "Marine Fossils in E.P. Walls," 29 April 1936, p. 12.

El Paso Herald Post, "El Paso's Weatherman 'in an Fog' Windowless Office Clouds Forecasts," 30 April 1936, p. 1.

El Paso Times, "Old U.S. Building to be Razed Soon," 30 December 1936.

El Paso Herald Post, "Courthouse Restoration: \$4 Million," 8 June 1992.

El Paso Times, "Courting History," 15 January 1995.

Unknown, "Lea Steps Down From Scaffold Courthouse Murals Finished," n.d.

10. Geographical Data

Acres of Property 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 / 1 - 3 /	/ 3 / 5 - 9 / 5 - 2 - 0 /	/ 3 - 5 / 1 - 4 / 5 - 0 - 0 /	3 / - - /	/ - - / - - - /	/ - - / - - / - - - /
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
2 / - - /	/ - - / - - - /	/ - - / - - / - - - /	4 / - - /	/ - - / - - - /	/ - - / - - / - - - /

See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.) See Continuation Sheet p. 16.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) See Continuation Sheet p. 16.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Victoria Green Clow, Cultural Resources Project Manager; Marsha Prior, Archivist/Historian; and Terri Gilbert, Consultant

organization Geo-Marine, Inc. date June 6, 2000

street & number 550 East Fifteenth St. telephone (972) 423-5480

city or town Plano state TX zip code 75074

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name General Services Administration, Greater Southwest Region

street & number Fritz G. Lanham Federal Building, 819 Taylor Street telephone (817) 978-4229

city or town Fort Worth state TX zip code 76102

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 16

**El Paso U.S. Courthouse
El Paso County, Texas**

Verbal Boundary Description

The legal property description for this property is: 44 Mills, all of block.

Boundary Justification

All property lines are as they existed at the time of the building's construction. The nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: El Paso US Courthouse

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, El Paso

DATE RECEIVED: 3/20/01 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/09/01
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 4/25/01 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/05/01
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 01000434

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 4-25-01 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



142067 0271 H-3

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
Photo 1



1363467 0271 N 2

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
PHOTO 2



1303467 0271 N-1

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
PHOTO 3



I-N 1220 290081

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
PHOTO 4

HENRY MORGENTHAU JR

SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

JAMES A FARLEY

POSTMASTER GENERAL

PERCY WEAR MCGHEE

GUY LEWIS FRAZER

THOMAS B LIPPINCOTT

ASSOCIATE ARCHITECTS

LOUIS A SIMON
SUPERVISING ARCHITECT

NEAL A MELICK
SUPERVISING ENGINEER

1935

127467 0271 N-2

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
PHOTO 5



LI03467 0271 N-2

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
PHOTO 6



1011467 0271 N-2

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
PHOTO 1



LD63467 0271 N-2

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
PHOTO 8



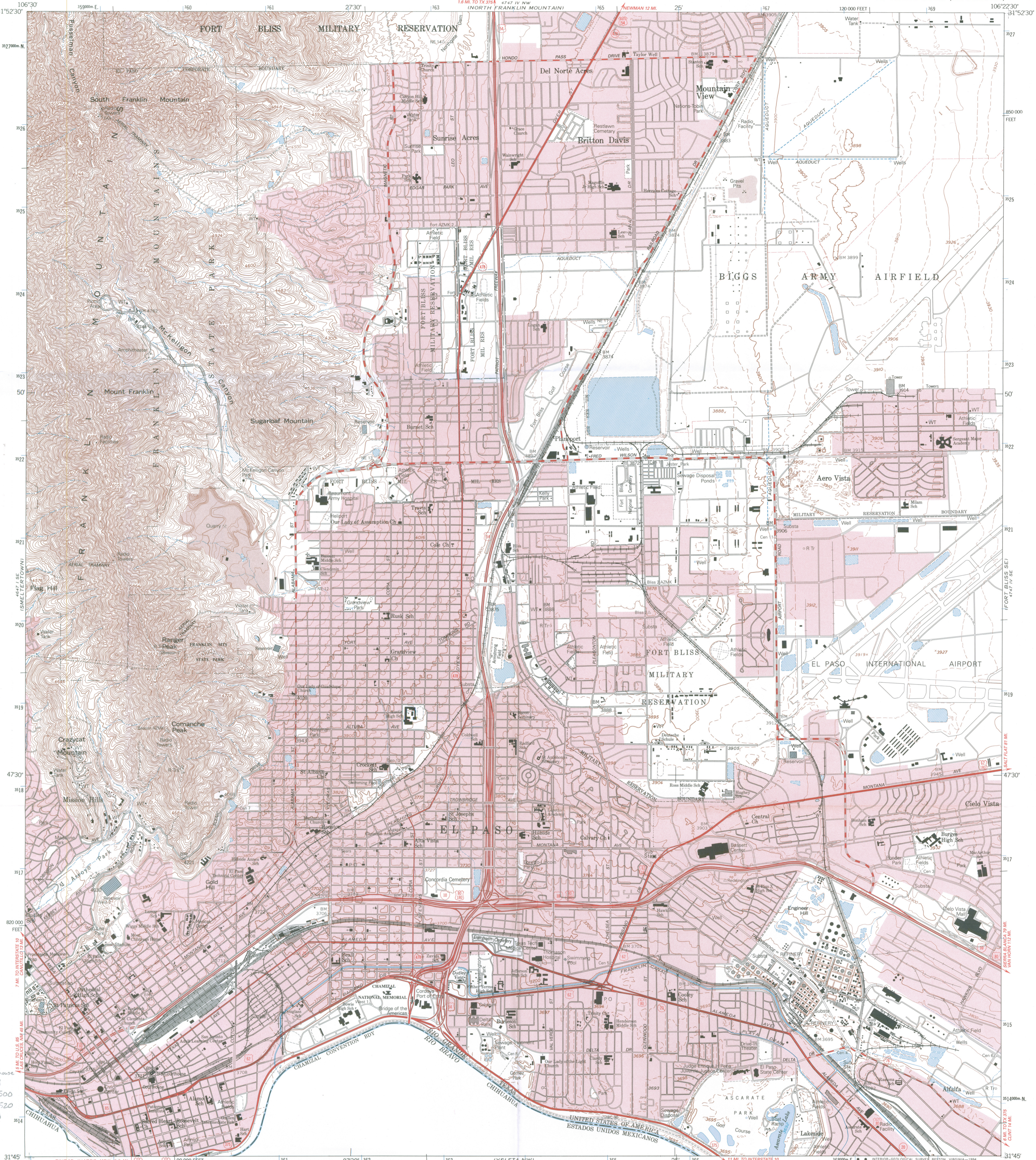
1130467 0271 R-1

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
PHOTO 9



L193467 0271 N-2

US COURTHOUSE
EL PASO, TX
PHOTO 10

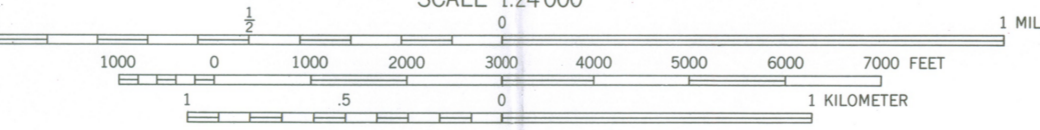
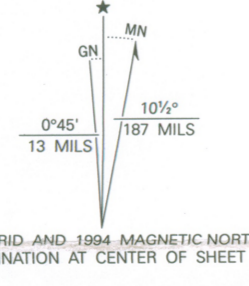


Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA

Compiled from aerial photographs taken 1954. Revised from aerial photographs taken 1991 and other sources. Field checked 1992. Map edited 1994.

North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 10,000-foot ticks: Texas Coordinate System, central zone (Lambert Conformal Conic).
Blue 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator ticks, zone 13
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software.

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown.
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is un-checked.



CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET
SUPPLEMENTARY CONTOUR INTERVAL 6 AND 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

COMPLIES WITH U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY STANDARDS FOR SPATIAL ACCURACY-CLASS 2
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route

EL PASO, TX
31106-G4-TF-024

MAPSCO, INC.
6353 CAMP BOWIE #101B
FORT WORTH, 76116 817/731-1888

1994
DMA 4747 IV SW-SERIES V882

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