

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 any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
other names/site number Laredo Federal Building, Laredo Custom House

2. Location

street & number 1300 Matamoros ☐ not for publication
city or town Laredo ☐ vicinity
state Texas code TX county Webb code 479 zip code 78040

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.)

Richard L. Rojas Camp
Signature of certifying official

4.3.01
Date

GENERAL SERVICE 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.)

Thomas L. ...
Signature of commenting or other official

3/20/2001
Date

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
State or Federal agency and bureau (Texas Historical Commission)

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:)

Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5/18/01

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	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	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:
GOVERNMENT	Post Office
GOVERNMENT	Courthouse
GOVERNMENT	Offices
GOVERNMENT	Custom House

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
GOVERNMENT	Post Office
GOVERNMENT	Courthouse
GOVERNMENT	Offices

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: Limestone

walls STONE: Limestone

roof Not visible

other

Narrative Description

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

See Continuation Sheets pp. 5-9.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 5

**Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas**

Narrative Description

Description

The 1907 Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House (also called the Laredo Federal Building) occupies the 1300 block of Matamoros Street in the heart of Laredo's central business district. Situated across from Jarvis Plaza Park, and two blocks from Laredo's City Hall and Webb County Courthouse, the building establishes a strong federal presence in downtown Laredo. The building also contributes to the historic character of downtown and is in close proximity to three historic districts: St. Peter's Historic District (two blocks east), the Old Mercado Historic District and the St. Augustine Historic District (two blocks southwest).

James Knox Taylor, Supervising Architect for the U.S. Department of the Treasury Construction, began designing the Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House in late 1905, and construction was completed in 1907. The Classical Revival building is similar in style, construction, and size to many other federal buildings built during the early 20th century across both Texas and the United States. A rear addition was appended in 1935, reflecting the same design as the 1907 portion of the building and doubling its original square footage. The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of the Supervising Architect, then under the direction of Louis Simon, supervised the construction of the 1935 addition. Although the subject of several renovation efforts, the interior retains several original historic features such as terrazzo floors, marble wainscoting, paneled doors, and dentil moldings. Despite additions and renovations, the Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House retains a high degree of integrity of setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Exterior

The Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House was commissioned in 1905 to answer the needs of a growing and prosperous community. The 3-story limestone Classical Revival building features a prominent Doric portico with full entablature, a flat roof, and a rectangular footprint. Each of the four elevations is arranged with two identical bays flanking a projecting central bay, although the primary façade with its Classically detailed portico exhibits the greatest amount of elaboration. A heavy horizontal stringcourse encircles the entire building, visually separating the ground floor from the upper two levels. This division is reinforced by a difference in exterior cladding above and below the stringcourse: the ground floor is clad with weighty, rusticated limestone blocks, while the upper two floors are clad in a more refined buff-colored ashlar limestone. The upper floor terminates in a simplified entablature; the unadorned architrave, frieze and cornice align with the same elements of the Doric portico. A parapet caps the entablature, and runs the full circumference of the building (pausing only for an interruption from the portico's pediment). The exterior is embellished with carved limestone, ornamental iron railings, and wooden windows with raised, decorative surrounds.

The primary façade faces south; it is bilaterally symmetrical and divided into three prominent bays. The center bay with its Classical portico projects well beyond the wall plain of the other two bays. The ground floor is characterized both by its visual weight and by its entrance arcade. The arcade consists of seven rounded arches, three in the central bay and two

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Narrative Description

in each flanking bay, each springing from a substantial piers (the spring is marked by a understated impost) and featuring a scroll-shaped keystone. The building name is applied in raised letters just under the stringcourse at the central bay. The entrance portals are located within the arcade, accessed by a set of steps that rise from sidewalk level to reach the arcade floor level. The building entrances are at the west end and in the central bay. The doors and windows within the arcade mirror the shape and placement of the outer archways: the windows are 12-pane casements with divided-light arched transoms above.

The two-story portico extends from the stringcourse upward, with the pediment reaching beyond the building's primary horizontal roofline. Four colossal Doric columns support a full entablature and pediment, both of which are laden with sculpture. The frieze displays typical triglyph and metope arrangement; the metope are simply detailed with round paterae in bas-relief. The pediment is framed with a heavy raking cornice and adjoining horizontal cornice (which aligns with the primary cornice of the remainder of the building). The cornice soffit is detailed with a series of mutules and the tympanum is decorated with a medallion and plume motif.

The recessed façade within the projecting portico is divided into three bays, each marked by pilasters whose placement reflects the position of the outer Doric columns. Along this inner façade at the level of the piano nobile are five sets of eight-pane French doors; the three opening to the south have rounded, divided-light transoms above, decorative stone door surrounds, and keystones. The two remaining sets of French doors, one opening to the east and one to the west, are of the same general configuration but have segmental-arched divided-light transoms and lack the elaborate ornament of the south-facing portals. Centered above the south-facing doors within the portico are three sets of triple casement windows (twelve lights to each segment). Smaller six-over-six double-hung windows with decorative surrounds are located above the east- and west-facing portico doors. The portico ceiling is divided into three bays delimited by ribs that run between a portico column and the corresponding inner pilaster. Within each ceiling bay is a recessed panel decorated with dentil moldings and rosettes.

The east and west bays of the south façade are symmetrically situated on either side of the portico. Each of these two bays displays the same fenestration pattern: the second story exterior is pierced by two sets of eight-pane, casement windows with segmental-arched divided-light transoms, decorative iron railings, decorative stone surrounds, and exaggerated keystones (these keystones are flat in profile rather than scroll-shaped, as are the keystones on the ground floor). Directly above, on the third floor, are six-over-six, double-hung windows with decorative surrounds and keystones. The corners of the façade, from the stringcourse to the entablature, are enriched by rusticated limestone quoins (similar to the limestone blocks that clad the ground floor of the building).

The east elevation has a series of evenly spaced window openings on each story. The ground floor is clad in horizontally scored, rusticated limestone. Eleven segmental-arched, twelve-over-twelve, double-hung wooden windows are set in shallow architraves crowned with scored voussoirs. Above the stringcourse at the second level are twelve pairs of eight-

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Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas

Narrative Description

by-eight casement windows with four-by-four segmental-arched transoms set in shallow architraves with raised surrounds, keystones, and ornamental iron balconet railings. The third story exhibits smaller, six-over-six, double-hung windows with similar surrounds and keystones.

The north (rear) elevation has the same three-bay appearance as the south façade with quoins on each corner and at the slight projection of the center bay. Seven windows penetrate the walls at each floor level, with the exception of the ground floor, where there are only six; the seventh is omitted to accommodate an entrance to storage space along the west side of the building. The same window configuration and detailing appears on the north as on the east and west elevations, with the exception of the third-story windows in the central bay. These paired rectangular windows are recessed (the pair is divided by a heavy stone mullion), six-over-six double-hung windows with six-pane transoms. Unlike other windows in this building, these lack decorative surrounds and any other sort of ornamentation.

The west façade is identical to the east façade, with the exceptions of the service vehicle entry and loading docks that have been added to the northwest corner. A two-bay concrete loading dock with a flat roof is adjacent to a single-car storage space constructed of similar scored limestone to match that of the ground floor level.

The site area immediately surrounding the building is limited, with green space only on the east side. A parking lot is located on the west side of the site; an iron fence runs from the northeast corner along the rear of the building and around to the west side to enclose the west parking lot and loading area.

Interior

Within the rectangular footprint of the 3-story Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House, rooms are arranged on both sides of an interior corridor around interior offices. The original layout of the building placed the post office on the ground floor, the custom service on the second level, and the federal courtroom on the third.¹ Intact historic spaces include the main postal lobby, second and third floor courtrooms, and, to an extent, tenant offices.

The ground floor level postal lobby, which retains much of its historic material and detail, is accessed primarily through the main entry doors on the south elevation. A corridor extends to both sides of the main doors, to the postal boxes lining the center wall, and around to the west, providing a circulation sequence. The postal lobby encompasses the south corridor and portions of the east and west corridors. Postal boxes, with decorative iron latticework above, occupy walls on the south and west corridors, and postal sales windows (with the same latticework design) are located along the east corridor. The remaining walls are a combination of marble wainscoting and plaster. The floor is of patterned terrazzo with marble baseboards. A coffered ceiling with dentil moldings further defines the lobby area. Although modern equipment and contemporary fluorescent lighting have been added, original spaces have been largely observed.

¹ "Progress of Work at Federal Building." *Laredo Daily Times*, 29 August 1906, 1.

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**Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas**

Narrative Description

Behind the postal area are tenant offices that have been modified with carpeting and acoustical tile ceilings. Original wood-paneled doors, some with frosted glass inserts, remain. To the west of the main entrance are double doors that provide access to the courtrooms on the second and third floors. Security equipment has been added, as well as a staircase along the west wall, in this small lobby space. Original decorative moldings, as well as the terrazzo floors and the marble wainscoting, remain.

The second and third stories have similar room placements; two identical courtrooms are situated on the west side of the building. It is difficult to discern from physical inspection and available information whether or not the two courtrooms date to the construction of the building. It is clear, however, that both courtrooms have been enlarged and modernized. Acoustical tile ceilings, as well as carpeting, new judges' benches, jury boxes, and audience seating, have been added. A large wooden panel is centered behind each judge's bench, and a single-panel wooden door with original hardware is centered on the back wall in the third-floor courtroom. Wood-paneled wainscoting and crown molding are the only other decorative elements.

Although the majority of the interior corridors retain the original terrazzo floors, the exception is the corridor sections at the north end of the building where carpet has been added. The elevator lobbies of each floor have the original decorative moldings along the corners of the walls. Carpet and acoustical tile ceilings have been added to tenant offices in the center of the building and along the exterior walls. Original wood-paneled doors and hardware remain throughout the first and second floors.

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Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas

Narrative Description

Alterations

The Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House has served continuously as a federal building since its construction. Over the years, changes in tenant use have necessitated the renovation of interior spaces and have resulted in the modification of several of the major historic areas. Even though these modifications have occurred, they have not impacted the building's ability to convey its historic significance as a federal building or to express aspects of its original design and use. Thus, the Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House retains an overall high degree of integrity.

Modifications have been primarily restricted to the interior and have typically entailed modernization efforts such as the addition of carpeting, fluorescent light fixtures, and acoustical tile dropped ceilings. These changes have taken place in the courtrooms, the tenant offices, and some of the corridor spaces. Modern light fixtures have been added in the postal lobby area. In the western section of the main lobby, renovations have resulted in a loss of space to allow for security equipment and a stairwell. The courtrooms, if original, may have been expanded as part of the 1935 addition.² The judges' benches, jury boxes, and audience seating appear to be relatively recent additions.

The exterior of the building is largely unaltered, with the exception of the 1935 addition. This addition extended the 1907 building (which was originally four bays deep) an additional seven bays to the north and is almost indistinguishable from the original 1907 building. A loading dock and a single-car garage have been added to the rear of the west elevation. A fence with electric gates has been installed along the building's perimeter on the north (rear) and west sides, enclosing the parking lot. A handicapped access ramp was added to the main entrance on the building's south façade.

² Oral accounts suggest that the U.S. district court occupied the second floor and the U.S. custom service was housed on the first floor. If this is correct, it is possible that the first floor courtroom was added, possibly in 1935, after the building's construction. If both courtrooms are original, it appears that they were renovated and expanded as part of the 1935 effort.

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

Period of Significance

1907-1951

Significant Dates

1907

1935

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

1907:

Taylor, James Knox—Supervising Architect, U.S. Treasury Dept.
Jeffries, Clarence—Contractor

1935 Alterations:

Simon, Louis A.—Supervising Architect, U.S. Treasury Dept.
R. F. Farnsworth & Company, Inc.—Contractor

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) See Continuation Sheets pp. 10-15.

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. 16.

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
Webb County Public Library, Laredo, TX
Webb County Heritage Foundation, Laredo, TX

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Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary

The Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places for significance at the local level under Criterion A for its association with early twentieth-century federal construction programs, as well as with governmental function and presence in the area. It is also eligible under Criterion C as an example of Classical Revival architecture, a style that was employed in the design of a number of federal buildings during the early 1900s. The period of significance is from 1907, the year the building was completed, to 1951 to correspond to the National Register's fifty-year cut-off limit.

Historical Significance

Background

Laredo was founded on the north bank of the Rio Grande on May 15, 1755, by Captain Tomás Sánchez, who was granted permission by the Spanish colonial government to settle fifteen leagues of land near an Indian ford. A 1757 Spanish inspection report revealed that the settlement had grown from the original three families to eleven families. The families depended on ranching—owning sheep, goats, cattle, mules, and horses—as their subsistence economy.³

When Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, Laredo became a part of Mexico. A prosperous trading economy in cattle hides and wood developed to the south in exchange for food and other household necessities. Trade relations, however, were disrupted when raids by the Comanche and Apache destroyed many ranches. Discontent with the Mexican centralist government's rule by dictatorship and its complacency in defending the northern frontier from the Indian attacks led many Laredoans to support the constitutional convention that created the Republic of the Rio Grande on January 7, 1840. Laredo became the capital of the new republic, but, after several skirmishes with the Mexican army, the short-lived republic ended after only 283 days. Subsequently, Laredo citizens remained loyal to Mexico, although the Republic of Texas, which had won independence from Mexico in 1836, tried to claim them.⁴

In 1845, the United States annexed Texas, which led to the declaration of war against Mexico. The Rio Grande was declared the boundary between the two countries under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and Laredo officially

³ Webb County Heritage Foundation, Inc. *Laredo Legacies: A Tribute to Our Past and A Legacy for Our Future*. 1997.

⁴ Webb County Heritage Foundation, Inc. *Laredo Legacies: A Tribute to Our Past and A Legacy for Our Future*. 1997.

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became a part of Texas. Mexicans wishing to retain their citizenship moved across the river and established Nuevo Laredo in 1848. Webb County, named for James Webb, the Secretary of the Treasury for the Republic of Texas, was organized that same year and Laredo became the county seat.⁵

Mail service to Laredo was established the following year.⁶ Augustin Soto was appointed the first postmaster, but the location of the first post office has yet to be determined. Soto served as postmaster until June 16, 1856, when Edward Jerden took over the position. Throughout the first 91 years of postal service in Laredo, 27 postmasters served the city. Among those postmasters, the only woman to hold the position was Mrs. Jennie R. Goodman.

The coming of the railroad in 1881 ushered in the modern era and ensured an economic boom for Laredo. Significant coal deposits long known to exist upriver along the Rio Grande assured a fuel supply for the new railroads. Construction began on the railroad from Monterrey to Nuevo Laredo in 1881, followed by the arrival of the Texas Mexican Railroad from Corpus Christi, Jay Gould's International and Great Northern from San Antonio, the Rio Grande and Pecos, and the Mexican National. The convergence of these rail lines in Laredo positioned the town as the gateway to Mexico. Population tripled between 1880 and 1890 as European and United States emigrants moved to Laredo in search of business and employment opportunities. Laredo flourished during the latter part of the 1880s and through the turn of the century, becoming a major trade thoroughfare between the United States and Mexico. During that period, Laredo's progress and growth were reflected in the construction of the Laredo City Hall and Market (built 1883-1884), the Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House (built 1905-1907), and the Webb County Courthouse (built 1909). Oil and gas finds in the early 1900s, as well as the establishment of a military presence—Laredo Army Air Field during World War II, reactivated as Laredo Air Force Base from 1952 until permanent closure in 1973—and the North American Free Trade Agreement have contributed to the population growth (reaching nearly 130,000 in the early 1990s) and the continued importance of Laredo as an economic center along the U.S.-Mexico international border.

Construction

The prosperity that came to Laredo stimulated a demand for government services.⁷ One response to that demand was construction of a new courthouse and post office. Preparations for building the Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House began in 1905, but bids were too high and the construction commencement date was uncertain. Clarence Jeffries was finally selected as the government's contractor, and construction began by the end of 1905, at a cost of \$650,000. The plans for the new building were prepared by the Office of the Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department, under the supervision of James Knox Taylor. Taylor, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department

⁵ Webb County Heritage Foundation, Inc. *Laredo Legacies: A Tribute to Our Past and A Legacy for Our Future*. 1997.

⁶ "Laredo Postoffice 91 Years Old." *Laredo Daily Times*, 1 February 1940.

⁷ National Register Nomination, Webb County Courthouse.

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Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas

Narrative Statement of Significance

between 1897 and 1912, was responsible for the design of at least 33 federal buildings across the United States and at least 3 in Texas, including the O.C. Fisher Federal Building and Courthouse in San Angelo, Texas and the U. S. Custom House in Houston. He was also head of MIT School of Architecture from 1912-1914. During his tenure with the Treasury, Taylor's architectural designs promoted the concept that government buildings should be monumental, represent the ideals of democracy, and set a standard for architectural sophistication in their communities. Taylor's buildings, as a rule, are Neo-Classical or Georgian Revival, often integrating classical details into newer "modern" construction techniques.

The Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House was an immediate source of pride for the town, and close attention was paid to the details of its construction. Plans unveiled in the *Laredo Daily Times* revealed that the building was to be two levels above a ground floor and a sub-basement, with an eight-foot wall surrounding the building. The idea of the wall was not well accepted by the citizens, and the Business Men's Club immediately protested. Plans were soon changed to reflect a building placed in the center of the block with landscaped gardens on both sides.

Construction was well under way by March 1906, and the *Laredo Daily Times* wrote about the modern materials and technologies being used in the building:

The inside partition walls will be laid in hollow fire proof brick which are much lighter than the ordinary brick, and walls made from this style of brick have interior ventilation and never get damp or moist. At first the big rocks from the Round Rock quarry were sawed to proper sizes for the stone cutters by hand but as the work progressed and the number of stones cutters increased, machinery driven by a large steam engine was erected to do this work and now the clang of the sharp toothless saws as they wear their way through these big blocks of stone can be heard day and night. For several weeks after work commenced in placing these big stones in the walls, their immense weight was handled by human hands. But this was only temporary, for in a short time, the grounds at the building were covered with huge derricks, the largest run by steam and now these dressed stones and heavy steel girder beams and sleepers for the flooring and inside walls are picked up and placed in position almost with the same ease that a child would handle his toys.⁸

The building was completed in 1907 and occupied that same year by the post office, the customs officials, and the federal district court. The new facility was touted locally as bringing much-needed relief to postal employees and officials who found the previous post office ill-lighted, hot, and humid. It was noted as "the pride and ornament of the city."⁹

In 1935, a substantial effort was undertaken to expand the building. The floor space of the new first floor was to be 15,400 square feet. As with the original portion of the structure, plans were prepared by the Office of the Supervising

⁸ "Work on Fine Federal Building." *Laredo Daily Times*, 24 March 1906, 1.

⁹ Rivera, Patricia. The U.S. Post Office and Court House. 4 December 1990.

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Architect for the Treasury Department, then under the direction of Louis Simon. These efforts resulted in the extension of the northern portion of the building using materials similar to those used in the original structure. The contracting company responsible for the 1935 construction effort was R. F. Farnsworth and Co., Inc.¹⁰

The business conducted by the expanded post office was brisk. In 1939, stamp sales amounted to \$83,841.36, and U.S. savings bonds sales totaled \$61,086.75. Demonstrating Laredo's importance as a border town, the post office certified 56,703 money orders to Mexico for \$442,087.86.¹¹

From 1935 until 1962, the three major federal tenants continued to occupy the building. In 1962 the customs department vacated the building for another location. The post office and the U.S. district courts, with related government agencies, continue to be housed in the 1907 structure, thus retaining the historic usage of the building.

Architectural Significance

The Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House was one of the many public buildings designed under the supervision of the Office of the Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department. For more than 75 years (1850s-1939), this office was responsible for the design and construction of most federal 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, 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."¹²

As with all federal buildings constructed during the early 20th century, the Department of the Treasury in Washington, D.C. was responsible for the original design of the Laredo federal building and of the 1935 addition. In 1905, when the original design was completed, James Knox Taylor was Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department's Office of the Supervising Architect. Sometime after this, Oscar Wenderoth became Supervising Architect. In 1935, when the Laredo addition was designed and constructed, Louis A. Simon was Supervising Architect. Interestingly, Simon, who joined the

¹⁰ Rivera, Patricia. The U.S. Post Office and Court House. 4 December 1990.

¹¹ "Laredo Postoffice 91 Years Old." *Laredo Daily Times*, 1 February 1940.

¹² 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.

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Webb County, Texas

Narrative Statement of Significance

Supervising Architect's office in 1896, was superintendent of the architectural section from 1905 to 1933. From 1915 to 1933, the Supervising Architect's office was presided over by "Judge" James Wetmore. Because Wetmore was a lawyer, he was designated only as the Acting Supervising Architect. As such, Simon was actually responsible for determining the office's architectural directions during this period. Simon then served as Supervising Architect from 1933 to 1939.¹³

From 1893 until 1914 under the provisions of the Tarsney Act, federal buildings could be designed within the Treasury Department or submitted for competitive bids among private architects. Prior to 1902, when the first federal "Public Buildings Omnibus Act" was passed, federal buildings were funded on an informal basis. Appropriations bills rarely funded more than three buildings at one time, and land acquisition and construction began only after Congressional authorization.

The passage of the 1902 act authorized the construction of 150 new buildings. Since the act provided for a wide variety of projects, it saved a considerable amount of time in Congress. The omnibus bills, however, also created the opportunity for abuse when Congressmen, eager to please their constituents, distributed "federal presents." Political influence, rather than actual operational needs, often dictated the size, ornamentation, and location of the buildings. Often viewed as federal "presents," the buildings confirmed to town residents the importance of their community and the power of their Congressional delegation.¹⁴ Use of the legislation increased the number of buildings controlled by the Treasury Department, and many of the new buildings were constructed in smaller cities and developing towns receiving their first federal building. Although the federal buildings were often viewed as "pork" projects, they did serve the communities in which they were placed. In some communities, the buildings were also genuinely needed and deserved. In Laredo, the post office was one of the six international money order offices in the United States.

The Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House is an excellent example of federally-designed Classical Revival architecture. In addition to the two-story portico dominating the façade, other Classical Revival features include the Doric columns and pilasters as well as the rusticated appearance of the ground floor and symmetrical fenestration pattern. Furthermore, the overall building alludes to a classical order column: the rusticated basement floor serves as the base, the

¹³ Craig, Lois A. *The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics and National Design*. 1984.

¹⁴ Kolva, H. J. *Historic Post Offices in New Mexico 1900-1941*. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1988.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 15

**Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas**

Narrative Statement of Significance

first and second floors as the shaft, and the cornice as the capital. The double limestone belt course at the first floor separates the base from the shaft, and the single limestone belt course at the second floor separates the shaft from the capital.¹⁵

For almost 100 years the Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, Custom House has continued to house a number of important federal agencies including the U.S. postal service and the U.S. district court. As such, the building continues to exemplify the federal government at the local level and remains an excellent example of Classical Revival architecture.

¹⁵ Savage, Cynthia. *McAlester Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse*. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, May 1999.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 16

Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas

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Newspapers:

"Bids for Laredo Building." *Laredo Daily Times*, 23 March 1905, 1.

"Federal Building Work." *Laredo Daily Times*, 12 January 1906, 1.

"Work on Fine Federal Building." *Laredo Daily Times*, 24 March 1906, 1.

"Progress of Work at Federal Building." *Laredo Daily Times*, 29 August 1906, 1.

"Laredo Postoffice 91 Years Old." *Laredo Daily Times*, 1 February 1940.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1. / 1 4 / / 4 4 9 9 4 0 / / 3 0 4 2 4 4 0 /

Zone Easting Northing

2. / - - / / - - - - - / / - - - - - - - - /

3. / - - / / - - - - - / / - - - - - - - - /

Zone Easting Northing

4. / - - / / - - - - - / / - - - - - - - - /

☐ See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.) See Continuation Sheet p. 17.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) See Continuation Sheet p. 17.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Victoria Green Clow, Cultural Resources Project Manager; Terri Gilbert, Consultant

organization Geo-Marine, Inc.

date November 15, 2000

street & number 550 East Fifteenth Street

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 17

**Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas**

Verbal Boundary Description

The legal property description for this property is Block 449, Lot 3042-169.

Boundary Justification

All property lines are as they existed at the time of the building's construction.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 11 Page 18

**Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas**

Photographs

Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photos by Terri Gilbert, Geo-Marine, Inc., Plano, Texas
October 2000
Negatives on file

South (front) elevation
Photo 1 of 11

East (side) elevation, looking north
Photo 2 of 11

East (side) elevation, looking west
Photo 3 of 11

East (side) elevation, looking west
Photo 4 of 11

North (rear) elevation, looking south
Photo 5 of 11

Column detail, south elevation, looking southwest
Photo 6 of 11

Interior stair, west wall, first floor
Photo 7 of 11

Postal lobby, ground floor, west corridor
Photo 8 of 11

Postal lobby, ground floor, east corridor
Photo 9 of 11

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 11 Page 19

**Laredo U.S. Post Office, Court House, and Custom House
Webb County, Texas**

Photographs

Postal lobby, ground floor, window and ceiling, south wall
Photo 10 of 11

Courtroom, second floor
Photo 11 of 11

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Laredo US Post Office, Court House and Custom House
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Webb

DATE RECEIVED: 4/09/01 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/26/01
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 5/12/01 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/25/01
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 01000516

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 5/18/01 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



NH 1220 690611

U.S. Post Office - Courthouse -
Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 1



1-N 1280 0906211

U.S. Post Office - Courthouse
- Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 2



1072665 0271 N N

U.S. Post Office—Court house
—Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 3



100-0665 0271 N.N

U.S. Post Office—Court House
- Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 4



1020665 0273 N H

U.S. Post Office - Courthouse -
Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 5



14-1200-00067

U.S. Post Office-Courthouse
-Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 6



5-N 12/0 0700761

U.S. Post Office - Courthouse -
Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 7



44 1240 999521

U.S. Post Office—Court House—
Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 8



LOTTERY
AND
SOLICITATION
IN THIS BUILDING
IS PROHIBITED

FIRST CLASS
PINEAPPLE

111 1/2 1/2 1/2 1/2

U.S. Post Office - Courthouse
- Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 9



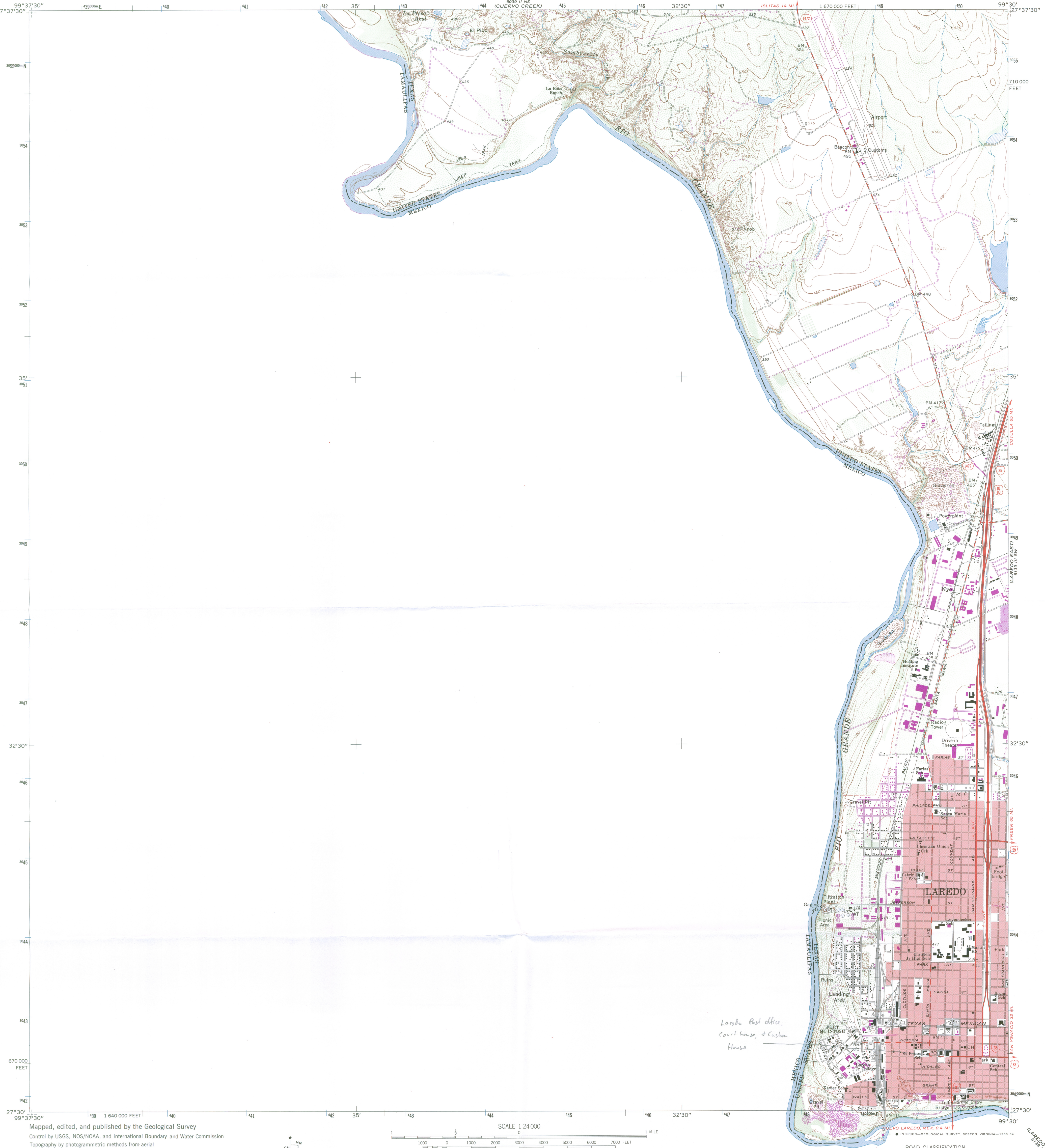
126366 0271 14-2

U.S. Post Office—Court House—
- Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 10



1320665 0271 R-J

U.S. Post Office - Courthouse -
Custom House
Laredo, Texas
Photo 11



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and International Boundary and Water Commission
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1964. Field checked 1965
Polyconic projection. 10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system, south zone 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 14, shown in blue. 1927 North American Datum To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983 move the projection lines 27 meters south and 32 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
International boundary line not completely defined at date of map, due to changes in river
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map

Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs taken 1975 and other source data
This information not field checked. Map edited 1980
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

SCALE 1:24,000
1 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET
1 0 5 10 KILOMETER
CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
DOTTED LINES REPRESENT 5-FOOT CONTOURS
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
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



2799-311

MAPSCO, INC.
6353 CAMP BOWIE #101B
FORT WORTH, 76116 817/731-1666

LAREDO WEST, TEX.
N2730—W9930/7.5

1965
PHOTOREVISED 1980
DMA 6039 II SE—SERIES V882



GSA Public Buildings Service

April 5, 2000

Ms. Carol Shull
Keeper, National Register of Historic Places
National Register History and Education Division
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20012-7127

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed for your approval is a National Register Nomination for the United States Post Office, Court House and Custom House located at 1300 Matamoros, Laredo, TX. This property is under the authority of the U.S. General Services Administration.

The following documents are enclosed:

- Original National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
- U.S.G.S. Map, and
- One set of original labeled black and white photographs.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the nominations, please contact Douglas Pulak on my staff at (202) 501-0190.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rolando Rivas-Camp". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being more prominent.

Rolando Rivas-Camp, AIA
Director,
Center for Historic Buildings

Enclosures