

United States Post Office
Carson Street, between Spear
and Telegraph Streets
Carson City
Nevada

HABS NO. NEV-13-8

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. NEV-13-8

UNITED STATES POST OFFICE (LATER NEVADA STATE LIBRARY)

Location: In block bounded by Carson, Spear, Plaza and Telegraph Streets (building faces west on Carson), Carson City, Nevada

Present Owner: State of Nevada

Present Occupant: vacant

Present Use: The building is currently (1972) being remodelled to house the Nevada State Library.

Statement of Significance: The former United States Post Office is an imposing late nineteenth century building on an entire block in the heart of the city. It is the first Federal Building in the State of Nevada, and has interesting and well-executed brick details.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The contract for the building was awarded May 25, 1888; the cornerstone laid on September 29 of that year; and the structure completed and occupied on May 19, 1891.
2. Architect: The architect was M.E. Bell, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department. Several of the working drawings of interior details bear the stamp of Will Frost, who succeeded Bell as Supervising Architect of the Treasury. Drawings for the heating and ventilating apparatus (drawings dated June, 1889) bear the stamp of James Windrum, who became Supervising Architect of the Treasury in March of that year.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The old United States Post Office is built on Block 42 of Musser's Division of Carson City. (J.J. Musser was one of the four original purchasers in 1858 of the Eagle Ranch upon which Carson City was platted). Prior to the erection of the Post Office, The Carson City Opera House was on the NW corner of this block. The following references to the title of Block 42 are found in the Ormsby County, Nevada, Deed Books.

- 1876 Deed, March 2, 1876, recorded in Book 16, page 594. George Gilson sold to Jacob Klein his half interest in Block 42 (except for the NW portion) for \$5,000.
- 1877 Deed, December 19, 1877, recorded in Book 18, page 556. The "Carson Opera House Association" paid \$2,000 to George Gillson and Jacob Klein for the NW portion (49 feet on Carson Street and 120 ft. on Spear Street) of the block.
- 1886 Deed, February 27, 1886, recorded in Book 24, page 201. Jacob Klein sold to H.M. Yerington for \$7,500 the whole of block 42 except for the NW portion (49 feet on Carson Street and 120 on Spear Street) which had been conveyed by Gilson and Spear to the Carson Opera House Association on December 19, 1877.
- 1886 Deed, February 27, 1886, recorded in Book 24, page 203. The Carson Opera House Association sold to H.M. Yerington the portion excepted in the foregoing deed. Price paid was \$5,000.
- 1886 Deed, March 1, 1886, recorded in Book 24, pages 205, 206. H.M. Yerington sold all of block 42 of Musser's subdivision bounded by Spear, Plaza, Telegraph, and Carson Streets to the United States. The United States had the option of paying \$9,500 to him and giving The Carson Opera House Association legal title to the block of land bordered by King, Minnesota, Musser and Division Streets (block 11 in Musser's subdivision), or paying the \$9,500 to him and \$1,500 to the Carson Opera House Association. The United States chose the latter course, paying a total of \$11,000. The Carson Opera House Association retained the right to remove any buildings on the property "with all convenient speed." Soon thereafter, the Opera House building was moved across Spear Street.
- 1971 Deed, May 17, 1971 recorded in Official Records Book 110, pages 69-80. The United States of America deeded all of block 42 of Musser's subdivision to the State of Nevada, acting through the Nevada State Planning Board. The quit-claim deed states that the property has on it a "multi-story brick building, containing approximately 20,616 sq. ft., formerly a United States Post Office and Courthouse."

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4. Original plans, construction etc.: The Nevada State Planning Board, which is supervising the current renovation, has on file at its office in Room 306 of the new Legislative Building in Carson City, blueprints of the original working drawings, as well as later drawings concerned with alterations or additions. The drawings are as follows: Nos. 1-38 (not inclusive) are signed by Bell, 50-56 by Frost, and 66-76 by Windrum.

1. Plot plan for U.S.C.H., P.O., Etc., Carson City, Nevada, with details of iron fence and gates.
2. Concrete Plan
3. Basement Plan
4. First Floor Plan
5. Second Floor Plan
6. Third Story
7. Section A.A. through the building from N to S
8. Front Elevation
9. North Elevation
10. South elevation, dated 5/31/87 and 6/28/87
12. Attic plan, dated 5/9/87
13. Roof Plan
14. Brick details
17. Piling and Concrete Sections
18. Concrete plan, dated 6/20/1887
20. Box girder and cast iron columns
21. First floor beam plan
22. Second floor girders
23. Column heads and stands
24. Box girders in first story
25. First floor framing plan
26. Second Floor framing plan
27. Third floor framing plan
28. Attic floor framing plan
29. Attic framing plan
33. Plan at first floor line
- 34-35. Concrete plans and sections
36. Basement plan
37. Trusses
38. Arches

The following drawings are signed by Will A. Frost, Supervising Architect of the Treasury:

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50. Corbelling details
51. Joiner work details
52. Details of Post Office screen
53. Details of plaster work
54. 3/4" and full scale details of staircase
55. Details of joiner work for doors
56. Plumbing details

The following drawings are signed by James Windrum, Supervising Architect:

66. Heating and ventilating apparatus, basement
67. Heating and ventilating apparatus, First floor dated 6/12/89
68. Heating and ventilating apparatus, second floor, dated 6/11/89
69. Heating and ventilating apparatus, Third floor, dated 6/11/89
70. Heating and ventilating apparatus, attic dated 6/11/89
71. Heating and ventilating apparatus details

The following drawings are unsigned, though they do have the stamped mark: Supervising Architect, Treasury Department

73. Diagrams of space for clock machinery
75. Heating and ventilating alterations (a note on these plans states that these alterations were "made necessary because of variations in the construction of the building from the working drawings".)
76. Bracing, dated July 25, 1890

The following drawings were done by the Public Works Branch of the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department:

83. New elevator and stairs, dated 9/10/35
84. Details of new elevator and stairs, dated 9/10/35
85. Framing plan for new elevator and stairs, dated 9/14/35
86. Details for temporary wood stairs, dated 11/26/35

There are also two sheets of drawings for new plumbing facilities installed in 1908. These are dated 5/22/08 and signed by James Knox Taylor as Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department.

There are also three recent, though undated, drawings by the firm of Vhay and Ferrari of Reno showing alterations currently being made for converting the building to the library. These are a basement plan, third floor plan, and attic.

The several safe in the building were made by the National Safe and Lock Company. The clock in the tower, a seven-day type, was made by the J. Borborka Co. of Iowa City, Iowa. The ornamental iron grilles in the bases of the columns also serve as heating vents. Original construction cost of the building was \$134,605.53.

5. Alterations and additions:

1. New lavatories were installed in 1908. In 1935, an elevator, the first in Carson City, was installed in the well of the main stair. The first of the notes on the drawings for the elevator (sheet 83) directed the contractor to "remove present wood stairs." The original wood stair, with elaborate newels and balusters, was replaced by a metal one. A loading dock was installed on the rear of the building at the southeast corner in more recent times.
2. The exterior of the building has remained much as it was when built. The interior underwent minor modifications but remained relatively intact until the present time. The interior is currently being extensively remodelled to serve as the new home of the Nevada State Library. Ceilings in many instances are being lowered and suspended but the old ceilings are cornices will remain in place above them.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

On January 5, 1885, the United States Senate passed a bill appropriating \$100,000 for a public building in Carson City. Nevada Senators Stewart and Nye were largely responsible for the appropriation, and on page 278 of his Reminiscences, Stewart notes that he "prevented the conversion of the Mint into a public building and secured mandatory legislation with an appropriation for the construction of the present Government Building at the capital." Several citizens of Carson City were

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then appointed as a commission to select an appropriate site for the building. A protracted search ensued, during which time the not-too-distant city of Reno offered a block appraised at \$30,000 if the building would be located there. Some three years after the original appropriation, work was begun.

Upon completion, the building was occupied by the Post Office, land office, United States Courts, and the Weather Bureau. In all, sixteen rooms were assigned to various agencies. As might be expected, the occupant most involved with affairs of a historic nature was the United States Court. Perhaps the most noted events the building witnessed were the trials relating to shortages in the refinery at the United States Mint: "U.S. vs. Heney, James," December 1895, "U.S. vs. Jones, John T.," May 1896, and "U.S. vs. Piper, Henry," March, 1896. The details of the trials are dealt with in the book Mint Mark "CC" (see bibliography). Suffice it to say here that the trials were conducted in the U.S. Federal Court presided over by Judge Thomas P. Hawley, and that all three men, former Mint employees, were found guilty. In all, some \$75,000 had been taken from the Mint vaults.

The last Federal Judge to preside in the new building was Bruce R. Thompson, whose court moved to Reno in 1965. The building ceased to serve the last of its original functions on September 20, 1970 as the new Carson City Post Office was opened the same day.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Both the Nevada State Museum in Carson City and the Nevada Historical Society in Reno have file folders on the Old Post Office, which have many photographs (almost exclusively exterior ones) of the building. These are variously dated. None of these was photo-copied for HABS inasmuch as the exterior of the building has been virtually unchanged since its completion. An early exterior photograph is on page 368 of the first bibliographical entry. Another early exterior photograph is facing page 218 of Wren's A History of Nevada (see bibliography). An interior photograph of the Post Office, showing the elaborate wooden screen, is on display in the lobby of the new Carson City Post Office.
2. Bibliography: A History of Public Buildings Under the Control of the Treasury Department. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901.

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Hickson, Howard Mint Mark "CC". Carson City: Nevada State Museum, 1972.

O'Hara, Joan. It's Tough to Grow Old (article in The Nevada Appeal, Sunday, April 12, 1970).

Wren, Thomas, ed. A History of The State of Nevada, Its Resources and People. New York: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1904.

Prepared by: S. Allen Chambers, Jr.
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
December 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The Carson City Post Office is a late nineteenth-century public building of picturesque composition with interesting brick details.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good; the interior is undergoing extensive renovation to adapt the building to library use.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions, about 85 ft. by 73 ft., 4 by 4 bays, three-and-a-half stories, T-shaped layout.
2. Foundations: About five feet high, rock-faced granite ashlar with moulded water table.
3. Walls: Pressed red brick, all-stretcher bond, with dark mortar joints. Belt courses are varied: some two courses and three courses wide of ordinary face brick, corbelling outward successively. In a frieze at the second floor level, bricks are laid in squares, two tiers high, three vertical units alternating with three horizontal units. Trim is yellow sandstone.
4. Composition of west front: The northern bay is four stories high, constituting a corner tower. The central two bays are three-and-a-half stories, high, gabled. The southern bay is two stories high.

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First Story - In each end bay there is a wide arched window; in the central bays there is an arcade of four semicircular-arched doorways. Each arch consists of three concentric rows of soldiers and a thin moulded brick hoodmould. Piers of the arcade are square, those at the center being a coupled pair, with carved sandstone capitals having prominently undercut conventional foliage between a neck and the abacus.

The Main entrance consists of four double doors with rectangular glazed transoms about them, recessed behind the four-bay arcade. Door frames are moulded cast iron; between openings there are side-light panels. This is essentially a metal and glass screen set behind the masonry arcade. Each door leaf is wooden: a large glazed panel above two panels. One opening has been altered. Ten granite steps lead up to the entrance. In each opening there is a granite threshold.

Upper portion of central two bays - This is slightly recessed behind the plane of the end bays. At the second story each bay contains a large triply-divided window with transom, within a segmental brick relieving arch. There are smaller triple windows at the third story, and a large semicircular window in the gable. This central portion extends the full depth of the original building, and is gable-roofed.

Upper portion of north bay - At the second story there is a double windows, and a triple window at the third story. At the level of the third story, corner pilaster strips "grow" out of the masonry walls and are terminated by large sandstone capitals carved with conventional foliage. Above this rises an octagonal story, its four major faces containing a pair of windows above which, corbeled out slightly, there is a gable with a clock. The diagonal faces are smaller and terminate in a corbel table. Above this there is an octagonal pyramidal roof, covered with sheet metal and crowned by a golden ball on a thin rod. The height of this "tower" is 106 feet.

Upper portion of south bay - At the second (top) story there are a double window in a segmental-arched opening, and a corbeled frieze.

5. Composition of south wall: This has three bays, similar at the first and second stories to the south bay of the west front. The central bay has a third story: a large

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hipped dormer having brick pilasters with carved sandstone capitals at the corners. Above this wall can be seen the south clearstory wall of the central two bays, which contains a group of four windows at the east end of its third story. The north wall resembles the south one except for containing the corner tower.

6. East Wall: The fenestration resembles that of the west front except that round-arched windows occur in the central two bays of the first story. A modern one-story wing has been added to the southeast corner of the building.
7. Roof: The central portion has a gable roof, the north and south wings a hip roof. These are covered with standing-seam sheet metal, painted. There are several small dormers.

C. Site and Surroundings:

This building occupies an entire block, facing west toward Carson Street. The terrain is level. The site is in the downtown part of the city.

Prepared by: Harley J. McKee
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
August 20, 1972

PART III. Project Information

These records are part of the documentation made during the latter half of 1972 and the summer of 1973 in a project undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Nevada State Park System to record structures in Carson City and nearby areas.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Eric R. Cronkhite, Administrator, Nevada State Park System, and Mrs. Marshall Humphreys of the Nevada Landmarks Society assisted the HABS recorders in Nevada. Professor Harley J. McKee, Supervisory Architect, National Park Service selected the subjects and provided architectural data for the sixteen Carson City structures which were recorded. Historical documentation for these buildings was prepared by S. Allen Chambers, Jr., Architectural Historian, Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor for the 1973 Nevada Summer Team, which produced the measured drawings, was Robert L. Hartwig of Harvard University. Student assistant architects were John T. M. Creery (University of Utah), Robert P. Mizell (University of Florida), and Jack W. Schafer (University of Cincinnati). Photographs were made by Aaron A. Gallup of Sacramento, California.