

UNITED STATES POST OFFICE,
CUSTOM HOUSE AND COURT HOUSE
400 Atlantic Avenue (NE corner of
Atlantic Avenue and Fourth Street)
Fernandina Beach
Nassau County
Florida

HABS No. FL-359

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

UNITED STATES POST OFFICE, CUSTOM HOUSE, AND COURT HOUSE HABS No. FL-359

Location: 400 Atlantic Avenue (NE corner of Atlantic Avenue and Fourth Street), Fernandina Beach, Nassau County, Florida.

Present Owner: United States of America.

Present Occupant: U.S. Postal Service and various offices of Nassau County.

Significance: This building is a fine example of the type of architecture with mediterranean motifs which was popular in Florida throughout the early twentieth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1909-1912. The following is a chronology of the erection of the Post Office building:

April 2, 1909	ground was broken. (<u>Florida Times Union</u> , April 4, 1909)
July 1909	building contract signed. (<u>Florida Times Union</u> , July 1, 1909; July 4, 1909)
July 7, 1909	building permit issued by the City of Fernandina. (City Commission Minutes, July 7, 1909, Vol. I, 278)
1912	dedication of building. (Goldstein, 1)

2. Architect: James Knox Taylor, Supervising Architect, Treasury Department. (From plans).

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Post Office building was built on lots 1, 2, 16, and the west 20' of lot 13 and the west 20' of lot 15 of Block 23 of the official plat of the City of Fernandina which was lithographed and issued by the Florida Railroad in 1857 and enlarged, revised, and reissued by the Florida Town Improvement Company in 1887 and 1901. The chain of title is drawn from the Deed Books of Nassau County, Florida:

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1907 Deed, recorded October 18, 1907 in Book Y,
page 69. Lots 1, 2, and 16 of Block 23 were
sold by
Fernandina Hotel Company
to
The United States of America.

1907 Deed, recorded April 24, 1907 in Book
B-9, page 70. The west 20' of lot 13 and
the west 20' of lot 15 of Block 23 were
sold by
Bertha F. Angel
to
The United States of America.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers, etc: The D. J. Phipps Company of Newport News, Virginia received the contract of the construction of the new Post Office. (Florida Times Union, July 1, 1909; July 4, 1909)
5. Original plans, construction, etc: A complete set of original drawings (27 sheets) of the Post Office are located in the basement of the building. In addition to these there are sheets covering heating, lighting, and wiring.

The collection of drawings contains detailed plans for the site; each floor level; transverse and longitudinal sections; elevations; structural plans; window, stair, door, cornice, and room details.

A representative selection of 16 of these drawings have been photocopied and sent with this report.

6. Alterations and additions: In 1939 a wire screen was constructed across the southern portion of the first floor. This was used as a security screen. (From plans located in basement).

Around 1965 the interior of the building was renovated. The postal windows were relocated from the west lobby to the south lobby. The wire screen was removed.

In the same year the steam heating apparatus was replaced with a new system incorporating air conditioning.

The floor of the first floor was also removed and replaced with the present black tiles.

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- B. Historical Context: The building has housed several Federal agencies during its history. It has served as post office, custom house, federal courthouse, and military recruiting offices. While it still serves as a post office the other agencies have left.

Presently the upper floors serve as office space for several agencies of Nassau County which leases these spaces.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Plans: Taylor, James Knox. United States Post Office, Custom House, and Court House, Fernandina, Florida. 27 sheets. April 16, 1909. In Post Office building in Fernandina Beach, Florida.

2. Old Views:

Construction: Photograph looking south showing the interior of the first floor almost complete. No floor is shown. September 1, 1910. In the files of the Postal Service, Post Office building, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

Photograph, view from south looking north showing steel framing and supports for flooring. January 17, 1910. In the files of the Postal Service, Post Office building, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

Photograph from second story showing early construction on first floor. January 17, 1910. In the files of the Postal Service, Post Office building, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

Photograph showing the southeast corner of the building under construction. January 1, 1910. In the files of the Postal Service, Post Office building, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

Post card showing the south and west sides of the Post Office building. In possession of George Davis, Fernandina Beach, Florida. n.d.

Post card showing south facade. In possession of George Davis, Fernandina Beach, Florida. n.d.

Photograph showing south and east sides of structure. In possession of George Davis, Fernandina Beach, Florida. n.d.

3. Primary and unpublished sources:

Campbell, J.C., Assistant Postmaster, Fernandina Beach Post Office, Fernandina Beach, Florida. Interview, August 28, 1974.

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Fernandina Beach, City of. City Commission. Minute Books. Fernandina Beach City Hall, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

Goldstein, Louis. "Local Postal Service History." Typewritten manuscript, n.d. In the files of the Postal Service, Post Office building, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

Nassau County. Deed Books. Nassau County Courthouse, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

4. Secondary and published sources:

Florida Times Union, April 4, 1909; July 1, 1909;
July 4, 1909.

Prepared by: Phillip A. Werndli
Historian
HABS-Fernandina Beach, Florida
August 29, 1974

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Bicentennial Commission of Florida. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, this project was completed during the summer of 1974, at the HABS Field Office, Fernandina Beach, Florida by Charles Edwin Chase, (University of Florida), project supervisor; Phillip A. Werndli, (University of Florida), project historian; Janice Fahey, (Rhode Island School of Design), and Frederick Wiedenmann, (University of Florida), architects; Crady J. Reich, Jr., (University of Texas), and Roger Swayze, (University of Oregon), student architects.

Addendum To:
NASSAU COUNTY COURTHOUSE
Corner Fourth and Center Streets
Fernandina Beach
Nassau County
Florida

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PHOTO-COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

ADDENDUM TO:
NASSAU COUNTY COURTHOUSE
Atlantic Avenue & Fifth Street
Fernandina Beach
Nassau County
Florida

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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U. S. POST OFFICE, CUSTOM HOUSE & COURTHOUSE
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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