

100 Years of Service



Imagery Evoked at the Muskogee Federal Courthouse Establishes a Federal Presence.

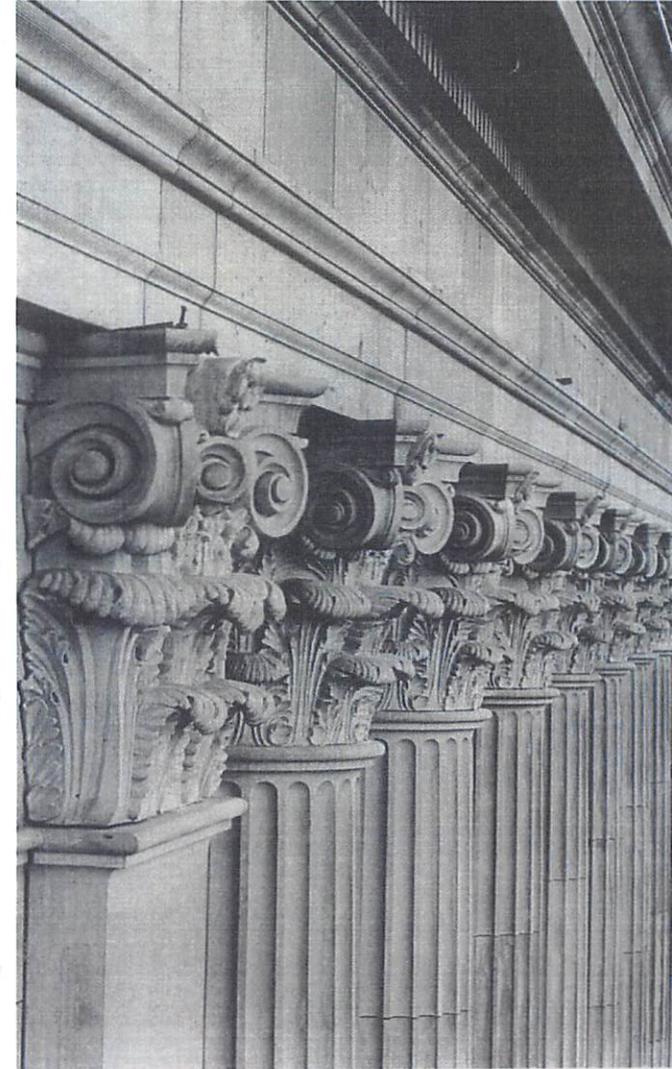
Often seemingly a remote entity, the federal government has remained a tangible reality in Muskogee through the construction and one-hundred year use of the Ed Edmondson U.S. Courthouse. The prominent landmark is one of the city's largest buildings and the only federally-owned building in Muskogee. Although the building no longer serves as a post office, it plays a key role in the community, the operations of the federal judiciary, and houses a number of other federal agencies. Court is still held in the two historic (1915 and 1938) courtrooms as well as a two additional courtrooms, added in 1982 and 2008. In 2000, the building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 2003, the building was renamed in honor of Muskogee native Ed Edmondson. Edmondson was an Oklahoma public servant who served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1953 to 1973.



U.S. General Services Administration

The General Services Administration (GSA) provides oversight in the stewardship of the Ed Edmondson U.S. Courthouse with the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma and other tenant Federal agencies. This ensures that this important local landmark continues to serve the needs of the residents of Muskogee and surrounding communities.

100th Anniversary *Celebration*



Ed Edmondson U.S. Courthouse

101 North Fifth St.
Muskogee, Oklahoma

Architecture

The Ed Edmondson U.S. Courthouse is a Classical Revival building that occupies an entire block of downtown Muskogee. Although it looks like a four-story structure, it has a fifth floor and basement. The building opened in November of 1915 with a Muskogee reporter touting it as "...one of the finest buildings in the southwest and, with the possible exception of the state capitol building, will be the finest piece of architecture in the state of Oklahoma."

The impressive structure has a buff colored Indiana limestone exterior with similarly hued terra cotta accents. Distinctive architectural features include the three-story Corinthian columns and pilasters on the front and side elevations, which stand underneath a prominent entablature and ornamental terra cotta cornice. The government's adoption of classically influenced architecture during this period was intended to convey a physical sense of federal permanence and presence at the local level.

The building features a well appointed former postal lobby and two historic courtrooms. The ceremonial courtroom (pictured) has crescent-shaped lunettes containing images of an eagle, clock, federal shield, and ribbon motif. Inscriptions above the courtroom doors read "Justice Is the Great Interest of Men of Earth," "With Malice Toward None, with Charity for All," "Conscience Is the Chamber of Justice," and "It is Impossible to Be Just If One Is Not Generous."



1915 Ceremonial Courtroom

Building History

The community of Muskogee became the location of the first federal court to be established in what was then "Indian Territory" in 1889. Located at the corner of Court and Second streets, the cornerstone for the first federal court building was laid on June 24 of that year. Ten years later, in 1899, a fire destroyed much of downtown Muskogee. While the nearby offices of the Indian Agency burned in the fire, resulting in the "irreplaceable loss of all government records," the "U.S. Court building was saved by the most heroic work of the officials."



Muskogee U.S. Post Office & Courthouse, circa late 1930s

Between 1905 and 1907, as Oklahoma was in the midst of securing its statehood, attempts were underway in Washington to appropriate funds for a new combined post office and U.S. courthouse in Muskogee. Concurrent with these efforts, the significance of Muskogee as a court town escalated as the city was designated as the headquarters of the Eastern District Court. Interestingly, Oklahoma was one of two states in the union that had two district courts since the time of statehood.

In May 1909, after a protracted search for a suitable location for the new building, the site at Fifth Street and Okmulgee Avenue was selected. By February 1911, a formal request for bids for construction of a combined post office and courthouse was advertised and in Sep-



1938 Courtroom

tember, architectural plans were approved by the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department under James Knox Taylor.

Construction was underway in 1914 and proceeded through most of the following year, although the building had progressed sufficiently to allow it to be put in temporary service in late September 1915. One of the first events to be held in the new building was a departmental examination for stenographers.

Completed at a cost of three-quarters of a million dollars, Muskogee's new federal building opened for public inspection on the 26th of November 1915. In addition to the postal and court offices, some of the other early occupants included U.S. Marshal, Union Indian Agency, and the Weather Bureau.

In 1937, the Treasury Department, with Louis A. Simon as Supervising Architect, approved plans for an addition to the 1915 building. Completed in 1938 at a cost of \$360,000, a 32-foot-wide wing was appended at the rear (west) elevation. Its design lacks the dominant columns and pilasters present on the other building facades. Despite its less stylized appearance, the rear addition is considered historic and reflective of the growth of Muskogee and its federal needs.

A second courtroom (pictured above) was constructed as part of the 1938 expansion. This courtroom, similar in size and proportion to the 1915 courtroom, utilizes indirectly lit curved ceiling and modest details to ornament the room.