

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 U.S. Courthouse - District of Columbia

other names / site number E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse

2. Location

street & number 333 Constitution Avenue, NW not for publication

city or town Washington vicinity

state District of Columbia code DC county District of Columbia code 001 zip code 20001

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).

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

State or Federal Agency or Tribal Government _____

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

Signature of commenting official/Title _____ Date _____

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): _____

Signature of the 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	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	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: Government Sub: Courthouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Government Sub: Courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modernistic: Stripped Classicism

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Limestone

roof Asphalt

walls Limestone

other _____

Narrative Description

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

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 pattern of our history.
- B** Property 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 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Community Planning and Development
Government
Architecture

Period of Significance

1949-52

Significant Dates

1949-52

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Louis Justement

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (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:

U.S. General Services Administration

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property 4 acres**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1 8	3 2 5 0 4 5	4 3 0 6 2 5 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)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Erin E. Brasell, Architectural Historian
 organization Earth Tech, Inc. date May 12, 2006
 street & number 7 St. Paul Street, Suite 900 telephone 410.637.1600
 city or town Baltimore state MD zip code 21202

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 SHPO or FPO)

name U.S. General Services Administration, National Capital Region
 street & number 7th & D Streets, SW telephone 202.708.5891
 city or town Washington state DC zip code 20407

Paperwork Reduction 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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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U.S. Courthouse of the District of Columbia

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Summary:

Since its completion in 1952 the U.S. Courthouse for the District of Columbia has been an important landmark in Washington, D.C. The U.S. Courthouse was one of the last buildings constructed in the Judiciary Square and Municipal center complex, which had been an important site for civic activity since the 1820s. Designed by nationally renowned architect, Louis Justement, the courthouse is an example of an almost entirely unaltered example of early 1950's stripped classicism that was predominant in federal architecture after World War II. Responding to the emerging government style of stripped classicism, the building displays many tenets of European modernism combined with a more traditional, classical design vocabulary.

The U.S. Courthouse accommodates all the necessary court functions and activities within a single building envelope for the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia and the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The multi-function building is indicative of Justement's concepts of space planning that set a precedent for contemporary technology utilization in the courthouse building type. Serving as the setting for numerous important trials and hearings in the past, the U.S. Courthouse retains its vital role within the city.

Narrative Description:

The U.S. Courthouse for the District of Columbia is located on a site bounded by Constitution Avenue, Third Street, C Street and John Marshall Place in the Northwest quadrant of the city. Facing Constitution Avenue, the building's placement at the time accommodated driveways along the south and west, along with plazas and landscaping that provided a buffer between the rigorous U.S. Courthouse and the lush National Mall – before I.M. Pei's 1979 East Wing of the National Gallery.

The courthouse is an impressive H-shaped building composed of a central eight story rectangular block with intersecting perpendicular six story wings on the east and west sides. Each of the courthouse's four elevations is monumentally composed in both materials and design. Defining features of the building are the sharp contrasts between the Indiana limestone exterior and dark vertical bands of aluminum fenestration, the projecting Somes Sound window and door frames, and the building's tripartite composition – base, body and attic.

The main (south) entrance fronts Constitution Avenue and is approached by three granite steps with original bronze handrails. A nineteen-bay, recessed central block contains the central main entrance and is flanked on the east and west by two four-bay, projecting wings. Windows and doors around the entire base (first floor) are floor-to-ceiling openings that unify the central block and its flanking wings. Three equally-spaced, central doorways provide access to the building and are framed in Somes Sound granite. Each doorway encloses a set of double bronze gates with highly decorative sculptural grates. Recessed, vertical windows span across the building from the second to fifth floor on the main block and from the second to fourth floor on the central block – defining the body of the building. Somes Sound Granite window frames surround the vertical windows and are surmounted by Virginia Serpentine spandrels. The dark contrast of the recessed windows and Indiana Limestone façade create the appearance of a colonnade. Smaller, square windows define the attic space (sixth floor) on the central eight bays of the main block, further

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defining the central main entrance. The sixth floor windows are accentuated by projecting frames similar to the vertical windows below. Small square fifth floor windows are located directly above all of the vertical windows on the flanking wings.

The east elevation of the courthouse is now obstructed by the new Annex building, but was originally similarly composed as the west elevation. Each side is twenty-four bays, arranged identically to the south elevation with floor-to-ceiling openings on the first floor, vertical windows spanning the second through fourth floors, and small square fifth-floor windows that define the attic space. The west elevation contains three, evenly-spaced entrance doors that are similar to the south elevation.

The north elevation is also similarly arranged as the south elevation with floor-to-ceiling first floor window and door openings, second to fifth floor vertical windows on the central block, and small, square attic windows that stretch across the entire elevation. The north entrance is much smaller than the other three entrances, and contains only one set of double-leaved doors. It was not intended as a primary entrance and connects to a secondary corridor inside, rather than a lobby as in the other three entrances.

Landscaping surrounding the U.S. Courthouse consists of a series of driveways, pedestrian paths and interlocking granite walls that echo the form of the building. The nature of the modern courthouse's landscaping, which features expansive exterior plazas, is an important aspect of Justement's design because it broke from the traditional forms of courtyard-plan government structures. Expansive exterior plazas were a tenet of the modern architectural movement, and distinguish the U.S. Courthouse from the surrounding older buildings. A wide granite plaza leads to the main (south) entrance and serves as an unobstructed buffer between the south driveway and the courthouse. Two secondary plazas flank the main plaza, each containing a red Carnelian granite fountain. A large granite trylon rests in the middle of the main plaza with one face carved to depict images of freedom, another illustrates salient features of our judicial system, and the third provides symbolic sketches of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. A bronze sculpture of Justice Blackstone stands at the eastern end of the south lawn. The south and west landscaping is adorned with terraced gardens and sculpture, while the north and east landscaping reflects the pedestrian nature of the courthouse.

A courthouse annex is nearing completion on the east side of the U.S. Courthouse's site – formerly the courthouse's surface parking lot. Designed by Michael Graves, the U.S. Courthouse Annex exists as a separate structure, both aesthetically and functionally, but is connected to the U.S. Courthouse by 21 pedestrian bridges for circulation between the two buildings. The annex will increase space for court functions as well as administrative offices, and consists of 350,000 square feet of new space, providing nine courtrooms, 19 judges' chambers, and office space.¹ The main entrance for the annex is located on 3rd Street, and reinforces that the primary, prominent entrance for the U.S. Courthouse remains on Constitution Avenue.²

¹ "Federal Triangle Getting a New Look End-to-End," *Washington Business Journal* (September 14-20, 2001): 67.

² National Capital Planning Commission, *E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse Annex and Restoration*, Report to the General Services Administration, NCPA File no. 5853 (October 10, 2001) 2-3.

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Interior

The primary elements that comprise the building's interior spaces are; the main south entrance lobby, a series of double-height courtrooms, a matrix of main and secondary hallways for circulation throughout the building, and private offices and suites for the various officials in the building.³ Within these areas, the courthouse provide spaces for trials, jury deliberation, prisoners, law libraries, judges' chambers, and waiting rooms for witnesses, lawyers and jurors.

The primary circulation spaces on the first floor are some of the most richly appointed in the building and include the entrance lobbies, main east-west corridor and the elevator lobby. All of these spaces connect to form a contiguous circulation path, which connect all four entrances of the building. The most highly visible public spaces, such as the main entrance lobby remain largely intact. The main lobby is entered through three sets of double-leaved doors on the south side of the building. A vestibule separates the lobby from the entry doors, and is finished with Maryland Verde Antique marble walls and terrazzo floor. A glass partition separates the vestibule from the lobby and is divided by four square marble columns. The south lobby extends beyond the vestibule to the north and intersects with the elevator lobby and connects to secondary corridors on the east and west sides. The lobby's floors are similar terrazzo and patterning as the vestibule, and the walls are clad in S. Genevieve Botticino marble. Fluorescent fixtures illuminate the space, and are hung from the original flat suspended plaster ceiling. The east and west entrance lobbies are composed of the same materials as the main (south) lobby, and are entered through identical sets of triple doorways on their respective sides of the building.⁴

The interior spaces within the U.S. Courthouse reflect the original design that was meant to house both the U.S. District Court for and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. Justment's placement of the two court's courtrooms on separate floors isolated their functions, provided space for all trial participants and enabled multiple court activities to exist under one roof. The first six floors of the U.S. Courthouse are similar in plan; four elevators open into a small lobby that provides access to the double-loaded east-west corridor. The main hallway runs nearly the entire width of the building, intersecting secondary corridors at each end that provide access to office spaces.

The courtroom suites serve as the principal programmatic component of the U.S. Courthouse, and many of the original spatial arrangements remain intact. Of the 21 original courtrooms in the building, the District Court holds most of floors two, four and six, while the Court of Appeals occupies floors three and five. Justement incorporated fluorescent lighting and air-conditioning into his courtroom design, which eliminated windows as the principal means of ventilation and cooling. By situating all of the courtrooms on floors two through six, Justement eliminated street access in addition to street noise and external stimuli that plagued other courthouses in Judiciary Square. The

³ The associated court offices included those for probation officers, U.S. Marshals, the District Court Clerk, and Clerk for the Court of Appeals, the U.S. Attorney, the Register of Wills, and the Naturalization Office. These offices also included space for the Public Health Office, the Civil Action Docket Room, the Marriage License Division, the Bankruptcy Office, the Domestic Relations Office, Mental Health staffs and the Assignment Commissioner.

⁴ The east lobby was retained with the addition of the new Annex building, but no longer serves as a primary entrance to the building.

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courtroom spaces were also designed to be double-height, which was also a dominant factor in the layout and appearance of the U.S. Courthouse building.⁵ Along with the separation between the District and Appellate Courts, a hierarchical and segregated plan was necessary to ensure the security and privacy of all trial participants – Justement had to eliminate the chance of encounters between jurors, lawyers, judges and the public. As part of his design concept, Justement enclosed all courtrooms within office spaces and corridors, which eliminated all external light and noise during trials. The three distinctive circulation networks guaranteed that judges, prisoners and jurors would interact only within the courtrooms.

Courtrooms for the District judges were designed in three variations, which were depicted as A, B, and C. Along with varying ceiling heights and partition configuration, subtle changes in materials, texture and shape differentiated the three courtroom types.⁶ Each District Court suite contained three rooms: the courtroom, jury room and prisoner holding cell. Justement organized the double-height courtrooms with central entrances of double doors and a 10-pew visitor viewing area in the rear of the courtroom. The visitor viewing area served as a barrier between the laypersons and judicial system that could be crossed through two swinging gates in the separating wall. Jury boxes are located on the right or left side (depending on the courtroom), and the judge's bench forms the apse of the courtroom. Because Justement's space planning relied so heavily on eliminating exterior disturbances, acoustics within the courtrooms played an important role in his designs. A broad marble surface behind the judge's bench reflected sound waves from the trial area to the back of the visitors seating. This allowed clear audibility of court activities throughout the courtroom. Sound-absorbing acoustic tile on the ceilings, and fabric-covered rear walls helped to eliminate echoing effects. Originally cork-tiled floors also absorbed ambient noises, but have been covered with the existing carpet. Each of the courtrooms varied in their wall treatments as well, with veneers of dark walnut, white oak and Korina (a blonde hardwood).⁷

Justement also designed a ceremonial courtroom on the sixth floor that was almost twice the size of the typical District Courtrooms. It was intended to serve as a civil or criminal court for special cases in which great numbers of participants or spectators were expected. In addition, the courtroom was expected to house any courthouse events. As such, the judges' bench was designed so that all judges could sit simultaneously. In general the ceremonial courtroom is similar to the District Courtrooms, with the exception of its visitor seating and decorative detail. Because of its potential use for high-visibility cases, a press box was located in the courtroom along with the jury box, which both sat on either sides of the courtroom perpendicular to the judge's bench.⁸

⁵ Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, *Historic Structure Report: E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Courthouse*, Prepared for the US. General Services Administration, 86-87.

⁶ Ibid, 87-88.

⁷ For more detailed descriptions of courtroom type layout and finishes, see Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, 86-87 and 90-98.

⁸ Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, 88-89.

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The entire third and fifth floors belonged to the U.S. Court of Appeals, and their only courtroom, located in the southeast quadrant of the fifth floor, is similar to District Courtroom type C. Since the Court of Appeals required at least three judges to oversee a case, the judge's bench was expanded to accommodate their needs, which held seats that allowed nine judges to sit simultaneously *en-banc*.⁹

Rooms designed primarily for the judges' include the chambers, conference rooms and dining rooms. The District Court houses 21 judge's chambers, which consist of a judge's office, secretary's office, clerk's office, and waiting room. Each of the judges chambers are located adjacent to the respective courtrooms and approached through a private hallway that separates the courtroom from the chambers. The Court of Appeals contains 11 judge's chambers, which appear along the east and south sides of the fifth floor. Similarly to the District Court's chambers, the Appeals Court judges' chambers hold an office, secretary's office, clerk's office, waiting room, but also contain a private judge's study. Each of the chambers are accessed by a private secondary corridor that runs the entire length of the fifth floor. Because the Court of Appeals required more than one judge deliberating cases, two conference rooms were provided for this function. The conference rooms are located off of the same corridor as the judges' chambers, and appear at the north and south end of the corridor. The northern conference room is finished in white oak veneer and originally contained cork tile floors. The south conference room, located across the corridor from the judges' robe room, is finished in walnut veneer and built-in bookshelves.¹⁰

Alterations

Many of the U.S. Courthouse's original spatial arrangements remain and significant features remain intact. The public spaces, including lobbies, corridors and courtrooms remain in their original configuration and retain most of their original materials. The richly detailed judge's chambers, dining room, conference rooms and libraries are also essentially intact.¹¹ The office spaces, not readily available to the public, have been the most dramatically changed and much of the space has been reconfigured with new drywall construction in an attempt to accommodate current needs.

⁹ Ibid, 98-99.

¹⁰ Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, 100-106.

¹¹ Some of these rooms have been reconfigured with additional partitions and doorways.

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Summary Statement of Significance:

The U.S. Courthouse for the District of Columbia is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with city development plans for Washington, D.C.; and under Criterion C as an almost entirely unaltered example of early 1950s stripped classicism that set a precedent for space planning and technology utilization in the federal courthouse building type.

From the time of its construction (1949-1952), the building served as a federal presence in the Judiciary Square and Municipal Center complex, an important civic enclave since early 19th century. As both a classical and modern architectural expression, the building is indicative of the federal government's search for a new architectural identity in the wake of the Great Depression and Second World War.

Historic Context:

Pierre Charles L'Enfant's 1791 plan for Washington, D.C. defined the general shape of the future site for the U.S. Courthouse. L'Enfant's plan imposed regular street grids intersecting with wide Baroque avenues that radiated diagonally from the Capitol. The U.S. Courthouse's early trapezoidal site is indicative of the irregular block shapes created by the complex grid intersections. As part of the original plan for Washington, D.C., Congress reserved 540 acres for open spaces and monumentally scaled government buildings. The U.S. Courthouse for the District of Columbia sits on "Reservation 10" in the area that would later become Judiciary Square.

The intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and John Marshall Place became one of Washington, D.C.'s earliest domestic enclaves, and Reservation 10 experienced an abundance of residential and commercial development in the early to mid 19th century. The area just north of the future U.S. Courthouse site was designated for the District of Columbia's City Hall (1820-1849) – the first of many public buildings in the neighborhood. In 1873 the federal government acquired City Hall to use as court space, which spurred further court development and the neighborhood's name "Judiciary Square."¹²

By the turn of the 20th century, L'Enfant's 1791 plan for Washington, D.C. was largely unrealized. Washington, D.C.'s growing prominence created the need to physically expand the Nation's Capital. Congress decided it was necessary to revitalize L'Enfant's initial ideas for future growth of the city and formed the McMillan Commission in 1901. While relying on the scope of L'Enfant's original designs, the McMillan Plan focused on a more comprehensive plan for Washington, D.C., and was the basis for more specialized government planning in the coming decades.¹³ Federal planning in the 1910s and 20s focused greatly on the monumental core of the District of

¹² Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, 25.

¹³ Gutheim, Frederick, *Worthy of the Nation: History of Planning for the National Capital* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1977) 133-136.

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Columbia, most notably areas flanking the National Mall. While beneficial to the city as a whole, the plans for D.C.'s monumental core led to commercial and institutional migration westward along Pennsylvania Avenue. The shift in population left John Marshall Place, a former social hub, as an undesirable area around the turn of the century.

The urban fabric of Reservation 10 and its surrounding areas remained largely unaltered until 1927 when the District of Columbia commissioned plans for a 10-block comprehensive Municipal Center to be bounded by Constitution and Indiana Avenues between 3rd and 6th Streets. Land for the Municipal Center was razed in 1932, but remained mostly vacant until 1934. Nathan C. Wyeth, Municipal Architect, received approval for a pared-down Municipal Center that included only Judiciary Square and the two blocks north of C Street.¹⁴ His plans separated judicial and municipal functions by situating court development in Judiciary Square and municipal construction south of the 1820s City Hall. Three buildings were constructed between 1934 and 1939, which included the Police, Juvenile and Municipal Courts. Wyeth also designed a Central Public Library, bounded by 6th and C Streets, John Marshall Place and Pennsylvania Avenue. A Capitol Auditorium on the site of Reservation 10 would mirror the Library, according to the initial schematic. The first portion of the library was finished in 1942, but was the only section completed due to lack of funding. The Capitol Auditorium never progressed beyond an early design phase, leaving the site open for the U.S. Courthouse in 1945.¹⁵

In his original plans, Nathan Wyeth had hoped to build a fourth municipal courthouse on the site of the Pension Building (now the National Building Museum), which was slated for demolition. Because Pension Building tenants could find no other accommodations, city and federal government officials were forced to negotiate alternate courthouse locations. The city agreed to build a dual occupancy courthouse to accommodate the U.S. District Court and U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. In late 1945 the District of Columbia abandoned its idea of a unified Municipal Center, and sold the southeastern quadrant to the federal government.¹⁶

The Commissioner of Public Buildings awarded a contract to Louis Justement for the design of the new U.S. Courthouse in September 1947. The plan for the U.S. Courthouse generally conformed to the style and massing of the surrounding buildings, but special arrangements and site planning differed in several ways. Because of newer technologies, such as fluorescent lighting and air-conditioning, Justement was able to abandon the traditional courtyard building plan type. Rooms were arranged within a large, continuous floor plate, which afforded more space for exterior plazas – a tenet of the modernist architectural movement. Justement's final plans for the building were approved in January 1948 and ground was broken the following year in August.

Harry S. Truman laid the cornerstone in June 1950, and the building was officially opened in 1952. Public response to the U.S. Courthouse was overwhelmingly positive, citing the new building's efficiency in uniting all aspects of the

¹⁴ Wyeth, Nathan C. "Notes on the New Municipal Center," *Pencil Points* (September 1939): 579-81.

¹⁵ Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, 30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

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courts, thoughtful design and technological advancements. Judge Harold M. Stephens articulated the public's opinion of the building well in stating that:

It will not only have a beauty and dignity appropriate to judicial use, but will also in room arrangement, furnishings, lighting and acoustics, function for the needs of the judges, jurors, witnesses, lawyers, litigants and the public more efficiently than any other court building thus far constructed in the United States.¹⁷

Justement's building responds to Wyeth's Municipal Center in its materials, massing, and stripped classical form. Flat, limestone-veneered piers separated by vertical strips of windows suggest colonnades. Window divisions also suggest the Classical composition of podium, shaft, and attic. Justement, however, adheres to the Modernist aversion to ornament, employing no pediments, entablatures, porticoes, or carved decoration.¹⁸

In March 1997 the U.S. Courthouse for the District of Columbia was renamed the E. Barrett Prettyman Courthouse. E. Barrett Prettyman was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals under the Truman Administration and served on the D.C. Circuit court for twenty-six years, two of which were served as Chief Judge.¹⁹

Architectural Significance:

The U.S. Courthouse for the District of Columbia constitutes an almost entirely unaltered example of early 1950s stripped classicism, which prevailed in federal architecture after World War II. In his design for the courthouse, Justement employed the grand scale urban presence of pre-war federal architecture, but relied on simplicity and function to guide the building's final plan. Stripped classicism responded to many of the tenets of European modernism – emphasizing function and utility, abstraction and sculptural form along with modern materials and technology – while combining them with more classical design vocabulary. The classical arrangement of the U.S. Courthouse also alludes to the more traditional buildings in the Municipal Center while revealing a more Modern aesthetic through its block-like massing, juxtaposition of dark attenuated vertical windows and light planar surfaces, and its overall functional design.

Programmatically, the building design incorporates all necessary court functions and activities within a single building envelope. Initial plans for the U.S. Courthouse set the complex functional mandates for the building's operation – to provide adequate space for the Circuit and District Courts in the future, but also provide convenience and comfort for the multitude of people using the building. Originally designed for the

¹⁷ Joseph Paul, "President Sees Our Justice as Challenge to new Tyranny" *Washington Post* 28 June 1950: 1.

¹⁸ Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, 30-35.

¹⁹ Tracy Locy, "A Tribute to the Champion of the Law: U.S. Courthouse Named after Longtime Appellate Judge," *Washington Post* 27 March 1997: J01.

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U.S. District Court and U.S. Court of Appeals, the building required innovative space planning methods to avoid conflicts of interest between the two courts.

Justement was charged with a complex design challenge that required innovative programmatic solutions. Due to new technologies such as fluorescent lighting and air-conditioning, Justement was able to arrange interior spaces within one large, continuous floor plate, which was conducive in an urban setting. Building designs of the modern era emphasized functionalism and economy, as is reflected in the U.S. Courthouse building. Grand lobbies were often absent from Modern designs and instead, plazas served as grand exterior gateways.²⁰ The expansive exterior plazas, which are a defining feature of the U.S. Courthouse, are also indicative of comprehensive planning that was prominent in both the modern architectural movement and Justement's other designs.

Like many public buildings, artwork was commissioned for both the interior and exterior of the building. Bronze plaques were incorporated into doors and doorways, high-relief bronze busts were installed in the Court of Appeals courtroom, and statuary was placed on corbels in the ceremonial courtroom. Sculptor Carl Paul Jennewein, who had coordinated the decorative arts program for the Justice Department Building, designed the central feature of the courthouse's art program, the Trylon of Freedom that marks the courthouse's entrance on Pennsylvania Avenue. It was carved from Somes Sound granite by Vincent Tonelli and Roger Morigi. Reliefs illustrating the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the seal of the United States decorate the 24-foot-high, triangular-plan form. Approved in 1949, the trylon was finished in 1954.²¹ Facing Pennsylvania Avenue near the southeast corner of the courthouse is Paul W. Bartlett's bronze statue of English jurist Sir William Blackstone, whose Commentaries on the

²⁰ *Growth, Efficiency & Modernism*, prepared for the General Services Administration by Robinson & Associates, (Washington, D.C., 2003) 30.

²¹ Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, 38; James Goode, *Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C.: A Comprehensive Guide* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974) 222.

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British legal system helped shape the American Constitution.²² Commissioned in 1923, the statue was erected near Elliott Woods's Court of Appeals in 1943. It was moved to its site near the U.S. Courthouse in 1952.²³

The U.S. Courthouse is also significant for its association with prominent Washington, D.C. architect and planner, Louis Justement. Justement came to Washington, D.C. in 1908 and obtained his bachelors degree in architecture from George Washington University in 1911. By 1924 he had started his own firm where he remained as principal architect until his death in 1968. Justement was known for his hospital, educational and commercial structures, and also for his strong ideas on planning reform. In addition to the U.S. Courthouse for the District of Columbia building, Justement designed the Meridian Hotel (1941), Howard University Law School (1953), Howard University Medical School (1955), as well as his active participation in planning and redevelopment programs in Washington, D.C.²⁴ Most widely known for his publication *New Cities for Old* in 1946, Justement was praised for his work as an affordable and feasible plan for the future of city planning. In 1952 Justement, along with Chloethiel Woodard Smith, was commissioned by the National Capital Parks and Planning Commission to develop a large-scale redevelopment plan for the southwest quadrant of Washington, D.C. The plan consisted of wide-spread demolition of existing buildings in southwest, which were replaced with combinations of high-rise buildings and townhouse blocks surrounded by expansive plazas and planned landscapes.²⁵

²² Goode, *Outdoor Sculpture*, 221.

²³ Ibid, 22.

²⁴ Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, 35-36.

²⁵ Ibid, 37-38.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The U.S. Courthouse of the District of Columbia and its grounds at 333 Constitution Avenue, NW occupy the block bounded by Constitution Avenue, C Street, 3rd Street, and John Marshal Place, NW in Washington, D.C., on Square 533.

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.

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Photographs: