Form 10-317
(Sept. 1957)

File

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

1. STATE
Arkansas

Theme XI, Advance of the Frontier, 1763-1830, also Themes XII, XIII, XV

3. NAME(S) OF SITE
Fort Smith (First and Second Sites) and Judge Parker Courtroom

4. APPROX. ACREAGE
22 acres

5. EXACT LOCATION (*County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet*)
Fort Smith

6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (*Also administrator if different from owner*)
City of Fort Smith

7. IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (*Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant*)

The check to westward exploration caused by the War of 1812 came to an end in 1817, when an expedition under Maj. Stephen H. Long arrived at the junction of the Arkansas and Poteau rivers in Missouri Territory. There, just east of the Osage boundary line on a rocky bluff named by French traders "La Belle Pointe," Long began to build a log fortification which he called Cantonment (later Fort) Smith. The fort when completed consisted of some 24 buildings surrounded by a stockade, with two-story blockhouses at the alternate angles, the whole being approximately 132 feet square. The establishment of Fort Smith filled a pressing need, for the Cherokees who had begun crossing the Mississippi River in 1809 were encroaching on the lands of the fierce Osage, and constant vigilance was necessary to prevent bloody inter-tribal warfare. Here, too, as elsewhere along the frontier, force was occasionally required to keep the westward moving settlers from crowding onto Indian lands. Though four companies of the Seventh Infantry were sent to reinforce the garrison in 1822, Indian depredations continued. The Fort Smith garrison was moved westward to the mouth of the Verdigris River in April, 1824, where they established Fort Gibson. Only a token force was left at Fort Smith, which soon fell into decay. With the gradual increase of white settlement in the Southwest, a second fort was established at Fort Smith in July, 1838. The site selected was a short distance east of the first fort, and the buildings were to be of brick and stone, the latter material being quarried from the out-croppings at Belle Pointe. Work on the second fort was abandoned within five years, after several buildings had been completed, though troops continued to be stationed there until 1871. In that year, the United States Criminal Court of the Western District of Arkansas was moved from Van Bur[redacted] to Fort Smith, being housed in one of the old fort buildings. Judge Isaac C. Parker was appointed in March, 1875, to head the court, which had jurisdiction over some 74,000 square miles in Arkansas and the Indian Territory. During his 21 years in office, Parker gained a national reputation for his efforts to bring law and order to a lawless frontier. During his time, some 13,500 cases were docketed in his courtroom, ranging from theft of - (cont'd.)

8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (*Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works*)
Grant Foreman, Indians and Pioneers: The Story of the American Southwest before 1830 (New Haven, 1930); Ray A. Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier (New York, 1949); Walter Lowrie et al, editors, American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States.... Class II. Indian Affairs (2 vols., Washington, 1832-34); J. Fred Patton, "The History of Fort Smith, Arkansas" (Ms., 8 pp., copy in Region One Office); David Y. Thomas, "Isaac Charles Parker," Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XIV.

9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (*Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, HABS, etc.*)
John O. Littleton, AWR Survey Card, April 1953; Leroy W. Hagerty, HSS Card, August 1937.

10. PHOTOGRAPHS* ATTACHED: YES ☒ NO ☐	11. CONDITION	12. PRESENT USE (*Museum, farm, etc.*)	13. DATE OF VISIT
	Good	Museum	Oct. 10, 1958
14. NAME OF RECORDER (*Signature*) Frank B. Sarles, Jr.		15. TITLE Historian	16. DATE Dec. 10, 1958

*DRY MOUNT ON AN 8 X 10½ SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. GIVE LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

(IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER)

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 16—74016-1

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SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on the regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as many Supplement Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical order of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, it's name and the word (cont'd), as, 6. Description and Importance (cont'd)....

State	Name(s) of site
Arkansas	XI - XII - XIII - XV

government timber to murder. Some 9,500 defendants were convicted, and 88 died on the scaffold which stood nearby. Mute testimony to the rigors of Parker's task is afforded by the record, which shows that 65 of his deputy marshals were slain in line of duty.

Status: There are no surface remains of the first fort at Belle Pointe, though the quarries used in constructing the second are visible. The Belle Pointe area, formerly a shantytown section called Coke Hill, has recently been cleared in a program for creating a new municipal park, though the work has been delayed somewhat by clouded land titles. Probably part of the fort site has been destroyed by erosion, but the remainder should provide a rich field for archeological exploration. Of the second fort, the important remains are the old stone Commissary, now maintained by the city as a museum, and the altered building which served as the Federal courtroom. The courtroom itself has been restored to its original appearance and is open to visitors. The nearby Fort Smith National Cemetery, established soon after the first fort, contains a number of Federal and Confederate dead from the Civil War battlefields of northwestern Arkansas, as well as Judge Parker himself.

built in 1839 to serve as the northwest bastion of the fort. Was used by the military until 1871 & now houses a museum

(continued)

Status:- Since the preparation of this inventory sheet, word has been received of a preliminary archeological exploration of the Belle Pointe site. Stone foundations were located which are believed to be those of the walls of the first fort. The finishing touches are being given to a detailed historical study of the site, and a major archeological project is being planned for ~~next~~ the summer of 1959.

During recent archeological exploration of the site

The old Federal Building, half of it built in 1840 as a troop barracks in a block southeast of the commissary. It housed soldiers until 1871 & Federal court from 1873 to 1887. This two story brick bldg is in two parts. The old half was used by the County & Judge Parker. The new was added in later years