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 21 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 Buren 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.)
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 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.

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 summer, 1959.
9. Artist's view of the 1838 fort. Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce,
8. Fort Smith, Ark. Aerial view, looking north, of the site of the fort. (1) Site of 1817 fort on Belle Point; (2) Barracks of 1838 fort, later Judge Parker's courtroom; (3) commissary of 1838 fort, now housing museum; (4) Fort Smith National Cemetery. Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce.
Fort Smith
Fort Smith, Sebastian County, Arkansas
Commissary Building, 1940
Courtesy of HABS
Art 2a
Fort Smith, Judge Parker's Courthouse