

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JAN 13 1983
DATE ENTERED	

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
~~United States~~ Inspection Station / U.S. Custom House
AND/OR COMMON
U.S. Custom House

RECEIVED
APR 12 1982
OHP

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Virginia and Tijuana Streets.
CITY, TOWN
San Ysidro
STATE
California 92073

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
na 42nd
VICINITY OF
CODE
06
COUNTY
San Diego
CODE
073

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (if applicable)
General Services Administration Region IX
STREET & NUMBER
525 Market Street
CITY, TOWN
San Francisco
STATE
California 94105

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. San Diego County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER
220 West Broadway
CITY, TOWN
San Diego
STATE
California 92188

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
none
DATE

____ FEDERAL ____ STATE ____ COUNTY ____ LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS
CITY, TOWN
STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The old U.S. Custom House at San Ysidro is situated approximately fifty feet from the border between the United States and Mexico, at the southeast corner of a vast border station complex - the busiest between the two countries. The small town of San Ysidro is not itself incorporated, but rather a noncontiguous part of the city of San Diego, about fifteen miles north. It consists primarily of low-rise commercial, institutional and residential structures displaying a wide variety of architectural styles from both countries, from Spanish Colonial to Dunkin' Donuts. Immediately north of the border complex is a group of attached single-story commercial buildings, the southernmost structures of the town. South of the complex, beyond the steel fences and the U.S. "no man's zone," are the commercial buildings of Tijuana, in Mexico. Immediately east of the Custom House is a steeply sloped, scrub-covered hill and beyond that is a railroad line with a depot facility.

The 1933 Custom House is today dwarfed by its replacement, indicating the increase in traffic which passes through the facility. The new building, completed in 1974, is a massive concrete structure which sits astride the highway north of the Custom House; it serves as the inspection station for incoming vehicular and pedestrian traffic and houses the offices of the various government agencies at the border. The 1933 Custom House is virtually surrounded by several steel rod and chain-link/barbed wire fences, which tend to create a harsh atmosphere for the residentially scaled building. Landscaping around the Custom House has been kept to a minimum, designed to eliminate potential hiding places for illegal immigrants. The building sits within a small grass lawn, the only one in the complex, behind a three-foot fence; within this lawn is planted a row of Sycamore trees and a few foundation shrubs. Behind the Custom House is another small grassed area with evergreen trees. Site furniture consists of the fences and a trio of flagpoles at the northwest corner of the building.

The Custom House itself depends on a picturesque massing and roof profile for its stylistic distinction. A one- to two-story structure shaped as an irregular E, it exemplifies the informal grace and movement of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The building is further placed within the Spanish Colonial idiom by its use of materials: stucco with terra cotta trim for the exterior walls, dark-painted wood windows and doors and ceramic tile roofs. Coming from an architectural office (the Supervising Architect's office of the Treasury Department) in which eclectic revivalism had become a hallmark, the Custom House displays a notable faithfulness to its Spanish antecedents. The roofline is the building's most dominant element; its multi-planed surfaces are covered with red clay mission tiles and are punctuated at intervals by decorative stucco-covered cupolas, chimneys and a sizeable spired tower which is centered on the ridge over the main public entrance. The roofs are either shallowly pitched gables or flat roofs with copper or composition covering, and the eaves are made up of the curved tiles themselves wrapped over the outer wall edges. The Custom House is designed as a two-story central main section which

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET U.S. Custom House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

faces west, with a two-story rear wing extending at an angle from the southeast corner of the main section and a one-story end wing attached on the north side. A one-story addition at the rear of the main section completes the E shape.

Fenestration consists generally of 6/6 double-hung windows aligned along the first and second stories. The first floor windows are in most cases more elongated than the second and feature plain terra cotta lugsills; the second floor windows feature continuous terra cotta sills. Windows on both floors are simply enframed with stucco heads and jambs. The first floor windows on the south section of the front facade are situated within an arcade of sorts, which is lined by a row of decoratively patterned ceramic tiles, and the second floor windows on the west and front sections of the north and south facades are framed by rustic wood shutters. Many of the first floor windows are today covered with plywood sheets to prevent entry into the building by people crossing the border along the sidewalk in front. Door configurations vary with their uses, ranging from the boarded-up main entrance (originally a double-leaf doorway with multi-pane transom over) and simple single-leaf entries to large sectional garage doors on the north side of the end wing. Some of the entries feature mission-tiled canopies overhead.

The focal point for the front facade - and one of the few areas of ornamentation below the line of the eaves - is the small porch over the main entrance. Centered on the main section, it was originally part of a large canopy over a drive-through area in front of the building; it has since been cut back to the present abbreviated configuration. The porch today is supported by a row of freestanding square, stuccoed columns at the front with two engaged columns at the building wall; each of these columns has inset ceramic tiles in the shaft, with a plain base and simply moulded capital. Atop the columns rests the spandrels, also inlaid with decoratively patterned tiles, and above these spandrels is a second floor balcony, comprised of tile-inlaid posts over the columns, with wrought iron railings inbetween. This balcony is nonfunctional, however, not accessed through any second floor doors, and its use today is essentially ornamental.

The interior spaces of the building have undergone extensive alterations of configuration and finishes, made over the years as the needs and traffic volume have changed. Originally the main section first floor consisted of a series of office spaces joined by a central corridor from the main entrance. These spaces included: the Customs workroom, Customs lobby, office spaces for the Deputy Collector and two others, vault, Immigration clerks' office, Immigration Inspector's office, waiting rooms and an examination room. The central corridor

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET U.S. Custom House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

has since been removed, as have most of the other walls between the offices, and today the main section first floor is one large space lined with two rows of columns, unused other than for minor storage capability. Beyond the main section to the south is the angled rear wing, originally subdivided into a warren of small spaces housing offices, vaccination rooms, physical examination chambers, assembly room, laboratory, dressing and undressing rooms for both sexes, disinfecting room, toilets, storage rooms and a cyanide chamber attached at the rear. Today many of the spaces remain in original configuration - the laboratory has been changed into an X-ray room, the disinfecting room has been changed into a small cell block for the Shore Patrol and a few other minor changes have been made. This wing, like the main section, is now unoccupied, unfurnished and boarded up. The end wing on the north side of the main section is the only part of the first floor currently in use. Today it houses the garages and maintenance and storage rooms of GSA the building's administrator.

The first floor interior finishes have undergone changes as the rooms were changed, but many original elements remain in place. In the main section and the rear wing the 6" square quarry tile floors remain, as do the plaster walls and ceilings and some of the mouldings. Most of the original toilet fixtures are in place, as are the cells used by the Shore Patrol. The second floor originally housed the Customs general workroom, offices for the Chief Customs Patrol Inspector and Immigration and Agriculture agents in the main section, with more Immigration offices, search rooms, toilets and day and night detention chambers for both sexes in the rear wing. This level is occupied today by the U.S. Customs Service offices and has been extensively altered with the addition of wall paneling, carpeting and suspended ceilings.

Summary

The U.S. Custom House is situated just north of the border between the United States and Mexico, within the massive border station complex at the crossing in San Ysidro. The building is picturesquely massed as an irregular E-shape, with the roofline as the most dominant element. Featuring red clay mission tile roof surfaces, stucco walls with terra cotta trim, dark painted wood windows and doors and a somewhat rambling floorplan, the Custom House exemplifies the informal grace and movement of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. As the photographs indicate, it has been unevenly maintained in recent years. With many of the windows and doors boarded over, the first floor unoccupied and the upkeep inadequate to maintain the

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET U.S. Custom House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 4

exterior in original condition, it is in need of attention. Despite this, however, the building remains a substantial structure with its exterior integrity largely intact. A well-executed example of vernacular architecture designed on a national level, the Custom House remains a regionally significant and prominent architectural resource.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES	Designed: 1931-32	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	James A. Wetmore
	Built: 1932-33		Acting Supervising Architect

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the United States Custom House at San Ysidro rests upon its intrinsic and representational values on a local level to the city. These values lie in two areas: architecture and politics/government. Architecturally the building displays the features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, typical of the kind of eclectic borrowing which distinguished the many public buildings designed in the 1920s and 1930s by the Supervising Architect's office of the Treasury Department. It is a locally prominent example of its genre - a small public building of the early thirties. More important than its architectural significance, however, is the building's symbolic role in international relations between the United States and Mexico. Erected as a Custom House and Inspection Station on the border between the two countries, it served for over twenty years as the only U.S. building at the San Ysidro crossing. Today this crossing is the most heavily trafficked along the border, and although superceded in function by the immense new inspection structure, the 1933 Station still represents the importance of international commerce and governmental relations.

Addendum

On 12 June 1931 the U.S. Treasury Department took title to the last of five small parcels of land on the border between California and Mexico in the small town of San Ysidro. This ended the first phase for the proposed new Custom House and Inspection Station at the border crossing. There was little question of the need for a new structure: the existing single-story frame inspection station had proved inadequate to accommodate the growing volume of traffic between the two countries. The stations at Tecate and Calixico, although not as heavily used, were in similar shape. Commented Collector of Customs William H. Ellison:

We need the buildings very much, as our present quarters at those places are crowded, and I am urging both the treasury and the customs and immigration bureaus that actual construction be speeded as much as possible.

The general location for the San Ysidro building was predetermined: it would

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Addendum, Item 9

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 1	49, 74, 2, 0	3, 610, 04, 2, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The 1933 Inspection Station is part of the federally owned complex at the border crossing at San Ysidro. The grounds around the building have been extensively altered by contemporary development; this nomination includes only the Station building itself, with no surrounding land. *See aerial photograph...*

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Clayton B. Fraser, Principal

ORGANIZATION

Fraserdesign

DATE

7 March 1982

STREET & NUMBER

1259 Cleveland Avenue Suite Two

TELEPHONE

303-669-7969

CITY OR TOWN

Loveland

STATE

Colorado 80537

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES

NO

NONE

4/20/82

K. M. Ellen

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National State Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE *W. ROTH* J. WALTER ROTH

TITLE

DIRECTOR, HISTORIC PRESERVATION
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

DATE 12 JAN 83

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: *Melrose Byers*

DATE 2/10/83

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Entered in the
NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET U.S. Custom House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

be situated alongside the main thoroughfare between San Diego and Tijuana beneath the hill east of the highway at the international border. Congress had appropriated funds for land acquisition and building construction the year before, along with the other two border stations and a great many other public buildings across the country. Boosters for the new station in San Diego would finally get the new building they had hoped for.

In reality the Custom House was part of an enormous federal building program undertaken by Congress and the Hoover administration in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this period some 1300 new civil federal buildings were erected across the country, nearly doubling the number under the aegis of the Treasury Department. The program was initiated in 1926 - the first such federal initiative for public building construction since 1913 - with a Congressional authorization of \$165 million over a period of eleven years. The authorization was increased by \$125 million in 1928 and, with the Depression worsening, by \$330 million in 1930 and 1931. The total appropriation, including revenues from the sale of so-called obsolete structures which added \$69 million, hovered at \$700 million. According to Lois Craig in The Federal Presence: "In terms of establishing the image of the United States government, this program was the most important undertaken since the first few decades under the Constitution."

The massive construction effort was designed to serve three functions. First, it represented fiscal pragmatism and was calculated to reduce the rising rental costs incurred by the growing number of federal agencies in leased space. The program also afforded Congress an opportunity to distribute political presents in the form of post offices and courthouses (and border stations), a type of logrolling it historically has found hard to resist. Finally, under the deepening shadow of the Depression, the building project was in the later years a make-work project, intended to provide jobs for the local unemployed. A predecessor to the myriad New Deal programs (Roosevelt took office two months before completion of the Custom House), Hoover's building program was later absorbed within the Public Works Administration.

This renewed activity rekindled long dormant animosities between the Supervising Architect's (SA) office in the Treasury Department and private architects, represented by the American Institute of Architects. The AIA, protective of a membership beleaguered by the Depression, objected vociferously to in-house design of federal buildings by the SA's office, which had increased its staff from 432 in 1929 to 750 in 1932. A 1931 Resolution of the AIA Board of Directors proclaimed:

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET U.S. Custom House ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 3

We believe that the country is entitled to the services of the best architectural talent available, and that the concentration of so large a volume of work as the present appropriations provide, into the hands of a single Government bureau, must inevitably tend to produce stereotyped, mediocre and uninspiring results.

Architects railed against the SA repeatedly in the trade periodicals; American Architect was particularly fervent in its criticism, regularly publishing articles like "Government Architects Cannot Create Beauty" and "The Time Has Come for Government to Get Out of the Architecture Business." A counterattack was printed in the April 1931 Federal Architect, a magazine sympathetic to the SA:

The ethics of the profession has certainly taken a jolt when the architects of the country on letterheads of their A.I.A. Chapters blacken without investigation the work of other architects' offices with the naive and frank admission that it is for the purpose of getting architectural commissions for themselves.

The Federal Architectural offices are weaned and reared on criticism. If they use material A, delegations appear to lambaste them for not using material B. Or vice versa. If they face the building north, a newspaper crusade develops because it was not faced south. The bitter attacks of private architects are, therefore, merely the regular order. . . . But - one could have wished that architects would have stood by architects.

Although the Public Buildings Acts of 1926 and 1930 granted the Treasury Department the option to commission private architects for federal projects for the first time since the repeal of the Tarnsey Act in 1911, the Hoover administration used their services sparingly, and the fusillades continued throughout the early 1930s.

There were stylistic differences as well. At one extreme was the SA's office, which continued to advocate classicism as the appropriate symbolic expression for public buildings. The SA executed hundreds of buildings of varying scales with classical facades and detailing during the twenties and thirties. James A. Wetmore was the Acting Supervising Architect from 1915 to 1933. A graduate of the Georgetown University Law School, Wetmore was not himself an architect, the reason for the "Acting" before his title; stylistic direction for the office was given by the Superintendent of the Architectural Division Louis A. Simon, a stylistic traditionalist who later succeeded Wetmore as Supervising Architect - the Treasury's last. At the other end of the spectrum were a number of

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET U.S. Custom House ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 4

architects in the avant garde of the private sector. Embracing the tenets of the emerging Art Deco and Moderne styles (and a decade later the International style), these architects designed public buildings relatively unembellished by ornamentation and austere when compared with their classical predecessors. Between the two extremes, architects designed with a wide range of stylistic expression, combining new forms with borrowed revivalist or vernacular forms or motifs or somehow compromising between the classical and modern trends to create what is today termed "starved classicism."

The San Ysidro Custom House was one of many in California designed by the Supervising Architect's office. It borrows heavily from the Spanish vernacular for its stylistic distinction. The Spanish antecedent is an appropriate one for the building, because it was the 1915 Panama-California Exposition held in San Diego that the style began to receive attention outside of the region. By the time this building was designed, Spanish Colonial Revival was a nationally accepted style. Although the red tile roof, stuccoed walls with inset tiles and picturesque roof profile with decorative cupolas tied the building with mainstream Mexican and Southern Californian architecture, the SA did not limit its use of the style to areas in which it was a vernacular form; post offices and courthouses throughout the country displayed variations of the style through the thirties.

Construction drawings for the building were completed in early 1932, and bidding for the construction was let that spring, with the bid opening on 29 April. Ten contracting firms bid for the project. Among these were five San Diego companies: M.H. Golden, B.O. Larsen, W.E. Kier and the Jarboa Construction Company and G.F. Campbell Building Company; but despite the fact that the federal building program was to provide work for local laborers, the contract was awarded to a Texas contractor, Robert E. McKee of El Paso. The Texas firm had submitted the lowest bid - \$93,800.

The following month some sixty federal and county officials met in the San Ysidro civic center to plan the formal ground breaking ceremony. Also at the meeting were several businessmen and government officials from Tijuana, an indication of the importance of the building to both countries. The ground was broken in early summer 1932, and the construction was commenced. It continued without report of incident through the remainder of the year and into the following spring. On 13 May 1933 the San Diego Evening Tribune reported:

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET U.S. Custom House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 5

The new United States customs building at the border was completed today, and although not officially accepted by the bureau at Washington, the immigration department, bureau of animal industry and the bureau of sanitation have moved into the spacious quarters provided in the large building.

An innovation in the inspection of autos crossing the border is the installation of a system of lights so designed to light up the under part of the cars, which are reflected in mirrors imbedded in the three concrete drives under the arcade in front of the building. Another innovation is the living quarters in the lockup on the second floor, with accomodations for both women and men with shower baths.

Although formal dedication ceremonies had been planned the year before, no mention of such an event was reported in the San Diego newspapers, as the building was put quietly to use. Two weeks after the opening, Customs officials announced, over the objections of San Diego businessmen, that the border crossing would be opened 24 hours a day (it had been closed at 6 pm each night before). A year later a 12'x 15' shelter was erected in the road in front of the Custom House. Traffic at San Ysidro continued to increase and by 1955 the crossing was the second busiest along the border between the two countries; only the crossing at El Paso, Texas handled a greater volume. By that time U.S. Commissioner of Customs Ralph Kelly characterized the border crossing as "terrible," urging the General Services Administration to implement a planned expansion of the facility. A new building was erected just north of the 1933 Custom House; in 1974 the present massive structure over the crossing was completed, dwarfing the earlier building. Today the border crossing at San Ysidro is the busiest between the United States and Mexico. The second floor of the 1933 Custom House is occupied by the U.S. Customs Service; the first floor stands empty, ill-maintained with its windows boarded up. Although superceded in its function by the new facility, the 1933 Custom House still represents the immigration and customs history of the region. Just short of fifty years old, the building possesses the exceptional historical and arhcitectoral significance to qualify it for enrollment on the Register.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET U.S. Custom House ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Addendum: Major Bibliographical References

Books

- Armstrong, Ellis L., ed. History of Public Works in the United States: 1776-1976. Chicago: American Public Works Association, 1976.
- Craig, Lois, ed. and the staff of the Federal Architecture Project. The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics and Symbols in United States Government Building. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978.
- Fletcher, Banister. A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967.
- Whiffen Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969.
- Who's Who in America Volume 1: 1897-1942. Chicago: A.N. Marquis Company, 1942.

Periodicals

- Heath, Ferry K. "The Federal Building Program," Architectural Forum, September 1931.
- Sawyer, Phillip. "The Design of Public Buildings," Architectural Forum, September 1931.

Newspapers

- "Border Officers Move into New Station Building," San Diego Union, 13 May 1933.
- "Border Station to Get Canopy," San Diego Union, 8 October 1970.
- "Complete Border Customs Building," San Diego Evening Tribune, 13 May 1933.
- "Custom Bureau Plans Expansion at San Ysidro," San Diego Union, 25 September 1955.
- "Custom's New Name," San Diego Union, 5 August 1973.
- "Customs Office to Remain Here, Collector Says," San Diego Union, 19 May 1932.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET U.S. Custom House ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

- "El Paso Bidder Gets Border Job," San Diego Union, 30 April 1932.
- "Five Firms Seek San Ysidro Job," San Diego Union, 15 April 1932.
- "Hurry Border Station Bids, Plea to U.S.," San Diego Evening Tribune, 14 April 1932.
- "Improved Customs Facilities Favored," San Diego Union, 31 December 1955.
- "Officials Plan Fete at Border," San Diego Union, 10 May 1932.
- "Proposal Downgrades 2 Big Ports," San Diego Union, 30 March 1965.
- "San Diego Against 24 Hour Opening," San Diego Sun, 29 May 1933.
- "San Ysidro Gate Goes Full Blast," San Diego Union, 3 June 1973.
- "Speed on Border Stations Urged," San Diego Union, 14 April 1932.
- "U.S. Borders Open 24 Hours," San Diego Sun, 27 May 1933.

Miscellaneous

- "San Ysidro," unpublished history of town. Provided by San Ysidro Branch Library.
- U.S. Department of Treasury, Public Buildings Service. Original construction drawings for U.S. Inspection Station, San Ysidro California. By Supervising Architect's Office, Washington D.C. Provided by General Services Administration Region 9 Office, San Francisco California.
- U.S. Department of Treasury, Public Buildings Service, Site title papers for U.S. Inspection Station, San Ysidro California. (General correspondence, 1838-1968, Entry 80; Box 70). Provided by National Records Center, Suitland Maryland.