

PH00 11509

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	
COUNTY:	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER 71.9.11.0012	DATE 9/10/71

1. NAME

COMMON: (within the Boundaries of the
Custom House and Post Office (Georgetown) Georgetown Historic District)
AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
1221 31st Street, N.W. (Georgetown)
CITY OR TOWN:
Washington

STATE District of Columbia	CODE 11	COUNTY: District of Columbia	CODE 001
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3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	Post Office	
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
The United States of America - U.S. Postal Service

STREET AND NUMBER:
CITY OR TOWN:
STATE:
CODE:

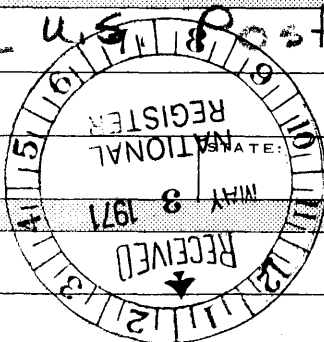
5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Recorder of Deeds
STREET AND NUMBER:
6th and D Streets, N.W.
CITY OR TOWN:
Washington
STATE:
District of Columbia
CODE:
11

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Proposed District of Columbia Additions to the National Register of Historic Properties recommended by the Joint Committee on Landmarks
DATE OF SURVEY: March 7, 1968 Federal State County Local
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
National Capital Planning Commission
STREET AND NUMBER:
1325 G Street, N.W.
CITY OR TOWN:
Washington
STATE:
District of Columbia
CODE:
11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



STATE:
COUNTY:
ENTRY NUMBER: 71.9.11.0012
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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Georgetown Custom House and Post Office was designed in 1856-7 in the Renaissance Revival-Italian Palace manner. It is located on the east side of 31st Street (formerly Congress Street) about 120 feet north of M Street. The two-story Custom House is rectangular in shape with a full basement. The building is constructed of finely finished dark grey ashlar with courses 1'4" in height. The main block which faces west is 61 feet wide (5 bays) and 46 feet deep (3 bays). There are additions to the north and east of the original building. The simple hipped roof is covered with seamed metal--it is of low profile and cannot be seen from the street.

The building is fronted at the west and south ends by a wide stone paved terrace called the "platform," reached by steps from grade level. Under the terrace, a tunnel approximately six feet wide extends to the street from the basement. At the first floor of the west facade is the main entrance to the Post Office.

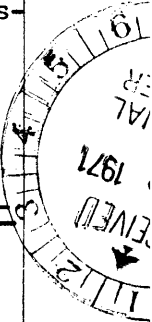
The articulation of the main facade is very symmetrical. The main entrance is located in the center of the west facade, and is flanked on either side by two windows. The second story contains five windows directly over the first story openings. The side and main doorways are similar in that they are framed by a granite trim band with a cyma molding edge and capped with a projecting stone cornice. However, the main doorway on the west facade is distinguished by having a dentil band under the crowning cornice.

Most of the windows on both the first and second floor are the original 6/6 light double hung sash. Window openings are fitted with stone lintels and sills and framed by granite trim. The lower floor windows have projecting flat entablatures of stone similar to those over the doorways. The sills of the first floor windows are linked together by a projecting stone band. The second floor windows are trimmed with an eared granite band and a sill supported by a pair of small granite consoles. The fenestration of the remaining sides is similar. The basement windows each have a 2' x 4' grate covered archway. An elaborate stone cornice about 4' in height crowns the building. It is formed with cyma-recta and scotia moldings and has a fine dentil band.

The interior has been altered extensively throughout its history. On the first floor, the major remaining decorative features are the 12 cast iron Corinthian columns. An attractive cast iron stairway, which runs south to north along the east wall, originally led to the Customs offices. The pierced risers are decorated with a central palmette and curving swags and sprays. The stringer ends are also open, with similar sprays. The cast iron newel post is decorated at the base with acanthus leaves, and the balusters are similarly treated. Since the removal of the Customs office, the second floor space is unused except for one office used by the Coast Guard. If elevators were installed, the Post Office would be able to utilize the space.

(Much of the above architectural description is taken from Georgetown Architecture, No. 10: see bibliography)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **date of construction: 1857-8**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | <u>Custom house and</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | <u>Post Office</u> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated the Custom House and Post Office a Category II Landmark of importance which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia. The building, designed by Ammi B. Young (1798-1874) who was Supervising Architect of the Treasury from 1852-1862, is one of several standardized types of custom houses developed under his supervision. Built in 1857-8, the Custom House and Post Office was designed in the Renaissance Revival-Italian Palace manner. This style provides for a simplicity and generalization of classical elements and also lends a classical dignity to the building.

The Custom House and Post Office is one of a number of federal buildings designed during the period when Ammi B. Young was Supervising Architect of the Treasury. It is believed that Young may have studied under Alexander Parris in Boston. Prior to his work in Washington, his important commissions include Thorton, Wentworth and Reed Halls at Dartmouth, the Vermont State Capitol, 1832, and the Boston Custom House, 1936-47.

The Georgetown Custom House and Post Office has been described by Talbot Hamlin in his book, Greek Revival Architecture in America:

The best of these Italianate Federal buildings is the still simpler Italian-palace type found in the customs house...in Washington and the somewhat similar Federal Building (1856-8) at Galena, Illinois. In these the classical elements are so generalized and the proportions so wide and ample that the effect is almost as Georgian as it is Italian Renaissance, except for the very large scale of the parts. In these, at least, ...there is evident much of that strong, simple feeling for wall surface pierced by well-placed openings and for detail, bold yet discreet, which we associate with the Greek Revival.

Georgetown was established as a port of entry to the United States by an act of Congress approved March 22, 1779. The site of the first custom house, however, has been impossible to locate. By 1856 the problem of where to build a permanent custom house for the District arose and was referred to a Senate Committee on Commerce. The Committee reported, "There is nothing that can be called commerce in Washington, and there is something of it in Georgetown." Consequently, Congress appropriated \$65,000.00 to build a custom house and post office in Georgetown. The building was com-

(Continued on Form 10-300a)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Commission of Fine Arts and HABS, Georgetown Architecture-Northwest Washington (Historic American Buildings Survey Selections, No. 10) Washington, D.C.: 1970, pp. 163-186.

Hamlin, Talbot. Greek Revival Architecture in America. New York: Dover Publications, 1964. Pp. 108-109.

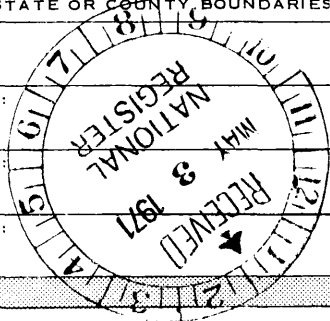
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		38° 54' 20" N	77° 03' 40" W	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: approximately 14,880 square feet

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Suzanne Ganschietz, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION: National Capital Planning Commission DATE: March 29, 1971

STREET AND NUMBER: 1325 G Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: District of Columbia CODE: 11

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION **NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name: [Signature]

Title: Deputy Mayor Commissioner

Date: APR 30 1971

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

[Signature]
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: SEP 10 1971

ATTEST:

[Signature]
Keeper of The National Register

Date: JUL 29 1971

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
COUNTY	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
71.9.11.0012	9/10/91

(Number all entries)

8. Significance - Custom House and Post Office

pleted in 1858 at a total cost of \$55,468.00.

The first floor was used for the post office. Georgetown had its first post office as early as 1776, under the management of Benjamin Franklin, first Postmaster General of the United States. However, the post office in Georgetown never had a permanent location until Congress purchased the land for the present building. In 1877, the Georgetown post office was made a branch of the District of Columbia post office system.

The second floor was used by custom house officials and the Corporation of Georgetown was permitted to occupy space in the building for municipal purposes; the Mayor's office and the Councils and Alderman were housed there. The basement was used for storage of goods awaiting inspection.

In 1864 Senate Bill No. 210 was introduced proposing the abolishment of Georgetown as the port of entry and making the official port Washington City. The mayor of Georgetown led a violent fight against this bill charging that Congress was attempting to destroy his city; he was able to convince Congress that the Custom House should remain in Georgetown. When Georgetown was absorbed into the District of Columbia, the name of the port of entry was officially changed to Washington. In 1913 President Taft ordered a reorganization of customs districts; the port of Washington became a part of Customs District Number 13 which included Maryland, Washington, and Alexandria, Virginia. In 1967, the Custom House moved out of its second floor space. The post office still occupies the first floor.

(Much of the historical information above was taken almost verbatim from Georgetown Architecture, No. 10: see bibliography)

