

PH0013170

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTY: \_\_\_\_\_

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY DATE: **JUL 16 1973**

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Riggs National Bank

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
(within Boundaries of Lafayette Square Historic District)

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1503-05 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Congressman  
Walter E. Fauntroy, DC

STATE: District of Columbia

CODE: 11

COUNTY: District of Columbia

CODE: 001

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
Riggs National Bank

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1503 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia

CODE: 11

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 Places 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

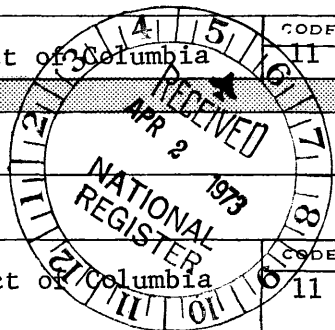
STREET AND NUMBER:  
1325 G Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia

CODE: 11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



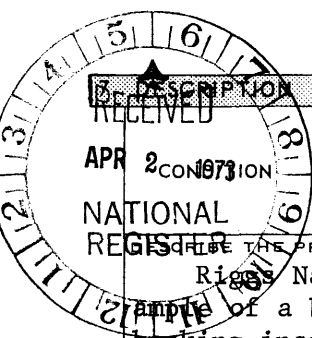
STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTY: \_\_\_\_\_

ENTRY NUMBER: 16973

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

FOR NPS USE ONLY



RECEIVED  
APR 2 1973  
NATIONAL REGISTER

(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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Riggs National Bank at 1503 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, is an excellent example of a building in the dignified, Neo-Classical Revival style favored by banking institutions at the turn of the century. The pedimented building with Ionic columns in antis was designed by the New York City firm of York and Sawyer and built between 1899 and 1902. Between 1922 and 1924 the west office wing was added and the banking room remodeled. This addition by Appleton C. Clark, Jr., of Washington was sympathetically handled, and the fact that it is an addition is not immediately apparent. The addition and the original building have the same roofline and form a contained, rectangular mass. The interior banking room, a monumental space, occupies most of the volume of the original building. Public rooms are finished in a variety of marbles and have elaborate, decorative ceilings.

The bank's main (south) facade faces and complements the Ionic columned portico of the Treasury Department building, a Category I landmark. A 15-foot alley separates the bank's west facade from the Neo-Classical Treasury Annex. The north facade can only be seen from a service alley. The American Security and Trust Company, a Category II Landmark, is attached at the east. This building was designed by York and Sawyer and built in 1904-1905. Its style, scale, mass, and materials complement Riggs National Bank and the designs of the two buildings are so harmonious that they are often thought to be one building. Together they form a monumental corner grouping which contrasts dramatically with the High Victorian, red brick National Savings and Trust Company, a Category II Landmark, across 15th Street.

Originally the 1899-1902 building was 53-1/2 feet by 111 feet with a projecting area at the rear (north) for services. There was one major facade, the narrow, temple form Pennsylvania Avenue (south) facade. On this facade, the brick building was faced with smooth, white granite. Although there was only one story and a full basement, the building was the height of a four story building.

An earlier building was attached to the bank at the west. Between 1903 and 1919 this building's south facade was faced with stone and redesigned along Neo-Classical Revival lines. In 1922-24 this building was replaced by the bank's west wing. This brick wing which is the same height as the original building has five main floors, a basement, and a partial sixth floor for utilities. The wing's south facade is 26-1/2 feet wide and its west facade is 111 feet long. The exterior today largely retains its 1924 appearance. Both south and west facades are faced with smooth, white granite with regular ashlar bonds.

The main (south) facade is an asymmetrical but very ordered composition. There is a full entablature with modillions and dentils. Above this is a stone parapet which hides the roof. There are two bays. The original building occupies the east bay; and the wing, the west bay. The pedimented east bay projects slightly from the main wall. Under the triangular pediment are a frieze with the words "RIGGS NATIONAL BANK" bordered by carving and pilasters flanking the recessed entrance area. In the pediment is a carved eagle and other carving in high relief. In front of each pilaster is a bronze light stanchion supported by bronze griffins. These stanchions are important exterior features as they contrast in material and form with the blank surfaces of the pilasters. The entrance area is defined by 40-foot high, free-standing fluted Ionic columns on pedestals. Between the pedestals are stairs

(Continued on Form 10-300a)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**SIGNIFICANCE**

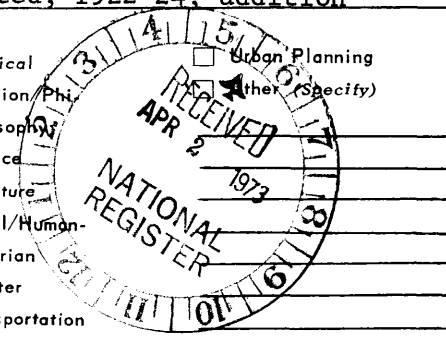
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1899-1902, erected; 1922-24, addition

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             |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           |   |
| <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 checked="" 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 Riggs National Bank a Category II Landmark of importance which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia. The bank, an outgrowth of the exchange and brokerage firm founded by William Corcoran in 1836, as an institution occupies an important place in the history of American banking houses. Its main office is an excellent and representative example of a building in the elaborate, Neo-Classical Revival style favored by banking firms at the turn of this century. The buildings significance is increased by its location across from the Treasury Building on the Pennsylvania Avenue approach to the White House. The granite faced bank with Ionic columns in antis complements the Treasury Building, a National Historic Landmark, and adds to the monumentality and dignity of its surroundings.

Riggs National Bank was constructed between 1899 and 1902 on a site which had been at the center of Washington's financial district since the early 19th century when it was owned by the Second Bank of the United States. The design by York and Sawyer received considerable attention in the contemporary architectural press. In May 1905, the Architectural Record featured it in an article and the American Architect and Building News illustrated it in its International Edition of May 12, 1906. York and Sawyer, a New York City architectural firm founded in 1898, had a reputation for designing banking houses, large office buildings, and hospitals. Philip Sawyer (1868-1949) studied civil engineering before studying architecture at Columbia University and the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Edward Palmer York (1865-1928) studied architecture at Cornell University. Both men worked for McKim, Mead and White prior to forming their partnership. The Riggs building was sympathetically enlarged between 1922 and 1924 by Appleton P. Clark, Jr., of Washington.

The history of the Bank as an institution dates back to 1836 when William W. Corcoran, a former employee of the Second Bank of the United States, opened an exchange and brokerage business in a small office on Pennsylvania Avenue. In 1839 he moved his offices to space in Rhodes' Tavern recently vacated by the Bank of Metropolis. (Rhodes' Tavern, a Category II Landmark, at the corner of 15th and F Streets, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.) On April 15, 1840, George Washington Riggs, the son of a wealthy New York banker entered into partnership with Corcoran and "Corcoran and Riggs" became a bank of deposit.

(Continued on Form 10-300a)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Assessments, Atlas, Directories, Newspaper Clippings, and Photographs.  
 Washingtoniana Collection. D.C. Public Library.  
 Columbia Real Estate Title Company. Deed Search Files. Cases 22671; 32920; 36022; and 41117.  
 Gridley, Charles O. and Hugh Morrow. "Big Shots Have Money Troubles Too." Reprinted from The Saturday Evening Post. Sept. 18, 1948.  
 Larner, John B., ed. "History of Banking in the District of Columbia." Washington: Past and Present. J.C. Proctor editor-in-chief. Vol. I. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1930, pp. 298-301.  
 National Capital Planning Commission. Landmarks File.

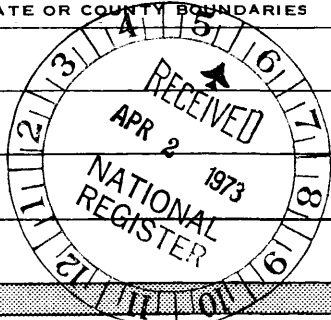
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				OR	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
NW	0	'	"	38°	53'	57"	77°	02'	04"
NE	0	'	"						
SE	0	'	"						
SW	0	'	"						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 9,692 sq. feet .222+ acres

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



121-303580-000 585

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
 T. Robins Brown, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION: National Capital Planning Commission DATE: March 2, 1973

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

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

**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: X James G. Anderson

Title: Assistant to the Mayor for Housing Programs

Date: MAR 09 1973

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

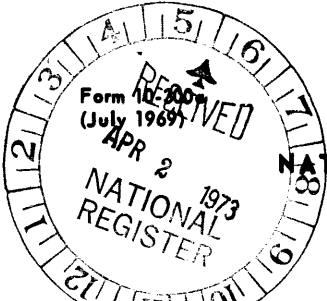
Robert K. Utley  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 7/18/73

ATTEST:

W. J. [Signature]  
 Keeper of the National Register

Date: 7.20.73



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
COUNTY	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	JUL 16 1973

(Number all entries)

7. Description - Riggs National Bank

leading to the main doorway. The doorway has enriched stone trim and an entablature supported on consoles. Flanking it are windows with stone trim. Above the door and windows is a large, multiple light window with metal frame with narrow Ionic columns. The west wing has a slightly recessed area between pilasters and below the entablature. In this area is a first story window surrounded by stone fretwork. Above this window is a larger, multiple light window with metal frame with narrow Ionic columns. Behind the stone parapet is an opening.

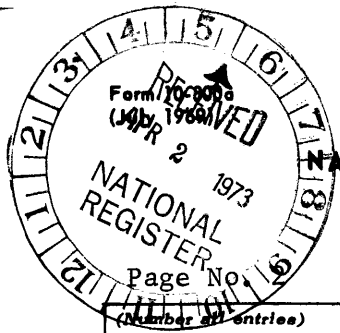
The west facade has five bays separated by pilasters. Each bay has one first story window, a single opening containing second and third story windows, a fourth story window in the frieze and a fifth story window behind the parapet. The openings are arranged so that they conform with the composition of the main facade. The architrave of the entablature of the main facade continues on the west facade, but the cornice of the west facade is much simpler than that of the main facade.

The interior was altered when the wing was added in 1922-24. Since then the offices in the wing have been remodeled several times. The main banking room has been changed less and is an impressive interior space. It is a four story high room finished in rich materials and bold Neo-Classical decoration. The ceiling with colored glass skylight, rosettes, and panels with enriched mouldings is particularly noteworthy. The east and west walls are each divided into bays by six fluted Ionic pilasters located above 12 foot high marble panelling. These pilasters support a full entablature with enriched mouldings.

Originally offices in the west wing opened onto the main banking room by balconies which have been enclosed. Two tiers of balconies have been added at the north and south ends. The first was added about 1928 and the second about ten years later. Both balconies at the south and the lower balcony at the north have been enclosed to create more private office space. The room has a U-shaped counter arrangement. Marble stairs, leading to the vaults in the basement, are located west of the entrance. The banking area on the first floor of the west wing opens on to the main banking room. This room also has marble paneling, marble floors, and marble counters. Its one story high ceiling has octagonal panels. The ceilings in the basement near the vault have gold tiles and geometric designs. The predominant colors of the interior are gold and white. The interior decoration is rich and elaborate, but not gaudy or ostentatious. In both interior and exterior appointments the building impresses upon the visitor a sense of dignity, wealth, and stability.

8. Significance - Riggs National Bank

In 1845 Corcoran and Riggs bought property at the northwest corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 15th Street. Located near the corner was the building which housed the Second Bank of the United States from 1824 to 1836 and west of it, a house where the bank's cashier had resided. In 1846 "Corcoran and Riggs" moved into the old bank building. This brick Federal building, probably designed by George Hadfield, served as the bank's office until 1902 when the bank moved next door to the new building designed by York and Sawyer and located on the site of the old cashier's house.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
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(Number all entries)

8. Significance (cont.)

In 1904 the old bank building on the corner was torn down in order to erect a new building for American Security and Trust Company. This building was designed by York and Sawyer and it is attached to and relates in proportions, scale, mass and materials to Riggs' building by the same architectural firm. (The American Security and Trust Company, a Category II Landmark, is being nominated to the National Register.)

After Corcoran retired in 1854 to devote his energies to philanthropic activities, Riggs formed a partnership with his half-brother Elisha Riggs, and the firm became "Riggs and Company." It retained this name until 1896 although partners changed and George Riggs died in 1881. In 1896 it became a national bank and has since been known as "Riggs National Bank."

Since its earliest years, this bank has served many important persons. During the Civil War it was the depository of President Lincoln and most of his cabinet. Records show that the war caused the closing of a number of accounts including those of Jefferson Davis, Alexander H. Stephens and John C. Calhoun.

Because many Presidents have banked with Riggs National Bank, it has been referred to as the "Presidents' Bank." Numerous military leaders and politicians have also banked there; among them Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, Sam Houston, Teddy Roosevelt, Ulysses Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Admiral George Dewey. John C. Fremont drew \$6000 from the bank to supply his 1845 trip from St. Louis to Sutter's Fort in California, where he helped save California from the Mexicans. General Pershing began banking there in 1886 and was a director for many years. From 1942 to 1945 General MacArthur stored his personal papers and records at the bank while he was in the Pacific, and General Eisenhower kept his collection of medals there during World War II.

Many financial transactions for the government have been handled by Riggs. In 1847 and 1848 the bank bought the entire second and third issues of Mexican War Loan Government bonds, totalling \$34,000,000. When the demand for these fell Corcoran went to England and sold enough of them to help put United States credit on firm footing in foreign countries. In 1868 Riggs cashed the draft for \$7,200,000 in gold coin which the United States paid Russia for Alaska. This was one of the largest transactions handled by the U.S. Treasury at the time.

In the 20th century the bank continued to play a major role in national finance. During the banking crisis of the 1930's, its president, Robert Fleming, became the unofficial Washington spokesman and political representative of the banking business. To help alleviate the number of bank failures, he turned the balconies of the main office into an agency for the assignment of Reconstruction Finance Corporation Loans to unstable banks.

In 1928 Farmers and Mechanics National Bank of Georgetown consolidated with Riggs National Bank, and in the 1950's Riggs merged with the Washington Loan and Trust Company, which had been a pioneer in the trust company business in the District. In 1953 the bookkeeping department and other records were moved from the main building but a closed-circuit television was installed to make records readily available.

(Continued on Form 10-300a, page 3)

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
COUNTY	
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(Number all entries)

8. Significance - (Cont.)

The bank building retains its original function as the main administrative office for the banking house. The building has undergone almost no exterior modification since the 1922-24 addition. The interior offices have been modernized but the monumental space of the lofty banking room has been substantially preserved although balconies now intrude upon it.

