Form No. 10-306 (Rev. 10-74)

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 OCT 9 1986
DATE ENTERED NOV 13 1986

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
INTERIOR DEPARTMENT OFFICES

AND/OR COMMON
GENERAL SERVICES BUILDING

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
18th and F Streets, N.W. — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Washington, D.C. 20405 — VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
NONE

STATE — CODE: 11 — COUNTY: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA — CODE: 001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	X ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	__YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	X YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: *(If applicable)*
General Services Administration, National Capital Region

STREET & NUMBER
7th and D Streets. S.W.

CITY, TOWN
Washington, D.C. 20407 — VICINITY OF

STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Recorder of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER
515 D Street, N.W.

CITY, TOWN
Washington, D.C.

STATE

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE NONE
Mention is made in Federal Writer's Project Publications of 1937 (Washington, City & Capital) and 1942 (Washington, D.C.)

DATE

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X__ORIGINAL SITE
X__GOOD	__RUINS	X__ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The General Services Building (former Interior Department Offices or Interior Building) is a seven storey office building occupying the entire block between E and F Streets and 18th and 19th Streets, N.W., in Washington, D.C. A steel-framed structure clad in limestone, the building's Beaux Arts Classical Revival exterior is little changed from its appearance when first completed in 1917. Two additions dating from 1935 - a seventh floor built on the original flat roof and recessed behind its parapet, and a cooling tower built in the west court - were designed to complement the original building and, indeed, are hardly noticeable as additions today. Most of the historically significant interior spaces are also in near-original condition. The E-shaped plan provides two large light courts within which stand the cooling tower, a library, an auditorium, and a former press room where U.S. Geological Survey maps were printed. Overall, the building is in good condition and still serves the same function for which it was designed.

Measuring approximately 400 feet along E and F Streets and 392 feet along 18th and 19th Streets, the building contains full basement and ground storey, and rises 86 feet above grade on F Street and 103 feet above grade on E Street due to the slope of the lot. The entire building is faced in smooth, buff-colored Indiana limestone. The street facades are subtly articulated by projecting pavilions: The F Street, or main, facade has a central pavilion three bays wide containing three doors, and two end pavilions of three bays each, but these contain no entrances except for the single door in the central bay of the southern 18th Street pavilion.

Horizontal facade divisions are created by a watertable at the first storey window sill, belt courses at the second and sixth story window sills, and a modillioned cornice topped by a simple parapet at the level of the original roof. This cornice consists of a dentil row with round drops at outside corners, and modillions beneath a paneled soffit. The E Street facade, considered the back of the building, echoes the basic design of the F Street facade, with its cornice, belt courses, and watertable (here encompassing the entire ground storey due to the drop in grade from F Street). The south facades of the three wings are freestanding above the first storey. The two-storey links connecting these wings each contain an arched vehicle passageway which provides access into the court and is closed off at the street by a large iron gate. The passageway walls have smooth granite bases, limestone ashlar walls, and Guastavino tile arched ceilings.

The fenestration was intended as a strong design element. Between the window groupings, on both court and street elevations, the smooth limestone wall rises uninterrupted four storeys. Originally the ironwork, including ornamental spandrel panels that separate the window frames vertically, was painted a dark grey. This would have given the fenestration a strong vertical emphasis, balancing the horizontality of the long facades.

The entrance at the southern end of 18th Street is unusual in that it is sheltered by an iron and glass marquee which overhangs the granite steps and part of the semi-circular driveway leading to the steps. This entrance was designed originally as a private entrance for the Secretary of the Interior, whose suite of offices was directly above on the sixth storey.

The major decorative element of the building is the central F Street entrance. Each of the three doors is framed by pilasters and a modillioned cornice supported by consoles. Over the central cornice is an eagle carved by Ernest C. Bairstow, a decorative sculptor from Washington, D.C. Bairstow also provided the designs for the 28 limestone panels in the frieze at the sixth storey and the ornamental work at the entrance on F Street.

Originally the building was to have been faced in red brick with limestone decorative elements. At the urging of the Commission of Fine Arts the brick was changed from red to grey. When the construction bids came in far below the appropriated amount, it was decided to face the entire building in limestone, thus making it somewhat grander than originally intended.

The original exterior doors were removed in 1970 and replaced with bronze-colored, anodized aluminum and glass doors at all street entrances. The original one-over-one wood window sash remain, however, and are still sound though in need of repair. The original French doors equipped with iron balconies still overlook the courts from the first storey of the F Street wing. The bronze lamp standards flanking the F Street entrances are original. No record remains of the first landscape design, but the original granite-bordered planting beds surrounding the building's areaways are still in place.

The interior of the former Interior Building is surprisingly intact. The basic plan, consisting of long, double-loaded corridors, has been changed only in a few places where walls have been removed to

create open, "landscaped office" areas, or where the ends of corridors have been closed off to create suites of rooms. The ceilings of the corridors on the second through fifth storeys were lowered to conceal ductwork for the newly installed air conditioning system in 1935. They were given a vaulted form which is in harmony with the interior architecture. The marble-clad F Street lobbies with their molded plaster ceilings have sustained changes only to their doors, lighting fixtures, and elevator entrances. The auditorium is unaltered except for the replacement of seats and fire doors. The library has undergone some changes which alter its appearance: The lobby ceiling has been lowered by the installation of a suspended acoustic tile ceiling, concealing the original vaulted ceiling which has lunette windows at each end. Doorways have been blocked; ductwork, sprinkler pipes, and fluorescent light fixtures have been mounted on the ceiling of the stack area; and carpeting has been installed over the original glass floors in the stacks. Most of the original features of the library still remain, however, and could be restored.

The press room, located in the east court south of the auditorium, contained the huge color presses and lithographic stones used to print the U.S.G.S. maps during the first half of the century. When the Geological Survey moved its offices to Reston in 1974, the presses were removed and the space is now used for storage and building workshops. All elevators have been modernized within the last 25 years and their cab interiors are not original. The firestairs, however, are unchanged except for the installation of safety treads over the original slate treads.

The most elaborate area in the building is the suite of offices originally occupied by the Secretary of the Interior. Located on the sixth storey at the south end of the east wing, the suite consisted of a public office or reception room, a private office, a private passage, and a restroom complete with bath. The offices and passages are paneled from floor to ceiling with carved English oak. The two offices have elaborately molded plaster ceilings, and the reception room contains a fireplace faced in carved French limestone. The floors are white oak in a herringbone pattern with borders of walnut. The windows contain leaded glass. The room is patterned after a room from Bromley-by-Bow, an English house built in 1606.(1)

Except for the replacement of furniture, lighting fixtures, bathroom fixtures, and wiring for new communications equipment, the rooms appear as they did when first occupied. They could easily be restored by repairing the leaded windows and refinishing the woodwork.

1. Karel Yasko Files, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
__1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	X PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
X 1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	X POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Charles Butler for the Supervising Architect of the Treasury

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Completed in 1917 as the headquarters for the Department of the Interior, the present General Services Building is significant in three areas relating to the National Register Criteria. It is associated with events, such as the Teapot Dome Scandal, and the growth of the National Park Service and the U.S. Geological Survey, which have had a significant impact on the broad patterns of our history (Criterion A). The building was occupied by two Secretaries of the Interior (Albert Fall and Harold Ickes), who played significant roles in American History (Criterion B). The building was a refinement of the Federal office building tradition. Designed as a truly "modern" office building, the former Interior Building embodies the distinctive characteristics of that type, thus meeting Criterion C.

Criterion A:

This building served as headquarters for the Department of the Interior during two of its most important decades, 1917-37. By the end of this period the Department had grown to employ over 13,000 people and had a budget of $100,000,000. Its responsibilities were the "disposal, development, conservation, and administration of the public domain. "(1) In addition, it controlled the Patent Office until its transfer to the Department of Commerce in 1925 and the Pension Office until its consolidation with the Veterans Administration in 1930. The Department at that time also administered St. Elizabeth's Hospital, the Freedmen's Hospital, Howard University, and the Columbia Institute for the Deaf.

Established in 1849, the Department of the Interior "was created chiefly to deal with problems arising out of the opening of public lands to settlers."(2) Over the years the policies formulated and carried out those occupying western lands. The General Land Office was responsible for the disposition of public lands, granting easements, railroad rights-of-way, and leases for mineral rights. The Bureau of Reclamation, set up to build and manage irrigation projects in the arid states, was responsible for constructing Hoover and Boulder dams in the Colorado River Basin and the Grand Coulee Dam in the Columbia River Basin. The Bureau of Mines studied mining safety and technology to improve the nation's utilization of coal and precious metals.

(See Continuation Sheet Item 8 page 2)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3.6 acres

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	18	322818	4307079	B			
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Bounded on the north by F Street, on the east by 18th Street, on the south by E Street, and on the west by 19th Street in northwest Washington, DC

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
Andrea Rebeck, Project Architect

ORGANIZATION
Velsey Architects AIA

DATE
1/24/86

STREET & NUMBER
8605 Cameron Street, Suite 314

TELEPHONE
(301) 654-0866

CITY OR TOWN
Silver Spring, MD 20910

STATE

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES ✓ NO ___ NONE ___

Carol B. Thompson
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 X National ___ State ___ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE J. WALTER ROTH
Historic Preservation Officer

W Roth

DATE October 8, 1986

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE 11-23-86

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

During its tenure in this building, the Bureau of Indian Affairs demonstrated a new sensitivity for the American Indian. With the Wheeler-Howard Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Bureau "reversed traditional policy which, by allowing the break-up of Indian reservations into individual allotments, undermined the economic basis of tribal culture. At special referendum elections held in 1934 and 1935, a large majority of tribes and of the Indian population voted to accept the act. New allotments or sale of Indian lands, except to tribes, are now forbidden, and unentered remnants of the so-called surplus lands are being restored to tribes."(3)

The National Park Service was essentially born in this building. "Largely as a result of the initiative of Franklin K. Lane [first Interior Secretary to occupy this building], the National Park Service was established as a bureau of the Department of the Interior by act of Congress approved August 25, 1916, to correlate the administration and development of the national park and monument areas...."(4) President Roosevelt consolidated all Federal park areas under the Park Service in 1933, and by 1936 it had 9,929,432 visitors at 26 national parks and 69 national monuments, encompassing 16,000,000 acres of land.

The U.S. Geological Survey, the "Department's scientific adviser on the resources of public lands," was the largest tenant in the former Interior Building. The Library housed its large and unique geological collection as well as the George Frederick Kunz collection of gems. The Press Room, designed as a separate building projecting into the east light court, housed the huge color presses on which were printed the topographic maps produced by the Survey. By 1937 the U.S.G.S. had surveyed 47% of the country's land area. Several chemistry, geology, and photographic laboratories were provided for the Survey engineers and scientists. The results of Survey studies determined which public lands should be closed to development to conserve mineral and water resources, which could be used for grazing and farming, and after the severe droughts of the 1930's, which lands should be closed to even these activities. These patterns of use had a great impact on the economic development of the middle and western states in particular.

Thus the years during which the Department of the Interior occupied this building were important years to both the Department and the nation. Policy and actions formulated in this building are still influencing American life today.

Criterion B:

The history of the United States is that of a vast land explored, settled, and exploited by its inhabitants. During the 19th century the Federal Government, appreciating the need for more accurate surveying and control of its lands, established the Department of the Interior and later the Geological Survey, the General Land Office, the Bureau of Mines, and the Reclamation Service. From 1917 to 1937 these agencies occupied the former Interior Building, and their activities shaped the use of public lands throughout the country. The Secretary of the Interior's office was located in this building, and two Secretaries in particular were associated with significant events or made important contributions to our history.

The first was the infamous Albert B. Fall, a central figure in the "Teapot Dome" scandal of 1921-22. Fall was convicted and imprisoned for accepting $400,000 in bribes from oil magnates Harry F. Sinclair and Edward L. Doheny in return for secretly granting them rights to drill for oil in Wyoming and California on public lands which had been set aside as Naval oil reserves. By the time Albert Fall went to prison in 1931, the implications of his corrupt actions, the complexities of the Government investigation, and the extended court trial combined to impress the scandal on the public consciousness and made the name Teapot Dome synonymous with government corruption.(5)

The second Interior Secretary of major importance had a more positive role. Harold L. Ickes served as Secretary of the Interior under Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman from 1933-46. As Secretary for a record 13 years, he oversaw the construction of the Shasta, Friant, Bonneville, and Grand Coulee dams; fully developed the National Park Service to provide for the recreation needs of the nation; and served as the first Federal administrator of public works, which expanded the construction industry and furnished employment during the Depression years.(6)

Criterion C:

The former Interior Building was designed by Charles Butler for the Supervising Architect of the Treasury. The construction was supervised by C.P.S. Garwood from the New York office of James Gamble Rogers. It was designed to contain those bureaus of the Interior Department that dealt with land matters - the U.S. Geological Survey, the Reclamation Service, the Bureau of Mines, the General Land Office,

and the Office of Indian Affairs. In addition to administrative personnel, these bureaus employed geologists, engineers, topographers, paleontologists, chemists, physicists, hydrographers, geophysicists, petrologists, and other scientists whose laboratory and office needs were very specific.

The building was the focus of considerable Congressional and official interest, and was frequently discussed in the press. The Congressional legislation passed in 1910 directed the Secretary of the Treasury to produce a "fireproof building of modern office-building type."(7) The then Supervising Architect, James Knox Taylor, instructed his staff to prepare plans for this building. Of these designs, Taylor's successor as Supervising Architect, Oscar Wenderoth, described them as "not office-building types at all. They are the usual long, low building, such as the Senate Office Building and the House Office Building, and had no suggestion of office-building construction . . . that was contrary to the idea involved in the legislation."(8) The bureau heads also expressed opinions about the character of the new building. F.W. Newell, Director of the Reclamation Service, stated that he felt that too much Federal money was lavished on useless ornamentation, which drained the Federal treasury. Such designs caused poor lighting conditions for Federal workers and consequently reduced the energies of workers.(9) To this statement, Supervising Architect Wenderoth assured Newell that every effort would be made to erect a modern office building as "I have had more or less experience in planning office buildings while in the employ of private architects."(10)

The former Interior Building's location outside the monumental groupings around the White House and the Mall was a further argument for a functional office building. Without the constraints of neighboring monumental buildings, it was felt that "it would be possible to design a building which should meet in every detail the practical requirements of the Department."(11) As the Evening Star reported, "The new building will be a workshop, not a show place . . . The site was chosen because it is, in a measure, 'out of the way'."(12) At the time the site was designated for the use of the Interior Department, it was thought by some Congressmen to be a poor location for a major Federal Government building. Although sited only one block from the State, War and Navy Building, the square was too far west of the Capitol-White House axis to be readily accessible to members of Congress. Some Congressmen were unsure of where the square was.(13) It should be remembered that during the nineteenth and much

of the early twentieth centuries, members of Congress made frequent rounds of the Executive Departments on behalf of their constituencies. Some Congressmen felt the site to be practically a "back yard" to the more desired location along Pennsylvania Avenue.(14) As Representative Henry A. Barnhart of Indiana remarked in 1913, "Every time we build one of these buildings, we get them farther and farther out, after a while they will go to the city limits and demand buildings there. We have to spend about $10 now every time we want to make the rounds of the public buildings. It is a good thing for the cab men and the taxicab men, but it is not a good business policy to scatter these buildings everywhere."(15) Representative Henry Allen Cooper of Wisconsin felt so strongly about the unattractiveness of the site that he attempted to block an appropriation for the building.(16) He argued that, "It is not at all in harmony with the plan for the improvement of the city of Washington and is utterly inappropriate for this department." He described the site as "remote, inconvenient, awkward to reach, and which was originally bought as a site for a hall of records."(17) However, the delays inherent in acquiring another site quieted these objections.

The characteristics of "modern" office design embodied by the former Interior Building included devoting a minimum of interior space to purely ceremonial public areas such as grand lobbies or enclosed central light courts. Offices of shallow depth were given large windows (50% of the wall area on the street facades and 70% on the court facades), and operable transoms over their glazed corridor doors to maximize natural light and ventilation. Each office had its own lavatory and had inner connecting doors to neighboring rooms. The telephone system was very sophisticated for its day, providing most office workers with their own telephone. Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane insisted on equipping the building with an iced drinking water system (most buildings of the day had central drinking "wells" where occupants shared a common drinking cup).

The distribution of bureaus was on several floors, "confined to one section of the structure, and accessible by stairways and elevators." The Evening Star believed this disposition of offices on vertical lines rather than the usual horizontal plan to be "new." The new system of grouping was considered to be more efficient. "It is the theory that the distance up and down stairs is better in the matter of conservation than to spread offices on the same plane with long walking distances. Rapid elevators and easy stairways will facilitate communication."(18) Each of the three entrances along F Street led into its own vestibule and lobby. A public corridor parallel to F

Street connected the three lobbies. The three entrances corresponded to each of the wings and led to their respective bank of elevators and stair halls. In this way, employees of a particular bureau were "sorted on their entrance into the building." Visitors were also directed to enter the elevator leading to the desired bureau. This system of entry addressed the problem presented by all employees arriving and leaving the building at the same time. The building was also provided with special facilities described by the Director of the Geological Survey, George Otis Smith, as "features more varied than any office building in this or any other city, such as an Auditorium (the first in a Federal Government building), a Library, chemical laboratories, and the largest map engraving establishment anywhere to be found, including a highly specialized photographic laboratory."(19)

The building's design was patterned after a private office building recently completed in Washington, D.C. In a March 1913 letter from Oscar Wenderoth, Supervising Architect of the Treasury, to F.W. Newell, Director of the U.S. Reclamation Service, he cited the Southern Building (1425 H Street, N.W.) as the local example of the kind of structure he envisioned for the Interior Department offices.(20) Constructed between 1910-11 at the northeast corner of 15th and H Streets in downtown Washington, the Southern Building was designed by the firm of Daniel Burnham. The building had been commissioned by the Southern Commercial Congress, a non-profit organization founded in 1908 to promote Southern business interests. The building's rents were intended to endow the organization. Although originally designed to rise eleven stories, it was topped off at nine. The U-shaped plan above the third floor allowed for a large open light court opening to the west. Windows were placed along its entire perimeter so that natural light could illuminate the offices. The structure was a steel frame clad in buff brick and terra cotta. At its completion, it was a modern, elevator-serviced building located in the highly desirable financial district along 15th Street.

The exterior of the Southern Building was embellished with elaborate terra cotta trim because it was intended to catch the eye and thereby attract rent-paying tenants. By contrast, the former Interior Building had no need to appeal to potential tenants -- occupants were already at hand, anxious to occupy the building upon its completion. The Evening Star described the building as "exceedingly simple. In style, it may best be described as American office building architecture of the most dignified type. The details in general are a modern and free adaptation of the style of Louis XVI."(21) The relative plainness of the former Interior Building can also be ascribed to its highly functional nature and its location outside the monumental and commercial sections of the city.

In early 1915, the Commission of Fine Arts examined the designs for the building and pronounced the design to be excellent.(22) Wenderoth himself was pleased with the building, describing it to the Director of the Geological Survey George Otis Smith, "This structure when completed will be a marked advance in the design of Federal Buildings which, necessarily, must be devoted to utilitarian purposes, and I believe it will indicate a line of development for such structures in Washington as are outside the district which we must give consideration to questions of monumental effect."(23)

The influence of the former Interior Building design can be seen in two other buildings in the Northwest Rectangle: the new Interior Building along C Street built in 1935-36 after designs by Waddy B. Wood for the Public Works Administration, and the War Department Building (now the original section of the State Department Building) along 21st Street completed in 1941 after designs by Gilbert Stanley Underwood and William Dewey Foster for the Public Buildings Administration of the Federal Works Agency (the new home of the Supervising Architect and his staff). Its influence could also be seen in the Social Security Board Building (now the Mary Switzer Building) located along the southern border of the Mall on Independence Avenue between 3rd and 4th Streets, S.W., which was completed in 1940 after designs by the Supervising Architect and his staff. The Social Security Board Building was designed with open light courts that provided for maximum illumination and ventilation.

In 1942, the Federal Writers' Project Guide to Washington, D.C., described the former Interior Building (then called the Interior Building, North) as "an early example of a trend that was further exemplified by the completion of its neighboring South Building 20 years later and by the War Department Building nearly 25 years later -- to do away with the external ornamentation and to erect buildings having an obviously functional character."(24)

The change in cladding material from brick to limestone marks an interesting transition point in the design of Federal buildings in Washington. The original selection of red brick for the former Interior Building was motivated by a desire for a cheap, simple, and functional building. The decision to substitute grey brick for red brick was made at the urging of the Commission of Fine Arts which thought that the new color would lighten up the exterior as well as the interior of the building. When the original construction bids came in well below the appropriated amount, the Treasury Department decided to

face the building in limestone, even though construction had already commenced. Architect Butler's urgings were instrumental in this change. From his temporary residence in Paris, France, he wrote to Secretary Lane, "Certainly Congress, in making the appropriation, expected that we would put up the best possible building for the money, and in view of the fact that it has now been shown to be possible to erect the building in stone, I think we shall be subjected to criticism if we fail to do so."(25) Limestone appears to have been a novel choice for a Federal Government building. Previous masonry materials used in Federal building included marble, granite, sandstone, and red brick. While limestone was more costly than brick, it was cheaper than other masonry materials. After the construction of the former Interior Building, limestone became the preferred cladding material for Government buildings. Beginning in the 1920's, the Federal Triangle buildings, the new Interior Building, the Social Security Board Building, and the War Department Building, were also clad in limestone.

With limestone, the former Interior Building took on a greater air of monumentality than it would have with a brick exterior. However, its sparce embellishments demonstrated that it did not seek the monumental character of the great public buildings in Washington, D.C. Despite the changes in exterior material, the building still had to conform to its original purpose as stated in the 1910 legislation, "a fireproof building of modern office-building type." This building fulfilled its intended destiny of flexibility and adaptability as it later served as the headquarters of the Federal Works Agency and the General Services Administration.

1. H.P. Caemmerer, Washington, the National Capital (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), p. 421.

2. The Federal Writers' Project, Washington, City and Capital (Washington, D.C.: Works Progress Administration, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937), p. 924.

3. Ibid., p. 927.

4. Ibid., p. 926.

5. "Albert Bacon Fall," "Who's Who in the Nation's Capital (Washington, D.C.: The Consolidated Publishing Co., 1921), pp. 127-128; Samuel Eliot Morrison and Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of the American Republic Vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 621; and Robert Sobel, Biographical Dictionary of the United States Executive Branch 1774-1977 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), pp. 111-112.

6. Harold L. Ickes, Who's Who in the Nation's Capital (Washington, D.C.: Ransdell Inc., 1934), pp. 472-473 and Robert Sobel, Biographical Dictionary of the United States Executive Branch 1774-1977 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), pp. 183-184.

7. Public Law No. 265, 61st Congress, 2nd session, 1910, H.R. 16987.

8. U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, Public Buildings and Grounds. Hearings before a Subcommittee of the House Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, No. 50, January - February, 1913.

9. F. W. Newell to Oscar Wenderoth, 13 march 1913, Box 126, General Correspondence, Interior Department Offices, RG 121, NARS, Washington, D.C.

10. Oscar Wenderoth to F.W. Newell, 17 March 1913, Box 126, General Correspondence, Interior Department Offices, RG 121, NARS, Washington, D.C.

11. Charles Butler, "The Office Building of the Department of the Interior at Washington, D.C.," Architectural Record, 44 (September 1918), p. 199.

12. Evening Star, 8 December 1914, p. 19.

13. U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, op. cit., p. 53 for discussion of uncertainty about location of Square 143.

14. Ibid., p. 62.

15. Ibid., p. 64.

16. Evening Star, 8 February 1915, p. 13.

17. Evening Star, 9 February 1915, p. 4.

18. Evening Star, 5 May 1915, p. 3.

19. George Otis Smith to E.J. Ayers, 26 September 1916, Box 127, General Correspondence, Interior Department Offices, RG 121, NARS, Washington, D.C.

20. Oscar Wenderoth to F.W. Newell, 17 March 1913, Box 126, General Correspondence, Interior Department Offices, RG 121, NARS, Washington, D.C.

21. Evening Star, 26 November 1915, p. 2.

22. William W. Harts to Byron R. Newon, 9 January 1915, Box 126, General Correspondence, Interior Department Offices, RG 121, NARS, Washington, D.C.

23. Oscar Wenderoth to George Otis Smith, 28 January 1915, Box 126, General Correspondence, Interior Department Offices, RG 121, NARS, Washington, D.C.

24. The Federal Writers' Project, The WPA Guide to Washington, D.C. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, originally published 1942), p. 283.

25. Charles Butler to Franklin K. Lane, 23 December 1915, Box 127, General Correspondence, Interior Department Offices, RG 121, NARS, Washington, D.C.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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Interior Department Offices

18th and F Streets, N.W.

Washington, D.C.

Commemoratively signed in ceremony, September 29, 1987

Donald Paul Hodel
Secretary, Department of the Interior

Terence C. Golden
Administrator, General Services Administration