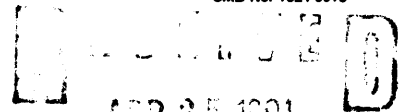


652

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Port Townsend U.S. Custom House and Post Office
other names/site number Port Townsend Main Post Office

2. Location

street & number 1322 Washington N/A not for publication
city, town Port Townsend N/A vicinity
state Washington code WA county Jefferson code 031 zip code 98368

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
Historic U.S. Post Offices In Washington, 1893 - 1941
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
[Signature] 1-11-90
Signature of certifying official Date
U.S. Postal Service
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
[Signature] 12/15/89
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. [Signature] 5/30/91
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:)
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

U.S. Post Office
U.S. Customs House

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

U.S. Post Office

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)Richardson Romanesque

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brickwalls Sandstone

roof Copperother

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Resting upon a half-story basement, the Port Townsend MPO contains two full stories plus a partial attic story. Supported by concrete footings and steel framing, the walls are brick which is faced by sandstone ashlar. Richardson Romanesque in style, the building's front facade (south) is generally symmetrical with an asymmetry resulting from towers at each end of the central salient; one is square and the other is round. The central salient, by extending above the flanking wings and featuring a semi-circular-arched entry that extends through two stories, is the facade's focal point. The west corner of the salient is a round tower with three window bays at the basement, first, and second story levels. Five semi-circular-arched bays extend from mid-way of the second story through the attic story. The square tower of the east corner extends only slightly beyond the plane of the salient. It contains one semi-circular-arched bay on the first floor, two flat-arched bays on the second floor and three semi-circular-arched bays on the attic floor. The flanking wings are configured identically to each other-- three paired flat-arched bays on the basement level, three semi-circular-arched bays on the first floor, five flat-arched bays on the second floor, and a projecting stone cornice. A copper-clad hipped roof covers the building.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The front facade (south) is symmetrical and consists of two stories and an attic on a raised basement. The facade is divided into three sections and faced with ashlar (random-ranged, quarry-faced sandstone). Emphasis is provided on the corners and window and door openings by flat dressed sandstone, slightly recessed from the quarry-faced stone. The central section projects slightly forward of the flanking wings. It also rises above the wings in elevation and displays a full three stories (attic forms third story). The ribbed copper roof of the central portion rises above the flanking wings and roof line and is perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the building. Additional emphasis is provided the central mass by towers at the two corners, one

 See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

circular and the other square. The towers terminate at the eave line of the roof with a conical roof topping the circular tower and a hipped roof topping the square tower (both meld with the main roof). The window design and alignment of the towers differ and break up the symmetry of the facade.

The circular tower houses the stairway between the first floor and attic levels. This tower projects 18 feet from the facade as compared to the 6-foot projection of the square tower. Three one-over-one-light, double-hung, wood sash windows are on the first floor level, with three identical windows aligned overhead between the first and second floors. The windows are framed with dressed sandstone--quoined jambs, flat sills, and flat lintels. Five narrow vertical window openings span midway between the second and third floors to the midpoint of the third floor. These openings are framed with dressed sandstone and topped with voussoired cut sandstone semi-circular arches. The window openings are divided into two sections by a dressed sandstone lintel/sill. Both sections consists of one-over-one-light, double-hung, wood sash, with the upper light of the top section cut in a semi-circular arch.

The square tower, with dressed sandstone quoins, contains three tiers of windows. A single semi-circular-arched window bay is on the first floor and is identical to the remainder of the arched first floor bays. The second floor contains two flat-arched window openings, each with one-over-one-light, double-hung, wood sash. The third floor contains three semi-circular-arched windows which are identical to the upper sections of the windows in the circular tower. As with the circular tower, these windows are framed by dressed sandstone blocks.

As an interesting historic aside, the original design for the building (from March 1890 plans to September 1890 plans) was altered during construction. The towers as originally designed were reduced in height when the building was constructed. Originally, they were planned to extend above the roof of the building, one to be utilized by the Signal Corps to display signals to shipping, and the other to be utilized by the Signal Corps to display observance of all incoming and outgoing ships. The appropriations, however, were not sufficient to construct the towers.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

The portion of the salient between the towers contains a semi-circular-arched entry bay which extends to the second story. The entry is framed by quoined dressed sandstone supporting a molded belt course and voussoired dressed sandstone arch. Single sandstone columns flank each side of the main entry doors and support a plain sandstone entablature. The columns are smooth and rest on raised square sandstone pedestals. Of particular interest is the treatment of the capitals. They are square with acanthus leaves on the corners and faces of local Indians on each face. (The local names for the Indians were the Duke of York, Queen Victoria, King George, and Jenny Lind.)

The entry, which once consisted of double paneled doors, has been blocked because of strong prevailing winds from the south. The entry now consists of a four-light, wood sash, fixed window centered between a wooden panel below and a two-light transom window above.

The second floor portion of the arch contains three window openings behind the arch. A fixed, single-light, wood sash window is in the center and is flanked by single-light fixed sash on each side. The windows are separated by dressed, flat sandstone columns. The third (attic) story contains five semi-circular-arched windows which are identical to those of the square tower. A molded string course is located between the second and third window tiers and extends along the entire facade (except the round turret). A second molded string course is at the sill line of the third floor windows. A final molded string course is above the windows and extends along the entire central salient. The wall is topped by a simple molded cornice. The gutter line is recessed slightly from the cornice line.

The main entry stairs are granite and fronted by a sandstone wall. Entry is provided by lateral runs at each side to a central landing, then a central run to the entry landing. Sloped sandstone buttresses flank the central run. Since the south entry is blocked, these stairs are not used.

The wings flanking the center section are identical to each other. Three semi-circular-arched bays are on the first floor of each of the wings. The bays are framed by dressed sandstone, quoined sides, voussoired arches, and plain sills.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

The lower windows consist of one-over-one-light, double-hung, wood sash separated by a thick fluted wooden mullion. A band of dentils separates the upper three-light, semicircular-arched windows. A narrow molded string course extends along the facade between the window openings. Paired flat-arched windows (one-over-one-light, double-hung, wood sash) are aligned beneath the first floor windows at the basement level.

The second floor contains five window bays with the end and center bays centered on the first floor arches. The openings are framed with dressed sandstone which is quoined on the outsides of the end openings. The windows are one-over-one-light, double-hung, wood sash. The walls are topped by a molded cornice which is terminated by a slightly projecting copper gutter line. The hipped, copper roof is topped by a crested copper ridge with flag poles at each end.

The side facades are identical except for the variation provided by the towers of the south facade. The side wings project from the central mass of the building and are aligned to the south facade line, although the elevations would indicate (by the edge of the circular tower) that they are centered along the central axis of the building. The facades of the projecting wings are symmetrical and two stories in height. The grade line slopes from the north down to the south, thus exposing an apparently increasing basement wall height toward the south. The roof is hipped and clad with copper. The projecting gutter is also copper-clad. Flag poles mark the end of the roof which is topped by a crested copper ridge. A single dormer with hipped copper roof is centered on each wing. The dormer roof is supported by three engaged copper-clad columns. The ridge is crested and terminated by a copper finial.

The first floor consists of three semi-circular-arched bays, identical in size to the window bays of the front facade. The central bays contain double-doored entries and project slightly from the facade. The projection terminates at the sill line of the second floor window bays and is topped by a flat roof. The corners are quoined as are the corners of the wings. The flanking window bays are identical to those described on the front facade, both in terms of sash and framing.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

The second floors each contain six window bays. The middle bays, aligned over the entry, are narrower than the flanking bays and paired by the dressed stone framing. They consist of one-over-one-light, double-hung, wood sash. The flanking bays are also paired by dressed sandstone framing. The window treatment is identical to that of the front facade. A molded string course, which extends from the front facade, is above the second floor windows. The cornice treatment is also identical to the front facade.

The rearward extension of the central mass from which the wings extend is also identical in each side facade. It rises above the eave line of the wings and contains one window bay. The first floor contains a semi-circular-arched window identical to those of the wings. The second floor contains a fixed, four-light, wooden-sash window with double transom windows separated by sandstone transom bars. A molded string course is located between the tops of the windows and molded cornice. A slightly recessed gutter tops the cornice.

The rear facade is symmetrical with two-story wings flanking a three-story central salient. The corners of the wings and central salient are quoined with dressed sandstone. The wings contain three semi-circular-arched window openings, identical to those of the front and side facades, on the first floor. The second floor consists of six flat-arched window openings identical to those of the front and side facades. The remainder of the facade treatment is similar to that of the front facade.

The central portion contains the concrete loading platform on the first floor. The platform area is located on the eastern half of the facade and is covered by a flat metal roof which projects over the platform. Three bays provide access to the service vestibule. Three window bays are located in the western half. These windows consist of fixed single-lights with a single-light transom window. The second floor contains six window bays in sets of three framed by dressed sandstone. The windows consist of four-light, wood sash with double transom windows separated by dressed sandstone transom bars.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1893-1941

Significant Dates

Site acq.-1885
Const.-1893

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bell, M.E. (1885-86), Edbrooke, W.J. (1891-92), Supervising Architects/ Federal Government

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Port Townsend post office is the oldest federally-constructed post office in the State of Washington. It is a well-preserved and unaltered example of Richardson Romanesque design--the only example of its use by the federal government in the state. The building, of finely crafted sandstone and occupying a site on the bluff overlooking the downtown area, is a prominent edifice on the city's skyline. Originally housing the customs house as well as the post office, the building was constructed in an eight-year period that spanned the rise and fall of Port Townsend as the port city of Puget Sound. Thus, it is a symbol of what the thriving port city had hoped to attain, but, with the vagaries of finance and mechanization, did not. The federal government responded to the town boosters and increased the size of the building after construction began, but the plea to complete the building as planned fell on deaf ears as the town's economy withered and insufficient funds were available to build the towers.

ARCHITECTURE

The Port Townsend Post Office is the oldest federally-constructed post office in the State of Washington, with its initial appropriation and design predating statehood (early plans indicate "Port Townsend, Washington Territory"). The building itself is an example of Richardson Romanesque design and, with its siting atop the bluff and overlooking the waterfront, is an imposing structure. The finely constructed sandstone exterior, arched window and entry bays, projecting circular tower, and copper-clad hipped roof combine to create an edifice rich in architectural and visual character.

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Port Townsend Daily Leader; various articles 1890 - 1893.
2. Simpson, Peter. "The Federal Building Could Easily Not Be Standing Today." Port Townsend Daily Leader. 1 October 1980, p. PA-6.
3. Original Plans; November 3, 1889 and September 27, 1890.
4. Thomas, Jacob, and Richard McCurdy. "Port Townsend Historic District" (National Register Nomination), 19 April 1976.
5. Denison, Allen T. and Wallace K. Huntington. Victorian Architecture of Port Townsend, WA. Saanichton, B.C.: Hancock House Pub. Ltd., 1978.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

USPS Facilities Service Center
San Bruno, CA 94099-0330

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.11

UTM References

A

1	0	5	1	7	8	2	0	5	2	6	8	1	2	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B

Zone	Easting				Northing									

D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Quadrangle Name: Port Townsend South
Quadrangle Scale: 1:24,000

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Block 61, Original Townsite. The site is the block bounded by Washington, Van Buren, Jefferson, and Harrison streets.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the property originally purchased by the federal government for the post office site.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title H.J. "Jim" Kolva, Project Manager; Steve Franks, Research Assistant
organization Institute for Urban & Local Studies date March 1989
street & number West 705 First Avenue telephone (509) 458-6219
city or town Spokane state WA zip code 99204

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

Local accounts by the Port Townsend Leader on the acceptance of the newly-finished building indicate the significance of the building. On February 21, 1893 the acceptance was given a four-tiered headline and it was reported that "Port Townsend had the handsomest and most costly post office on the Pacific Coast. It has the finest public building in the State of Washington and finer than any public building in the State of Oregon." The opening of the post office and customs house also marked the end of Port Townsend's heyday (actually the "bust" had occurred in 1890) and its seven-year construction process had spanned it.

Also of artistic and historical note are the sculpted sandstone capitals flanking the original entry bay (south facade). As described previously, they depict local Indians who had been "immortalized" by the early townspeople. This treatment is unique to any Northwest post office. The post office is also within the Port Townsend Historic District and is considered a pivotal structure within the district. Because of the quality and sophistication of the building's design, the building is significant on a statewide level under Criterion C.

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Port Townsend's position of U.S. customs headquarters of the Puget Sound dates from 1854 when the Port of Entry was moved from Olympia. The office was then lost to Port Angeles and gained back in 1866. Having the customs house was important to the strength of the local economy--ships were required to put into port for inspection. Appropriations for the building came in bits and pieces, but in 1888 the appropriation was doubled, making it the most expensive building in the booming city. Both Seattle and Tacoma had passed Port Townsend in population and economic base, but Port Townsend was able to hang on to its position by tradition. This was in spite of the replacement of sail power (which favored Port Townsend) by steam power (which favored the ports of Seattle and Tacoma). Another factor in Port Townsend's retention of the customs post and construction of its federal edifice was that President Benjamin Harrison had personal connections to the city. Harrison, who became President in 1883, was a close friend of the A. W. Bash family of Port Townsend; in 1883 he visited the family in Port Townsend and was impressed

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

by the city. Furthermore, he named his brother-in-law, J. N. Scott, as superintendent of government construction for Pacific ports and Scott chose Port Townsend as his headquarters. Finally, confusion regarding and resistance to the proposed reorganization of the customs service forestalled Port Townsend's inevitable loss of the customs port until the building could be completed. (Even at that, however, the quest to construct the towers of the building as originally planned did not succeed in spite of the Chamber of Commerce's best efforts. No more money would be appropriated for the building. Port Townsend, however, would retain the Puget Sound port of entry until 1913.) Thus, the building is significant on a statewide level under Criterion A.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Port Townsend is in Jefferson County, at the mouth of Puget Sound in the northeast corner of the Olympic Peninsula. Tourism, supported by Port Townsend's wealth of buildings remaining from its boom days of the 1880s, has grown to be a significant part of Port Townsend's local economy. In 1987 it had an estimated population of 6,550.

Captain George Vancouver sailed up the Strait of Juan de Fuca in 1792 and after discovering a "very safe and capacious harbor" named it Port Townsend in honor of the Marquis of that name. The first permanent settlers, Alfred Plummer and Charles Bachelder, constructed a log cabin in 1851. On September 28th of the following year the first post office was established in Port Townsend in the cabin constructed by Plummer and Bachelder. Other settlers came to the area and in 1856 the town site plat was filed. Within several years the waterfront area was occupied by substantial wooden wharfs, stores and warehouses, with businesses across the street. The settlement developed as a seaport and by 1880 the population approached 917.

Locals dreamed of Port Townsend as being "the city of Puget Sound." Efforts to organize a railroad link with Portland, Oregon were initiated in the late 1880s. The town grew rapidly and a building boom prevailed, with impressive commercial buildings and houses constructed. By 1889 Port Townsend's population had grown to approximately 6,500. In

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 3 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

1890, however, the building boom collapsed, after the collapse of the Oregon Improvement Company (which had purchased the Port Townsend Southern Railroad right of way and proposed to complete the link to Portland) and the emergence of the more inland seaports of Seattle and Tacoma. People left the city in droves and by the Depression of 1893 the population was reduced to less than 2,000.

The construction of coastal fortifications by the federal government in the late 1890s provided some strength to the economy. Port Townsend's population fluctuated from 3,443 in 1900 to 4,181 in 1910 to 2,847 in 1920. The construction of a paper plant by Crown Zellerbach in the late 1920s added a boost, as Port Townsend grew to 3,979 in 1930 and to 4,683 in 1940; it continued to grow through World War II, reaching 6,888 by 1950. It fell to a population of 5,074 in 1960, but since then it has experienced continued though modest growth, as it has become a popular tourist destination. In 1976, the downtown waterfront and residential area on the bluff were designated as a National Historic District. In 1980 Port Townsend's population was 6,067.

The Port Townsend Post Office is in an historic district and occupies a dominant position on the bluff overlooking Puget Sound. The historic Victorian James House (1889, NHR), a "Bed and Breakfast" guest house, is across Harrison Street east of the post office. A modern residence and dentist's office are on the bluff across Washington Street south of the Post Office. Residential uses are across Van Buren Street to the west and Jefferson Street to the north.

LOCAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE
PORT TOWNSEND MAIN POST OFFICE

The Port Townsend Main Post Office is a product of a somewhat piecemeal process of appropriation which spanned a period from March 3, 1885 (when \$9,000 was appropriated by Congress to purchase a block of land on the bluff overlooking Port Townsend's waterfront) to February 1893 when it was finally completed. This period also spanned the rise and fall of Port Townsend's dreams of becoming the major port city of the Puget Sound. According to an October 1, 1890 article in the Port Townsend Leader: "Port Townsend's unsuccessful grasp at glory was bracketed by the construction

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

of the federal building, yet it was probably the government's heavy investment that prolonged and forestalled Port Townsend's inevitable demise."

Construction of the basement for the expanded building was begun in 1889 and neared completion in January of 1890. On November 12, 1890, Gise and Eisenbeis of Port Townsend were awarded the construction contract for the masonry work on the building. An article in the Port Townsend Leader that day indicated the optimism of the city (which shortly burst):

From the fact that the government is determined to rush completion, it is certain that all the fuss about Tacoma being made a port of entry was campaign material pure and simple. It will be over two years yet before either Seattle or Tacoma can secure public building appropriations. Congress is not anxious to build at Port Townsend a customs house in the belief that there will be no business to transact within its walls after it is erected. Besides which the chamber of commerce believes it has just as much influence with the powers that be at Washington as its sister body of the City of Destiny, and when the time arrives Port Townsend's claims will not be found wanting.

On November 16, 1890, the bank that had been financing the railroad construction for the Oregon Improvement Company closed its doors, thereby ending hopes for a railroad link to Portland, Oregon and precipitating the fall of the city's dreams. By 1893 Port Townsend's population dropped to less than 2,000 (from 4,559 in 1890). This may have been a factor in the inability of the local Chamber of Commerce to gain additional appropriations to complete the towers as indicated in the original building plans. The original plans had been amended in September of 1890 (September 27th as indicated on the revised plans) because the original appropriations were insufficient to construct the building as planned.

The Leader, in an article of February 11, 1892, published a petition that had been submitted to Congress "to build the structure according to the original plans and specifications." The request was never granted, however, and the towers were constructed according to the amended plans.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

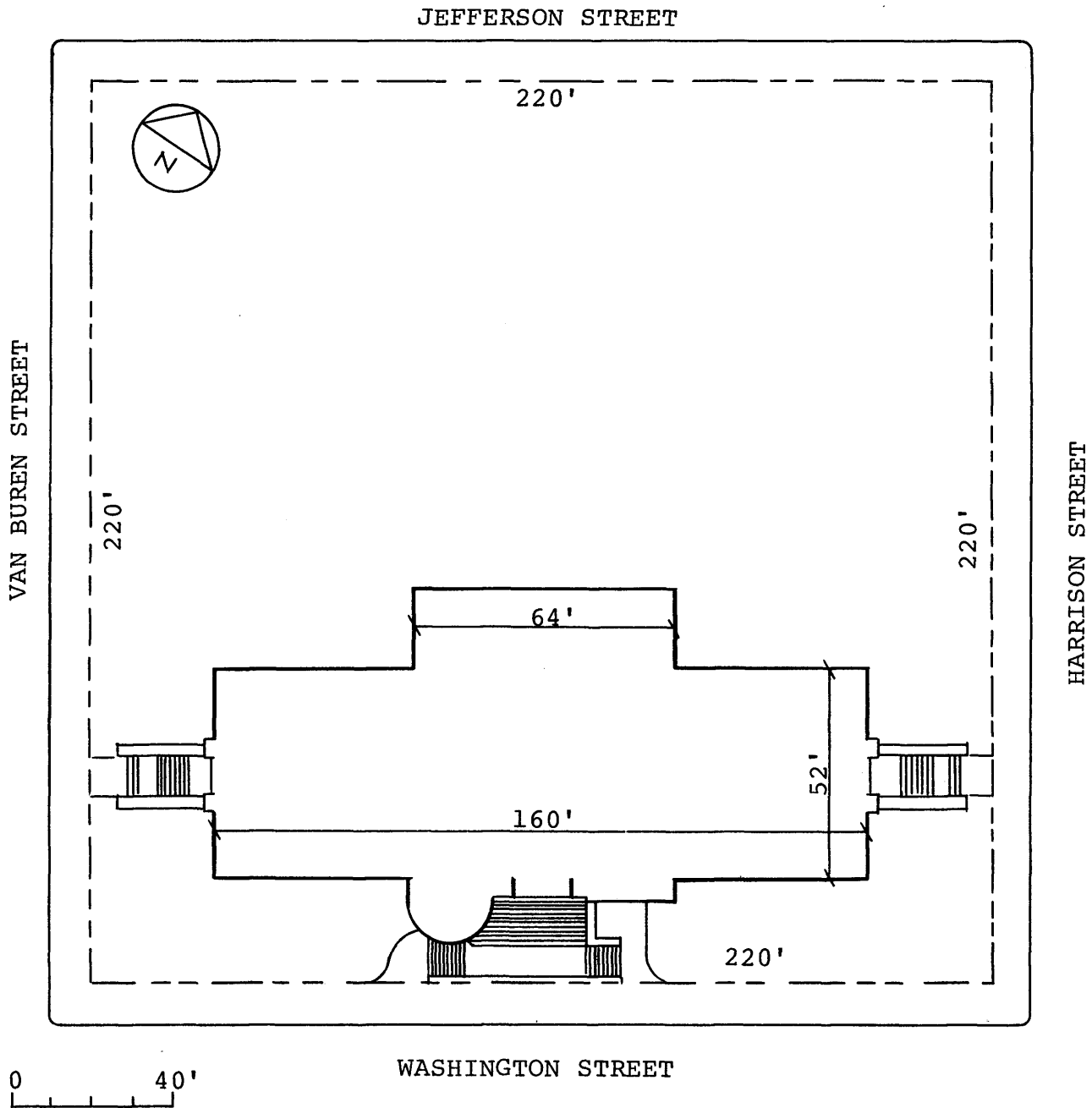
Section number 8 Page 5 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

N. J. Edbrooke, Supervising Architect, inspected the building on January 11, 1893 and commented on the fine construction of the building. According to the Leader, he agreed with the Chamber of Commerce officials that the building needed the two towers, but the appropriation never came. Finally, on February 21, 1893, the Leader reported that the new building was ready to be occupied and commented that "Port Townsend has the handsomest and most costly post office on the Pacific Coast." According to a representative of the Leader, Edbrooke had stated that the Port Townsend customs house was without question the finest constructed building he had inspected on the entire Pacific Coast, and "for that matter, size considered there is nothing better in the United States." The post office was officially opened on March 1, 1893.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1 PORT TOWNSEND MPO



**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number Photos Page 1 PORT TOWNSEND MPO

The following information is the same for all the photographs listed:

1. Port Townsend MPO
2. Port Townsend, Washington
3. Jim Kolva
4. July 1984
5. Negatives on file at USPS Facilities Service Center, San Bruno, CA.

Photo No. 1 (negative #11)

6. View to north

Photo No. 2 (negative #7)

6. View to northwest

Photo No. 3 (negative #6)

6. View to west