# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "NA" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property
historic name UNITED STATES CUSTOMS HOUSE & POST OFFICE
other names/site number Escambia County Courthouse

2. Location		
street & number 223 Palafox Place		N/A not for publication
citv or town Pensacola		N/A vicinitv
stateFLORIDA code	FL_countv Escambia	code033 zip code 32595
3. State/Federal Agency Certification	**************************************	
As the designated authority under the National Histo   request for determination of eligibility meets the of Historic Places and meets the procedural and profes   meets   does not meet the National Register or   nationally   statewide   locally. (  See contin   Signature of certifying official/Title Florida State Historic Preservation Officer State or Federal agency and bureau	documentation standards for registeria ssional requirements set forth in 36 C iteria. I recommend that this property justion sheet for additional comments Date	ng properties in the National Register of FR Part 60. In my opinion, the property be considered significant .)
In my opinion, the property I meets I does not me comments.)	eet the National Register criteria. (	See continuation sheet for additional
State or Federal agency and bureau 4. National Park Service Certification		
hereby certify that the property is:	For Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
entered in the National Register	Ma M.M.	
<ul> <li>determined eligible for the</li> <li>National Register</li> <li>See continuation sheet.</li> </ul>		
<ul> <li>determined not eligible for the</li> <li>National Register</li> <li>See continuation sheet.</li> </ul>		
removed from the National Register.		
other, (explain)		

Escambia, FL County and State

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resou (Do not include any pre	rces within Prope viously listed resources	r <b>ty</b> in the count)			
private public-local	⊠ buildings □ district	Contributing	Noncontribu	ling			
<ul> <li>public-State</li> <li>public-Federal</li> </ul>	☐ site ☐ structure	1	0	buildings			
	object	0	0	sites			
		0	1	structures			
		0	2	objects			
		1	3	total			
Name of related multiple pro (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of		Number of contrib listed in the Natio		previously			
"N	/Α"	0					
6. Function or Use	<u> </u>						
Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)		Current Functions (Enter categories from instr	uctions)				
GOVERNMENT: custom house,	post office	GOVERNMENT: courthouse					
			··				
7. Description		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		···· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·			
Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)		<b>Materials</b> (Enter categories from	instructions)				
LATE VICTORIAN: Renaissance	Revival	foundation <u>STON</u> walls <u>STONE</u>	<u>E</u>				
		roof <u>ASPHALT</u>					
		other					

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

### 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

### **Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- **B** removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- **F** a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

# **Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

# **Bibliography**

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.) Previous documentation on file (NPS): Primary location of additional data: preliminary determination of individual listing (36 State Historic Preservation Office CFR 36) has been requested Other State Agency

- 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

Areas of Significance

GOVERNMENT

#### **Period of Significance**

<u>1884-1</u>947

**Significant Dates** 

### **Significant Person**

N/A

#### **Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Bell, M.E./unknown

Federal agency

University

Name of Repository

Other

#

Local government

# (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

1884

Escambia Co., FL **County and State** 

U.S. Customs House	
Name of Property	

Escambia Co., FL County and State

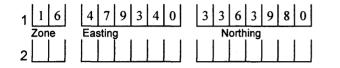
### 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 

less than one

### **UTM References**

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)



#### **Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

#### **Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

#### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title John Daniels/Robert O. Jones, Historic Sites Specialis	t	···		
organization Bureau of Historic Preservation		date	<u>May</u>	/ 1997
street & number R.A. Gray Building, 500 S. Bronough Street		telephone	<u>(904)</u>	) 487-2333
city or town Tallahassee	_ state	Florida zip co	ode	32399-0250

#### **Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### **Continuation Sheets**

#### Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

#### Additional items

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

#### **Property Owner**

 (Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

 name
 Board of County Commissioners, Escambia County

 street & number
 223 Palafox Place, P.O. Box 1591

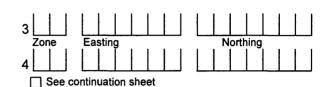
 telephone
 904/436-5781

 city or town
 Pensacola

 state
 FL

 zip code
 32597-1591

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).



# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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UNITED STATES CUSTOMS HOUSE AND POST OFFICE, PENSACOLA, ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

# SUMMARY

The United States Customs House and Post Office (hereafter referred to as the Customs House), was built in 1884, and is located at 223 Palafox Place, in Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida. The three and one-half story, Renaissance Revival style building is faced with limestone. The building has had historic and non-historic alterations. A non-historic clock tower is located on the corner of the property, and two non-contributing canons are located on the grounds.

#### SETTING

The Customs House is located on the northwest corner of Pensacola's main historic commercial thoroughfares, Palafox Street, running north/south, and Government Street, running east/west. There is ground level parking beside the building on the north and west sides. The building is surrounded by latenineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings, including the Citizen's and People's National Bank, and the American National Bank Building (listed NR 1978). It is adjacent to Plaza Ferdinand VII, a National Historic Landmark. Pensacola Bay and a shipping pier are three blocks to the south. In the early 1990s, a clock tower was built on the southeast corner of the property. Two decorative, historic canons have been placed on either side of the main entry sidewalk, facing east.

### PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

### Exterior

The main (east) facade of the Customs House faces Palafox Street. The building is constructed of load bearing brick walls that are faced with limestone. Belt course moldings at the bases of the windows for each floor visually separate the building into three horizontal divisions. The central portion of the building is inset from the north and south ends, dividing the elevation

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UNITED STATES CUSTOMS HOUSE AND POST OFFICE, PENSACOLA, ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

into three bays. The base of the building, below the lower belt course, forms a plinth for the building which is continued at porticoes on the east and south elevations. The level of the first floor is expressed at the top of a large projecting horizontal stone band that runs around the building and forms lintels for the basement windows. Quoins define all corners. The first story of the building is raised. The basement is semirecessed, and has ground level windows with decorative iron bars. The building has a complex, hipped roof pierced by five interior chimneys (Photo #1). Fenestration is generally 1/1, wooden, double hung sash windows with stone window surrounds. Modillions are at the eaves (Photo #2).

The main, east facade is dominated by a flat roofed, colonnaded portico (Photo #3). The porch is accessed by eight, broad, granite steps. The Tuscan Order portico with four pairs of columns on plinths divide it into three bays. The portico has a plaster ceiling within the three coffered bays. The major entrance has two wooden doors. The columns are reflected at the building wall by squared pilasters. The roof of the portico is accessible from the second floor windows and forms a balcony surrounded by solid stone railings. The north and south bays contain two windows on each story, and the central bay contains three on the second and third stories. The exterior wall is terminated by an architrave with simple modillions supporting a stone soffet and projecting cornice molding. The plane of the wall continues above the cornice to form a parapet, behind which is the cross-hipped roof, which is pierced by five stone chimneys. Historic dormers, barrel-shaped air vents, and two skylights in the center roof section are no longer present.

The south elevation has four bays with four windows on the first story, and five windows on the second and third stories (Photos #4,5,6). A portico is in the second bay from the east, in what had been the center of the original building. The style is the same as on the eastern facade, except it contains only two pairs of columns. The windows on the second and third stories above the portico are divided into three sections by vertical stone muntins, with the central larger window flanked by two

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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narrow ones. At the roof line this bay has a brief gable extension.

The north elevation has four bays and window arrangements similar to those on the south elevation, except that there is a window instead of a portico, and double windows instead of tripartite windows(Photo #7). One window on the first story is enclosed.

The <u>west elevation</u> has three bays, and displays 1912 and 1953 alterations. The northern and southern bays repeat the style and materials of the other elevations, and contain two windows on each story (Photo #8). The central bay is brick on the first story and steel curtain-wall on the second and third stories (Photos #9). Two enclosed walkways connect to the west elevation, providing access to a 1953, contemporary styled addition immediately to the west (Photo #10). An approximately ten foot alley exists between these two portions of the building. The first walkway, connects to the first story, and is constructed of brick and glass (Photo #11). Immediately south of this walk is a second walkway, three stories high, connecting to the inner corner of the south bay (Photo #12). This walkway is constructed of concrete and glass.

The 1953 addition, known as an annex building, is four stories high. The addition is built of concrete, faced with brick and limestone.

#### Interior

Inside the main, eastern doors is a public lobby which has marble floors, shoulder-high marble walls with painted plaster in the upper wall portions, and acoustic drop ceilings (Photo #13). A non-historic stairway is against the east wall. Original plaster walls remain, but many non-historic partitions of steel and glass have been added to create work spaces. The second floor, containing the offices of county commissioners and the commission meeting room, remains largely intact with original doors, windows, transoms, and moldings present. The original main stairwell against the south wall is intact with cast iron balusters and newels, and wooden hand rails (Photo #14).

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The interior floors and ceilings are supported by a system of iron "I" beams with flat clay tile and barrel-vaulted brick spanning between them to form the decking. The "H" shaped hipped roof is supported by iron trusses (Photo #15). The iron beams supporting the ceiling of the top floor are also suspended from these trusses. The roof trusses support a grid of iron angles into which decking panels of cast, lightweight, cementitious material, and in some areas, clay tile are fitted. Ties running through this decking, that apparently held the original roof in place, are visible in the attic.

### HISTORIC ALTERATIONS

In 1912, the first major alterations to the building were made in order to adapt the building to function as a post office and a federal court. The north and south walls were extended to the west, in keeping with the style of the original. Offices to the west of the central north-south corridor on floors two and three were eliminated, and the floor between them removed. The west wall was removed and extended to gain space for a centrally located federal courtroom. Three arched windows were installed in the central west wall. A concrete beam was installed to span the opening where the original west wall was removed, and the new ceiling for the courtroom was suspended below this. A wall running north and south that contained windows for mailing and Post Office functions was installed, creating a lobby space between it and the main doors.

In 1938, the building was converted to its present use as a courthouse for Escambia County. A central hallway was installed from the lobby to the rear of the building, and included the addition of marble wainscoting around the lobby space at this time.

# NON-HISTORIC ALTERATIONS

In 1953, a setback in the west wall, adjacent to the courtroom, was enclosed to accommodate bathrooms and a conference room. The enclosure was made with brick, and a steel curtain-

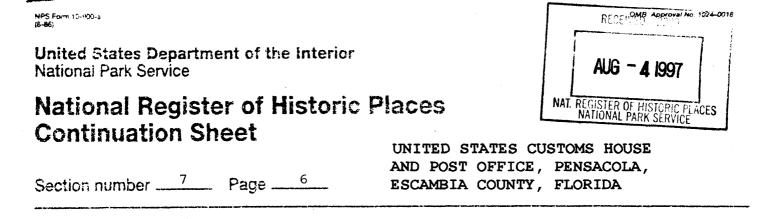
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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wall (Photo #9). That same year a contemporary styled annex building was constructed adjacent to the west side of the building. The two buildings are joined by two walkways. One walkway is three stories tall, and the other walkway is at the first story only. In 1953, the original metal roof cresting was removed, along with dormers and air vents, and a new roof surface enclosed the original slate roof, which is still visible within the attic. More recent alterations have been the remodeling of the courtroom, which is now used for county commission meetings. A modern ceiling encloses the elaborate 1912 ceiling.

### NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

In the early 1990s, a clock tower was built in the southeast corner of the property, beside the sidewalk (Photo #16). Historic canons, not historic to the site, have been placed on either side of the entry sidewalk as decoration.



The 1953 Annex addition is a four story building with a basement. The rectangular building has a flat roof and an extension on the north elevation which contains a stairwell. The building is constructed of concrete and faced with limestone on the south and western elevations, and brick on the eastern and northern elevations. All windows are fixed metal sashes within prefabricated window/wall units. The public access to the building is from a polished marble-faced porch at the first story of the southern elevation. Access is into a small lobby and offices on all floors are arranged around centrally located corridors. The interior has linoleum floors, plaster walls, and acoustic tile ceilings.

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UNITED STATES CUSTOMS HOUSE AND POST OFFICE, PENSACOLA, ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

#### SUMMARY

The U.S. Customs House is nominated to the National Register on the local level under Criteria A and C in the areas of Government and Architecture. The Customs House served federal government functions including the monitoring of imports and exports from the region's most active harbor which experienced its peak activity from the 1880s until World War I. The building is a prominent landmark within the historic downtown part of Pensacola. The U.S. Customs House is a good, and early example of Renaissance Revival architecture.

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

When Florida became a territory of the United States in 1821, Governor Andrew Jackson divided the territory into Escambia County to the west, and St. John's County to the east. Pensacola became the seat of Escambia County government, and has remained so ever since. Since early Spanish exploration in the sixteenth century, Pensacola has been important as a harbor. During the Period of Territorial Florida (1821-1845), Pensacola served as a primary port for exporting agricultural products, especially cotton. Following the Civil War, the city brought itself out of an economic depression by using the harbor to export lumber, a local natural resource. A short railroad was built from Millville, a lumber mill center west of Pensacola, to the port. In 1869, work began to link the port with a railroad line from Montgomery to Mobile and New Orleans. William D. Chipley, manager of the Pensacola Railroad, constructed between Pensacola and Tallahassee in 1883-1884, described Pensacola Bay as being "spacious enough to accommodate the navies of the world," and of its "unrivaled" position for distribution in the region. Chipley's railroad facilitated the development of the lumber industry in northwest Florida.

In 1877, Pensacola's harbor had docked, loaded and unloaded 590 ships. By 1900, Pensacola harbor surpassed Charleston,

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UNITED STATES CUSTOMS HOUSE AND POST OFFICE, PENSACOLA, ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

Brunswick, Savannah, Mobile, and Galveston in commercial volume, and exceeded Tampa, Mobile, and Richmond in exports. Pensacola's dominant role as a commerce center for the region did not subside until World War I. The federal government located customs houses within major port communities to account for imports and exports, and exact whatever duties might be imposed at the time.

#### HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The northwest corner of Palafox and Government Streets in Pensacola, Florida, has been the center of governmental activity in the city since 1858. Federal offices were housed in the Dimmick Building, a three-story brick structure, until 1880, when a disastrous fire swept downtown Pensacola. The fire devastated Palafox Street, leveling blocks of commercial buildings. The massive destruction of buildings dealt a blow to the economy and morale of the community. Although local leaders called for the immediate reconstruction of the customs house, plans were delayed. In the confusion following the assassination of President Garfield in 1881, the decisions to rebuild the customs house and to fill the office of collector of customs were postponed.

By early 1883, plans to construct a new customs house were underway. An additional delay resulted when Mr. Hill, supervising architect, became involved in a scandal, and was removed from his post. Work on the customs house began in earnest in 1884, when a new architect, M. E. Bell, was appointed, and \$200,000 was appropriated for construction. The building, completed in 1887, housed the customs house, the post office, the circuit and district courts, the federal marshal's office, the district attorney's office, the office of the internal revenue collector, and the office of the surgeon in charge of the marine hospital that was located in Pensacola.

When completed, the Customs House was one of the largest buildings in Pensacola, dominating the Palafox Street business district. Not until 1901, when the Thiesen Building (NR 1979) was completed, was its prominence rivaled. It was the only structure built in the Renaissance Revival style in Pensacola and

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UNITED STATES CUSTOMS HOUSE AND POST OFFICE, PENSACOLA, ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

one of a very few local stone buildings. The Customs House served the Pensacola Bay shipping trade during its most prosperous period from the 1880s until World War I.

By the 1920's, the customs house had fallen into disrepair. Sometime prior to 1932, federal officials placed it on the abandoned list. When federal government representatives decided to build new offices, they hesitated, fearful that abandoning the old court house would have a detrimental effect on downtown commercial property values in the midst of the Great Depression. In 1937, when the old Escambia County Court House at the northeast corner of Palafox and Chase streets was slated for demolition, federal representatives arranged a property exchange - the old customs house for the land upon which the court house In 1939, the new post office was completed and in April, stood. 1940, Escambia County officials moved into the customs house building. From 1940 until 1976, the building at Palafox and Government streets served as the center for Escambia County government. With the construction of a new county judicial building in 1976, many court-related functions were moved from the old Customs/Court house, but the offices of the county commissioners and various licensing and tax offices remain in the Customs/Court house.

### ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

Renaissance Revival architecture was popular from the 1890s into the 1930s. Derived from accurate, academic investigations of Italian and Continental building traditions, the formal style was a reaction to the eclectic design approaches of the 1870s and 1880s. Usually the style was used for architect designed metropolitan landmarks. The style is characterized by symmetrical building arrangements and facades, with a recessed main entry covered by a central portico supported by classical columns. Simple, or cross-hipped roofs with small wings on either end of the facade, have either broad eaves or short parapets or balusters. Exterior walls are masonry, or mimic masonry with veneers or scored stucco. First stories often have

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rusticated exteriors, and large first story windows are common, often with arched tops. The buildings usually include quoins, belt courses, and bracketed window surrounds.

### ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The three and one-half story Renaissance Revival style U.S. Customs House, despite alterations, retains its 1887 architectural character. A 1912 historic alteration on the west side of the building utilized a similar construction material and decorative elements. The U.S. Customs House is a prominent, Pensacola landmark, and is adjacent to the Pensacola (Seville Square) Historic District (NR 1970), and the Theisen Building (NR 1979).

The U.S. Customs House is a good, and early example of Renaissance Revival architecture. The building has a symmetrical main facade, and all elevations repeat consistent design features, imparting a formal character. The building has a cross-hipped roof with small wings to the north and south, masonry veneered walls, quoins, belt courses, bracketed window cornices, and a roof line with a parapet.

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1 UNITED STATES CUSTOMS HOUSE ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Daily Commercial, 1887.

Ellsworth, Lucius F. and Linda V., <u>Pensacola, The Deep Water</u> City. Tulsa, Oklahoma: Continental Heritage Press, 1982.

Escambia County Deed Book 146, p. 209.

Escambia County Deed Book Y, Z, 146.

- Fetzer, Jeff and Carolyn Peterson, <u>Preservation Planning</u> <u>Report Escambia County Courthouse, Pensacola, Florida</u>. 1995.
- McGovern, James R. <u>The Emergence of a City in the Modern</u> <u>South:</u> <u>Pensacola, 1900-1945</u>. Pensacola: privately printed, 1976.

Pensacola Commercial, February 20, 1884.

Pensacola Semi-Weekly Commercial, April 28, 1882.

Pensacolian, December 15, 1883.

Viccars, Marion, "A History of the Pensacola Post Office" privately printed, 1973): pp. 19-20.

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

South 169 feet 11 inches of Lot 113 and all Lot 114 and east ½ of Lot 115. Block 15, Old City Tract, Deed Book 371 p.307, Deed Book 146 p.209/210/211.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This boundary encompasses the property historically associated with the United States Customs House.

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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### PHOTOGRAPHIC LIST

- 1. United States Customs House and Post Office, 223 Palafox Place
- 2. Pensacola, Escambia County
- 3. Jeff Fetzer, AIA
- 4. 1996
- 5. Historic Pensacola Preservation Board
- 6. Roof, camera facing south
- 7. Photo 1 of 16

Items 1-5 are the same for the following photographs except where indicated.

- South elevation, window surrounds, belt courses, modillions, camera facing northeast
- 7. Photo 2 of 16

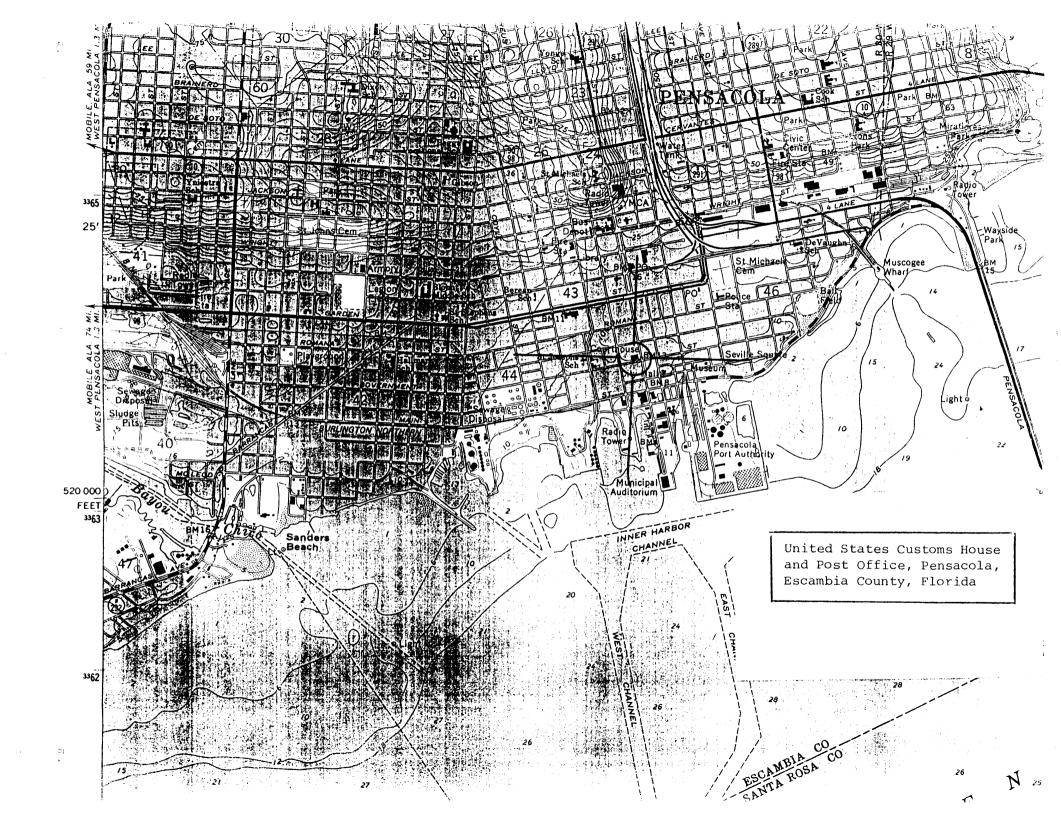
6. Main facade, camera facing west

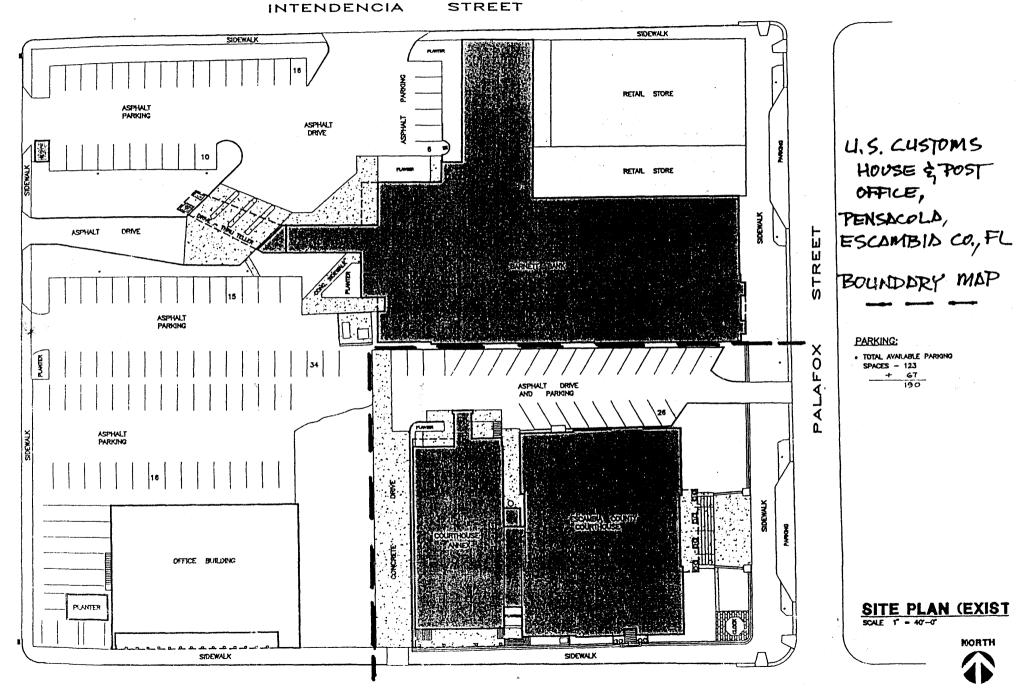
- 7. Photo 3 of 16
- South elevation, camera facing north
   Photo 4 of 16
- 6. Detail of south elevation portico, camera facing north 7. Photo 5 of 16
- 6. South elevation entrance, camera facing north7. Photo 6 of 16
- North elevation, camera facing south
   Photo 7 of 16
- 6. Northwest corner showing western elevation, camera facing southeast
- 7. Photo 8 of 16

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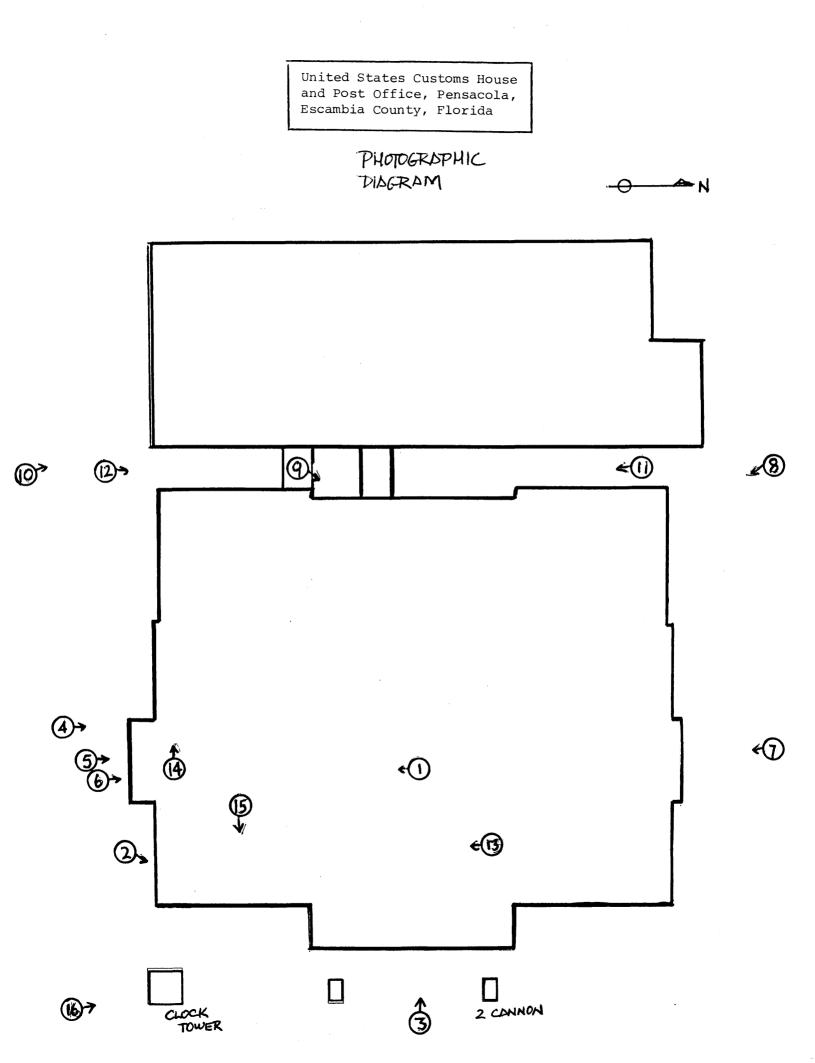
- 6. West elevation showing steel curtain wall and brick, camera facing northeast
- 7. Photo 9 of 16
- 6. Annex building and corner of Customs House, camera facing northwest
- 7. Photo 10 of 16
- 6. West elevation showing one-story walkway, camera facing south 7. Photo 11 of 16
- 6. South elevations showing three-story walkway between buildings, camera facing north
- 7. Photo 12 of 16
- 6. Interior of main lobby, camera facing south
- 7. Photo 13 of 16
- Interior of original stairwell on first floor, camera facing west
- 7. Photo 14 of 16
- 6. Interior of iron roof rafters, camera facing east
- 7. Photo 15 of 16
- 6. Non-contributing clock tower and cannons, camera facing north7. Photo 16 of 16



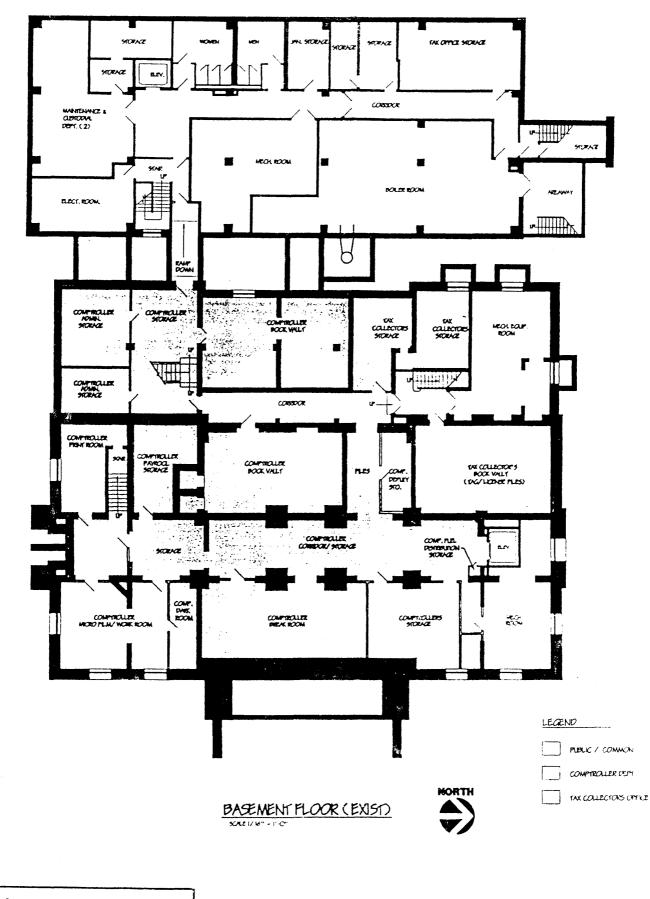


GOVERNMENT STREET

BAYLEN STREET



# BASEMENT FLOOR ANNEX (EXIST)



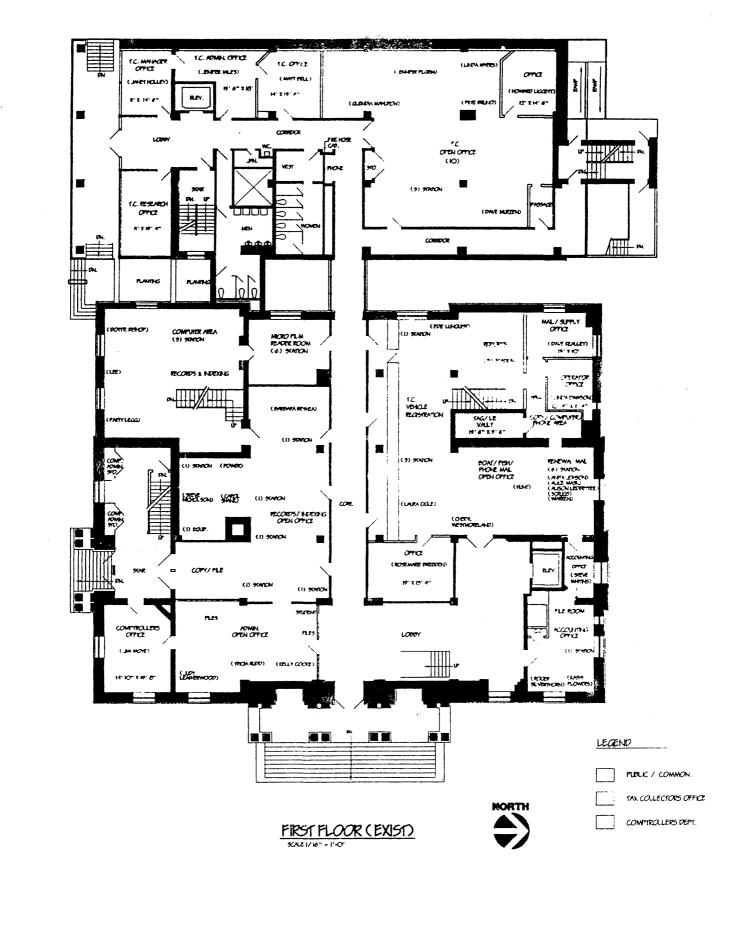
United States Customs House and Post Office, Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida

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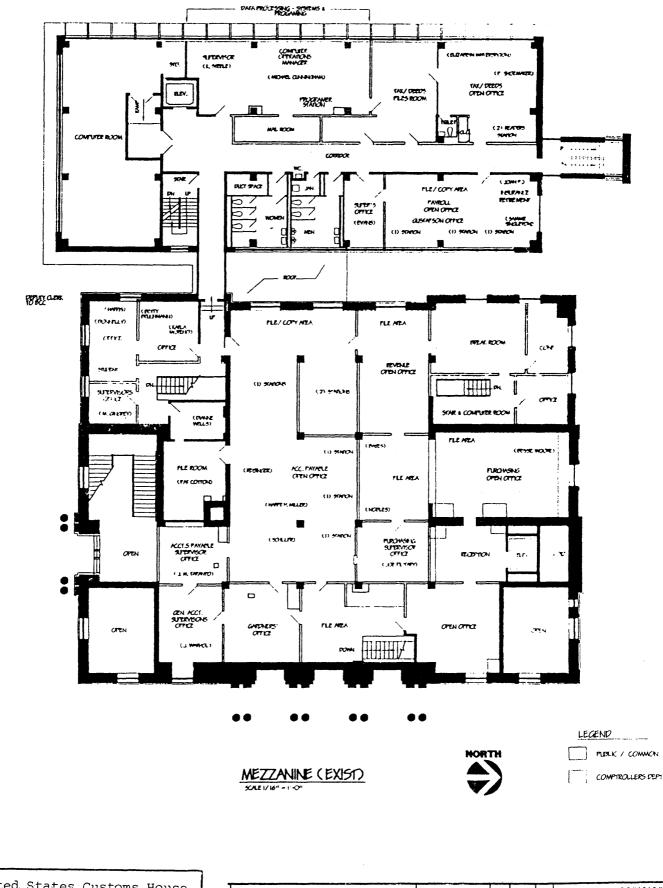
FIRST FLOOR ANNEX (EXIST)





MQ.	DATE	APTR	REVISION

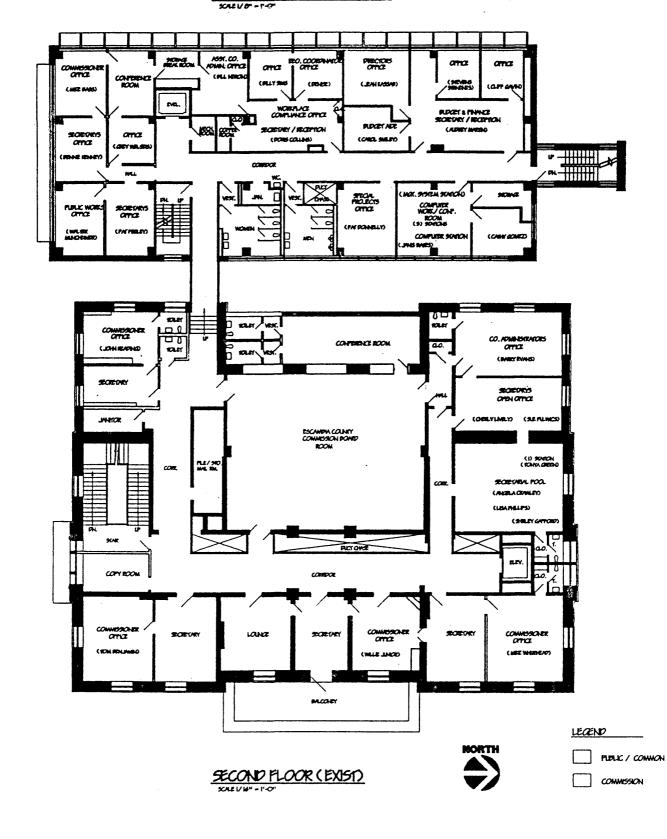
# SECOND FLOOR ANNEX (EXIST)



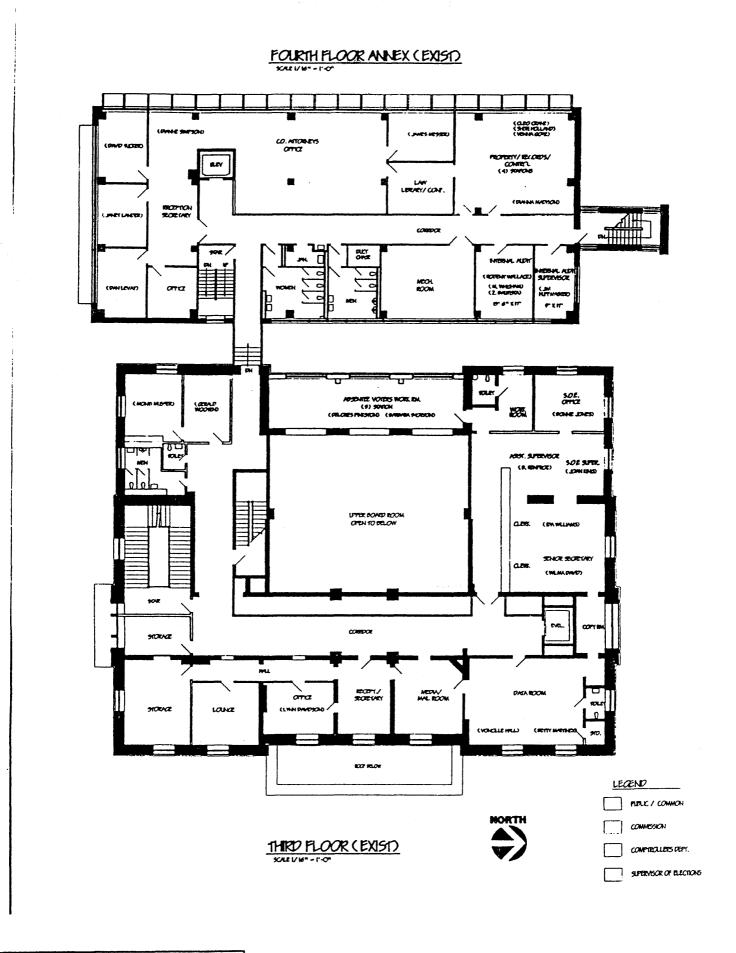
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BASKERVILLE- DONOVAN, INC.						
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MQ.	DATE	APTR.	REVISION

# THIRD FLOOR ANNEX (EXIST)

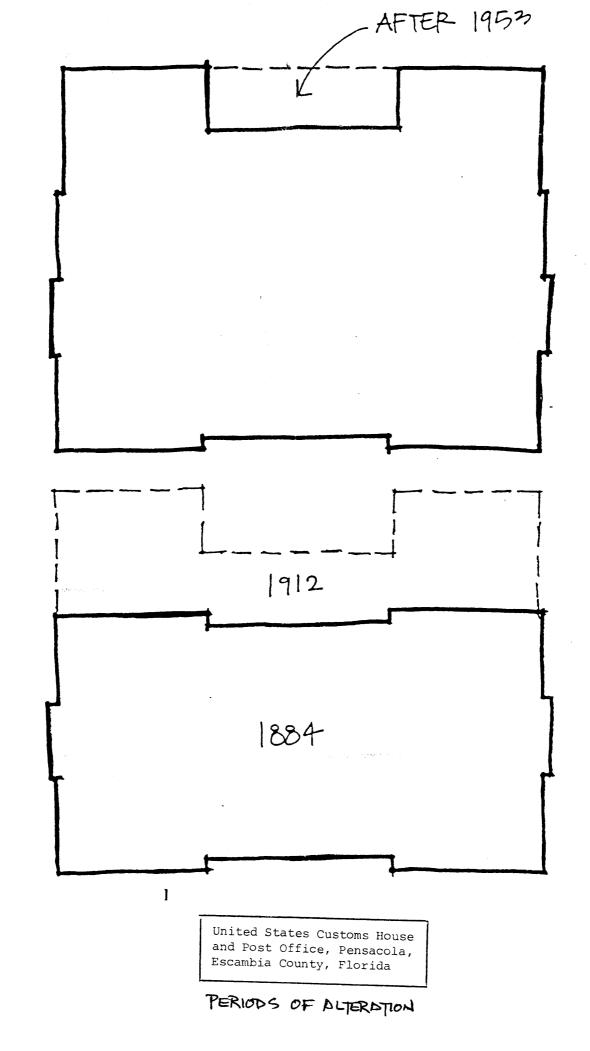


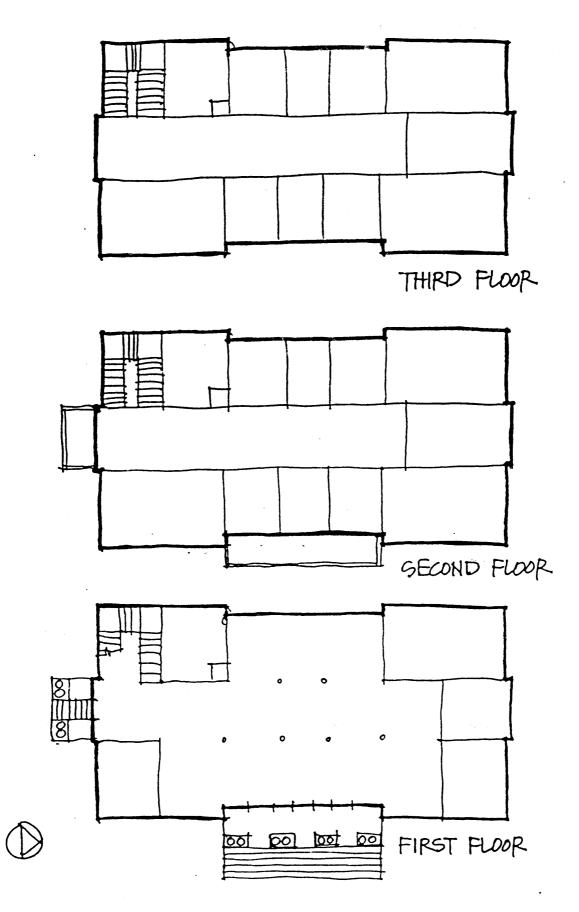
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Donovan, inc.		╉			



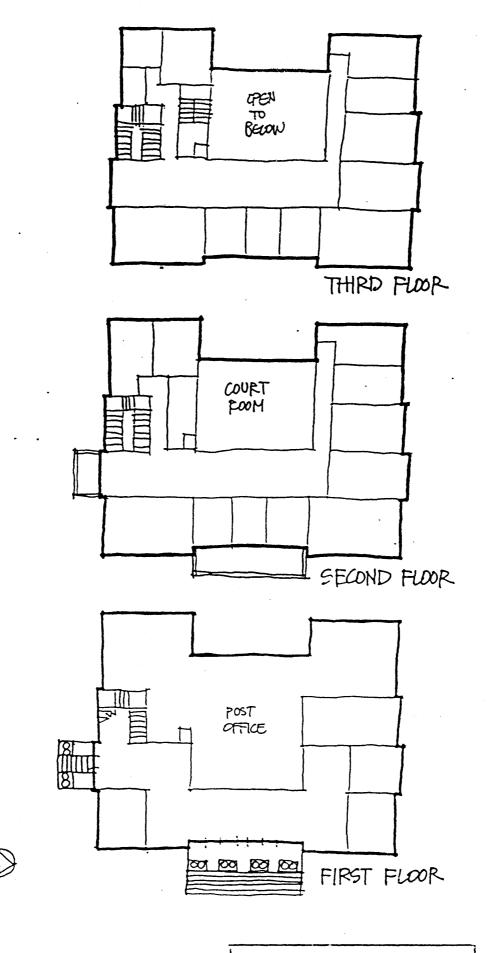
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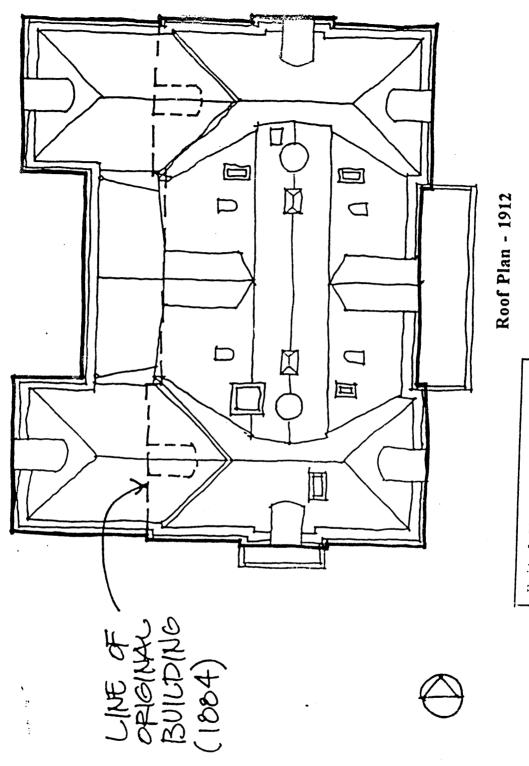




United States Customs House and Post Office, Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida · 1884 (assumed)



United States Customs House and Post Office, Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida . Plan - 1912



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