

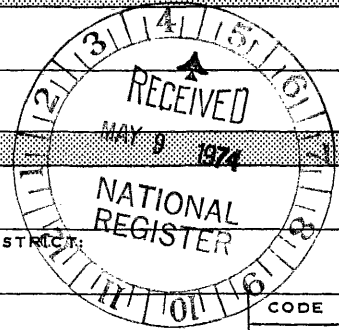
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM  
FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>South Carolina</b>
COUNTY: <b>Charleston</b>
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE <b>OCT 9 1974</b>

**1. NAME**

COMMON: U.S. Custom House  
~~United States Custom House~~  
AND/OR HISTORIC:  
Custom House



**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
200 East Bay Street  
CITY OR TOWN:  
Charleston  
STATE:  
South Carolina  
CODE:  
39  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
First  
COUNTY:  
Charleston  
CODE:  
019

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

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

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

**4. AGENCY**

General Services Administration  
REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)  
CITY OR TOWN:  
Atlanta  
STREET AND NUMBER:  
1776 Peachtree  
STATE:  
Georgia  
CODE:  
10

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Charleston County Courthouse Annex, Registry of Deeds  
STREET AND NUMBER:  
Courthouse Square  
CITY OR TOWN:  
Charleston  
STATE:  
South Carolina  
CODE:  
39

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Charleston Architectural Survey  
DATE OF SURVEY:  
 Federal  State  County  Local  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Carolina Art Association  
STREET AND NUMBER:  
135 Meeting Street  
CITY OR TOWN:  
Charleston  
STATE:  
South Carolina  
CODE:  
39

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:	
COUNTY:	
ENTRY NUMBER	<b>OCT 9 1974</b>
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7. DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The United States Custom House in Charleston, South Carolina, fronts East Bay Street on the west, and Concord Street and the Charleston Marbor on the east. [It is located within the area of the Charleston Mistoric District, although the buildings immediately surrounding the structure are not distinguished. The Custom Mouse property, which includes parking areas and lawn, is defined by an iron fence.

A concise description of how the monumental Custom Mouse was to appear originally was printed in The Charleston Courier in 1854: "The style selected is Roman Corinthian, which gives an elevation of the two upper stories decorated with attached columns and porticos, supported on a rusticated basement story, and surmounted by a dome, the highest point of which will be 160 feet from the pavement. The general plan is a cross, the longest arm from East to West being 259 feet, while the shorter arm, extending North and South will measure 152 feet." Excepting the reference to the dome which was never built, this early description could be used to relate the present-day appearance of the building.

Begun in 1853, the Custom Mouse was not completed until 1879. The Roman Corinthian order was carried throughout the structure, not only in the pedimented porticos on the east and west fronts, but also the columns decorating the piers between the windows. The plan is a simple cross with one short and one long axis. Originally there was to have been a rotunda with a dome and skylight at the intersection of the cross arm, but apparently this was eliminated as construction of the building was prolonged and became costlier. The basement story is rusticated while the upper wall surfaces are smooth marble. Windows on both floors are rectangular and pedimented, as are the centrally located entrances on each portico. Surmounting the building is an entablature with a molded architrave, a wide unadorned frieze, excepting the "UNITED STATES CUSTOM MOUSE" carved into the west front in 1964, and a dentiled cornice. Above this is an open balustrade, behind which a low pitched roof is barely visible.

A grand sweep of stairs leads to both portico entrances. The first terrace level of the west side entrance is paved in diamond-patterned black and white marble.

The interior of the building revolves around the two-story cortille, called the "Business Room" in early records. Originally to have been a rotunda with a skylighted dome, the cortille is square with a coved ceiling in which eight artifically lit skylights have been placed. Fourteen free-standing Corinthian columns support the second floor gallery, all of which is made of iron. Eluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals decorate the walls of the gallery. The ceiling is painted gold, red, white, and blue: rectangular shapes in the coved section depict the American flag and other patriotic symbols: the flat area of the ceiling is divided into squares which are stenciled with classical motifs. (continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE <b>South Carolina</b>	
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(Number all entries)

No. 7 Description (continued)

The main entrance to the Custom House is on the west side through an entrance foyer. Opening onto the foyer on the south is an office, while on the north is the cast iron staircase leading to the second floor. Most offices open onto the cortille except those located in the entrance areas. Marble door and window framing is used throughout the building. Hall and cortille floors are diamond-patterned black and white marble. In the west front of the second story is a narrow, winding, but highly decorative cast iron staircase leading to the attic. Original carved marble fireplaces are still visible in some offices. A few of the original gas chandeliers have been electrified and hung in the halls. Renovation has taken a minimum toll on the appearance of the Custom House, both the interior and the exterior.



**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century            | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1853-1879

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Both architecturally and historically, the United States Custom House in Charleston, South Carolina, is an outstanding public building, even in a city which has one of the most complete historic districts in the country, and one which contains a multitude of architecturally significant structures. Its existence, which was threatened in the early 1960's, and its continual use as a custom house, completes the commercial history of one of the country's busiest early ports.

Prior to construction of the Custom House, port business was transacted in the Exchange, authorized by Britain's Common House of Assembly in 1767 and completed in 1771. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, it was obvious that larger facilities were needed. Congress approved purchase of a site in 1847, and two years later, paid \$130,000 for the area fronting west on East Bay with 277 feet and extending east to the Cooper River, including the waterfront section then known as Fitzsimons Wharf.

Competition designs for the Custom House were due February 1, 1850. Although Charleston architect Edward C. Jones was declared winner, the choice was over-ruled in Washington. Indications are that Ammi Burnham Young apparently coordinated various competition drawings into one design: Jones protested to the Secretary of the Treasury that the portico and dome were taken from his design; and the floor plan was taken from a drawing by John S. Morris.

Construction began in 1853, with Charleston architect E. B. White serving as superintending architect. White was also a commissioner of the Custom House. When digging the foundation, it was discovered that the site had been the location of Craven's Bastion or Fort in the colonial period. In order to support the weight of the Custom House, an elaborate grillage had to be built, and was considered a major engineering achievement.

The dome was started but left unfinished when work was suspended with the beginning of the Civil War. The partially constructed building was damaged, so much so that Congress appropriated money in 1866 and 1867 to keep it from further deterioration. A. B. Mullett had made an inspection of the structure in 1867 at which time he reported to Congress that it was a "magnificent marble structure," but complained of the shoddy work being done to complete it. He requested an appropriation of a small sum in order to complete the exterior.

continued

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

A History of Public Buildings under the Control of the Treasury Department.  
 Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901, pp. 532-533.  
 "History of the United States Custom House, Charleston, S.C." Mimeographed  
 sheet made available to public at Custom House.  
 Ravenel, Beatrice St. Julien. Architects of Charleston. Charleston: Carolina  
 Art Association, 1945, pp. 196, 206, 235-236.  
 Records of the National Archives, Atlanta Regional Branch of the National Ar-  
 chives, Federal Records Center. Record Group RG121, Accession Number 372851,  
 "History and Renovation: United States Custom House, Charleston, South  
 Carolina," prepared by the Public Building Service; and Accession number 393640.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

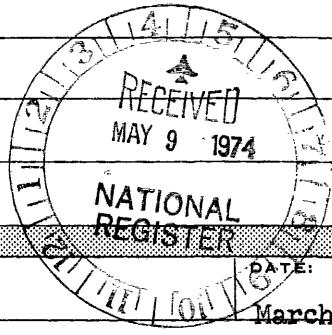
LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		32° 46' 50"	79° 55' 36"	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: one acre where building is located

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

157M  
 17/602500  
 36-1280  
 10



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: Ellen Beasley

BUSINESS ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

STREET AND NUMBER: 2516 Belmont Boulevard

CITY OR TOWN: Nashville

STATE: Tennessee

PHONE: 615-297-6637

DATE: March 26, 1973

**12. CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION**

State Liaison Officer Recommendation:  
 Yes  
 No  
 None

Charles E. Lopez  
 State Liaison Officer Signature

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby  
 nominate this property to the National Register, certifi-  
 ing that the State Liaison Officer has been allowed 90  
 days in which to present the nomination to the State Re-  
 view Board and to evaluate its significance. The recom-  
 mended level of significance is  National  State  
 Local

Steven R. Rutterbaum 2/6/74  
 Federal Representative Signature Date

Historic Preservation  
 Liaison Officer

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

AR Mortensen  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date 10/9/74

ATTEST:  
Charles A. Henry  
 Acting Keeper of The National Register

Date 10.7.74

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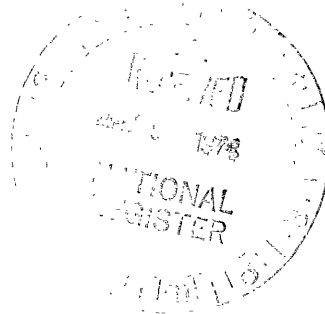
(Number all entries)

No. 8 Significance (continued)

Construction resumed in 1870, at which time alterations were made to the original plans. One change was the source of materials. During the war, the quarry at Hastings, New York, from which the stone had been procured, was abandoned and filled in, but similar marble was located at a quarry in Tuckahoe, New Jersey. In June, 1870, Mullett submitted a plan for completion of the building contemplating the omission of the dome and the side porticos and modification of the east and west porticos. These actions resulted in a reduction of cost. By summer, 1879, the Custom House was occupied and completed at a cost of \$2,806,915.43.

Few changes were made to the building. In 1906, a modern heating system replaced the use of stoves and open coal grates, and in 1910, plumbing, conduit, and lighting systems were installed. With the advent of a city water supply, the seven cisterns built within the structure were abandoned.

Although in good condition in the early 1960's, the Custom House, which was being used by numerous federal agencies, was threatened with demolition when a new federal building was opened. Local preservationists and United States Custom officials as well as United States Representative L. Mendel Rivers, joined forces to save the building. In 1968, over \$212,000.00 was spent to restore the Custom House which now serves as permanent headquarters for the customs service. The building has been designated an Historic Custom House.



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(Number all entries)

No. 9 Bibliographical Sources (continued)

The News and Courier, Charleston, December 8, 1968, "Custom Mouse: Trade Symbol Preserved," by W.M.J. Thomas.

