

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: **CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART AND CORCORAN SCHOOL OF ART**

Other Name/Site Number: N/A

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 1700 New York Avenue, N.W.

Not for publication: _____

City/Town: Washington

Vicinity: _____

State: District of Columbia

County: N/A

Code: 11

Zip Code: 20006

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-local: _____

Public-State: _____

Public-Federal: _____

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: _____

Site: _____

Structure: _____

Object: _____

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

1

Noncontributing

_____ buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

_____ objects

_____ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	Recreation and Culture Education	Sub: Museum School
Current:	Recreation and Culture Education	Sub: Museum School

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification:
Beaux Arts with
Neo-Greco detailing

Materials:
Foundation: Concrete
Walls: Granite and marble
Roof: Glass
Other Description: Copper framing,
bronze decorative elements

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art faces east on 17th Street between E Street and New York Avenue, N.W. and overlooks the White House grounds. This site was purchased in 1891 by the Trustees of the Corcoran and is the second home for the Gallery. The building, which fronts the street and defines the entire block, stands three stories tall on the east and south sides and two and a half stories on the north side. The main entrance to the Gallery faces 17th Street with a secondary entrance to the School on the New York Avenue side. There has been only one exterior change to Ernest Flagg's original building since its completion in 1897. In 1928, Charles Adams Platt executed a highly sympathetic addition to the main block which ensured the architectural integrity of the Flagg plan. One interior change occurred in 1915 when Waddy B. Wood, a Washington architect, was called upon to redesign the interior of the Hemicycle at the northeast corner of the building.

The primary structure, by Flagg and set on 17th Street, is comprised of 12 bays which measure 263 feet. The E Street facade measures 280 feet (including the 167 foot set-back addition by Platt) and is comprised of 20 bays. The north facade, on New York Avenue, measures 112 feet consisting of 7 bays and an entrance. Flagg's building is basically rectangular with Platt's U-shaped addition (with an open courtyard in the center) creating an overall L-shaped plan.

An excellent example of French Beaux Arts rationality and spatial planning, the structure consists of three distinct units--Gallery, School and Hemicycle. The dynamic curve of the Hemicycle connects the Gallery and the School at the corner. This curve also addresses the urban vitality of one of the city's most prominent intersections. The slight projection of the east facade expresses, in a typically Beaux Arts manner, the importance of the interior space, which serves as gallery; this function is further emphasized by the expanse of blank wall on the second story, which houses the primary exhibition spaces. The main facade is executed in the French Beaux Arts tradition with Neo-Grec detailing and subtly indicates the different functions of the building within the divisions of the facade.

The "rear" of the building, the west facade, is of non-decorative yellow bricks. Platt, who designed this part of the building, left this facade unfinished with the idea that the Corcoran may one day again expand its galleries.

The foundation of the building is concrete and the basic construction is brick with hollow tiles and steel framing. The walls are faced with pink Milford granite and white Georgia marble. The roof is glass in copper framing, which allows for natural light inside the Gallery via a series of laylights and skylights.

A fosse or ditch was used to accommodate the building to its sloping site. The basement level is of rusticated granite with chamfered edges; here Flagg "signed" his building in the lower right hand corner, much the way an artist signs his canvas. A molded string course separates the basement level and the first story, which is constructed of alternating double, wide courses with single, narrow courses of rusticated white marble. This first story has rectangular fenestration topped by projecting lintels with decorative wrought iron screens covering the windows.

The main entrance is centered on the first story and is approached by a flight of stairs from street level; the doorway is crowned with an elaborately carved crest, a rinceaux culminating with a caduceus above the inscription "Dedicated to Art." Above the crest, a change in story is again articulated by a single string course above which rises the blank wall of the gallery (second story) level. The surface tension of the smooth, unrusticated marble and its blankness is interrupted only by the crest above the main door. This predominant feature gives the Corcoran its monumental quality. Two ornamented pilasters flank the wall at north and south and carry shields which bear the initial "C" of the founder's name, which are surmounted by the sculpted head of Athena, who in Greek mythology is the patroness of artists and architects.

A frieze of alternating metopes and modillions supports a molding on which rests the attic story, which exists only in the main block, and consists of a row of alternating marble claustra, or ventilation blocks, of rich Greek inspired star patterns and small engaged Doric piers. The elaborate decorativeness of this story directly contrasts the blank severity of the second story wall. Another frieze runs along the top of the attic story and bears the names of eleven artists: Phidias, Giotto, Durer, Michelangelo, Raphael, Velasquez, Rembrandt, Rubens, Reynolds, Ingres and Allston. The list was compiled by Flagg and included the name of one American artist-- Washington Allston--who was Flagg's uncle by marriage.

A richly carved Greek cheneau caps the main block and directs one's eye to the slanting glass and copper roof. Glass plates are suspended by a framing of copper and lead which allow for the dramatic interior illumination within the Gallery through a glass ceiling of laylights, an element which Flagg may have seen in Gustave Eiffel's Bon Marchè department store (1876) in Paris. The hipped roof of the main block is crested with decorative bronze elements and flanked on north and south by acroterions in the form of winged griffins, or flying dragons. On the other sections of the building, the hipped roof is lower, as no attic story is present.

Clear articulation of story level and their functions are expressed through fenestration and the use of string courses. The Hemicycle, an auditorium for lectures and concerts, contains three blind windows crowned with triangular pediments in the second story. The north facade, which houses the School, allows for larger and more frequent fenestration. The second story of this facade contains a five bay balustraded arcade of arched openings. The entrance to the School is centered on the first floor and is approached by a flight of stairs from the street level. The doorway is marked by a triangular pediment supported by brackets and bears the inscription "Hemicycle Hall."

In 1915, the Board of Trustees commissioned Waddy B. Wood to redesign the interior of the Hemicycle. Flagg had designed a double height room, but the Board found the lighting unsuitable for the exhibition of paintings. Wood's redesign split the Hemicycle into two stories. The lower story served as an auditorium for School lectures and concerts. The room, modelled after a Greek amphitheater, accommodated over two hundred people. The upper story was converted into additional gallery space and housed special touring exhibitions. This proved especially pleasing to the Board since the public could visit the special exhibitions at night without the necessity of opening the entire Gallery building.¹

¹Annual Report by the President of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, January 1, 1915 to January 1, 1916, Washington, D.C.:12-14. This sections gives an account of the Board members involved in choosing Wood as architect and the changes he effected.

The E Street addition (Platt, 1928) retains the continuity of fenestration and articulation of story of the original Flagg building. Materials of the addition reflect those used in the original structure.

Two large bronze lions on pedestals flank the staircase of the main entrance on 17th Street. These lions were bought in 1888 at the auction of the estate of Bill Holliday, founder of the Pony Express. Director Frederick B. McGuire acquired the bronzes for \$1,900. They were displayed at the original home of the Corcoran Gallery on 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue (today the Renwick Gallery, part of the Smithsonian Institute). There they faced the street, but when moved to the new building in 1897, they were placed facing each other. The lions are copies from the originals by Antonio Canova, which adorn the cenotaph of Pope Clement XIII in Rome.²

Two additional pedestals flank the doorway and were intended to support statues of allegorical figures. Here one realizes that from a distance, the scale of the building is deceptive. The doorway is 10 feet wide and 20 feet high. The two heavy bronze doors are each ornamented with a bas relief of a lion's head holding a large ring in its jaws. Entry is into a foyer from which a flight of stairs leads to the large open area of the Gallery's two storied double atria (commonly referred to as the Atrium), which runs north to south and measures 150'x 50'x 40'. The area is lit through laylights in the roof of glass and copper. The lower floor is surrounded by 40 fluted, baseless Greek Doric columns while the upper floor is surrounded by 38 fluted Greek Ionic columns; both orders are of Indiana limestone and stand 18 feet high. The Ionic columns, which support the ceiling beams, are detailed with gilt bronze necking. The columns are spaced around two open wells with circulation along the outside. The frieze that surrounds the lower southern Atrium wall is a 19th century plaster reproduction of the frieze on the Pantheon. The walls of the lower Atrium were restored to their original deep red color in 1987. Originally, the Atrium housed statuary and plaster casts. Today, statuary is still exhibited here as well as plaster and wooden busts of famous Americans, which are mounted on brackets around the room.

The floor in the lower Atrium contains glass panels that circumscribe each interior court and originally served to provide illumination for the school studios located in the basement. For evening functions, the soft glow of the bottom lit glass panels illuminates the center of the large Atrium space. Flagg may have taken his inspiration from Labrouste's Bibliothèque Nationale (1854-75) in Paris, but glass floors were also used in Ware and Van Brunt's Harvard Library (1880-81).

The main axis of the building crosses the north-south orientation of the Atrium and directs the visitor to the "grand staircase," one of the most elegant in all of Washington. Though 16 feet wide, the risers are relatively low with a midway landing to slow the pace of the visitor requiring him to pause and to contemplate the gallery space. Tiered blocks are provided along the outside of the railing for statuary or decorative foliage. The staircase rises from the main floor level to a landing, turns back on itself and continues to the upper galleries; limestone balustrades enhance the upper flights of stairs. Originally, niches at the head of the landing exhibited plaster casts of a Romanesque bas relief flanked by classical sculpture.

The main gallery rooms project off the upper and lower Atrium with museum offices and museum shop on the lower floor. The galleries are of the highest craftsmanship, outfitted with parquet floors in a herringbone pattern, sliding pocket doors and iron grill work over the windows. The sightlines of the galleries follow classical proportions.

The galleries of the Clark addition, designed by Platt, retain the elegance of the original museum, but differ greatly from Flagg's strict classical symmetry. Platt's design took into account that the collections received from Senator Clark had been exhibited in a "home" atmosphere at the Senator's Fifth Avenue mansion (now destroyed). The architect studied the collection contents to

²Melvin A. Pettit, True History of Lions at Corcoran Entrance is Revealed, Sunday Star, 21 May 1939.

determine which exhibition spaces would best suit their display and designed an addition complimentary to Flagg's original plan. Platt discretely added the entrance to his wing at the top of the landing of the grand staircase by opening one of the sculpture niches, which placed his entrance directly on axis with the original entrance. Beyond this large, classically designed portal, and designated by the inscription "The Clark Collection," is the Rotunda, a cylindrical room capped by a coffered ceiling, owing its inspiration to the Hadrian's Pantheon. This room, while serving as a transition from the symmetry of the older building to the newer, more humanly-scaled rooms, also refers to the Clark residence, which had a circular entrance hall in which a copy of Canova's Venus was displayed, as it is at the Corcoran.

Directly beyond the Rotunda is the staircase hall, a richly panelled room lit by a skylight and decorated with marble columns and iron railings along the staircase to the upper galleries. This area is more intimate in its atmosphere as opposed to Flagg's monumentally scaled areas.

Platt's plan also included a gallery specifically for the re-installation of an 18th century French Salon which had been dismantled and moved to Senator Clark's home. The room was removed from the Hôtel d'Orsay in Paris, housed in New York, and then moved to the Corcoran where it is the center of the European collections. Not only ceiling, walls, mantle and floors were intact, but wall length mirrors and many furnishings as well.

Flagg's building introduced not only Beaux Arts classicism to the nation's capital, but also the new building form of "the classical building of the arts."³ This design, completed by 1891, was at the forefront of the classical movement in American architecture, following fast on the heels of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago which served to showcase classical designs by such architects as Richard Morris Hunt and McKim, Mead and White.

The Corcoran, both in its original section and its addition, emphasizes Beaux Arts classicism in its overall plan and design through its massing, symmetry, spatial relationships and the use of historical style through its Neo-Grec detailing. Building type, site and program are elegantly and practically combined here. The geometry of the exterior architectural form fits the building to the street and enlivens the architectural and urban context around it. Along with Daniel Burnham's turn-of-the-century Union Station, the Corcoran Gallery of Art is one of Washington, D.C.'s best executed examples of the Beaux Arts tradition of the French Ecole.

³Donna Barnard Ari and Cynthia R. Field, "Beaux Arts Traditions at the Corcoran," Museum News LIV(1976):50.

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Adding to Washington's visual beauty and cultural heritage, the Corcoran Gallery of Art is the oldest art museum in Washington, D.C. and one of the three oldest museums in the country, the other two being the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. William Wilson Corcoran (1798-1888), native of Georgetown, merchant, businessman and philanthropist, founded the Gallery in 1869 and presented to a newly formed Board of Trustees a "Deed of Gift" of his art collection and a building in which to house the collection.¹ The Corcoran Gallery was chartered by Congress in 1870.

The first home of the Corcoran, now known as the Renwick Gallery in the northeast corner of 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, was designed by James Renwick in 1859 and has been listed as a National Historic Landmark since 1971. The second building to house the collection, on 17th Street and New York Avenue, has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1976. This building is a significant contribution to one of the most important architectural areas in the city. Within three blocks of the gallery are numerous prominent architectural examples, all of which are listed as National Historic Landmarks: the American National Headquarters of the Red Cross; Blair-Lee House; Octagon House; Renwick Gallery; State, War, and Navy Building [now Old Executive Office Building]; United States Department of the Treasury; and the White House. The Corcoran was the first semi-public building to be built along the western side of 17th Street. Not only its well-wrought architecture, described as "the Beaux Arts tradition at its best,"² but also its association with prominent Americans and historically important cultural events make the Corcoran an excellent candidate for landmark status.

In 1859 Corcoran commissioned James Renwick to design a building to house his rapidly growing collection of American art. Because of his Southern sympathies Corcoran left the country from 1862 until the end of the Civil War.³ In reaction to his political views, the United States government seized control of the unfinished gallery building. But, in 1869, the building was returned to Corcoran and its construction completed. It opened its doors with an exhibition of 98 paintings and sculptures in January, 1874.

By 1878 visitors had difficulty viewing the art because of the many art students who came to copy the works. Corcoran then provided funds "for the specific purpose of aiding in the establishing the school of design in connection with the Gallery."⁴ The school was initially housed in an annex to the north side of the gallery and officially opened in 1890 with forty students and two instructors. Today the Corcoran School of Art is the only four-year art college in Washington and is fully accredited. Enrollment in the BFA program reached 300 in the 1990-91 academic year in addition to over 1000 students in the Open Program, a non-degree granting educational program. There are 47 full time faculty and 40 part time faculty.

¹.Members of the 1896 Board included: James M. Carlisle, George W. Riggs, Dr. James C. Hall, Anthony Hyde, James G. Beret, James C. Kennedy, Henry D. Cooke, James C. McGuire, and W.T. Walters. Corcoran chose not to place himself on the Board of Trustees.

².Washington Metropolitan Chapter of the AIA, A Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C., 1965.

³.Corcoran was a great friend to General Robert E. Lee and attended a 1869 reception for him at the Greenbrier Resort in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia.

⁴Architecture: Discovery and Awareness, 3.

The Corcoran Gallery and School, though, were not Corcoran's only philanthropic endeavors and he is considered to be one of Washington's most illustrious patrons.⁵ In 1869 he donated \$550,000 for the establishment of the Louise Home, "an institution for the support and maintenance of a limited number of gentlewomen who have been reduced by misfortune."⁶ Additionally, Corcoran made contributions to several institutions of higher learning, including Columbian University (now George Washington University), the Ascension Episcopal Church, Georgetown, the University of Virginia, the College of William and Mary, the Virginia Military Institute, the Episcopal Theological Seminary, the Protestant Asylum and the Academy of Visitation both of Washington, D.C. In total, his gifts and bequests to the Corcoran Gallery and School of Art equaled \$1,600,000. For his efforts, Corcoran won the respect of many and was praised in the Morning Tribune of February 27, 1852:

There are so few among those who can afford to be patrons of the Fine Arts in this country...that every votary who feels a just pride in seeing the genius of his own country respected and encouraged cannot hesitate to pay an honorable tribute to one, who... contributes to develop the talent which neglected would languish from want...[Mr. Corcoran] has contributed his private resources to foster native merit....⁷

By the late 1880s a new building for the School and Gallery was required due to the substantial growth of both. Adjoining properties on Pennsylvania Avenue and 17th Street proved to be unavailable and the decision was made, by the Board, to buy land and construct a new building. In 1891 the Board of Trustees purchased a plot on 17th Street and New York Avenue, N.W. A design competition was held and in 1893 the Board awarded the commission to the New York architect Ernest Flagg and hired the contracting firm of Norcross Brothers, a favorite firm of Henry Hobson Richardson.⁸

Ernest Flagg (1857-1947) left formal education at the age of 15 to work as an office boy on New York's Wall Street. After dabbling in several real estate ventures, he entered the second class of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris in 1889. He further pursued his studies at the Atelier Paul Blondel. Flagg returned to New York in the 1890s skilled in the architecture of the "French School" of Beaux Arts. He took the basic concepts of the Beaux Arts tradition--symmetry, use of classical details and forms and care for spatial relationships--and added his own mark to it by concentrating on matching the special needs of the program to the building type.⁹ In his design for the Corcoran, Flagg considered the founder's mission for the institution: "to educate through the school and to elevate public taste through the contemplation of art" and attempted to express this dual purpose through his architecture.¹⁰

In a review of Flagg's works, H. W. Desmond comments that he was "a man who has thoroughly accepted certain well-defined principles from which he proceeds logically [and exhibits] a clear

⁵Charles Moore, Washington Past and Present, (New York: The Century Co., 1929), 204.

⁶Dictionary of American Biographies, Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 440.

⁷Morning Tribune, February 27, 1852(?).

⁸Building and Grounds Report, Guide to the Corcoran Gallery Archives, 2.

⁹Mardges Bacon, Ernest Flagg: Beaux Arts Architect and Urban Reformer, (New York: Architectural History Foundation; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 1986), 77.

¹⁰Ari and Field, 50.

process of architectural thought."¹¹ After the completion of the Corcoran building, Flagg commented, "I have tried to make it simple and monumental and above all to give it the appearance of an art building."¹²

Flagg's design drew on the many architectural examples he saw while in Paris. The monumental structure and massing of the museum has clear relations to Henri Labrouste's Bibliotheque St. Geneviève (1838-50).¹³ In his listing of 11 artists around the cornice of the Corcoran, Flagg directly quotes Labrouste's library. Baron von Haussmann's redesign of the Paris street schemes may have influenced the way Flagg chose to address the Corcoran's site at the busy intersection of New York Avenue and 17th Street. Additionally, certain aspects of the Roman basilica form are evident in the interior of the building, including its long open center space and supported side aisles. The Beaux Arts architecture is enhanced here with Neo-Grec details, one of the many ornamental styles available to Flagg at this time. This classicism was not only timely, in that Richardsonian Romanesque was beginning to die out by the end of the 19th century, but also authentic in that Flagg spoke from the source, he had studied these monuments first hand and knew them well.¹⁴ Flagg perceived the Corcoran institution and the building it occupied to be the American Louvre.

In considering the museum as an inspirational and educational institution and using all the lessons learned in Paris, Flagg introduced a form which has today become familiar to the American museum goer--"the classical temple of the arts."¹⁵ In his design, submitted well in advance of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, which bolstered the use of the Beaux Arts style in America, Flagg anticipated the vogue in Beaux Arts classicism. The interior of the Corcoran reflects the clear planning and symmetry of the Ecole tradition; the location and needs for the various functions of a museum were provided for in the design. Frank Lloyd Wright, perhaps the greatest American architect, reportedly considered the Corcoran to be the best designed building in Washington.¹⁶

Like Corcoran, Flagg was deeply committed to efforts at improving conditions for the urban poor, but is generally considered to have been an architect of skyscrapers and tenements. In the 1950s a renewed interest occurred in Flagg's work and turn-of-the-century Beaux Arts design. One of Flagg's other monumental schemes, the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland (1900-1910), was listed as a National Historic Landmark in 1961. Another well known Flagg building, the Singer Tower in New York, was briefly the tallest skyscraper in the world after its completion in 1908. In 1967 it became the tallest building up to that time to be demolished.¹⁷

Professor William Jordy in his introduction to Mardges Bacon's biography of Flagg states: "Clearly here was an architect whose work exemplified to a degree matched perhaps by that of no other American the full range of what the Ecole des Beaux Arts had to teach....[Flagg is]

¹¹H.W. Desmond, "The Works of Ernest Flagg," Architectural Record XI(1902):1.

¹²Bacon, 79.

¹³Bacon, 85.

¹⁴Desmond,2.

¹⁵Ari and Field, 50.

¹⁶Benjamin Forgey, "The Best Building in Washington," The Washington Post 31 July 1982.

¹⁷Bacon, xi-xii. Introduction by William Jordy.

(possibly the) consummate exemplar of the full range of the Ecole training and ideals in the United States."¹⁸

The Corcoran's new building opened its doors in February 1897. It was immediately hailed for its elegant architecture and interiors. President and Mrs. Cleveland attended the opening with all the members of the President's Cabinet. This continued the close relationship of the Gallery and the residents of the White House.

In 1925 the Corcoran accepted Montana Senator William Andrew Clark's (1839-1925) bequest of his collections of art and artifacts. Clark's collection consisted of almost 200 paintings, drawings, watercolors, sculpture, tapestries, rugs, antiques, stained glass windows, lace, furniture and the interior decoration and furniture of a Louis XVI Hôtel Salon. The collection is noted for its Dutch, Flemish, and French Romantic paintings, which includes works by Hobbema, Cuyp, Rembrandt van Rijn, van Goyen, Daumier, Degas, Rodin, and several French Barbizon painters. The collection also consists of several pieces of Italian majolica earthenware. Clearly more space was needed in the Gallery to house this collection; accordingly, the Clark family donated \$700,000 for an addition designed by New York architect Charles Adams Platt (1861-1933) with the James Baird Company as contractors. The wing was opened in 1928.

Platt was by training a painter and printmaker and had exhibited his work at the Corcoran Gallery. Earlier, he had designed the Italianate Freer Gallery (1913-18), also in Washington, but his career flourished mostly in residential work. While he remained loyal to classical traditions, he at first leaned toward the Italianate and later to Georgian expressions. His sympathetic addition to the existing Flagg building enlarged the gallery space by 27,032 sq. feet and added such special areas to the museum as the Rotunda, the Clark Landing, the Mantle room, the Tapestry room, and the Salon Dore. Members of the Clark family, as well as President and Mrs. Coolidge, attended the opening of the Clark Wing in March, 1928.

Thomas Corcoran immigrated to Baltimore, Maryland from Limerick, Ireland in 1783. He moved to Georgetown where he served three times as mayor and was an influential merchant. William Wilson Corcoran was born December 27, 1798. He went into the dry goods business, but in 1823 filed for bankruptcy. Corcoran then managed his father's property and later worked for the Bank of the United States and the Bank of Columbia from 1828-36. In 1837 he formed a partnership with George W. Riggs and founded the brokerage firm of Corcoran and Riggs. Since 1896 this institution has operated as the Riggs National Bank. After making his fortune by selling United States bonds to defray the cost of the United States' war with Mexico, Corcoran retired in 1854, devoting his time to his many philanthropic efforts.¹⁹

Corcoran was one of the few early American collectors to value and purchase contemporary American art at a time when most collectors turned to the art of Germany and France.²⁰ Because of his firm belief in the talents of American artists, Corcoran stated that the goal of his gallery would be to "encourage American genius in the production and preservation of works pertaining to the Fine Arts."²¹ Over a period of years, the popularity and desire of the public to view his private collection influenced and persuaded Corcoran to use his collection and financial resources to open a public institution committed to American art.

¹⁸Bacon, xiii. Introduction by William Jordy.

¹⁹Architecture: Discovery and Awareness, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Education Department, unpublished manuscript, 2.

²⁰Donna Barnard Ari and Cynthia R. Field, "Beaux Arts Traditions at the Corcoran," Museum News LIV (1976):50.

²¹Deed of Gift. 1869.

The Corcoran was founded by a man with the foresight to realize, in the middle of the nineteenth century, that American art was deserving of encouragement and its finest examples worth preserving for posterity. Further, as Corcoran stated in his original Deed of Gift, the Gallery and School were intended to "encourage American Genius," a goal pursued by the institution to this day.

Since the Corcoran's founding predated the existence of any Federal art gallery, its role as a national repository for art was recognized soon after it was established and foreign visitors often included the museum on their itinerary.²²

In 1909 the Senate Parks Commission, known as the Macmillan Commission, exhibited their models and suggestions to the public at the Corcoran. As one of the first large semi-public buildings on this stretch of 17th Street, the gallery was identified as an integral part to this City Beautiful plan.

The Museum has for more than a century collected a wide spectrum of American, as well as some European, painting, sculpture, prints, drawings, and decorative arts. However, among the more than 11,000 works in the collection, the most significant works are to be found in American art. The Corcoran's collection is recognized internationally as one of the most outstanding assemblages of American art in existence today, containing a thorough survey of American art from the mid-18th century through to 1991.

In the past innovative exhibitions, as well as single artist shows, have exhibited the works of such artists as Thomas Doughty, Albert Bierstadt, John Singer Sargent, Thomas Eakins, Andrew Wyeth and Worthington Wittredge. The 1983 exhibition A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting 1760-1910 was a landmark exhibition co-organized by the Corcoran and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and was considered by many in the field as an exhibition which helped to achieve the formal national recognition and public acclamation worthy of American art.

The excellence of the designs of the exterior and interior and the wholly compatible addition to the Corcoran make it the premier example of French Beaux Arts architecture in Washington at the turn of the century, a tribute to the Gallery's founder and its architects, all of whom made additional significant contributions to the history of America art and architecture.

²²The creation of the present National Gallery of Art did not occur until 1931 with the gift from Andrew Mellon of his art collection and a building. Mellon kept his paintings in storage at the Corcoran while he served as Secretary of the Treasury in the 1920s. (Diane Shaw Wasch, "The Evolution of 1785 Massa-chusetts Avenue: From Luxury Apartment House to National Trust Headquarters," unpublished manuscript, 1989, 39.)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bacon, Mardges. Ernest Flagg: Beaux-Arts Architect and Urban Reformer. New York: Architectural History Foundation; Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986.

Desmond, H.W. "The Works of Ernest Flagg." Architectural Record XI/3(1902):1-104.

Drexler, Arthur, ed. The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux Arts. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977.

Forgey, Benjamin. "The Best Building in Washington." The Washington Post. 31 July 1982.

Kidney, Walter C. Architecture of Choice: Eclecticism in America, 1880-1930. New York: George Braziller, 1974.

Levine, Neil. "The Romantic Idea of Architectural Legibility: Henri LaBrouste and the Neo-Grec." The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Arthur Drexler, ed. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977.

Moore, Charles. Washington Past and Present. New York: The Century Co., 1929.

Obituary, Ernest Flagg. New York Times. 11 April 1947.

Pettit, Melvin A. "The History of the Lions at the Corcoran Entrance is Revealed." Sunday Star 21 May, 1939.

ON ERNEST FLAGG

King, Moses. Notable New Yorkers of 1869-1899. New York: 1899.

Peters, Frazier Forman. Houses of Stone. Westport, Connecticut: 1933.

Semsch, Otto Francis. The History of the Singer Building Construction, Its Progress from Foundation to Flag Pole. New York: The Trow Press, 1908.

BY FLAGG

"Reducing Costs by the Proper Designing of Houses--The Architect's Opportunity," Housing Problems in America: Proceedings of the 19th National Conference on Housing. Philadelphia: 1923. 81-97.

Small Houses, Their Economic Design and Construction: Essays on the Fundamental Principles of Design and Descriptive Articles on Construction. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922.

ON CHARLES PLATT

Monograph of the Work of Charles A. Platt Royal Cortissoz, introd. New York: The Architectural Book Publishing Company, 1925.

American Academy of Arts and Letters. Catalogue, Exhibition of the Works of Charles A. Platt at the American Academy of Arts and Letters. New York: American Academy of Arts and Letters, 1938.

The Architects and the Works, Volume 1, Number 3. 1908.

Morgan, Keith N. Charles A. Platt, the Artist as Architect. New York: Architectural History Foundation; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985.

Concerning the Opening of Flagg's Corcoran Building

"The New Corcoran Gallery," The Evening Star, April 15, 1893.

"The New Corcoran Art Gallery at Washington, D.C.," Stone Cutters' Journal, August 1895.

"Without a Superior: Opening the Beautiful New Corcoran Gallery of Art," The Evening Star, February 20, 1897.

"Opened the Art Gallery: Five Thousand People Attend the Private View of its Treasures," The Morning Times, February 23, 1897.

"Majestic Art Palaces: Two Grand Galleries on the American Continent, The Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Corcoran at Washington," The Morning Times, October 14, 1900.

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: Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives; Library of Congress (Corcoran papers)

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Approximately 1.7 acres

UTM References: Western Quadrant of USGS District of Columbia map
Zone Northing Easting Zone Northing Easting

A _____	B _____
C _____	D _____
E _____	F _____

Verbal Boundary Description:

Lots 1-5, 13-21, 27 and 28 on Surveyor's map (attached).

Boundary Justification:

Area is bounded to the north by New York Avenue, N.W.; to the east by 17th Street, N.W.; to the south by E Street, N.W.; and to the west by the property line adjacent to the United Unions building.

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 17

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Debra L. Alderson
Organization: University of Virginia
Street/#: 35 West Range, UVA
City/Town: Charlottesville
State: VA
ZIP: 22903
Telephone: 804/293-7389
Edited by: Carolyn Pitts, NPS