

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <u>North Carolina</u>
COUNTY: <u>New Hanover</u>
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE <u>MAY 2 1974</u>

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Federal Building and Courthouse

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
Custom House

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
North Water ~~Street~~ between Market and Princess Streets

CITY OR TOWN:  
Wilmington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
Seventh

STATE:  
North Carolina

CODE  
32

COUNTY:  
New Hanover

CODE  
129

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

**4. AGENCY**

General Services Administration

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1776 Peachtree

CITY OR TOWN:  
Atlanta

STATE:  
Georgia

CODE  
10

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
New Hanover County Courthouse, Registry of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Third and Princess Streets

CITY OR TOWN:  
Wilmington

STATE:  
North Carolina

CODE  
32

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:

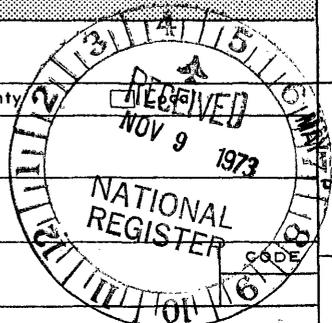
DATE OF SURVEY:  Federal  State  County

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:



STATE: N. Carolina

COUNTY: New Hanover

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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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
	(Check One)		(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<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 Federal Building and Courthouse in Wilmington, North Carolina, is an imposing three-story stone structure overlooking the Cape Fear River. Fronting Water Street, it is located between Market and Princess Streets on the western edge of the Wilmington business district.

Still known locally as the Custom House, the neo-classical building was completed in 1919. It consists of a central mass with balanced projecting wings having engaged pedimented porticos. The first floor is rusticated and is separated from the smoother upper wall surface by a stringcourse. The second and third story surfaces alternate between recessed areas with columns and flush areas flanked by pilasters. An unadorned frieze, simple molded cornice, and solid balustrade crown the building.

There are fifteen openings across the central mass and five on the projecting ends. Windows on the first and third floors are eight-over-eight, and are cut into the stone. Window treatment of the flush areas on the second floor is identical but with the addition of four-light transoms. The French doors in the recessions of the central mass and the engaged porticos of the wings of the second floor have balustrades with cast iron rinceau and eagle motif. The five French doors denoting the main entrance area are pedimented while all others have only a simple architrave.

Leading to what was the main entrance is a stair flanked by balustraded walls. The courtyard is planted with a fountain in the center. There is a Water Street entrance in each projecting wing. Cut into the stone are the words, "UNITED STATES/CUSTOM HOUSE" over the north entrance, and "UNITED STATES/COURT HOUSE" over the south entrance.

The south facade on Market Street has eight openings. Across the Princess Street or north facade are seven openings spaced between projecting columns. The three entrances on this side have keystones with carved urn motifs, suggesting that this was the major secondary entrance to the building originally. It is presently used as the main entrance. The back of the building fronts an alley dividing the property from other office buildings.

Although the interior plan of the building has been altered little, details have changed considerably. One exception is the entrance foyer of the north or Princess Street side. Most of the wall surface of the foyer is rusticated white marble with some use of plaster. The ceiling is decorated with neo-classical motifs while the floor is black and white marble. Separating the foyer from the hall are three open arches corresponding to openings to the elevator and stairways across the hall.

Original plans and elevations for the building show that the courtroom on the third floor was originally elaborately furnished. It is now

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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE North Carolina	
COUNTY New Hanover	
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(Number all entries)

No. 7 Continued

a relatively plain rectangular room. Remaining is the raised free-standing judge's platform at the back of which is a series of columns connected by a frieze and cornice. On each end of the cornice is an urn; in the center is a gilded eagle.

The building dimensions are 332' x 113'.



**B. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **Completed 1919**

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 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 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

Described as "the pride of the city" in 1919, the United States Federal Building and Court House remains a major structure in downtown Wilmington, North Carolina. Originally labeled the Custom House, Appraisers Store, and Court House, it reflects the economic development of Wilmington as a port city on the Cape Fear River.

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The Federal Building is located on the site of earlier Wilmington custom houses. As early as 1819, property within the same block was purchased for use as a custom house. The structure burned in 1840, and was replaced in the mid-1840's with a custom house designed by the noted New York architect, John Norris. Original drawings and plans in the Atlanta Regional Office of the National Archives show the Norris building was a superb three-story Greek Revival structure which combined functions as post office, courthouse, and custom house.

In 1914-1915, the old custom house was demolished to make way for the newer, larger building. Additional land on the block had been purchased over a period of years. The Wilmington Morning Star reported that the cornerstone was laid December 9, 1916. It reads: "WILLIAM G. MCADOO/SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY/JAMES A WETMORE/ACTING SUPERVISING ARCHITECT/1916." The building had been expected to be completed by early 1918 at an estimated cost of \$500,000. World War I delayed completion until the following year when in May, 1919, the United States Court held session in the courtroom even though the building was not quite ready for occupancy. "A steady stream of humanity" viewed the structure on July 19, shortly before federal agencies moved in.

A unique architectural feature of the Wilmington Federal Building was the incorporation of the design of the front facade of the earlier Norris custom house into the projecting wings of the present structure. The pedimented portico sections, even to the cast iron details, are a repeat, if not an exact reproduction of the 1840's custom house.

Custom services are no longer housed in the Federal Building. It is occupied currently by the United States Courts, the Corps of Engineers, and other agencies.

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

A History of Public Buildings under the Control of the Treasury Department. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901, pp. 454-455.  
 McKoy, Henry Bacon. Wilmington, North Carolina--Do You Remember When? Greenville, South Carolina, 1957, pp. 134-137.  
 Records of the National Archives, Atlanta Regional Office of The National Archives, Federal Records Center. Record Group RG121, records pertaining to Wilmington Custom House/Federal Building.  
The Morning Star, Wilmington, May 13, 1919, and July 20, 1919.

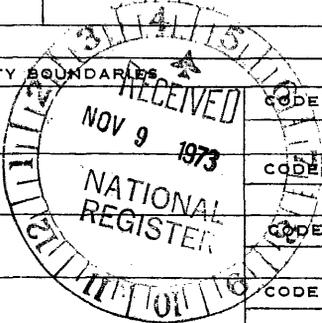
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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
NW	° ' "	° ' "		°	'	"
NE	° ' "	° ' "		34	14	07
SE	° ' "	° ' "			77	57 00
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: about 3/4 acre

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: <u>Ellen Beasley</u>	DATE: <u>April 12, 1973</u>
BUSINESS ADDRESS:	
STREET AND NUMBER: <u>2516 Belmont Boulevard</u>	PHONE: <u>615-297-6637</u>
CITY OR TOWN: <u>Nashville</u>	STATE <u>Tennessee</u> CODE <u>41</u>

**12. CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION**

<p>State Liaison Officer recommendation:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes  <input type="checkbox"/> No  <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><u>[Signature]</u>                  State Liaison Officer Signature</p> <p>In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Liaison Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The recommended level of significance is <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/> National <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State</p> <p><u>[Signature]</u> <u>10/24/73</u>                  Federal Representative Signature Date</p> <p><b>Historic Preservation Liaison Officer</b></p>	<p>NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION</p> <p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p><u>[Signature]</u>                  Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</p> <p>Date <u>5/2/74</u></p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p><u>[Signature]</u>                  Keeper of The National Register</p> <p>Date <u>5.2.74</u></p>
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