U.S. General Post Office (now U.S.
Tariff Commission Building)
Between 7th, 8th, E, and F Sts., N.W.
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-219

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
801 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

U. S. GENERAL POST OFFICE
(now U.S. TARIFF COMMISSION BUILDING)

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Location: Between Seventh, Eighth, E and F Streets, N.W. Washington, D.C.

Latitude: 38° 53' 48" north.

Longitude: 77° 01' 22" west.

Presnet Owner: United State of America

Present Occupant: U. S. Tariff Commission and U. S. Post Office Department.

Present Use: U. S. Government Office Building and Branch Post Office.

Brief Statement of Significance: A mid-nineteenth century federal office building with important historical associations and notable architectural character; a landmark of the national capital.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built by the United States Government, it has always remained under the same ownership.

2. Date of erection: Original portion, 1829-1844; additions, 1855-1866; minor later additions.

3. Architect: Robert Mills, architect of original building; Thomas U. Walter, architect of addition.

4. Builder or contractor, suppliers: Robert Mills supervised the construction of the original building, letting different parts of the work to separate contractors: [H. M. Pierce Gallagher, Robert Mills (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), pp. 189-198].

   Captain Montgomery C. Meigs, U. S. Corps of Engineers, superintended the addition from 1855-1859. [Sacket L. Duryea, A Historical Summary of the Work of the Corps of Engineers in Washington, D.C. and Vicinity, p. 15.

Russell Weigley, Quartermaster General of the Union Army (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 98].

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Marble for the old part, 1839, came from West Chester, N.Y.: for the new part, 1855, came from Cockeysville, Md. [George P. Merrill, Stones for Building and Decoration (New York: Wiley, 1903, 3rd Ed.), p. 525].

Masterson and Smith supplied samples of marble from quarries at East Chester, N. Y. [Memorial of Robert Mills, appended to Superintendent and Architect of Public Buildings, Report No. 460, H. of Rep., 27th Congress, 2nd session, 1842].

Hayward, Fox & Co. supplied furnaces. [Annual Report, Comm. of Public Buildings, Jan. 7, 1846, William Noland].

5. Notes on original plan and construction of building: The Post Office Building situated on E. Street North, and running from 7th to 8th Street, West [i.e., the Old Post Office]. The main front is on E. Street extending 204 feet with a wing at each end stretching 102 feet up 7th and 8th Streets. The whole rises three stories above the basement. The street facades are of white marble of the richest workmanship in the Corinthian style, the court or rear front with a beautiful specimen of light granite. The first story is faced with a channelled rustic over which rises the order of columns and pilasters with their rich capitals extending up two stories surmounted by their entablature and crowned by a panelled blocking course. The main entrance is from E. Street by a flight of marble steps into a recessed vestibule; to the right and left are spacious corridors leading to marble staircases conducting to the different stories. Each floor contains twenty-five rooms, seventy-five rooms in all. The whole is made thoroughly fireproff, and is heated by furnaces in the basement story. [Gallagher, Robert Mills, pp. 69-70, quoting from the Robert Mills Papers in the Library of Congress.]

An iron railing enclosed the site by 1848. There were four hot-air furnaces in 1848. The building was lighted by gas; this was at least the second, perhaps the first, public building in Washington to be lighted by gas. [Public Buildings, etc., Report No. 90, H. of Rep., 30th Congress, second session, (1848)]

In the closing years of the nineteenth century an electric plant in the basement served this building, the Patent Office, Pension Building, and other public buildings; this was one of the early central heating and lighting stations in the U. S. Government service. [Notes in files

of U. S. National Capital Planning Commission, compiled by Donald Lehman, G. S. A. Historian. Much of the material noted here is reproduced by courtesy of Mr. Lehman and the N. C. P. C.]

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B. Historical events and persons associated with structure: From c. 1842 this building was occupied by the Post Office Department, until 1897; from 1897 to 1917 by the General Land Office; the Selective Service in 1917; the Tariff Commission since 1932. General John J. Pershing occupied offices in this building, where he prepared his final reports as Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces. [Sidney Morgan, Secretary, U. S. Tariff Commission, The Tariff Commission Building, Typewritten, 1940.]

C. Sources of information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Old photographs in the National Archives: No. 273-MHW-15, No. 273-MHW-2-70, No. 273-MHW-2-41, No. 66-Q-23DL-22, No. 111-SC-64106, No. 66-Q-23DL-20. (These references are noted by courtesy of Mr. Calvin Felton, formerly of G. S. A.)

2. Secondary and published sources: "General Post Office," engraving published by Meyer, 1851.

"General Post Office," wood engraving from Harper's, 1859.

"General Post Office," Stereo Photograph.

[the above prints are in the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division]

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: An important early building for the United States Government, designed by two of the most noted nineteenth-century American architects, largely in its original state, of refined and restrained monumentality. The original portion illustrates the best characteristics of Robert Mills' maturity: his versatility, inventiveness, directness, sense of structure and function, mastery of classical elements and ability to use them creatively. The addition shows Thomas U. Walters' respect for an existing masterpiece and the ability to harmonize with it, while making full use of newer materials and methods.

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2. Condition of fabric: The building is generally in good condition and is well maintained. Some exterior stone decoration has been damaged by weathering to a moderate degree. As in any old building some interior woodwork has been affected by exposure to humidity and by repeated coats of paint: this is most noticeable with respect to interior shutters on the window openings. Some major iron or steel supports in the basement under the court appear to have deteriorated sufficiently to cause grave concern about their load-carrying ability. Bricks at the top of the large chimney appear to be loose.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Original building was 102' X 204'; after enlargment it is 280' X 204'; originally 7 by 19 bays, now 19 by 19 bays; three stories above the basement; originally U-shaped, now rectangular, with an enclosed court partly occupied by a wing on axis.

2. Structural systems, framing:

a. The original building has load-bearing walls of stone and brick masonry and a brick-vaulted floor system employing semicircular, segmental and groined compartments, with a timber-framed roof. Some small areas are ceiled with marble slabs. Joints are filled with hydraulic cement mortar.

b. The addition has masonry load-bearing walls and fire-resistant floors of brick-arched panels supported on rolled wrought-iron joists. The roof is supported on arcaded brick walls which carry iron rafters. Foundations below grade are random stonework, units being 4" to 1'-2" high, 8" ashlar course on the inside above grade.

3. Exterior composition:

a. General: The original building was three stories in height and its principal facade was at the south, facing E Street. The lower floor was treated with rusticated pilaster strips; the two upper stories were treated with a colossal Corinthian order of pilasters, accented by shallow projecting pavilions at the center of each front, using engaged columns. When the building was extended the same ordonnance was applied to the exterior of the new portion.

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Since 1873, due to lowered street levels, about six feet of the basement wall, which is plain, show above grade.

b. Order: Columns are fluted, approximately ten diameters high, and taper somewhat more than Roman or Greek prototypes. Capitals are of normal proportion but there is only one row of acanthus leaves (five on the engaged columns, three on the pilasters); as a consequence, the caulicoli are unusually conspicuous. The axial volutes intertwine, as on the Temple of Castor and Pollux in Rome. Pilasters are unfluted. Bases are of the Attic type, set on a high plinth block treated with a plain horizontal panel, doubly recessed. Pilaster and column shafts are each made of four pieces of stone.

The entablature is of normal height and largely follows Roman precedent. The architrave is composed of three fascias and its crowning mouldings are enriched. The frieze is plain. The cornice consists of a cyma reversa bed moulding, a plain fascia (not denticulated), above that an enriched ovolo, a modillion course, corona, small cavetto, fillet, cyma recta and fillet. Modillions are block in form, the ends being ornamented by a circular panel containing a rosette of four leaves. Many of these have considerably weathered. Between modillions, in the soffit, there is an enriched coffer. Above the cornice there is a low parapet.

c. South facade (originally the principal front): This is nineteen bays wide, the central three bays projecting slightly and, with the bay adjoining on each side, forming a central pavilion. The pilaster strips of the first story, which is treated as a podium, are channelled along the horizontal joints. The marble ashlar of this facade is otherwise tooled smoothly, drafted margins being faintly visible. The marble surface has weathered unevenly, leaving shallow "pock marks" and spalled places at the edges of individual stones and at projecting corners. In a few places small stones have been inlaid to patch the wall. In general the wall is in good condition.

As to the fenestration, there is one rectangular window in each basement bay. In each first-story bay there is a window in the smooth recessed area between pilaster strips, framed by architrave trim.

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Each sill is moulded and continues across the entire recess.

The first story is crowned by a two-piece entablature, whose slightly-projecting cornice consists of a small echinus bed moulding, soffit with plain drip mould, corona, narrow fillet, echinus and wider fillet.

A tall window in each bay of the second story is framed with architrave trim, a plain frieze and delicate triangular pediment. The window sill rests on the first-story cornice. At the third story the windows are square and have an architrave on all four sides; the upper edge of this architrave is level with the top of the pilaster shafts.

Window sash are probably not original. They are double hung, two lights over two lights, except on the third story, which are casements.

The central second-story window is triply divided and carries a segmental pediment. The window above it is, likewise, triple.

d. South entrance: This entrance, originally the principal one, is centered on the first story above a straight flight of stairs. There are seventeen plain granite steps from the sidewalk to the first floor; only the upper third of them being original. They are flanked by marble blocks (treated as pedestals) in three tiers, the lower two tiers having been added after the street was lowered c. 1873. The moulded coping takes the form of a cornice: a filleted corona above a cyma reversa bed mould, below which is a neck or frieze having a fillet and bevel at the lower edge. The lowest tier abuts granite fence posts.

The central bay is filled by a recessed entrance porch. A pair of fluted Greek Doric columns stand "in antis", slightly recessed behind the outer face of the rusticated piers, and carry a three-piece entablature, The architrave is plain except for a row of guttae at the lower edge of the taenia. The frieze, which corresponds to that of the first-story entablature, contains a row of five wreaths. The cornice is a continuation, without break, of that on the first-story entablature.

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Inside the porch, the architrave and frieze continue, but here the frieze is unornamented. The ceiling consists of three pieces of stone in the form of three moulded panels, the central one being largest. At each side of the porch there is a semicircular niche with architrave trim. The door opening is flanked by antae and sidelights glazed in a geometrical pattern. Double doors and glazed transom are modern. The floor is marble.

e. Original western facade: This consists of seven bays at the southern end of the west wall. The central bay is wider than the others and projects slightly, being treated with coupled Corinthian columns to form a pavilion. Windows of the three central bays, above the basement, are triply divided, those of the second story having segmental pediments. In the third bay from the south end there is a plain entrance to the basement, reached by descending a short flight of granite steps. Trim consists of wooden mouldings; there is a glazed transom. The doors are not original.

f. Original eastern facade: This is similar to that on the west except that the basement entrance is farther below the present sidewalk level, and there is no transom. The double doors each have two panels, the lower one square and the upper one tall; they may be old but are probably not original.

g. Northern facade: As to composition, this front is thirteen bays in width, having a projecting five-bay pavilion at the center, which, with its recessed portion on the upper stories, is the dominant element. Flanking the central element there are connecting links of a single bay and three-bay end pavilions. At present a wide flight of steps leads up to the central seven bays, although originally the sidewalk level was near that of the first floor.

Central pavilion: There are five round-arched openings at the first story, only the central one now being used as a doorway; the others are filled with windows, and stone below their sills. Horizontal stone joints are channelled and there are triple keystones above the arches. This story has a high base consisting of two plinth courses, and there is a slender cornice at the second floor level.

The recessed portico is the full height of the second and third stories, employing coupled fluted Corinthian

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columns. At each end the order consists of coupled plain pilasters. Each pair of columns rests on a single paneled plinth. The capitals differ slightly from those of the south facade, in that their central intertwining volutes are larger. All of the column capitals have lost their outer corner volutes but pilaster capitals are complete. On the inner wall of the porch there are pilaster responds.

Inside the portico a conventional architrave extends around above the capitals. Above this there is a plain frieze, corresponding to marble beams which span from wall to columns; this is crowned by an enriched cyma reversa. In each of the five major ceiling compartments there is a deeply recessed panel with an enriched ovolo at the top.

The portico floor consists of large marble slabs pitched to drain outward; they have raised caulked joints. There is no railing. Second-story windows reach nearly to the floor, making access possible, but apparently the portico was not intended for use.

End pavilions: Each is distinguished by a pilaster and slight projection in front of the face of the connecting links. The central bay is the widest and has a double projection marked by a pair of pilasters; its central windows are triple. On the first story the windows are rectangular and the walls are channelled.

Miscellaneous details: Windows are similar to those of the south facade. The entrance steps are granite, abutting blocks in the form of Classic pedestals at each end. There are seven risers at the east end and ten at the west end, because of a sloping sidewalk. There is a secondary entrance under the center of the west pavilion: a double door at the basement level reached by nine granite steps descending in a straight flight along the west wall, inside the fence which encloses the site. The main entrance, in the central bay, is entirely modern.

h. Eastern facade: This is nineteen bays long, the southern seven being original and the remainder an early addition. It is symmetrical, the center being accented by a three-bay pavilion of slight projection, which is marked by freestanding Corinthian columns, those at the ends being coupled. The one-bay pavilion (fourth bay from the south end) on the original part

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of the building is duplicated by one placed symmetrically on the north half of the facade.

In the central bay at the first story there is an entrance, which was the principal one for the building when the addition was completed. It is now closed, and has been for many years. A pair of Doric antae set within the piers carry a plain architrave with a row of guttae under the taenia. Within the opening there is a wooden double door with a fan-shaped semicircular glazed transom. The doors, having a square moulded panel below and a tall panel (now glazed) above it, may be original (i.e., dating from the addition). Nine marble steps with moulded nosing lead from the sidewalk to the first floor: the upper four are the original ones, of yellow marble, the lower five probably having been added c. 1873.

i. Western facade: This resembles the eastern front except for its central entrance. This is a semicircular-arched opening extending down to grade, which admits vehicles to the courtyard. It is closed only by a metal gate. The opening has an archivolt (without impost) whose mouldings extend down to a high plinth (three stone courses above grade). On the projecting keystone there is a head carved in high relief. Somewhat resembling Athena, it is said to symbolize fidelity. In each spandrel corner there is a winged figure carved in high relief. The one on the right, with bat-like wings, holds a locomotive, said to symbolize steam-powered transportation. The one on the left, with bird-like wings, holds a scroll; although said to symbolize electricity, it appears to this observer to depict written communication.

Inside this entrance there is a carriage vestibule extending through the wing of the building into the courtyard, through a simpler arched opening at the inner end. The walls are gray granite ashlar. The ceiling is cast iron, having nine beams in the form of an architrave, paneled on the soffit, spanning the width of the vestibule, each crowned by an enriched bead and an enriched ovolo. In each compartment between beams there are five square coffers, separated from each other by an enriched bead. Each coffer contains an acanthus-leaf band bordering its field, which is otherwise unornamented.

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Doorways, centered on the north and south walls of this carriage vestibule, connect with the central hallway of this wing of the building. Each is set within a deep recess which connects with the vestibule through an arched opening, with an archivolt and moulded keystone having a large enriched bead along its axis. Within the recess, nine granite steps lead up to the doorway. The door opening is rectangular, framed with cast-iron mullion and transom bars; it has glazed sidelights and transom light. Double doors each have three panels, the upper and lower ones square and the middle one tall; these panels are triply recessed, not moulded, and have raised fields. These doorways date from the time of the addition (i.e., 1855-1866).

j. Courtyard walls: These walls are faced in gray granite ashlar. At the second floor level there is a simple entablature; another plain entablature and parapet terminate the walls. There is a slight difference in color at the junction of the original building and the addition, the older granite being slightly lighter and warmer. Individual stones are 4'6" long and 1'8" high, on the first story, and are laid with 3/16" joints. Windows have architrave trim and plain sills; those on the third story have an architrave on all four sides.

On the north side of the court the central portion, five bays wide, projects into the court three bays, leaving a bay with triple windows between it and the side walls of the court. It is full height; beyond it projects a one-story granite wing three bays wide, which is continued by a clumsy brick addition one bay square.

Basement windows of the original portion are semicircular. They contain an ornamental cast-iron grille, which has a lyre-like central motif flanked on each side by an anthemion-like pair of leaves. Basement windows of the addition are low and rectangular. A few of them contain grilles of similar design, adapted to the rectangular shape.

4. Chimneys: In the original building chimneys were located to serve a fireplace in each office; four appear above the south facade and three along the southern portion of the east and west facades. Above the roof they are marble, designed in the manner of a Classical pedestal. They are no longer used.

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A large brick freestanding chimney occupies a location near the center of the east side of the court; this is a much later addition.

5. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: A hip roof of low pitch, its ridge over the axis of each wing of the building, is covered with sheet metal. That over the original building is copper, recently installed. That over the addition is corrugated sheet iron, thought to be original; it is painted. It rests on T-sections of iron, which span between rafters.

b. Cornice, eaves: The entablature of the Corinthian order forms the cornice for the building. Above it is a low parapet having block pedestals above each pilaster or column. On the pedestal face there is a plain panel, doubly recessed, unmoulded. Above each wall pavilion the parapet rises at a slight pitch to a central apex. At the central parapet of the south facade there is a flag pole, apparently a relatively modern one, braced by three guy wires.

c. Cupolas: Above the stairs of the original building, and above the center of the south wing, there are cupolas. Those over the stairs contain skylights; the central one apparently did originally but it has been replaced by a penthouse of no architectural interest.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The plan of the original building is a wide U, in which a central corridor in each wing gives access to offices at both sides; at the interior angles stairs are located. Offices are nearly square in plan. The basement, first and second floors are similar; the third floor is similar except that the center of the south wing is occupied by a large hall.

The addition extends the side wings and places a large room in the open end of the U. which connects with the wings through a shallow corridor. A later addition extended this north wing farther into the courtyard, and provided space for mechanical equipment in a basement and sub-basement, which extends under a substantial portion of the court.

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At present the entire building is occupied by the Tariff Commission, except for the main body of the north wing on the first story, which serves as a branch post office. Basement areas formerly housing mechanical equipment are now vacant.

2. Stairways: The southwest stair extends from the basement to the third floor. It is in a U-shaped masonry compartment with an open well; at the top this compartment becomes circular and is lighted from above. The steps are formed individually, each from a block of marble, and supported at both ends on curving masonry walls below the first floor. Above the first floor the steps are supported on the outside wall and by arch action. There is an open string.

   At the basement there is a wide curtail step, on which rests an octagonal cast-iron newel painted to match the color of varnished mahogany; it has a plinth, base mouldings, shaft with modified Ionic pilasters on the four main faces, a two-part entablature and a pyramidal moulded cap. From this a moulded varnished mahogany handrail curves upward in a helix to the third floor without interruption. An ornamental cast-iron railing is composed of repetitive units spaced one per tread. Each unit has a circular motif at mid height about which the upper and lower parts are symmetrical: a Greek palmette growing from a U-shaped acanthus-leafed base, from which also spring two buds.

   At the third story the opening from the stair compartment to the hall is framed by a short tapered fluted pilaster of modified Roman character. The wall of the stair compartment, between the third floor and the neck of this order, is divided into six plaster panels around the circumference. These panels have a border consisting of an anthemion band in relief. Above them is a frieze in relief, which recalls the capitals of the pilasters, alternating acanthus leaves and caulicoli. Above this level, on a surface which begins to assume the form of a dome, are six similar panels (warped into curving trapezoids). Above this is the lower rim of the cupola, which is bordered by an acanthus-leaf band and a bead enriched with rope moulding. In the drum of the cupola there is an architrave consisting of two fascias, a relief anthemion band in the frieze, and above that a wave band with foliations between the scrolls. A rather heavy moulding forms the cornice, above which is a skylight. The work just described is plaster.

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The southeast stair was similar but it has been altered somewhat by the installation of a modern elevator in the well, which it fills.

The northeast stair, in the addition, is of the open well type, with two landings. It has marble steps with moulded nosing, an open string, moulded wooden handrail, and an ornamental cast-iron railing whose units are similar to those of the original building, except that the decorative units adjoin each other without any intervening space. The cast-iron newel is octagonal; it has a plinth, torus, scotia, acanthus leaves on the lower part of the shaft, twisted fluting on the upper part of the shaft, and a small moulded cap on which rests a wooden finial against which the handrail terminates.

The northwest stair is similar except that a modern elevator has been installed in the well. Between the first floor and the basement both of these stairs are plain, having granite steps.

Risers in the original buildings average 6 3/4"; in the addition from 7 1/4" to 7 5/8".

3. Flooring: The floor of the main south hallway in the basement is of marble tiles 11 1/4" square, laid in a diagonal pattern, black and white alternating. It is interrupted by steel-plate covering over duct tunnels. Other basement corridors are covered with concrete of uncertain date.

   The main south hallway of the first floor is covered with large (1'7") marble squares laid diagonally in a checkerboard pattern. Gray alternates with very light figured gray but the tones vary considerably, so the pattern is not uniform. There is a narrow plain border. Thresholds of doors opening from this hallway are light gray marble. The west corridor is similarly floored but the units are smaller. This kind of flooring is typical throughout the corridors of the upper stories.

4. Ceiling finish, (typical): Most ceilings are finished by plastering directly on the structural elements. In the original part of the building these are:

   a. First story, south hallway: A barrel vault, elliptical in section, interrupted by groined compartments at the center, opposite the stairs, and at the intersections with the east and west corridors.

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At the center and at the stairs, these bays are ornamented with a plaster centerpiece: an eight-pointed star of smooth leaves in the center, four palmette motifs (resembling the head of a Greek stele) on the principal axes; on the diagonals there is a foliated plant, continued along the groin corners by a small rope moulding. The soffit of the transverse arches which outline the groined bays contains moulded panels, the arches carrying archivolt mouldings on their vertical faces.

b. The second-story south hallway is similar; the one in the basement is similar in form but unornamented.

c. The east and west corridors in the basement are covered with segmental barrel vaults. On the first and upper floors these corridors have semicircular barrel vaults. On the first floor they have been lowered to an elliptical section at a later date to afford duct space.

d. The vaults described above terminate at the spring line against a plaster impost, whose mouldings resemble those of a Greek Doric anta capital.

e. Most basement rooms are barrel vaulted (in a direction perpendicular to the corridor) with semi-elliptical sections. A few are covered with groined vaults. Offices of the three main floors are groined vaulted, above corner piers and imposts.

Under the ramp of the carriage entrance, iron joists have a 5" wide lower flange and are spaced 2'4" on centers. Between them there are segmental-arched brick panels.

In the addition generally, ceilings are plastered onto the bottom of the floor construction (i.e., brick arches between joists). The corridors have coved compartmented ceilings, the units being oblong in plan, bordered by mouldings, above a moulded plaster cornice.

The original color(s) of ceilings is not apparent now.

5. Wall finish, (typical): Walls are plastered over the masonry. In the original building halls, a low plain plaster base is painted to simulate marble; this may be original painting. Halls in the addition have a dark marble base. An archway marks the point of transition between the old and new parts.

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6. Doorways and doors, (typical): In the original building, door trim is a plain projecting plaster band 7" wide. Doors have moulded panels with raised fields: one large low panel below and two vertical rows of panels, the middle one being tall and the upper and lower ones horizontal. Many doors have had glazing installed in the upper panels. Openings to the offices also have partial doors containing two rows of louvers.

   In the addition, door openings are taller and include a glazed transom. Frames are iron, cast in a single piece (including transom bar and trim), in the form of a shouldered architrave with chamfered corners and an enriched cyma reversa. Doors have recessed panels with raised fields: a pair of square panels below and tall panels above. In a number of doors the upper panels have been altered.

   Throughout the building, window trim corresponds to that of the doors.

7. Rooms of special design:

   a. Central third-story room of the south wing: This area is three bays deep (extending through the wing). Each bay is groined vaulted except the one in the center, which carries a dome on pendentives. These vaults are carried on wall piers and on four central fluted Greek Doric columns; the wall piers flanking the axis at the east and west ends are formed as 3/4 Doric columns. All finish is plaster. The floor covering is modern.

      The vault groins are marked by thin ribs. The four arches of the central bay are enriched with a fret band and rope moulding. Pendentives are paneled and have an anthemion-band border; in each there is a caduceus (this would seem to refer to an early symbol of the Post Office Department, rather than a medical reference). Above the pendentives there is a soffit consisting of a fret band in relief and a rope moulding. In the drum the surface is divided into twelve panels in the form of coffers; their mouldings are enriched. The cupola is now flat on top, having been altered.

      At the east and west end of this room there is a single axial bay, at the end of which there is a double doorway, having a moulded transom bar, side-lights and fanlight. The glazing is leaded in a geometrical design. These doors give access to the compartment adjoining the stairs.

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b. South first-floor vestibule (on E Street): This vestibule occupies a square bay just inside the recessed porch described among exterior elements. It opens on the north side through a screen of two plain Greek Doric columns in antis, the anta capitals continuing as an impost along the other walls. An architrave carried on these columns forms a transom bar, above which there is a semi-elliptical opening.

There is a groined vault over this bay, with an ornamental centerpiece similar to that in the adjoining hallway.

c. East first-floor vestibule (on Seventh Street): This was designed, as part of the addition, to be the principal entrance to the building; its exterior aspect has been described above. It has a rectangular shape in plan, with a free-standing fluted Greek Doric column in each corner supporting an architrave which is plain except for a band of guttae below the taenia. Above this there is a paneled ceiling: a large rectangular panel and two narrow ones (near the outer doors and the hall doors, respectively). These panels have borders of enriched moulding.

On the axis of each side wall there is a semicircular niche. The floor is marble: 10" white squares with clipped corners admitting 3" black squares (diagonal). Double doors open to the hallway, each having three moulded panels (the one in the middle tall, the others square).

All surfaces in this vestibule are marble, now rather dirty, except the ceiling panels, which resemble scagliola.

d. Central first-floor room on the north (F Street): This room, now used as a post office, is entirely modernized.

e. Central north room on the upper floors: This is five bays wide and four bays deep, with windows on all four sides. Originally this was the dead letter office, two stories in height, containing a gallery. In modern times a floor has been inserted to divide the space into rooms at the second and third floors, respectively. The former is now used as a library. The latter, which retains a number of original elements, is used as a hearing chamber by the Tariff Commission.

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There is a skylight with two major divisions, each containing four groups of lights: a square area with nine panes. Between the major divisions there is an enriched panel and the border around the whole ceiling is similarly enriched. It contains a band of oak leaves, apparently metal, standing free from the background. A similar band forms the upper edge of the room cornice, below which are an enriched ovolo and an enriched bead.

8. Miscellaneous interior finish: All windows in the original building are equipped with interior shutters; most are now inoperative because they have been "painted shut."

9. Mechanical equipment: Fireplaces in the original building have all been closed. Other original equipment throughout the building has been replaced with more modern types.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General Setting: This building fills the block bounded by E Street, Eighth Street, F Street and Seventh Street, N.W. The site slopes gently toward the south and the west; formerly it was more nearly level. These streets extend in the cardinal directions. When this building was erected the area was largely residential; now it is predominantly commercial.

2. Historic Landscape Design: An area about ten feet wide surrounds the building, except where entrance stairs interrupt it; this is enclosed by a fence which is old but not original, having replaced an earlier fence some time after c. 1873. The present fence rests on a gray granite base whose height varies somewhat according to the grade of the sidewalk. At intervals there are granite posts in the form of classic pedestals. Cast-iron posts are spaced at ten-foot intervals; in design they resemble modified Doric colonnettes, with moulded base, cap and finial. Square iron or steel bars are spaced five inches on centers; they are set diagonally in plan, in a cast-iron base in the form of four upright acanthus leaves. There is a top rail of rectangular section. At the top of each vertical bar there is a cast-iron finial ornamented with simple foliations and terminating in a point.

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Generally, where the basement window sills are below sidewalk level, there is a depressed area paved with marble. Where these sills are above grade the area between the wall and the fence is planted to grass.

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ADDENDUM
U.S. GENERAL POST OFFICE
(U.S. Tariff Commission Building)
Between Seventh, Eighth, E and F Streets, NW
Washington
District of Columbia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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U.S. GENERAL POST OFFICE
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Between Seventh, Eighth, E, & F Streets, Northwest
Washington
District of Columbia County
District of Columbia

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