U.S. Customs Service Port of Roosville,
Main Port Building
U.S. Highway 93 immediately south of U.S.-Canada border
Eureka vicinity
Lincoln County
Montana

HABS No. MT-110-A

HABS
MT-110-A

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Intermountain Support Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S. CUSTOMS SERVICE PORT OF ROOSVILLE, MAIN PORT BUILDING

HABS No. MT-110-A

Location:	On U.S. Highway 93 at the U.S.-Canada border, approximately eight miles north of Eureka, Montana; in the NW ¼ of the NE ¼ of the SW ¼ of Section 1, Township 37 North, Range 27 West of the Principal Meridian
Date of Construction:	1933; altered in 1978-79; 1981-82
Architects:	James A. Wetmore, Acting Supervising Architect, U.S. Treasury Department/Louis A. Simon, Superintendent, Architectural Division, U.S. Treasury Department
Builder:	Grover C. Gorsuch, Wenatchee, Washington
Present Owner:	United States of America General Services Administration/ Public Buildings Service Rocky Mountain Region Denver Federal Center, Building 41, Room 272 Denver, CO 80225-0546
Present Use:	Border station office
Significance:	Built in 1933, the Main Port Building Port of Roosville is an excellent example of federal border station architecture produced by the Treasury Department during the 1930s along the U.S.-Canada border. Designed by prolific Treasury Department architect Louis A. Simon, the Main Port Building demonstrates the effective use of Colonial Revival stylistic imagery as an appropriate architectural treatment reflective of the dignified, official purpose it served. The Main Port Building at Roosville represents one of several standardized border station designs developed by Simon and built during a period of intensive federal construction activity, funded by the Public Buildings Act of 1926, during the Great Depression. The Main Port Building serves as the border station's primary structure, and originally contained the inspection station offices, detention cells, restrooms, and storage rooms along with garages and an inspection shed in the end wings.

I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Constructed in 1933, the Main Port Building is the primary building and houses the administrative and operational functions of the U.S. Customs Service (USCS) Port of Roosville, Montana. The Main Port Building is part of a historic building complex that also includes two, separate, associated dwellings for customs and immigration inspectors stationed at the port. The border station complex at Roosville was built in conjunction with the state sponsored and federally-aided improvement of U.S. Highway 93 in 1932-33, extending north from Eureka, Montana into British Columbia. The improved highway was intended to accommodate increased trans-border traffic and commerce, but also facilitated the smuggling of alcohol, a substance banned under the Volstead Act of 1919.

Responding to the need for regulation of the flow of people and goods from Canada via U.S. Highway 93, including the collection of duties and the interception of controlled substances and illegal immigrants, in 1927 the U.S. Customs Service initiated operations at the border crossing near Roosville. A one story, wood frame building, measuring 12' x 28' was erected for the purpose, on the east side of the unpaved road (predecessor to the improved U.S. 93) close to the international border (Figure 1). A gate placed across the road next to the customs station prevented motorists from crossing the border without stopping.[1] The first officer stationed at this location was Alfred Schrupp.[2]

Intending to establish a more permanent inspection station at this location, in 1931 the federal government purchased a 6.8 acre tract of land adjoining the international border across from the small settlement of Roosville, British Columbia.

Improvement of Highway 93 from Stryker north to Roosville finally commenced in late 1932, and on November 3 the *Eureka Mirror* announced that a contract in the amount of $41,100 was let for construction of a new customs house at Roosville. Contractor Grover C. Gorsuch of Wenatchee, Washington, was the successful bidder. Plans were drawn up by Louis A. Simon, Superintendent of the Treasury Department's Architectural Division, working under James A. Wetmore, Acting Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department. Initial work on the site began in February of 1933, and by mid-April, excavation of the Main Port Building's basement was underway, and by November the border station building was completed.

---

[1] "Approach Plan," scale ¼"= 1'-0", Sheet No. 1, U.S. Inspection Station, Roosville, Montana, October 5, 1930. On file at General Services Administration, Rocky Mountain Region office, Denver.

[2] Olga Weydemeyer Johnson, ed., *The Story of the Tobacco Plains Country; the Autobiography of a Community*. Privately published by the Pioneers of the Tobacco Plains Country, Eureka, Montana, 1950, pp. 188-189.

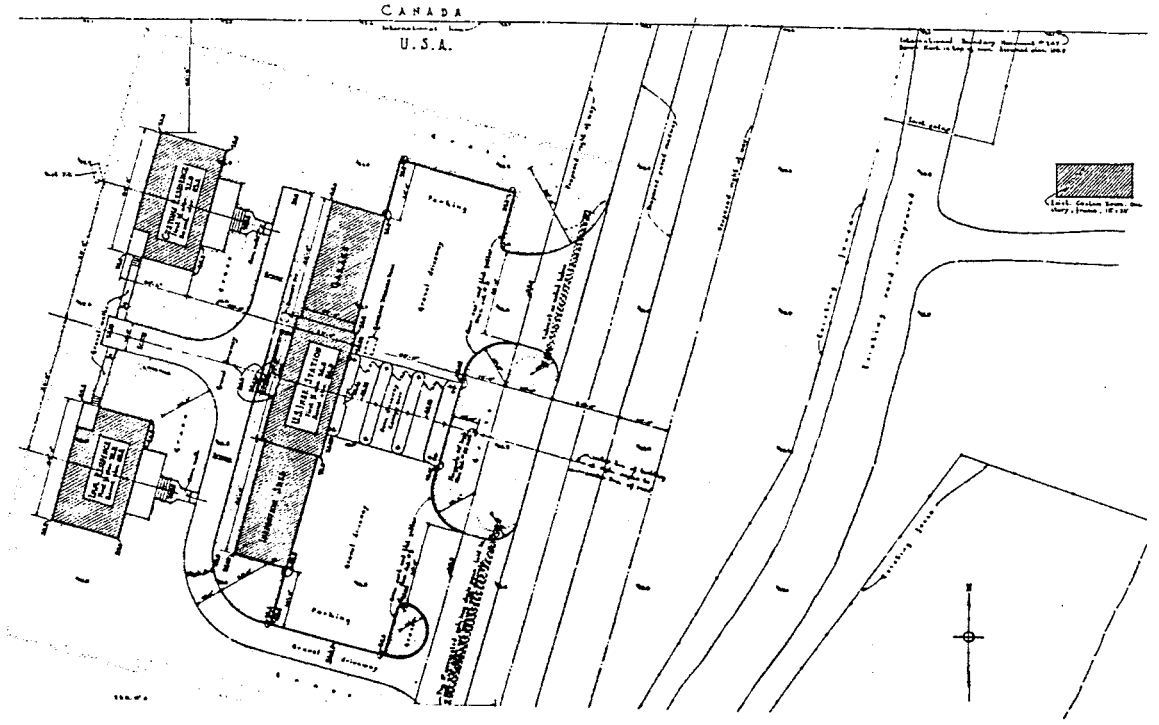

Figure 1. 1932 plan showing the original wood frame customs inspection station at Roosville (upper right) as well as the new station that replaced it (left).

J.D. Levin, construction engineer for the Treasury Department, described the new Main Port Building as "a two-story main structure 22 x 47 feet, of solid brick construction, with a 4-car garage wing on each side of frame and clapboard construction, each wing being 19.8 x 42.4 [feet]. The main building thus has an over-all length of 131 ft. 8 inches."[3] The building was covered by a variegated green and purple slate roof.

The port building contained all the facilities necessary for conducting customs and immigration inspections. The first floor was divided for use by the two tenant agencies; the U.S. Customs Service occupied the north side, while the Immigration and Naturalization Service occupied the south side. The Customs and Immigration offices were each equipped with a counter accessed via a central public space. Small restrooms were located toward the back (west) end of the building, along with stairways accessing the basement and upper floors.

The port building's second floor contained five rooms, including a Customs office, a Customs storage room, an Immigration board room, and two detention cells located at the south end. Each detention cell was equipped with a lavatory.

[3] *Eureka Mirror*, March 2, 1933.

The port building's basement was divided into three large spaces. The central space served as the boiler room, and contained the equipment for supplying steam heat to the building. A brick chimney rose from the boiler room near the back (west) end of the building through the upper story roof. The boiler room was flanked on the north by a machine room, and on the south by a fuel room.

The original Treasury Department plans for the Main Port Building indicate that a second dormer – similar to a dormer on the rear elevation – was added as a revision to the design, but for some reason was never built.[4]

The Main Port Building at Roosville represents one of several standardized designs replicated at other locations along the Canadian border. Complete comparative data is unavailable; however, border stations featuring main port buildings similar to Roosville were erected at least in Caanan, North Troy, Norton, Richford, and West Berkshire, Vermont; and a similar wood frame example was built at Champlain, New York.

Minor modifications were made to the building around 1959. The architectural firm of Brinkman & Lenon, based in Kalispell, Montana, was contracted to draw up the plans for a variety of improvements and repairs to all of the border station buildings.[5] Modifications to the Main Port Building included the addition of pipe handrails to the front and rear entries, the addition of metal eave extensions to the roof, and the installation of wood louvered vents below the peaks of the gables at both ends of the two story, brick central section.

Deficiencies in the aging facilities at the Port of Roosville were addressed in the late 1970s–80s. In 1978, plans for replacement of the canopy over the inspection lanes, as well as for installation of public restrooms and handicap access ramps in the Main Port Building, were drafted by the General Service Administration's (GSA's) Design and Construction Division.[6] These improvements were made by Christensen Construction of Libby, Montana, for the sum of $74,850.[7] The 1978 canopy replacement resulted in the removal of original decorative details, including a white painted metal balustrade railing along the perimeter of the canopy roof, that incorporated unique, encircled four-pointed star elements, as well as flagpoles that originally rose from the corners of the canopy's end.[8]

---

[4] See "Revised Second Floor Plan Including New Dormer" (Plan 6-A), c. 1934).

[5] See accompanying drawing no. 27-9 ("Improvements and Repairs"), prepared by Brinkman & Lenon, Architects and Engineers, Kalispell, Montana, c. 1959.

[6] See accompanying drawing no. 2-1 ("New Canopy and Handicap Facilities"), prepared by GSA's Design and Construction Division, Region 8, Denver, 1978.

[7] *Tobacco Valley News*, June 15, 1978.

[8] This original canopy roof cresting is visible in various photographs of the Main Port Building contained in Record Group 121, Box 25 ("Construction Management Division, Denver"), at the National Archives, Denver Branch.

The new public restrooms were installed in the northern half of the hip-roofed south wing, which originally served as a vehicle inspection shed. To compensate for the loss of the inspection shed, a new Secondary Non-Commercial Inspection Garage was built in 1980 southeast of the Main Port Building. The new freestanding garage provided a spacious and well-lit facility for conducting vehicular inspections.

Other interior alterations were made to the Main Port Building in the early 1980s, including conversion of the northern garage wing into office space and construction of a ground floor detention cell that replaced two original upper story detention cells. Plans for these changes were drafted by GSA in October 1980, and the vacated upper story detention cells were converted to separate storage rooms for Customs and Immigration. The first floor alterations originally converted only the southern half of the north hipped wing into office space, adding an entry and a large window on the façade, while preserving two garage bays.[9] More recently, these garage bays have also been replaced by additional office space including a break room, and two more large 12/12 light double-hung windows were added to the façade in lieu of the original garage doors.

Another significant development occurred in the 1990s when high radon levels were detected in buildings on the property. Consequently, a radon remediation system was installed in the basement.[10]

Despite all of these alterations and improvements, by the mid-1990s the Main Port Building was determined to be inadequate in terms of operational efficiency, security, and comfort. A feasibility study sponsored by GSA recommended replacement of the nearly 70 year old historic structure with a modern facility better equipped to process the increased international traffic on U.S. 93.

---

[9] See accompanying drawings, including "Insulation and Repairs/ First and Second Floor Plans," no. 3-1, dated 10/13/1980, as well as drawing no. 4-1, stamped "Project Record Document, As-Built Drawing, 21 December 1982."

[10] CTA Architects Engineers, *Feasibility Study, United States Border Station, Roosville, Montana, Final Submittal, April 17, 1998*, submitted to the General Services Administration, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver, pp. 4-5.

II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Main Port Building is a symmetrically arranged, Colonial Revival style structure consisting of a one and one-half story, side gabled, red brick central section flanked by slightly narrower, identical, one story, hip-roofed wood frame end wings. The building, which rests on a concrete foundation and basement, measures approximately 131 feet long (N-S) by 22 feet wide (E-W). The entire roof is clad with painted (red), split wood or tile shingles.

The long axis of this rectangular plan building is aligned with U.S. Highway 93, and three parallel traffic inspection lanes channel southbound vehicles (from Canada) to the front of the building, where inspection and questioning is conducted by USCS and INS officers. The inspection lanes are separated by lozenge-shaped concrete curbs, one of which supports a small glazed inspection booth of modern design.

The gabled, central section of the Main Port Building has walls of dark red brick set in English bond (alternating courses of headers and stretchers). The structure is covered by a steeply pitched roof, at each end of which are rectangular roof vents as well as small 4-light attic windows. The front façade is penetrated by the main entry, flanked on both sides by two large windows. All of these openings are accented by flat segmental brick arches with buff-colored, concrete (simulated carved stone) keystones. All window openings on the building's central section are set above buff-colored concrete sills. The main entry is centered on the façade and consists of a glazed, aluminum frame door and a full-height aluminum frame sidelight, set beneath a large 6-light wood sash transom. The windows on the front elevation, flanking the entry, consist of large 12/12 light, double-hung, wood sash units.

Set into the brick masonry below the northernmost window on the central section of the building is a "cornerstone" of buff-colored cast concrete or carved stone, that displays the following inscription:

WILLIAM H. WOODIN
SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY
LAWRENCE W. ROBERT JR.
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY
JAMES A. WETMORE
ACTING SUPERVISING ARCHITECT
1933

Affixed to the façade is a broad, nearly flat-roofed sheet metal canopy that extends perpendicularly over two of the three inspection lanes. The canopy is supported by three pairs of square-sided (4x4") metal columns.

The rear side of the Main Port Building's brick central section contains a prominent, wide shed dormer clad with clapboard or synthetic lapped siding, and fenestrated with four 8/8 light double-hung wood sash windows illuminating the upper story. A large brick interior chimney rises from the center of the rear slope of the roof above the dormer. The first floor is equipped with large tandem sets of 12/12 light, double-hung windows with mullions, as well as two very narrow, small 4/4 light double-hung yellow glass bathroom windows. A semi-subterranean entry is offset to the south, and is covered by a small, shed-roofed canopy supported by large diameter pipe posts. This entry allows access to the main floor as well as the interior basement stairwell.

The end wings originally served as garages – each with four bays - but have been converted to other uses. Both are clad with wide, lapped vinyl siding. Other features common to both wings include large tandem sets of 12/12 light, double-hung, wood sash windows on the end of each wing, and pyramidal sheet metal roof vents mounted on top of each end wing. Two similar roof vents are installed on the roof over the port building's central brick section.

The southern garage wing now contains modern public restrooms, and a storage area occupies its south end. The storage area is accessed by two tall (original) vehicle bay openings sealed with modern, fiberglass, roll-up doors. The restrooms are accessed by a door located adjacent to the south end of the building's central brick section.

The northern garage wing now contains offices, break, and conference rooms in lieu of the original multi-bay garage. A doorway accessed by a small open concrete porch with painted pipe handrails is offset to the south end of this one story wing; although the opening is original, it is now equipped with a modern painted metal door containing one light. The front of the northern one story wing is fenestrated with three identical, modern 12/12 light, double-hung windows. The rear (west) end of the wing is penetrated by three windows including two original large 12/12 light, double-hung, wood sash units, as well as one smaller 1/12 light double-hung window.

The main port building appears to be in very good condition. Its original form is intact, however, it has been altered by the conversion of the north and south wings from garages into offices, restrooms, and storage space, and by re-siding of the exterior walls with vinyl siding. Despite these changes, the building's historic appearance and character are readily apparent.