

United States Post Office & Courthouse  
120 N. Duke Street  
Lancaster  
Lancaster County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-370

HABS  
PA,  
36-LANC,  
3-

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS  
PA,  
36-LANC  
3-

Addendum to:

United States Post Office and Courthouse (Lancaster Municipal  
Building)  
120 North Duke Street  
Lancaster  
Lancaster County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-3

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
P.O. Box 37127  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20013-7127

HABS  
PA,  
36-LANC,  
3-

AMERICA'S CITY HALLS

ADDENDUM TO: United States Post Office and Courthouse

NAME:

Lancaster Municipal Building or Lancaster City Hall  
Original or Historical Name: United States Post Office or  
Government Building

The City of Lancaster is the present owner.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** The present Lancaster Municipal Building, originally the Post Office, possesses many facets of historical and architectural importance. As the Post Office, it played an important role in the community's activities. When converted to become the City Hall in 1931, it embarked on yet another stage of its roles in public life. The very act of converting a Post Office to a City Hall in 1931 is an important chapter in the history of adaptive reuse in Pennsylvania.

The architectural significance of this structure may be outlined briefly as follows:

1. This is one of the most elegant and intact of all late Victorian public buildings in Lancaster City.
2. This is part of a distinguished and sculptural streetscape, situated near the center of several blocks of eclectic architecture.
3. This is the sole extant example of the Venetian Renaissance or Morrish style of architecture in Lancaster.
4. In Lancaster, this is the only documented building by James H. Windrim.
5. This is also the only building in Lancaster in which James H. Windrim and C. Emlen Urban are known to have collaborated.
6. The structure has many excellent interior features that were designed by C. Emlen Urban in 1931.
7. It is interesting that the Lancaster Municipal building stands next to the Bell Telephone Building, a 1929 structure designed by John T. Windrim, the son of James H. Windrim.
8. This is the only Lancaster building in any way associated with the noted architect James Knox Taylor.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

Built as the Post Office, the present Lancaster Municipal Building stands on four adjacent lots purchased for about \$15,000 by the Federal Government between August 18 and 23, 1888. In this same year, the U.S. Government appropriated \$100,000 for land acquisition and construction. An illustration of the proposed building was published in the Lancaster daily NEW ERA for April 3, 1889. In September, 1889, bids were opened and Windrim was officially noted as being the architect.

Actual construction commenced about March 1, 1891, after <sup>(page 2)</sup> some changes in the plans and resolutions of debate about the site. The exterior was completed before February 1, 1892. Several months later, the interior was finished, the heating system being one of the final installations.

- ARCHITECT:** The architect for this building was James H. Windrim (1840-1919) of Lancaster. Windrim was noted for his Masonic Temple in Philadelphia, which was completed in 1873, and the Agricultural Hall for the Centennial of 1876. Windrim's local, on-site consultant was the young Lancaster architect C. Emlen Urban (1863-1939). For almost half a century, following 1890, Urban was Lancaster's leading architect. Among his notable Lancaster buildings are the Southern Market of 1888, the Hager Building of 1910-1911, the Watt and Shand Department Store commenced in 1898, and the 1924 Greist Building. (For documentation, see the Bibliography)
- BUILDER:** For the 1891-1892 original construction, the contractors were Robert S. Johnston of Trenton, New Jersey and Charles Byrnes of Philadelphia. The lumber for the building was purchased from B.F. Hiestand & Sons of Marietta, Lancaster County. The carpenter and mill work was supplied by the Lancaster Planing Mill.

**ORIGINAL PLANS:** The exterior is almost entirely intact to its original appearance, and hence a description of the original appearance seems redundant. For locations of plans and early views see the bibliography.

**ALTERATIONS & ADDITIONS:** In 1907-1908, the original building was enlarged by matching additions to the west. These additions were designed by James Knox Taylor. Costing about \$75,000, this addition was completed in 1908.

In 1931, the interior was remodelled to suit the functions of a City Hall from designs by C. Emlen Urban of Lancaster. These modifications commenced about the time of the purchase of the building by the City of Lancaster in January, 1931. The contractor for this stage of the work was H.L. Wiant of Lancaster. On January 1, 1932, the former Post Office Building was dedicated as Lancaster's Municipal Building.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT:** Many facets of the historical context of this structure have been mentioned in the preceding text. However, it is interesting to note that both the elegant ornamentation and the actual cost of this building have always been sources of civic pride in the community. When completed in 1892, Lancaster newspapers noted with pride that this "modified Renaissance style" structure had cost \$84,013.24.

The very act of transforming the Post Office into a City Hall all in 1931 was another focal point for City pride. Moreover, it was a relatively early instance of an adaptive reuse that maximized preservation of the buildings fine, original exterior features. Some indication of the building's importance in 1932, at the time of its dedication, may be gleaned in newspaper accounts and the Dedication Program.

## II. DESCRIPTION:

- A. EXTERIOR:** Of overall rectangular form, two stories in height, the exterior features somewhat asymmetrical fenestration, a prominent and elaborate tower at the northeast corner, and walls of cut Indiana limestone, these stone

facings are backed with brick. All cornices, acroteria on the roofline, and the elaborate belvedere of the corner tower are of oxidized copper, with rich detailing. Many details of the exterior stonework, such as panels, architraves enframing the horseshoe shaped windows, and moldings boast fine sculptural details. The basic structural system features weight bearing masonry walls. The wood for the joists and roof framing is Georgia yellow pine, which was considered most unusual in this locale in the early 1890's. There is a limited use of some iron and steel structural elements.

#### B. INTERIOR:

Most of the parts of the interior possessing architectural distinction date from the 1931 work designed by C. Emlen Urban. Inspection of the 1889-1891 drawings from Windrim's office, and those of 1907-1908 from Taylor's office, reveal that little visible embellishment from either of these earlier phases survives. In other words, almost everything of aesthetic quality which now meets the eye on the interior dates from Urban's remodelling of half a century ago. Outstanding elements of this 1931 stage include the barrel vaulted foyer with coffered ceiling, the main staircase in the corner tower with stone steps and bronze balustrade bespeaking Art Deco inspiration, and the ornamentation of the piers and cornice of the large first floor room.

As entered on the first floor, one walks through this barrel vaulted foyer, with the main staircase located to the north of this hallway. From this point, moving straight to the west, one enters a large room that occupies most of the square footage of the first floor. A secondary, rear staircase is situated near the southwest corner of the building.

Ascending the main staircase to the second floor, a large, L-shaped hall with composition tile floor and marble revetments links various offices on this level. Most of the doors on the second floor are of chestnut, with raised panels.

#### C. SITE

The facade of this building faces east, along the west side of the second block of North Duke Street. The tower is situated at the northeast corner of the property. East Marion Street is the northern border of the site, and the area now locally known as "Marion Court" defines the western limits. The now vacant St. Paul's Church property constitutes the southern boundary. At the southern end of the Municipal Building, along North Duke Street, is a small area with several bushes and an iron fence. There is no other landscaping.

At the north side of the building, along East Marion Street, a ramp for handicapped access was sensitively installed in 1980.

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The 1889-1891 drawings by James H. Windrim are in the custody of the Lancaster Postmaster, Lancaster.

The 1907-1908 drawings by James Knox Taylor are owned by the Architectural Archive of the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County, 11 North Duke Street, Lancaster.

For post 1931 drawings, many are preserved in the Office of the Director of Public Works, Lancaster Municipal Building.

B. Early views prove, most wonderfully, that the exterior is remarkably intact. Early views include a drawing in the Lancaster Daily New Era for April 3, 1889; 1890's period photographs at the Lancaster County Historical Society, Lancaster; c. 1900-1910 postcards at the Lancaster County Historical Society; and fine views in the rare 1892 portfolio publication, Art Work of Lancaster.

c.1 - Primary Sources

The following deeds at the Lancaster County Courthouse, North Duke and East King Streets, Lancaster: D-13-48; D-13-49; D-13-53; D-13-55; (all 1888); and R-30-480 (1931).

In addition to the Windrim drawings, the original construction is documented by a scrapbook of notes and letters between Windrim and Urban, in the small collection of C. Emlen Urban Papers at the Lancaster County Historical Society.

For documentation of the 1931 remodelling, see Lancaster City Council Minutes 1930-1932, Lancaster Municipal Building.

Pertinent newspaper coverage may be found in the following issues of various Lancaster newspapers: Daily NEW ERA, April 3, 1889; Daily NEW ERA, September 17, 1889; Daily NEW ERA, September 19, 1889; Daily NEW ERA, February 1, 1892; Daily NEW ERA, February 20, 1892; Lancaster SUNDAY NEWS, December 29, 1929; Daily NEW ERA, January 1, 1932.

For details of the dedication program at the Municipal Building on January 1, 1932, see Dedication Program at the Lancaster County Historical Society.

John J. Snyder, Jr.  
Consulting Architectural  
Historical Researcher

Historic Preservation Trust of  
Lancaster County

August 25, 1981