INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE HEADQUARTERS BUILDING
(IRS Building)
1111 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington
District of Columbia

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HABS No. DC-657
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE HEADQUARTERS BUILDING
(IRS Building)

Location: 1111 Constitution Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C.


Present Occupant and Use: National headquarters and offices of the United States Internal Revenue Service.

Significance: The French Renaissance-style Internal Revenue Service Headquarters (IRS) Building was the first of several U.S. Government buildings of monumental scope to be erected in the 1920s and 1930s in the "Federal Triangle" area of Washington, D.C., bounded by Pennsylvania and Constitution avenues and 15th Street. Like headquarters buildings of other departments and agencies in the Triangle, it consolidated in a single location IRS functions and employees from disparate, often leased sites throughout the District of Columbia. The Internal Revenue Service Building and other Triangle structures that followed represented the largest public building project to that point in American history.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Early History of the Property, 1700-1890

Until the first survey of the area in 1790, the site of what is now the IRS Building was a marsh, fed by the floodwaters of Goose (later Tiber) Creek, which meandered just to the south. In 1788 the State of Maryland had ceded the area for the District of Columbia to the new Federal Government, which, two years later, bought the swampy farm from landowner Davy Burnes. Investors, anticipating the growth of a new Nation's Capital, in turn, bought lots on the land. Pennsylvania Avenue, immediately to the north of the eventual IRS Building location in the Federal Triangle, became the new city's "Main Street," and small factories, roominghouses, Federal-style row houses and businesses of all description sprang up on both sides of the avenue. Among the first buildings on the site of what would become the IRS building was a legitimate theatre, The Washington.

In the early 1800s, as "canal fever" -- spawned by the westward push of the Erie and Chesapeake & Ohio waterways, -- swept the nation, developers hurried to turn Tiber Creek into a navigable city canal, draining the nearby offending marshes and connecting the Potomac River with the city's bustling Center Market at Pennsylvania Avenue and 7th Street. So
steady was canal traffic that Congress ordered a turning basin built on Squares 324 and 350 -- the precise location of the main wing of the IRS Headquarters Building today. Excavators on the IRS site in the 1920s would find many remnants of the canal, including 400 feet of wood pilings from the wharf and running water that at one point measured 20 feet deep in an elevator pit. The water source, including artesian wells, were sealed off below the structure.

In the 1830s in the northeast corner of the eventual IRS Building location, along Pennsylvania Avenue, a Washington landmark, Harvey's Restaurant, opened. The oyster house, with its novel process of steaming shellfish, became a favorite of presidents and plebians alike. Remodeled in 1866, it was still in business when the wreckers came to clear the site for the Federal Triangle in the late 1920s.

During and after the Civil War, the westernmost portion of the area bounded by the canal and Pennsylvania Avenue (11th through 14th Street in the Triangle today) became a notorious neighborhood of taverns and bawdy houses, variously called "Murder Row" and, during the tenure of the Union general of the same name, "Hooker's Division." The canal by this time had declined in importance as railroads -- including the Baltimore & Potomac, which housed locomotives and coal towers on the Mall nearby and ran tracks to a station in the Triangle -- took away business. Center Market, now attracting streetcar patrons, continued to thrive, and its butchers disposed of rotting fish and animal carcasses directly into the canal, running along the rutted dirt of B Street. Soon the canal was known as the "B Street Main." In 1871, District of Columbia Governor Alexander "Boss" Shepherd ordered the "pestiferous" canal filled and covered. Sixty-two years later in 1932, to mark George Washington's 200th birthday as the Federal Triangle buildings were rising along the northern side of B Street, it would be repaved and renamed Constitution Avenue.

The "City Beautiful," 1890-1929

An entire nation of drab, gritty communities was transfixed by a glittering "Great White City" -- the Beaux-Arts 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. From that world's fair came the inspiration for "City Beautiful" transformations of urban spaces across the nation. The momentum hit Washington just as the United States was flexing its power in the Spanish-American War and on the high seas worldwide.

To mark the Nation's Capital's centennial of 1901, President McKinley invited distinguished architects from across the country to present papers on how the dreams of the city's original planner, Pierre-Charles L'Enfant, might be realized. Soon a commission, called by Sen. James McMillan of Michigan, focused on untangling the disarray of train sheds, tracks and industrial buildings on, and alongside, L'Enfant's envisioned grand Mall. Chairing the commission: Charles Burnham, impresario of the '93 World Expo, in concert with the same men who had helped him stage the Chicago world's fair.

From this group and a Commission of Fine Arts appointed in 1910 by President Taft -- also chaired by Burnham -- would come the vision of a parade of colonnaded "Parthenonic Temples" that would centralize the functions of the Federal Government. To house them, the commission eyed
the triangular sector of worn industrial buildings, chop suey houses, tattoo parlors and brothels bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue, the Mall, and 15th Street. The government had already purchased one long block of land there (between 14th and 15th streets) in hopes of locating four federal departments within it.

World War I delayed implementation, but in 1923 a new Public Buildings Commission called for acquisition of land for this "great park" of federal buildings; the authorization bill was signed by President Coolidge in 1926. By Christmas of 1928, the government had purchased the entire 70 acres of the Triangle.

Design and construction fell to Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, who, early on, made the uniformity of design a priority. "New-fangled notions in architecture will not be allowed to sway the character of the great monumental structures," he told the Washington Star. His board of architects traveled the world, seeking inspiration, agreeing, finally, on an overall concept of buff-colored limestone structures with red-tile roofs, set amid vast courtyards, circles and gardens, "uncontaminated" in the words of one report, by commercial, manufacturing or housing activities.

C. 1927-present: The IRS Building

Original plans of the Public Buildings Commission sited a new headquarters for the Internal Revenue Service -- which had grown in importance with enactment of the federal income tax in 1913 -- along Pennsylvania Avenue, between 12th and 13th streets. But Beaux-Arts-trained architect Edward Bennett, who had been appointed by Secretary Mellon to shepherd the Triangle project, moved the IRS a block to the east to its present location on the superblock between 10th and 12th streets, beside and behind the Old Post Office Building.

Architects who served with Bennett received no pay, but each got a commission to design one of the massive Federal buildings. Louis Simon of the Treasury's Office of the Supervising Architect was given the IRS building. Like the others, he had been sent abroad to study the buildings in which European governments housed archives and other papers (in these days before computers, when millions of pieces of paper accumulated at IRS offices, efficient and fire-safe storage was of paramount importance). Simon was said to have been especially influenced in his configuration of the IRS building by the design of Somerset House, headquarters of the British Inland Revenue Office, on the Strand in London. Like the other Triangle Buildings, it would be of steel-frame construction, with a "classical" limestone façade. Because it would house a government bureau subordinate to the Treasury Department, rather a full department's headquarters, the IRS Building was designed with minimal ornamentation -- marble colonnades and a single pair of sculptured eagles at the Constitution Avenue entrance.

Construction on the building's main portion, fronting on B Street (soon to be Constitution Avenue), began in 1927, with soil-hauling trucks reported moving to and from the site at the rate of one a minute from 4 a.m. until well after dark; this pace enabled the IRS Building to become
the first Federal Triangle building to open -- 16 months ahead of schedule -- on June 1, 1930. Construction costs of this first phase totalled $6.4 million.

An L-shaped northeast extension was added between 1934 and 1935, in part to accommodate the space needs of the Division of Distilled Spirits that had been created near the end of Prohibition in 1933. The extension completed the symmetry of the façade of the building along 10th Street. The north side of the original IRS Building and the western ends of its extension corridors were faced with unadorned red brick, rather than Indiana limestone, anticipating demolition of the Old Post Office Building and completion of Simon's plan.

Removed to make room for the IRS Building, in addition to Harvey's oyster house, were the Presidents' Theater -- one of the city's earliest playhouses and the site of inaugural balls dating back to John Quincy Adams -- next door, as well as various wholesale houses selling seeds, grains and fertilizers. Some sheds from the city's vast Farmer's Market also extended into the site. The Federal Government had previously purchased the lot behind the Old Post Office Building with the intent of constructing a mailbag-repair shop; it was never built.

As the first new Federal Triangle building to rise, the IRS Building provoked intense local curiosity, moreso because of the onset of the Great Depression, which brought thousands of jobseekers to the site. The building's painting contract produced a storm of protest when it was awarded to an out-of-town company, which, the local painters' union alleged, was hiring newly arrived immigrants at barebones wages. The Secretary of Labor had to intervene, upholding the union's demand that the local prevailing wage of $11 a day be paid.

The IRS Building and others in the $125 million Federal Triangle project prompted stirring tributes at the time of their opening. The Saturday Evening Post would write that a monumental corridor "to awaken the patriot's pride" was about to emerge "from the artistic illiteracy and hodgepodgey of Washington." But as the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue, across the street from the IRS, began to deteriorate in the 1950s and '60s, many critics would rue this "Great Wall of Washington" as a "hermetically sealed" buffer, blocking pedestrian flow between the Mall and Downtown Washington, and, after its thousands of bureaucrats had gone home for the night, standing as a barrier to human activity on "America's Main Street." A 1981 Master Plan for the Federal Triangle called the concentration of Triangle buildings devoted to a single use "an historic error [precluding] the vital diversity necessary for any such large scaled building project." Substantial upgrading of blighted structures throughout the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor, including construction or refurbishing of large-scale office and condominium projects across from the Triangle, have since put monolithic structures like the IRS Building into greater harmony with their surroundings.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:
1. Architectural character: The Classic Revival style IRS Building was conceived as an irregularly shaped structure with monumental façades on Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues and 10th Street, with a portion of the 12th Street façade curved to form a hemicycle -- the eastern half of a circular plaza or "Great Circle" -- modeled after the Place Vendôme in Paris -- to balance the circular arcade of the "New" Post Office Building across 12th Street. The main section of the IRS Building, fronting on Constitution Avenue, was opened in 1930, with the expectation that the 1899 Richardsonian Romanesque "Old" Post Office Building, in the northwest portion of the parcel, would be demolished to make way for completion of the semicircular IRS addition. As late as the 1960s, a feasibility study on the completion of the Federal Triangle, by architect John Carl Warnecke, called for razing the Old Post Office -- except for its distinctive 315-foot clock tower, which was to be integrated into the neoclassical Federal Triangle design. Earlier, the economic pressures of the Great Depression had saved the 1899 post office structure. This time, a preservationist campaign -- dubbed "Don't Tear It Down" -- intervened to save it anew. The Old Post Office Building received Landmark status, and the planned completion of the Internal Revenue Service Building was halted. The IRS Building thus remained at its 1935 level: the original portion, facing Constitution Avenue; an extension along 10th Street; a short portion on Pennsylvania Avenue; and an open courtyard beside and behind the Old Post Office. Only one-quarter of the IRS Building's circular arcade was ever built, and the "temporary" brick on several façades of the building remained in place.

Like other Federal Triangle buildings, the IRS Building has the classical tripartite vertical division (two-story base, four-story main zone, capped with an entablature with attic) and fixed cornice height. Like the others, the building is steel framed, dressed with an Indiana limestone superstructure and a granite base and low-pitched roof. The mansard roofs of the IRS Building's incomplete, semicircular portion and New Post Office building across 12th Street that were to form the Great Circle are set apart from other Triangle buildings by being slate, rather than the predominant red-clay tile. Like the others, though, the IRS Building's top or seventh story is set back behind a balustrade, and the building is constructed around interior courts.

2. Condition of fabric: The IRS Building is generally well preserved; structural and aesthetic integrity, except for the missing final section of the building as designed, are intact. The building has suffered no major water leaks. Over time, the gray-granite masonry base course, limestone façade, exterior bronze work and marble trim have been darkened or soiled by vehicular exhaust, bird excrement and drippings from window air-conditioner units. The interior, including cut stone staircases, crafted metal elevator doors, wood-panelled elevator cars, polished terrazzo, and marble paving, has been generally well maintained and was extensively renovated in the early 1980s.
Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: From the air, the IRS Building resembles a chubby scorpion whose “body” - - the building's main section fronting on Constitution Avenue, contains four interior courts (three landscaped, one a service court). Extending up one side (along 10th Street) and hooking to the northwest along Pennsylvania Avenue, is the “scorpion’s” claw -- the building’s L-shaped extension that was added five years after the main section opened.

The building is seven stories in height, although the treatment of the exterior walls gives the illusion of five stories. The Constitution Avenue façade is 27 bays wide. The 10th Street façade is the longest of the building, extending over 600 feet.

2. Foundation: The building is supported by approximately 8,000 Raymond “step-tapered” concrete-filled pilings, some of which -- until artesian wells underneath them were capped -- had been initially weakened by percolating water. The piles rest in a layer of sand and gravel approximately 35 feet below the surface, below which is dense sand and clay at approximately 65 feet down.

3. Façades: Along Constitution Avenue, a three-story Doric colonnade supports a bracketed entablature, with a balustrade at the sixth floor. The belt course above the Constitution Avenue entrance openings carries a stone-carved quotation: “Taxes are what we pay for a civilized society, Oliver Wendell Holmes.” Above it, a balustrade motif defines the beginning of the piano nobile -- the third to fifth floors. Columns are constructed of nine marble sections. The façade is capped by a Corinthian entablature. Seventh-floor walls are set back six feet from the balustrade and are faced with smooth limestone ashlar.

Pedimented prostyle porticos are found at each end of the 10th Street elevation and above the incomplete semicircular arcade facing 12th Street. The 10th Street façade features a simple screen of Doric pilasters from the third to fifth stories. The Pennsylvania Avenue façade, never completed, would have featured a colonnade similar to that on the Constitution Avenue side, with a mansard pavilion to match the New Post Office Building next door.

The Pennsylvania Avenue façade contains 11 bays, five of which are unpilastered and six that have a screen of limestone pilasters. The west end of this wing is brick, owing to the halt in completion of the northern end of the building.

The 14 bays on the south end of the 12th Street façade repeat the basic design established on the Constitution Avenue side. The arcade along 12th Street received a limestone ceiling and pendant fixtures of cast bronze to match those of the New Post Office Building across the street.

Walls within the courts have little architectural detail. Those within the “L” of the IRS Building extension form an informal courtyard, which was used as a parking lot ever since it was determined that the “Great Circle” would not be completed.
4. Structural systems, framing: The building is steel-framed, fireproofed with concrete. Floor slabs span 15 feet and are supported by 24 B70s, spanning across the floors into the exterior steel columns. The interior beam is a 16 B45, spanning approximately 14 feet across the corridor. The steel framing is typically three spans, 23 feet, 14 feet, and 23 feet across the width of the office floors.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The building’s main entrance is on Constitution Avenue (envisioned as a ceremonial boulevard linking the Capitol, the Lincoln Memorial, and, by extention into Virginia across Memorial Bridge, Arlington National Cemetery). The pink-marble entrance openings are flanked by cartouches with an eagle and fasces -- the only significant ornamentation on this utilitarian building. In addition to the main entrance, there are nine ground-floor entrances, three opening onto elevator lobbies and six onto corridors. All 20 exterior entrance doors are made of polished bronze. Main doors on Constitution Avenue are dominated by arched windows above their transoms, extending to the top of the second story. Most doors off the driveway and 10th Street arcade have their original iron grilles. Smaller, undecorated doors into the interior courts are painted metal. The 12th Street service court is entered through an archway, secured by a cast-iron gate.

b. Windows: Most windows are set in painted steel frames and sash with overhead pulleys. Third-floor windows are the same size as those on the first and decrease in size above the third. Awnings, which had been popular in government buildings to provide shade from the summer sun, were not used in the IRS Building because of the fire hazard (from matches or tobacco products discarded from windows above).

8. Roof: A pitched roof, covering all of the building except the small “Great Circle” portion, is sheathed in mission tile in shades of gold, brown, purple, gray and red. The mansard roof of the semicircular portion is sheathed in black Pennsylvania slate, mirroring that of the companion building across 12th Street. Roofing materials were set in mastic over an asphalt membrane. Because of initial slippage due to the slope of 3½ inches to the foot, the slate was lifted and reanchored with a copper strip nailed to the roof decking. The roof is insulated with a material called “Insulite” between the ceiling beams, fastened to the concrete roof deck. Flashing was sheet copper. Rainwater is collected in interior copper gutters connected to pipes and downspouts, connected to large drains in the basement.

There are seven penthouses atop interior elevator shafts, facing interior courts. They are faced with either buff brick with stone coping or, on the building’s extention, smooth limestone ashlar.
C. Description of interior: While the exterior was designed to blend with the monumental nature of the Federal Triangle, the interior, in keeping with the bureaucratic function of the IRS, emphasized practical office uses with few ceremonial spaces.

1. Floor plans: Refer to sketch plans.

2. Stairways: Refer to sketch plans.

3. Flooring:

   a. Basement: The pump room in the basement (like kitchen quarters on the seventh floor) utilizes 6"x6" quarry tile.

   b. Entrances and corridors: The entrance and elevator lobbies are floored in marble. Public corridors are furnished in Tennessee terrazzo, set with brass strips and bordered by light-gray marble, marble baseboards and plinth blocks.

   c. Office floors: Office space was designed to have wood floors, but architects, looking at cost and maintenance considerations, switched to a mastic composition laid on cement. (In the building's 10th Street extension, added in 1934, asphalt tile was substituted for mastic flooring.) In 1954, the main wing's original mastic flooring was covered with asphalt tile of marbled black and dark green. Most office floors have since been covered with wall-to-wall carpeting. To facilitate cleaning of the carpeting, radiators were hung on the wall. Only the Commissioner's office received wood flooring in a parquet checkerboard design. Bathroom floors were in gray tile; a seventh-floor courtroom featured a cork tile with bands of black marble.

4. Wall and ceiling finish:

   a. Entrances: The main-entrance vestibule is lined with Mankato stone -- a limestone with a porous surface similar to Travertine marble. Secondary entrances feature McMullen light-gray marble.

   b. Office space: Permanent walls are masonry, terra cotta tile-covered with wire mesh lath and plaster. Rooms have no cornices or other decorative trims. Originally the building accommodated 400 floor-to-ceiling, movable metal partitions, most of which had doors for interoffice access; this approach, innovative in the 1920s, was seen, by administrators terrified of fire in a building full of paper records, as a vital fireproofing measure. Much of the steel was grained to imitate wood paneling. (With the installation of central air conditioning in 1963, most movable metal partitions were replaced by permanent steel-and-glass partitions extending from side
walls, thus creating private offices as well as general secretarial spaces.) From the beginning, several office spaces featured acoustical tile on both walls and ceilings to soften the cacaphony of IRS clerks' adding machines and, later, calculators and computer keyboards.

The Commissioner's office, eight hearing rooms, and a courtroom originally had mahogany paneling. Hearing rooms featured acoustical plaster ceilings as a soundproofing measure. Walls in bathrooms were covered with 6"x6" tiles to a height of 6 feet, above which walls were plastered. Stalls in the main section were divided by wall-hung marble partitions (metal in the building's extention), closed off with paneled wood doors.

In 1968, a visitors' center, including a two-story glass exhibition space and overhanging balcony, was added to the main lobby. A year later, a computer center was installed on the sixth floor. In 1972, a new auditorium replaced the courtroom on the seventh floor; original wood paneling, doors and frames, and court furnishings were removed and replaced with modern wood paneling and suspended ceilings. In 1974 the visitors' center was removed, and the Constitution Avenue entrance was restored to much of its original appearance.

c. Corridors: Walls, door frames and doors have been painted in non-historic colors.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Doors throughout the interior are of a large panel design set in metal frames with metal trim and transom frames. Most doors in the main section are African mahogany, some with glazed panels; doors in the building's extention are walnut, in part to match the walnut stain atop the mahogany doors in the original section. Doors with glazing have transoms to match. Hollow metal doors, painted to imitate walnut, are used in bathrooms, service areas, closets and hallways. Transoms are generally operable, although they were originally fixed in hearing rooms. They were subsequently opened for better ventilation, then closed again after the noise from hotly contested debates inside the hearing rooms proved distracting to office workers and passersby.

b. Windows: Interior windows are equipped with sash poles and hangers; sills are steel with a curved deflector on the underside and a support for hanging radiators. Windshields of wood and glass were installed on 2,700 office windowsills, permitting windows to be opened for ventilation without creating drafts across desktops. Kitchen and cafeteria spaces were given fly screens.
The government's Maintenance Superintendent had recommended venetian blinds for the Triangle buildings, but they were rejected as inhibiting circulation of air. Instead narrow slat wood shades, which roll on spring rollers and featured guides to prevent flapping in the breeze, were installed.

6. Decorative features and trim:

a. Main lobby: The IRS Building's Constitution Avenue lobby is its most elaborate interior space, with a green marble floor, stone walls with niches, arcade with second-story balustrades, bronze lamps on pedestals, wall sconces, and directory boards. The 75'x32' ceiling here contains 276 elaborate gilt coffers with rosettes; it is surrounded by a 6" entiled cornice.

b. Other entrances and lobbies: Other entrances, including a central entrance on 10th Street and a corner entryway at Pennsylvania Avenue and 10th, are less ornate. Decorative painting features only flat colors.

c. Surfaces: Structural steel was coated with red lead paint. Metal doors, frames and transom stiles were grained to match walnut wood doors. Library shelving was covered with walnut graining. Doors were stained with mahogany or walnut finish and varnished. Room numbers were originally lettered in gold leaf directly on wood or metal surfaces; in 1931, after some confusion about the numbering system, all rooms were renumbered. (The doors have since been painted and their numbers obscured.) Plaster walls were allowed to cure for a year, then painted in flat colors. The photostat room received three layers of black paint. Basement areas were coated with cold water paint.

Unlike some other Federal Triangle buildings, no murals grace the IRS Building; but some decorative painting, including the addition of waterproof varnish to heighten reflectance of the second-floor lobby visible from the main entrance, can be found.

7. Hardware: Handles, knobs, sconces, hallway lamps, radiator grilles, clocks -- even thermostats -- throughout the building are typically bronze.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: Heating was originally supplied by seven coal-fed boilers in the basement, supplied by coal dumped down three trap doors in the south wall of the service court. Steam was fed into wall-hung radiators. Centralized heating and electrical power for the entire Federal Triangle had been proposed but rejected as uneconomical; a centralized plant was judged to be intrusive to the monumental design of the project. But at some
point, thought to be in the 1960s, the function was shifted to the General Services Administration central heating plant. The basement boiler rooms were converted into space for air-conditioning equipment, installed in the early 1970s.

b. Cooling: Air conditioning, which was a new feature in a limited number of public buildings (including the House of Representatives chamber of the U.S. Capitol) in the late 1920s was considered for the IRS and Commerce Department buildings in the new Federal Triangle. It was felt, though, that the IRS employees would dislike having to keep windows closed, and the cost was deemed too high. However, the subsequent poor ventilation in the massive buildings led to air conditioning being included in plans for subsequent Triangle buildings.

For many years IRS employees were forced to make do with ventilation from windows, over transoms, and from supplemental fans hanging on each side of windows. But in 1947, a five-ton air-conditioning unit was added to rooms on a portion of the first floor (where accounting machinery had made conditions especially insufferable). In 1963, a centralized chilled-water system was installed to cool most of the building; cooling towers are located in the center section of the roof, pumps and compressors in the old boiler rooms in the basement. During this installation, suspended acoustical-tile ceilings were hung in offices, corridors, vestibules and hearing rooms (except in entrance lobbies) to conceal the air-conditioning ductwork.

c. Lighting: Exterior lighting fixtures included a large bronze lantern in the archway of the driveway into the service court. Lighting throughout the offices, services and stairways was provided by simple overhead incandescent fixtures, augmented by desk lamps. Some featured pendant fixtures with white opaque globes on brass chains. The hearing rooms and courtroom featured chandeliers, originally fitted with candle-shaped bulbs. When these proved too glaring for judges and masters, they were covered with shades.

When false ceilings were added during the installation of central air conditioning in 1963, original incandescent lighting fixtures were removed and replaced with florescent fixtures. Wall fans, sash poles and windshields associated with the old window-ventilation system were removed.

d. Plumbing: The IRS Building offered a chilled-water drinking-fountain system via an ammonia compressor as early as 1931. An automatic-sprinkler system -- set to go off at 212 degrees Farenheit, was installed in the paint shop, plumbing shop, typewriter-repair room, electrician's shop and carpenter shop.
f. Clocks: The building was equipped with a synchronized system of 861 electric Telechron clocks, fitted with bells and buzzers (or a silent visual indicator in the seventh-floor courtroom) activated from the master clock.

g. Telephones: The IRS Building was originally equipped with 1,400 telephones, 46 public-phone stations, and a switchboard room on the second floor.

h. Elevators: Because of the concern for fire safety, the building's 15 passenger and two freight elevators were encased in metal cabs, the passenger versions lined in walnut with open-grill doors, originally operated by attendants. A switchover to automatic elevators, with modern (and less ornate) cabs, began in 1974.

9. Original furnishings: Most desks and fixtures were of nondescript government issue. The railings, judge's bench, desk and shelving in the courtroom and hearing rooms were relocated from the old courtroom in the National Savings Bank building. The hearing rooms were also equipped with new mahogany-finished chairs and settees. Benches in the courtroom were mahogany. Kitchens were furnished with electrical, rather than the more common gas, appliances, again as a precaution against dreaded fire.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The IRS Building faces south, its main façade and entrance aligned along Constitution Avenue -- the street that forms the base of the Federal Triangle. Across Constitution Avenue is Washington's Mall, along which lie the complex of Smithsonian Institution museums (the National Museum of Natural History is directly across the street). The IRS Building's short, topmost façade fronts on the Triangle's hypotenuse -- Pennysylvania Avenue. Across that wide boulevard, IRS workers face one of the area's many refurbished high-rise office structures, the "1001 Pennsylvania" building. Within the Federal Triangle, IRS is sandwiched between two other monumental buildings, the New Post Office (to the west across 10th Street) and the Justice Department (eastward across 12th). As this report has pointed out in several sections, the anachronistic Old Post Office Building gobbles the northwest corner of the site originally intended for completion of the Internal Revenue Service Building.

2. Historic landscape design: Edward H. Bennett, the chairman of the architectural board of consultants that planned the Federal Triangle, envisioned plantings at the base of the building, tree-lined streets and wide lawns. Plantings tended to become overgrown over the years, and the site became cluttered with city-bus shelters, vending machines and -- in the courtyard formed within the "L" of the building's extension -- an unsightly,
free-standing brick wall along 11th Street, built to shield what became a parking lot for 47 cars when the Great Circle plaza was not completed. Three of the interior courtyards feature sandstone walkways, fountains, benches of pink granite. The short Pennsylvania Avenue walkway has been improved with new plantings, by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Commission, which tore out hollies and boxlike hedges, improved existing azaleas, and added trees and perennials in decorative pots.
PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


Additional, Unused Sources


Drawings of the Public Buildings Service, File #DC0022ZZ, General Services Administration Region 11 Library, Washington, D.C.
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The research was conducted during June and July, 1991, and based in part on author's 1988 research into the history of Pennsylvania Avenue and the Federal Triangle, to comply with a Memorandum of Agreement among the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer, and the General Services Administration, prior to alteration of the building.

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Takoma Park, MD
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Data for Survey - August, 1926
Plan of Preliminary Excavation - November, 1927
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MODIFIED PLAN FROM BAIST'S
REAL ESTATE ATLAS OF SURVEYS OF
WASHINGTON DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, 1940
Site Plan - October, 1990
First Floor Plan (Other Floors Similar) - February 1940
11th Street Facade (under construction)
First Floor Plan (Other Floors Similar) - December, 1991
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12th Street Facade (under construction)
First Floor Plan (other floors similar) - December 1991
ADDENDUM TO:
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1111 Constitution Avenue Northwest
Washington
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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