

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JAN 18 1985
DATE ENTERED	MAR 4 1985

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

U.S. Post Office and Custom House, Astoria, Oregon

AND/OR COMMON

U.S. Post Office, Astoria, Oregon

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

750 Commercial Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Astoria

NA VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1

STATE

Oregon

CODE

41

COUNTY

Clatsop

CODE

007

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	NA IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
Thematic	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Group		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (if applicable)

U.S. Postal Service

STREET & NUMBER

850 Cherry Avenue

CITY, TOWN

San Bruno

NA VICINITY OF

STATE

California 94099

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Clatsop County Assessor's Office

STREET & NUMBER

749 Commercial Street

CITY, TOWN

Astoria

STATE

Oregon 97103

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

State of Oregon Inventory, Historic Sites and Buildings

DATE

August, 1974

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office

CITY, TOWN

Salem

STATE

Oregon 97310

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE <u>NA</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Underlain by timber pilings, the foundations, basement, and structural walls of the building are constructed of reinforced concrete. Sandstone is used to face the exterior walls. The Astoria Post Office is two stories in height on a raised basement. A hipped roof of red tile terminates behind a balustraded parapet. The front facade is symmetrically arranged and divided into 11 bays: three entry bays flanked on each side by three window bays, all divided by flat fluted pilasters supporting a full entablature, and one window bay in each of the slightly recessed corner wings. The building is well preserved and unaltered from its original construction.

#### Physical Appearance

The foundations, basement, and structural walls of the building are constructed of reinforced concrete. The foundation and footings are constructed over timber pilings driven into the earth beneath the facility. The exterior facades and architectural detailing are faced with cut stone (fine grained granite and sandstone). The roof is a hipped roof with mission style red clay tile on the pitched faces and asphalt composition on the level top surface.

The front (south) and side facades (east and west) are relatively flat with no major architectural projections. The stone facing of the facades is a gray to buff color. The corners of the front and side facades are slightly recessed from the major portion of the facades. The corners consist of flat unadorned surfaces with single windows at the first and second floors (front facade). The windows are double hung and single paned with painted wooden frames. A single paned transom is located above the first floor windows. Stone sills and fluted pilasters frame the windows.

The portion of the front facade projected beyond the corners is defined by fluted pilasters which vertically separate nine first and second floor window/door bays. The ends of the embellished facade are marked by a pair of fluted pilasters, with single fluted pilasters between the bays. The pilasters are capped by corinthian capitals which support a relatively simple carved architrave with flat, unadorned frieze. The same entablature motif extends beyond the end pilasters to the corner, thence to the side facades. "United States Post Office and Custom House" is carved in the stone frieze over the front entrance. Square dentils run along a strip below the cornice. Square modillions hang from the bottom of the cornice which supports a balustraded perpendicular style parapet. The mission style tile roof joins the exterior walls behind the parapet. (The fluted pilasters, topped by Corinthian columns with the balustraded parapet, is reminiscent of the Louis XVI (seize) style of architecture.)

As with the corner windows, the windows between the pilasters are framed only by painted wood inset in the stone faced walls. These windows are paired double hung with single panes. The first floor windows are greater in vertical dimension than the second floor windows (with equivalent horizontal dimensions). Single paned, paired transoms are located above the first floor windows. The tops of the window transoms are in line with the tops of the single paned transoms over the three main entrance doors. An aluminum grill in a grid pattern covers the exterior of the transom. The main vertical and horizontal members of the grill are in a cable motif. The bottom of the grill is decorated in a floral pattern with a wreathed shield in the center.

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The exterior doors are paired and made of cast aluminum. The doors are decorated in a bas relief floral pattern which frames clear plate glass. A flat panel also framed by the same floral pattern is located below the glass. The door jambs are also decorated in a floral pattern. The door head consists of a flat panel then a row of dentils in its upper portion. Bas relief panels of carved stone are located above the doors and windows of the first floor. The panel detailing above the doors consists of eagles flanking a single rosette framed by a wreath enclosed circular panel. A sill course in a foliated running scroll pattern lies along the bottom of the second floor windows. The exterior entry stairs consist of carved stone. Cast iron light standards with spherical milk glass globes flank the entry stairs.

The side facades are identical and of the same architectural style as the front facade. The corners are unadorned and recessed from the major portion of the facade. Five window bays are separated by single fluted pilasters with paired fluted pilasters at the corners of the facade. The window, pilaster, entablature, and parapet details are repetitious of the front facade in detail.

The rear facade consists of the same stone as the front and side facades. With the exception of the cornice and parapet, detailing at the ends of the symmetrical wings, the rear is unadorned. The rear of the building is in a U-shape with the loading ramps projecting beyond the rear building line. Three windows are located on each of the first and second floors of each wing. Single windows flank a paired window on both the first and second floors. The window details are identical to those of the front and side facades.

The interior of the building is substantially in the same form and condition as when it was built. The main lobby and lock box area is constructed with marble columns and floor, original frosted glass, hardwood framing around the glass and inside doors, and complementary cast aluminum inside doors (three), which are highly polished. The basement walls and floors are constructed from the poured concrete foundation elements and in most instances have been painted and have not been plastered.

The second floor area is not remarkable in appearance as it uses the typical marble flooring and kickboards and plain hardwood doors, jams, and framing of that era. There is an unfinished and unoccupied attic (third floor) area which is accessed by the main stairway.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1900 to 1941

BUILDER/ARCHITECT See individual forms

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the property included in this nomination lies in the following areas: architecture, art, community planning, economics, and politics/government. It is important to note that all of the individual properties do not possess every type of significance. The nominated buildings were selected as well crafted and well maintained or notable examples of their style. In one case, the nominated building is significant because of the combination of design era, art, and community setting, although the building is not significant from a strictly architectural point of view.

In smaller communities, the properties were the first federally constructed buildings and the sole representation of the federal presence. Most remain as the only federal building. In some cases, the grouping of the post office and other local governmental buildings created an ensemble which marked the civic core of the community. One of the nominated properties is located on a site that represents a continuum of federal building use dating from the late 1800s.

The nominated properties represent the evolution of federal design philosophy and public building programs as influenced by international design movements and federal funding programs. Essentially, the buildings constructed prior to 1920 represent the first of the comprehensive federal building programs, while those constructed in the 1930s represent the transition of design and construction programs in response to national economic emergency. Depression Era public arts programs are also represented by murals in three of the nominated buildings. In addition to manifesting the ideology of the New Deal, these murals also leave an historical legacy through the portrayal of significant events in the growth of the community. Both the post office buildings and the art completed during the Depression Era exhibit the use of federal construction programs to aid local economies on a nationwide basis.

The following discussion details the areas of significance based on national criteria A, B, and C for local and state levels. These include: (a) architecture; (b) art; (c) politics/government and economics; and (d) community development.

#### A. Architectural Significance

##### 1. Local Level

##### a. Criterion C



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Local Context

Astoria, with a 1982 population of approximately 9,950, is the county seat of Clatsop County. Astoria is located in the northwest corner of the state on the southern edge of the mouth of the Columbia River. Founded as a fur trading post in 1811 by a party sent west by John Jacob Astor, Astoria was one of the first American settlements on the west coast. Astoria boasts the first post office west of the Rockies, which was founded by John Shiveley, the first postmaster, on March 9, 1847. Astoria developed as a port city with fishing and timber as economic mainstays. Astoria's second post office, and its first federal building, was constructed on the site of the existing post office in 1873.

By 1890 the population of Astoria had grown to 6,184; by 1900 it had reached 8,381. World War I stimulated significant growth in the city and by 1920 the population reached 14,027. Astoria suffered a disastrous fire in 1922 with the destruction of 32 blocks; and although numerous prominent new buildings arose from the ashes, the population declined to 10,349 in 1930. The Depression hit the city hard, particularly the timber industry, and the 1940 population increased to only 10,390. World War II and the tuna fishery stimulated a boom and the population rose to over 15,000 persons. After the war, however, the city again declined. The economy of the city has, over the years, diversified and the public sector employment, retail and wholesale trade, and other services have replaced the once dominant fishing and timber industries.

The Astoria post office is located at the western end of the city's central business district. The Clatsop County Courthouse (1909, Renaissance style) is located across Commercial Street to the south of the post office, and the National Historic Register listed Flavel Mansion is located one block further south. The combination of these three buildings forms an ensemble of architecturally and historically significant buildings.

Local News Coverage of the Astoria Post Office and Custom House Construction

Construction of the Astoria federal building was reported in the Astorian-Budget between December of 1930 and December of 1932. On December 19, 1930, the paper reported that testing and plans would be completed soon and that construction was expected to begin within about four months. The customs house, which was occupying space in the existing post office building, had been given until January 1, 1931 to find new lodgings. The post office intended to remain in the building until the demolition/construction program forced it to move. The existing post office building was to be demolished and the new federal building erected on the same site. In an article dated December 31, 1930 the Astorian-Budget explained to its readers that the razing of the existing post office building would be included as part of the construction contract as a matter of post office policy, so demolition would not provide local jobs during the winter months.

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On May 1st demolition/construction bids were called for and the bids were opened on June 8th. The low bidder was Hall-Baver-Labin, Inc. of Chicago, whose offer was \$211,000 for a terra cotta structure and \$223,400 for a sandstone structure. On June 18th it was announced that demolition work (by R.E. Boatwright of Salem) had actually begun. The paper subsequently noted that of the eight men employed during demolition, none were from Astoria. Oregon's Governor Julius Meier promised that every step would be taken to assure the hiring of local men for further work on the site.

On September 28th the paper reported that the new federal building was to be constructed of brick and sandstone, which would cost \$20,000 more than the original terra cotta bid. An article on October 17th noted that the new brick structure would be reminiscent of work done in 1871 by J.H. Jettters, who was the area's first brick mason, arriving in 1847.

The use of a steam shovel to prepare the site for the building's foundations failed, and it was necessary to blast the foundations with dynamite. On October 20th the Astorian-Budget reported that the Gilpin Construction Company would drive 400 pilings. The completion of the excavation and footings was announced on December 3rd and the December 30th issue reported that the pile driving was finished.

In January of 1932 work was delayed while the steel for the foundation was in transit. On February 9th the paper ran an article stating that Senator Steiwer had announced that the selection of the stone for the new federal building would be up to the contractor and that it would be either Wilkinson or Columbia sandstone. The Chamber of Commerce objected that Columbia sandstone would be too porous for use in the federal building. It was anticipated at this time that the concrete would be poured soon.

On March 7th the Astorian-Budget reported a controversy surrounding the issue of the hiring of local labor. The contractor claimed he was hiring local labor, but local doubts persisted. On April 26th the paper reported that the federal building work was slightly behind schedule but that the first floor walls were then being poured; steel for the floor slab would be placed when the walls were completed.

In mid-July the stone contractors defaulted on their contract and on July 16th the Astoria-Budget announced that "the stone fight is on again." On September 7th the paper reported that the federal building contract would be awarded soon and that the job would be rushed. Indiana limestone was reported to be the stone selected for use. On November 23rd it was announced that L.H. Hoffman of Portland would finish the job and that 16 men had been put to work the previous day for that purpose. The stone was then enroute and was expected within 10 days; the first carlot of stone arrived on December 2nd. Icy weather caused a brief delay, and a change in the cornerstone in the middle of December caused another. But by December 24th, the paper announced that the cornerstone ceremony would be held December 27th at 2 p.m.

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On December 28th the paper reported that a crowd of more than 200 people gathered for the cornerstone ceremony. The Reverend D.J. Ferguson spoke about the history of Astoria, and a variety of documents were placed in a copper box to be secured behind the new federal building's cornerstone.

A January 4, 1933 article reported a delay in construction caused by the mortar. Senator Steiwer requested immediate action in solving the problem in order that the 30 to 40 men working on the job not be thrown out of work. The issue of February 27th included a sketch of the nearly completed federal building. An article discussed the "strong Greco-Roman influence" which was "... commonly refined to an American Post Office architecture. While the design lacks originality it is most substantial in design and structure." The end of August brought the opening of the new post office. Several articles anticipated the opening and finally, on August 21, 1933, the Astoria Post Office was open for business.



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U.S. Government Publications

1. General Services Administration, Inventory of Murals in Post Office Buildings, unpublished manuscript, 1948. Available from General Services Administration, National Register, and USPS Office of Real Estate.
2. U.S. Post Office Department (Postal Service), Annual Reports of the Postmaster General, 1849-1880, 1900-1940.
3. U.S. Postal Service, History of the U.S. Postal Service, 1775-1982, Publication No. 100, April 1983, Washington, D.C.
4. Annual Report of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, Fiscal Year 1908-1917.
5. Treasury Department, Digest of Appropriations, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926-1939.
6. Public Buildings Omnibus Act of 1902, Statutes at Large of the United States of America, Vol. 32, p. 310.
7. Public Buildings Omnibus Act of 1908, Ibid., Vol. 32, pp. 310-327
8. Public Buildings Act of May 25, 1926, December 1925 to March 1927, Vol. 44, pp. 630-635.
9. Federal Employment Stabilization Act of February 11, 1931, Ibid., Vol. 46, pp. 1085-1087.
10. National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, Ibid., Vol. 48, p. 195.
11. Emergency Appropriation Act, Fiscal Year 1935, Ibid., Vol. 38, pp. 1061-1062.
12. Federal Public Buildings Appropriation Act of 1938, Ibid., Vol. 52, p. 818.
13. Reorganization Plan No. I, Ibid., Vol. 53, p. 1427.

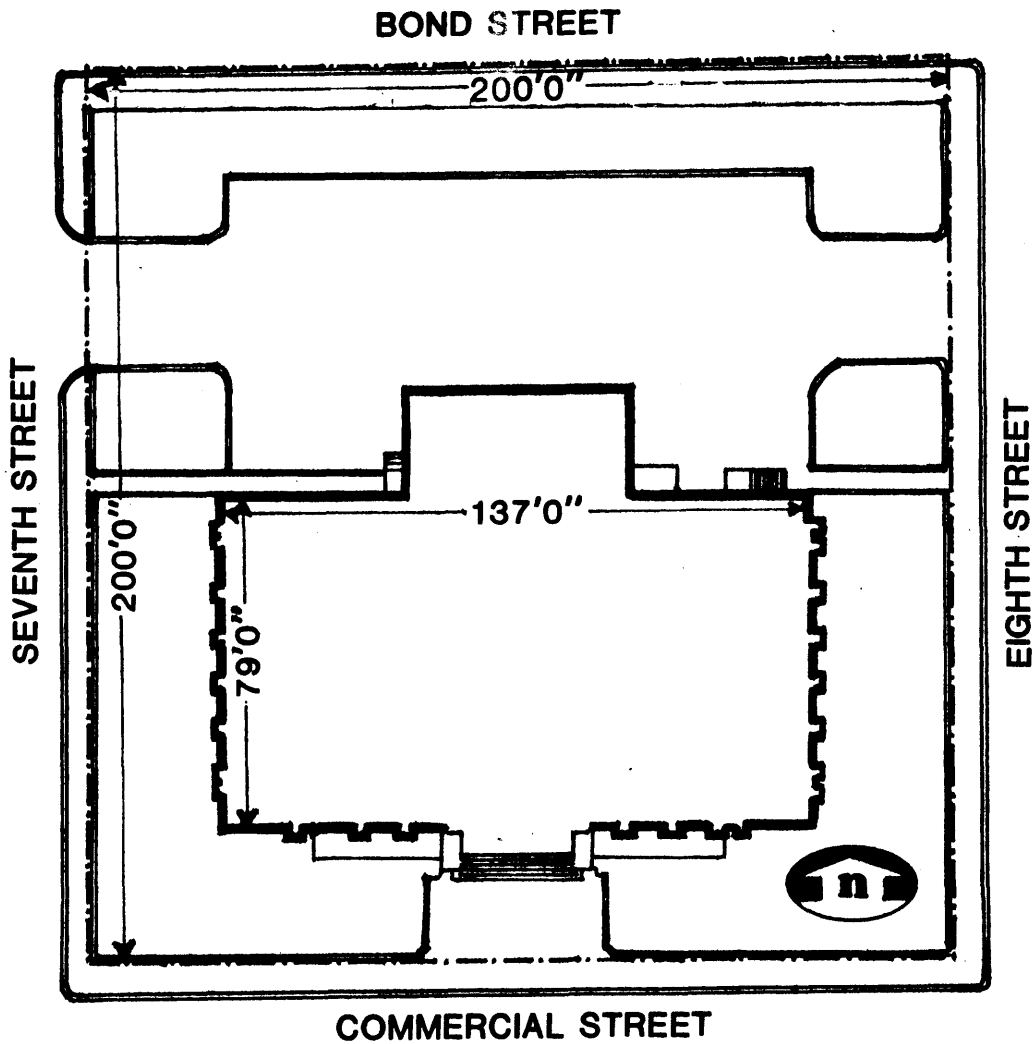
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ASTORIA, OREGON  
U.S. POST OFFICE AND CUSTOM HOUSE  
September 1984.

STREET VIEW TO LEFT  
Negative #11



UNITED STATES POST OFFICE AND CUSTOM HOUSE

ASTORIA, OREGON

U.S. POST OFFICE AND CUSTOM HOUSE

September 1984

FRONT FACADE (south)

Negative #12



ASTORIA, OREGON

U.S. POST OFFICE AND CUSTOM HOUSE      STREET VIEW TO RIGHT

September 1984

Negative #13