

Portions of this document have been redacted.

Historic Structure Report  
on the

Herbert C. Hoover Building

U.S. Department of Commerce

14th and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D. C.

Prepared for

General Services Administration  
National Capital Region  
7th and D Street, SW  
Washington, D.C.

under

Contract Number GS - 11B - 39001

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by

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# HISTORIC STRUCTURES

## DESCRIPTION

Patent Search Room - The Patent Search Room (Illus. 32) is the largest of the significant public spaces in the building. It occupies the bulk of the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor section (#7) and is two stories in height. The room bears many similarities to the 14th Street Lobby but is somewhat simpler in its spatial arrangement and decorative details. The room has base dimensions of approximately 67' x 220' and has thirteen window bays at both the north and south elevations. The room is divided as three long ranges by virtue of two screens of arched piers set close to the north and south exterior walls. Access to the room was originally internal via a single door at the east and west ends of the room.

The floor is laid in cork tile squares with a Levanto marble border. The simple rectangular piers are of limestone as are the walls. The piers terminate with simple echinus moldings from which spring semi-circular arches of plaster. The archivolt is painted with Classical foliate and geometric designs in polychrome. A painted border on the walls above the arches repeats the curve. Secondary arches connect the internal piers with the exterior walls and are similarly decorated. At the north wall windows are arched in repetition of the interior design. At the south wall, this pattern is repeated but the windows are truncated as to allow for a single door below each window opening. The doors opened into the stack areas and are rather simply treated with limestone architraves. At each of the short ends of the room is a single monumental doorway of carved limestone in rich relief (Illus. 33). A double-leaved bronze and glass door with transom and barred transom grille has an architrave with gadrooned inner border and acanthus carved cyma molding. Above the architrave is a frieze with carved fruit swags, stylized festoons, paterae, and terminating at each end with a bird supporting the swag end in its beak. Above the frieze is an astragal band, and acanthus carved cyma. The door is recessed slightly within the wall and framed by a semi-circular arch headed opening. A bronze clock with open face and Roman numerals is positioned directly above each door. These doors exhibit some of the finest sculpture within the building both in their design and execution.

The ceiling is treated in two ways. In the narrow ranges at the north and south ends, the ceiling is divided into groin vaulted areas. In the large central area of the room, the plaster ceiling is coffered in the Italian Renaissance style as seen in the 14th Street Lobby. Here, however, the pattern is somewhat different in that the principal coffers are octagonal with smaller rectangular and circular coffers in subordinate arrangements. With paterae rosettes and gilt and polychrome finishes, they are otherwise like that of the 14th Street Lobby. A series of staggered chandeliers suspended from chains have two tiered forms and foliate designs in bronze.

Identification Number:

32

Patent Search Room

February 5, 1932

View toward east end.

Unknown

Photographer:

Source:

National Archives  
Still Pictures Branch  
RG 121, Series BCP  
Box 122  
Photograph identified: "2-5-32-3"

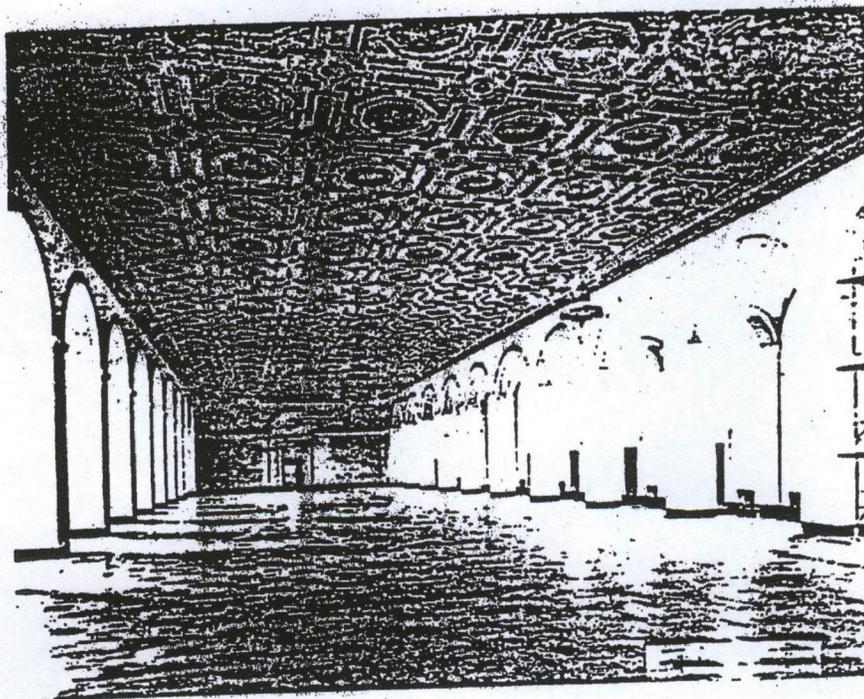
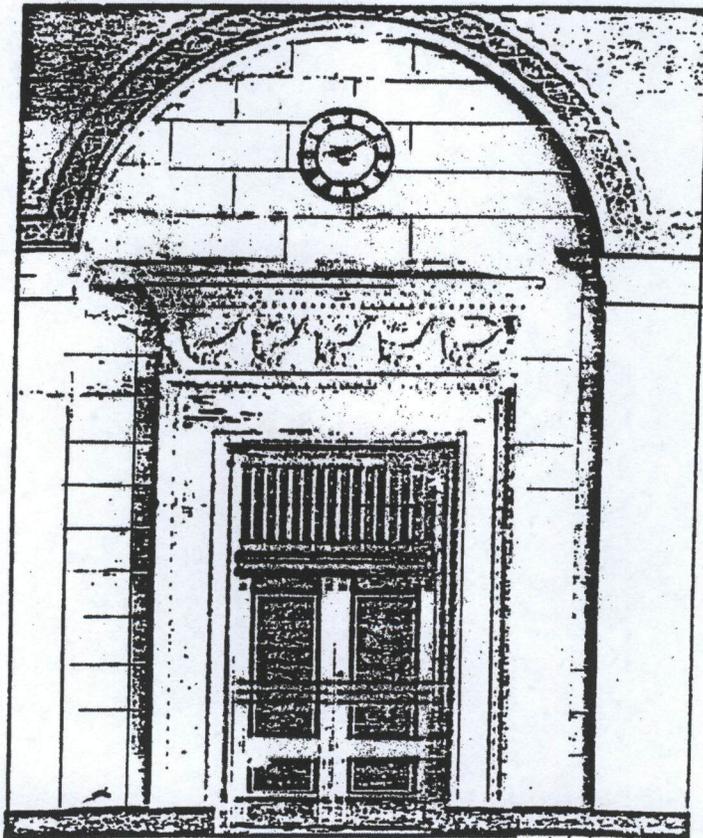


Illustration Number: 33  
Subject: Patent Search Room - East or West Entrance  
Date: c. 1931, 1932  
Description: Note carving; clock; painted vault ceiling.  
Photographer: Unknown  
Source: National Archives  
Still Pictures Branch  
RG 121, Series BCP  
Box 122



## Architecturally and Historically Significant Spaces

The Commerce Department Building possesses several aesthetically and architecturally noteworthy interior spaces which add greatly to the overall quality of the building. In a government building which is predominantly characterized by miles of corridors leading into generally undistinguished office spaces, these special areas provide a uniquely interesting quality to the building as a whole.

### Patent Office Search Room (now Washington Tourist Information Center)

In March 1983 the Washington Tourist Information Center opened in the large area once known as the Patent Search Room. While this area retains its essential architectural character, extensive spatial subdivisions have occurred as the room's function has changed. In general, the changes have been especially insensitive and detract from the clarity and order of the original space.

Ceiling - The original coffered and vaulted painted plaster ceiling of Italian Renaissance design is intact although colors have dimmed and paint peeling in places.

Floor - The original cork tile floor laid in squares with a Vermont Verde Antique marble border and baseboard is concealed by a raised platform floor which is carpeted.

Walls - The original limestone walls show minor patching in places. The walls end in a groin vaulted ceiling. Arches are painted and decorated in a Classical design and are in need of restoration. The south wall, originally a series of arched window openings is now blocked with grey painted wood partitions to conceal the air conditioning and electrical systems. The doors below the arched windows are now closed for the same reason in a simplistic, unattractive solution to the problem of concealing the air conditioning equipment.

Doors - The central entranceway area, once a series of tall arched windows, now has three sets of aluminum frame and plate glass doors. At the east and west ends of room are bronze doors with grilled transoms and elaborately carved marble surrounds. All bronze surfaces need cleaning.

Lighting - The original Italianate bronze chandeliers are in need of cleaning and restoration. Several light fixtures are missing at the west end of the room. The new track lighting installed to illuminate display cases in the arched alcoves at the southern end of the room is awkward and unattractive. Bronze sconces, on the north side of the piers, are original and need cleaning.

Windows - The original hand crank units designed to open the large windows on the north and south elevation remain intact.

Furniture - The original reading tables installed in this room were moved with the Patent Office when it was relocated to 2021 Jefferson Davis Drive in Arlington, Virginia. They remain in use in the present Search Room at this address.

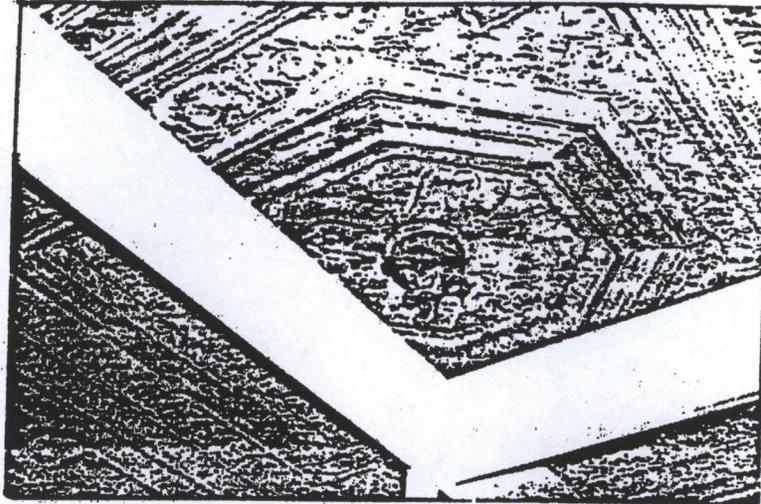
Major Modifications - In general, modifications to the space have been grossly insensitive and detract from original beauty of the room: they should be removed and the room's aesthetic integrity restored to the architect's original intent.

- 1) Modern partitioning units added at the west end of the room. The partitions hold air conditioning units on top as well as additional track lighting. These show a lack of respect for the intrinsic beauty of decorative details. Other new partitioning serves to isolate office spaces from rest of room in gift shop area. The main partition is of plaster and extends into the original coffered ceiling.
- 3) Toilet added behind gift shop at southwest corner.
- 4) Furnishings - modern window display cases and display partitions, plants, and a circular information desk have replaced the original separate desks in Patent Office Search Room.
- 5) A vestibule between the interior and exterior aluminum entry door was created when this area was remodelled. The rectangular area is carpeted - needs cleaning. Original arched openings at east and west ends of vestibule have been filled with aluminum and glass arched enclosures. Heating and air conditioning units at the base of each arch is visually awkward and unattractive. Original stone walls show signs of recent patching attempts - areas badly in need of cleaning the proper restoration.

- R With proper air balance, a return air fan would not be needed. The system will not be modified to operate with 100% outside air.
54. C A large mail room is also served by the Great Hall airconditioning system. Since operating hours and cooling load profiles will be quite different here than in the Great Hall, control problems may be expected.
- R Cooling load profiles will be controlled by existing variable air volume devices in each branch duct controlled by a zone thermostat. It is anticipated that the operating hours will be similar. (Current mail room hours are 6:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. M-F.)
55. C We do not see any practical substitute for utilization of the raised floor system for airconditioned air distribution. However, it appears likely that the vertical ductwork which serves this area could be made rectangular (instead of round), and rearranged and condensed so that the face of the duct enclosure would lie behind, rather than in line with, the columns and arches at the south side of the hall.
- R This solution is proposed for scenarios B and C.
56. C It would be technically feasible to divide the existing air handling casing down the center (or close off one fan and one coil) so that half the system could run independently; however, very careful engineering assessment would be required.
- R We will investigate.
57. C Our recommendations are:
- That no exhibition or artifacts requiring close environmental control be contemplated until formal architectural and engineering investigations and designs are completed and suitable HVAC renovation can be provided.
- R We concur.

Illustration: 78

First Floor, Patent Search Room, 1985. Alteration to the plaster ornamental ceiling where one of the bronze chandeliers hung.



First Floor, Pennsylvania Avenue elevation, 1985. New entrances have been cut from former window openings.



## CHAPTER 8: DESIGN GUIDELINES/REHABILITATION

### INTRODUCTION -

In general it is the exterior and significant interior spaces that define the historic architectural character of the building; and it is these elements and spaces that should be preserved and restored to their original (1932) appearance and protected against further deterioration and disturbance.

The exterior of the building, due to its architectural historical significance and its prominent setting within the Federal Triangle, clearly merits careful preservation. Fortunately, the exterior has undergone remarkably little change and is in good condition. The major changes to the building have been in infilling and adding mechanical equipment to Courtyards 1 and 6 and in the addition of three new entrance doorways centered on the Pennsylvania Avenue elevation. Both street and courtyard elevations are significant design elements which must be preserved. All original design elements, from the lightwells to the ridge of the Spanish tile roof, are likewise worthy of preservation.

### SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT SPACES

<u>ZONES</u>	<u>SPACES</u>	<u>FLOOR</u>
A	14th Street Lobby; Conference Room; 3 Conference Room Corridors, former Conference Room Lobby;	(first floor) (first floor)

Zone A includes the principal entrance to the building, and three of the most highly articulated individual spaces: the 14th Street Lobby and the Conference Room on the first floor, and the Aquarium at the basement level. Zone B is within the north portion of the building -- that portion originally devoted exclusively to the Patent Office. At the first floor, the Patent Search Room and Patent Office Library are especially significant spaces. The two elevator groups offer (in the case of Group 15) communication between the rooms and (in both cases) major public entrances at the Pennsylvania Avenue elevation. Elevator Groups 6 and 10 have been considered here as axial termini for Zone C, the Secretary's Suite. Circulation systems, both horizontal and vertical, while rarely afforded the degree of stylistic articulation seen in spaces such as the 14th Street Lobby, are significant in their continuity and in their linkage of the significant spaces. (Refer to series of floor plans colored in to indicate the locations, extents and relationships of these spaces -- Illus. Nos. 3.26-3.31).

### ACTIONS TO RESTORE THE BUILDING'S INTEGRITY

#### EXTERIOR

The exterior of the building, particularly the street elevations, has undergone remarkably little alteration and remains in good condition. The

loss of two landscaped courtyards is the most regrettable alteration. Specific recommendations would include the following.

- o Restore the Pennsylvania Avenue facade to its original appearance by removing the recently added doors to the National Visitors Center and recreating the original window designs. Traffic to the

must be re-opened to its intended appearance if the design integrity of the space is to be respected.

**ZONE B: PATENT SEARCH ROOM, PATENT OFFICE LIBRARY, PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE ENTRANCE/ELEVATOR LOBBIES**

The initial modifications were made for a Bicentennial Exhibit in 1976. The space now houses the National Visitors Center (located here since March, 1983), a concern independent of the Department of Commerce. The space as it now exists is vacuous and unattractive, having been desecrated by the installation of a raised platform floor, a superfluous and over-scaled vestibule, and arbitrarily placed large partitions outfitted with ventilation ducts. The largest of the building's grand spaces, the Patent Search Room now holds another distinction, that of being the most degraded space in the building.

#### Patent Search Room

- o Remove the recent vestibule entrance centered at the north wall of the room and restore the three doors to their original configuration as windows.
- o Remove the platform floor which cuts short the piers and the whole appearance of the room. Beneath the platform is the original cork tile floor with its marble border. This original floor should be restored. The platform was designed to conceal ductwork for the ventilation and air conditioning system; the design significance of this room necessitates that an alternative system be devised -- one which will not pose a threat to the integrity of the space.
- o Remove all partition walls which are not original to the room, this includes the large free-standing partitions now used as visual display units for the Visitors Center; also included is the large

plaster wall which reaches to the ornate plaster ceiling and the toilets (both in the western third of the room).

- o Clean all limestone surfaces to their original coloration and reflectivity; fill small holes and repair any other damage.
  - o Restore to its original finish the ornately decorated ceiling and plaster walls and intrados. Cleaning is the preferred method of preservation with the need for some infilling and other work recognized. Areas of the painted canvas which have pulled loose from the plaster must be re-attached with an approved adhesive agent. As described in the northeast documents centers report. Appendix F, p. 410.
  - o Clean all marble surfaces of accumulated dirt (note especially the east and west doors to the room).
  - o Replace missing chandeliers. Every effort should be made to locate the original fixtures; in the event that they cannot be found, reproductions must be cast to match the remaining originals.
  - o Clean all bronze lighting fixtures including chandeliers and sconces to their original finish appearance.
  - o Install uniform and historically appropriate light bulbs in the bronze lighting fixtures. An early photograph (Illustration #32, p.83) shows the round bulb type used for the chandeliers but flame-shaped bulbs, as survive in some of the fixtures, may have been originally used in the sconces.
  - o Clean the bright finished bronze framed doors at the east and west ends of the room.
  - o Open the now sealed-over door and window openings along the south wall of the room. The doorways should be opened to a minimum length of two feet beyond the wall; a new false wall or partition should be erected at this point and lighting carefully selected to convey a sense of the juxtaposition of light and shadow that characterized these openings when they were used in conjunction with adjacent stack areas as originally intended. The arched windows should be restored to their original function by removing their present covering. Opening them to Courtyard 6 will restore the original architects' intention of allowing light to spill into the room from the south windows, passing through the arcaded south range and into the central area of the room.
  - o Restore to use the original doors located at the east and west ends of the room; these connect with the two original Pennsylvania Avenue entrance lobbies. It is recommended that visitor traffic to the Patent Search Room be directed through the original entrance
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lobbies -- this in place of the recently added vestibule entrance directly to the room.

Entrance Lobbies (Elevator Groups 15 & 16)

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- 2) Create new toilets in a section of the former stack area directly adjacent to the Patent Search Room - offers the advantage of a carefully defined and easily monitored visitor zone; costlier than utilizing existing historic toilets; best location would be near the present toilets in the Patent Search Room so as to take advantage of existing pipes and drains.
  - 3) Utilize northeast entry lobby as access to second floor toilets; the small area of the second floor served by the elevators at this point contains existing (historic) toilets and one small office - provided this office can be secured and that one elevator can be directed solely between the first and second floors, this plan is feasible.
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