

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Extensible Building
other names / site number U.S. Department of Agriculture South Building (preferred)

2. Location

street & number 14th Street and Independence Avenue, SW ☐ not for publication
city or town Washington ☐ vicinity
state District of Columbia code DC county District of Columbia code 001 zip code 20003

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☐ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally.
(☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

State or Federal Agency or Tribal Government _____

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of commenting official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register

☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☒ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register**

0

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	<u>Government</u>	Sub:	<u>Offices</u>
	<u>Government</u>		<u>Laboratories</u>

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	<u>Government</u>	Sub:	<u>Offices</u>

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modernistic: Stripped Classicism**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation graniteroof slatewalls brick, limestone

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property** 4 acres**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1 8	3 2 3 3 8 0	4 3 0 5 3 9 5	3							
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing				
2				4							

☐ See continuation sheet**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Erin E. Brasell, Architectural Historian
organization Earth Tech, Inc. date May 12, 2006
street & number 7 St. Paul Street, Suite 900 telephone 410.637.1600
city or town Baltimore state MD zip code 21202

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.**Additional Items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name U.S. General Services Administration, National Capital Region
street & number 7th & D Streets, SW telephone 202.708.5891
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20407

Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et. seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Community Planning and Development

Government

Architecture

Period of Significance

1930-1936

Significant Dates

1930-1936

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation**Architect/Builder**

Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect of the Treasury

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☒ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

U.S. General Services Administration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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U.S. Department of Agriculture South Building

Name of Property

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Summary:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture South Building (Agriculture South) is located in the Southwest quadrant of Washington, D.C. on a site bounded by Independence Avenue to the north, C Street to the south, 12th Street to the east and 14th Street to the west. The Agriculture South Building is situated within sight of the National Mall, the Washington Monument (1848), the Freer Gallery (1923), the Smithsonian Castle (1847) and Paul Cret's Central Heating Plant (1934) – all prominent buildings in Washington, D.C.'s monumental core.

The massive six-story masonry building is designed in the Stripped Classical style and was meant to serve as a subordinate building to the earlier Agriculture Administration Building. However, the Agriculture South Building is of particular interest because of its unusual variety and application of materials that consist of variegated brick, limestone, terra cotta and painted iron. The exterior has changed very little, and while alterations to the interior have been more extensive, the current condition remains faithful to the character and governing principles of the original design. The building remains today much as it was originally in 1936, and continues to house offices clustered according to the Agriculture Department's various administrative divisions.

Narrative Description:

The Agriculture South Building occupies a site bounded by Independence Avenue on the north, C Street on the south, 12th Street to the east and 14th Street to the west. Rectangular in shape, the building consists of seven parallel wings that form six exterior courts and provide light and ventilation to interior offices. The building rises six stories above grade with a basement and sub-basement, and is connected to the existing Administration building by two enclosed pedestrian bridges on the Independence Avenue elevation. By Washington, D.C. standards the building is rather tall, but the semblance of verticality is offset by its large base dimensions that span two entire city blocks. A uniform cornice line at 75 feet, above which the sixth floor is setback, also reinforces the low monumentality of the building.

The building's four street elevations share a common pattern of fenestration and classical tripartite composition consisting of base, central and upper sections. The street facades are uniplanar in appearance and are broken only by shifts in materials and shallow projecting pavilions. Materials in each elevation occur in different combination that establishes a clear order of hierarchy. The 14th Street and Independence Avenue elevations, which include the main entrances, are most elaborately treated. By comparison, the 12th and C Street elevations are secondary in nature.

Originally intended as the principal entrance, the 14th Street elevation is composed of 41 bays broken into five planar sections. The sections consist of a projecting central entrance and colonnade that is flanked by two recessed intermediate sections, and two projecting end sections. The base of the building, which includes the basement, first and second stories, is faced in buff colored ashlar limestone. At the basement level the rusticated limestone is laid in regular blocks with evenly spaced windows occurring in unison with the pattern of rustication. At the first and second floor levels, the rusticated limestone is laid in horizontal courses that extend unbroken between bays across the entire façade. A limestone belt course separates the basement from the first two floors.

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On the 14th Street elevation, the central projecting plane consists of 19 bays and contains three semicircular arch headed entrance doorways centered on the first floor. The entrance doors are reached by five granite steps and are framed by cheek walls topped with light standards. The double-leaved entrance doors are plate glass and polished bronze with two part transom and sidelights. Above the doors is an upper transom and fanlight. Removable cast iron grilles are set in front of the sidelights, upper transom and fanlights. The door surrounds consist of a gadrooned border, coffered intrados, and a paneled soffit fitted with highly veined marble panels. Centered above each fanlight is a terracotta cartouche set within the key block above the doorway. Four small window openings are spaced between the doors and are treated similarly with removable cast iron grilles.

Windows on the first and second floors are divided between the five planar sections of the building, and align vertically with corresponding bays on the upper floors. The first floor windows have voussoirs with crossettes that merge with the horizontal banding. All of the second story windows are without lintels, and are capped by the third floor beltcourse separating the upper floors.

The third, fourth and fifth floors of the 14th Street elevation comprise the body of the building. Clad in smooth faced limestone, the upper floors are distinguished from the rusticated base by three story colossal columns and pilasters located in the central and end sections of the façade. The central colonnade has 16 fluted Corinthian engaged columns, which rise from the beltcourse at the third floor to the sixth floor cornice. The central three bays of each end section are set between simple pilasters with capitals designed in various agricultural motifs. Windows on the third, fourth and fifth floors are graduated and contain cast iron spandrels within each of the five planar sections. The spandrels contain animal motifs – bucranium¹, ram, turkey and horse – set against a background of glyphs.

The upper section of the building consists of the cornice, recessed sixth story and hipped roof with its three penthouses. The entablature has a cyma moulded architrave, frieze and cornice. The frieze is ornamented with applied classical bronze lettering reading:

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Above the entablature is a smooth faced limestone parapet with a balustrade above the two recessed bays. At the central projecting plane, the parapet contains a central inscription flanked by small cut-out panels in geometric designs with a bas relief eagle at each corner. The sixth story is set back behind the parapet with 39 window bays that are virtually invisible from the ground. The hipped roof is slate shingled and is interrupted by three symmetrically placed on-ridge penthouses. The penthouses are composed of variegated brick.

The Independence Avenue elevation is second in importance to the 14th Street (principal) façade. The elevation is 81 bays in length and is broken into thirteen vertical segments by shallow planar projections and recessions. A clear central emphasis is not present as on the 14th Street entrance, and is due mostly to the fact that two pedestrian bridges

¹ Bucranium is a sculpted ornament representing an ox skull adorned with wreathes, etc, usually represented in a ritual sacrifice.

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obscure the possibility of seeing this side of the building in its entirety. Instead, seven entrance groups are distributed over the length of the façade, occurring roughly in concert with the seven north-south wings. The entrances are not treated with monumental detail and are not distinguished greatly from the adjacent window bays.

The east and west ends of the elevation are clad in smooth faced limestone and are, in effect, extensions of the 12th and 14th Street elevations. The east end contains entrances 1 and 2, while the west end includes entrances 6 and 7. Entrances 1 and 7 have three doors each. The central door contains a console supported by the entablature and leaded glass eagle design in the transom. Entrances 2 and 6 are located directly below the two pedestrian bridges, and have two simple door openings set within a wall segment of smooth-faced limestone. The structural steel frame pedestrian bridges span Independence Avenue and connect Agriculture South and Administration Buildings at the third floor. The bridges each have a single, low segmental span and are faced in smooth finished limestone. Sparsely ornamented, the bridges have slightly stepped parapets with a cornice of alternating fret and glyph panels and bas-relief eagle medallions. The undersides of the bridges are faced in cream-colored glazed brick.

The building's most varied use of materials is found on the central section of the Independence Avenue elevation, distinguishing it from the other three sides. Extending just short of the east and west pedestrian bridges, this section contains entrances 3, 4 and 5. The tripartite design of the building is carried through to the central section of this elevation, but contains cream-colored terracotta at the basement level and variegated tan brick on the first and second floors. The basement is capped by a terracotta fret course. Alternately raised continuous bands of horizontal brick bands at the first and second stories are laid in English bond within each band. Each of the entrances has three door openings. The central doors at entrances 3 and 5 have terracotta consoles and entablatures with a glyph and roundel frieze – the flanking doors have plain surrounds. At entrance 4 (central entrance) the three doors are treated equally with terracotta consoles and entablature, identical to entrances 3 and 5. Windows on the first and second floors vary in size and are cut deep into the walls, with terracotta sills on the second floor.

A projecting terracotta course separates the base from the body of the building, which extends through the fifth floor. The central five bays comprise a pedimented pavilion with a colonnade of five engaged columns. The columns are identical to those on the 14th Street façade, but are made of polychrome terracotta. Within each bay, the third, fourth, and fifth story windows are set deep into the walls and are linked by cast iron spandrels. The flanking wall sections on the third, fourth and fifth floors appear as simple pilasters. Windows are single, double and triple, with spandrel designs that repeat designs seen elsewhere on the building. The upper horizontal sections of the building contain the cornice, recessed sixth floor and roof – identical to the upper stories on the entire building, except for the substitution of brick and terracotta for limestone. The small, central pediment is cream terracotta with a brick tympanum and polychrome terracotta cartouche.

The 12th and C Street elevations are secondary in nature to the 14th and Independence entrances. The 12th Street elevation is composed of limestone and repeats many of the same design motifs of the 14th Street side. Its secondary nature is expressed in the absence of any entrance doors and a lack of a strong central focus. The elevation's 37 bays are divided into three vertical planes, consisting of two projecting end pavilions of five bays each. Windows occur in

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singly, paired and triple arrangements with cast iron spandrels. An iron balustrade extends above the cornice at the setback sixth floor.

The C Street elevation, like the Independence Avenue façade, has limestone end sections framing a large central section of variegated brick and terracotta. The two end pavilions are identical to the Independence Avenue elevation, with the tripartite delineation of base, middle and upper sections of the elevation. The elevation's 85 bays are distributed among 9 planar sections with seven, single door entrances spaced according to the intersecting north-south wings. Each entrance door has a terracotta surround, soffit and console supported entablature that is identical to Independence Avenue entrances. Three slightly projecting pavilions at entrances 3, 4 and 5 establish planar breaks along the central section of the façade. Above each of the pavilions, the hipped roof projects slightly in a pedimented form. As with the other street elevations, varied window sizes and massing are used to lend importance to the entrances. The cornice and sixth floor iron balustrade carry over from the other elevations.

At regular interstices six large, vehicular portals with segmental arched heads and simple terracotta voussoirs open into six courts. The vehicular bays are 16 feet in height and are hung with double-leaved wrought iron gates. Elevations at each of the six enclosed courts are of variegated brick with terracotta detailing. The elaborate system of rustication and the large entablature seen at the street facades are carried over into the courtyards through the use of terracotta coursings.

Interior

The Agriculture South Building has six major floors, a basement and sub-basement. The first through sixth floors and basement were originally used for laboratory space and the treatment of spaces and finishes in these spaces are remarkably consistent. The first floor is distinguished from the others by its function as the entrance floor. The typical floor plan consists of a series of eight double-loaded corridors flanked by inter-communicating spaces intended interchangeably for office or laboratory use. Two long corridors that extend on the east-west axes (Independence Avenue and C Street) connect the seven shorter perpendicular north-south wings. The wings are more or less evenly spaced and are numbered 1 (12th Street) through 7 (14th Street). The 4,500 rooms within the building are served by a vertical circulation system of 38 elevators and 23 staircases. Each floor has 14 or more toilet rooms, with one at each end of the numbered wings. Typical features throughout the building consist of the grid configuration mentioned above, quarry tile flooring laid within marble borders with matching bases, as well as simply treated walls and ceilings of plaster.²

The first floor is the most elaborately treated of the building's nine interior levels, and serves as the principal point of entry for the building. In addition to the entrances, the Library and Projection Room occur on the first floor and are

² Interior rooms and corridors contain typical finishes unless otherwise stated. Deviations from the typical grid/finishes will be described below in detail.

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sole deviations from the otherwise standardized plan. There are fifteen entrances in the first floor plan, seven at the Independence Avenue and C Street Wings and one centered at the 14th Street wing.

Vestibules at the Independence Avenue entrances have one set of double-leaved doors opening into the street aligned with a second set opening into the Lobbies. Flooring in the vestibules is glazed polychrome tile laid in geometric patterns within rectangular fields. The tiles are set within a marble border that continues to a series of steps that ascend to the lobby level. The ceilings in the vestibules have low, segmental vaults. Lobbies on the Independence Avenue only occur at entrances 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7. Although varying slightly in size and shape, the lobbies are generally T-shaped and contain an elevator lobby at the intersections of the north-south and east-west wings. Each elevator lobby has three elevator openings with bronze double-leaved doors. The marble elevator surrounds are slightly pedimented. Similarly to the vestibule, the lobby flooring is glazed polychrome tile with marble border, base and wainscot. The upper walls are plaster finished and the ceilings are beamed plaster.

The 14th Street entrance was intended to serve as the main public entrance, and as such is given unique interior treatments and is composed of a large Entry Lobby and smaller elevator lobby. The Entrance Lobby is entered through three bronze and plate glass doors. The lobby's walls are clad in Yellow Kasota marble with an Antique Verde marble base. At the north and south ends of the lobby, two radiator niches are concealed behind bronze grilles. The Lobby floors are glazed polychrome tile with American travertine borders. Eight travertine steps ascend from the Entrance Lobby to the first floor, where the small Elevator Lobby is located. Three tightly spaced inner doors open into the Elevator Lobby, which is a smaller space with identical floor and wall materials. Centered on the east wall is a Yellow Kasota water fountain that consists of a semi-circular arch headed niche and projecting bowl. Flanking the fountain are two elevator doors that are those in the Independence Avenue Entrance.

The C Street entrance is modest in comparison with only a small vestibule and three steps leading to an elevator lobby. The elevator lobby occurs at an expansion of the north-south wing and east-west corridor. The entrances are all identical – each with a quarry tile floor, marble border and base, plaster ceilings and walls with oak and plate glass inner doors. Two elevators occur at each of the entrances.

The two spaces on the first floor that deviate from the rest of the building's typical grid plan are the Projection Room and Library. The Projection Room (now the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Auditorium) extends from the North Corridor into Court 5 and is composed of three principal elements – a lobby, projection room and a sound studio. The Lobby is a rectangular space open to the Independence Avenue (north) corridor. The walls are clad in Yellow Kasota marble and the low segmental vaulted ceiling is painted plaster divided by paneled plaster beams.

The Projection Room is a large rectangular room, originally with a cork tile floor and Antique Verde marble base.³ The floor slopes downward toward the stage at the south end of the room. The walls are wainscoted walnut wood

³ The cork tile floor has been since covered with carpet.

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panels with the upper walls and ceiling in plaster.⁴ The ceiling is of particular interest with its central north-south low segmental vault, and wood panel beams in a gridded pattern. Centered within the coffers are vents with decorative rosette deflectors. The stage is a simply treated space that is raised to the same level as the north end of the room, and has two tiers. Flanking either side of the stage are canted corner walls, each with a double-leaved paneled door opening into the sound studio area. The seating is arranged in three sections and served by four north-south aisles, and are of metal and clear varnished figured plywood. A projection booth is located between the projection room and the lobby, and has several small openings for projectors.

The Library is a large irregularly shaped First Floor space, which projects partially from the North (Independence Avenue) corridor into Court 4. Intended to serve as the USDA's large collection of agricultural publications, the library was a sprawling series of rooms with the stack area being a central focus. The stack area is a rectangular space, with the library office and reading areas arranged roughly in a u-shape. The library is finished in a similar fashion to the other rooms in the building.

The second, third, fourth and fifth floors are all similarly arranged in a common grid pattern, with very few deviations. The third floor differs slightly from the other three floors in that it contains the pedestrian bridge linking the Administration Building to the North Corridor at wings 2 and 6. These spaces are treated as extensions of the corridor and have quarry tile floors set within a marble border. The walls and ceiling are plaster with a marble base, and are lighted by large skylights.

The sixth floor is slightly different from the floors below. The setback from the street and selected court elevations resulted in narrower office and laboratory space, however the corridor pattern and treatment are typical. Originally a cafeteria was installed in Wing 6, and spanned the entire width of the wing.⁵

Changes/Alterations

The original building fabric of the Agriculture South Building has changed very little since its construction in 1930-36. Through the 1950s the Agriculture South Building continued to function in the capacity for which it was originally intended. Much of the original configuration of offices, corridors and the Library and Auditorium remain intact. The first floor lobbies, most visible public areas, have all retained their original configuration and integrity. Changes in the first floor include the addition of a cafeteria space joining wings 2 and 3, which occupies much of Court 2. The original plaster ceilings on the first floor have been covered and lowered with acoustical tiles with flush fluorescent tube fixtures. Corridors contain most of their original equipment, which includes porcelain water

⁴ The plaster walls have since been covered with non-original sound absorbing fabric that extends to the ceiling.

⁵ The cafeteria is no longer extant.

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fountains, painted steel fire hose closets, watch station, office signage and bronze sign plaques with room direction arrows. An escalator and general seating area have since been added on the north end of the building, between corridors 2 and 3, which leads to the basement and tunnel. As mentioned earlier, the Projection Room remains nearly the same as originally intended, with the exception of carpeting on the floor and sound absorbing fabric covering the plaster walls. The Library has also sustained minor changes, including carpeting over the original flooring.

The second, third, fourth and fifth floors all have remained virtually the same, with the exception of former laboratories spaces functioning now as office spaces. Many of the offices are divided with temporary partition walls, and have been refinished in newer materials. These changes, however, do not diminish the integrity of the Agriculture South Building, as in many ways it functions as originally intended.

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Summary Statement of Significance:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture South Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the growth of the United States Department of Agriculture and broader patterns of city development in Washington, D.C., as well as Criterion C as an excellent and largely unaltered example of Stripped Classical federal architecture in the 1930s.

Resource History and Historic Context:

At the turn of the 20th century, Pierre Charles L'Enfant's 1791 plan for Washington, D.C. was largely unrealized. Because of the growing prominence of Washington, D.C., Congress decided it was necessary to revitalize L'Enfant's initial ideas for the future growth of the city. In response to growing discontent with the way the National Mall had developed throughout the 1800s, the McMillan commission formed in 1901. Until that point, the central city was laced with railroad tracks with a depot directly on the Mall, which was not a desirable space to represent the nation's capital.⁶ While relying on the scope of L'Enfant's original designs, the McMillan Plan focused on a more comprehensive plan for Washington, D.C., and was the basis for more specialized government planning in the coming decades.⁷

The Agriculture South Building was a product of a federal building program initiated under the Public Buildings Act of 1926 – a multimillion dollar building program that would take over 10 years to complete.⁸ As a result of World War I, a severe delay in federal building and construction led to a crisis in the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury. The Act enabled the Public Buildings Service (PBS) to hire private architects for the design of federal buildings, and was the precursor to one of the country's largest construction programs.⁹ Between World War I and World War II, Washington, D.C. was transformed by the rapid growth of the federal government, which established a critical need for space to house federal workers. It also spurred the large scaled building program conducted by the Office of the Supervising Architect.¹⁰

⁶ Gutheim, Frederick, *Worthy of the Nation: History of Planning for the National Capital* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1977) 117-118.

⁷ Gutheim, 133-136.

⁸ Lee, Antoinette J. *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect's Office* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 237.

⁹ Lee, 238-241.

¹⁰ Geier, Brown, Renfrow Architects and Oehrlein & Assoc. *Historic Structure Report and Preservation Manual: Agriculture South Building (HSR)* (Washington, DC: General Services Administration, 1988) 25.

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Federal planning in the 1920s and 30s focused greatly on the monumental core of the District of Columbia, most notably areas flanking the National Mall. During this time period, more than any other, the ideals of the McMillan Plan of 1902 were realized and the monumental core of the city was formed. In the immediate vicinity of the Mall, the Agriculture South Building and Administration Building, Bureau of Engraving and Printing Annex (1938), the Treasury Procurement Division (1932), and the Central Power Plant (1934) were constructed. North, across the Mall, the Federal Triangle (1928-1938) was also underway and the largest building project undertaken by the federal government. On Capitol Hill, the Supreme Court (1935) and the Library of Congress Annex were built, and west of the Ellipse the Department of the Interior Building (1936), the Federal Reserve Board (1937), the Public Health Service (1931), and the Arlington Memorial Bridge (1926-1932) were completed.¹¹

The U.S. Agriculture Department (USDA) during this period focused its attention on the completion of a monumental building complex. In order to bring its growing laboratory facilities into a modern atmosphere, the USDA sought the construction of the South Building as a simple, flexible space that would accommodate large numbers of rooms for laboratory and office use. The Agriculture South Building grew out of a larger plan to consolidate into one single complex the various functions of the USDA. The Administration Building (1928-1930) and its laboratory wings (1904-1908) had been planned as early as 1900. The first priority of the USDA's building program was to complete the Administration Building, which was needed to connect the two existing L-shaped Laboratory Wings. It was evident at the time that the Administration Building would not sufficiently accommodate all of the USDA's functions, and beginning in 1927, a series of schematic designs were developed for the Agriculture South Building. The building was, at times, originally referred to the "Extensible Building" for its ability to be extended. However, it was more commonly referred to as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "South Building," during its planning stages and throughout the period of significance, thus its preferred name for this nomination.

Construction of the Agriculture South Building required the acquisition of three city blocks and abandonment of two streets that formerly traversed the site.¹² Because of difficulties in land acquisition, the building was conceived from the start as a phased development plan. Notice to proceed with the first phase of construction was given in 1930, which saw the rise of wings four and five and the connecting segments.¹³ The scope of the second phase, which included everything west of wing five and much of what is east of wing four, began in 1932 with completion in 1935. Concluding in 1936, the last portion of construction featured two connecting pedestrian bridges, which link the South Building to the Administration Building. Evolution of the pedestrian bridge's lengths is evidence of the development of Independence Avenue. The original 1931 plan for the Agriculture South Building was based on the premise that B Street would be closed. Instead B Street was expanded, based on plans for the Federal Triangle, into Independence Avenue.¹⁴

¹¹ Geier, Brown, Renfrow, 8.

¹² Linworth Place and 13th Street both extended on north-south axes dividing the site into three equal parts; Geier, Brown, Renfrow, 42.

¹³ "Contract Given for U.S. Building" *Washington Post* 2 July 1930: 5.

¹⁴ "Triangle Traffic Jam Is Foreseen by Experts." *Washington Post* 14 Dec 1926: 1; "Steps to Rename B Street Washington Avenue Taken" *Washington Post* 4 Apr 1932: 14.

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Along with the plans to expand B Street, the plans for the pedestrian bridge were dramatically altered to accommodate the much larger distance between the Administration and South Buildings. Through the 1950s, the Agriculture South Building continued to function as it was originally intended. Removal of the laboratory functions to the USDA's Beltsville, Maryland facility has altered the function of the Agriculture South Building, now serving exclusively as office space. The change in function, however, has not altered the integrity of the building, as it is consistent with the original intent of flexible interior spaces to serve the changing needs of the federal agency.

Architectural Significance:

The Agriculture South Building was designed by the Office of the Supervising Architect, which played a prominent role in shaping the direction and style of federal architecture in Washington, D.C. Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect 1933-1941, was responsible for the Agriculture South Building's design. Originally established under the U.S. Treasury Department in the early 1850s to oversee the design and construction of Custom Houses, the Office of the Supervising Architect designed a great number of buildings located within Washington, D.C. as well as across the country. "While vilified by many private architects over the years, the Office represented a center of culture and design in the federal government...." and "...the location of the Office in the U.S. Treasury Department provided the financially based agency with a strong cultural flavor."¹⁵

Louis A. Simon was born in Baltimore in 1867 and received his architectural degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Simon was working in his own architectural firm in when he was asked to join the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury in 1896. Simon began initially as a draftsman in the Office, but soon worked his way to becoming chief of the Engineering and Drafting Division, under the supervision of then Supervising Architect James A. Wetmore, in 1915. He succeeded Wetmore to become Supervising Architect in 1933. Simon remained with the Office of the Supervising Architect throughout the duration of his career and was responsible for a great deal of architectural work associated with the office between 1915 and 1941.¹⁶

The 1930s and 40s was period when the federal government was straying from Beaux Arts style, but still working within a classical framework. "Starved classicism" was the result of classical elements combined with modern ideas of architecture. The style often displays large expanses of blank walls, simplified ornamentation and minimal sculptural elements.¹⁷ The Agriculture South Building is one of an impressive number of federal structures in Washington, D.C. in the stripped classical style. Alternately referred to as "Starved Classicism," "Depression Moderne," and "WPA Moderne," the style was grounded in a reinterpretation of classical design principles.¹⁸

¹⁵ Lee, xii-xiii.

¹⁶ Lee, 258-280.

¹⁷ Spiro Kostoff, *History of Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 716.

¹⁸ Geier, Brown, Renfrow, 24.

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Departing from the more traditional Beaux Arts and Neoclassical styles of the 19th century, stripped classicism emphasized massing over detail, evoking a sense of strength through form rather than ornamentation. The sense of efficiency and functionality displayed by the style made it particularly suitable for government buildings at the time. Although developed by private architects, the stripped classical style assumed a strong, if not exclusive association with federal architecture during the following decades.¹⁹

The Agriculture South Building is a building of great mass that is expressed horizontally and serves as a subordinate structure to the earlier Administration Building. The building is above all a practical building, but its use of varied materials sets it apart from many other federal projects of the period. Its exterior employs a combination of variegated brick, glazed terracotta, limestone, cast and wrought iron, and slate. Interior materials, particularly at the main entrance lobbies, are also somewhat unusually applied and include a variety of ceramic floor tiling and natural finished wood doors and frames. As with many federal buildings of the period, the interior was designed to permit the future flexibility of spaces and functions. As mentioned in the building's history, few changes have occurred to the building since its completion in 1936, with the exceptions being functional rather than aesthetic. The exterior is all but unscathed, and interior functions are consistent with the original intentions of Louis A. Simon's design.

¹⁹ Geier, Brown, Renfrow, 24.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture South Building and its grounds at 14th Street and Independence Avenue, SW occupy the block bounded by Independence Avenue, C Street, 14th Street and 12th Street, in Washington, D.C., on Square 264.

Boundary Justification:

All property lines are as they existed at the time of the building's construction. The nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.

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Photographs: