

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

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

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Old Naval Observatory

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 23rd and E Streets NW.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

D. C.

CODE

11

COUNTY

D. C.

CODE

001

**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"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME (Admin. by <sup>United States</sup> Department of the Navy) occupied by U.S. Naval Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Washington

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

D.C.

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, Recorder of Deeds  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

6th and D Streets NW.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1974

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress, Division of Prints and Photographs

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Old Naval Observatory is a two-story brick building with observatory dome and three wings, all painted gray with white trim. The north, central, square section, with small metal dome, was constructed in 1843 and wings to the east, west and south were added before 1893. Some of the additions and remodelings were directed by Ernest Flagg, architect of the Naval Academy, in Annapolis. The circular building to house a second telescope was added to the end of the south wing c. 1873.

As seen on the enclosed map of the Potomac Annex installation, the old observatory building (Building #2) is situated in the midst of c. 1906 offices, and residences. The old observatory has undergone many remodelings and has a very irregular shape. However, there was obviously a genuine attempt to harmonize the many later additions with the original section by uniform materials and colors, and repeating exterior ornament such as the cornice design, the pilaster-on-pilaster motif and window treatment, throughout several sections of the building.

The roofline of most of the building is nearly flat, with a modified cornice, painted white. The windows of the Original central (north) section are rectangular with flat entablatures supported by consoles, as are the windows on the first story of the east and west wings flanking it, and several rear wings. The second story windows on these east and west wings framing the original section, and the windows of the west wing, are recessed, with rounded arches, in a series which simulates an arcade. The pilasters which decorate the front and rear facades of the original section, plus several later additions, are two-story, brick and Doric style, pilaster-on-pilaster, divided by the watercourse that runs around the building between stories.

There are three entrances on the north, in the center of the three major projecting blocks of the building which are connected by narrower wings. There are portions of particularly nice iron fences around the east front walk, but the east wing of the building generally has less ornament than other parts of the structure. On the south end of the wing behind the original section is a round one-and-a-half-story brick observatory, on a fieldstone base, with metal roof and central opening. It was built in 1873 to house a 26-inch refracting telescope built by Alvan Clark and Sons, the oldest of its type still in use, it is now housed at the Naval Observatory, Massachusetts Avenue, moved to that new site in 1893.

On the interior the old building has been somewhat remodeled, but is essentially utilitarian, office space, as originally. The second story room of the 1843 section is still open up into the metal dome, but used as a reception room. The original equipment, including the 9.6-inch refractor telescope it was built to contain, was removed long ago.

(CONTINUED)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES 1843-1893 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Additions under direction of Ernest Flag

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Between 1844 and 1861, the Naval Observatory, under the leadership of Matthew Fontaine Maury, became widely known as a world center for advances in oceanography and navigational information. As the father of modern oceanography, Maury made his greatest contributions to science during these years.

The U.S. Naval Observatory evolved from the Depot of Charts and Instruments, which was established by the Secretary of the Navy in 1830 to maintain and check the accuracy of nautical instruments, charts, and books. In September 1838, the Depot began to conduct continuous astronomical observations, and thus laid the foundation for the permanent establishment of a naval observatory.

Shortly after Lt. Matthew Fontaine Maury became Superintendent of the Depot in July 1842, Congress authorized the Secretary of the Navy to contract for a suitable building, at a cost not to exceed \$25,000. Although an astronomical observatory was not mentioned in the act, the site on the hill at 23rd and E Streets, NW., and the plans for the structure, were selected with such a function in mind. With the construction of the Naval Observatory, the Federal Government entered into practical scientific research in an important way.

Matthew Fontaine Maury had become a naval astronomer and had published A New Theoretical and Practical Treatise on Navigation in 1836. As Superintendent of the Depot, his work on winds and currents, extremely important in the days of sailing ships, led to the issue of Wind and Current Charts and Sailing Directions in 1847. In 1853, Maury represented the United States at an international congress at Brussels and convinced the participating nations to adopt this uniform system for recording oceanographic data.

In 1854, the Depot became the United States Naval Observatory and Hydrographical Office. The following year Maury published The Physical Geography of the Sea, the first textbook of modern oceanography. His association with the Naval Observatory ended April 20, 1861, when he resigned to follow his native Virginia into the Confederacy.

Maury's contributions to oceanography and navigation were recognized during his lifetime, and are still recalled. The Navy Oceanographic Office charts still mention their debt to this man. The simple brick observatory building, enlarged since Maury's day, now provides offices for the Potomac Annex of the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	18	32,205,0	430,69,1,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The national historic landmark is the old observatory, Building #2 of the Potomac Annex, alone. Beginning at a point approximately 93' from the gatehouse and on the east curb of the sidewalk, proceed in a southerly direction approximately 169' to a point; thence west a pproximately 80' to a point; thence northwest approximately 156' to a point; thence east 163' to the point of origin.

### LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Blanche H. Schroer, Landmark Review Project; Steven H. Lewis, 1964

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey Division, National Park Service

DATE

3/3/77

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

**Landmark**  
Designated: Nov 12, 1965  
**Boundary Certified:**  
*George Emery*  
June 21, 1978 date

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

11/24/78

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

((NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS))

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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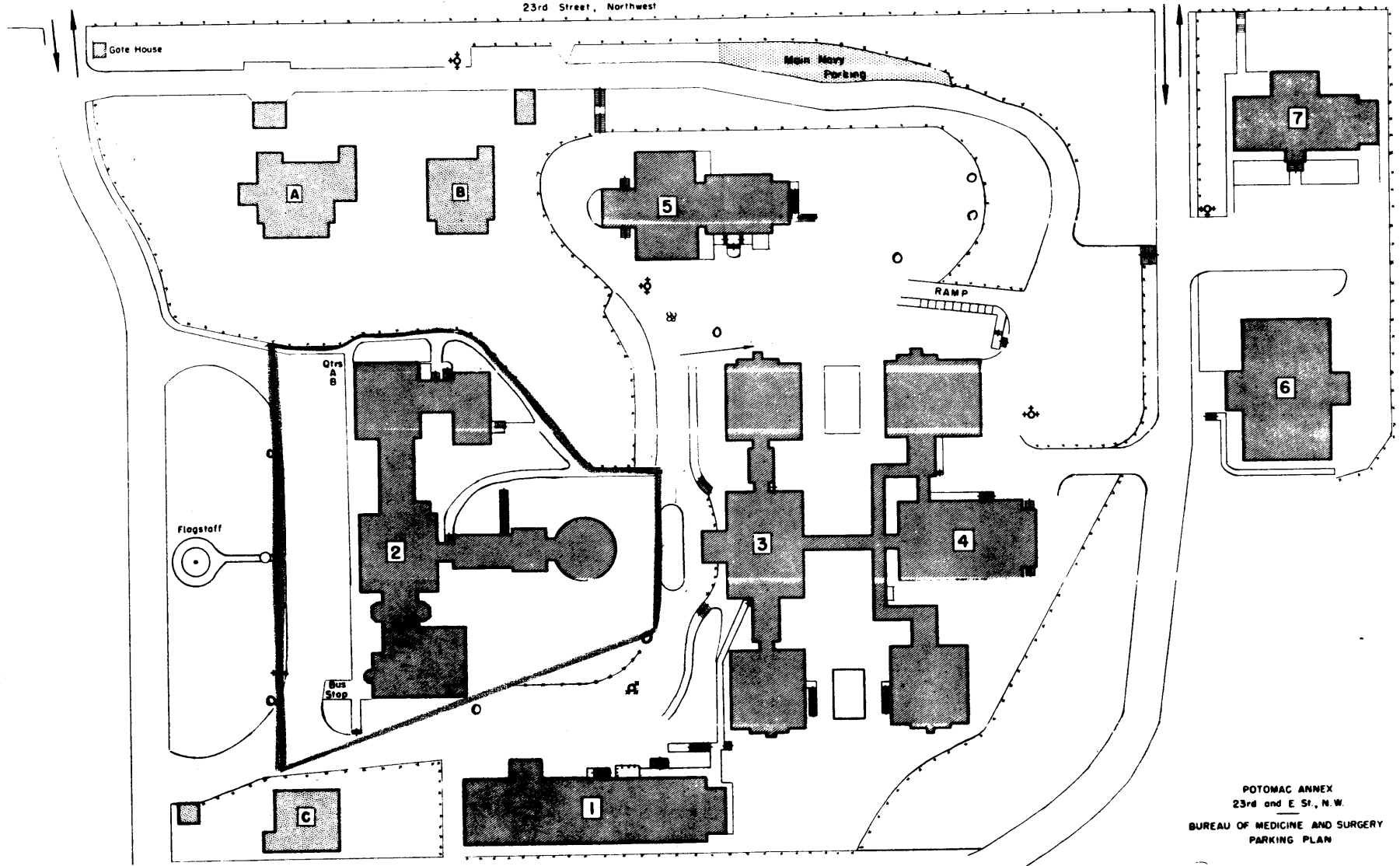
Old Naval Observatory

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

The original observatory site proved to be a poor location for an astronomical observatory, with mud flats and swampy land immediately to the south and west. The proximity to the Potomac River caused extremely foggy conditions, and the lights of the nearby city caused further problems. On May 15, 1893, the Naval Observatory formally occupied its present location on much higher land in northwest Washington.

# OLD NAVAL OBSERVATORY



POTOMAC ANNEX  
23rd and E St., N.W.  
BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY  
PARKING PLAN