

VLR-7/21/81 NRHP-10/29/81

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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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 U. S. Post Office and Courts Building
and/or common Old Norfolk City Hall (Preferred)

2. Location

street & number 235 East Plume Street not for publication
city, town Norfolk vicinity of congressional district Second (G. William Whitehurst)
state Virginia code 51 county (in city) code 710

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name City of Norfolk c/o Mayor
street & number Norfolk City Hall
city, town Norfolk vicinity of state Virginia 23510

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Norfolk City Hall
street & number
city, town Norfolk state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1981 federal state county local
depository for survey records Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, 221 Governor Street
city, town Richmond state Virginia

7. Description

Condition

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

Check one

unaltered

altered

Check one

original site

moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The old City Hall building is located at 235 East Plume Street in the heart of Norfolk's commercial area. It was constructed in 1900 after the plans of Wyatt and Nolting of Baltimore as the U. S. Courthouse and Post Office. A copy of the original architectural drawings survives and is in the possession of the owner. Architecturally it reflects a period in which the federal government spared little expense in the construction of public buildings both in Washington and throughout the United States. The Palladian-inspired structure has rusticated stone facing on the first story and Flemish-bond yellow brick with stone quoining on the second and third stories. A full entablature with a parapet wall of yellow brick crowns the edifice.

The facade is broken by a central pedimented engaged portico that contains the main entrance on the street level. The entry consists of a rusticated semicircular-arched opening with a foliated keystone and flanking carved stone cartouches. A shallow stone balcony supported by carved Corinthian-style paired consoles is directly above the entrance. The entry contains a transom-light double doorway with wood-frame glass doors topped by a semicircular transom. A glass pane has the painted words "City Hall." The doorway is approached by stone steps flanked by stone plinths with bronze lamp standards and rounded, translucent glass globes. On the second and third stories the pavilion has four engaged Roman Ionic columns that support a full pediment. A stone shield carved with stars and stripes and set in foliated ornament embellishes the tympanum. Side entrances are also found in semicircular rusticated arched openings; the entrance on the east elevation is flanked by bronze lamp standards on stone plinths.

The building is distinguished by a variety of fenestration treatments. The facade, like all the elevations, has rusticated semicircular-arched windows on the first story. The second-story openings are rectangular. The openings within the pavilion have pedimented stone heads supported by consoles and containing cartouches in the tympanum. The flanking windows also have cornice window heads supported by consoles, a treatment repeated on the rest of the second-story openings. The third-story openings are square and are framed by crossetted architraves. All openings have French-style casement windows. A stone entablature with a modillion and dentil cornice runs the perimeter of the roof line.

The Old Norfolk City Hall's interior survives in an excellent state of preservation. The original plans, drawn in 1898, called for the post office and related services on the first floor. The second floor housed the U. S. courtroom and its related offices; the third floor contained the courtroom gallery, marshal offices, and a dormitory for the railway mail services. While the use of the spaces has changed throughout the years, the exceptional detailing in the public areas remains.

After the city obtained the building ca. 1935, the post office space on the first floor was converted into the city treasurer's offices. Minimal alterations were necessary, and much original fabric survives. The area is distinguished by wood paneling that flanks glass and metal-grilled openings originally used by the post office for customer services. The surrounding walls in the hall have marble-veneer facing, and the floors are paved with stone. Many of the offices retain their original paneled doors. The hall ceiling is vaulted.

The second floor is distinguished by an open court. The court is framed by an arcade that has marble columns with Ionic capitals topped by an elaborately ornamented plaster-work cornice. A balustrade with classically turned balusters runs between the columns. Like the first floor, the second-floor hall has a vaulted ceiling, marble facing, and stone paving. The court space and office space on the second floor have undergone considerable

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1900 **Builder/Architect** Wyatt and Nolting

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Norfolk's Old City Hall, formerly the U.S. Post Office and Federal Courts Building, stands as an important and rare example of the Neo-Palladian Revival. The style, while popular in Europe, especially Britain, at the end of the 19th century, was overshadowed in the United States by the Greek- and Roman-influenced Neoclassical Revival. Characterized by the same sense of monumentality as the Neoclassical style, Neo-Palladianism draws upon the architecture of Palladio and his followers for its composition and detailing. The Norfolk building's rusticated stonework, engaged entrance pavilion, and interior arcades suggest the influences of the Palladian school. Illustrative of the high architectural quality of buildings commissioned by the federal government in this period, the edifice was designed in 1898 as the U.S. Post Office and Courts Building by the Baltimore firm of Wyatt and Nolting. The firm was responsible for a number of architectural landmarks in Baltimore as well as in the Washington, D.C., area. Title to the building was transferred from the U.S. government to the city of Norfolk in 1937, when it was converted into a city hall. No longer used, the city plans to sell the building to a private concern that will sympathetically rehabilitate it for commercial use.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the period of its emergence as an international port, from 1880 to World War I, Norfolk witnessed a substantial growth in both its population and development. Between 1880 and 1900, the city's population increased 112%, resulting in a vast building boom in the city center as well as in the surrounding county. As a direct consequence of this activity, the U.S. government commissioned the Baltimore firm of Wyatt and Nolting to design a new building for the city's post office and federal courts. The firm's two principals, James B.N. Wyatt and William G. Nolting, brought to the project diverse architectural backgrounds.

William G. Nolting was born in Baltimore and educated in Richmond, where he apprenticed under Albert Lybrock. Later, he moved to Washington, D. C., and continued his training under William Poindexter, a Richmond native. He returned to Baltimore in 1887 and formed a partnership with James B. Wyatt, which lasted until 1925. James B. Wyatt was a native of Baltimore and was graduated from Harvard University in 1870. He studied architecture both at M.I.T. and the École Des Beaux Arts in Paris. Upon returning to Baltimore, he entered into practice with Joseph Sperry and later with William G. Nolting.

Among the outstanding firms in the city of Baltimore in this period, Wyatt and Nolting were responsible for such important Baltimore landmarks as the Keyser Building, the Baltimore Courthouse, the Fifth Regiment Armory, the Garrett Office Building, and the Federal Land Bank Building. They also designed a number of prominent residences, hospitals, and schools in the Maryland-Washington, D.C., area. The Norfolk City Hall building shows the

9. Major Bibliographical References (see Continuation Sheet #1)

Album of Norfolk, Virginia, and Historical Vicinity, St. Louis: Adolph Selige Publishing Co., 1907.
Know Norfolk, Virginia, Norfolk Advertising Board, Vol. I, No. 4, 1941.
Sapp, Charles P. Norfolk, Virginia, Gateway of the South, Norfolk: Sheldon Co., Inc., 1904.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 23,050 sq. ft.
 Quadrangle name Norfolk South, Va. Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<u>18</u>	<u>384920</u>	<u>41071841210</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

(See Boundary Justification, Item 7, Continuation Sheet #1)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff
 organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date July 1981
 street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3144
 city or town Richmond state Virginia 23219

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Tucker Hill*
 title Tucker Hill, Executive Director date JUL 21 1981
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

For HCRRS use only
 (I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register)
 Keeper of the National Register
 Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

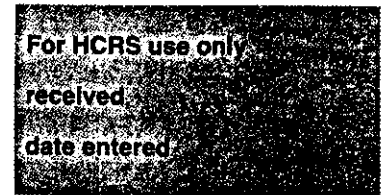
**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

OLD NORFOLK CITY HALL, Norfolk, Virginia

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 9, 7, 8

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- "Twentieth Century Edition," Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, June 1900.
 Wertebaker, Thomas J. Norfolk, Historic Southern Port. Durham: Duke University Press, 1962.
 Withey, Henry F. and Elsie R. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects. Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., 1970.

7. DESCRIPTION

alteration; however, current plans call for the restoration of the mezzanine area around the court. The offices on the third floor are arranged around the court opening. The floor has a blind arcade that runs the perimeter of the mezzanine area. The arcade has crosssetted architraves that frame the office openings alternating with marble tablets. Round medallions are found above the architraves. The coffered ceiling has ornamental plasterwork that includes a Greek fret and egg-and-dart ornamentation. The skylight is embellished by a plaster cornice featuring a geometric motif and a classically inspired anthemion motif. Upon the city's acquisition of the building, the third floor was altered to accommodate municipal offices.

The general plan of the building is an irregular rectangle, so shaped to conform to the irregular street plan and resulting corner lot size. The building occupies its entire lot, being built out to the street. It is a distinctly urban structure, maintaining itself as a visually dominant element in a tight commercial area.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The Old Norfolk City Hall is located at 235 East Plume Street in the city of Norfolk. The nominated property consists of the building and a small area to the south and west, occupying a total area of 23,050.81 sq.ft. and listed in the Norfolk City Deed Book as #1459. It encompasses 135.70' on Plume Street (north), 151.70' on Atlantic Street (east), 143.07' on a private lane (south), and 187.07' to the west. It is the same area that was turned over to the city of Norfolk when it acquired the property from the GSA of the U. S. government in 1937.

RCC

8. SIGNIFICANCE (Continued)

architects' successful use of the Neo-Palladian Revival style, which Wyatt no doubt brought to the project from his training in Paris. His exposure to French Neoclassicism and the mastery of Neo-Palladian details is evident in the design of the firm's Norfolk building.

The growth of Norfolk after World War I resulted in the need for a larger federal building. Not until 1934, however, were funds finally appropriated for a new federal building on Granby Street. Following its completion, the U.S. Post Office and Federal Courts Building was turned over to the city of Norfolk for use as a city hall. The public use

(See Continuation Sheet # 2)

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

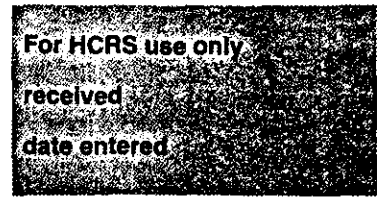
**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

OLD NORFOLK CITY HALL, Norfolk, Virginia

Continuation sheet # 2

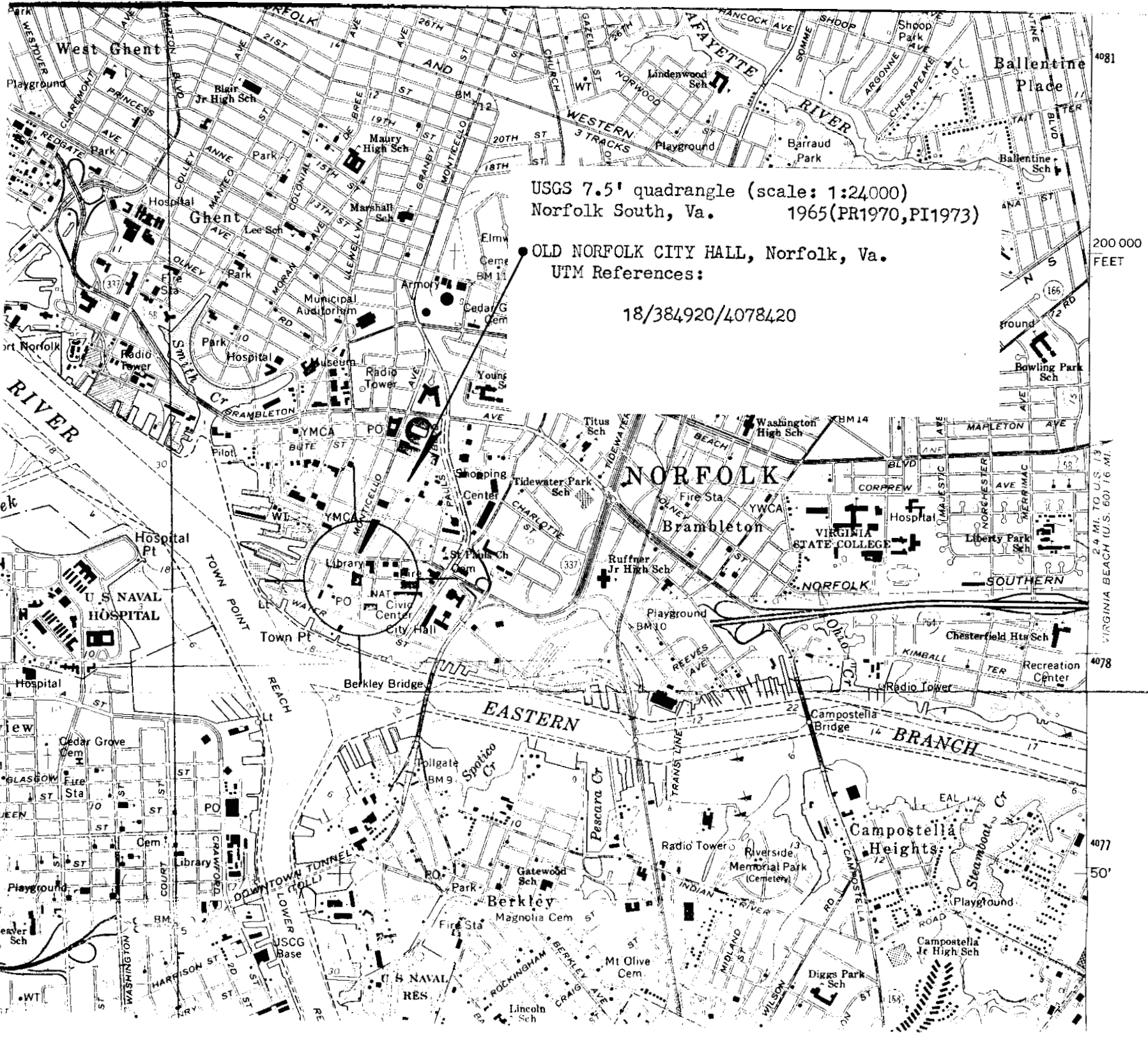
Item number 8

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restriction was released by the General Services Administration on July 17, 1980. The city now plans to sell the structure to a Richmond developer who is currently working on its conversion into a restaurant.

MTF/RCC



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale: 1:24000)
Norfolk South, Va. 1965 (PR1970, PI1973)

● OLD NORFOLK CITY HALL, Norfolk, Va.
UTM References:

18/384920/4078420

4081

200 000
FEET

2.4 MI. TO U.S. 13
VIRGINIA BEACH (U.S. 60) 1.6 MI.

4078

4077

50'