

U.S. Customs Service Port of Roosville,
INS Residence
45 feet southwest of Main Port Building
Eureka vicinity
Lincoln County
Montana

HABS No. MT-110-B
HABS
MT 110-B

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Intermountain Support Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S. CUSTOMS SERVICE PORT OF ROOSVILLE,
INS RESIDENCE

HABS No. MT-110-B

Location: On U.S. Highway 93 at the U.S.-Canada border, approximately eight miles north of Eureka, Montana; in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 1, Township 37 North, Range 27 West of the Principal Meridian

Date of Construction: 1933; altered in 1959, 1969

Architects: Louis A. Simon, Superintendent, Architectural Division, Department of the Treasury/ James A. Wetmore, Acting Supervising Architect, U.S. Treasury Department

Builder: Grover C. Gorsuch, Wenatchee, Washington

Present Owner: United States of America
General Services Administration/ Public Buildings Service
Rocky Mountain Region
Denver Federal Center, Building 41, Room 272
Denver, CO 80225-0546

Present Use: Vacant/Not in Use

Significance: Built in 1933, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Residence is an integral component of the historic border station complex comprising the Port of Roosville. The building served as a dwelling provided by the government for the use of INS officers and their families, while stationed at this relatively remote location to inspect traffic entering the U.S. from Canada and to enforce federal immigration laws. The design of this dwelling as well as the nearby duplicate U.S. Customs Service (USCS) Residence, is representative of standardized border station domestic architecture developed by prolific Treasury Department architect Louis A. Simon and erected at various locations along the U.S.-Canada border during the 1930s. The INS Residence was designed to be stylistically compatible with the associated Colonial Revival style Main Port Building. The dwelling also is reflective of the relative isolation of many border stations at a time when automobile transportation was more primitive, necessitating the provision of on-site housing for immigration inspectors.

I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Residence is one of two separate government inspectors' dwellings constructed as part of the U.S. Customs Service (USCS) border station complex comprising the Port of Roosville, Montana. The INS Residence is the southernmost of the two dwellings behind the Main Port Building, and the similar USCS Residence is located a short distance away to the north-northeast. The border station complex at Roosville was built in conjunction with the state sponsored and federally-aided improvement of U.S. Highway 93 in 1932-33, extending north from Eureka, Montana into British Columbia. The improved highway was intended to accommodate increased trans-border traffic and commerce, but also facilitated the smuggling of alcohol, a substance banned under the Volstead Act of 1919.

In 1927 the U.S. Customs Service initiated operations at the border crossing near Roosville in a small, wood frame building located on the east side of the unpaved road (predecessor to the improved U.S. 93) close to the international border. Intending to establish a more permanent inspection station at this location, the federal government in 1931 purchased a 6.8 acre tract of land adjoining the international border across from the small settlement of Roosville, British Columbia.

Improvement of Highway 93 from Stryker north to Roosville finally commenced in late 1932, and on November 3 the *Eureka Mirror* announced that a contract in the amount of \$41,100 was let for construction of a new customs house at Roosville. Contractor Grover C. Gorsuch of Wenatchee, Washington, was the successful bidder. Plans were drawn up by Louis A. Simon, Superintendent of the Treasury Department's Architectural Division, working under James A. Wetmore, Acting Supervising Architect for the Treasury Department. Initial work on the site began in February of 1933, and by mid-April, footings were being constructed for the two residences.

J.D. Levin, construction engineer for the Treasury Department, described the new INS and USCS dwellings being constructed:

“...there are two cottage residences, one for the Customs Inspector and one for the Immigration Inspector, located some distance behind the main building. These are each 24½ x 44 feet in size, and consists of a small basement, two bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, living room with fireplace, breakfast nook, and front and rear porches. Cottages are of frame construction; roofs of all buildings will be of architectural roof tile.”¹

The border station at Roosville was finally completed in November 1933, and the INS dwelling was occupied immediately.

¹ *Eureka Mirror*, March 2, 1933.

The INS residence at Roosville appears to represent a standardized design for immigration inspector's quarters replicated at other locations along the Canadian border. Complete comparative data is unavailable; however, other border stations at which officer's dwellings similar to Roosville appear to have been erected include Laurier and Metaline Falls, Washington; St. Johns, North Dakota; Chateaugay and Mooers, New York; and Coburn Gore and Fort Fairfield, Maine.

The design of the INS Residence was a simple, side-gabled, rectangular-plan form similar to the "Minimal Traditional" house style that achieved popularity with homebuilders in urban settings across America in the 1930s.² Included in the design were Colonial Revival details to complement the design of the Colonial Revival-style Main Port Building. These original Colonial Revival details included fanlights placed beneath the side gables, as well as prominent front porches equipped with unfluted cylindrical columns, wooden balustrade railings on the porch and porch roof, incorporating unique "asterisk" elements, and wooden balustrade handrails on the porch entry stairs. The Colonial Revival imagery was also enhanced by the symmetry of the façade, by the use of multi-light double-hung windows, and by the exterior covering of white-painted clapboard.³

Minor modifications were made to the building around 1959. The architectural firm of Brinkman & Lenon, based in Kalispell, Montana, was contracted to draw up plans for a variety of improvements and repairs to all of the border station buildings at Roosville. Modifications to both the INS and USCS inspectors' residences included screening-in of the front porches and replacement of the balustrade rails with plywood; removal of the attic windows (fanlights) and installation of wood louvers (attic vents) in each gable; and the addition of metal-covered eave extensions. Finally, the original wooden stairs accessing the rear porch were to be replaced by concrete steps equipped with pipe handrails.⁴ These alterations effectively removed the Colonial Revival detailing of the INS and USCS dwellings.

The INS dwelling underwent additional remodeling in the summer of 1969. These improvements, designed by the General Service Administration's (GSA's) Region 8 Design and Construction Division, included enclosing of the front porch and the relocation of its entry from the front to the right (north) side. This change involved removal of the existing porch railings and screening, construction of new framing and windows on the front, and installation of a new entry door with sidelights. The original

² Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), p.478.

³ The Colonial Revival stylistic details employed on the officers' dwellings are depicted on sheet no. 5 of the original plans for the U.S. Inspection Station, Roosville, Montana, 1932; these details are also visible on photographs taken by J.D. Levin during construction in 1933, now in Record Group 121, Box 25 ("Construction Management Division, Denver), National Archives, Denver branch.

⁴ See accompanying drawing no. 27-9 ("Improvements and Repairs"), prepared by Brinkman & Lenon, Architects and Engineers, Kalispell, Montana, c. 1959.

Classical columns were to be left in place. The porch was to be accessed via a new set of concrete steps equipped with wrought-iron handrails. The newly enclosed front porch was designed to contain an entry vestibule as well as an “all weather room.” The 1969 work also involved interior alterations as well as replacement of the original rear window with a new 3-light picture window.⁵

Sometime between 1978 and 2000, the house was re-sided with lapped aluminum siding. Although synthetic, this siding effectively mimicked the historic appearance of the exterior walls.

High radon levels were detected in all the buildings at the Port of Roosville in the 1990s. This discovery resulted in the permanent abandonment of both officers’ dwellings, although a radon remediation system was installed in the basement of the Main Port Building.⁶ After more than 60 years of convenience, INS officers thereafter had to commute to work from Eureka, approximately seven miles south of Roosville.

⁵ See accompanying drawing no. 27-21 (“Repairs & Improvements, Residence Modification”), prepared by GSA’s Design and Construction Division, Region 8, Denver, 10/1/68.

⁶ CTA Architects Engineers, *Feasibility Study, United States Border Station, Roosville, Montana, Final Submittal, April 17, 1998*, submitted to the General Services Administration, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver, pp. 4-5.

II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) residence is the southernmost of two similar buildings located behind the Main Port Building at the U.S. Customs inspection station of Roosville, Montana. Built in the Modern/Minimal Traditional Style (originally embellished with Colonial Revival style details), it is a one story, wood frame, side-gabled dwelling set upon a concrete basement. Its plan is a mirror image of the plan for the USCS dwelling, located a short distance to the north. The residence is a rectangular plan, six room house (two bedrooms, one bathroom) with an additional room occupying a projecting enclosed front porch. The dwelling is clad with narrow lapped aluminum siding (simulated clapboard). Its moderately pitched gable roof has boxed eaves and negligible rake overhang, and is clad with painted wood or tile shingles. The house is fenestrated throughout with double-hung, wood sash windows. Entries are located on the north side of the projecting front porch, as well as the north elevation near the structure's northwest corner. A basement entry stairwell is also located on the north side of the building.

The fenestration of this dwelling is nearly identical to the nearby USCS dwelling, consisting of multi-light, double-hung, wood sash windows. A notable exception is the replacement of the triple central window on the rear (west) elevation with a large fixed rectangular picture window. A movable awning is affixed to the back wall of the house to shade this window from excessive afternoon sunlight.

The only other major difference in the design of this house as compared with the USCS dwelling is the projecting front porch. As noted above, the front porch is enclosed and serves as an extra interior room. This projecting room is glazed above the closed rail by a series of 1/2 light fixed windows, and contains a small enclosed porch in its north end.

Like the USCS dwelling, the INS residence is uninhabited but appears to be in very good condition. The only exterior alterations evident are re-siding with lapped aluminum siding that effectively mimics clapboard; the replacement of the porch and basement doors with modern units, and the installation of modern storm windows. These modifications do not significantly alter the building's historic appearance and character.