

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

HABS No. MT-110-C
HABS
MT-110-C

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,
USCS RESIDENCE

HABS No. MT-110-C

- Location: On U.S. Highway 93 at the U.S.-Canada border, approximately eight miles north of Eureka, Montana; in the NW ¼ of the NE ¼ of the SW ¼ 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 U.S. Customs Service (USCS) 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 USCS officers and their families, while stationed at this relatively remote location to inspect traffic entering the U.S. from Canada and to enforce federal customs laws. The design of this dwelling as well as the nearby duplicate Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) 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 USCS 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 customs inspectors.

I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (USCS) 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 USCS Residence is the northernmost of the two dwellings behind the Main Port Building, and the similar INS Residence is located a short distance away to the south-southwest. 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 USCS and INS 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 USCS dwelling was occupied immediately.

¹ *Eureka Mirror*, March 2, 1933.

The USCS 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 USCS 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 USCS and INS 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 USCS and INS dwellings.

Sometime between 1978 and 2000, the USCS inspector's 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

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.

Building.⁵ After more than 60 years of convenience, USCS officers thereafter had to commute to work from Eureka, approximately seven miles south of Roosville.

⁵ 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 U.S. Customs Service (USCS) residence is the northernmost of two similar buildings located behind the Main Port Building at the U.S. Customs inspection station of Roosville, Montana. It is a one story, wood frame, side-gabled dwelling set upon a concrete basement. The residence is a rectangular plan, six room house (two bedrooms, one bathroom) with a projecting semi-enclosed, screened front porch containing the main entry. 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 structure's front and south sides.

The dwelling's façade is symmetrically arranged, and is dominated by a wide projecting front porch covered by a nearly flat roof. The porch has a closed rail clad with lapped aluminum siding, above which are screened bays framed by square-sided wooden posts with capitals. The porch features a centrally located entry accessed by poured concrete steps equipped with pipe handrails. The porch entry is sealed by a modern glazed metal door containing 12 lights set beneath a transom. Within the porch is the main door to the house, consisting of the original painted wooden door containing nine lights placed above two recessed rectangular panels. The original wooden screen door is installed over the front entry. Flanking the main entry on the front wall within the porch are identical 6/6 light windows. On either side of the front porch are small 6/6 light windows.

The rear or west elevation is symmetrically fenestrated with five windows, including a centrally placed, large triple set of 6/6 light windows separated by mullions. Flanking these central windows are identical narrow 4/4 light windows. A solitary 6/6 light window is located near the north end of the elevation, and a tandem set of similar windows (separated by a mullion) is placed near the building's south end.

The south elevation is equipped with a basement entry stairwell as well as a small, elevated open porch and side entry at the dwelling's southwest corner. The porch consists of a poured concrete stoop with painted pipe handrails. The side entry is sealed by a modern glazed and painted door. The south elevation is fenestrated with two different sized 6/6 light windows, as well as a small rectangular attic vent placed beneath the gable.

The north elevation is symmetrically fenestrated with two small 6/6 light windows. A small rectangular attic vent is placed beneath the peak of the gable.

A fireplace in the building's living room is equipped with a brick chimney that rises through the peak of the roof, offset towards the south. Two pyramidal sheet metal attic vents – similar to those on the roof of the Main Port Building - are placed atop the ridge line of the roof, equidistant from each end of the house.

Although uninhabited due to high radon levels, the USCS dwelling is well maintained and appears to be very good condition. The only exterior alterations evident are re-siding with lapped aluminum siding that effectively mimics clapboard; 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.

The house is a virtually unmodified example of the Modern/ Minimal Traditional style of domestic architecture. The style is characterized by the omission of historical "revival" imagery or other ornamentation, and reflects a design emphasis on economy and functionality. The INS and USCS dwellings at Roosville are representative of a very popular house form built in both rural and urban areas throughout the United States from c. the 1930s through the 1950s (McAlester and McAlester 1988:477-478).