

391/132011
INTERIM HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT, PART I
~~CLEANING~~ ^{on} EXTERIOR OF
FIRST BANK OF THE UNITED STATES
PART I
INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
JULY 1959

Region Five
421 Walnut Street
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

July 28, 1959

Nelligan
7/28

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park
From: Regional Director
Subject: Interim Historic Structures Report, Part I, Cleaning
of Exterior of First Bank of the United States

This Office recommends approval of the subject report.

(Sgd.) Daniel J. Tobin

Daniel J. Tobin
Regional Director

In duplicate

Copy to: Director
Chief, EONC
Operations Division

MHNelligan/cp

General
Daily
Area



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

July 21, 1959

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H30-DCA

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
JUL 23 1959		
✓ REG. DIRECTOR		
✓ ASST. REG. DIR.		
✓ OPERATIONS		
✓ INTERPRETATION		
✓ ADM.		
✓ REC. RES. PLAN.		
✓ RANGERS ACT'S		

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Acting Chief Architect

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part I, Cleaning of Exterior
of First Bank of the United States, Independence

The Historic Structures Report, Part I, Cleaning of Exterior
of First Bank of the United States, Independence National Historical
Park has been reviewed by the interested Divisions in the Washington
Office and is recommended for approval.

Charles W. Lessig
Charles W. Lessig
Acting Chief Architect

Copy to: Chief, EODC (2)
Supt., Independence

Info	OPERATIONS	Act	Initial and Date
	Lands		
	Engineer		
✓	Architect		
✓	Land Archt.		
✓	Programs		

Crawford
J.E.C. 8/4
Davis 8/7

Interim Historic Structures Report - Part I

Cleaning Exterior First Bank - INDEPENDENCE "

INTERPRETATION

☒	History
☒	Nat. His.
☐	Archeo.
☐	Publ.
☐	Museum
☒	Soc'y.
☐	
☐	

OK Agree with recs

OPERATIONS

1/14/59

return 7/23

Info	OPERATIONS	Act	Initial and Date
☒	1st		
☐	2nd		
☐	3rd		
☐	4th	☒	
☐	5th		
☐	6th		
☐	7th		
☐	8th		
☐	9th		
☐	10th		
☐	11th		
☐	12th		

ASSISTANT REGIONAL DIRECTOR

will return 7/20

OK
SAP 7/22

REG. DIRECTOR

No comment - looks OK

Dr
7/14/59

COMMENTS DUE SUPT. July 20, 1959

Passarelli
7/10
Nelly
7/16

Region Five
421 Walnut Street
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

July 10, 1959

Memorandum

To: Director
From: Regional Director
Subject: Interim Historic Structures Report, Part I, Cleaning of
Exterior of First Bank of the United States - Independence
NHP

Attached for your review is an Interim Historic Structures Report for the cleaning of the exterior of the First Bank of the First Bank of the United States. This report was prepared in accordance with this office's memorandum of June 25. One copy is also being forwarded to EODC for review. Please submit comments by July 20.

(Sgd.) Daniel J. Tobin

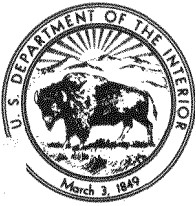
Daniel J. Tobin
Regional Director

In duplicate

Attachments 2

Copy to: EODC, w/copy of Report
Supt., Independence

CPassarelli
General
Daily
Area
Operations Division



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Independence National Historical Park
Old Custom House
420 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

July 9, 1959

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H30

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
JUL 9 - 1959		
REG. DIRECTOR		<i>ad</i>
ASST. REG. DIR.		
OPERATIONS		
INTERPRETATION		<i>CP</i>
ADM.		
REC. RES. PLAN		
RANGER ACT'S		

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region V

From: Superintendent, Independence NHP

Subject: Interim Historic Structures Report, Part I, Cleaning of
Exterior of First Bank of the United States

In accordance with your memorandum of June 25, 1959, we
are herewith transmitting in quadruplicate for review Interim His-
toric Structures Report on First Bank of the United States, Part I.

M. O. Anderson
M. O. Anderson
Superintendent

Enclosures (4)

Nelligan
6/25/59

Region Five
421 Walnut Street
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

June 25, 1959

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park

From: Acting Regional Director

Subject: Interim Historic Structures Report, Part I, Cleaning
of Exterior of First Bank of United States

We understand that an Historic Structures Report, Part I, for the First Bank of the United States is scheduled to be prepared sometime this fall; in the meantime, however, it is generally agreed that landscape development in progress about the building makes it desirable to clean up the exterior of the building by removing the present unsightly paint.

So all offices concerned may be sure of the purpose of the paint removal project, and its relationship to the historic appearance of the structure, we believe that an interim Historic Structures Report, Part I, limited to this project, would be desirable. Such a report should consist of two conventional sections: a brief Administrative Data Section outlining the purpose, etc. of the project, and a brief and not necessarily illustrated Historical Data Section presenting the essential evidence regarding the exterior finish of the structure - whether painted or not. A page or two at the most should suffice. We suggest that it be prepared and submitted to this office for review distribution as soon as possible.

It occurs to us that the ornamental plaster on the wood tympanum above the portico should be considered separately from the paint removal project, because it will probably involve technical Museum Branch collaboration in its conservation.

(Sgd.) George A. Palmer

George A. Palmer

Acting Regional Director

In duplicate

Copy to: Director
Chief, EODC

MHNelligan/ep
General
Daily
Area
Operations Division

Region 5 copy

SIGNATURE SHEET

RECOMMENDED

Director Date _____

Regional Director Date _____

Chief, Eastern Office, Div. of Design & Construction Date _____

APPROVED

Superintendent Date _____

Interim Historic Structures Report

on

First Bank of the United States

Part I

Prepared by

Staff

Independence National Historical Park

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

July 1959

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Finish of the Building

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CHAPTER I

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Prepared by Superintendent M. O. Anderson

This interim historic structures report has been prepared as a necessary preliminary to the removal of paint from the brick wall of the First Bank of the United States building. The historical data section of this report has established the fact that there was no paint on the walls before 1846. Thus removal of the paint can be accomplished with no loss of historical values. As the project will return the walls to their original appearance, it is strongly endorsed.

The recommendation for investigation of the paint in advance of removal is also concurred in.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL DATA

Prepared by Historian David A. Kimball

HISTORICAL DATA ON EXTERIOR
FINISH OF THE BUILDING

The much admired building on south Third Street occupied on July 24, 1797 by the Bank of the United States for many years "... towered as a dominating presence among the brick and frame structures of the old Quaker City, and for a few years...had no rival as the masterpiece of Philadelphia for beauty and grandeur of architecture." By 1800 the then enormous total of \$110,168.05 had been lavished on its construction. For this sum of money, the president and trustees had raised a structure, the front of which was, according to a contemporary account, "...covered entirely with elegant polished marble, decorated with superb specimens of sculpture; and a great piazza...the top of which [was] supported by marble pillars of immense size and height."

This splendid facade was in marked contrast to the sides and rear wall of the building. They were of brick except for the sills and lintels of the windows, the foundation stones, and the elaborate wooden cornice. No less an authority than the designer himself, Samuel Blodget, Jr., termed this use of brick "an injurious deviation" from his original plan.

That the brick of the walls was natural red in color is implicit in Blodget's statement. Confirmation of this interpretation is found in those copies of the Birch prints of 1798, "Bank of the United States With a View of Third Street, Philadelphia," and 1799, "Bank of the United States in Third-Street," which were colored at the time of

issuance. These prints show the north and south walls to have been brick red. Later prints add nothing to our knowledge of the building's wall finish. All prints show the cornice, balustrade, and tympanum as white.

For nearly fifty years this was the condition of the bank building's exterior. Then around May 15, 1846, in preparation for resumption of business by one of the successor banking firms, the marble-work was scrubbed with sand and water. Four days later, noting the progress of the work, the Public Ledger suggested a further improvement:

As this building is now undergoing the purifying process of whitewashing, scrubbing, &c., would it not be advisable on the part of the owners, the city, or the tenants of the bank, to have the north and south sides rough-cast or plastered in imitation of marble? The building has been a standing joke to connoisseurs in architecture ever since it was built and it certainly looks odd with its richly ornamented marble front and plain brick sides. It has been aptly likened to a white satin vest with a red flannel back, and as the bricks are getting very dark, it would be well to obviate a comparison between them and dirty flannels.

For once a newspaper experienced the satisfaction of having its advice followed by officialdom. On June 1, the Public Ledger proudly announced: "...city authorities have adopted our suggestion in relation to painting the sides of the Girard Banking House. Workmen are engaged in giving the sides a coat of white which will make them at least seem to be in harmony with the marble front."

The building is now painted grey.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The sides and rear wall of the First Bank building were unpainted until 1846. It is therefore recommended that the grey paint presently on the brickwork be removed. Before this is done, samples of the paint should be taken for analysis and possible future use in exhibits.

The cornice, balustrade, and tympanum were in all probability originally painted white. An investigation should be undertaken to confirm the evidence of the prints referred to in section 1 above. However, no general removal of paint from these features should be undertaken until the analyses have been completed and a plan has been evolved to assure preservation of the exposed woodwork.