Historic American Buildings Survey

Resource Guide & Bibliography

Logan Circle Area Survey, 1300 Block of Vermont Ave., NW.
In Historic American Buildings Survey: District of Columbia Catalog.
Resources in the Special Collections Research Center

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THE HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY (HABS)

On a November day in 1933 Charles E. Peterson, an architect for the National Park Service, wrote a letter to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. Peterson proposed that relief employment be provided for architects by having them record interesting and historic buildings of all kinds, so as to document their history before they passed into oblivion. Ickes was supportive of the idea. Harry Hopkins, assistant to President Roosevelt, approved the plan, which was to fall under the Civil Works Administration, and later the Works Projects Administration.

On November 29 the Washington Post reported that 1,200 architects would be employed for six months to measure, photograph, and prepare drawings of historic public buildings, churches, bridges, homes, and other structures. In July 1934 the Department of Interior, on behalf of its own National Park Service, entered a so called "Tripartite Agreement" with the Library of Congress, and the American Institute of Architects to oversee the project. The Park Service was to administer the program, the AIA supplied the architects, and the Library of Congress received the documents and made them available for public access and use.

The project, of course, lasted longer than six months, and while funding for HABS ceased from World War II until 1957, its work continues to this day. HABS has documented over 27,000 structures, and 600-800 people use the collection at the Library of Congress each month, making it one of the Library's most popular. The goal of HABS is to provide architects, scholars, and interested researchers comprehensive documentation of buildings and structures significant in American history.

The 56 microfiche collection in Special Collections covers over 200 structures in the District of Columbia surveyed from the 1930s to 1979. Structures are chosen for inclusion in the survey based on their architectural interest and merit, as well as historical associations. Beyond the name and location, many contain detailed historical and architectural information. This includes records of ownership, present condition, materials of construction, dimensions, number of doorways and windows, etc.

For further information on historic buildings in Washington, D.C., consult the Special Collections finding aids entitled "A Guide to Washington, D.C. Architecture" and "Real Estate Directories of the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area." The former offers sources on D.C. neighborhoods and historic preservation, and the later provides a graphic illustration of the city's development in this century.
THE HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY (HABS)

Holdings: 1933-1979 (56 Microfiche)

Fiche number 1 through 25 contain structures located in Georgetown, with the remaining balance covering Washington, D.C. in general. Entries which include a detailed record are designated with an asterisk (*) after the title and number (prints can be ordered from the Library of Congress from these numbers).

Call Number: Special Collections Microfiche S2

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Old Stone House (DC-2) *
Row Houses 3001 to 3009 M St., NW

Fiche #2

Ross & Getty Building (DC-113) *
John Mason (Worthington) House (DC-28)
Mackall Square (DC-164)
Dumbarton House (DC-10)
Bowie-Sevier House (DC-60)
Halcyon (Stoddert) House (DC-69) *
Old North Building, Georgetown University (DC-170)
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (DC-147) *

Fiche #3

John Mountz House (DC-18)
U.S. Customhouse and Post Office (DC-138) *
Cottage at 1222 28th St., NW (DC-149)
Fiche #4
William Knowles House (DC-163) *
John Stoddert Haw House (DC-156)
House at 2817 N St., NW (DC-157)
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Cox House (DC-150)
Clement Smith (Bodisco) House (DC-174)
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House at 3115-17 M St., NW (DC-33) *
Corcoran House (DC-34)
Riggs-Riley House (DC-46) *
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Grace Protestant Episcopal Church (DC-101) *
John Davidson House (DC-102) *
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