Declared NHL under theme: "Pol. & Mil. Affairs" (19
Also considered under Architecture (1971)

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)

STATE: District of Columbia	
COUNTY:	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON: Decatur House

AND/OR HISTORIC: Decatur House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 748 Jackson Place, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia | CODE: | COUNTY: | CODE:

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP		STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☐ District ☒ Building ☐ Site ☐ Structure ☐ Object	☐ Public ☒ Private ☐ Both	Public Acquisition: ☐ In Process ☐ Being Considered	☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Preservation work in progress	Yes: ☒ Restricted ☐ Unrestricted ☐ No

PRESENT USE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

☐ Agricultural	☐ Government	☐ Park	☐ Transportation	☐ Comments
☐ Commercial	☐ Industrial	☐ Private Residence	☐ Other *(Specify)*	
☐ Educational	☐ Military	☐ Religious		
☐ Entertainment	☒ Museum	☐ Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: National Trust for Historic Preservation

STREET AND NUMBER: 748 Jackson Place, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington | STATE: District of Columbia | CODE:

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Recorder of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER: 6th and D Streets, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington | STATE: District of Columbia | CODE:

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1937, 1964 ☒ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Washington | STATE: District of Columbia | CODE:

STATE: | COUNTY: | ENTRY NUMBER | DATE | FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	[X] Excellent	[ ] Good	[ ] Fair	[ ] Deteriorated	[ ] Ruins	[ ] Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	[ ] Altered	[X] Unaltered		[ ] Moved	[X] Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL *(if known)* PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Decatur House is built of brick on a stone foundation. The brickwork is laid in Flemish bond on the East front, and common bond on the other three elevations. The house is rectangular, 51' x 45' with a long two-story masonry service wing and stable facing H Street and joining the house at the Northwest corner. There are three full stories over a basement.

The East elevation, facing Lafayette Park, is three bays wide with the principal entrance in the center. This entrance has a flat elliptical glazed transom over an eight-panel door flanked by glazed sidelights. The windows of the second floor are much higher than those of the ground floor and the third floor. They are six lights over nine and reflect the fact that the second floor is the principal floor of the house and contains the main reception rooms. The flat stone lintels of this facade are of stone and have decorated corner blocks. The North elevation is four bays wide, and of the total of twelve window bays, six are false. The windows of this facade have brick jack-arch lintels. The house has a shallow hipped roof covered in slate, and four interior end chimneys. The eaves have a marked projection supported by a simple wooden cornice with panelled soffit and widely spaced, underscaled modillions used as brackets.

The ground floor has a central hall plan with the principal stair hall immediately behind the highly sophisticated vestibule. To the south of this central axis are two nearly identical family sitting/dining rooms. To the North is the principal bed chamber and behind it a dressing room and service stair and a modern elevator. The trim on this floor is quite simple except for the vestibule. The vestibule is divided into three parts, the first part being a shallow rectangle in plan with a ceiling consisting of a shallow barrel vault. The central section is a square in plan, the ceiling of which is a flat circle inscribed in the square and supported on pendentives. The rear section of the vestibule is a semicircle in plan and has a ceiling of a half dome above a central doorway flanked by arched alcoves.

The second floor is the principal floor of the house. It contains a large rectangular drawing room across two of the three bays of the East front. The third bay is taken up by the dining room which also extends two thirds of the length of the North facade. Behind the dining room is the service stair to the third floor and a service room. South of the stair hall is a smaller drawing room overlooking the garden. The main drawing room and the dining room have elaborate painted ceilings and inlaid parquetry floors installed during the Beale occupancy. The third floor, originally bedrooms, is now used as offices for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Some original mantels from this floor have been relocated in the ground floor rooms. The basement is divided into storage and archive storage rooms.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- [ ] Pre-Columbian
- [ ] 15th Century
- [ ] 16th Century
- [ ] 17th Century
- [ ] 18th Century
- [x] 19th Century
- [ ] 20th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) *(If Applicable and Known)*

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- Aboriginal
  - [ ] Prehistoric
  - [ ] Historic
- [ ] Agriculture
- [x] Architecture
- [ ] Art
- [ ] Commerce
- [ ] Communications
- [ ] Conservation
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Engineering
- [ ] Industry
- [ ] Invention
- [ ] Landscape Architecture
- [ ] Literature
- [x] Military
- [ ] Music
- [x] Political
- [ ] Religion/Philosophy
- [ ] Science
- [ ] Sculpture
- [ ] Social/Humanitarian
- [ ] Theater
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Urban Planning
- [ ] Other *(Specify)*

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Decatur House, situated on the Southwest corner of the intersection of Jackson Place and H Street, N.W., overlooking Lafayette Park, was designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820) as the residence of Commodore and Mrs. Stephen Decatur. This severe three-story brick house has been a social center for official Washington ever since it was completed in 1819. Decatur House was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960 under the theme "Political and Military Affairs."

The actual design of Decatur House itself is somewhat flawed when compared with houses of its period of similar prominence. With the exception of the very fine vestibule, the plan lacks the coherent brilliance and originality which distinguish, for example The Octagon and Tudor Place. In elevation the impressive simplicity of the near-cube of its mass is reduced by the lack of unity and the indecision of the design of the North elevation which, because of the prominent corner location of the house, is seen as a unit with the East elevation and yet is of a different scale, design, and rhythm and contains an unresolved array of false and genuine window bays.

Its major architectural significance lies chiefly in two areas. Firstly, it is one of the very few surviving residential structures designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe. The existence of many of Latrobe's working drawings for the house, and the remarkable state of preservation of the structure itself combine to form a highly important specimen of Latrobe's work. Secondly, the important role this building has played in the planning and development of Lafayette Park is of paramount significance. The relationship between Decatur House, Saint John's Church, the White House, and the park itself are the factors which give the area its essential character.

History:

Decatur House was commenced in the spring of 1818 and completed in January of 1819. The construction of the house was a deliberate exercise in prominence. Commodore Stephen Decatur, for whom the house was built, was at the height of his distinguished naval career. He and his wife, Susan Wheeler Decatur, wished to establish themselves firmly in Washington society. They chose as a site for their house the Southwest corner of the intersection of Jackson Place and H Street, N.W.,

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. Significance (1)

diagonally across Lafayette Park from the White House. They chose as their architect, Benjamin Henry Latrobe who had worked on the Capitol, the White House, and on Saint John's Church. The imposing house that resulted from this combination was to be the home of the Decatur's for little over a year. Stephen Decatur was mortally wounded in a duel with Commodore James Barron on March 22, 1820, and died that evening in Decatur House.

Mrs. Decatur found it necessary to take up residence elsewhere and therefore leased Decatur House to a series of foreign diplomats, and then to Secretary of State Henry Clay from 1827 to 1830. Clay was followed by Martin Van Buren, and then by the British Minister. The house was finally sold, to John Gadsby, and upon his death leased to Judah P. Benjamin when he was Senator from Louisiana. Finally, during the Civil War the house was used for a time as government offices.

In May 1871 Decatur House was sold to General Edward Fitzgerald Beale, however the government did not finally vacate the premises until February 29, 1872. The Beales altered the appearance of the exterior of the East front by enriching the ground floor bays with heavy brownstone trim and lowering the sills of the windows. On the interior the vestibule and the main reception rooms were extensively redecorated. Upon the death of Mrs. Beale in 1902 the house passed to her son, Truxton Beale. After the death of Truxton Beale, his wife continued to occupy the house and maintain extensive social responsibilities. In 1944 she commissioned Thomas T. Waterman to restore the ground floor exterior of the East front as closely as possible to the original as research at that time made possible. She also had the decorated ceilings in the principal reception rooms on the second floor repainted. Upon Mrs. Beale's death in 1956 her will provided for the bequest of the house to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The house at present serves the dual purpose of a historic house museum depicting the Decatur and the Beale occupancies and also the purpose of headquarters for the National Trust.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

James G. VanDerpool, "Historical Development of Architecture in the U.S.A., 1632-1912," (N.P.S. Ms., 1966), ; Harold D. Eberlein and Cortland Van Dyke Hubbard, Historic Houses of Georgetown and Washington City (Richmond, 1938), 259-274; Hugh N. Jackson, ed., A Guide to the Architecture of Washinton, D.C. (New York, Washington, and London, 1965), 77; Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic (New York, 1922), 239, 252, 298 ; Washington, D.C., A Guide to the Nation's Capitol (American Guide Series) (New York, 1937), 257-258, Talbot F. Hamlin, Benjamin Henry Latrobe (New York, 1956);

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY						OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES					
CORNER	LATITUDE			LONGITUDE			LATITUDE			LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	38°	53'	59"	77°	02'	20"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: W. Brown Morton III

ORGANIZATION: Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service

DATE: 2/8/71

STREET AND NUMBER: 801 19th Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia

CODE:

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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 National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☐

Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

_____
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

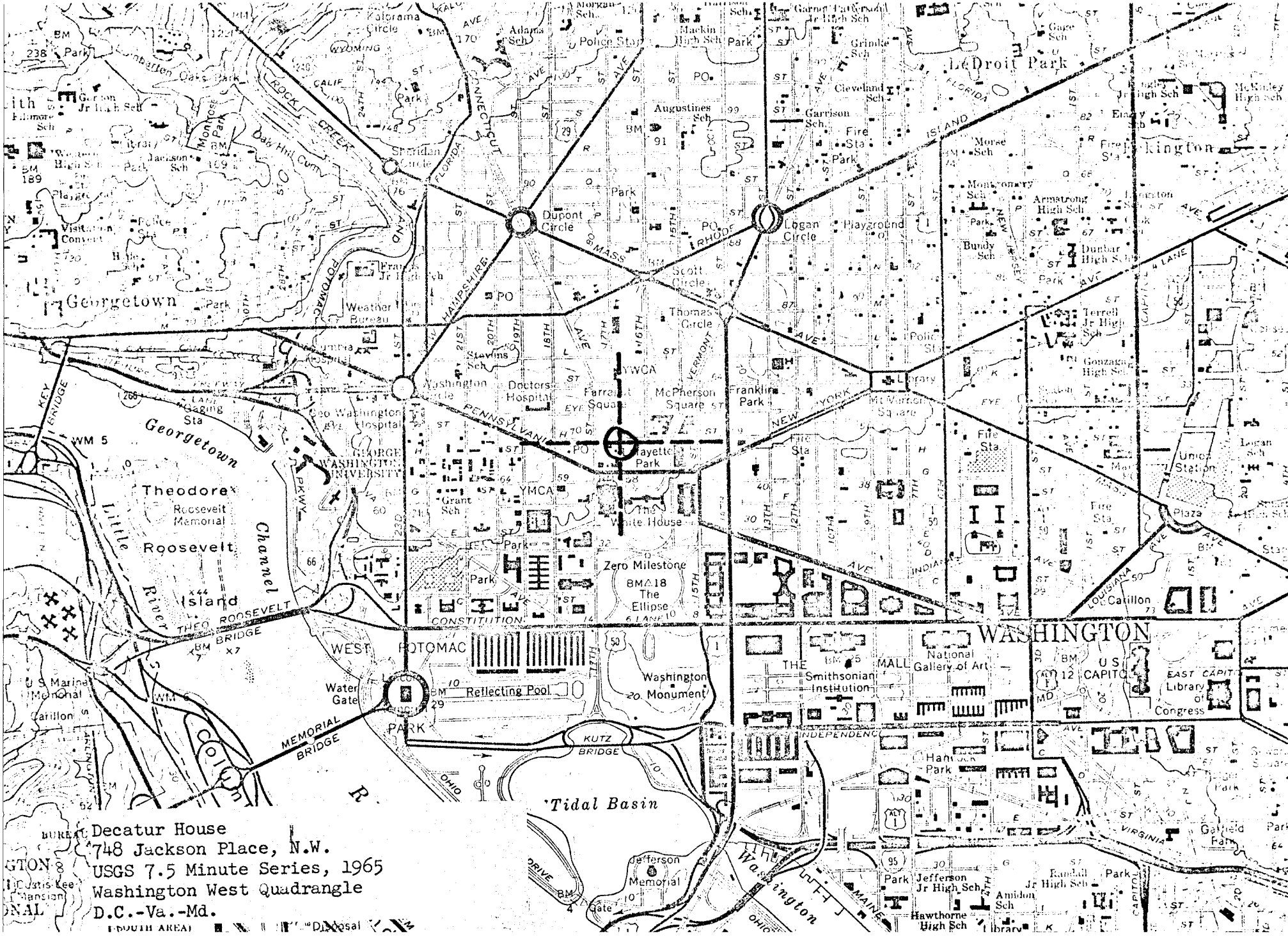
Date _____

ATTEST:

_____
Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



Decatur House
748 Jackson Place, N.W.
USGS 7.5 Minute Series, 1965
Washington West Quadrangle
D.C.-Va.-Md.

Form 10-300a
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

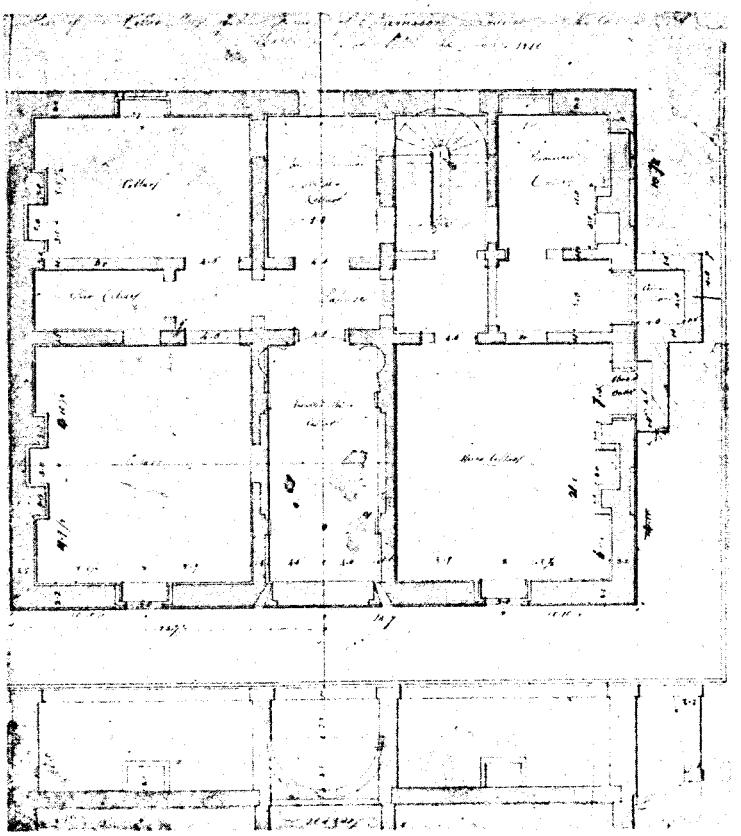
(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
District of Columbia	
COUNTY	

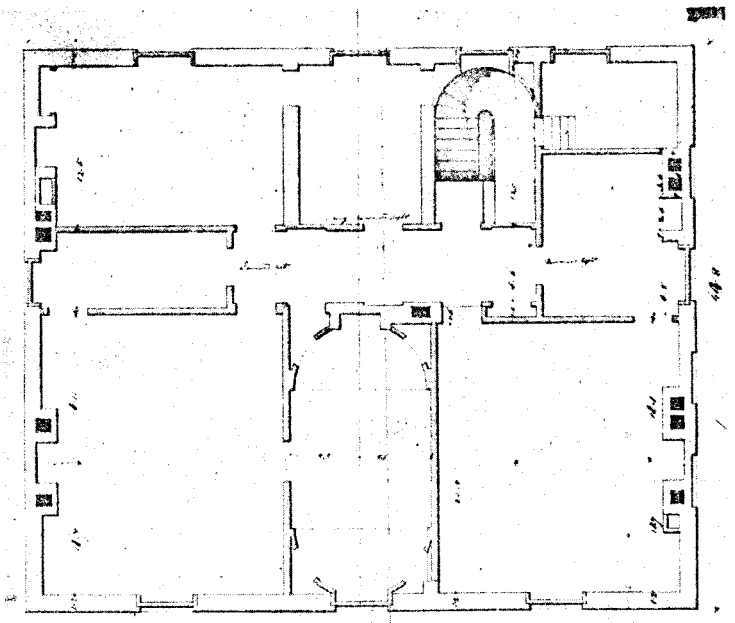
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

Decatur House
Basement and
3rd Floor Plan



"Plan of the Cellar Story of New House of Commodore Decatur in the City of Washington —B. H. Latrobe Jany. 1818." Pink: foundations; violet: walls on foundations; yellow: joists in section. Inscriptions: "Cellar/ Beer Cellar/ Vaulted Provision/ Vegetable Cellar/ Passage/Vaulted Wine Cellar/Stairs/Provision Cellar, Wood Cellar, Cellar Door, Wood Door." "Section" (Library of Congress Collection).



Latrobe plan in ink and wash for third floor, Decatur House—pink: masonry walls; yellow: partitions and window frames. Inscriptions: "Borrowed light/a large borrowed light" (Library of Congress Collection).