Declared NHL under theme: Pol. & Mil. Affairs (1960)
Additional recognition under: Architecture (1972)

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

STATE: District of Columbia
COUNTY:

FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER | DATE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON: The Octagon

AND/OR HISTORIC: Colonel John Tayloe House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 1799 New York Avenue, 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: American Institute of Architects

STREET AND NUMBER: 1735 New York Avenue, 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: 1936 ☒ 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

(116)

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

The Octagon is built of red brick over a stone basement and is trimmed with Aquia Creek sandstone sills, beltcourse, and recessed decorative panels. The house is three stories over a raised basement, and was originally constructed with a flat roof behind a high brick parapet. Circa 1840 a hipped roof was constructed over this original roof, the parapet removed and the present cornice installed. Not an octagon at all, the house is an irregular hexagon with a projecting semicircular bay containing the circular entrance hall on the main floor and the "Treaty Room" on the second floor. The principal entrance is in the central bay of this hall and has a semi-circular leaded and glazed transom. On the exterior this doorway is preceded by a one-story Ionic porch with two unfluted Ionic columns with Coade Stone composition bases and capitals. The stone steps and iron hand rail leading to the street were lengthened later in the 19th century when the level of the street was lowered approximately two feet. The handrail is terminated at the bottom step by a pair of handsome wrought iron lantern holders. The exterior elevation of the street facade is marked at the second floor level by a stone belt course and elliptical iron balconies. Above the second floor windows are recessed rectangular stone panels and no belt course. The double hung window sash is six panes over six on the first floor, six over nine on the second floor, and three over three on the third floor. The 18th Street and New York Avenue elevations are laid in flemish bond and the garden elevations are laid in English bond. The window lintels, except in the stair hall are rubbed brick jack arches without keystones. The Octagon is an exceptionally well thought out and direct house. The only lapse from "truthfulness" is that the exterior design creates the visual impression that the second floor of the house is the principal floor, the "piano nobile," in the European fashion. However, the interior reveals that the principal rooms are on the ground floor and that the second floor rooms are subordinate in size and decoration. The entrance hall is circular in plan, 20'-2" in diameter. There are two window bays, one on either side of the entrance door. Opposite the entrance is a recessed arch opening to the stair hall. This arch is supported by two engaged fluted Corinthian columns with composition decoration. Flanking this archway are arched alcoves containing cast iron heating stoves resembling classical urns on pedestals. The floor of the entrance hall is covered with gray and white tile squares with a central motif made up of black and white tiles. This hall has a molded baseboard, chair rail and an elaborate plaster cornice decorated with foliated ornament.

Beyond the entrance hall is the stair hall, roughly oval in shape, approximately 13 feet wide and 25 feet long. The graceful, simple wooden stair rises to the third story with straight double runs and semicircular landings. The rounded handrail is supported by unadorned rectangular balusters, some of which are executed in iron to strengthen the stair. At the first floor landing is a Palladian window overlooking the garden and at the third floor landing a wide semicircular window. West of the main stair is a small enclosed service stair. Flanking the entrance hall and the stair hall on the first floor, and at an angle to them are the

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

7. Description (1)

two principal reception rooms of the house, nearly identical in size. The dining room to the West is 28'-3 1/3" X 19'-10 3/4"; the drawing room to the East is 28'-0" X 20'-0". Both rooms have excellent Coade Stone mantels of cast stone composition. The drawing room mantel is signed "Coade London 1799" and is the more elaborate of the two being decorated with bas relief antique figures and floral garlands. The dining room mantel is decorated with more simple marine motifs. Both mantels have shelves of wood applied composition anthemion ornament. Both rooms have decorated plaster cornices and plaster center pieces in the ceiling.

The circular study on the second floor, known as the "Treaty Room" has a molded chair rail and baseboard, a wooden mantelpiece decorated with applied composition ornament of wheat and foliated scrolls, and a decorated plaster cornice with rosettes in the soffit. The principal doorway to this room has a six paneled door with molded architrave set in a recessed archway. The second floor rooms flanking the "Treaty Room" now large exhibition rooms, were originally partitioned. The West room was divided into two rooms, each with a fireplace. The East room divided into a small vestibule, a large room with fireplace, and a smaller dressing room which connected with the "Treaty Room." On the third floor both large flanking spaces were partitioned in a manner similar to the West room below. In the basement is the original kitchen, recently restored, and other service rooms. On the West boundary of The Octagon property, along 18th Street, were constructed a rectangular smoke house and a six-bay stable. Both buildings had flat roofs when constructed which were changed at a later date. The smoke house was moved from its original site early in 1971 during the construction of a new headquarters building behind The Octagon for the A.I.A. When this project has been completed the small building will be returned to its original location. The stable, which had previously been incorporated into the former A.I.A. headquarters in 1940, has been demolished.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

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

The Octagon, 1799 New York Avenue, Washington, D.C., is the national headquarters of the American Institute of Architects. Constructed from 1799 to 1800 as a town residence for Colonel John Tayloe of Mount Airy, Richmond County, Virginia, The Octagon was designed by Dr. William Thornton, architect of the United States Capitol. This three-story brick house, adapted to an irregular building lot, displays a dramatic break with the traditional, late Georgian and early Federal house planning that preceded it. The degree of this break is matched only by the domestic buildings of Thomas Jefferson. The Octagon achieves a zenith in Federal architecture in the United States through its brilliant plan which combines a circle, two rectangles and a triangle, and through the elegance and restraint of the interior and exterior decoration. Many of the leading European architects of the late 18th century sought to achieve a new direction in architecture through a design philosophy that found its expression in seeking to combine simple, basic geometrical shapes, and to use a minimum of unnecessary decoration. Dr. Thornton traveled extensively in both England and in France and was no doubt alive to this philosophy. Being presented with a building site that did not lend itself readily to a stereotyped solution, Thornton took full advantage of his opportunity and brought to the new Federal City a building of startling freshness and originality which has never been surpassed. The Octagon was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960 under the Theme, Political and Military Affairs.

History:

In 1797, Colonel John Tayloe decided to build a town house in the new Federal City, upon the recommendation of George Washington who had discouraged Tayloe from undertaking such a project in Philadelphia. Ground was purchased at the corner of New York Avenue and 18th Street, N.W., within site of the President's House. Gustavus W. Scott was paid one thousand dollars on April 19, 1797, for Lot 8, Square 170 which Scott had purchased from the Government in 1796. Colonel Tayloe selected Dr. William Thornton (1759-1828) as the architect. Work was begun early in 1799 and completed late in 1800. In designing this building, Thornton was confronted with adapting the house to the acute angle formed by the intersection of New York Avenue and 18th Street. The solution, called The Octagon by the Tayloe family is actually an irregular hexagon with

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

a projecting semicircular bay. The house, as built, is a refinement of at least two preliminary schemes now in the Library of Congress. The plan of the house, composed essentially of a circle, two rectangles and a triangle, is a masterpiece of simplicity and the most outstanding feature of the design. The Tayloes occupied the house, with a few notable interruptions, from 1801 until the death of Mrs. Tayloe in 1855. Colonel John Tayloe (1771-1828) was the only son of a family of eleven children. He married Anne Ogle, daughter of Governor Benjamin Ogle of Maryland in 1792 and they had a family of fifteen children. Colonel Tayloe was educated at Eton and Cambridge; by politics he was a Federalist and a strong supporter of President Washington. He served briefly in the army under General Henry Lee and in 1799 declined an appointment by President Adams as Major of the Light Dragoons. He preferred serving in the Virginia Senate, and at one point ran unsuccessfully for Congress. Most of his energies went into managing his extensive agricultural and financial holdings. He was also active in the establishment of St. John's Episcopal Church, Lafayette Square.

In August 1814 the British burned the White House and the Capitol. Colonel and Mrs. Tayloe had left Washington and returned to Virginia, leaving The Octagon occupied by the French Minister, Monsieur Serrurier, no doubt with a view to its protection. The house was not damaged and the Tayloes were asked soon after to offer it to President and Mrs. Madison as temporary quarters. The Madisons moved in September 8, 1814, and remained for the better part of a year. On February 17, 1815, President Madison signed the Treaty of Ghent in the circular study on the second floor of the house. When the Madisons moved to the house on the corner of 19th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., the Tayloe family reoccupied The Octagon and remained until 1855. After Mrs. Tayloe's death the house was leased for a variety of purposes including a girls school, government offices, a studio, and finally as a tenement.

On February 11, 1898, the Board of Directors of the American Institute of Architects voted to lease The Octagon for five years at a rent of $360 per annum as a preliminary step in moving their national headquarters from New York to Washington. The A.I.A. occupied the building on January 1, 1899, and in 1902 purchased the property for $30,000. Since that time the Institute has acquired further property adjacent to the main house, and is currently constructing a new headquarters behind the original house. This new building will occupy the present site of the original stable. From the time the A.I.A. first moved into the house, conscientious efforts have been made to preserve it. Major restoration projects were carried out in 1949-1950 and 1967-1970. The second floor plan has been somewhat altered to create larger exhibition space.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Talbot F. Hamlin, The American Spirit in Architecture (New Haven, 1926), 113; Fiske Kimball, American Architecture (Indianapolis, 1928), 90; Thomas E. Tallmadge, The Story of Archiecture in America (London, 1928), 85; Wayne Andrews, Architecture, Ambition, and Americans (New York, 1955), 71; James G. VanDerpool, "Historical Development of Architecture in the U.S.A., 1632-1912," (N.P.S. Ms., 1966), 128; Harold D. Eberlein and Cortland Van Dyke Hubbard, Historic Houses of George-Town and Washington City (Richmond, 1938), 301-316; Hugh N. Jackson, ed., A Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C. (New York, Washington,

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY

CORNER	LATITUDE Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	LONGITUDE Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"

OR

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES

LATITUDE Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	LONGITUDE Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
38°	53'	46"	77°	02'	30"

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 Serive

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

Form 10-817a
(Sept. 1957)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS
SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on t regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as ma Supplement Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical ord of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, its name, and the word (cont'd), 6. Description and Importance (cont'd) . . .

STATE	NAME(S) OF SITE
District of Columbia	The Octagon

9. Major Bibliographical References (cont'd)

and London, 1965), 91 ; Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic (New York, 1922), 169, 201, 214, 220, 231, 233, 240, 243, 247, 248, 298; Washington, D.C., A Guide to the Nation's Capitol (American Guide Series) (New York, 1937), 281-283; Arnold Nicholson, American Houses in History (New York, 1965), 135-138; Carl W. Condit, American Building Art, The Nineteenth Century (New York, 1960), Fauber, J. Everette, Jr., The Octagon, Gentleman's Town House of The Federal Period in the Federal City, (Unpublished manuscript for the American Institute of Architects, Washington, 1968).

Form 10-300a
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

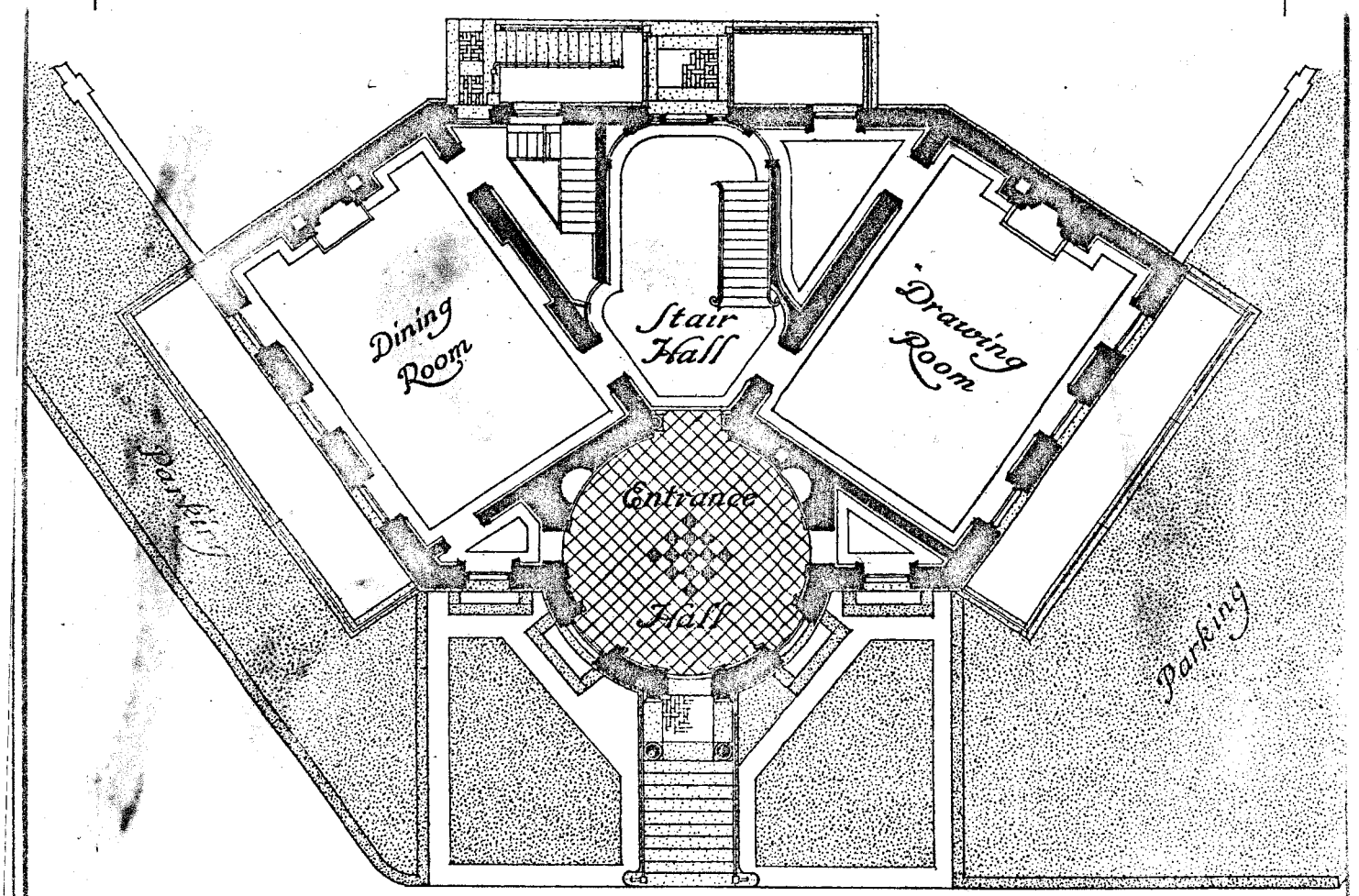
(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
District of Columbia	
COUNTY	

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

The Octagon, 1799 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C.
First Floor Plan



First Floor Plan

Form 10-300a
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

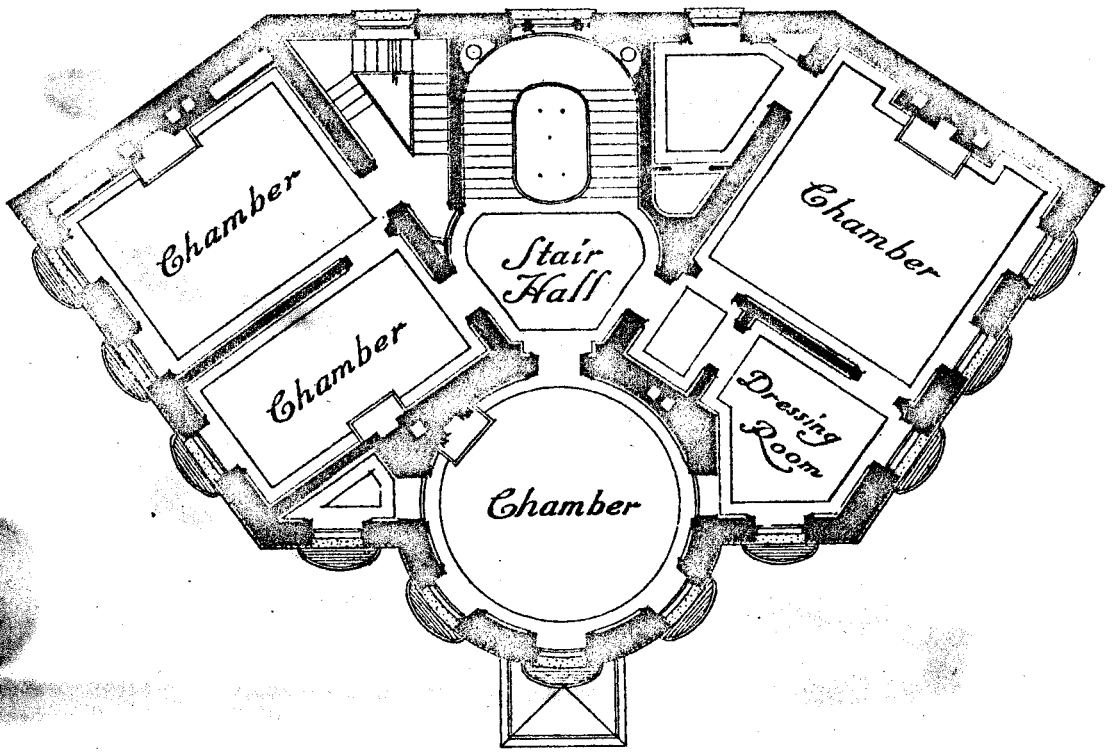
(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
District of Columbia	
COUNTY	

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

The Octagon, 1799 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C.
Second Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan