



PROJECT PROFILE

Customs House

Conservation and Materials Evaluation | New Orleans, LA



CLIENT

Woodward Design + Build

BACKGROUND

The Custom House in New Orleans—listed on the National Register of Historic Places and as a National Historic Landmark—was originally designed by Alexander Thompson Wood; however, the design concept was altered several times throughout the construction process. Alfred B. Mullet, architect for the Treasury Department, completed the final design in 1871, twenty-three years after construction began. The Custom House, as completed in 1881, is a Greek Revival building with Egyptian motifs. It is now owned by the United States General Services Administration.

As a subcontractor to Woodward Design + Build, Frontier Waterproofing was contracted by the General Services Administration to conserve Marble Hall at the United States Custom House in New Orleans following damage from Hurricane Katrina. Frontier Waterproofing hired WJE as the project conservator to develop appropriate treatment recommendations. The intended treatments included cleaning the marble walls, performing patch repairs, and repointing joints.

SOLUTION

As part of the design build team, WJE performed materials analysis related to the historic fabric in Marble Hall, including mortar and coatings. WJE implemented and assessed cleaning methods and trial repairs. Based on the cleaning trials, WJE developed a series of cleaning protocols depending on the specific type and extent of soiling at each location. In accordance with the professional standards, WJE selected the gentlest effective cleaning technique for each unique condition to be implemented by Frontier Waterproofing. In addition, sympathetic masonry repairs, including Dutchman repairs, patch repairs, resetting marble floor tiles, and repointing, were designed and implemented by the team. WJE identified the original gold leaf finish on much of the cast iron ceiling elements as well as evaluated the adhesion of the existing coatings on the ceiling.

Treatments were selected to allow changes to be “reversible” so that alterations could be undone in the future without excessive damage to adjacent historic fabric.

