

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Veterans Administration Regional Office

Other names/site number: VARO Building

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 1801 Assembly Street

City or town: Columbia State: SC County: Richland

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of commenting official:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Title :</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 determined eligible for the National Register
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

Public – Local

Public – State

Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

District

Site

Structure

Object

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/government office

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN/International Style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, limestone, glass

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Veterans Administration Regional Office building is a five-story, L-shaped masonry structure situated atop historic Laurel Hill, at the corner of Laurel and Assembly Streets in downtown Columbia, South Carolina. While the building is only five-stories tall, its position atop the highest point in the original city limits made it more imposing and prominent than its relatively minimal height suggests. The building is an intact example of International Style architecture in South Carolina's capital and represents the shift in the architecture of federal buildings during the mid-century period from Stripped Classicism to Modernism. It exemplifies tenets of Modernism through its lack of ornamentation, use of *brise soleil*, and its emphasis on horizontality. Beyond the property's hilltop siting, its brick and concrete composition add to the monumentality of the structure. Additionally, the structure's L-shaped plan allows for maximum visibility along two street faces and further emphasizes the horizontality of the design.

Veterans Administration Regional Office

Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.

County and State

Narrative Description

Located at the corner of Laurel and Assembly streets, the Veterans Administration Regional Office building is a five-story, L-shaped masonry building with a full basement. The primary facade faces east and features a granite relief sculpture in its southern corner, around the building's main entrance. The building is composed of blonde brick in a Sussex bond pattern. Instead of the standard header and stretcher pattern, this bond uses a header followed by three stretchers before repeating the pattern. The building's standard window features two anodized aluminum casement windows surmounted by a transom, creating a T-shaped appearance. Many of these windows currently feature screens which give them a slightly darker appearance. Aside from the entrance sculpture, the few other decorative features are limestone. The building's exterior has changed very little since its construction. Numerous photographs document the construction of the building as well as its completed appearance and show that its exterior remains remarkably intact.

The east façade is thirteen bays long with the three southernmost bays comprising the building's primary entrance and a granite relief sculpture. The relief is situated at the southernmost bay of the three-bay granite entrance, which projects from the building's plane in an asymmetrical design and features the building's name, Veterans Administration Regional Office, across the cornice in metal letters. The sculpture, which was completed in 1953, is a depiction of South Carolina's agricultural heritage. The artwork features five people: Dr. Thomas G. Clemson (standing atop a bale of cotton), a white man, an African American man, an African American woman, and a white boy. Crops and animals raised in South Carolina populate the sculpture's background.¹ The remainder of the entrance is composed of rectangular granite panels and two sets of deeply recessed aluminum-framed double doors, each surmounted by a transom. These doors are not original to the building as evidenced by historic photographs. These doors likely date to the 2000s. The remainder of the first level features ten standard windows. Each window features a limestone panel beneath it and trim around it. The second through fifth floors are identical. Each level features thirteen windows, the entire span of which is surrounded by limestone banding, emphasizing the horizontality of the elevation. The roofline features a simple limestone cornice.

The south elevation is similar to the east façade with minor variations. It is also thirteen bays long and features the same standard windows. The first level utilizes the same limestone trim and paneling that is present on the east façade on all thirteen windows. Because of the change in topography, the western end of this elevation is raised much higher than it is on the eastern end. The concrete foundation, which houses a lightwell for the basement level, follows the downward slope of the topography, giving the elevation a different, more utilitarian appearance than the arbor-lined appearance of the east façade. Much like the east façade, the second through fifth elevations feature the same horizontal banding around the span of windows. However, the top portion of the banding also features a protruding, shelf-like element called *brise soleil*, or sunshade. The south elevation is the only elevation on which this feature is used due to the ample amount of sun the southern elevation receives.

¹ "South Carolina in Granite," *The State*, November 23, 1952.

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

The northern and western narrow ends of the "L" are each three bays wide and feature standard windows with the same panel borders on the first level and banding around the upper levels.

The west and north elevations, which compose the interior angle of the "L," are not visible from either Laurel or Assembly Streets and vary from the primary elevations. The west elevation is ten bays deep and features three sizes of windows. Moving from the north to the south on the first level, there are two bays of standard-sized windows, a single door entrance to a stairwell which features a heavy limestone surround, five standard-sized windows, and two small, square, paired casement windows. A flat concrete awning connects the corners of the angle and is supported by a column at its corner. The upper levels of the west elevation largely follow the same pattern. The only exception is a small, square picture window on each level above the doorway. These windows are situated between each level as they correspond to the stairwell. Moving east to west along the north elevation, the first floor exhibits the following pattern: a single door entrance with in-filled sidelights, a small, paired casement window, followed by six standard-sized windows, a single door entrance, which has had its sidelights infilled with aluminum and features a concrete canopy overhead, and two standard-sized windows. The second through fifth floors are similarly laid out but feature a small set of paired casement windows at the angle of the "L," which correspond to the stairwell accessed by the first level door. These paired casement windows extend up to the rooftop mechanical rooms, but the fifth-floor window is absent. The typical pattern of six standard windows follows until a second set of paired casement windows are located in between each level, corresponding with the stairwell. The final two bays feature standard windows.

There is a small sixth floor mechanical room atop the roof that is stepped back from the front of the building, but that is still visible from Assembly or Laurel Streets. This rooftop section mimics the L-shape of the building but is situated along the western and north edges of the building. The north elevation of this sixth level has four cut-out bands at the corner while the west elevation features two large louvered vent covers and a set of small paired casement windows. A smaller addition and the elevator shaft are located atop the mechanical room at the angle of the L shape.

The building's landscape is the most altered feature of the property. Currently, the Strom Thurmond Federal Building occupies much of the 1800 block of Assembly Street. Prior to the that building's construction in the late 1970s, this space was associated with the Veterans Administration building. The landscape presently follows the L-shaped building and features cylindrical concrete planters at its rear. These planters most likely were moved from defensive positions around the building to prevent vehicles from driving into the building. However, they are now stored behind the building as the building is not occupied. These types of defense mechanisms were common following the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995 and the 9/11 attack in 2001 in an attempt to protect Federal buildings from vehicular attacks. The planters were most likely moved after the agency vacated the building in 2009. Aside from the planters, the landscape is largely hardscape, particularly since the building fronts two streets with sidewalks. Additional sidewalks connect the Laurel Street side of the building to the rear and back to Assembly Street.

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

The interior of the building is largely repetitious throughout each floor. The first-floor lobby is the only decorative space, featuring terrazzo floors and marble walls. The remainder of the first-floor features corridors with offices on either side that appear to represent a later renovation.² There are considerably more offices located on the first floor than the upper floors. They exhibit carpeted floors, sheet rock partition walls, and dropped acoustical ceiling tiles, which were added during a renovation and currently obstruct the transoms along the exterior walls. An elevator lobby is located at the angle of the “L,” along with restrooms, utility rooms, and electrical closets.

The second and third floors are largely identical. They feature open concept workspaces with the elevator lobby, restrooms, utility rooms, and electrical closets along the northern and western walls at the angle of the L-shape and few enclosed offices, usually at the south and east walls of the L’s angle. The walls are primarily plaster and the floors a combination of original and later addition linoleum and carpet. A “corridor” created by large square columns runs along the northern and western walls while the remaining outer portions are open space for desks or cubicles. Both the floors and ceilings delineate this change in use: the “corridor” ceiling on each level is plaster while the workspace is acoustical tile and the flooring is linoleum tile in “corridor” and carpet in the workspace. The fourth and fifth floors are similar to the second and third, but feature more offices and large, enclosed work rooms. These enclosed rooms appear to be later additions from around the 1990s and feature sheetrock or partition walls. One of the notable rooms on the fifth floor is the Office of Director, which features cherry wood paneled wainscoting, complete with radiator covers. This room is located in the northwestern corner of the fifth floor. It is the only unique feature on the upper floors. The Veterans Administration vacated the building in 2009, allowing the building to deteriorate with such issues as flaking paint and water infiltration.³ However, overall, the building is in good condition.

² There does not appear to be documentation of a renovation in the newspaper, but the change in ceilings and wall finishes indicates a renovation. Based on the materials used, this renovation occurred in the 1990s or early 2000s.

³ “New Options for Old VA Building?” *The State*, July 1, 2009.

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance

1949-1953

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Lafaye, Lafaye & Fair
Stork & Lyles
R. M. Lee Construction Co.

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Veterans Administration Regional Office building is eligible under Criterion C as a remarkably intact example of an International Style federal building in downtown Columbia, South Carolina. Located at the corner of Assembly and Laurel streets, the building's position atop Laurel Hill, one of the highest points in Columbia's downtown, allowed it to prominently display the city's movement into the Modern era. Designed by acclaimed Columbia architecture firm Lafaye, Lafaye, and Fair in conjunction with Stork and Lyles, the predecessor firm of the regionally prominent Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle & Wolff (LBC&W), the building's design is Modern in every sense of the term. Its International Style features a simple design and minimal ornamentation. The building represents the shift in postwar architectural styles from the decorative and classical elements of Beaux-Arts and Stripped Classicism to the minimal and austere aesthetic of Modernism, which signified the stability of the federal government and the forward-motion of postwar America. The Veterans Administration Regional Office is also eligible under Criterion A for its association with the decentralization of the Veterans Administration in the mid-twentieth century and the intense growth of the federal government following World War II. Designed for efficiency, the building was a critical resource for an agency designated to serve a vast number of veterans in an expanding number of ways.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion A: Politics/Government

The construction of Columbia's Veterans Administration Regional Office came amid a period of dramatic expansion in the size of the federal government, including those sectors devoted to the support of those who had taken up arms on that government's behalf. The earliest federal programs involving the care of veterans came in the form of pension laws passed during and after the Revolutionary War. Subsequent nineteenth century wars brought additional statutes relating to veteran compensation, including a pension plan for Civil War veterans described as "one of the costliest and most significant social measures in U.S. history." Notwithstanding the size and cost of such programs, it was only in the twentieth century that federal veterans' programs assumed a meaningful presence in the lives not just of disabled veterans or widows collecting pensions, but even in those living former soldiers who had served their full-term. In 1917, at the advent of World War I, Congress passed a new, more comprehensive plan for veterans that included disability compensation, insurance for veterans and service personnel, and vocational rehabilitation for disabled servicemen. In 1921, Congress consolidated all programs into the Veterans Bureau and again in 1930 into the newly formed Veterans Administration. It was during these interwar years that state-based regional offices like the one ultimately built on Assembly Street in Columbia proliferated, as the agency's increasingly complex bureaucratic machinery became more accessible to veterans across the country. This new agency, the goal of

Veterans Administration Regional Office

Richland Co., S. C.

Name of Property

County and State

which was to “consolidate and coordinate Government activities affecting war veterans,” only continued to grow in size following World War II and the passage of the GI Bill in 1944.⁴

Prior to World War II, much of the agency’s administrative apparatus was centered in the nation’s capital, where it had relatively fewer responsibilities. However, the influx of returning soldiers from World War II and the passage of the GI Bill created a much greater need for direct accessibility to the Administration across the country, continuing the decentralization that had begun prior to the war. Under the leadership of General Omar N. Bradley, a more organized and modern organization arose as regional offices sprung up in large cities across the U.S. These more geographically dispersed offices made the Administration more readily accessible to former soldiers and families beyond the nation’s capital and helped alleviate the workload of agency bureaucrats in Washington, D.C.

The Veterans Bureau/Administration occupied several different locations around Columbia in the early and mid-twentieth century, however the facility that was built at 1801 Assembly seems to have been the first permanent local headquarters constructed exclusively for the agency’s non-medical programs. For most of the 1930s and 40s, the services later offered from the nominated property were housed at a Veterans’ Administration hospital built in 1932 on Garner’s Ferry Road, a few miles away from downtown Columbia. As World War II drew to a close, though, agency officials saw an increasingly pressing need for the Administration’s non-medical services to be housed in a larger, separate space to better accommodate veterans returning home. Agency officials announced the formal separation of the Administration’s other services from the hospital in 1946 and initially moved the now distinct VARO services to temporary housing at nearby Fort Jackson.⁵ The next year, Congress appropriated \$1,850,000 for a new VARO facility to be located in downtown Columbia, news hailed by the local *State* newspaper for putting the Administration’s services within more convenient reach of “the thousands who will be passing through its doors.”⁶ This formal division of the agency’s responsibilities into two separate and

⁴ Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The GI Bill: A New Deal for Veterans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12-14 (quotation on 13). For a more detailed overview of the development of federal veterans’ policy, see *ibid.* generally. “History – VA History,” https://www.va.gov/about_va/vahistory.asp. Accessed 3/2/2020. Jessica L. Adler, “The Evolution of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,” *Scholars*, September 27, 2017, <https://scholars.org/contribution/evolution-us-department-veterans-affairs>, accessed June 1, 2020.

⁵ In 1922, the Veterans Bureau moved into the two-story brick Koon Building at 1322 Taylor Street, though it is unclear if this was the Bureau’s earliest local office. Three years later, the agency moved into a portion of the old YMCA Building/St. George Hotel at the corner of Main and Lady streets. It remained there until 1932, when the reorganized Veterans Administration began medical and non-medical programs out of a newly constructed VA Hospital five miles outside of downtown Columbia. When it became apparent that the Veterans Administration Regional Office needed separate, additional space from the hospital, they initially relocated to a temporary facility at nearby Fort Jackson in 1946, the Administration’s last location before the building on Assembly Street. “Baptists to Get Veteran Clinic,” *Columbia State*, June 7, 1922, p. 8. “Enlarged Veterans Bureau Here to Begin Operations on Monday, with New Families B[r]ought Here,” *Columbia Record*, February 1, 1925, Society section, p. 2. “Regional Offices Will Be Moved to Hospital Friday,” *Columbia Record*, October 11, 1932, p. 1, 7. “Regional VA Office to Get Quarters at Fort Jackson,” *Columbia State*, July 26, 1942, p. 10.

⁶ “New VA Building,” *Columbia State*, July 25, 1947, p. 4.

Veterans Administration Regional Office

Richland Co., S. C.

Name of Property

County and State

distinct facilities fits within the larger expansion the federal government underwent following the Second World War as it became the “most gigantic business on earth.”⁷

The establishment of an independent Veterans Administration Regional Office in downtown Columbia signaled the agency’s development into a complex bureaucracy that sought to impact the lives of a greatly expanded body of veterans in multi-faceted ways. As the federal government continued to grow in the postwar period, more federal agencies began establishing state and regional offices to accommodate the expanding reach of their offices. The Veterans Administration faced the tremendous task of assisting the over fourteen million veterans of World War II alone, along with the nearly four million veterans of previous wars (as has been well-documented, the VA was notably more committed to ensuring its programs benefited veterans who were white over those who were black). For the 174,000 veterans from South Carolina around the time of the VARO building’s initial planning, services could be obtained at agency contact offices located throughout the state. In the years after the VARO building’s completion, though, the agency closed many of these smaller offices to cut costs and streamline operations. Consequently, Columbia’s regional office assumed an even more vital importance, serving as the Administration’s primary point of contact with its constituents not just in the capital city, but throughout the entire state.⁸

Criterion C: Architecture

As a federally financed and constructed building in Columbia, South Carolina, the Veterans Administration Regional Office followed the government’s pattern of commission and construction in the immediate postwar period. Following increased growth of the Federal government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Congress created the Public Buildings Commission in 1913. This new program would serve as the construction manager for Federal buildings across the country, ensuring the prompt completion of projects. The Public Building Commission also recommended locations for new buildings based on need, and standardized procedures for the construction of new Federal buildings.⁹ In 1926, Congress passed the Public Buildings Act which oversaw the construction of Federal buildings throughout the United States and authorized the funding for those projects.¹⁰ However, following the onset of the Great Depression, this program fell under the purview of the New Deal’s Public Works Administration from 1939 until the end of World War II. During this time, numerous temporary

⁷ Judith H. Robinson and Stephanie Foell, *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Services Administration, Office of the Chief Architect, Center for Historic Buildings, 2003), 6.

⁸ “VA Report Shows 174,000 Veterans in South Carolina,” *Columbia State*, May 25, 1947. “VA Will Close Contact Office,” *Charleston Evening Post*, November 7, 1961, p. 1-2. On the discriminatory administration of VA programs, see David H. Onskt, “‘First a Negro...Incidentally a Veteran’: Black World War Two Veterans and the G.I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Spring 1998), 517-43; Louis Lee Woods II, “Almost ‘No Negro Could Get a Loan’: African Americans, the GI Bill, and the NAACP Campaign Against Residential Segregation, 1917-1960,” *Journal of African American History*, vol. 98, no. 3 (Summer 2013), 392-417; and Courtney L. Tollison, *World War II and the Upcountry: “We Did Just Everything We Could”* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2009), 262-64.

⁹ Robinson and Foell, *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism*, 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

Veterans Administration Regional Office

Richland Co., S. C.

Name of Property

County and State

structures were built, creating a need for permanent buildings following the Second World War.¹¹ The period of building during the Great Depression largely still featured classical architectural styles like Beaux Arts, but Stripped Classicism also became prominent and reflected the depressed economy. The Stripped Classicism style was the first step towards minimizing decorative elements and ornamentation on buildings, leading towards the embrace of Modern architecture.

Commissioned in 1948, the Veterans Administration Regional Office building predates the General Services Administration's policy on design and social initiatives, making it an early example of the new type of building erected by the Public Buildings Administration across the country. While the building was contracted prior to the creation of the GSA, it represents the beginning of the vast postwar expansion of Federal buildings. Following the lean and hard years of the Great Depression and World War II, the architects created a bright facade and clean lines to denote a fresh start. The building's location, at one of the highest points in downtown, also helped it exude a sense of pride and newness. The building also signifies the progress of the United States federal government as it grew and became associated with a new and modern world through its design philosophy and emphasis on efficiency. With a vast construction campaign underway, the federal government needed its new buildings to be economical, efficient, and functional. Efficiency, both in construction and design, was key. To ensure cost-effectiveness, the designs featured clean, unornamented lines, and standard details for fixtures and equipment. Any components thought to be unnecessary, such as monumental exterior stairs and customized features, were quickly abandoned.¹² The steel-reinforced concrete frame of the Veterans Administration Regional Office, along with its clean lines and unornamented facade underpin this shift to efficiently laid out and constructed government buildings.

Following the financial hardship of the Great Depression coupled with an expensive world war, the federal government wanted buildings that could be cheaply and quickly built and that would feature open, flexible space inside for adaptable use. As the *State* newspaper noted, movable partition walls, instead of fixed plaster walls, helped make the new Veterans Administration building more functional and adaptable.¹³ In addition to spatial efficiency, the inclusion of *brise soleil* on the exterior of the building indicates a desire for energy efficiency. The flat, continuous, shelf-like protrusion along levels two through five of the south elevation were inspired by Le Corbusier's various sun protection elements used in the design of buildings located in hotter climates.¹⁴ While the projection is functional, it remains minimal in its design and ornamentation. By covering the windows of the elevation that receives the most sunlight, the architects were attempting to diminish energy costs from the hot South Carolina sun.

The new VA building exhibited efficiency in a number of other ways. Prior to the construction of the building on Assembly Street, the Veterans Administration offices were housed in twenty-

¹¹ "Architecture and Government," U.S. General Services Administration, July 18, 2019, <https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/historic-preservation/historic-building-stewardship/architecture-and-government>.

¹² Robinson and Foell, *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism*, 29.

¹³ "Cornerstone Laying Saturday For Regional VA Building," *The State*, December 8, 1950.

¹⁴ Urbanalyse, "Brise Soleil Study," Urban Developments and Analysis, August 27, 2012. <https://urbanalyse.com/research/brise-soleil-study-2/>. Accessed September 11, 2019.

Veterans Administration Regional Office

Richland Co., S. C.

Name of Property

County and State

nine different buildings on the grounds of Fort Jackson.¹⁵ By consolidating the multiple offices into one structure, the Veterans Administration could function more efficiently, fulfilling a principle of Modernism. In addition to being consolidated into one space from twenty-nine, the centralized location in downtown Columbia allowed for more efficient access. By moving to the downtown thoroughfare of Assembly Street, the Regional Office became more accessible to veterans from across the Midlands. Soon after the VA building's completion, Assembly Street was expanded to accommodate more traffic, further improving the site's efficiency.¹⁶

The use of local architecture firm Lafaye, Lafaye, and Fair in association with Stork & Lyles represents an early example of the Federal government, through the GSA, hiring private, local architects to design Federal buildings. By 1948, Lafaye, Lafaye, and Fair was a well-known and accomplished firm with numerous commissions to their name. The three-story Tapps Department Store building (1940), the eight-story Owen Building (1947), and the four-story Carolina Life Insurance Building (1949) are all prime examples of Lafaye, Lafaye, and Fair's prowess for Modern architectural design. All three buildings are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. When compared with these structures, all of which feature an emphasis on verticality, the Veterans Administration Regional Office building highlights the design's horizontality, one of the character-defining elements of Modernism.¹⁷ The design accomplishes this through its boxy, L-shaped form, flat roof, and its use of windows that appear ribbon-like because of the limestone banding, reinforcing their horizontality. Despite utilizing masonry instead of smooth stucco or sandstone, the Veterans Administration building successfully conveys the streamlined look of the International Style.

In addition to Lafaye, Lafaye, and Fair, Stork and Lyles also contributed to the success of this building's design. Stork and Lyles would evolve into Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle, and Wolff (LBC&W), one of the leading architecture firms in the southeast, soon after the completion of this building. The firm became synonymous with Modernism throughout the region as their success proliferated across the southeast. This project also marks one of LBC&W's earliest partnerships with the federal government. LBC&W leveraged relationships with numerous Federal agencies and entities in the postwar period, designing a multitude of buildings for the Army, Navy, and Postal Service, as well as a number of state offices. These include the South Carolina State Capitol Complex, multiple projects for the University of South Carolina, Clemson University, and the Department of Education, to name a few. For the nearby Cornell Arms apartment building (1949), they partnered with the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). The early association established with the Veterans Administration appears to have been pivotal in creating a decades-long relationship between the government and the architecture firm.

The employment of local architects represents a shift in practice for the design of Federal buildings. Prior to the establishment of the GSA, government architects from the Supervising Architect's office were responsible for designing new Federal buildings. By the end of the Second World War, particularly with the advent of the GSA, the government began hiring

¹⁵ "Atlanta Firm Low Bidder on VA Building," *The State*, September 23, 1949.

¹⁶ "Columbia Grows Bigger, Better, and Taller," *The State*, December 30, 1951.

¹⁷ Thomas L. Schumacher, "Horizontality: The Modernist Line," *Journal of Architectural Education* vol. 59, no. 1 (September 2005): 17.

Veterans Administration Regional Office

Richland Co., S. C.

Name of Property

County and State

private architecture firms to design new buildings. These private firms were typically chosen based on their portfolios, which frequently led to Federal buildings featuring similar styles to private office buildings.¹⁸ In Columbia, the Carolina Life Insurance Building, which was designed by Lafaye, Lafaye, and Fair in 1949, echoes the same L-shaped floor plan, while Stork and Lyles' Cornell Arms apartment building features the same banding around the windows.

Prior to the construction of the Veterans Administration Regional Office, the Robertson-Seibels Mansion occupied the corner of Laurel and Assembly streets. This three-story Beaux-Arts style mansion, constructed in 1902, housed two prominent Columbia families during its brief life. Situated at the highest point in the city, the house evoked the wealthy, antebellum grandeur of the Old South, despite being constructed in the early twentieth century. When the Public Buildings Administration purchased the Robertson-Seibels Mansion in 1949 to raze it for a brand new, Modern building, the act symbolized Columbia's foray into a new era of progress and prosperity for the capital city. Modernism during the postwar period came to symbolize "a break with the past and seemed to stand for a shiny new age of peace and prosperity."¹⁹ It was during this era that Columbia attempted to reinvent itself as a modern, forward-looking city, primarily by transforming its built environment. The Veterans Administration building was one of the earliest International Style buildings to be constructed in this immediate postwar period and built in a highly visible space in Columbia's downtown. The building was not the only one in the city to exhibit a Modern design, though. According to *The State* newspaper, in the six years following the conclusion of World War II, Columbia experienced "unparalleled growth and expansion. Postwar construction has literally changed the face of the city," with all the buildings identified in the article employing a Modern design.²⁰ It was, however, the only Federal government building constructed in Columbia during this period.

One notable element of many federal buildings from this period is the inclusion of public art, either on the grounds or as part of the building. The Veterans Administration building's granite relief sculpture is an early example of the incorporation of fine art into a government building, a practice that would ultimately become standardized by the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture" in 1962.²¹ The relief sculpture was designed by renowned artist Edmond Amateis, a New York sculptor. Amateis was known for his fountains and sculptures at Brookgreen Gardens in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, as well as the Great Frieze on the Kansas City Liberty Memorial in Missouri. He was a prolific sculptor, working primarily along the east coast of the United States.²² The sculpture depicts South Carolina's agricultural heritage and the state's hierarchies of class, race, and gender. Dr. Thomas G. Clemson, part of the white planter elite of the antebellum age, is most prominently placed. He stands atop a bale of cotton and offers instruction to the people below him. The white male farmer holds a stick of tobacco and stands closest to Clemson. The Black man and Black woman are both positioned behind and below the

¹⁸ "Architecture and Government," U.S. General Services Administration, July 18, 2019, <https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/historic-preservation/historic-building-stewardship/architecture-and-government>.

¹⁹ Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture*, 263.

²⁰ "Columbia Grows Bigger, Better, and Taller," *The State*, December 30, 1951.

²¹ GSA "Guiding Principles" Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space, June 1, 1962.

²² "South Carolina in Granite," *The State*, November 23, 1952.

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

two white men, a reflection of the racial hierarchy still present in the South when the building was constructed. The boy, who is also white, also holds a lower position, but is in much closer proximity to Clemson as the representative of the “coming generation of Future Farmers.”²³

A 1952 newspaper article on the sculpture described the two African Americans as representing “the 49 percent of our farm population who have played such an indispensable part in the agricultural history of our state.”²⁴ This contemporary description notably does not include any references to the enslavement of African Americans, which led to the success of South Carolina’s agrarian economy, nor any mention of the legacy of sharecropping. Additionally, Dr. Clemson, the founder of present-day Clemson University, is instructing the farmers of South Carolina in scientific farming, indicating that the people who have worked in this industry for generations must learn from the white professor to be more scientific and efficient. The young child, who is white, represents the future generations of farmers in the state. While problematic in the present, this relief sculpture provides a sense of how mid-century Americans viewed race and gender at the time.

The Veterans Administration Regional Office remains an extant example of early mid-century Federal architecture in Columbia’s capital city. Its functional design and prime location made it highly efficient. The building’s only two instances of ornamentation, the *brise soleil* and the relief sculpture, also served as functional and artistic components, keeping with the philosophy of Modernism in the federal government. The building is a representation of the government’s shift from classical styles to Modernism and exhibits the use of private architects instead of a government one. It is a worthy illustration of Modernism in Columbia’s built environment.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other

Name of repository: Historic Columbia Foundation

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 0.75

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 34.008929 | Longitude: -81.039340 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Beginning at the northwest corner of the intersection of Laurel and Assembly streets, the boundary runs north along Assembly Street until the northern edge of the building, where the boundary turns west and extends beyond the building to a fence. The boundary then turns south, following the fence until it turns west again. The boundary turns south again where the fence meets a concrete wall that extends to the Laurel Street sidewalk where the boundary turns and runs east until it dies into the corner of Laurel and Assembly streets.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary constitutes the existing legal boundaries of the property. The historic boundaries have been altered due to the construction of the Strom Thurmond Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jane Campbell, Preservation Consultant
organization: Rogers Lewis Jackson Mann & Quinn, LLC
street & number: 1901 Main Street, Suite 1200
city or town: Columbia state: SC zip code: 29201
e-mail: jcampbell@rogerslewis.com
telephone: 803-978-1963
date: 3/9/2019

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Ownership Information

Owner: SC Property Builds, LLC
Address: 1591 Savannah Hwy.
Charleston, SC 29407

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Veterans Administration Regional Office

City or Vicinity: Columbia

County: Richland

State: South Carolina

Photographer: Jane Campbell

Date Photographed: July 13, 2018; December 16, 2019

Veterans Administration Regional Office
Name of Property

Richland Co., S. C.
County and State

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 18 Southeast oblique of building
- 2 of 18 East façade
- 3 of 18 Southwest oblique
- 4 of 18 North elevation
- 5 of 18 West elevation
- 6 of 18 Northwest oblique, interior of "L" shape
- 7 of 18 Sussex brick bond detail, east façade
- 8 of 18 Façade entrance with sculpture, signage, and doors, looking west
- 9 of 18 *Brise soleil* along south elevation, looking west
- 10 of 18 Window pattern with limestone borders, east façade
- 11 of 18 Concrete planters at rear of building, looking east
- 12 of 18 Engraved plaque, looking north
- 13 of 18 Lobby with terrazzo floor and marble walls, looking west
- 14 of 18 First floor corridor, looking west
- 15 of 18 Second floor open office space, looking south
- 16 of 18 Third floor office space, looking north
- 17 of 18 Director's Office, fifth floor, looking northeast
- 18 of 18 Basement level cafeteria, looking northwest

List of Figures

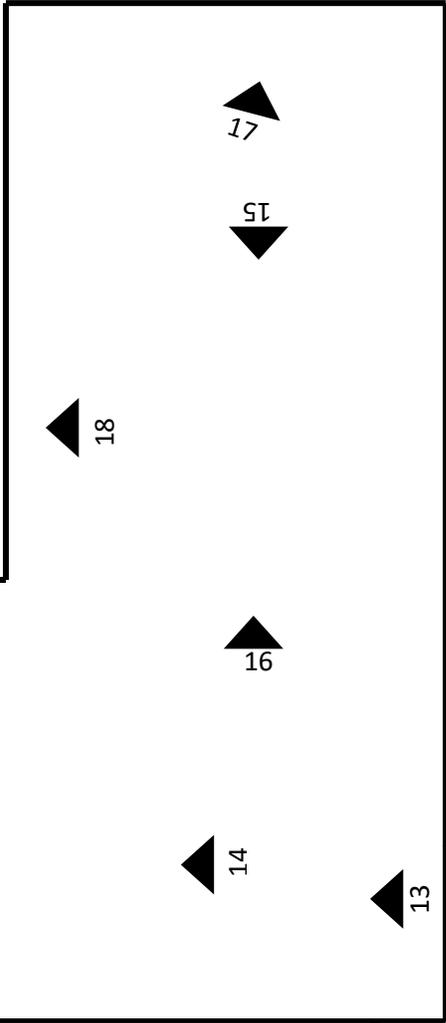
- 1 of 4 "VA Building, Near Complete Building from Across Street," c.1950, John Hensel Photograph Collection
- 2 of 4 "VA Building, View of Construction," c.1950, John Hensel Photograph Collection
- 3 of 4 "VA Building, Interior View," c.1950, John Hensel Photograph Collection
- 4 of 4 "Veterans Administration Regional Office," c.1953, Russell Maxey Photograph Collection

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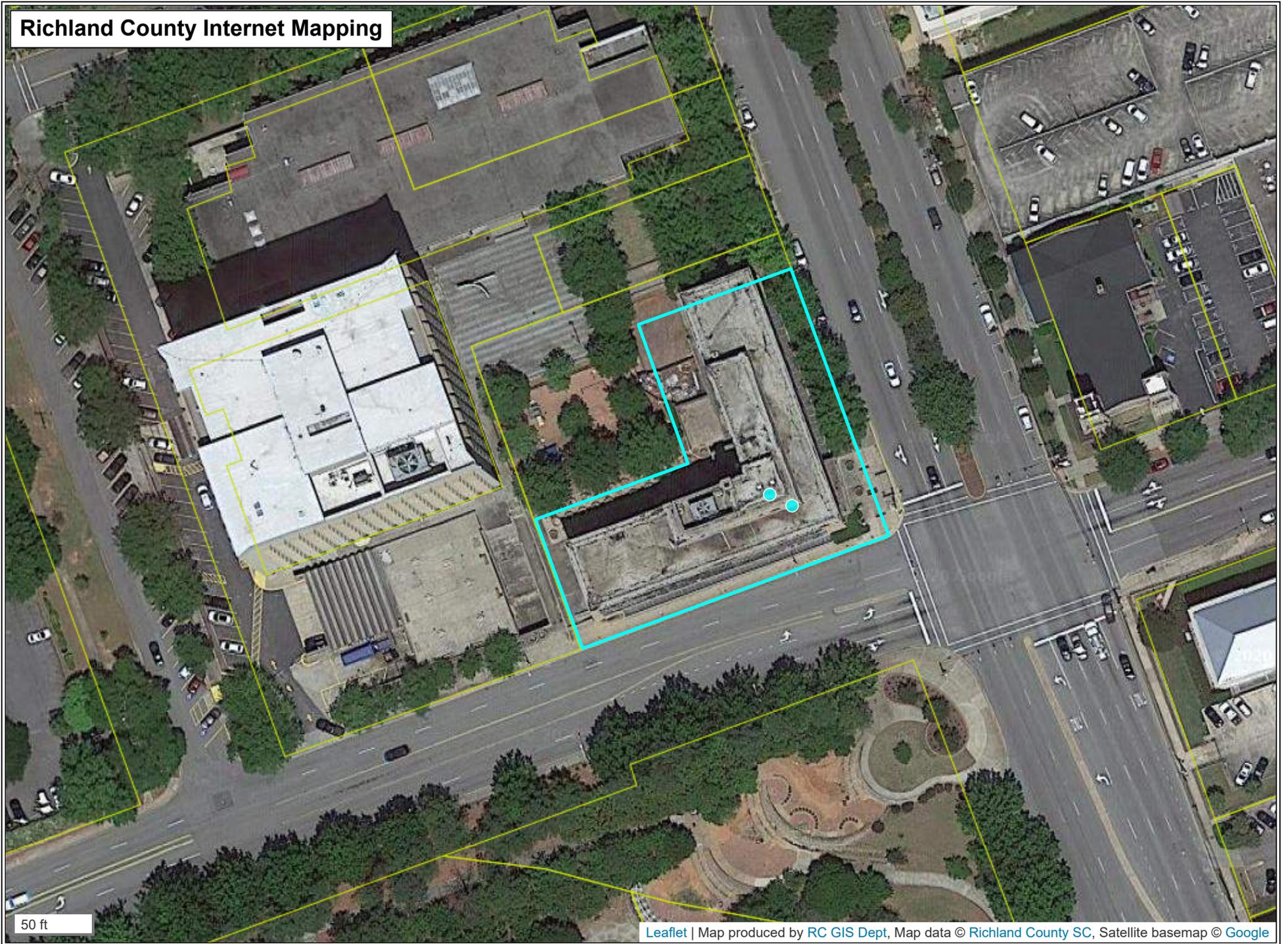


Laurel Street

Assembly Street



Richland County Internet Mapping



50 ft

Leaflet | Map produced by RC GIS Dept, Map data © Richland County SC, Satellite basemap © Google

Veterans Administration Regional Office

Columbia, Richland County

Veterans Administration Regional Office

Google Earth

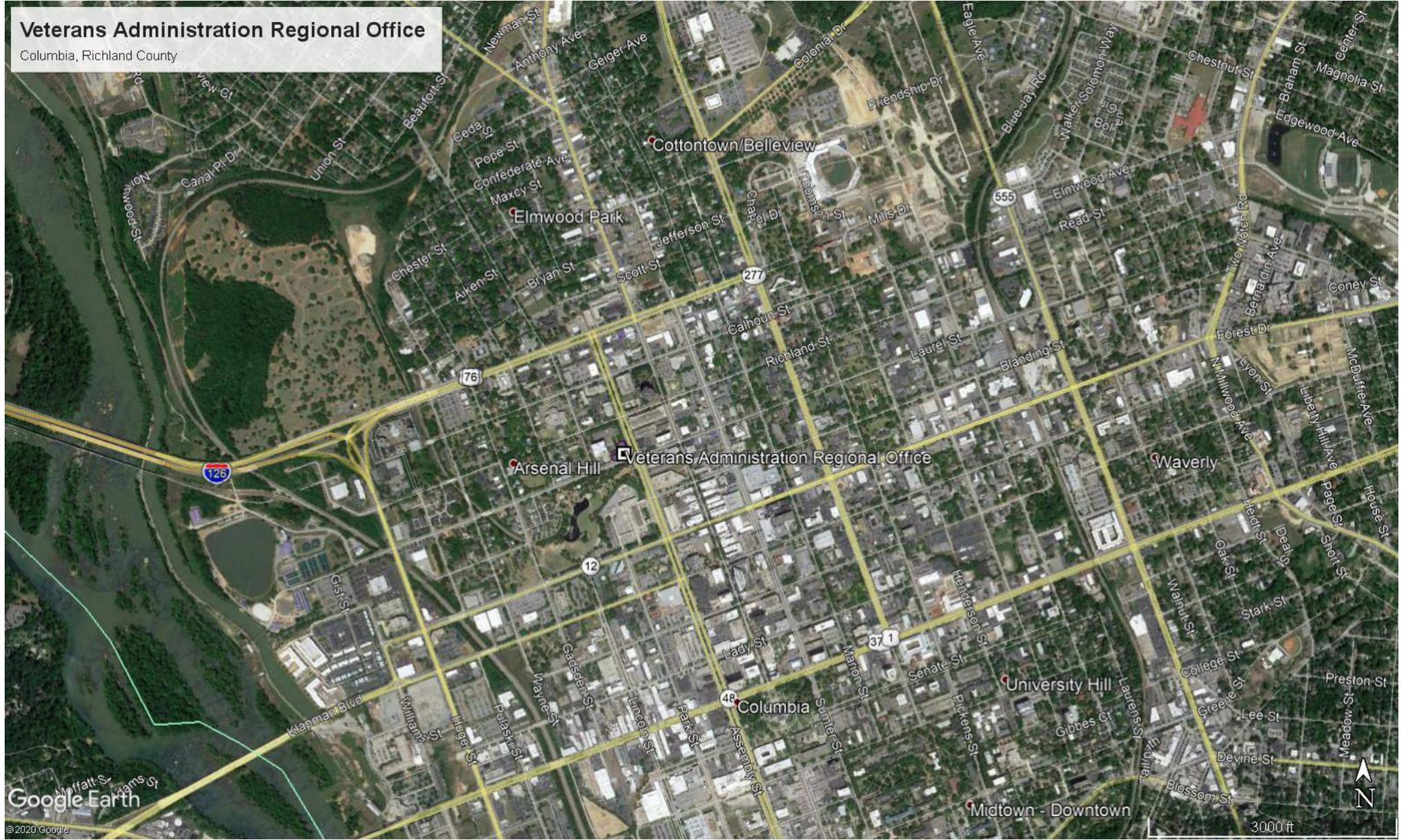
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100 ft



Veterans Administration Regional Office

Columbia, Richland County



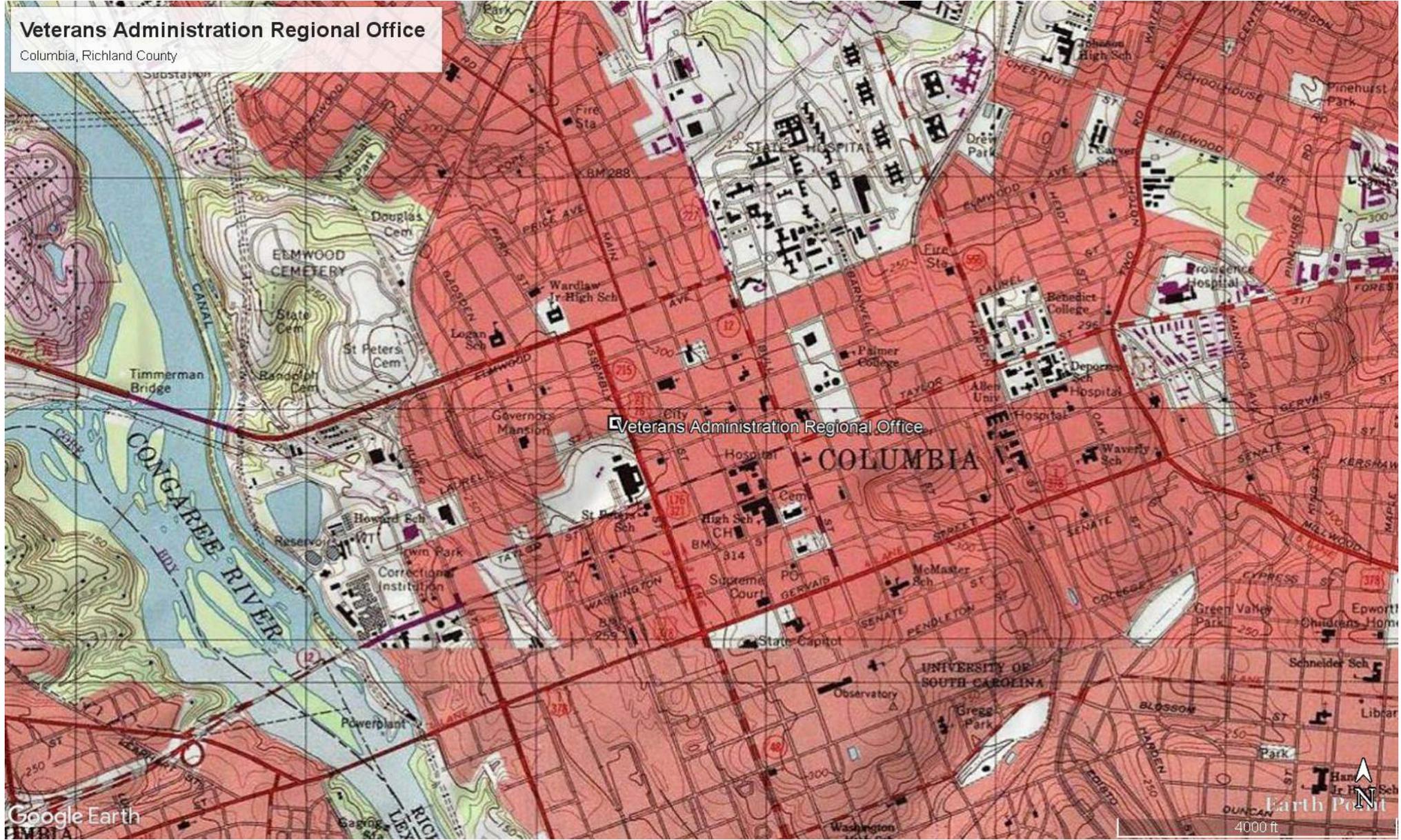
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3000 ft

Veterans Administration Regional Office

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Earth Point
4000 ft















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ALBERT E SANDERSON
SUPERVISING ENGINEER

LAFAYE LAFAYE & FAIR AND STORK & LYLES
ASSOCIATED ARCHITECTS

RAY M LEE COMP
CONTRACTOR

1949



















