

ERECTION OF AN ADDITION TO THE CUSTOM-
HOUSE AT NORFOLK, VA.

While the appropriation "Repairs and preservation of public buildings" has, by long practice, been treated as available for the payment of the expense of certain minor improvements to public buildings, which expenditures are not strictly either for repairs or preservation, yet it can not be held to be available for the purpose of erecting an additional building to be used in connection with a custom-house.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE OF COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY,

October 29, 1891.

SIR: I am in receipt of yours of the 25th instant, asking whether the expense of erecting an outhouse in the rear of the custom-house building at Norfolk, Va., may be charged against the appropriation "Repairs and preservation of public buildings;" said building to be 20 feet wide by 35 feet long and 10 feet high, with shed roof connecting with the main building, and divided into three compartments, one for the storage of coal and two for water-closet fixtures.

In reply thereto I have the honor to state that said appropriation provides only for "repairs and preservation" of custom-houses, etc. A strict construction of this provision would not authorize anything in the nature of improvements and additions to public buildings. By long practice, however, the appropriation has been considered available for payment of the cost of slight changes in public buildings; as, for instance, the erection of partition dividing one room from another or screening off a portion of a room, or, as recently held by me, the cost of putting in a speaking tube; but it never has been held available for the purpose of paying the expense of erecting an outhouse or permanent addition to a building of the character indicated in your letter.

I am of the opinion, therefore, that the appropriation "Repairs and preservation of public buildings" is not available for the payment of such expense. If such building is imperatively needed, the only remedy lies in an appropriation by Congress for such purpose.

Respectfully, yours,

R. B. BOWLER,
Comptroller.

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY.