

TANGIER, MOROCCO

TANGIER OLD LEGATION

Tangier Old Legation, the first property acquired by the United States Government for a diplomatic mission, was presented in 1821 as a gift to the American people by Sultan Moulay Suliman. His generosity was inspired by the success of the Moroccan-American Treaty of Friendship. This 1786 treaty, with John Adams and Thomas Jefferson as signatories, was renegotiated by John Mullanby in 1836. The treaty, still in force today, is among the most durable in American history. The legation served as a diplomatic post for a record 140 years. Of special significance in the building's history is the Cape Spartel Lighthouse Treaty of 1860, which was negotiated there. The treaty is considered to be the forerunner of the League of Nations and United Nations because it speaks to broad cooperation within international law.

Located within the ancient city walls, the original structure, an eighteenth century stone building, was gradually incorporated into an enlarged complex surrounding a picturesque courtyard. United States Minister Maxwell Blake undertook an ambitious program of restoration and renovation from 1927 to 1931. He constructed a Moorish pavilion overlooking a new courtyard, which incorporated antique doors and tiles from different areas of Morocco. Blake also added handsome eighteenth century lanterns, iron grillwork, and marble mantelpieces. The result is a harmonious blend of Moorish and Spanish architectural traditions. World War II activity included a major U.S. military contribution to the Allied presence in Africa at the strategic entrance to the Mediterranean. The property was used by the then newly-formed Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and it was the locus of military planning operations in North Africa that led to the landings in France and Italy. When the Consulate General moved in 1961, the property became an Arabic language school.

Since 1976 the compound has been leased to the Tangier-American Legation Museum Society, a public non-profit organization established by a group of American citizens. The museum maintains a collection of engravings, maps, rare books, aquatints, paintings, and other artifacts depicting events in the history of over 180 years of U.S.-Moroccan diplomatic relations. The legation was listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places on January 8, 1981. United States Secretary of the Interior James G. Watt subsequently designated it a National Historic Landmark on December 17, 1982. This listing was the first such designation in a foreign country.

