

# *The Treasury Building*



*A National Historic Landmark*





*The first Treasury building.*

## *The Capital Moves to Washington* (1790-1835)

**I**n the spring of the year 1800, the capital of the United States was preparing to move from the well-established city of Philadelphia to a parcel of tidewater land along the Potomac River. President John Adams issued an Executive Order on May 15th instructing the federal government to move to Washington and to be open for business by June 15, 1800.

Arriving in Washington, relocated government employees found only one building completed and ready to be occupied: the Treasury Department building. Of the 131 federal workers who moved to Washington, over half of them (69) were housed in the Treasury Building. Nearby stood the partially completed White House, while almost a mile to the east at the terminus of Pennsylvania Avenue rose the Capitol building, still a work in progress.

Few were so generous as to call Washington a “city” despite the arrival of the executive and legislative branches of the federal government. In 1800, Washington had a population of 3,210 with neighboring Georgetown (considered a separate municipality) at 2,993 – ranking them as the 31st and 32nd largest cities in the country at the time. By contrast, New York City’s population was 60,515, Philadelphia was 41,220, and Baltimore was the third largest city with 26,514 inhabitants.

What many had hoped to find on their arrival in Washington was a city that mirrored the scale, architecture, and amenities of the former capital cities of New York and Philadelphia. All too frequently visitors were disappointed at the progress of the new capital city:

*“I arrived about one o’clock at this place known by the name of the city, and the name is all that you can call so. As I expected to find it a new country, with houses scattered over a space of ten miles, and trees & stumps in plenty with, a castle of a house - so I found it - The President’s House is in a beautiful situation in front of which is the Potomac with a view of Alexandria. The country around is romantic but a wild, a wilderness at present.”*

*- Abigail Adams, First Lady*

Architecturally, the development of Washington was influenced by a small number of professionally trained architects from England and Europe who had relocated to the American colonies in search of better opportunities. These imported architects were augmented by local “master builders” who used established architectural pattern books and construction techniques to design their buildings.

The number of architects and designers who eventually had a hand in the completion of the Treasury building in 1800 represents a virtual “who’s who” of practicing architects in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in America. Initially, the winning design for the Treasury “Executive Office” building was awarded to George Hadfield, an English architect who moved to the United States in 1795 and had served as Superintendent of Construction for the Capitol building.

The construction of the new building was the responsibility of the City Commissioners who were receptive to the design but not necessarily the architect. The Commissioners wanted to purchase the architectural drawings from Hadfield and supervise their own construction. After a series of protracted negotiations over the amount of compensation, the drawings were procured and Hadfield was released from the project.

The City Commissioners had some concerns that Hadfield’s original design was a little too imposing, particularly given the building’s location next to the new President’s House. They chose to modify the design towards the more comfortable proportions of the Georgian style by removing a third floor and eliminating a stately entrance portico and columns.

To supervise the construction, the Commissioners turned to Architect James Hoban who was fulfilling

similar duties next door at the White House. Hoban was an Irish architect who came to Philadelphia in 1785. He is believed to have been involved in the design of the First Bank of the United States in Philadelphia whose appearance was remarkably similar to the Royal Exchange building in Dublin, Ireland with which Hoban was very familiar. The drawings for the First Bank were submitted under the name of Samuel Blodgett, a businessman and land speculator who frequently collaborated with Hoban (In 1793 Hoban completed a design for Blodgett's Hotel on a parcel of land near the White House).

When the first Treasury building was completed it was a two story brick building with a basement and attic that had 16 rooms on the first floor and 15 rooms on the second floor. The building was 147 feet long and 57 feet wide, flanking the southeast end of the White House.

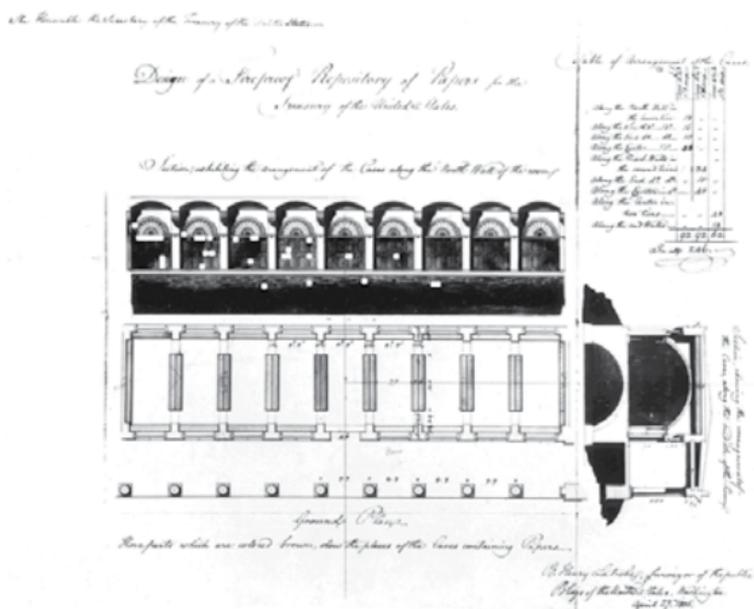


*Watercolor by Nicholas King. View of White House, 1803.*

Within six months of occupying the building a fire broke out on January 20, 1801 nearly destroying the entire structure. The fire started in one of the first floor rooms and burned through to the floor above but was extinguished before any serious structural damage occurred. The building was repaired, yet by 1805 the records of the department were beginning to overwhelm the original building and a new “fireproof” brick and masonry vault extension was planned for the west side of the Treasury building.

The extension of the Treasury building was designed by architect Benjamin Latrobe and completed in 1806. Since 1803, Latrobe had served as Surveyor of Public

Buildings and Superintendent of Construction at the Capitol building, and while working in Washington had maintained his practice in Philadelphia. It was during this period that a young Robert Mills, future architect of the East and Center wings of the current Treasury building, apprenticed at Latrobe's office (1803-1808).



Latrobe's plan for the fire-proof vault.

The fire-proof vault addition designed by Latrobe turned out to be a hearty structure - it was the only part of the building that survived the 1814 attack by British troops who burned many of the significant buildings in Washington during the War of 1812. Treasury offices were temporarily relocated to seven buildings along Pennsylvania Avenue between 19th and 20th streets and James Hoban was once again asked to supervise the construction of the Treasury building and the White House which took until 1817 to complete.

With the reconstruction of the Treasury and White House buildings finished, Hoban was asked to oversee the construction of two new buildings: the State Department at the northeast corner of the presidential grounds across from the Treasury building and the Navy building on the northwest corner of the grounds (in the area later to be occupied by the EEOB building). By 1820 the three executive office buildings surrounding the White House were completed.

While James Hoban was focused on the construction of executive office buildings on the Presidential grounds,

Robert Mills had moved on to become a practicing architect in South Carolina. In 1820 he was named the Commissioner of Public Buildings for the state of South Carolina and in 1827 completed his influential Fireproof Record Office in Charleston, SC, constructed entirely of nonflammable masonry materials. By 1830, however, Mills had moved back to Washington and was working as a draftsman in the Land Office of the Treasury Department.

On March 30, 1833, the Treasury building was once again engulfed in flames. Late in the evening Richard H. White had set fire to the building hoping to destroy incriminating pension records inside the Treasury building. Volunteers saved records that could be retrieved (mostly from the Latrobe vault extension which once again largely survived the fire) and the Treasury offices were relocated to a row of buildings on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue, opposite the Willard Hotel. After the fire, it was Robert Mills who was asked to prepare a set of drawings of the Treasury building recording the design of the building before the fire.



*Early 19th century design sketch for the Treasury building south wing.*

## *A Monumental Treasury Building* (1836-1851)

When Robert Mills submitted drawings of the destroyed Treasury building along with a report on the need for a more fire-proof building in the future, he also included drawings of what he proposed as a potential new Treasury building. Mills eventually won a design competition and was appointed Architect of Public Buildings by President Andrew Jackson to oversee the design and construction of the Treasury and Patent Office buildings. Construction on the new Treasury building began on September 7, 1836.

Ironically, Mills faced similar design concerns from some Washington officials that architect George Hadfield had endured back in 1800. Both architects proposed designs that contained elements of the Classical Revival style of



*Column capital detail, east wing colonnade.*

architecture that echoed the buildings of ancient Greece and Rome – a larger more imposing architectural style for government buildings of the new capital. While Hadfield's designs were too expansive and were never used for

the first Treasury building, Mills more restrained Greek Revival design, and the passage of 30 years in architectural sensibilities, allowed his drawings to win the design competition with few alterations. Then construction started and opinions began to change.

Disagreements over the Treasury building came to a head less than two years into the construction of the east wing.

In January, 1838 a proposal was introduced in Congress to demolish the partially constructed building. The Committee on Public Buildings directed Capitol building architect Thomas U. Walter to inspect and report on the Treasury building. A report on January 29,



*East wing colonnade along 15th street.*

1838 by Walter critical of the building design was rebutted by Mills a few weeks later in February. Despite Mills' arguments, a congressional bill was brought to the floor and voted on with the recommendation to demolish the Treasury building and use the stone for a replacement Post Office building. The bill was narrowly defeated 94-91 and work on the Treasury building was allowed to continue. Despite all of the difficulties in the design and construction of the Mills Treasury building, in 1839 Mills was awarded the commission to design the new Post Office building by President Andrew Jackson. This was the Post Office that Congress had wanted to build with stones from the proposed demolition of the Treasury building.

The Mills wings of the current Treasury building (east and center sections) were finally completed in 1842. The massive, 350' long Greek inspired Ionic colonnade facing 15th street is the most striking feature of Mills design. By 1844, the tan sandstone exterior, including the colonnade, was painted white to protect the integrity of the stone (the same stone and painting thereof was used at the "White" House as well). While Mills had always envisioned additional wings added to the Treasury building beginning with a south wing extension, in 1851 he was removed from his Treasury position before any design or construction of the south wing had begun.



### *The South Wing Extension* (1852-1859)

As early as 1841, Mills had published a conceptual plan for the Treasury building that included additional wings at the north and south ends of the east wing, running parallel with the center wing. In Mills design there would be no west wing of the building, allowing clear views of the White House from the Treasury building.

By the early 1850's there was a growing need to increase the size of the Treasury building. Mills revised his earlier design and submitted a plan to Treasury Secretary Thomas Corwin. Controversy followed Mills yet again and Thomas U. Walter was brought in to critique the Mills plan and eventually provided two design drawings of his own. Walter's drawings for the first time showed a west wing

of the Treasury building that would eventually create a closed rectangular shaped building with Mills center wing bisecting the rectangle and creating two enclosed courtyards. Ultimately Walters design was chosen and in 1851, Robert Mills was released from his architectural position at the Treasury Department.

In 1853 Ammi B. Young was named the Supervising Architect in the Office of Construction at the Treasury Department. Key among his responsibilities was to merge the design approaches previously prepared for the addition of a south wing to the Treasury building. One of the most important revisions was the acceptance for the need to expand the Treasury building with both a south and west wing. The inclusion of the west wing in the design and planning created an opportunity for economies of scale by reducing costs for manpower and building materials. In 1855 ground was broken to start excavating for the South Wing foundation.

During the period that the south wing was being designed, Treasury Supervising Engineer Alexander Bowman had begun testing wrought iron as a structural building material. Testing was completed in 1854 and wrought iron was used in federal building construction for the first time in the south wing of the Treasury building and concurrently in the construction of the St. Louis Post Office. The use of structurally supporting wrought iron and decorative cast iron in the south wing allowed the size of the corridors and office spaces to be opened up since these spaces were no longer restricted by the limitations of heavy building stone and masonry supporting walls. These larger spaces are a point of distinction between the earlier east and center wings of the building and the south, west and north wings.

By 1857 construction of the south wing had progressed up to the second floor level and excavations for the west wing foundations had begun. Progress on the Treasury building came to a halt in 1858 with the country falling into a recession after the Panic of 1857. Construction on all federal buildings was stopped due to a lack of funding appropriations from Congress. Before the stoppage, the construction of the south wing had completed setting in place over 45 monolithic stone columns and pilasters, some weighing as much as 33 tons each.

Little work was done on the Treasury building between 1858 and 1860. Whatever funds were able to be put towards the

building construction focused on completing the south wing including the completion of the new office of the Secretary of the Treasury. In 1859 the 1805 Latrobe vault extension from the first Treasury building was finally demolished. It had continued to survive over the years first as President Adam's tool shed, then as President Jackson's "orangery" (fashionable in the 17th-19th centuries as greenhouses for wintering citrus trees) and lastly as President Pierce's greenhouse. Given the finances of the times, a cost reduction of the design of the south portico was reconsidered and 4 stone columns were eliminated through the use of cast iron beams for the upper floors and ceilings.

Economic challenges were not the only events that disrupted the construction of the south and west wings of the Treasury building. By 1860 it appeared almost certain that the country was headed towards a military conflict between the states. Troops were stationed in the Treasury building and occupied the newly completed south wing from the attic down through the first floor. For the next few years, the building was more of a fortification than it was a government office building.



*Union troops camped in Treasury building courtyard.*

## *The Civil War Era* (1860-1866)

The years of the Civil War in America (1861-1865) were challenging times for a large number of federal buildings under construction before the start of the war. The government used many of their existing buildings to accommodate war-time needs. So it was that members of the military command were the first occupants of the newly completed south wing in 1860. During the same year the Treasury Carpentry Shop staff was loaned out to help build fortifications along the Potomac River. Troop regiments camped in the south courtyard space were a regular occurrence throughout the war.

While a labor force and the supply of some building materials became increasingly scarce as the war grew longer, the Treasury building and the expansion of the Capitol dome were among the few large scale federal building projects that remained active during the war. By 1861 Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase was occupying his new office, although work on the west wing would remain suspended until February of 1862. By the summer of 1862 work had begun once again and the setting of all of the massive west portico columns was completed. In July, Ammi B. Young, the Supervising Architect, resigned after completing the south wing and 70 other federal buildings across the country. He was replaced by Isaiah Rogers who oversaw the building of the west wing.

In 1863, as work continued, another key figure arrived at the Treasury Supervising Architect's office when Alfred Mullett was appointed as a clerk in the Bureau of Construction. In less than 5 months he rose to the position of Assistant Supervising Architect. Within two years Muller would rise to the position of Supervising Architect.

While the construction of the west wing was the major focus of the architects office during the Civil War, some attention was paid to addressing improvements to previously constructed parts of the Treasury building. The south wing attic space was converted to usable office space in 1863. By 1864 the west wing was essentially completed and in the same year the Mills designed center wing courtyard facing windows were replaced.

On many levels, 1865 was a one of the most significant years in the history of the nation, and of the Treasury building as well. Over a period of 41 days starting on March 4,



*Lincoln portrait, Treasury Department Collection.*

1865, President Lincoln held his Second Inauguration; the Civil War ended on April 9, 1865 with General Robert E. Lee's surrender; and President Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865.

After the death of President Lincoln, the Secretary of the Treasury provided his office for Vice President Johnson as a temporary Office of the President until Mrs. Lincoln moved out of the White House. As the Civil War ended and many of the troops left Washington, their departure allowed spaces in the Treasury building to be returned for the department's use.

Despite the return of space in the south wing, the Treasury building needed to continue to expand its capacity. In 1865 the attic level was converted to offices in the Mills designed east and center wings. The role of the Supervising Architect expanded as well taking on the supervision of real estate owned by Treasury and procuring rented space in existing buildings for Customs officers.



*Robert Mills*



*Alfred Mullett*

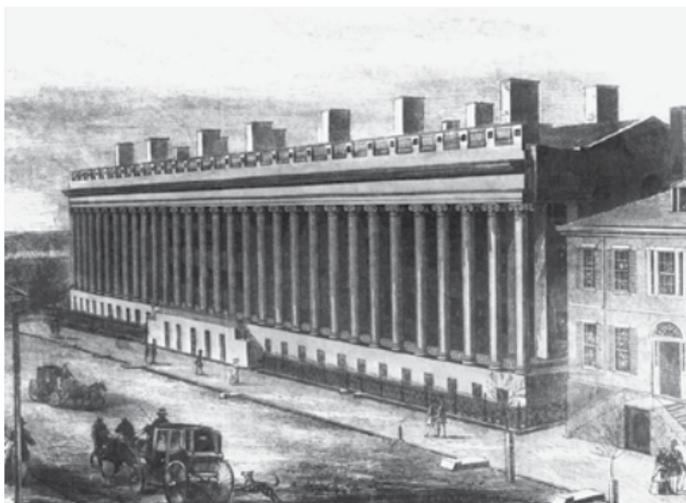
These tasks did not fall upon Isaiah Rogers who resigned his position in September of 1865, but to Alfred Mullett,

the new Supervising Architect. Also, in the fall of 1865 a road running between the Treasury building and the White House (East Executive Avenue) was opened. Another small change was Mullett's replacement of the south wing exterior



*East Executive Avenue, 19th century.*

fence along 15th Street at the southeast corner of the building. With three out of four wings completed, the State Department building at the north end of the building was demolished in order to be able to add the north wing.



## *The North Wing - Completing Treasury* (1867-1870)

By the time the west wing of the Treasury building was completed, an architectural style and construction methods were well established. All that was needed to begin the north wing of the building was the removal of the State Department building. In January of 1867 the building was demolished and construction officially began on the north wing.

The north wing was completed in a little over two years, a remarkably short period of construction given the delays that had plagued every other wing of the building. The north wing entrance, lobby, Cash Room and adjacent spaces were sufficiently finished to allow the Cash Room to be able to host the Inaugural Reception for President Ulysses S. Grant in March of 1869.

The speed with which the north wing was built was possible because much of the building stone and raw materials were purchased and delivered to the site as early as 1866. In addition to new materials, portions of the building materials from the old State Department building were salvaged and used for the north wing addition. A critical concern as the construction began was how to successfully “attach” the new wing of the building to the east wing on one side constructed 24 years prior, and the west wing recently completed in 1864. To insure a proper alignment the grounds were excavated an extra 18 feet deeper for the foundations of the north wing which then abutted the existing structures.

In the midst of the north wing construction, architect Alfred Mullett was also working on modifications to features of the previously completed west and south wings. At the roof level along the east and south wings Mullett lowered the balustrades and along the west wing removed galvanized iron ornaments designed by Isaiah Rogers which Mullett felt conflicted with the restrained Classical Revival style of the Treasury building. At the south entrance, Mullett reworked the entrance plaza raising the central platform and replacing the curvilinear design of Ammi Young.

Mullett anticipated the construction of the north wing to be completed in January of 1869 and confidently agreed to a proposal to hold the Inauguration Reception for President Ulysses Grant on March 4, 1869. The construction continued into March right up until the event with Mullett pressing his suppliers for the materials he needed to complete the Cash Room space. Portions of the second floor marble walls never arrived in time and through the use of decorations and large fabric murals of the “Goddess of Liberty” and “Abraham Lincoln”, uncompleted areas remained hidden from view during the reception.



The preparations for the 1869 Grant Inauguration Reception were a distraction that temporarily slowed the remaining construction at the northwest corner of the building. The corner offices and the spiral staircase in this section of the building would continue to be worked on until 1870, when the construction of the entire wing was completed.

Delays in one area of the building did not dissuade Mullett from continuing to make improvements in other parts of the building. In 1870 he converted the attic space on the 5th floor of the west wing spiral staircase into a magnificent triple-skylight oval dome with ornamental and gilded plaster details. The Cash Room ceiling also received gold leaf accents for its ceiling and the addition of a new hydraulic elevator. These small projects aside, in 1870 after 34 years of construction, the Treasury building was finally complete.



*Currency shipment leaving Treasury building vaults.*

## *Late 19th - Early 20th Century* *(1871 - 1909)*

**D**uring the late 19th century the Treasury building incorporated a vast array of new technologies. At the same time, outside the building walls, Washington, DC had grown into a more metropolitan capital city with commercial and infrastructure projects that had significant effects on the neighborhood around the Treasury building.

In 1877, one of the earliest telephone lines in Washington was installed between the White House and the Treasury building, and by 1879 there were phone lines throughout the building. Other improvements included the first direct current electricity brought into the building by the U.S. Electric Company for the Engraving & Printing operations in the basement in 1885, which would be expanded throughout the building over a 10 year period.

As improvements to the Treasury building continued towards the end of the 19th century, they were barely able to keep pace with the growing population of Treasury employees. The large number of federal buildings under construction by the Office of the Supervising Architect necessitated adding a temporary drafting studio building in 1891 inside the open south courtyard space once occupied by Union troops during the Civil War. In 1904 a “duplicating gallery” for the production of architectural drawings was added to the attic space of the center wing (what would later become the full-height 5th floor of the Treasury building above all wings). From the late 1890’s through 1910 over 400 federal buildings (post offices, courthouses, custom houses, mints, etc.) were designed by the staff of the Supervising Architect’s Office.

At the turn of the century came one of the first major renovation projects at the Treasury building. In 1907 Supervising Architect James Knox Taylor began the lengthy process of reconstructing the facade of the entire east wing of the building including the replacement of the massive portico columns. Although granite was the building stone originally specified by architect Robert Mills in 1833, congressional appropriators overruled his selection and substituted less durable sandstone in order to reduce costs. By the turn of the century, the sandstone had begun to crumble and had to be rebuilt, this time using granite, the type of stone suggested by Mills over 70 years earlier.

While the east facade and colonnade were being reconstructed outside the building, in 1910 a major architectural report was being prepared on the use of space inside the Treasury building. Under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury, the architectural firm of York & Sawyer documented in drawings and photographs the existing use of office, factory, clerical and storage spaces throughout the building. The report made a number of recommendations for building improvements including ways that space could be more efficiently utilized.

Among the first of the York & Sawyer report recommendations to be implemented was the relocation of the Office of the Secretary of the Treasury to the southwest corner of the building on the third floor, where the office remains to this day.



*World War I  
Treasury Annex Building  
(1910 -1921)*

With an architect's study completed and a long list of projects to improve the interior of the Treasury building, in 1910 Congress approved \$180,000 for an interior modernization. Some of the projects completed included the construction of an IRS laboratory on the fourth floor of the north wing and the installation of a building-wide fire alarm system. By 1914 however, the attention (and the finances) of the nation began turning towards a growing conflict in Europe – World War I.

Even before America officially entered the war in 1917, vast quantities of supplies were being shipped to Allied countries in Europe. Once America declared war on Germany, the government and private businesses rapidly turned manufacturing and construction efforts towards those materials and items that could aid the war effort. One of the few federal building projects that was allowed to continue was the construction of a Treasury Annex building on the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue, across the street from the main Treasury building.

Designed by well respected architect Cass Gilbert, the building that stands today was created as a section of what was proposed to be a much larger building taking up the entire side of the street facing the east end of Lafayette Park across from the White House. Designed and constructed in just 2 years, the Annex building exterior reflects the classical origins of the main Treasury building.

Part of the reason that the Treasury Annex building was allowed to be constructed during a time of war was the passage of the War Revenue Act, which required the expansion of the Internal Revenue Service to process the collection of tax revenues which were financing up to one third of the costs of the war. The work of the Treasury employees who would occupy the Annex building was so critical that President Wilson signed an Executive Order waiving the 8 hour work day rule to expedite construction. Likewise, structural steel for the building fabricated by Bethlehem Steel was processed as a “war order” to insure a quick delivery of the steel.



*Treasury Annex, 2007.*

On June 14, 1919, after only 14 months of construction, the Annex building was ready for occupancy primarily by the Bureau of Internal Revenue Income Tax Unit. On June 28, 1919 World War I ended with the signing of the Peace Treaty in Versailles. Ironically, a building rushed through design and construction to be able to accommodate Treasury employees whose work was critical to the war effort was completed just 14 days before the war was over.

With all of the dramatic mobilizations for war behind them, the Treasury architects once again turned to the list of building improvements suggested in the York & Sawyer report of 1910. In 1921 the expansion of the attic space into a fully functioning 5th floor addition continued along the west wing of the building. Despite the addition of a new floor and an entire Annex building, space was still at a premium in the Treasury building as the department continued to grow in size and complexity.



## *The Great Depression - World War II* (1922 - 1949)

With World War I ended and the country entering the roaring 1920s, few would have predicted that two of the biggest economic challenges the country and the Treasury Department would ever face were yet to come. Changes to the Treasury building itself during the early 1920s were relatively modest. After going decades without another fire, misfortune returned when the Supervising Architect's duplicating gallery on the 5th floor over the center wing of the building caught fire and was destroyed. Conversely, it was a happier occasion in 1923 when the statue of Alexander Hamilton was dedicated on the south plaza of the Treasury building.





In 1927 for the first time, the Treasury building appeared on the country's currency as the main subject on the reverse side of the \$10.00 bill. During the

Depression, funding for repairs and renovations to existing federal buildings such as the Treasury or Annex buildings, or to construct new buildings, was limited. When projects were funded they were viewed through a prism of job creation rather than to design architecturally significant buildings for the federal government. In order to get as many projects as possible into the construction phase, the President's Emergency Committee for Employment reported that the Office of the Supervising Architect was "... running its blueprint department night and day, three shifts and its committee on the selection of [building] sites has been holding night sessions."

From 1927-1933 no significant architectural projects were completed at the Treasury building. In fact, the most noteworthy changes to the building for the first half of the 20th century were the changing of the entire electrical system from direct to alternating current (1933-38), and a new building-wide air conditioning system (1934). There was one exception – changes made to the Treasury building to secure the building and its inhabitants during World War II.

The possibility of enemy air strikes over Washington, DC during World War II created a need to structurally reinforce parts of the Treasury building for the first time since the Civil War. The domes with skylights over the stairwells were infilled with concrete pads up to 12" thick. Where required for black-out purposes, additional corridor skylights and exterior windows were either filled-in or fitted with black-out shades. On the lower floors of the building, taking advantage of the thick granite foundation walls, several rooms and vaults were converted to bomb shelters, including one specifically for the use of the President.



*President Roosevelt's bomb shelter in Treasury building.*

Understandably, the focus of the Treasury Department during the Great Depression and World War II was on managing the finances of the country. Building additions and repairs were largely deferred. As the Treasury building moved forward into the 1950's, years of benign neglect would take their toll on the building.



*West Wing dome, skylights with concrete infill, 1957.*

## *Mid 20th Century - and Another Great Fire (1950 - 1996)*

**B**y the 1950s, the earliest wings of the Treasury building had surpassed the century mark since their original construction. Into the 1960s the building was 50 years removed from the last major renovation in 1910. The Treasury building was falling into disrepair just as the country was beginning to appreciate some of the earliest iconic historic buildings that had played important roles in American history with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966.

In 1954, the exterior stone of the building was systematically cleaned and a few other minor changes to the outside of the building were made including the carving of the words "Treasury Department" above the south wing portico entrance (1956). By 1959 the heating system had been replaced and modern fluorescent light fixtures were installed throughout the building.

The Treasury Department continued to try and keep up with individual repair and renovation projects throughout the 1960's. The plumbing and restroom facilities were renovated in 1963, and there were continuous upgrades made to various windows, doors, and air conditioning systems.

Difficulties in maintaining and modernizing an older building in the center of the nation's capital were not unique to Treasury. Many large commercial and government buildings along Pennsylvania Avenue were beginning to acquire a rather shabby appearance. This imagery did not go unnoticed by President John F. Kennedy during his inaugural parade in 1961. Within a year the President's Advisory Council on Pennsylvania Avenue was formed to work on a new master plan for the "Nation's Main Street."

Treasury's efforts to keep its own building up to date were more functional than aesthetic, nevertheless in the 1970's the Treasury building received among the highest honors bestowed on important American buildings. In 1971 the Treasury building was nominated and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This registration was followed by an even more significant 1972 appointment of the building as a National Historic Landmark. While the interior of the building had endured decades of neglect and some insensitive renovations, the Classical Revival exterior fully clad in durable granite had retained its stately architectural presence.

In 1976, a tradition that began over a century earlier ended when the public banking room known as the



*Cash Room view from balcony over banking operations.*

"Cash Room" was closed at the north entrance to the building. Established after the Civil War as a way to reinforce public faith in the federal government's greenback currency, the room allowed the public to enter

the Treasury building and redeem any bills, coins, bonds, or certificates issued by the federal government.

With the utilitarian banking room requirements no longer needed, the Treasury Department recognized a unique opportunity to restore the Cash Room as a ceremonial space. Assisted by the formation of an Office of The Curator for the Treasury in 1985, the Cash Room was restored to the period of the 1869 Inaugural Celebration for President Ulysses S. Grant and reopened for use by the department in 1987.

After the completion of the Cash Room, additional restoration projects progressed room by room, including; the North Lobby (1987), the Secretary of the Treasury's Conference and Diplomatic Reception Rooms (1988), the Andrew Johnson Suite (1991) and the Salmon Chase Suite (1992). Concurrently, the building was in a continuous state of repair in an effort to overcome a list of deferred maintenance projects that seemed neverending.

In 1996, a project to replace a portion of the roof of the building accidentally started a fire above the north wing. Damage from the fire and water that cascaded down all five floors of the building created a level of destruction not seen since British troops had burned the previous Treasury building during the War of 1812.



*Treasury building, South Wing, 2006.*

## *A 21st Century Restoration and Modernization (1996 - 2007)*

The interior damage and repairs that were needed after the 1996 fire were extensive enough to raise serious questions about the overall safety of the building

and led to the decision to undergo a comprehensive renovation of the entire Treasury building. Once the areas of the north wing that were affected by the fire were stabilized, an architectural design team and the Treasury Department began to prepare for a phased restoration and modernization of all four wings and two courtyard buildings.

In 1997 the exterior portion of the project was begun as restoration contractors focused on replacing the roof, repointing and repairing the granite stone masonry, and cleaning the entire building for the first time in almost half a century. While work on the outside was being completed a complicated design for the interior modernization and restoration was developed.

Just as the exterior project was finishing and the interior portion of the project was ready to begin, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 took place. Suddenly, new levels of security requirements were added to the Treasury exterior and interior projects. Some of the new protections extended beyond the building itself to the surrounding grounds including a redesign of Pennsylvania Avenue, limited access to the service road at the south end of the Treasury building, and security bollards along 15th street.

Inside the Treasury building, virtually every mechanical, electrical and plumbing system was either upgraded or replaced. Telecommunication systems were upgraded and rooms originally designed in the 19th century for clerical pools or currency production were subdivided into modern office spaces. For the first time, a building wide fire suppression and sprinkler system was installed and all of the stairwell dome skylights covered during World War 2 were reopened and restored.

Almost as difficult as the new construction to modernize a historic landmark building was the need to carefully protect historic spaces in the building that were previously restored, such as the North Lobby entrance, the Andrew Johnson office suite, and the Salmon Chase offices. Elaborate protective panels were installed with self contained circulating ventilation fans and air purification components. A separate vibration monitoring system insured that any new construction above or below the restored areas did not adversely damage these important spaces.

One of the most significant restoration efforts incorporated into the modernization of the building was the triple oculus skylight over the West Dome above a monumental double spiral staircase. Elevators were removed from the open centers of the stairwells, concrete pads from World War II were taken out of the skylight bases, and the elaborate painted and gilded finishes of the dome were restored.



*West wing dome restoration, August, 2005.*

As winter arrived towards the end of 2006, the last office spaces in the west wing of the building were being completed. Small projects in service areas of the basement would continue into 2007, while all of the remaining employees displaced during construction returned to the building. For the first time in over 10 years all four wings of the building were fully occupied.

Throughout the long construction period, thousands of photographs were taken of features of the building including some of original construction techniques and materials that were seen for the first time. Some of this new information was targeted for research before construction began based on archival information about where certain historic architectural features or decorative finishes might be found beneath modern layers of new materials. Added to these known historic features grew a lengthy list of discoveries and observations that were unexpected.

In general, the interior of the building is now more representative of its 19th century appearance than at any point during the last century. The ability to run many building systems beneath floors or through

wall channels has removed many of the unsightly air ducts, wiring channels and office heating and cooling equipment that had scarred the appearance of the building during the 20th century. New reproduction doors, windows and light fixtures were returned to their historic 19th century character.

The success of the modernization and restoration of the Treasury building was recognized with the 2007 Chairman's Award for Federal Achievement in Historic Preservation from the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation.

The Treasury Department, the Office of the Curator and the nonprofit Treasury Historical Association continue to work in partnership to complete important restoration projects remaining and newly discovered since major construction ended in 2007. These future projects will help enrich the Treasury building for decades to come as the building begins its third century as the oldest federal agency occupying its original location since the federal government was moved to Washington, DC in 1800.



*“These old buildings do not belong to us only,  
they belong to our forefathers and they will  
belong to our descendents  
unless we play them false.*



*They are not in any sense  
our own property to do with  
as we like with them.*

*We are only trustees for those  
that come after us.”*

*– William Morris*



## *Historic Timeline*

- 1800** - First Treasury building completed in time for the relocation of the federal government from Philadelphia to Washington, DC.
- 1814** - During the War of 1812 British burn the Treasury building requiring extensive rebuilding and repairs.
- 1833** - Arsonists burn Treasury building to the ground. Treasury Department is relocated to rented space in nearby buildings.
- 1836** - New Treasury building designed by Robert Mills begins construction.
- 1842** - Mills designed East and Center wings of the building are completed.
- 1859** - South Wing completed by Ammi B. Young.
- 1861** - Start of the Civil War, officers and troops stationed in the South Wing of the Treasury building.
- 1864** - West Wing completed by Isaiah Rogers.
- 1865** - End of the Civil War, assassination of President Lincoln. President Johnson temporarily moves his office into Treasury building.

- 1869** - North Wing completed by Alfred Mullett; President Grant Inauguration event.
- 1877** - Phone line installed between the White House and the Treasury building.
- 1885** - Electricity installed in parts of the Treasury building.
- 1904** - Electricity installed throughout the entire Treasury building.
- 1917** - America enters World War I.
- 1919** - Treasury Annex building designed by Cass Gilbert is built in 14 months.
- 1927** - Treasury building appears on currency, back of the \$10 bill.
- 1934** - Air conditioning is installed throughout the Treasury building.
- 1944** - Treasury building secured for World War II, stairwell dome skylights blacked out and filled in with concrete slabs.
- 1959** - Fluorescent lighting installed throughout the Treasury building
- 1972** - Treasury building designated as a National Historic Landmark.
- 1976** - The Cash Room as a banking room is closed.
- 1985** - Cash Room restored to the period of President Grant's Inaugural Ball, 1869.
- 1987** - North Lobby restored.
- 1988** - Secretary's Conference Room and Diplomatic Reception Room created.
- 1991** - Andrew Johnson Suite restored.

- 1992** - Salmon Chase Suite restored.
- 1996** - Roof fire above North Wing of the Treasury building.
- 1997** - Exterior and interior restoration and modernization of the entire Treasury building begins.
- 2004** - West Wing stairwell dome with three skylights restored.
- 2007** - Treasury building restoration and modernization completed. Treasury building receives the Chairman's Award from the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation.
- 2009** - Northwest and Southeast stairwell domes decorative painting and gilding are completed.
- 2010** - Exterior east colonnade historic cast iron railing restored between each of 33 columns.





*The Cash Room is one of many restored spaces in the Treasury Building that celebrates the architectural grandeur of the 19th century. Today, as part of an active office building, the architecture, decorative arts and historic artifacts on display at the Treasury Building provide a connection to a heritage that extends back to the founding of our country.*



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