U. S. Treasury Building

Achieving a Balance: The Stewardship of a Historical Landmark and its Collection
History

The first Treasury building, a Georgian style brick building used by the Department from 1800, was burnt to the ground by the British in 1814. The present building was constructed on the site of the original building between 1836-1869.

The earliest east and center wings were designed by Robert Mills, architect of the Washington Monument and the Patent Office building in Washington, DC. Later additions were designed by Thomas U. Walter, Ammi B. Young, Isaiah Rogers and Alfred B. Mullett.

The Treasury Building is the oldest departmental building in Washington and has had a great impact on the design of other government buildings.
Treasury Historic Spaces

Historically Significant

Public Areas

Restored Suites

Architecturally Significant
Adaptive Use

- Executive Offices
- Public Lobbies & Corridors
- Bureau Offices
- “Production” Spaces
- Additions and alterations
TBARR (Treasury & Annex Restoration and Repair project)

- Multi-year Project
- Congressional Authorization
- Comprehensive
- Utility Modernization
- Efficient use of space
- Improve work environment
- Restoration is a “companion” activity within the project
Which is more important, to preserve the maximum amount of historic materials from different periods with little context or to preserve the original intent, using restoration, even if it may require the loss of historic materials or the use of replacement materials?
“Historic Fabric”

- 1869 signature on the inside of a marble panel.
- Original 19th century escutcheon hardware
- Sympathetic granite corner “Dutchman” repair
There is a significant amount of original materials and finishes that remain in the Treasury building, often covered over with subsequent finishes and alterations.

Although there are often conflicts in presenting a cabinet level, landmark building to official visitors and the public, there is a strong commitment to retaining and documenting original, 19th century features and finishes.
Authenticity vs. Period Restoration

- Public spaces retain a significant amount of original materials with restored, period finishes.
- Significant offices have been restored to a particular period, and furnished with original or comparable period pieces.
- Select conference and reception rooms are recreated period rooms. They are not restorations of specific historic spaces.
- Multiple architects, and architectural periods create an interpretive challenge that often is at odds with current use and expectations.

The current restoration and modernization project is the first time that a single architectural team has worked on the entire Treasury Building comprehensively.
Historic offices that were restored less than 15 years ago will be within the larger TBARR project. While items from the Collection can be removed, interior finishes will be extensively protected and monitored while work is being performed.
The Treasury Collection is one of the oldest and most intact collections of fine and decorative arts in the Executive branch of the United States government.

Many of the objects in the Collection continue to be used for their intended purpose and are exhibited in restored historic suites, reception and conference rooms as well as in offices.

- Paintings
- Decorative Art Objects
- Furniture
- Historical Artifacts
- Architecture

Over 65% of the paintings, objects, and furniture from the collection are in use at any given time.
Collection Data

- Moves and inventories are correlated to administration changes.
- Temporary accessions have increased dramatically due to the building restoration and modernization project = increased off-site storage requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accessioned Objects</th>
<th>3,525</th>
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<tr>
<td>Temporary Accessions</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>92</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>188</td>
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Once a part of the Collection, tracking the object is primarily a function of annual inventory reports, moves, and a repair/conservation history.
The Secretary’s Portraits

- Every Secretary of the Treasury has a portrait.
- Portraits are only hung within the Treasury Building.

After a roof fire in 1996, every portrait and frame on display was cleaned and conserved. The fire forced a reconsideration of emergency response requirements for the Collection.
Balancing care and use of the Collection

The Collection is used in the offices of Senior Treasury officials and selected conference and reception rooms.
The Office of the Secretary of the Treasury is a combination of selected items from the Collection infused with furnishings distinct to the requests of each Secretary. Artwork is often selected and loaned from Washington, DC museums in addition to pieces from the Collection.
Interpretation of an Object

This chair was a part of the rediscovered Mint collection in 1969, and made its way to Washington, DC c.1970. The chair was covered in period practice upholstery. In the late 1980’s with additional research, a lithograph of an interior office in Treasury of a similar chair was the basis for the upholstery and refinishing of the chair. In 2002, once the full set of chairs was acquired, historic documents relating to their original use at the S.F. Mint were able to guide a more appropriate upholstering and refinishing of the chairs.
Furniture from the S.F. Mint

The San Francisco Mint building was completed in 1874 by architect Alfred B. Mullett, 5 years after completing the north wing of the Treasury Building. Mullett designed many of the furniture pieces for the executive offices, and Mint records trace much of the furniture production back to J.B. Luchsinger, a furniture manufacturer in San Francisco.

Much of the furniture was in disrepair and out of use until 1969 when Mary Brooks the Miint Director found them in storage and had them restored. In 1994, the Mint building and the on-site museum suffered damage in an earthquake. Furniture was transferred to Washington, DC and in 1996 the Curator’s Office at Treasury began accessioning excess pieces into the Collection. This process is continuing, and recent additions have completed the restoration of the original holdings of the Superintendents Office at the San Francisco Mint.
The Cash Room was completed in 1869 as part of the north wing construction. Until 1976 it was open to the public as a banking room where government currencies and checks could be cashed or exchanged. During the early 1980’s the space was restored and has been used as a ceremonial space since that time.
The breadth of the previous restoration did not include the cleaning and repair of the ornamental brass balustrade, and the decorative brass screens at the doors. Additionally, the marble walls were inspected and minor repairs were made, and the plaster ceiling repairs, repaint and gilding were completed.
Paint analysis revealed a gray ceiling color that more appropriately coordinated with known historic events, and a signature behind a marble panel dated after the “initial” completion of the room for the Inaugural Ball for President Grant.
Exhibitions at the Treasury building display departmental and bureau artwork. In addition, topical presentations relating to historical figures, history, and artifacts of the building are displayed within the building for a 6-9 month period.
Education

Education is a process that takes place among the building users, new management executive, peers in the federal government, and with the general public.
Exhibitions on the Internet

OFFICE OF THE CURATOR

Welcome to the Office of the Curator

The mission of the Office of the Curator is to preserve the cultural resources of the Treasury Building and Treasury Annex for the enjoyment of the public, Treasury employees, and future generations. To this end, the Office provides:

- Preservation and technical guidance for the conservation and preservation of the Treasury Building and Annex (Federal Historic Landmarks) in accordance with...