



April 2006

TREASURY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Inside this Newsletter...

- **Financial Management Service's Historic Treasure.** The temporary World War I building in Southwest Washington has survived 80 years to become a significant historic structure in Washington, DC.
- **Public Tours to Begin.** The Department is finalizing plans to reinstitute its public tour program for the restored spaces of the Treasury Building..

New THA Officers and Committee Chairs for 2006-2007 Term of Office

Following the November 1, 2005 election of THA's Board of Directors for 2006-2007, the outgoing Board members cast their votes for the THA officers for this period.

Four of the five officer positions' incumbents were changed: THA's new president is David J. Monroe; vice president, Judith S. Ochs; Treasurer, Gary E. Grippo; and, Secretary, William F. Falls. The Board Chairman remains Thomas P. O'Malley.

After the first of the year, THA's president, David Monroe, appointed chairs for the Association's several committees: Publications, Paula Mohr; Commemorative Products, Thomas O'Malley; Communications, Charles Powers; Finance, Gary Grippo; Membership, Elaine Rand; and, Programs, Judith Ochs. The former term's Development Committee has been incorporated into the Finance Committee's responsibilities.

While most of the committee members are from the Board of Directors, there are opportunities offered to all THA members to participate in one or more committees of interest. To volunteer to assist in a committee, please contact THA by mail, e-mail or telephone (see reference box on page 2).

Photographic Calendars Remain Available

In 2000, THA published a fine art photographic calendar with contemporary and historic images and educational text about the National Historic Landmark Treasury Building, particularly the restored areas and antiques.

This keepsake of photographs and text remains available in limited quantity to THA members for only the shipping costs of \$2 for one or two copies or \$5 for a carton of 12 copies. To order, please mail your check and your address to THA (see box on page 2).

Katrina and the New Orleans Mint—It Could Have Been Worse

Treasury's historic buildings in Washington and around the country are no strangers to disasters. The Treasury headquarters buildings adjacent to the White House has had several major fires during the Department's long history. At the opposite end of the country, the San Francisco Mint weathered the earthquake and fire which devastated the city in 1906. The most recent disaster struck the Gulf Coast in August 2005 and the former New Orleans Mint Building was not spared. Of the nine museums in New Orleans' French Quarter operated by the Louisiana State Museum, the hardest hit was the Mint Building.

Two days after Katrina, the Louisiana State Museum staff entered the building under armed escort and discovered that the high winds had ripped off a large portion of the copper roof. Fortunately, the collections, including rare coins, displayed inside were undisturbed by looters or water. While the collections survived, the building itself sustained significant water damage. FEMA has hired contractors who have covered the Mint's roof with a tarp and temporary repairs are underway. Greg Lambousy, Director of Collections for the Louisiana State Museum, estimates that more permanent building repairs will take two or three years. Areas of the building that were in need of attention prior to the hurricane will also be addressed during the restoration process.

The New Orleans Mint was operated as a mint until 1909. After that time, it was used by the Federal Government for various office purposes. In 1966, the building was transferred to the state of Louisiana and, in 1981, it reopened as a museum dedicated to numismatic history and the history of Louisiana.

THA members who are interested in learning more about the Mint's historic buildings will want to look at the on-line exhibit "The Federal Presence: U.S. Mint Buildings Across the Nation" organized by the Treasury's Office of the Curator. See <http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/management/curator/exhibitions/mintbldgs/>



New Orleans Mint (Louisiana State Museum)

Liberty Center: FMS' Historic WWI Facility

As motorists proceed south on 14th Street toward Virginia, they view a building to the right that has a curious roadway cut through the first floor. Many do not realize the historical significance of this "temporary" World War I building that has survived to become the headquarters of Treasury's Financial Management Service (FMS).

The following is an article written by FMS retiree George Bromley that was published in FMS' Fiscal Scene newsletter, and reprinted here, with permission.

The Liberty Center Building has been the Financial Management Service's headquarters facility since 1987. However, for most of its existence, Liberty Center was known as the Liberty Loan Building. In many ways it is a very special structure, with a long and interesting history. Although it appears to be just another Government office building, the former Liberty Loan is Washington's sole surviving World War I temporary. Intended to last for only a decade or two, it has stood at the foot of 14th Street for over 80 years, enduring the rigors of time, changing as Washington itself has changed.

America entered what then was known as the World War in April 1917. Existing Federal buildings rapidly became overcrowded as the workforce expanded, creating an unprecedented demand for office space. In order to create additional work space, the Government began building many three story temporary structures on the Mall on the future location of Constitution Gardens and further east near the future sites of the National Gallery of Art and the Air and Space Museum. Additional temporaries were built north of the Mall in what is now the Federal Triangle area. In October 1918 one temporary building rose alone, tucked away on a small parcel of land just south of the Engraving and Printing plant. When completed in early 1919, the building was occupied by workers processing paperwork generated by the Government's war bond drives, known as Liberty Loans. At the time, it was a common practice to name a building after the work performed

there, so the new structure was christened the Liberty Loan Annex. This suffix was changed to "Building" in the 1920s, probably to avoid confusion with the newly completed Treasury Annex.

Liberty Loan was built overlooking one of the most picturesque spots in the District of Columbia, but before the early 1900s, Southwest Washington had been a very different place. In the Nineteenth Century the Potomac River shoreline ran just beyond 15th Street. From there, marshy shallows known as Potomac Flats stretched westward for hundreds of yards into the main channel of the river. The murky waters of the Flats were often fetid and occasionally malarial. The construction of the Tidal Basin after 1900 and the planting of the cherry trees in 1912 completely altered the landscape of Southwest, creating most of the vistas we know today.

From the beginning, Liberty Loan has stood in the shadow of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing plant that opened in 1914. This massive structure replaced the old facility at 14th and Independence, which had served BEP since 1879 (now the Yates Building, formerly the Department of Agriculture's Auditors Building).

In the early years of Liberty Loan, a covered walkway ran from the present west wing delivery entrance area to Engraving. Although many older LLLB employees later spoke of a "tunnel" between the two buildings, the walkway is visible in aerial photographs published in 1922.

Because of the walkway, there was no alley between BEP and Liberty Loan for some time. Originally, the building had no entrances facing 14th Street. The "front" door was located on the north side of the building, a few yards down the present alley. The only available parking was curbside along 14th Street. Traffic there was light as few workers owned cars in the early 20s. Those who did not arrive by car, or on foot, rode streetcars that ran past the building and left onto Maine Avenue, where they ended their southbound run. Riders paid a seven cent fare when Liberty Loan opened in 1919. Inside, Liberty Loan was mostly open

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Treasury Planning To Restart Tours

THA has learned that the Office of the Curator of the Treasury Building is finalizing plans with the Office of Security and the U.S. Secret Service to permit the reinstatement of the public tours of the restored areas of the Treasury Building sometime in early Summer. These public tours had been terminated shortly after September 11, 2001, to provide increased levels of security.

Tours are expected to be conducted on Saturday mornings only, by advance registration, with sufficient time for the authorities to conduct reviews of all visitors. Registration will require submission of full name, date of birth and social security number.

Since THA's next newsletter will not be published until August, when plans for the tours are finalized, THA will post the tour reservation telephone number on our website and will include it in our announcement on our telephone information line, to permit THA members to register for the tours. See box below for our website address and telephone information line.

During the multi-year repair and renovation project that is being essentially completed this month, several significant historical treatments in the building were unexpectedly discovered; and, restoration and preservation work ensued. Included were additional *trompe l'oeil* wall paintings, ceiling murals, and elegant gold leaf treatment of certain ceilings. Many of these "new finds," along with the previously-restored spaces in the building are expected to be included in the public tours.

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space, except for three large vaults that were located on each floor of the north side of the west wing. These areas are now conference rooms on the second and third floors, and part of the fitness center on the first floor. There were only two sets of elevators, both in the building's west wing. The original restrooms were directly opposite the main elevators. As there was no air conditioning, employees only recourse was to turn on electric fans, open the windows, and deploy the large awnings which were then a feature of virtually every office building in Washington. Occasionally, these measures proved insufficient and workers were sent home when the temperature-humidity index became excessive.

The surrounding neighborhood was very different during Liberty Loan's early years. A small railroad yard occupied the current parking lot on the opposite side of 14th Street. Row houses lined the street further north on the present sites of the Engraving Annex and the main Department of Agriculture building. Some of the early Liberty Loan employees may well have lived in these homes or in other row houses to the east. USDA's experimental gardens and greenhouses stood to the west of BEP in the now open area between the Tidal Basin and 15th Street.

Although Maine Avenue crossed 14th Street just south of the building, traffic jams were rare as not many workers commuted from outside the District. Southwest Washington saw very few tourists in the days before the BEP "money tour," but there were swimmers. A small beach ran along the Tidal Basin shore at the present site of the Jefferson Memorial and swimming was permitted there until 1927.

Though a modest and simple design, Liberty Loan was a strong building, one of the first reinforced concrete structures erected in the Washington area. Although intended as a temporary building, engineers determined it could support additional weight. Since the demand for office space had not abated after the war, the Government decided to add two floors to Liberty Loan in 1927.

Other significant alterations were made at that time. The building's main entrance was moved from the north side to the present location facing 14th Street.

A new entrance was added at the south end and a set of elevators was installed to serve that wing. The covered walkway from LLB to Engraving was probably removed during this renovation. These changes increased Liberty Loan's floor space by over 60 percent and considerably improved its appearance.

The 1927 addition gave LLB an advantage over its fellow temporaries, some of which were already being razed to make way for the Commerce Department building at 15th and Constitution.

However, Liberty Loan's future was hardly secure. Plans drawn up by the National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 1928-29 showed the building's site as parkland. Although LLB appeared in two plans published during the 30s, a 1941 plan featured only the west wing. Such were the hazards for any temporary facility in Washington, DC.

Tracing the various Liberty Loan tenants is difficult, but it appears Public Debt was the primary tenant until the early 1940s. A memo to the Secretary of the Treasury dated November 11, 1919, stated in part:

Since the beginning of our participation in the war, the Division of Loans and Currency has increased in personnel from 88 to over 2800 employees. The space occupied by the Division . . . includes space in nine buildings in Washington, including the exclusive occupancy of the three-story building on the grounds adjoining the Bureau of Engraving and Printing with something over 60,000 square feet of available floor space, which it was necessary to build as a war measure.

Loans and Currency shortly thereafter became part of the new Bureau of the Public Debt. The "three-story building" was of course, Liberty Loan.

Liberty Loan acquired its first future FMS tenant during World War II. In July 1942 the old Check Accounting Division, which was then part of the Office of the Treasurer, moved to LLB from the Main Treasury. Check Accounting was split into the Check Claims Division and the Check Payments Division in 1953. The latter was renamed Check Payment and Reconciliation Division (CPRD) in 1956. This organization began using some of

the Treasury's first computers in LLB in the late 1950s, but acquisition of larger, heavier systems forced CPRD to shift to the GAO Building in 1961. Check Claims, however, was to remain in Liberty Loan for over 40 years, eventually occupying the entire building by the mid-1970s.

While the building changed very little inside or out in the 1930s and 40s, the surrounding area began to assume its present appearance. In the mid-30s the last private structures along 14th Street were demolished to make way for the Engraving and Printing Annex. Among the losses were two cafeterias, a deli, and a hamburger stand, greatly reducing employees' options for lunch. Agriculture completed construction of its massive south building in the late 30s. The BEP Annex opened in March 1938 and the Jefferson Memorial was dedicated in April 1943.

In the early 1940s the streetcar terminal at 14th Street and Maine Avenue was moved north to an underground location at the corner of 14th and C Streets SW. The tracks then began their descent into the new loop just south of 14th and Independence Avenue. The new terminal, which had exits to both BEP and USDA, remained in operation until January 1962, when the last street cars went out of service. The underground terminal space became part of Engraving's garage complex and 14th Street was filled in, assuming its present appearance.

During World War II, even more temporary buildings were erected south of the Mall's Reflecting Pool. The presence of these structures, combined with rapid population growth in Northern Virginia, led to a tremendous increase in commuter and tourist traffic in Southwest Washington. These developments would mean major changes for Liberty Loan.

In the late 1940s the decision was made to bridge 14th Street over Maine Avenue and thus eliminate the often congested intersection. However, Virginia-bound traffic moving west on Maine would then be forced to proceed up 15th Street, east on Independence, then back down 14th, encountering four traffic lights in the process. The simple alternative was a loop back onto 14th from Maine, as was proposed in the 1941 NCPPC plan. The problem was that Liberty Loan stood in the way.

Tearing down the south wing was considered, but the demand for office accommodations had increased dramatically during the New Deal and World War II, and the Government was reluctant to surrender any space. So Federal highway engineers drove the loop directly through the south wing in 1952, resolving the traffic problem, while keeping most of Liberty Loan intact.

By the late 1950s the facility was nearly forty years old but holding up well. Window air conditioning units were finally installed in the early 60s, making offices more habitable in summer and ending the early dismissals. By the mid-1960s tenants included Check Claims, the Comptroller of the Currency, Agriculture, and General Services Administration (GSA). A minor building renovation was carried out in 1966, the chief result being that the exterior was painted a slightly lighter hue. In 1969-70 the last of the World War I temporaries along Constitution Avenue were demolished, leaving Liberty Loan as the sole survivor of Washington's emergency building boom of 1917-18.

The 1970s were years of change for Liberty Loan. Ceilings and thermostats were lowered throughout the building to save energy. Carpeting was laid down in most offices, covering the worn hardwood floors. Modular furniture began to replace the old battleship-gray desks and partitions broke open work areas into cubicles. Gradually, push button phones replaced rotary models and typewriters started to give way to word processors.

During the mid-70s the Division of Check Claims became the sole Liberty Loan tenant when Smithsonian and Comptroller of the Currency offices were moved elsewhere. Many current FMS employees worked in the building at the time and undoubtedly can recall the building as it was in that era. The primary color throughout was a gloomy institutional green. Each level had a narrow central aisle with floor to ceiling walls. The effect was to make the interior much darker than it is today, since less natural light was let in.

Check Claims' executive offices were located on the fifth floor, overlooking 14th Street. Four huge automated files that stored the Division's closed cases stood on the ground floor of the west

wing in the present conference room space. The snack bar and the lounge were on the fifth floor of the west wing. In the area now occupied by the offices of the FMS Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner.

Although the 70s saw minor attempts at modernization, the building was showing its age. The structure no longer met the District's building code and conditions were deteriorating rapidly inside and out. All of the building's windows were desperately in need of replacement. Because windowpanes occasionally fell out, GSA constructed a corrugated metal covering over the alley sidewalk and each entrance. The loose windows meant drafts, making the building very difficult to heat properly. Temperatures in some offices fell into the low 60s during the winter months, occasionally forcing workers to wear their overcoats at their desks.

On January 4, 1979, the Washington Post reported that GSA was proposing to renovate the building at a cost of \$6.1 million, seven times the original cost of Liberty Loan. The Planning Commission opposed this plan and recommended that the building be torn down and the site returned to parkland. Many employees concurred, but Liberty Loan endured once more.

In late 1985, GSA began to gut the building completely and proceed with a reconstruction. The last offices were relocated to Hyattsville at the end of that year. Although the building was in desperate need of repair, there were other considerations that contributed to the decision to renovate. FMS had been under pressure to vacate the Treasury Annex for some time. The Service was also attempting to consolidate its Washington operations, which were scattered among seven different buildings. FMS' space needs thus played a major role in the retention and renovation of LLB.

The Liberty Loan project took nearly two years to complete. The first office staffs moved in on October 19, 1987. By December, the structure was fully occupied. In January 1988, FMS held an open house for the neighboring Government agencies. The building then was christened Liberty Center. However, that name has never been fully accepted. For example, the building was abbreviated

as "LL" in the Treasury Department telephone directory well into the 1990s. And to the many employees who worked in the pre-renovated structure, the building will always be known as Liberty Loan.

The last decade has seen relatively few changes. Additional conference rooms and executive offices have been added and a fitness center was installed in 2002. With the exception of the Holocaust Museum that opened in 1993, the surrounding area also has stayed much the same. The massive Portals complex, which was to occupy the parking lot across the street, remains mostly unbuilt. Meanwhile, "temporary" Liberty Loan's story shows no signs of ending. Although the building's site has been mentioned as a location for the proposed African-American History Museum, it seems unlikely to be chosen as there are better sites along the Mall.

Today, Washington, DC, is no longer the city of 1918. Many of its institutions have vanished with the passing years: the Washington Senators twice moved away, "Woodies" declared bankruptcy, The Evening Star folded, Peoples Drugs became CVS, and DC Transit's green street cars gave way to Metro's red, white, and blue buses, and silver-gray trains. The list goes on and on, but through it all, Liberty Loan has remained standing and become a part of the cityscape of Southwest Washington.

Although nothing lasts forever, some things manage to last for years against great odds. Many stronger buildings have crumbled before the wrecker's ball, but "war measure" Liberty Loan has somehow prevailed and now stands in a new millennium. If there is a lesson in all this, perhaps it is that life is capricious. Sometimes man's best laid plans and projects go astray, while some of his footnotes endure for generations. When it began, and in so many "master plans," Liberty Loan was such a footnote, if it was thought of at all. On a number of occasions, it could have been swiftly leveled and soon forgotten. But the Fates were kind, and so it stands today, long after all of its builders and brother temporaries have gone. Liberty Loan has served us and our predecessors for many years and likely will continue to do so far into the future. All of us should hope to do as well.