



August 2002

TREASURY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Inside this Newsletter...

- **Personalities from Treasury's Past.** In this issue, THA begins a new series of articles on people who have shaped the Treasury Department's history over the past two hundred years.
- **Special savings to members on THA holiday cards.** THA is once again offering its members special savings on the purchase of its snow scene holiday greeting cards, through October 31, subject to stock on hand.

THA Reception for Cash Room Ceiling Restoration Donors

On April 29, 2002, THA hosted an appreciation reception for the individuals, corporations and foundations that contributed to the Special Restoration Campaign that funded the re-gilding of the Cash Room ceiling. The two-hour evening social event was held in the restored Cash Room, in the North Wing of the Treasury Building, offering an opportunity for all to enjoy the brilliance of the 24-karat gold-leaf restoration. Approximately 80 were in attendance at the event at which Secretary of the Treasury Paul H. O'Neill presented welcoming and appreciation comments. Several other senior Treasury officials were also in attendance.

THA Board Member and Chairman of the Programs Committee Clifford R. Northup served as master of ceremonies at the event, and brief comments were delivered to the audience by THA President and Chairman of the Special Restoration Fundraising Committee Michael D. Serlin, as well as by Board Chairman Thomas P. O'Malley.

The Office of the Curator and its cadre of volunteer docents offered brief tours to several other restored rooms of the Building for the attendees. Special guests included former Secretary G. William Miller and THA's co-founder and first president, Robert R. Fredlund. Also, two former Treasurers of the United States were in attendance, Kathryn D. Ortega and Mary Ellen Withrow.

North Entrance of Treasury Re-Opened After 25 Years

On June 28, 2002, Secretary Paul O'Neill officiated at the ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the re-opening of the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance in the North Wing of the Treasury Building. This entrance had been closed since 1976. Beginning July 1, this will be the primary entry to the Building, since the Visitors Appointment Center and the entire East Wing will be closed for major renovation work.

For the ceremony, THA helped provide some of the historical facts that became part of a Treasury Department News webpage on the North Entrance vicinity, which is excerpted below:

The North Entrance and Lobby were first opened in 1869. Architect Alfred Mullett designed the Cash Room and North Lobby to be the most opulent spaces in the Treasury Building and decorated in a sumptuous manner with gold gilding. In 1927 the Cash Room was renovated and the present bronze doors were added. The Cash Room and Lobby were closed in 1976, and were restored between 1985 and 1987. In 2001, THA funded the re-gilding of the Cash Room ceiling.

15 vaults lay under the North Lobby for over 100 years. They varied in size from 10 feet by 16 feet to 50 feet by 90 feet. In the 1970s they were converted into Treasury's main computer command center. Among the documents stored in these vaults was the checkbook used in the 1870s by the Comptroller of the Currency to pay the depositors of the failed Freedman's Savings and Trust Bank, whose main office was just opposite the North entrance on the site of the Treasury Annex. Below the vaults are the catacombs, special vaults used to shore up the Cash Room. The catacombs are so cool that Woodrow Wilson's administration stored flour in them during World War I.

In 1949 the Albert Gallatin statue replaced the fountain (originally installed in 1869) in the North Plaza. The statue was designed by James Earl Fraser, the American sculptor who designed the Buffalo nickel. Fraser attended the dedication. Secretary John Snyder (later a THA member) officiated. The dedication was one of the first Treasury events to appear on television news.

THA Repeats Special Offer on Holiday Cards for Members

THA is once again offering its members a special savings on its holiday cards of the Treasury Building through October 31, subject to stock on hand. The cards show the Treasury Building from a Southwest view, in a full-color snow setting, with the Treasury Annex Building in the distance. This image, from a watercolor by local artist Ken Frye, may be seen on THA's website.

The THA holiday cards are packed 10 to a box, and come in a choice of inside printings (see below). To order, cut out or photocopy this column, add your name and address, and mail it with your check to the address in the right column by October 31.

THA member special pricing is \$7 per box (usually \$8), plus members get a free box for every two purchased. Inside printing types may be mixed.

Order for Treasury Building Cards

SPECIAL MEMBER-ONLY OFFER
EXPIRES OCTOBER 31, 2002

__ Box(es) Holiday Cards @ \$7, with inside inscription as follows:

- () "Merry Christmas and Best Wishes for the New Year"
 () "Seasons Greetings and Best Wishes for the New Year"
 () Blank inside for your message

TOTAL OF ORDER: \$ _____

Plus Free Boxes of cards, 1 box free for every 2 boxes purchased:

- () **Merry Christmas;**
 () **Seasons Greetings;**
 () **Blank**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Personalities from Treasury's Past —

Robert Mills — Architect of the "New Treasury Building"

Following the arsonist fire in the Treasury Building in 1833, Secretary of the Treasury Louis McLane commissioned a report assessing the damage to the building and called upon Robert Mills—the architect most experienced with fireproof construction in the country. Mills had gained considerable fame for his practical, yet aesthetically refined, fireproof buildings which he designed for the state of South Carolina. The federal government, after suffering from a series of disastrous fires, was intensely interested in Mills' technical expertise in fireproof construction.

Mills was born in Charleston, SC, in 1781. While the facts about his early training as an architect are clouded, Mills stated that he was "the first American who has passed through a regular course of study in architecture in his own country." Mills took great pride in this claim and encouraged others to pursue a uniquely American taste in architecture. As a young adult, Mills was apprenticed to White House architect James Hoban and, afterwards, Thomas Jefferson employed Mills as a draftsman at Monticello. In addition to the architectural training Mills received from Jefferson, he was afforded access to Jefferson's library, which was the largest architectural collection in America at the time. Mills other important mentor was Benjamin Latrobe who introduced him to the technology of fireproof construction as practiced in England. Following his apprenticeship with Latrobe, Mills began his own practice in Philadelphia.

Mills spent the decade of the 1820s working in his native South Carolina, but uncertainties about his continued employment in the state led him to Washington, DC in 1830. Working as a draftsman in the Land Office (part of the Treasury) and

later responsible for renovations in the Capitol Building and the White House, Mills was well positioned, professionally and politically, to assist Treasury in the aftermath of the 1833 fire. Three years after submitting his report on the fire damaged building to Secretary McLane, President Andrew Jackson named Mills "Architect of Public Buildings" and put him in charge of the construction of the New Treasury and a new Patent Office. During the 1830s, Mills also designed a number of customs houses for New England ports. These significant federal commissions put Mills in an enviable position as the leading designer of public buildings and made him a lightning rod for jealous colleagues who wanted the work for themselves.

Mills completed his work on the New Treasury Building in 1842 but continued in his federal position as "Architect of Public Buildings" until his dismissal in 1851. He died at his home in Washington in March 1855. His practical and classically refined designs continued to influence the direction of federal architecture well into the twentieth century, as evidenced by the buildings within the Federal Triangle. Mills' legacy is the extraordinary collection of buildings which expressed architecturally the hopes and aspirations of a young Nation.

(This article is the first in a series on the people who have shaped Treasury's history. See future THA Newsletters for other installments.)

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