

G R O W T H | E F F I C I E N C Y | A N D M O D E R N I S M

GSA Buildings of the 1950s | 60s | and 70s |



MODERNISM

G R O W T H | E F F I C I E N C Y | A N D

DETAIL OF FACADE,
STROM THURMOND FEDERAL
BUILDING AND U.S. COURTHOUSE,
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA |
MARCEL BREUER | 1979

GSA Buildings of the 1950s | 60s | and 70s |

Foreword

In early 2000, under its *First Impressions* initiative to improve public spaces in Federal buildings, the U.S. General Services Administration proposed a renovation project to the 1965 Byron G. Rogers Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Denver, Colorado. GSA planned to articulate and enhance the building's entryway and create a new lobby that would alleviate security queuing delays. While the design was under way, word of the project reached the Denver community and local citizens were soon vocal in opposing changes that they felt compromised the building's original design. Coinciding with this community interest was the publication of a book on Denver's Modern architectural heritage that called attention to the building as Denver's best example of the Formalist style of architecture, raising the possibility that it could be exceptionally significant under the criteria for eligibility in the National Register of Historic Places. This experience served as a wake-up call for GSA, making clear that the agency would need to develop a better understanding of its Modern-era buildings. In anticipation of increasing public interest, GSA initiated a program to proactively explore the significance of its buildings from this period.

On December 5, 2000, GSA brought together 75 leading private-sector architects and preservation experts to discuss how to best contend with the aesthetic and performance challenges of GSA buildings constructed between 1960 and 1979. The GSA symposium, "Architecture of the Great Society," was held at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, in partnership with Yale's School of Architecture, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the American Architectural Foundation, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

From "Architecture of the Great Society," a Blue Ribbon Panel was convened on February 22, 2001, at GSA Headquarters in Washington, D.C., to develop recommendations for addressing the issues raised at Yale. As a first step in response to the panel recommendations, GSA initiated a study to better understand this era of Federal construction within its context in American architectural history and the history of Federal public building construction. It quickly became apparent that the period under consideration should be expanded to include the decade between 1950 and 1960, when Modernism took hold in America. *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s* was released as a result of that endeavor. This second edition includes an additional case study, more illustrations, and inventory details we have ascertained since the original printing.

GSA's Center for Historic Buildings is pleased to present this study, which provides the context for evaluating the historic and architectural significance of GSA's mid-century Modern buildings as they near the 50-year age threshold for National Register eligibility. Some of the study's contents may come as a surprise. For example, a handful of these structures, such as Mies van der Rohe's Federal Center in Chicago, Illinois, have already been identified as

architecturally exceptional and determined eligible for listing in the National Register. Most, however, reflect the era's focus on efficiency and economy and are neither exceptional nor likely ever to qualify for listing.

As the study illustrates, balancing the goals of construction economy and architectural value has been a consistent concern of the Federal government. To promote higher-quality public building design, President John F. Kennedy issued the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture" in 1962. Three decades later, building on the efforts of successive administrations to improve Federal construction, GSA introduced a radical new process that would validate the continued relevance of the "Guiding Principles." Since 1994, GSA's *Design Excellence Program* has raised the bar for Federal construction by calling on the nation's premier architects to serve as peers to other nationally renowned project architects—from team selection through design development and project execution. Widely applauded by the design profession, the program has reinvigorated Federal architecture to produce what will become treasured landmarks of tomorrow.

In response to this success, the *Design Excellence Program* has been expanded to include major renovations. With over 550 Modern-era buildings in the GSA inventory, it is important that reinvestment decisions take into account relative architectural merit and potential National Register status. Understanding the quantity and quality of these resources, their relationship to the communities in which they are situated, and their potential cultural significance will enable GSA to consider these values when establishing priorities for reinvestment and retention.

The study is not meant to be a comprehensive review of Modernist buildings in the United States or a definitive critique of mid-century architecture. These broader subjects are left to the academic community. It would have been impossible, within the budget and time constraints of this project, to catalog every GSA property constructed during this period. Some no longer remain in the Federal inventory; others have been demolished; and, in some cases, construction records could not be obtained. Although these building-specific matters eventually need to be explored, the first priority was an extensive, well-documented background and specific guidance to assist individuals in assessing the potential significance of individual buildings within local, state, and national contexts. *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s* is a precedent-setting reference for understanding the Federal legacy of Modern public buildings and recognizing those that best reflect that era.



Rolando Rivas-Camp, FAIA
Director, Center for Historic Buildings

GSA'S MODERN BUILDINGS

1

WHEN GSA BUILT
MODERN AT ITS BEST,
IT EMBRACED STRIKINGLY
CONTEMPORARY DESIGNS
BY MODERN MASTERS.

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), created to bring order to the Federal government, “the most gigantic business on earth,” was established in 1949 to consolidate the government’s immense building management and general procurement functions. GSA began responding to a tremendous backlog of building needs coming out of unprecedented Depression-era and wartime expansion. The decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s stand out as a period of extensive Federal government growth, with the number of Federal employees, the Federal budget, and GSA’s building-related budget increasing dramatically. Between 1960 and 1976 alone, GSA undertook more than 700 building projects across the United States. These included office buildings, courthouses, post offices, museums, and border stations, located in cities and towns of all sizes.

GSA was building in a stimulating design environment. The 1950s through 1970s were decades immersed in the second wave of Modernism, and designers explored the aesthetics and advances in building technology with optimism. A few innovative Federal commissions from the 1950s and early 1960s—such as the buildings by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and Eero Saarinen’s Washington Dulles International Airport in Chantilly, Virginia—helped confirm Modernism as an acceptable style for the Federal government and set the stage for a broader application at GSA when the government began encouraging Modern architecture. A broad policy on quality of design emerged in 1962 when President Kennedy’s Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space promulgated the “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture.” The initiative called for design that reflected “the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American National Government. Major emphasis should be placed on the choice of designs that embody the finest contemporary American architectural thought.” GSA and other Federal agencies responded to this call for excellence by constructing Modern buildings throughout the country.

When GSA built Modern at its best, it embraced strikingly contemporary designs by Modern masters—Marcel Breuer’s sweeping Washington, D.C., headquarters building for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (1963-68), Mies van der Rohe’s sleek Federal Center in Chicago (1964-74), and Victor Lundy’s bold U.S. Tax Court (1969-76) in Washington, D.C. Overall, GSA tended to commission buildings designed by internationally and nationally recognized architects in larger cities, and buildings by locally known architects in smaller cities and towns.

RIGHT: ROBERT C. WEAVER FEDERAL
BUILDING, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON, DC |
MARCEL BREUER | 1963-68





Also during the decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, new (and sometimes conflicting) movements were taking root. These included urban renewal, concern for the environment, interest in quality of design, changes in transportation spurred by the interstate highway system, and historic preservation. As a result, legislative initiatives often dictated parameters and spurred new ways of addressing the Federal government's construction work nationwide. In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act was passed, mandating Federal responsibility for historic properties. Throughout the 1970s, Presidential executive orders directed Federal agencies to favor central city locations and to recognize social, economic, and environmental factors in planning, acquiring, and managing Federal facilities. In 1976, the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act authorized GSA to accommodate social and commercial enterprises such as restaurants and shops on the street levels of Federal buildings. The Act also encouraged acquiring and reusing historic and architecturally interesting buildings for public use.

During this time, art became an increasingly important component in Federal construction. In 1962, GSA created an art program that allotted a portion of construction funds for public art. Original works—often integrated into the buildings themselves—were common in buildings of the Modern era. Internationally recognized masters as well as artists of local acclaim were responsible for paintings, sculptures, and other works of art in Federal buildings throughout the country. One of the most highly visible artworks is Alexander Calder's *Flamingo* stabile installed in 1974 in the plaza of Chicago's Federal Center.

Coupled with art, the landscapes of Federal buildings and complexes were also prominent components of many Modern buildings. Landscaped plazas and courtyards were often executed as part of original building plans and offered valuable outdoor gathering spaces for both GSA tenants and the public.

In spite of the optimism associated with the Modern era, the assessment of the merit of architecture from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s is not universally positive today. As GSA sought to house legions of Federal employees and to bring efficiency to the Federal building process, economy was often a stronger driving force than architectural and physical distinction. The majority of buildings GSA constructed during this period reflect typical office building design of their time. Quality of materials and overall design ranged from high to poor. Buildings constructed for general office use often put priorities on cost and efficiency, sometimes resulting in stark buildings constructed with lower-quality materials. Many buildings of this era represent a Federal office building style that is massive, severe, and disengaged from its surroundings—edifices critics have referred to as “debased, reductive” versions of the Modern aesthetic. Landscaped plazas, which often incorporated expansive paved areas, have also been criticized as being barren and inhospitable. However, the best of these buildings are celebrated for representing the ideals of the Modernist style—an era of architectural history that can now begin to be critically evaluated with the perspective of time. ■

Significant Events in Federal Design

1789-1851

During the early decades of the New Republic, the Secretary of the Treasury manages construction appropriations, but local Federal officials oversee the design and construction of government buildings. Prominent private architects are engaged. Buildings are often monumental, reflecting the power and authority of the government and distinguishing Federal structures from those in the private sector.



In 1833, Robert Mills designed custom houses for New Bedford, Massachusetts, and three other cities in one of the government's earliest examples of standardized construction.

1852

The Office of the Supervising Architect and Office of Construction are created to coordinate and oversee Federal design and construction projects.



In 1871, Alfred B. Mullett is commissioned to design the State, War, and Navy Department Building in Washington, D.C. (now the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building).

1893

Tarsney Act passed, allowing the Treasury Department to acquire the services of architects outside the Federal government.

1912

Tarsney Act repealed under claims of excessive costs associated with using private architectural firms for Federal projects.

1913

Congress creates the Public Buildings Commission to draft recommendations on standardizing and streamlining the building management process.



In 1931, Cass Gilbert is commissioned to design the Federal Courthouse at Foley Square in New York City (now the Thurgood Marshall U.S. Courthouse).

1926

Public Buildings Act of 1926 passed, funding substantial construction for Washington, D.C., including the development of the neoclassical Federal Triangle, the most ambitious Federal construction campaign to date.

Late 1920s-Early 1930s

Private sector begins to embrace Modern architectural ideals and new building technologies. Examples include Rockefeller Center (Associated Architects) in New York City and the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society building (Howe and Lescaze) in Philadelphia. Federal buildings continue to reflect traditional styles.

1947

With the demand for office space critical following World War II, the Hoover Commission identifies the need for a centralized support service for the Federal government, "the most gigantic business on earth," and recommends the creation of an Office of General Services.

1949

Federal Property and Administrative Services Act passed. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is created, which includes the Public Buildings Service, the division responsible for the design, construction, and management of Federal buildings. The Act authorizes the employment of private architects for public building projects once again.

1951-1952

Construction completed on two highly influential Modernist works: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Lakeshore Apartments in Chicago and Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill's Lever House in New York City. Both architectural firms later design buildings for GSA.

1959

Public Buildings Act of 1959 passed. GSA assumes responsibility for Federal construction, ending unsuccessful lease-purchase efforts.

1961-62

Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space created by President John F. Kennedy. "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture" issued, encouraging the "finest contemporary American architectural thought" for designs of new Federal buildings.

1962

The integration of art in public buildings is recognized as a priority, with a focus on sculpture and murals.

1963

Construction begins on the headquarters of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Marcel Breuer) in Washington, D.C. (now the Robert C. Weaver Federal Building).

1964

Construction completed on early phase of the Federal Center in Chicago (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe).



The Federal Center in Chicago is the site of one of the earliest art projects commissioned by GSA, Alexander Calder's *Flamingo*.

1965

President Lyndon B. Johnson initiates the "Program for Beautification of Federal Buildings" with the objective of improving the appearance of Federal buildings and their grounds.

1966

National Historic Preservation Act passed. Sections 106 and 110 of the Act require Federal agencies to evaluate and consider historic resources impacted by Federal construction projects.

1969

National Environmental Policy Act passed. Energy conservation becomes a priority for Federal buildings.

Construction begins on the U.S. Tax Court (Victor Lundy) in Washington, D.C. The Modernist design is hailed as an example of "genuine classicism."

1972

GSA establishes the "Art-in-Architecture" program, recognizing the importance of public art in Federal buildings. The program eventually expands and encourages work in a variety of media.

1975

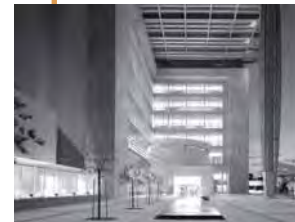
Two Federal buildings incorporating energy conservation technology are constructed: the U.S. Courthouse and Federal Building (Burns & Loewe) in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and the Norris Cotton Federal Building (Isaak & Isaak), Manchester, New Hampshire.

1976

Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act passed. Commercial and service-related uses are allowed in Federal buildings in an effort to revitalize downtowns.

1990

GSA Design Awards established, recognizing high-quality Federal design.



The award-winning Lloyd D. George U.S. Courthouse in Las Vegas, designed by Mehrdad Yazdani of CannonDworsky, is a result of GSA's Design Excellence Program.

1994

GSA's Design Excellence program created. Select Federal buildings are designed by masters of contemporary architecture.

1999

GSA's First Impressions initiative established to renovate the entrances and lobbies of Federal buildings, improving the entrance experience for both visitors and employees.



Transformed through GSA's First Impressions program, the entrance and lobby of the James A. Byrne U.S. Courthouse in Philadelphia, designed by Alan Greenberger of MGA Partners, is cited for excellence in design.

DEFINING THE MODERN ERA

2

The term “Modern” has been used to describe various twentieth-century movements that combine functionalism with aesthetic ideals that reject historical precepts and styles. By 1949, when GSA was established, what may be considered the first wave of Modern-era buildings was largely coming to a close—the “Moderne” styles of Art Deco, Streamlined Moderne, and Stripped Classical generally dated from the 1920s to the 1940s, and the International Style originated in the 1920s and actually continued in various forms into the 1970s. The stage was set for fresh architectural innovation. In the first three decades of GSA’s existence (the 1950s, 60s, and 70s), Modern architecture took many forms in numerous styles, some academically recognized and others less stylistically distinct.

Scholars and professionals studying twentieth-century buildings vary widely on their definitions of what the term “Modern architecture” entails and exactly what time period it encompasses. Generally, architects of the era and present-day architectural historians have avoided defining Modernism by any strict set of architectural characteristics because of the extensive range of materials and characteristics found in buildings of the recent past. Henry-Russell Hitchcock took a broad approach and echoed the thoughts of many scholars when he stated: “No better name than ‘modern’ has yet been found for what has come to be the characteristic architecture of the twentieth century.”¹

Selecting a beginning date for the Modern period of architecture is somewhat arbitrary and few scholars agree on a definitive date. One date that reoccurs in the literature is 1923, the year that architect Philip Johnson and Hitchcock credit with being the beginning of the International Style in their book titled *The International Style*, which was published in 1932 to accompany an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. An ending date for the Modern period is equally difficult to discern. Many scholars mark the mid-1960s as the end of Modernism, due in large part to the 1966 publication of architect Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, wherein he heralds the beginning of Post-Modern architecture.² However, as is typical with trends in architecture, widespread changes in architectural practice were slow to respond, taking as many as 15 to 20 years. Many buildings (often in smaller cities and towns) continued to be constructed in styles that were deemed outmoded by the architectural elite.

Other common terms used to divide buildings of the twentieth century into large categories include Modernism, Post-Modernism, and Deconstructivism, although other terms or divisions are found in architectural literature. Those that support this division usually refer to Modern buildings as those constructed throughout the twentieth century until the mid-1960s, when Post-Modern buildings came into vogue. Defined

by a return of historical references and ornament, albeit in new, imaginative, and stylized fashions, and the use of bold and often playful colors, Post-Modernism attempted to address what some architects and planners thought to be the nondescript buildings produced during the first half of the century. Following the Post-Modernist movement was an era known as Deconstructivism. Armed with the tenet of revealing the truth in architecture, Deconstructivists believed that the “problems” of a building could not and should not be solved by presenting a unified whole. Instead, buildings should reveal their inherent uses and issues by openly displaying the problems presented to the architect.

Some scholars and professionals do not agree with the Modernism/Post-Modernism/Deconstructivism nomenclature and prefer to distinguish individual styles of the twentieth century, such as the International Style, Formalism, Expressionism, Brutalism, etc. However, a substantial amount of continuing scholarly evaluation would still benefit the identification and evaluation of these styles of Modern architecture. Several notable style dictionaries simply stop short chronologically of the more recent architectural styles. William J. R. Curtis in *Modern Architecture Since 1900* proffers a chapter on “Crisis and Critiques in the 1960s” that describes the diverse approaches and varied personal styles of architects in the early 1960s, as well as their search for an architecture of greater robustness and complexity. He stops short of applying stylistic labels. Vincent Scully in *Modern Architecture* placed primary emphasis on the individual design characteristics and philosophies of architects of the time rather than on stylistic labels. The simple majority of sources appear to describe the individual design solutions and approach of notable 1960s-era Modern movement architects rather than using new stylistic terminology to group their designs into categories.

Some experts avoid these detailed stylistic labels altogether and simply refer to buildings “in the Modern style” or as part of the “Modern movement.” In an interview, architect Walter Gropius stated:

[t]he irrepressible urge of critics to classify contemporary movements which are still in flux, putting each neatly in a coffin with a style label on it, has increased the widespread confusion in understanding the dynamic forces of the new movement in architecture and planning.³

Scholars will continue to debate the use of the term “Modern” and its application to buildings of the recent past. In this report, the terms “Modern” and “Modern-era” are used in the general sense to refer to buildings in the study period of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. ■

Styles of the Modern Era

In the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, Modern architecture took many forms in numerous styles, some academically recognized and others less stylistically distinct. As in previous eras, many buildings blended elements of more than one style or adopted only one or two elements of a style. While stylistic terminology is still evolving for Modern-era buildings and some historians do not adhere strongly to the use of stylistic labels to describe buildings, it is useful to review four stylistic terms of the late Modern era that are in widespread use. For a more complete discussion on Modern styles, see Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 1996). Some of the more commonly accepted styles include the following:

International Style



- absence of ornamentation
- box-shaped buildings
- expansive windows
- smooth wall surfaces
- cantilevered building extensions

SHOWN: FEDERAL RECORDS CENTER BUILDING 100, OVERLAND, MISSOURI |
HELLMUTH, YAMASAKI AND LEINWEBER | 1956

Formalism

(also Neo-Formalism or New Formalism)



- flat projecting roof lines
- smooth wall surfaces
- high-quality materials
- columnar supports
- strict symmetry

SHOWN: PAUL G. ROGERS FEDERAL BUILDING AND U.S. COURTHOUSE,
WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA | STETSON & SPINA | 1972

Brutalism



weighty massiveness
rough-sur faced, exposed concrete walls
broad, expansive wall surfaces
deeply recessed windows

SHOWN: FEDERAL BUILDING, U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE,
ROME, GEORGIA | COOPER CARRY & ASSOCIATES, INC. | 1974

Expressionism



sweeping, curved roof lines and wall surfaces
nonexistent or minimal use of symmetrical
or geometric forms
faceted, concave, or convex surfaces
arched or vaulted spaces

SHOWN: ROBERT C. WEAVER FEDERAL BUILDING, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND
URBAN DEVELOPMENT HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON, DC | MARCEL BREUER | 1963-68

MANAGING GSA'S MODERN BUILDINGS

3

Currently, the Public Buildings Service (PBS) of the U.S. General Services Administration oversees 40 percent of Federal workspace, adding up to over 342 million square feet (including 175 million square feet of Federally owned space and 167 million square feet of leased space). As such, GSA supervises the largest office real estate portfolio in the world.

The role of PBS is broad and includes developing, constructing, leasing, managing, maintaining, and securing a variety of building types. PBS supervises office buildings, laboratories, courthouses, post offices, border stations, warehouses, customhouses, and daycare centers among its many buildings. By overseeing such an extensive collection of buildings, PBS is able to provide centralized management, procurement, and management services to more than 100 Federal organizations and over one million employees. PBS has the challenging task of maintaining and rehabilitating these facilities in a cost-effective manner. At the same time, GSA has a strong commitment to maintain the legacy of public architecture—by preserving historic buildings and making them viable with sensitive upgrades and by respecting their character-defining features.⁴

GSA is addressing public perceptions of buildings from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Often the architecture of these buildings is viewed negatively by those who visit and work in them. Many GSA buildings from this period are lacking in the architectural ornament and grandeur of public buildings from previous eras. However, many have noteworthy qualities and should be evaluated as products of the time in which they were built. As these buildings begin reaching 50 years of age—the standard threshold for National Register eligibility—this historic context will assist those assessing the buildings in placing them within the greater continuum of Federal buildings from these three decades. Understanding both the positive and negative aspects of these buildings will allow GSA to make informed management decisions regarding their maintenance.

GSA is faced with the challenge of balancing architectural and preservation issues with economic factors. Evaluations of historic significance should be arrived at independently and should serve as a foundation for economic decisions. GSA must maintain buildings that are pleasant and safe places to work, visit, and conduct business, but not at the expense of eradicating important features of historically significant buildings.

GSA's portfolio of buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s consists of approximately 600 buildings. Many of these buildings are currently in need of renovation in order to remain viable and offer appealing spaces for tenants. GSA is addressing immediate problems in its Modern buildings by assessing the merits and needs

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of each building. However, buildings from these decades are increasingly demanding more attention and dollars from GSA as they age. The philosophy of the Modern movement, coupled with the pace of changing technology, gave rise to a new commercial standard, which was reflected in many public buildings: Buildings had an anticipated lifespan of 20-30 years, which is the typical lifecycle of modern mechanical systems and also the standard period used for calculating return on investment. Unlike their predecessors, buildings were not constructed to last centuries.

GSA is faced with numerous questions regarding these buildings: Is it wise to reinvest large sums of money in buildings from this era? If so, under what circumstances and for what upgrades or alterations? When should character-defining architectural features be retained and when can they be removed or substantially altered? Can minor alterations reinvigorate an aging building and make it a more pleasant place to work and visit? How should GSA judge the potential historic significance of Modern-era buildings?

To answer the last question—how to identify buildings of the Modern era that are either exceptionally significant Modern masterpieces or that will likely meet National Register of Historic Places criteria in the future—GSA has developed this historic context report on its buildings of the Modern era. The historic context report helps address substantial questions: How should GSA evaluate quality? What do these buildings say about the Federal government in the twentieth century? Do these buildings enhance their environments by offering good public spaces? When should they be preserved? GSA identified a 30-year study period extending from 1949, the year GSA was established, to 1979. This study will assist GSA, its regional preservation officers, project managers, and others in generating a framework within which to make informed decisions on the future treatment of its Modern building stock.

The idea of completing a historic context for GSA's Modern buildings was developed as a result of several meetings GSA held to discuss the treatment and evaluation of its Modern buildings. On December 5, 2000, GSA convened 75 leading private-sector architects and preservation expert to discuss the historic significance and current performance of GSA buildings constructed from 1960 to 1979. The event, "Architecture of the Great Society," was held at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, in partnership with Yale's School of Architecture, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the American Architectural Foundation, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Following up on "Architecture of the Great Society," a Blue Ribbon Panel met and developed an action plan on February 22, 2001, at GSA Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

GSA then undertook the historic context study as a way to advance the dialogue from these two meetings. To develop this historic context, expansive research of architectural literature was conducted and extensive reviews of GSA building information were completed by the firm Robinson & Associates, Inc., experts in architectural and landscape history. ■



EDWARD J. SCHWARTZ FEDERAL BUILDING
AND U.S. COURTHOUSE, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA |
RICHARD WHEELER & ASSOCIATES AND
FRANK L. HOPE & ASSOCIATES | 1974

OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL DESIGN BEFORE GSA

4

To understand the complex environment within which GSA was designing its Modern buildings, it is useful to briefly review the history of Federal buildings in the United States. Reviewing earlier building trends and Federal design history explains much about the factors that influenced Modern building design.

From the earliest days of colonial America to the creation of a new nation, Federal public buildings have reflected the ideals and goals of government and its citizens. In 2001, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, former U.S. Senator and author of the “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture,” stated, “Architecture is inescapably a political art, and it reports faithfully for ages what the political values of a particular time were.”⁵ Throughout American history, architects have drawn inspiration from earlier architecture—reinterpreting familiar forms to fit the national spirit of the times and incorporating wholly new innovations in technology in public buildings. The resulting collection of Federal buildings conveys the history and growth of American society and government.

The New Republic

Befitting its status as a British colony, the public buildings of pre-Revolutionary America were generally derived from prevailing architectural styles and building practices of Great Britain. However, after declaring independence, the architecture of the young nation split from British colonial precedents and assumed a proud new identity. From the earliest days of the American republic, the architecture of public buildings has been strongly influenced and inspired by classical Roman and Greek forms. Political leaders in the new nation felt that these two civilizations—and consequently their architecture—represented the highest democratic values for the new nation, and by imitating and adapting these forms, architects and government leaders hoped to convey the ideals of law, citizenship, honor, and loyalty to country. Classically inspired public buildings were also meant to be symbols of the power and authority of the newly formed government.⁶

An Expanding Nation

As the nation was expanding westward during the nineteenth century, much of the Federal government’s role involved constructing bridges, roadways, and other forms of transportation infrastructure. Emerging national responsibilities also led to the construction of buildings, including forts to protect newly settled western regions, lighthouses to accommodate the nation’s rapidly expanding maritime trade, and hospitals to provide medical care for seamen.⁷

However, the first half of the nineteenth century was not a period of intense design and construction of Federal public buildings. A still-limited Federal government often purchased existing buildings or leased space to accommodate workers. Generally, urban centers—particularly those near Washington, D.C.—contained the greatest number of public buildings executed in the prevailing classical style, while frontier custom houses and other public buildings were utilitarian in form, with occasional classical references in the form of minor decorative elements.⁸

As the nation's population more than tripled between 1820 and 1840 and spread across the continent, it demanded physical manifestations of the Federal government in newly settled areas. Realizing that previous efforts to occupy existing buildings were inefficient, the Federal government embarked on a program of construction and created a new bureaucracy to manage the numerous undertakings. Within the Treasury Department, the Office of Construction and Office of the Supervising Architect were established in 1852 to oversee Federal design and construction. Centralization and standardization streamlined the building process. Identical or similar buildings were constructed in different cities from a single plan generated in the Washington office, although minor adjustments for site, climate, or local building traditions were allowed.⁹ Designs reflected the movement away from Classicism toward other forms of architecture with historic precedent, most notably the Renaissance Revival.

The Post-Civil War Era

After the Civil War, the nation continued to expand, using advances in technology and transportation to construct new buildings.

From the drafting boards of the Supervising Architect's Office, however, flowed an amazing variety of stylistic elements: mansard roofs, towers, clusters of spires. The juxtaposition of styles was typical of the period, but the sometimes disjointed mix-and-match of federal architecture reflected a special characteristic of federal building—the long span from authorization to completion.¹⁰

During the second half of the nineteenth century, federally funded buildings became an indication of stature for cities throughout the country. Congressmen strove to accommodate their constituents with new Federal buildings, even if the need for the structure was not proven. By the end of the century, the process had greatly improved. However, smaller cities and towns continued to receive federally funded buildings. Although the government was criticized for its design monotony, to residents—particularly those in western regions—the buildings represented “the latest in architectural style and technology and symbolically, membership in the Union.”¹¹

In the years after the Civil War, Federal buildings were designed by staff architects of the Supervising Architect's Office, and the quality of Federal architecture during this period was criticized for not being innovative, efficient, or of a high quality. In 1893, in an effort to include private architects in government projects, the American Institute of Architects won the passage of the Tarsney Act, which allowed the Treasury to acquire the services of architects outside of its office; however, this Act was not put into meaningful use until 1897. Prominent architects whose designs were constructed include McKim, Mead & White, Cass Gilbert, and Daniel Burnham. In 1912, Congress repealed the Tarsney Act under claims that employing private architects was excessive compared with using employees of the Supervising Architect's office.¹²

During this era, Federal buildings were not immune to popular architectural movements and often reflected societal trends. As the City Beautiful Movement captured the interest of Americans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Federal buildings began to exemplify many of the Beaux Arts principles—such as imposing, ornate classical designs with monumental entrance stairs and axial walkways and approaches; this practice was particularly appropriate for this period in American history, when affluence and power were ever increasing. Although some critics found the Beaux Arts style to be unapproachable and overly ornate, the nation responded to its grand mode.¹³ The Beaux Arts style also marked the government's return to its tradition of classical architecture after forays into Victorian-era styles.

A Growing Federal Presence

The twentieth century continued to be one of increased work and great growth for the Supervising Architect's Office. By 1912, the Office was responsible for the management of 1,126 buildings. In 1913, Congress created the Public Buildings Commission “to make recommendations concerning prompt completion of buildings, standardized procedures, and the issue of how to determine the need for buildings.” Criticism of the Federal government continued during this time. Some said that the government did not construct enough public buildings in Washington, D.C., but instead constructed unnecessary buildings in small towns throughout America, and others accused the Treasury Department of excessive delays and extravagances relating to public buildings.¹⁴ After World War I, two Public Buildings Commissions—one for Washington, D.C., and one for the rest of the nation—recommended that public buildings be constructed based on need and business considerations, rather than the political power wielded by some members of Congress. Finally, in 1926, the Public Buildings Act ordered the Treasury Department to implement such a policy.¹⁵

However, this policy was rather short-lived. The Great Depression began in 1929, and subsequent Federal New Deal relief programs pumped huge sums of money into public building programs. The Public Buildings program was placed under the jurisdiction of the Public Works Administration, which moved the business considerations policy to the background and made efforts to restart the economy and to provide

LOBBY, EVERETT M. DIRKSEN U.S. COURTHOUSE, FEDERAL CENTER,
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS | LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE | 1964



Buildings contained a variety of materials; concrete, stone, glass, and metals were combined to present a modern, strong presence. Architectural features found on Federal buildings from earlier eras were either absent or reinterpreted in new ways.

construction jobs a priority. During the New Deal era, approximately 1,300 federally funded buildings (nearly doubling the pre-Depression inventory) were constructed in over 1,000 communities nationwide as a strong Federal government replaced state and local powers. "In terms of establishing the image of the United States government, this program was the most important undertaken since the first few decades under the Constitution."¹⁶ Generally, the principles of Classicism remained evident in buildings, extending previous generations' and administrations' traditions of austerity and authority conveyed through government architecture. Also during the Depression era, the Federal government commissioned artworks for hundreds of public buildings nationwide. Subject matter was often chosen to convey and reinforce the social ideals of the New Deal.¹⁷

Architects of this new flood of Federal buildings looked to those early years of the Republic for design inspiration, deciding that Classicism was

either historically correct or uniquely expressive of democratic values, or both.... The actual building designs, however, reflected other influences as well. One was the increased scale of government and society. Not only did the buildings take up more ground and air space, but they now often housed collections of seemingly indistinguishable government bureaus rather than a few, discrete public offices. The name "Federal Building" began to be used in place of "Post Office, Courthouse, and Customhouse."¹⁸

Stylistically, these new Federal buildings reflected other influences as well. Although the classical forms—including the Beaux Arts style, which continued into the 1930s—were prevalent within the Supervising Architect's Office, early Modernism, which expressed changes in technology, materials, and building methods, had taken hold in Europe and the United States.

The use of clean lines, flat surfaces, and simple geometric shapes would create a style that ended all styles. If Classical architecture exploited the symbolism of ornament, Modernist architecture would convey meaning by the very lack of ornament. If Classic architecture's masonry masses asserted permanence and authority, the Modernists steel and glass would celebrate innovation, freedom, and flexibility.¹⁹

Using electrical and mechanical innovations and methods and materials—such as steel, glass, plastic, and reinforced concrete—that were previously unavailable, buildings took on appearances that were wholly different from their predecessors.

The Impact of Early Modernism

Following this trend toward minimalism, facades of public buildings during the New Deal era became more simplified. Ornament was more stylized and fenestration less prominent. Termed the Modern Classic or Stripped Classic mode, the style was so named because the basic form and symmetry of Classicism were retained, but much of the ornamentation and motifs were reduced or removed. Stripped Classic buildings were constructed throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. Their monumentality, presence, and permanence ensured a continued place of prominence in the cities and towns, but the lack of architectural ornament satisfied the contemporary taste for sleekness of design. As in years past, the Federal government never mandated an official public style, but the Stripped Classic style was adopted across the nation.²⁰

Despite the popularity of the Stripped Classic, other styles of architecture were also constructed with great success during the years between the two World Wars. Federal buildings designed in the Art Deco style reflected the nation's interest in machines and industry, with sleek, streamlined design. Styles with historic precedent, such as the Spanish Colonial Revival in the Southwest or the English Colonial Revival in the East, were constructed regionally. Buildings in National Parks and U.S. Forests were built in rustic styles that blended with natural landscapes.²¹

The Stripped Classic style of design proved to be enduring throughout the years of World War II. The use of classical ornamentation on buildings fell out of favor and was considered antiquated and unsophisticated by some design professionals. The preponderance of manufactured materials, principally glass, metal, and concrete, and the decline in the use of stone resulted in building facades that appeared quite different from those constructed in previous eras.

World War II accelerated the Modern Movement in several different ways. The increased use of highly mechanized mass-production techniques, increased familiarity with new building materials, and the need for cost-saving measures due to the burden of war expenditures provided opportunities for innovative methods and philosophies of construction. At the same time, Americans were receptive to the idea of a new, modern world with unprecedented forms of architecture. Increased automobile reliance as Americans moved to the suburbs also influenced Federal building trends as government buildings were located outside of city centers.

As the war ended and the United States assumed a role as a world power and protector, the Federal government was at first reluctant to embrace new forms of architecture. President Harry S. Truman admitted that he did not understand “fellows like [Frank] Lloyd Wright,” and new Federal buildings resisted the influence of Modernism. Although initially executed in a tentative fashion, Modernism finally made an impact during the 1950s, when the Federal government would begin encouraging Modern design.²² ■

CASE STUDY **Chicago Federal Center**

In 1992, the 30-story Everett McKinley Dirksen U.S. Courthouse at the Federal Center in Chicago needed to be expanded. The building, which housed the administrative and judicial branches of the Federal Courts in addition to other Federal agencies, also required renovations to improve its office space and infrastructure.

The 1964 Dirksen Courthouse is a component of the Federal Center designed by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), a key figure in Modern architecture who is recognized for his skyscraper designs. The Federal Center consists of three steel-framed buildings—The Everett M. Dirksen U.S. Courthouse, the John C. Kluczynski Federal Building, and the U.S. Post Office, Loop Station—oriented around a central plaza, which contains the dramatic stabile *Flamingo* by renowned artist Alexander Calder. The Federal Center received favorable national press at the time of its construction for its sleek design, its integration of the plaza, and its skillful incorporation of Calder's

art. Today, critics call the Federal Center one of Mies's finest works. Because the complex is a Modern masterpiece, GSA, in consultation with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, determined that it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and has placed a high priority on maintaining the significant features of the Dirksen Courthouse despite the need for expansion and renovation.

In efforts to ensure that subsequent changes respect the initial intention and spirit of an architectural design, it is important to consult with original architects or other architects who are experts in a particular design vocabulary. In the case of the Dirksen Courthouse, Mies van der Rohe died in 1969, prior to the completion of the greater complex. However, his grandson, Dirk Lohan, principal of the architectural firm Lohan Associates, studied under Mies, and was retained to complete a new design compatible with the sleek spaces and finishes of the original building. Lohan developed a plan that allowed for expansion of the courtrooms within the existing building rather than opting for new construction adjacent to it, an approach that was not only sensitive to the appearance of the Federal Center, but also cost effective. Lohan's design accommodated all of the courts' needs, including construction of eight, two-story courtrooms and secure corridors for judges and juries while maintaining the historic integrity and well-integrated detailing of the Dirksen Courthouse.

[Source: John Peter, *The Oral History of Modern Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 170.]



FLAMINGO | ALEXANDER CALDER | 1974 | FEDERAL CENTER, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THE FEDERAL CENTER:
EVERETT M. DIRKSEN U.S. COURTHOUSE (LEFT),
JOHN C. KLUCZYNSKI FEDERAL BUILDING (RIGHT),
AND LOOP STATION POST OFFICE (FOREGROUND),
CHICAGO ILLINOIS | LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE | 1964-69



ESTABLISHMENT OF GSA

5

In 1949, the General Services Administration was established. After the enormous and unprecedented expansion of the Federal government during the Depression and wartime eras, the Federal government was overwhelmed with

programs, personnel, materiel, records, and structures. In less than 20 years the number of federal civilian employees had risen from half a million to over two million; the number of bureaus and units had grown four-fold to over 1,800; annual expenditures had increased from \$3.6 billion to over \$42 billion...²³

After the war, many of the agencies were not reduced but continued to play a vital role in peacetime America. Consequently, Congress saw a need to reorganize the Federal government with a focus on economy, efficiency, and improved services. To achieve this new set of goals, the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government (referred to as the Hoover Commission) was created in 1947. During the war years, government services were scattered as massive decentralization occurred, resulting in higher costs for these services. Reconsolidating services was an obvious solution to cutting expenditures and streamlining administration. In 1949, after extensive study, the Hoover Commission reported that the U.S. government, "the most gigantic business on earth," needed a centralized support service.

The Commission recommended creating an Office of the General Services as a support agency to the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. President Harry S. Truman agreed, and signed the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, establishing the General Services Administration "to provide the resources needed by U.S. agencies to accomplish their missions." Essentially, the law consolidated and transferred the functions of numerous established agencies while making GSA the advisory agency responsible for establishing space and records management and supply requirements and in turn, managing these same functions.²⁴

Into the new conglomerate agency in 1949 were swept the vestiges of a line of federal building offices dating from the mid-nineteenth century, as well as the government's immense record-keeping, building management, and general procurement functions. The civilian construction role assigned to the GSA was located in its Public Building Service. Agencies with specialized building needs—the Department of Defense, the Veterans Administration, the State Department, the National Park Service—maintained their discrete building operations.²⁵

The Modern era ushered in an emphasis on functionalism, and interior spaces reflected this new design mode. Clean lines and prefabricated building components replaced heavily ornamented, handcrafted interiors.

GSA was formed to achieve the following goals: standardization, direct purchase, mass production, and fiscal savings. Economy in construction and maintenance costs was achieved by using clean, unornamented lines and developing standard details for all types of fixtures and equipment. Elements thought to be superfluous, such as monumental exterior stairs and custom-made features, were quickly abandoned.²⁶

The General Services Administration exists within a complex legal framework and is further guided by related Federal legislation. The Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (63 Stat. 377) created GSA to provide an economically efficient system for the procurement of government property and services and the utilization of property and records management (40 USC 471). Section 210 of this Act (40 USC 490) gave authority to the GSA administrator to operate, maintain, and protect Federal buildings. Furthermore, the administrator was also authorized to acquire land, to contract for the preparation of plans and specifications for Federal facilities, and to construct and equip these buildings.²⁷

The Hoover Commission also identified numerous operational and maintenance needs associated with Federal public buildings and recommended establishing a new office (with expanded authority to handle these issues) to replace the Public Buildings Administration. When GSA was created, all real-property operations were placed under a new division—the Public Buildings Service (PBS). Serving as the property management arm of the Federal government, PBS was responsible for the design, construction, maintenance, repair, remodeling, and enlargement of Federal buildings, overseeing office, warehouse, and other space as required by Federal agencies. The transfer of excess property among agencies was administered by PBS, as were leases and deeds. As stated in *The Establishment of the Office of the General Services Administration*, GSA became the Federal government's "architect, engineer, builder, landlord, and house-keeper," although a few Federal agencies continued to manage their own properties.

Maintenance of buildings, allotment of space, and moving service in the District of Columbia and in some selected cities would be the responsibility of the third bureau in the Office of the General Services. Its work thus related to all departments and agencies. ...It is essential in these matters that authority be expanded and that there be a central agency (a) to prepare and issue standards of efficiency in the management of public buildings; (b) to supervise space allotments in the Government buildings in towns where there are several large agencies (except in buildings of the National Military Establishment and the Post Office Department with which cooperative arrangements should be established); (c) to maintain and operate government buildings; (d) to prepare standard forms of leases and deeds and maintain a record of leases and buildings owned by the Government.²⁸

The Public Buildings Act of 1949 authorized \$40 million for the site acquisition and planning of 575 building projects. However, the cost of new construction was not included in this amount. Instead, PBS would focus on completing projects that were stopped during the war years, a period of very little non-military Federal construction. The Act also authorized \$30 million for the repair and improvement of existing buildings in Washington, D.C., where virtually no substantial improvements had been made since 1938.²⁹ ■



COURTROOM, BYRON G. ROGERS FEDERAL BUILDING AND U.S. COURTHOUSE,
DENVER, COLORADO | JAMES SUDLER ASSOCIATES AND FISHER & DAVIS | 1965

MODERNISM IN THE UNITED STATES

6

At the time that GSA was established, building trends in Europe and America were diverging from their historical precedents and following modes originated during the initial phase of Modernism beginning in the 1920s. GSA's first buildings were designed during a period of great change in both the philosophy of architecture and the technology of construction. In 1940, architect and critic J.M. Richards summarized the changing trends in architecture:

The principal reason why a new architecture is coming into existence is that the needs of this age are in nearly every case totally different from the needs of previous ages, and so cannot be satisfied by methods of building that belong to any age but the present. We can satisfy them in the practical sense, by utilizing modern building technique and modern scientific inventions to the full; and we can satisfy them in the aesthetic sense, both by being honest craftsmen in our own materials and by taking special advantage of the opportunities these materials offer of creating effects and qualities in tune with our own times.³⁰

One of the most noticeable changes in Modern architecture was the diminishing distinction between public and private buildings. In the past, the symbolism of public buildings was important, and formal, hierarchical sequences of ceremonial spaces were common. However, the Modern era ushered in an emphasis on functionalism, and the economy of interior space reflected this new design mode. Grand lobbies were absent from Modern designs; instead, plazas served as exterior gateways to sites, while the use of transparent building materials served to visually unite exterior and interior spaces.

Office spaces also changed dramatically. Individual offices became less common and large open areas, referred to as either universal space or flexible plans, became common. Moveable room dividers allowed spaces to be altered as necessary.

Modern architecture sought to break from the past by embracing new technology. Using electrical and mechanical innovations and methods and materials—such as steel, glass, plastic, and reinforced concrete—that were previously unavailable, buildings took on appearances that were wholly different from their predecessors. Architecture was influenced by Modern art and used abstract forms, space, light, and sometimes bold colors. Also coupled with this new architectural aesthetic were social goals. Architects hoped that the machine age would bring about equality and democratic values for all citizens.³¹

More so than in the past, architecture became practical. Functional efficiency, coupled with economic efficiency, overshadowed elaborate buildings of earlier eras, and perhaps one of the greatest reasons for the success of Modernism is that it was substantially less expensive than previous methods of building.³²

Unlike the architecture of previous eras, elements of buildings could be fabricated in factories and assembled on-site. This not only allowed for mass production, it was also a very cost-effective method of construction. The expense of paying individual artisans and craftspeople became largely prohibitive, and Modern architecture was the result of developing new ways to build, often with new materials. Construction with these materials—whether executed in prefabricated elements or constructed on-site—was significantly less expensive than in previous eras. Concrete, plastics, and aluminum proved to be doubly beneficial, as they were extremely economical and were suitable for aesthetic trends of the times.

Coupled with these new methods and materials was a radical notion of building—buildings were no longer constructed to last indefinitely. In 1956, Gordon Bunshaft, architect for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, stated:

It seems to me that the greatest change that is occurring in this country is that buildings are no longer being built to last five hundred years. They're no longer monuments that are built and that the interior purposes change with each generation such as some of the structures in Paris and London. Today the economics of our civilization and the increasing requirements of comfort demanded by the people are making buildings obsolete in twenty to twenty-five years. This change, I think, is going to have a basic effect eventually on the structure and on the design theories of architecture.... The architecture must be designed to suit our needs today.

As far as the technical aspects of development, there is no question that we must develop a method of building these buildings precisely, lightly, and quickly, and this, of course, leads to prefabrication.³³

Infl uential Buildings of the Modern Era

An elite collection of buildings in the United States designed by renowned Modern masters can be seen as truly pivotal and influential in the history of Modernism. Various components—design, materials, siting, orientation, etc.—contributed to the innovations of these designs, which were usually not only lauded by critics, but imitated by fellow architects. Many of these master architects were born abroad and brought foreign architectural and social influences to their work. A subset of key buildings and building types is discussed here.

Office parks and corporate campuses came to the forefront of private commercial architecture, representing the prominence of contemporary corporate culture. Between 1949 and 1985, approximately 30 buildings were constructed at the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan, with Eero Saarinen serving as one of the early designers. Also during the Modern era, GSA was constructing Federal centers on the outskirts of major metropolitan areas, reflecting the private-sector trend toward suburban office locales.

Numerous Federal buildings constructed during the Modern era displayed characteristics of Formalism and were likely influenced by high-profile, private-sector buildings executed in the style.

Individual office buildings or towers remained important examples of the possibilities of Modernism. The firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill designed Lever House, an early influential office building in New York, in 1952. Its 18-story glass tower and base are raised on pillars faced with stainless steel, creating an open streetscape on its Park Avenue site.³⁴ The Seagram Building (1958), designed by Mies van der Rohe in conjunction with Philip Johnson, in New York, is a sleek glass box overlaid with mullions that project slightly, adding a layer of visual interest to the building.³⁵ In Boston, I.M. Pei and Henry Cobb designed the Hancock Tower (1965-75), whose glass facade reflects nearby historic buildings. And while not a traditional office building, Wallace Harrison's United Nations Headquarters (1947-50) in New York, which included a long, low building coupled with a tall tower, was widely imitated in both the public and private sectors.

Several college and university campuses are homes to innovative buildings by Modern master architects. The Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (1961) by Le Corbusier at Harvard University and the Yale Art Gallery (1953) by Louis Kahn with Douglas Or are just a few of these notable buildings.

Perhaps one of the most influential residential designs of the era was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's apartments at 860-880 Lakeshore Drive in Chicago. Constructed in 1951, the complex consists of two black, steel-frame, glass towers arranged at right angles to each other to optimize the views of the city and Lake Michigan.

Two performing arts venues, both in the Formalist style, are widely recognized for their impact on Modern buildings, regardless of function. Edward Durell Stone, a frequent practitioner of the Formalist style, was responsible for the Kennedy Center (1971) in Washington, D.C., and Philip Johnson, another master of Formalism, designed the New York State Theater at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (1964) in New York City with Richard Foster. (The influence of the collective body of work by Stone and Johnson is likely responsible for much of the Federal Formalism seen during the 1960s and 70s.)

Other buildings with unique uses display inventive design tenets. In Chantilly, Virginia, Eero Saarinen designed his masterpiece, the terminal at Washington Dulles International Airport (1962), a sweeping building that celebrates the concept of flight, and Mies van der Rohe's design of the Federal Center in Chicago (1964-1974) is a Modern masterpiece owned by GSA. ■



DAVID J. WHEELER FEDERAL BUILDING AND U.S. POST OFFICE, BAKER CITY, OREGON |
EDMUNDSON, KOCHENDOERFER & KENNEDY | 1969

CASE STUDY **Byron G. Rogers Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse**

As part of GSA's *First Impressions* initiative, which aims to improve the appearance and efficiency of public spaces in Federal buildings, renovations to articulate the entrance area and alleviate security-check queuing delays were proposed for the Byron G. Rogers Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Denver, Colorado. During the design phase of the renovations in 2000, the publication of a book on Denver's Modern architectural heritage raised questions about the potential historic significance of the property. Although National Register of Historic Places criteria recommend that most buildings be at least 50 years old prior to being listed, some buildings that have not yet reached that age may prove to be exceptionally significant—and thus eligible for listing despite their more recent construction dates.

The Byron G. Rogers Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse is a locally noted example of the Formalist style of Modern architecture. The com-

plex consists of a 5-story courthouse and 18-story office building linked by an exterior canopy—each component an integral part of the overall design. A landscaped plaza, with trees, lawn panels, and outdoor seating, completes the site. The formal site configuration, which includes prominently situated public art and a water feature, gives a distinguished quality to the entire complex. Construction was completed in 1965 according to the design of two associated and noted local architectural firms, James Sudler Associates and Fisher & Davis.

An initial *First Impressions* design concept required the demolition of the canopy—a character-defining feature—for the planned lobby expansion. Therefore, before any of the proposed *First Impressions* alterations proceeded, GSA evaluated the potential historic and architectural significance of the buildings within the framework of various contexts—including the architectural style, the work of each of the architecture firms, and public architecture in Denver and the United States.

After the comprehensive analysis, it was determined that the Byron G. Rogers Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse was not exceptionally significant, and therefore not eligible for the National Register at that time—but that it would likely meet the Register's standard criteria for significance upon reaching 50 years of age. Although GSA was not obligated to consider the historic character of the complex while proposing alterations, the agency recognized its potential future significance and developed a successful design scheme that preserved the canopy while addressing the need for a larger entrance area to accommodate security screening. Since completion, the project has received several awards, including a Standing Ovation Award from Historic Denver, Inc.



LEFT: VIEW OF EXPANDED LOBBY

BYRON G. ROGERS FEDERAL BUILDING AND U.S.
COURTHOUSE, DENVER, COLORADO | JAMES SUDLER
ASSOCIATES AND FISHER & DAVIS | 1965



PRIVATE ARCHITECTS FOR FEDERAL DESIGN

7

One of the most important changes in Federal policy during the early years of GSA was the inclusion of private architects and designers in Federal projects, a policy that produced a few masterpieces of Modern architecture and an extensive collection of undistinguished buildings. With the advent of GSA, government architects were largely superseded by private designers. Because the government itself was being viewed as a business, and the general climate of America was pro-business, it came as no surprise that GSA viewed private-sector architects in a positive light. GSA assumed the role of overseer and manager of architecture and engineering for public buildings, with private architects serving as designers, engineers, and draftsmen.³⁶

As the role of the Federal government went from designer to administrator of public buildings, concern arose regarding the overall quality of Federal architecture. Private firms were selected based on professional credentials and previous experience and performance, a process that critics said led to conservative designs and left little room for architectural innovation by new firms, even if quality firms were selected. Despite an effort to establish the highest possible standards of architectural design, style, and ornamentation for Federal public buildings, public building design continued to suffer. Consequently, public buildings became less and less visually prominent, while private buildings displayed more innovative designs resulting in more distinguished buildings.



GEORGE C. YOUNG FEDERAL BUILDING
AND U.S. COURTHOUSE, ORLANDO, FLORIDA |
SMITH & SWILLEY | 1974

One of the most noticeable changes in Modern architecture was the diminishing distinction between government and private buildings. For the first time, public architecture began imitating private buildings, often making it difficult to distinguish between the two.

These lines of demarcation were soon blurred as private architects began designing Federal buildings. Until this time, public buildings were easily distinguished from their private counterparts in cities and towns. The size, scale, and the use of high-quality building materials made Federal buildings distinct landmarks in their communities. For the new era of building design at GSA, sleek, glass, curtain-wall towers and monolithic office blocks became more commonplace, imitating private office building design and often making it difficult to distinguish private buildings from public ones.

The federal presence so far as it was expressed symbolically in government buildings used by the general public, represented more and more big business of big government and less and less any tangible local proof of nationality. In 1962 a Presidential committee exhorted the government to adjure any official style. About the same time the line between federal and private style vanished. Only the official seal and perhaps more marble in the lobbies and more hardware on the guards distinguished the big buildings of federal business from the big buildings of private business. Of the two popular business facades—the glass cage and the masonry box—government preferred the masonry box with its sympathetic vestiges of public power: massiveness, whiteness, and columnar pilotis. For all the years and styles and functions that separated the Capitol dome and the President's House from their federal offspring in the capital, whiteness at least united them.³⁷

In the United States, conservative private architects rather than notable, cutting-edge architects were increasingly responsible for the design of Federal buildings. Generally, more concerned with efficiency and economy than with aesthetics, designers planned buildings that were utilitarian in nature. It was also during this era that the prominent, ceremonial entrances previously found on most public buildings all but disappeared. Cautious use of Modernism appeared with varying degrees of success. While public buildings followed the trends and technology of the larger architectural community, it was often with hesitation and delay. No longer were Federal buildings at the forefront of innovative design. However, technological advances in building design—most notably the use of metal skeletons sheathed with glass and other types of panels—were incorporated into Federal buildings.

In 1956, the title of Supervising Architect was changed to Assistant Commissioner for Design and Construction and the position was located within the Public Buildings Service of GSA. This title aptly reflected the shift toward using private architects rather than architects employed by the Federal government to design Federal projects. As design work shifted to private firms, the Assistant Commissioner was able to influence Federal architecture by recommending architects for Federal projects and advising the Executive Branch of the Federal Government on design issues.³⁸ ■

IMPROVED FEDERAL OFFICE SPACE

Despite the wartime expansion of Federal activity, the massive post-World War II government was in dire need of office space, but there was little available to house new agencies or the growing staffs of preexisting agencies. While leasing space was viewed as the fastest solution to the growing problem, both Congress and President Truman opposed the practice. However, Congress did not appropriate the construction funds necessary to remedy the problem. Instead, lease-purchase programs, wherein the government leased private buildings and eventually took over titles, were instituted.³⁹ Also during the post-War era, the form of Federal office buildings grew more and more like their private counterparts:

The majority of contemporary commercial office buildings and governmental office buildings tended to become larger and more standardized to the point where they were virtually indistinguishable in form. This was perhaps inevitable, since the functions of these structures were very nearly the same. The great variety of industrially produced materials and building components that became available after the Second World War, along with the economies of modern curtain wall construction, created a new element in the cityscape that was both monotonous and distracting: monotonous because many of the newer buildings were wrapped, like packages, in an overall pattern of windows and spandrels; distracting because there seemed no limit to the number of unsuitable patterns that one could place in juxtaposition to one another.⁴⁰

In 1954, Peter Stroebel, who brought over two decades of private-sector management and engineering experience to the job, was appointed Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service of GSA. During his brief, two-year tenure, a study was commissioned that deemed the Federal government's office buildings to be "obsolete," and replacement was recommended as a remedy. Created as a sort of temporary stop-gap measure, the Public Buildings Purchase Contract Act of 1954 was intended to provide some relief to the space problem. However, efforts during this time focused on space-saving campaigns. But the Act did allow, for the first time, private-sector investment to finance public buildings—a major shift in funding methods.⁴¹

The Public Buildings Act of 1959

In retrospect, little was done during the 1950s to alleviate the chronic need for office space. It was not until the Public Buildings Act of 1959 that opportunity for long-needed action was taken to correct the severe shortage of space. Designed to meet the "need for general authority for the orderly planning and construction of public buildings," the Act responded to the lack of an "orderly or systemic approach to the provision of the general-purpose public buildings" by Congress. The 1959 Act increased and refined PBS' ability to manage

Innovative solutions from informed and qualified professionals can preserve the character of the buildings while resolving issues of functionality, cost, safety, efficiency, and quality of space and public experience.

JACOB K. JAVITS FEDERAL BUILDING (RIGHT)
AND JAMES L. WATSON U.S. COURT OF INTERNATIONAL
TRADE (FOREGROUND), NEW YORK, NEW YORK |
EGGERS & HIGGINS | 1968





HURFF A. SAUNDERS FEDERAL BUILDING.
U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE.
JUNEAU, ALASKA | OLSEN & SANDS | 1966

Despite the Federal government's desire to construct buildings that incorporated local and regional architectural traditions, most Modern Federal buildings did not reflect influences of the areas where the buildings were located.

the public buildings program. In addition to these basic changes, new buildings for Federal agencies were to be constructed from appropriations made directly to GSA, and new procedures for determining the need for buildings and requesting space throughout the country were established. Appropriations previously directed to the Architect of the Treasury, which managed the central program for Federal construction, were directed to GSA. GSA then was to submit proposals for specific construction projects based on needs determined by surveys. After review by the Office of Management and Budget, prospectuses were forwarded to the House and Senate Public Works Committees for their approval, paving the way for legislation appropriating funds for construction. GSA was also charged with the new task of anticipating future Federal office space needs. Surveys of over 2,300 communities across the country were completed, gathering information on population, realty trends, road construction programs, and other pertinent information. Based on these facts, plans were made for constructing new buildings, expanding existing buildings, purchasing leased space, consolidating separate offices, or disposing of unneeded space.

At this point in time, GSA relied almost exclusively on private architects for its design input and aesthetic direction. PBS retained architects based in or near the cities where Federal buildings were being constructed, mirroring the process that the Federal government used in awarding general construction contracts.

Following the 1959 Act, design and construction rates increased dramatically. In 1961 and 62, over 7.7 million square feet of Federal office space was added, with some of the largest expenditures on individual buildings occurring in Washington, D.C., the city that had suffered perhaps the most through the post-War-years office space crisis.

After President John F. Kennedy was inaugurated in January 1961, there was a massive increase in the design and construction of Federal buildings. At the end of 1962, GSA had constructed numerous new buildings, acquired sites for new projects, completed repairs and/or improvements on existing buildings, and furnished building management services in 7,240 federally owned or leased buildings that housed over 533,000 Federal employees.⁴² ■

PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S "GUIDING PRINCIPLES"

9

President John F. Kennedy was disappointed by the inadequate state of Federal office buildings after his review of progress in implementing the 1959 Public Buildings Act.⁴³ Added to this is the well-known fact that during his inaugural parade on January 20, 1961, President Kennedy noticed the blighted and decayed condition of Pennsylvania Avenue. Primarily, the President reacted to the small-scale commercial buildings that lined the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue; many were in disrepair or were boarded up and sitting vacant. In fact, by the 1960s, the stretch of roadway between the Capitol and the White House was "widely considered a disgrace to the nation, lined with deteriorating structures on the north side and large, unremarkable buildings on the south."⁴⁴ Afterward, the President and his Secretary of Labor, Arthur J. Goldberg, discussed what could be done to improve the poor condition of the Avenue.

As a result of requests made by President Kennedy during a cabinet meeting on August 4, 1961, the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space was formed to advise the administration on immediate and long-term space needs, with particular attention paid to the Washington, D.C., area. The collection of decaying Federal buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue portrayed the government in a negative light and Kennedy feared such an image would deter citizens from seeking Federal employment. On June 1, 1962, the committee, which was organized by the Special Assistant to the President and consisted of the Secretaries of Commerce and Labor, the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, and the Administrator of the General Services Administration, issued its findings, the *Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space*. Contained in the report were the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," penned by the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then Assistant Secretary of Labor.

The committee found that office space in and around Washington was disorderly, inefficient, and wasteful.⁴⁵ An overall lack of government-owned space forced agencies to lease expensive, privately owned space on a large scale. "Of the 291 buildings occupied by the Government agencies in this area, 66 are obsolete Government-owned buildings, 47 are Government-owned temporary buildings, and 129 are leased buildings."⁴⁶

Frequent problems in both leased and government-owned office buildings included "overcrowding, poor lighting, and poor ventilation [which were] not conducive to efficient work performance, accident prevention, or the career attractiveness of the Federal service." As a result of these findings, the committee suggested a decade-long program that would eliminate temporary and obsolete buildings while constructing a minimum of 12 new Federal buildings.

As a result of requests made by President Kennedy, the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space was formed to advise the administration on immediate and long-term space needs, with particular attention paid to the Washington, D.C., area. Public buildings of the 1960s (particularly in Washington, D.C.) were considered to be successful and of a higher design quality than buildings of immediately prior and later eras.



FEDERAL OFFICE BUILDING 10B, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION,
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON, DC | HOLABIRD, ROOT
& BURGEE AND CARROLL, GRISDALE & VAN ALLEN | 1963

High-quality architectural designs for new Federal buildings that conveyed the “dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American Government” were recommended.

Although the committee acknowledged the problem of worker congestion within the city of Washington, members did not recommend immediate measures, such as decentralization or dispersal of government activities from the city. Citing factors such as the potential “disruption of public services, the problems encountered in large-scale relocation of employees and their families, and the costs of removal and resettlement,” the committee instead recommended careful, long-term studies for the potential for gradual decentralization of selected agencies.

To accurately determine a solution to—or at least an explanation for—the poor office conditions, the committee concluded that the General Services Administration’s lack of guidance should be corrected and responsibility for maintaining and managing the buildings should be clarified, thus improving overall office quality. As a result of this finding, the committee outlined a role and scope of responsibilities for GSA, with the recommendation for issuing an Executive Order to allow full implementation of responsibilities.

The committee viewed the potential for change in Washington in a positive light, stating that a “long-range program to improve Federal office space in the Nation’s Capital presents an exceptional opportunity to enhance the beauty and dignity of the seat of Government.”⁴⁷

Recommendations for the adoption of high-quality architectural designs for new buildings throughout the nation were mandated. However, the committee was quick to point out that exuberance or extravagance were not goals, but instead conveying the “dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American Government” through architecture should be given the highest priority. Efficient and economical construction that incorporated creative designs and works of art were strongly encouraged.

A three-point architectural policy was recommended by the committee:⁴⁸

1. Designs should incorporate the finest in contemporary architectural thought. Including local and regional architectural traditions and influences of the area where the building is located is encouraged. Incorporating pieces of fine art, preferably by living American artists, should be a priority. Buildings should also be functional for users, including the handicapped, and should incorporate materials, methods, and equipment of proven dependability, making them economical to build, operate, and maintain.
2. The development of an official style should be avoided. The architectural profession should dictate the trend of government buildings, but the government should not dictate architectural trends. Costs will likely be slightly higher to obtain quality designs, and the government should be willing to pay more to avoid excessive uniformity of design for Federal buildings. Design competitions may be held, and the advice of prominent architects should be sought prior to awarding important design contracts.

3. The choice and development of the building site should be considered the first step in the design process of Federal buildings, with special attention paid to nearby street layout and public places. Buildings should be located so as to permit a generous development of landscape.

In addition to recommending nationwide “Guiding Principles” for Federal office space, the committee also recommended redevelopment of Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. As the “grand axis” of Washington, Pennsylvania Avenue was laid out by Pierre Charles L’Enfant and led from the Capitol to the White House, symbolizing “at once the separation of powers and the fundamental unity in the American government.”⁴⁹ The committee cited the fact that many blighted buildings were coexisting with monumental government buildings. The imminent demolition of many of the dilapidated buildings provided the Federal government with the opportunity to view and redevelop the Avenue as a whole rather than piecemeal.

While some of the Ad Hoc Committee’s recommendations were indeed heeded by those responsible for designing Federal buildings, the guidelines were widely open to the interpretation of the individuals responsible for design and construction, and some interpretations were more successful than others. For the most part, buildings that were constructed after the issuance of the “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture” were less ornate and monumental than those of previous decades, yet they retained a formality—often through the use of symmetry and scale—that would not be as prevalent in public buildings of the 1980s and 90s. While most noticeable improvements in Federal design occurred in Washington, and other large cities boasted impressive Federal buildings from the 1960s, the exact extent to which Kennedy’s initiative spread to other regions of the United States remains less clear, but appears to be minimal. GSA adopted the Committee’s “Guiding Principles,” renamed Standards for Federal Architecture, as a “strong restatement of the Government’s dedication to the production of great architecture.” GSA continued to employ private architects who designed buildings that were similar if not identical to private-sector buildings of the era. Efficiency and economy continued to be GSA’s chief concerns when constructing new Federal buildings.⁵⁰

Regardless of the quality of design, the “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture” appear to have had an impact on the sheer number of Federal projects completed between 1960 and 1964, although the “Guiding Principles” were not directly linked to any funding program. Numerous Federal buildings, including major new projects in such large cities as Boston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and Denver—coupled with over 50 projects in which GSA served as developer for Federal and quasi-Federal agencies—made the first half of the 60s a period of major Federal construction. ■

CLAUDE PEPPER FEDERAL BUILDING, MIAMI, FLORIDA |
STEWART-SKINNER ASSOCIATES | 1964





STROM THURMOND FEDERAL BUILDING
AND U.S. COURTHOUSE, COLUMBIA,
SOUTH CAROLINA | MARCEL BREUER | 1979
SHOWN AT LEFT: FEDERAL BUILDING LOBBY

CASE STUDY **Strom Thurmond Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse**



The Strom Thurmond Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse complex in Columbia, South Carolina, is among the last projects by the celebrated German expatriate Marcel Breuer. Yet despite Breuer's international acclaim, his Brutalist project received a cool reception as it neared completion in 1979. The local press declared, "GSA's Dream Building—Nightmare Come True."* As time passed few people remembered that the three-part ensemble of office tower, low courthouse, and broad plaza had been designed by the firm of one of the era's most highly regarded Modernists.

When the Federal courts moved to a new building in 2003, GSA proposed reusing the vacated courthouse for offices as part of an overall master plan for the government complex. To maximize revenue, the project team considered bisecting the double-height courtrooms and both buildings' lobbies with a slab floor to increase rentable floor area—leaving little of the original finishes and design in the principal public and ceremonial spaces.

Meanwhile, GSA was beginning to implement its new Eligibility Assessment Tool (located at the end of this study) to evaluate the National Register eligibility of its Modern-era buildings in a more consistent manner.

An eligibility assessment of the Strom Thurmond complex captured its elegant proportions, understated craftsmanship, and careful detailing—especially in the four large courtrooms with original woodwork—prompting GSA to take a second look at the buildings. Investigation into their architectural heritage soon uncovered Breuer's involvement. The project team has since reconsidered alteration approaches that compromise significant spaces and finishes.

As the project moves forward, GSA's planning team is gathering information to better understand the local Modern-era context within which the buildings were originally constructed to inform the rehabilitation. Recognizing the complex's merit, GSA hopes to attract sympathetic architects with the skills to meet the project's technical requirements while preserving what is distinctive and unique about the buildings.

*Jan Stucker, "GSA Dream Building—Nightmare Come True," *The Columbia Record*, July 26, 1979.



ABOVE: ONE OF FOUR LARGE ORIGINAL COURTROOMS

THE POST-KENNEDY ERA

10

The General Services Administration continued to advance the Federal mandate for quality design, even after President Kennedy's assassination. In 1964, GSA participated in several high-profile projects that successfully conveyed the new "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture." The John F. Kennedy Federal Office Building in Boston and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Northern Plains Soil and Water Field Station in Sidney, Montana, were regarded as successful, innovative forays into the realm of Modern Federal architecture. The same year, GSA also oversaw the completion of the Smithsonian's Museum of History and Technology (1955-64), also considered to be an inventive design.⁵¹

Proud of the agency's accomplishments, Administrator Bernard Boutin stated in GSA's 1964 Annual Report that in addition to adhering to the goals of efficiently designed and constructed buildings that met the space requirements of Federal agencies, "added emphasis is being placed on the aesthetic architectural concept of the structure to produce buildings which reflect the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the U.S. Government" as directed by Kennedy's Ad Hoc Committee.⁵²

The Johnson Administration

President Lyndon B. Johnson followed Kennedy's initiative with the "Program for Beautification of Federal Buildings" in 1965. GSA undertook the mission of achieving the President's objective of improving Federal grounds and buildings. The initiative followed the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendation of avoiding the endorsement of an official architectural style and emphasized the importance of inviting, attractive landscape plans around Federal buildings.

The design of Federal office buildings, particularly those to be located in the Nation's Capital, must meet a two-fold requirement. First, it must provide efficient and economical facilities for the use of Government agencies. Second, it must provide visual testimony to the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American government.

Landscaping is included as an integral part of the design of any building and appropriate instructions are given in this respect during the design stage to contract architects and engineers. As part of these instructions, the architect is told to make his design in keeping with the motif of the community.⁵³

In order to carry out this new beautification policy, GSA maximized the use of its own resources while simultaneously coordinating with other involved government agencies and soliciting the support of the National Park Service, state and local forestry departments, and organizations such as community garden clubs to assist in landscape design and maintenance.⁵⁴

The concept of a long, low building placed next to a tall office tower set on a landscaped plaza was executed throughout the country, imitating the general plan of the United Nations Headquarters.



RICHARD BOLLING FEDERAL BUILDING, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI |
VOSKAMP & SLEZAK AND EVERETT & KELETI | 1965

Federal buildings constructed during various eras were cleaned, repaired, renovated, and re-landscaped. While an effort was made to include buildings from all geographic regions, special attention was paid to problems in Washington, D.C., where detailed plans to remove World War II-era temporary buildings, construct a series of new Federal buildings, and improve existing buildings were executed.⁵⁵

GSA took seriously the executive mandate to improve Federal design. Among the many tasks its architects were responsible for at this time were developing space and program requirements, establishing and maintaining design criteria, participating in site selections, preparing and negotiating contracts, monitoring schedules, reviewing and approving design submissions, and coordinating agency reviews (see Chapter 12, “GSA Directives in the Modern Era”). However, many GSA buildings constructed during the Johnson administration lacked distinguished designs. Nondescript buildings constructed with speed and efficiency continued to be the norm.⁵⁶

At the onset of the 1960s, a rising awareness of the historic significance of older buildings, as well as the economy of reusing them, had become part of the Federal government’s policy. President and Mrs. Kennedy were personally involved with the effort to save historic buildings facing Lafayette Square in Washington. Instead of demolishing the structures and replacing them with Modernist structures, the buildings were retained and new buildings built behind them. The design by John Carl Warnecke resulted in a nationally recognized and lauded preservation solution that blended historic preservation with Modern architecture.⁵⁷

In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act was passed, requiring the Federal government to evaluate its historic buildings and consider them when evaluating the impact of new undertakings (see page 50). Ten years later, in 1976, the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act encouraged the Federal government to acquire historic buildings rather than construct new ones. The Act also permitted cultural and commercial uses in public buildings, and was an attempt to integrate Federal buildings into community life rather than to have them viewed as enclaves for Federal employees only.

Concurrently, in the mid 1960s, there was a growing awareness of the environment and the impact that construction might have on it. In 1969, the National Environmental Policy Act was passed. Both the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act served as a framework for protecting their respective areas of concern, giving individuals and interested organizations opportunities to comment on the impact of planned construction. In many cases, the new laws slowed the design development process or had a larger impact on the outcome or location of a project.

A concern for energy conservation was also rising. In the past, Federal employees demanded office spaces—including lighting and temperature controls—that were comparable to private-sector work spaces. GSA met these demands, only later realizing the impact expanded energy use had on the cost of managing the

buildings. As a result, PBS instituted programs in existing buildings to regulate building temperatures and reduce water consumption, as well as other energy-saving measures. PBS was on the forefront of energy conservation measures in new buildings, installing ultraefficient equipment, using low-watt lighting, natural ventilation, recycled building materials, and solar energy collection devices.

Separate from all of the general building policies and philosophies adopted by GSA was the issue of Modern design and how the Federal government and GSA would approach and include Modern design tenets in its new buildings. Although one of Modernism's most distinguished early designs in the United States was the formative United Nations Headquarters (1947-1950) in Manhattan, it was not until the mid-1950s that the Federal government began executing buildings in the numerous Modernist styles.⁵⁸ Many of these early Modern Federal buildings were U.S. embassies located overseas, and consequently, they had no immediate impact on American cities; their influence was felt more strongly in the 1960s.

Under Assistant Commissioner for Design and Construction Karel Yasko, public buildings of the 1960s (particularly in Washington, D.C.) were considered to be successful and of a higher design quality than buildings of immediately prior and later eras.⁵⁹ Many public buildings from the mid 1960s contained excellent juxtapositions of materials and forms. The concept of a long, low building placed next to a tall office tower set on a landscaped plaza was executed throughout the country, imitating the general plan of the United Nations Headquarters. The Byron G. Rogers Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Denver is one such example that successfully replicated this three-part scheme. Buildings contained a variety of materials; concrete, stone, glass, and metals were combined to present a modern, yet strong presence. Like New Deal predecessors, public buildings from the 1960s often contained works of art, usually in the form of sculpture. A number of architects attempted to be conscious and respectful of surrounding buildings, and designed their new edifices to blend with existing streetscapes.⁶⁰

A number of architects attempted to be conscious and respectful of surrounding buildings, and designed their new edifices to blend with existing streetscapes.

ABRAHAM A. RIBICOFF FEDERAL BUILDING AND
U.S. COURTHOUSE, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT |
DOUG ORR AND EBBETS, FRID & ASSOCIATES | 1963



The landscapes of Modern Federal buildings and complexes were important components of many designs. Landscaped plazas and courtyards were often executed as part of original building plans and offered valuable outdoor gathering spaces for both GSA tenants and the public.

A critical period in GSA's history occurred under the leadership of Lawson B. Knott, Jr., Administrator from June 1965 to February 1969. During his tenure, 285 buildings were completed, and the number of square feet under GSA's control reached an all-time high at over 200 million. Knott instituted a successful program of design review. Wanting to continue GSA's "strong emphasis on the importance of high architectural standards and the enhancement of local environments where new buildings were to be situated," Knott appointed 17 established and respected architects to form a Public Advisory Panel on Architectural Services. Entrusted with the job of selecting the highest-quality designs for new Federal buildings, the panel made decisions based on "design criteria and professional contracting procedures." After one year, the panel was so effective that ten regional panels were instituted for local reviews.⁶¹

After the wave of construction in the first half of the 1960s, budget constraints, inflation, and the cost of military action in Vietnam led to dwindling Congressional appropriations, and GSA construction decreased as a result. Despite the hope for widespread improvement of Federal buildings that began during the Kennedy administration, social and political concerns dominated the government by the end of the decade. In 1968, the Public Buildings Service conducted a study comparing GSA's construction management policies to those of the private sector. The results were disheartening. Many of GSA's methods were outdated—from construction techniques to financing to the lack of computer use.

The Nixon Administration

The following year, President Richard Nixon appointed Robert L. Kunzig to the position of GSA Administrator. Under Kunzig, the Public Buildings Service was restructured and new management strategies implemented. The Office of Construction Management and the Office of Operational Planning were added, and followed trends found in the private sector. Among the most critical and innovative changes made was the introduction of phased construction (also referred to as parallel scheduling), which allowed construction to begin before design was complete, thus reducing the overall time for project completion. Construction and project management approaches were also revamped and streamlined, using new practices common in the private sector. These new approaches to construction brought a measure of professionalism to GSA and dramatically improved the agency's ability to analyze its projects. Initial and long-term costs were evaluated, and the information yielded allowed GSA to make decisions based not only on construction costs, but also on extended returns for dollars spent. Project budgets were scrutinized and excessive expenditures eliminated.⁶²

In 1972, GSA's methods of obtaining and constructing buildings were overhauled by amendments passed by the 92nd Congress. Massive funding preceded what was surely to be an enormous wave of construction. Within this new legislation was the directive that the GSA Administrator give "due consideration to excellence

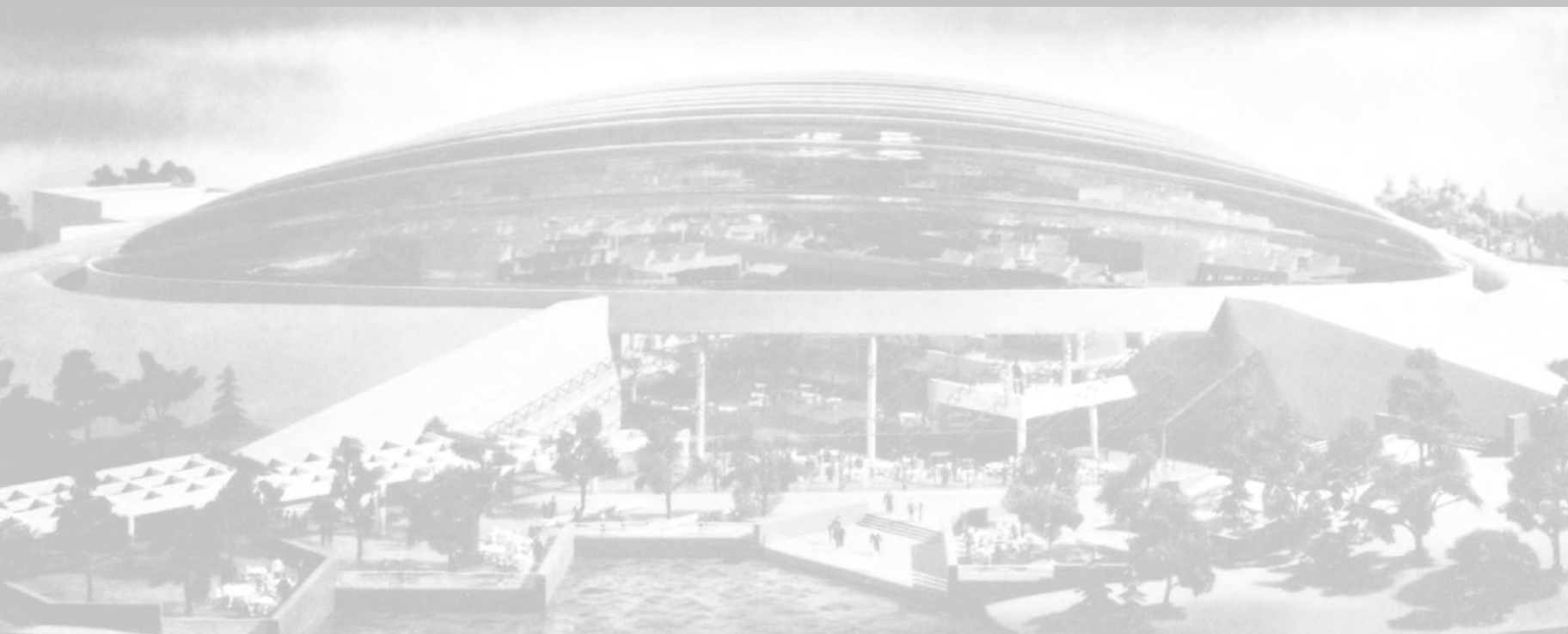


FEDERAL BUILDING, TUCSON,
ARIZONA | CAIN, NELSON, WARES,
COOK & ASSOCIATES | 1974

The Megast ructure Model

In an attempt to develop some truly innovative answers to Federal office space problems, GSA actively sought new money-saving and energy-efficient methods for its proposed construction. In 1975, GSA commissioned a study to investigate the feasibility of an office building prototype with earthen walls and an air-supported roof. The building was based on a design demonstrated at Expo '70 in Japan. Known as the "megastructure," it featured an air-supported roof enclosing a large-volume, clear-span dome; within the dome, all offices received natural sunlight through the translucent roof, and a large landscaped mall ran through the interior. The megastructure model was extremely energy efficient, with the roof providing excellent solar performance and energy conservation. Despite the many innovations included in the megastructure, it was comparable to traditional office buildings in cost and construction time, but was apparently never constructed for GSA.

[Source: "Megastructure." Undated GSA Informational Brochure from the vertical files of the GSA Library, Washington, D.C. Although the brochure is undated, corroborating information on the project indicates that the publication dates from the mid-1970s.]



of architecture and design.”⁶³ This is the first legislative decree concerning quality of design and gave a legal basis for espousing design principles. Reinforcing the quest for good design was President Nixon’s belief that “there should be no doubt that the Federal Government has an appropriate and critical role to play in encouraging better design,” a conviction echoed by the American Institute of Architects. These views were further bolstered by the Brooks Act of 1972, which required the Federal government to look only at the qualifications, and not the fees, of architects when selecting designers of Federal buildings.

Also in 1972, President Nixon issued an announcement that the government would explore the role of the arts in Federal design by sponsoring a design assembly for Federal administrators, reviewing the “Guiding Principles,” and improving Federal graphics and publications. Like the efforts of his predecessors, it appears that Nixon’s initiatives, while well intentioned, did little to improve Federal architecture.⁶⁴

Despite efforts at fostering design excellence in Federal buildings, some experts questioned the commitment of the government to this goal. Many buildings were considered to be lacking in quality or innovation or both. Common faults found with buildings of this era include bland exteriors that were uninviting and a general impersonal feeling to facades. Architectural critics cite a lack of noteworthy designs that offer a sense of timelessness to the buildings.

However, it was also during the late 1960s and early 1970s that some Federal buildings responded to public expectations for a “cost-conscious, nonauthoritarian, sensitive, and inclusive government.”⁶⁵ Anti-monumental, yet still formal, buildings that conveyed the government as welcoming, accessible, and participatory were generally lower in scale, often with clear glass that allowed views of the interiors. Landscaping also helped to achieve the goal of designing nonimposing, human-scale complexes by using plantings and water features such as pools or fountains. ■

CASE STUDY **Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Office Suite**

Although a building may lack architectural merit, strong associations with events or significant persons can make the property eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. An example of this is the architecturally undistinguished J.J. Pickle Federal Building in Austin, Texas. In 1996, GSA, in conjunction with the Texas Historical Commission, determined that the building was eligible because it contains the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Office Suite on the ninth floor.

Designed by Page Southerland Page and Brooks Barr Graeber White & Partners, the J.J. Pickle Federal Building was completed in 1965. At that time President Johnson, a native Texan, established the official local offices of the Chief Executive of the United States in the building. President Johnson's private suite, which included an office, dining room, kitchen, sitting area, and bathroom, retains a high degree of integrity and remains almost unchanged since he occupied it.

The Presidential Office Suite is surrounded by two-inch-thick, bulletproof glass. At the time President Johnson occupied the executive office, large windows afforded impressive vistas of the Texas State Capitol, the University of Texas, and the surrounding Texas hill country. (New construction currently obscures these views.)

Because the office suite is less than 50 years old and its significance is derived from people who occupied it and events that occurred there within the past 50 years, the argument for the exceptional significance of the site had to be made under National Register Criterion Consideration G (see page 107). The Presidential Office Suite is considered to be exceptionally significant because of its strong association with President Johnson and as the site of meetings of national importance. One of the most significant events to occur there was a meeting in December 1966, attended by President Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At this meeting they discussed the anti-ballistic missile system and decided to support the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This was a pivotal moment in determining U.S. nuclear policy in the Cold War era.

Although the building is not yet formally listed in the National Register, as a property determined eligible for the Register, it benefits from the same legal protections governing Federal activity as listed properties (see page 50). Since the determination of eligibility, GSA has maintained the Presidential Office Suite, recognizing its association with President Johnson's years as the Commander in Chief.

[Source: "Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Office Suite." National Register of Historic Places Determination of Eligibility Form. Completed by John Russick, Texas Historical Commission, 1996.]





J. J. PICKLE FEDERAL BUILDING, AUSTIN, TEXAS |
PAGE: SOUTHERLAND PAGE AND
BROOKS BARR GRAEBER WHITE & PARTNERS | 1965
UPPER RIGHT: PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S FORMER OFFICE
IS NOW USED BY SENATOR KAY BAILEY HUTCHINSON.
RIGHT: SITTING AREA WITH DINING ROOM BEYOND

11

THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS COOPERATIVE USE ACT

With the arrival of the 1970s, the effort to foster quality design in Federal architecture was headed by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). At the direction of President Richard Nixon, the Task Force on Federal Architecture was established. One of the lasting results of this task force was legislation permitting previously banned uses in Federal buildings. (In 1956, the GSA General Counsel concluded that because sections of the 1949 Public Buildings Act authorizing GSA to assign space do not specifically mention nonfederal agencies, GSA could not assign space to nonfederal entities, such as commercial enterprises.)⁶⁶

This interpretation was reinforced in a 1972 memo to the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service from the office of the General Counsel of GSA.

Since the question [of multiple-use Federal buildings] involves property owned by the United States, it must first be pointed out that the control and use of such property is vested in the Congress. Congress, when it sees fit, by statute delegates this authority to the heads of Departments and Executive Agencies or to corporate bodies, and even to the President....

This definition [of Public Buildings as defined in the Public Buildings Act of 1959], in our opinion, makes clear that the building is for use of federal agencies and we would go further and state that the use must be for federal activities....

In our opinion the Administrator has authority inherent in the statutory delegation to manage public buildings to provide for facilities needed in order to discharge this duty. It is under this premise we say that if commercial facilities are needed in order to serve the federal employees in a building because they are not reasonably available to them, concessions for commercial enterprises can be authorized.⁶⁷

At the time this memo was issued, it was viewed by many as an extremely narrow interpretation of the law. The legislation contains no specific references to the impact of Federal buildings on urban vitality or design, the perceived barrenness of Federal buildings, the lack of usage of Federal buildings during evening hours, or the desirability of multiple uses. The caveat mentioned in the memo was the result of GSA Administrator Franklin Floete's wish that the President of the United States be granted some latitude in defining public buildings. Therefore, Presidential influence could expand or alter the mandate of the Public Buildings Act of

1959, which further elaborates the Administrator's authority to plan, construct, and acquire public buildings. It also requires that GSA receive Congressional approval of all prospectuses for public buildings and conduct ongoing investigations of governmental space needs.⁶⁸

Numerous private developers provided statistics supporting multiple uses, and local jurisdictions pointed out specific cases where they felt adding retail establishments would enliven Federal buildings and the surrounding neighborhoods. The Federal Architecture Project of the NEA studied the situation, issuing a report titled *Federal Architecture: Multiple Use Facilities* in 1974. This study cited numerous opportunities for Federal buildings to engage in commercial agreements that would energize streets, offer amenities to Federal employees during working hours, and provide revenue for underused space.

Nixon also desired the development of "standards and criteria for Government operations that would guide the location and design choices for all new public buildings. New project sites were to be selected with consideration to local and regional development needs, especially the potential for rejuvenating existing social and economic conditions in depressed areas."⁶⁹

In its 1973 annual report, GSA stated that it was committed to a goal of building with excellence not only buildings that were functional and economical, but also of distinguished design.⁷⁰ In 1974, NEA published *Federal Architecture: A Framework for Debate* as a follow-up to 1962's "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture." The new document advocated the use of design guidelines for Federal buildings and touted the benefits of multiple-use and adaptive use of Federal buildings.

In 1976, Congress passed the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act, permitting the street levels of government buildings to be used for mixed cultural and commercial purposes, thus encouraging more interaction with the general public.

In 1976, Congress passed the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act, permitting the street levels of government buildings to be used for mixed cultural and commercial purposes, thus encouraging more interaction with the general public. The same legislation also encouraged acquiring and reusing historic and architecturally interesting buildings for public use.

This legislation encouraged the agency to utilize space in its older federal buildings. If a building's continued use was impractical, it could be protected with covenants and turned over to another responsible owner. Thus was inaugurated the greater effort to study older federal public buildings and to preserve their historical qualities while accommodating normal office functions.⁷¹

One of the first new buildings to incorporate commercial public spaces in Federal buildings was the Federal Home Loan Bank Board Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Designed by Max O. Urbahn Associates in 1973, many of the public amenities were part of the design prior to the Public Buildings Cooperative Use



J. EDGAR HOOVER FEDERAL BUREAU OF
INVESTIGATION BUILDING, WASHINGTON, DC |
C. F. MURPHY | 1972

One of the principal problems of Modern-era Federal architecture was its inability to relate to its surroundings, rather than individual building design. Many buildings of this era represent a Federal office building style that is massive, severe, and disengaged from its environment.

Act of 1976—the result of foresight on the architects' part. Part of the Living Buildings program, the building integrated several restaurants and cafes as well as an ice-skating rink and a landscaped courtyard into its design. The Federal Home Loan Bank Board Headquarters is also notable for its sensitive incorporation of the pre-Civil War Winder Building, which abuts it. However, GSA was widely criticized for demolishing historic buildings that were located on the site in order to construct the new office building.⁷²

Despite the positive changes instituted during the 1970s, there was a general decline in the quality of materials used in public buildings during the decade. Critics felt that dignity was lost when designers began executing buildings in the impersonal Brutalist style (see Chapter 6, "Modernism in the United States"). The Federal Bureau of Investigation headquarters was completed in 1972, after years of planning. The Brutalist design by C.F. Murphy is generally regarded as out of place in its location along Pennsylvania Avenue and features a rough concrete exterior and heavy massing. Buildings sheathed in glass—often tinted dark colors—also contributed to the detached feeling of Federal architecture of the 1970s.⁷³

Much Federal building in the 1970s, particularly in Washington, D.C., was the result of efforts stemming from the nation's Bicentennial in 1976. Many existing buildings were renovated in anticipation of the celebration. Perhaps one of the most notable and successful GSA construction projects from this era is the National Air and Space Museum. Designed by Gyo Obata of Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum and completed in 1976, the museum has been celebrated as "a very elegant airplane hangar."⁷⁴

The 1970s have been categorized as an "antimonumental" era, with the designs of public buildings responding to calls from the White House for increased energy efficiency. Public officials believed that government should be a welcoming entity and its buildings should be approachable. Effective and efficient use of money was important to Federal officials, and the perception of a cost-conscious government that was careful with the taxpayers' dollars was given a high priority. Buildings tended to be unassuming and focused on meeting the users' needs with as little superfluous design as possible. While these buildings may have been praised for their efficiency, they are among those that are most criticized today as being uninspired. ■

12

GSA DIRECTIVES IN THE MODERN ERA

During the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, GSA issued several broad policies on the design and construction of Federal buildings. These directives offer summaries of GSA building trends during the era and are useful tools for evaluating Federal buildings constructed during these years. Working within these parameters established by GSA, architects designed numerous Federal buildings for various uses.

Guidelines for Federal Buildings

In 1959, the Public Buildings Service issued instructions to contract architects and engineers regarding construction costs of projects. Projects were authorized for construction within a fixed “limit of cost,” which could include the expenditure for the site; of designing, constructing and equipping the building; and part of the cost of administering and supervising the project.⁷⁵

GSA also prescribed a basic policy on the selection of materials, systems, and equipment.

All buildings constructed by GSA will be functionally efficient and economical in construction, operation, and maintenance. This dictates selection of the type of construction and use of materials, systems and equipment that are economical, functionally suitable and, where pertinent, aesthetically acceptable.

Initial cost, availability, effect on recurring repair and replacement costs, and the time required to complete construction will be considered in order to determine the economy of the type of construction and the use of alternative materials, systems and equipment. All specifications will be written to permit best and most favorable use of materials including optional materials and those produced in the general locality of the project, which meet the conditions of this policy.

The architect and/or engineer will make a careful analysis and cost comparison, as required, to establish clearly the appropriate solution to comply with the above policy.⁷⁶

In 1962, the Public Buildings Service issued a series of design objectives for new and remodeled spaces in buildings that were GSA-controlled. These objectives were as follows:

- A high ratio of net usable space to gross area.
- Maximum flexibility of space assignment and utilization.
- Maximum economy and efficiency in the operation of buildings.
- Constant improvement of office space to improve employee morale, reduce personnel turnover, and increase employee efficiency.
- Protection of life and property.⁷⁷

To realize these objectives, PBS recommended that the circulation “core” of the building be carefully designed using adequate but minimum permanent corridors, toilets, stairways, elevators, and lobbies. The general office space was to be designed on approved “modular lines” with full flexibility of fenestration, lighting, power, and air-conditioning in order to permit the installation of movable partitions. Special-purpose space and custodial space was to be carefully designed for long-range usefulness derived from “painstaking” research and effective contacts with the tenant agencies. The partition layouts were to be responsive to the functional space studies as well as consistent with good architectural and engineering practice.⁷⁸

Space was generally divided into four categories: general office space; special-use space (for post offices, courts, border stations); custodial and common use space (assembly areas, cafeterias, and indoor parking); and storage space (finished spaces for small storage and unfinished spaces for bulk storage).⁷⁹

Because GSA was building across the country, conforming to various local zoning provisions and building codes while constructing public buildings and applying local ordinances and regulations with respect to licenses and permits was often a complex process. It was the broad policy of GSA to apply generally accepted building practices, usually as expressed in National Building Codes.⁸⁰ GSA also relied heavily on local architects and engineers who were familiar with the community and local practices.

As a consequence, GSA does generally meet and even exceed the requirements of local building codes even though they are not directly applicable to the United States. State safety laws cannot be enforced directly against Federal officials.... While GSA is not bound by local zoning ordinances, it does attempt to comply with them in full and, in any event, to avoid major departures from their provisions.⁸¹

Analyses of both foundations and framing methods were required by GSA. Soil investigations of proposed sites were required, and safe and economical foundation designs based on the findings were then reviewed by experienced personnel.⁸²

During the decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, technology propelled building methods into new arenas. Because a large percentage of construction costs is expended erecting the framing system of buildings, GSA was exploring new options, balancing cost with technology. For economic comparisons, framing systems were divided into two categories:

1. Older, widely used systems, such as ribbed slab and flat slab. These were to receive review for structural adequacy and compared with the costs of other framing systems.
2. New or seldom-used systems, such as folded plate, hyperbolic paraboloid, prestressed precast members, and thinshell arch construction. These systems were to be reviewed for their structural adequacy by engineers specially selected because of their expertise with each type of foundation. Because these new systems were often employed due to the architectural design of the building, the cost comparison was to take the design of each building into consideration.⁸³

Other industry factors, like cost comparisons between materials such as reinforced concrete and structural steel, were also to be considered when designing a building. GSA stipulated that in smaller buildings, the choice of framing or foundation be made based on the designer's knowledge of price. Structural framing schemes were to be based on the most economical scheme that satisfied the requirements of the specific project. "[E]xtraordinary or unique construction features" were carefully analyzed for structural feasibility when tentative sketches were reviewed.⁸⁴

In designing Federal buildings, GSA considered the needs of its tenants—allowing for concession stands if requested and health units for buildings housing over 300 people. In 1963, prior to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, GSA stipulated that all proposed Federal buildings provide easy access for wheelchairs to the first-floor entrance lobby. Where steps were unavoidable, a secondary entrance or a ramp was required. For proposed buildings over 50,000 square feet, and smaller buildings as necessary, accessible toilet stalls and water fountains were also mandatory.⁸⁵

In 1962, GSA declared that economical, functionally suitable, and, where possible, aesthetically acceptable materials should be used. Specifications were to be written to permit the most favorable use of the optional materials and those produced in the general locality of the project. Consideration was given to

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
DISTRICT OFFICE BUILDING, PERU, ILLINOIS
OMARA & CHAMLIN | 1969



In some small towns,
modest public buildings
are architectural and
social focal points—
symbols of the Federal
government.

local products when they were suitable and cost effective. The use of foreign stone was prohibited. Architects were to list marble and granite by trade names, and give specifications as to the appearance of acceptable limestone and sandstone.

In 1963, GSA issued a directive regarding materials and finishes for projects with construction costs of \$1 million or more. The following materials and finishes for exterior features were stipulated:

- wall facing: brick, stone, cast stone, ceramics
- trim: stone, granite, aluminum, stainless steel, enameled iron
- spandrels: brick, tile, stone, marble, aluminum, steel
- window frames: aluminum, bronze, steel
- entrance doors: aluminum, stainless steel
- title letters: aluminum, stainless steel
- flat roofs: composition
- pitched roofs: slate, copper

Stipulations involving interior spaces were more detailed and were outlined according to the intended use for the space. Generally, spaces such as basements, rooms containing mechanical equipment, storage spaces, and holding cells were finished in unpainted concrete. Typical office spaces and public toilets were finished with mid-grade materials such as vinyl flooring, plaster or ceramic tile walls, and acoustical tiles or plaster ceilings. Public spaces such as entrances and elevator lobbies and courtrooms were finished in higher-quality materials. There were generally terrazzo or tile floors, marble or wood wainscot, and plaster walls and ceilings. Ease of maintenance was repeatedly cited as a factor in choosing materials.⁸⁶ By the early 1970s, a new awareness of energy conservation in public buildings was rising. Thermostats were to be adjusted to 76-78 degrees in the summer and 70-72 degrees in the winter. Superfluous lighting was to be eliminated and unnecessary lighting standards were repealed. A building's success was measured not only in initial construction cost but in its long-term maintenance costs.

A procedure for maintaining estimated construction costs was proposed in March 1969, after repeated problems meeting proposed budgets and occupancy schedules. In a GSA order, William A. Schmidt, Commissioner of Public Buildings, outlined procedures for avoiding or justifying overexpenditures. It appears that this order was cancelled, and it is not clear if another order with similar objectives was ever issued or instituted. However, the value of the original cancelled order is in the fact that it sheds light on a recurring problem within GSA.⁸⁷

Supply and Distribution Buildings

Supply and distribution facilities, such as warehouses, were given a separate set of guidelines. Defined as a single building on an “uncrowded site, the purpose of which is to receive, store and distribute a wide assortment of supplies used by the Federal Government,” these warehouses were generally to be single-story buildings without refrigerated or dehumidified areas. The exception to the single-story mandate was in buildings where a mezzanine area was used for office space.⁸⁸

Aesthetic guidelines for these buildings stated that operational efficiency was considered the most important single factor in design and construction, but that consideration should be given to maintaining a high standard of architectural design and taste.

This is especially important in federally owned facilities, where consideration must be given to the resale value of the facility, and to stated GSA policy that places emphasis on designs which are distinguished in architectural style and embody the finest contemporary architectural thought. However, these results can be achieved by utilizing economical design concepts and construction materials and are largely dependent on the ingenuity and imaginativeness of the A-E.⁸⁹

GSA directives for supply and distribution facilities were detailed. Other GSA directives regarding buildings used for general office space or specific Federal agencies did not seem to be given equally specific guidelines. Sites for supply and distribution buildings needed to have good transportation service and accessibility by both commercial motor vehicle carriers (via the new interstate highway system) and rail carriers serving the entire nation. Electrical, sewer, water, telephone, publicly provided fire protection, and other utility services needed to serve the area at reasonable prices. Sites where minimal fill was needed were preferred, and buildings were to be located within the site to minimize the amount of paving and distance from the nearest main highway to the shipping and receiving areas. Designers were also directed to locate buildings so as not to inhibit future expansion. Seeding and landscaping were to be held to the minimum consistent with good landscaping design, and generally confined to areas at or near public entrances.⁹⁰

The buildings themselves were to be “as simple as possible to avoid high construction cost, consistent with optimum operating efficiency.”⁹¹ Primary consideration was to be given to the physical layout so as to provide optimum operational efficiency. Loading and unloading areas, storage areas, and support areas were arranged to facilitate the flow of merchandise and paperwork. Minimizing the amount of time employees spent moving among the spaces allotted for personnel, service, custodial functions, as well as allowing for continuous and safe equipment operation, was also stated as a goal of internal spacial organization.⁹²

Prime consideration must be given to the economy in the design and selection of materials to be used for exterior walls. The use of costly decorative materials such as natural stone shall be avoided or confined to an area at or adjacent to the main entrance. Materials shall be selected which do not require painting or extensive exterior maintenance.⁹³

As GSA sought to provide office space for legions of Federal employees and to bring efficiency to the Federal building process, economy was often a stronger driving force than architectural distinction.



U.S. BORDER STATION PATROL HEADQUARTERS,
SWANTON, VERMONT | BARR LINDE & HUBBARD | 1965

Windows on supply buildings were to be used only in office areas, where firefighters might need access to save employees. Low-maintenance windows were specified.

Analyzing the cost of producing supply and distribution facilities yields important information. Generally, public buildings of the pre-World War II era used about 60 percent of the construction budget for the building envelope, with the remaining 40 percent for mechanical systems. When “Design Criteria for GSA Supply Distribution Facilities” was published by GSA in 1970, these figures had shifted so that for distribution facilities, 20 percent of the cost went toward the envelope, with the remaining 80 percent toward systems.⁹⁴

Architectural Review of GSA Buildings

Because several different divisions within GSA were concerned with various aspects of the finished building, an internal GSA review process was in place by the early 1960s. The project architect first completed diagrammatic sketches and, once approved, tentative sketches showing net floor areas were developed. (The total gross areas were established in the GSA project prospectus.) An itemized cost estimate accompanied the tentative sketches, which were first given a preliminary review by PBS architects to make sure the basic requirements were met. After the preliminary review, sets of drawings were formally submitted to the appropriate agency or department (Post Office, U.S. Courts, Department of Justice, etc.) for review and approval. Prints were also sent to the Office of Space Management for review and to obtain requirements for any special permanent features or facilities. Agencies slated to occupy the spaces were also given an opportunity to comment and could work in conjunction with GSA's Design and Construction office to refine plans.⁹⁵

Art in Public Buildings

Federal buildings have long incorporated works of art into their designs. Customhouses from the nineteenth century often featured murals depicting commerce-related activities, and during the Depression era, public buildings such as post offices and courthouses were adorned with works by artists employed under New Deal programs. During the Modern era, art was reintroduced as a component of Federal buildings. As part of the Public Buildings Act of 1959, GSA recognized the importance of art—namely sculpture and mural paintings—as an integral part of Federal buildings, excepting those of a purely utilitarian character.⁹⁶ PBS recommended that when the estimated cost of construction was sufficient, the architect should give consideration early in the design stage to providing appropriate spaces for sculptured features and murals. Contracts for sculptural models, carving, and murals were awarded by either direct selection (the architect recommended the names of artists for consideration) or by competition.⁹⁷

PBS categorized “sculptural and mural embellishment” in the following ways:

- carved or cast work that forms an integral part of the building, and is applied to, or built into, the building;
- carved or cast work that is free-standing, or can be installed after the construction has been completed; or
- mural paintings, which can be (and usually were) applied or installed after the building was completed.⁹⁸

In 1963, in response to President Kennedy's Ad Hoc Committee's “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture,” GSA expanded its policy on fine arts to include painting, sculpture, and other artistic work in other mediums. Work was to reflect the national cultural heritage and emphasize the work of living American artists. GSA commissioned over 60 works of art during the 1950s and first half of the 1960s.⁹⁹ Generally, buildings with construction budgets less than \$250,000 did not include a fine arts component.¹⁰⁰

Another directive regarding art included keeping costs under one-half of one percent of the estimated construction cost. Projects that would not normally include a fine art component were permitted to include embellishment if there was a strong community desire and art was donated. GSA agreed to cooperate with the installation of these donated works of art, but subject matter and artistic standards were still subject to approval by the Office of Design and Construction (and the Commission of Fine Arts for projects located in Washington, D.C.).¹⁰¹

In addition to works of fine art, the Great Seal of the United States was installed on all new Federal buildings and on major additions or alterations to existing buildings. The Federal government furnished cast-aluminum seals in two sizes, 30” diameter and 22” diameter. Seals were to be displayed near the main public entrances. Document cases designed to house replicas of the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Bill of Rights were to be installed in buildings housing post offices, Federal courts, and other Federal agencies, and in new border stations having considerable public contact and major additions or newly altered spaces of existing buildings. Cases were to be in prominent locations, preferably public lobbies on the first floors of buildings. The installation of monuments and memorials was discouraged, but not prohibited. When permitted, they were subject to the same review process as other works of art.¹⁰²

In 1966, the art program was suspended when construction costs rose dramatically due to inflation. In 1972, the program was reinstated and named the Art-in-Architecture program. After the program suffered budget cuts during President Gerald Ford's administration, President Jimmy Carter's administration subsequently reinstated the program at its former funding level.



TRAPEZOID | ROBERT MAKI |
1975 | FEDERAL BUILDING AND U.S.
COURTHOUSE, EUGENE, OREGON

Original works of art—often integrated into the buildings themselves—were common in Federal buildings of the Modern era. A portion of construction funds was allotted for public art, which included sculptures and murals.

One of the most prominent works of art from this era is Alexander Calder's *Flamingo* stabile, located at the Federal Center in Chicago. Completed in 1974, the monumental scale of the piece, which soars to 53 feet in height and is 60 feet long and 24 feet wide, responds to its location amid tall skyscrapers. Executed in Calder's signature red color, the bright, curving forms of the stabile provide a contrast to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's black, linear buildings.

In 1977, GSA Administrator Jay Solomon announced a new Federal Art-in-Architecture policy. The amount of funds designated for artworks in federally commissioned buildings was raised from three-eighths to one-half of one percent of construction costs. In the past, this fiscal allotment had been limited to new construction, but it was now expanded to include existing buildings that initially were constructed without public art. The program also was restructured to include new art forms such as earth and light works and building arts such as ornamental grills, woodwork, brickwork, and stained glass. A greater variety of crafts, such as ceramics and photography, were also included.¹⁰³

With a focus on humanizing public buildings for both workers and visitors, Solomon stated that

the government has a responsibility—and obligation—to experiment, to innovate, to be a testing ground for new ideas. By expanding the concept of art-in-architecture, we will be able to give a whole new group of talented artists—craftsmen, photographers, environmental sculptors—a chance to participate in our program. By making more funds available for commissions, we will ensure that the American people will always have a substantial body of public art.¹⁰⁴

In its first three decades, GSA commissioned 150 artists all across the country to create more than 175 works of art for 90 Federal buildings.¹⁰⁵

Site Work/Landscaping

Although details were provided for many aspects of construction, few guidelines were provided for site work and landscape features. Sidewalks, curbs, steps, and retaining walls were to be executed in concrete, with the exception of street curbs in locations where local ordinances stipulated another material. Driveways and parking areas were to be bituminous paving unless budget restrictions required the use of a less expensive material, such as “gravel or cinders.”

Planting projects were to be conceived and designed by landscape architects. In the Washington, D.C., area, field inspections of plant specimens were to be conducted by the Office of Design and Construction. Parking facilities were to be provided according to the design of the building and the funds allotted.¹⁰⁶ ■

CASE STUDY

Des Moines Federal Building

Built in 1967-68, the Des Moines Federal Building in Iowa experienced water infiltration problems since its completion. After assessing the best approach to solve the problems, GSA decided that the low architectural merit of the building made it suitable for complete replacement of exterior surfaces—the most economical way to remedy the leaks while also addressing aesthetic deficiencies in the building. Beginning in 2003, GSA replaced the roof and entire facade, including the windows, dramatically altering the appearance of the building.



NORTHWEST VIEW SHOWN BEFORE FACADE REPLACEMENT (ABOVE) AND AFTER (RIGHT).

Before embarking on the proposed project, GSA notified the local architectural review board of its intentions to alter the building. Community support for the renovation project was overwhelming, with board members enthusiastically supporting a new exterior design. No concerns relating to its potential historic significance were raised or appeared to exist. The project architects sought to design a solution that would provide the necessary weather barrier and simultaneously provide a sleek new exterior form. The success of the Des Moines Federal Building's facade replacement demonstrates the positive impact GSA buildings can have on communities and the benefit of soliciting local input in discussions about changes to these buildings.

As part of GSA's *First Impressions* program, the lobby of the building was also redesigned. It was expanded and reconfigured to accommodate changes in the security-screening process and improve overall circulation. To make the lobby more compatible with the renovated exterior of the building, glass and metal finishes were selected. A new landscape plan with native plants was not implemented due to budget constraints—recalling the fate of many original Modern-era plaza designs.



FEDERAL BUILDING, DES MOINES, IOWA |
WETHERELL HARRISON, WAGNER AND MCKEEVEN | 1967-68 |
NEUMANN BROTHERS | 2002

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TRENDS INFLUENCING FEDERAL DESIGN

As Modern architecture trends evolved, other design factors were also developing. Sometimes these trends were directly responsible for innovative GSA designs. In other cases, the influences were more subtle.

Urban Renewal

Another movement begun during the 1950s and continuing into the 1960s was urban renewal, an effort to revitalize city centers. In some cases, this revitalization took the form of large-scale demolition of older (and sometimes historic) buildings to make way for Modern buildings. Whether building on a cleared or vacant parcel of land, Modernist architects became cognizant of the field of urban planning, considering how their designs would relate to existing buildings and contribute to the cities in which they were built. Efforts to respect the massing, scale, setback, and materials of surrounding historic buildings were made with varying degrees of success. As renowned architect Walter Gropius told his students:

I am not interested when you build a beautiful design in a gap of a street if you have treated it only as a unit in itself, not considering the neighborhood which is already there. You have to blend in with the larger circumstance. This larger circumstance is the main thing and all limited objectives have to be subordinated to the whole.¹⁰⁷

As the 1960s progressed and the urban renewal movement spread in the United States, GSA located some of its new buildings in targeted areas, which were most commonly in declining areas of major cities. By attempting to revitalize sections of these cities with an influx of Federal employees, GSA hoped that private businesses would soon follow.

For example, the program for the 1967 dedication ceremony states that the new Federal Building in Baltimore “serves as an attractive and striking ‘anchor’ to the southern end of the Charles Center Urban Renewal Project ...” Constructed to consolidate the offices of numerous Federal agencies that were previously spread throughout the city, the building emphasized “its design simplicity and functional characteristics.” Materials used in the construction included granite, aluminum, and glass.¹⁰⁸

The Social Security Administration Mid-Atlantic Program Center, constructed in 1975 in the Spring Garden renewal area of downtown Philadelphia, was “in accordance with Federal programs to use construction to assist local urban renewal efforts.” The building blended aesthetics—its “striking design” of bronze anodized aluminum and solar bronze glass—with state-of-the-art building systems concepts, a “set of seven interrelated and coordinated building components” that included mechanical systems and finished spaces.

The designers of the U.S. Courthouse and Federal Building in Philadelphia respected the role that the large building would play in the city, helping to shape the urban environment. This building also boasted a number of firsts, according to its dedication ceremony program. It was the first Federal project in Pennsylvania to be programmed for phased construction, which allowed preliminary work to be started while the design was under way, saving construction time and money. It was also the first Federal project to be subject to noise abatement procedures as part of the construction process to avoid noise pollution in Federal construction. After construction, noise was also a concern: the building was the first to require sound-level limits for the building's mechanical systems to restrict internal and external noise.¹⁰⁹

Historic Preservation

In addition to urban renewal efforts, GSA also played a key role in advising the executive branch on general design issues—including the retention and preservation of older or historically significant buildings and the integration of new buildings in historic and low-scale settings. With building booms and urban renewal efforts claiming many historic buildings in the name of progress, GSA advocated rehabilitation and reuse of Federal buildings. In 1964, the Public Buildings Service prepared studies of its historic buildings.

The recognized need for preserving Federal buildings that enrich the Nation's heritage requires knowledge and understanding of their roles in history....The collection of adequate and authentic historical data is an assurance that the buildings of true worth will be preserved. This will guide us, moreover, in reaching an informed judgment on the removal and disposal of buildings of little or no significance without diminishing the national heritage.¹¹⁰

GSA and PBS were on the forefront of the preservation movement within the Federal government. Realizing both the cultural and economic benefits of historic preservation, many historic buildings were properly maintained and kept in use. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 further confirmed the Federal government's leadership in nationwide preservation efforts.

By the late 1960s, executive orders directed Federal agencies to favor central city locations and to consider social, economic, and environmental factors in planning, acquiring, and managing prospective Federal facilities, once again placing GSA at the forefront of urban revitalization efforts.¹¹¹

Energy Conservation

During the 1970s, buildings were constructed under the new energy conservation mandates. Ground was broken in 1975 for the Williamsport, Pennsylvania, U.S. Courthouse and Federal Building. "Double-glazed windows, special lighting, and planned air conditioning" were among the design principles applied "to help make this an energy efficient facility."¹¹² The same year, the Manchester Federal Office Building (now the Norris Cotton Federal Building) in New Hampshire was constructed as a laboratory of sorts for energy conservation measures. Solar energy collectors were arranged on the roof, and each floor's temperature was monitored by computer. GSA strove to make it functional and economical while incorporating these new conservation technologies and recognized that the building was essentially an ongoing experiment.¹¹³ ■

NORRIS COTTON FEDERAL BUILDING,
MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE |
ISAAK & ISAAK | 1976





As the 1960s progressed and the urban renewal movement spread in the United States, GSA located some of its new buildings in targeted areas, which were most commonly in declining areas of major cities.



JAMES FORRESTAL FEDERAL BUILDING, WASHINGTON, DC |
CURTIS & DAVIS | 1969

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COMMENTARY ON MODERN FEDERAL DESIGN

Today, Federal architecture of the Modern era can be viewed both positively and negatively, although little current architectural writing focuses on thoughtful and critical analyses of these buildings. Much can be learned from reviewing commentaries from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s and understanding the goals set by GSA and professionals of that era. Fortunately, respected architectural critics, practitioners, and other experts voiced their opinions, providing crucial analyses.

Shortly after the “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture” was released, Stewart L. Udall, Secretary of the Interior, set the stage for improvement in Federal design. Writing in 1964, Udall stated:

Of the hundreds of buildings that the Federal Government has built and is building throughout the country, in every kind of setting, what can be said about their architectural quality? Frankly, not much. To put it bluntly, most feature massive mediocrity, rather than artistic excellence. The body of buildings are undistinguished and quickly forgotten, except in cases like the newest House Office Building in Washington whose monumental ugliness has raised a storm of critical protest.

The low quality of Federal architecture throughout America is a great pity, for in a country of such great power and high aspirations, there is no reason why public buildings must be nondescript. In fact, the vitality of our society could be the wellspring for a great and unique public architecture....

The time has come when America must begin to evaluate the implications of disregarding those values which lend dignity and strength and beauty to the American environment.¹¹⁴

Udall continued by praising the architecture of embassies and consulates constructed under the State Department's Foreign Building Service, many of which were designed by “some of our finest architects.” He commended recent National Park Service designs, which were compatible with their natural surroundings, and he also cited Edward Durrell Stone's design for the Kennedy Center, Eero Saarinen's Washington Dulles International Airport, and the plans for improvements on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington. Concluding his article, Udall challenged the Federal government to design buildings that conveyed the power of the nation and to move away from “standardized, unimaginative architecture in the years to come.”¹¹⁵

The 1977 Senate Subcommittee on Buildings and Grounds Hearings

Just over a decade later, in 1977, a hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Buildings and Grounds of the Committee on Public Works was convened to assess the status of Federal architecture in the United States. Numerous witnesses, many of them among the most accomplished in their fields, were assembled to give testimony on the topic and to discuss ways to improve Federal architecture.¹¹⁶

Fifteen years after the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture" was issued, it was still the most well-known document proposing axioms to be considered when designing Federal buildings. While the principles promulgated therein were timeless to a certain degree, one of the main reasons for calling for the subcommittee hearing was to evaluate the validity of the guidelines. In his opening remarks, Senator Robert Morgan, chairman of the subcommittee, shed light on the perceived state of Federal building design in America in the mid-1970s. He stated that the purpose of the hearing was

to talk about the need for improvement in the design of Federal buildings, and the idea of trying to make them more hospitable and inviting to the public. . . .

During recent years the popular trend has been toward contemporary design, due to the development of new and more flexible building techniques, which have favored commercial construction generally. This also has applied to Federal buildings in many cases.

These, no doubt, do good service as a functional solution to critical space needs. But the truth is that look-alike clusters of uninspired concrete and glass box buildings are rapidly replacing old familiar skylines all across the country.

In addition to this is the fact that many of them seem to have been transplanted, next to or in the middle of communities having no visible relationship in terms of environmental compatibility, and too often they stick out like sore thumbs and become the objects of criticism or ridicule.

Although some look drab and barren, while others seem to flaunt spectacular expanses of glass set at odd angles. The impression conveyed most often is that of a lack of creativity. . . . Some believe modernistic extremes are a fad and are concerned about how appealing they will seem in 20 or 30 years.... It is the conviction of many that architecture comprises our most definitive legacy to future generations. They further feel that the design of a Federal building should reflect an appropriate measure of dignity, to be viewed with pride and recognized as symbolic of our national heritage. This does not imply that designs should resort to neoclassical concepts, but rather that new facets of artistic expression might be explored.

A Federal building doesn't have to be massive, or grand, or made of marble, to command respect and convey a feeling of permanence and integrity. Even simplicity of design is in order so long as a pleasant and harmonious atmosphere can be achieved.



CHET HOLIFIELD FEDERAL BUILDING, LAGUNA NIGUEL,
CALIFORNIA | WILLIAM L. PEREIRA & ASSOCIATES | 1971 |
ACQUIRED BY GSA IN 1974



In some cases, GSA acquired innovative Modern buildings originally constructed for other uses in an effort to meet the critical need for additional office space.

In 1977, the Senate Subcommittee on Buildings and Grounds of the Committee on Public Works convened a panel of experts to assess the quality of Federal architecture in the United States and discuss ways to improve design.

There is nothing wrong with contemporary design or materials, provided their application is governed by genuine dedication and adherence to the principles of not only good taste but also a sense of national pride.

It is hoped that future designs will express more awareness of existing environmental factors which cannot be changed, and in addition convey a greater sense of accessibility to the public generally. I feel that not enough attention is being devoted to civic commitments by the Federal Government, and hope the new Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act of 1976 will go far toward correcting this situation.¹¹⁷

Following Senator Morgan's remarks, a series of authorities offered testimony regarding the state of Federal design since the Kennedy initiative. The first witness was Nicholas Panuzio, Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service of the General Services Administration. He expressed concern over the criticism that GSA faced from the public: wanting good design, but not wanting to see money wasted on elaborate buildings. Panuzio stated that the design of any public building should be a major consideration, and that GSA was attempting to design buildings that were appropriate for the city or town in which they were to be located, satisfying the needs for both the function and appearance of the building. He cited other issues, such as energy conservation and the adaptive use of existing buildings, that were priorities in GSA's design methodology, and stated that GSA continued to locate buildings in city centers and near public transportation lines, where possible. Looking toward the future, Panuzio stated that GSA was eager to implement the multiuse legislation that would allow cultural and commercial activities in public buildings.¹¹⁸

In order to evaluate sites, GSA first reviewed the mission of the tenant agency. If the agency's mission was to serve clients in a rural area, the location should be as convenient as possible for the constituency of that agency. Second, the social and economic goals of constructing buildings in urban renewal areas were reviewed, keeping in mind the health and safety of Federal employees. Finally, acquisition costs, accessibility and configuration of the site, adequate parking, and subsoil conditions were considered. Open spaces, such as walkways and plazas, were to be designed for enjoyable and efficient use.¹¹⁹

Once the site was determined, Panuzio emphasized, designing a building that was suitably matched to its surrounding environment was a high priority. To ensure a high quality of design, GSA attempted to "obtain the best possible talent" when hiring architects. To achieve this goal, regional advisory panels, consisting of experts nominated by their peers, selected both architects and engineers for each project.¹²⁰

When discussing his views on Federal buildings, Panuzio unequivocally stated that he believed Federal buildings should "stand out. They should be something we are proud of in the community." He declared that high-quality construction was imperative.¹²¹

We shouldn't go for cheap construction for several reasons....[T]he Federal Government is going to be around for a long time. We are not going away, and these buildings will be used for a long time....We are looking for solid construction and we will find in many instances when disasters strike, like floods, Federal buildings are less affected because basements aren't flooded out as they might be in less expensive buildings....We look for permanent construction as the Federal government should.

Supplying so many square feet of space at such and such a cost may seem to be our sole concern but in the long view our concern is matching sensible design solutions to complex problems so as to produce a lasting and positive impact on our national image and on the community we are affecting....

Government buildings should be attractive, blend with the community, be dignified, and hold to what I think is important; that is, our history. All this while being cost conscious.¹²²

When questioned by a Senator regarding GSA's activities to foster excellence of design, Panuzio outlined GSA's efforts since 1972, including the implementation of the regional advisory panels for architect and engineer selection and the sponsorship of two Biennial Design Awards programs "to identify, commend and publicize projects that have made significant contributions to the environment."¹²³

Following Panuzio was John McGinty, FAIA, President of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), who immediately stated that the "AIA believes that the Federal government should be a leader in establishing high design standards and in exemplifying good design." Citing the Federal "heritage of great design," McGinty continued by stating the government's responsibility to create buildings that are "representative of the finest achievement [and] the very best architectural expression," as outlined in the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," which the AIA supported and viewed as timeless and credible guidelines for creating Federal designs.¹²⁴

When asked to evaluate the impact of the "Guiding Principles" on Federal architecture of the previous 15 years, McGinty stated:

[I]t is certainly hard to trace the exact cause and effect relationship. It is our opinion... that the "Guiding Principles of Federal Architecture" ...slipped away from our attention and I would hesitate to say that they have had much influence...

[T]he document itself has not achieved the purposes for which it was intended...

It never did have the force of implementable law, just stated principles, and these things are easily forgotten and shoved aside.¹²⁵

McGinty maintained that the Federal government was inconsistent in the quality of the design of its buildings. Because the government constructed so many buildings in the time period after the “Guiding Principles” were issued and 1977, the year of the hearing, McGinty surmised that while there were excellent examples of Federal architecture, Federal leadership in the building arts was not as “deep and broad” as it should be. According to McGinty, one of the principal problems of new Federal architecture was its inability to relate to its surroundings, rather than problems with individual building design. He suggested more “open buildings, more inviting buildings, buildings that speak to the streetscape they are on and conform to and help advance the purposes of the city plan that they are sited in.”¹²⁶

In an interchange with Senator Morgan, McGinty iterated that it was not necessarily the role of the Federal government to be on the leading edge of technological innovations in architecture, but rather to wait until experimental methods had some record of success. Once this was established, the government could then assume a role in demonstrating the potential of these innovations. McGinty said that the government should experiment with the notion of good design and aesthetics of its buildings.¹²⁷

When assessing the “economy” of buildings, McGinty was quick to point out that this did not mean cheapness of construction or initial cost, but rather in the life-cycle cost of buildings, including maintenance and energy consumption. He concluded that good design must be economical.¹²⁸

When asked to evaluate GSA's efforts to bring a level of excellence to Federal design, McGinty responded that GSA maintained an attitude of openness and flexibility toward changes in the building process. He also commended GSA for its collaborative efforts with architects and for strengthening its role as a client and for managing the construction process. Finally, he praised GSA's selection process for architects and engineers, which resulted in the retaining of better-qualified professionals than in previous eras.¹²⁹

Subsequent to the conclusion of McGinty's statements, George White, Architect of the Capitol, testified. After aligning himself with much of what Panuzio and McGinty stated, White said that he believed “that we have had in the recent past a sort of confused period in design.... As a result of that there have been a lot of experiments taking place and a lot of dissatisfaction.”¹³⁰

White discussed design criteria, such as energy and cost considerations, which impact the final appearance of a building. He stated that certain trends will result in the changing appearances of buildings. For example, the use of large amounts of glass in buildings made energy efficiency more difficult, so he predicted that less glass would be used in forthcoming Federal buildings. He also described the trend toward humanizing architecture.¹³¹

The concept of a building as machine for living is one that was very popular 30 years ago and perhaps even today in some areas and yet human beings have found themselves uncomfortable with the stark glass boxes as being inhuman, and so texture has begun to return to design as well as color and scale.¹³²



E. BARRETT PRETTYMAN U.S. COURTHOUSE,
WASHINGTON, DC | LOUIS JUSTEMENT | 1952

Public spaces such as entrances, elevator lobbies, and courtrooms were finished in higher-quality materials than general office spaces. Ease of maintenance was repeatedly cited as a factor in choosing materials.

The HUD Building

While both period and current analyses of Federal buildings of the Modern era have been generally negative, certain buildings were consistently considered exceptional. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) headquarters (now the Robert C. Weaver Federal Building) in Washington, D.C., is one of the most successful buildings in GSA's Modern building inventory.

The HUD Building is a powerful sculptural form designed by Marcel Breuer, an internationally respected architect whose work had a profound impact on the course of Modern architecture. The HUD building's dramatic use of reinforced concrete, geometric simplicity, and reduction of ornament exemplify the stark forms and raw surfaces of Modernism. Dominating its site and featuring a double Y-shaped plan, the building rests on piers (or pilotis), and its concave facades are articulated with bands of recessed window modules. The HUD building is recognized as the first Federal building in the United States in which precast concrete was a primary structural and exterior finish material, as well as the first fully modular design for a

Federal office building. By taking the lead in construction in the District of Columbia's Southwest Washington Redevelopment Area, the HUD building also symbolically demonstrated the Federal government's commitment to urban renewal across the nation.

The design and execution of the HUD building exemplify the fundamental goals of the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture." According to *Buildings of the District of Columbia*:

"More than any other federal government edifice of the 1960s, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) building fulfills the directives President John F. Kennedy issued in an effort to improve the quality of public building design, 'Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture.'..."

"One of the world's leading architects, Marcel Breuer epitomized modernity. His body of work fit perfectly President Kennedy's call for the 'choice of designs that embody the finest contemporary American architectural thought.'"

It is unclear as to whether the design of the HUD building was actually a direct response from Breuer to the "Guiding Principles." While the HUD building remains one of the most notable Modern Federal buildings of the 1960s, it may simply be a product of Breuer's mature design work. The building was based on a series of designs first executed by Breuer at the UNESCO and IBM buildings in France. Breuer's impetus in relationship to the "Guiding Principles" remains an important topic for research. Regardless of influence or inspiration, the HUD building is an outstanding Modern achievement that exemplifies the primary tenets of the "Guiding Principles."

[Source: Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee, *Buildings of the District of Columbia* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 239. See also "New Federal Architecture." *Architectural Record*, March 1965, 136.]



ROBERT C. WEAVER FEDERAL BUILDING, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON, DC | MARCEL BREUER | 1963-68
ABOVE: TYPICAL INTERIOR CORRIDOR



White advocated hiring architects whose designs were based on classical principles so that their contemporary buildings, representing the period in which they were designed and not simply imitating the past, would blend with surrounding historic buildings. He also urged GSA to design buildings with long life and use spans, rather than following the trend of the era that accepted that buildings could be essentially disposable; that is, used for only 20 or 30 years before they were obsolete. Cautioning against involving the uneducated public in criticism of Federal designs, White stated that input “should be made by those who have a sound basis for criticism.”¹³³

Finally, agreeing with previous witnesses, White stated that the GSA selection policy for architects—based on experience and not cost—was a good one. While he maintained that selecting the most expensive architect did not guarantee a good design, he believed that selecting an architect based on a low bid ensured a mediocre building at best and cautioned GSA against using price as a criterion for selection.¹³⁴

Perhaps some of the most direct comments of the subcommittee hearing came from Wolf Von Eckardt, who, at the time, was on leave from his job as architecture critic at *The Washington Post* to work with the Committee for a National Museum of the Building Arts (the current National Building Museum).

Assessing the state of Modern architecture, Von Eckardt stated:

I feel pretty rotten if I pass the FBI building on Pennsylvania Avenue. In fact, it sort of reminds me of what Senator Fulbright called arrogance of power. It is an overbearing way for government to deal with people.... [P]ublic architecture has a tremendous influence on how the governed feel about their government.... Federal architecture is generally pretty mediocre these days, often offensive, but private architecture is not very much better. . . . Contemporary architecture is in a state of confusion, of crisis. The modern movement has lost its way, I think. Modern architecture is, I believe, the only style of architecture that has totally lost its hold on the common culture....

Architects will realize that they don't have to experiment all the time; that they don't have to reach new frontiers of technology or originality. They will find something we can live with for awhile and be calm about.

Up until now artists and architects felt they had to come up with something new every Monday morning. The criterion was not is it good, is it beautiful, but is it novel and is it original.¹³⁵

Von Eckardt continued by discussing the energy crisis' possible influence on architectural design. He was hopeful that the return of features such as operable windows and breezeways would return some of the attractive features of buildings to modern design. Technology allowed architects to design without regard for direction of the sun or prevailing winds because engineers could accommodate any design by installing heating and cooling systems. He hailed the potential responsiveness to natural forces as an influence that would result in buildings that were “more pleasing, more human, and more livable.”¹³⁶

Von Eckardt then made an impassioned plea for the return of small-scale architecture: "Small is beautiful. Megalopolises, megastructures, all super-big things are unmanageable and inhuman. The individual is lost... The bigger is worse."¹³⁷ He continued by criticizing the government for not soliciting the opinions of the public, since, in many cases, Federal buildings were built for public use. Following up on this thought, he lauded the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act, which was responsible for "making public buildings public." He encouraged the government to take advantage of the burgeoning trend of cosmopolitanism and install amenities such as shops and cafes in its buildings. Furthermore, the government should take a lead in siting buildings in central city locations and in urban renewal areas, and should consider the design of a new building not just as an individual work but as an "instrument of urban design."

We often wring our hands about aesthetics: This facade is good and this is not so good. But that is not as important as what the building does for its surroundings and the total ensemble... the total grouping of the buildings and the spaces it creates and the atmosphere it creates with them. I think GSA and whoever does the public building should put much more into city planning rather than just individual building design.¹³⁸

He pointed out that in some small towns, public buildings are the architectural and social focal points. Residents deserve good design that shows respect for "both the Government and the governed" and instills a sense of confidence in the government.¹³⁹

Von Eckardt encouraged GSA to bring new architectural talent to the fore rather than selecting only architects with prominent past experience. He deemed the work of these established architects to be substandard in the areas of efficiency and cost, and stated that the government has an obligation to "help young people along, to help new ideas along. This can be done with caution, without being radical and wild about it." Along the same lines, he encouraged the use of lesser known artists to fill public buildings with art, instead of spending entire allotments on works by a single master artist, such as Alexander Calder or Henry Moore. He continued by extolling the virtues of architectural competitions for major public buildings: "We have got to take risks to arrive at excellence." Furthermore, he reminded the government that costs should be considered not only in terms of short-range monetary output, but also in terms of long-range maintenance costs and benefits to those who work in and visit the building, as well as the community where the building is located.¹⁴⁰

In other words, let's look at public buildings not only as a machine to live in or to work in, a machine built for obsolescence to be discarded in 20 years, a machine that gives us the most efficient job for the least money. Let's look at public buildings as setting examples of excellence, as means to enhance their surroundings, as tools for building communities in the physical as well as the metaphysical sense. A public building should be a joy to work in and a pleasure to visit.¹⁴¹



U.S. TAX COURT WASHINGTON, DC |
VICTOR LUNDY | 1974



Congress and the architectural community widely criticized the quality of federal design during the Modern era. In the hope of encouraging better design, GSA initiated programs to raise awareness of successful projects.

14



Modern architecture was the result of developing new ways to build, often with new materials. Construction with these new materials—whether executed in prefabricated elements or constructed on-site—was significantly less expensive than in previous eras.

JAMES A. MCCLURE FEDERAL BUILDING AND
U.S. COURTHOUSE, BOISE, IDAHO | HUMMEL,
HUMMEL, JONES & SHAWVER | 1967

Following Von Eckardt's testimony, Roy Knight, who at the time was the Acting Director of the Architecture and Environmental Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, described what he considered to be one of the most common problems of public buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. "There is also another question in terms of the matter of orienting oneself to buildings.... [A] typical problem that occurs in terms of monumental buildings is the one of how you get in."¹⁴² Knight encouraged GSA to undertake evaluations of the buildings, asking users—both tenants and visitors—what was and wasn't successful about designs, and incorporate that knowledge into future designs.

Knight continued by making an important point: The design of buildings is really never finished, citing the U.S. Capitol as an example of a building that began as the result of design competition, but evolved as use of the building changed. Like other speakers, Knight stated that GSA should encourage a dialogue between the architect and those that would visit, work in, or live near the building, rather than ending the communication between the designer and GSA.¹⁴³

In his written statement to the subcommittee, Knight stated:

We do not mean to duck the issue of the actual style of Federal buildings, of the way they "look." What we are saying is that it is important to put this issue in perspective if our major concern is to assure that our Government buildings provide an appropriate image of democratic government.

Since at least the early 1960s, Federal office buildings, laboratories, and the like have been designed in styles generally typical of American architectural practice. While they rarely have been the leading examples of their styles, and that is to be regretted, they compare favorably, I believe, with contemporary building in the private sector. That should hardly be surprising, since the Federal Government uses the services of private architects who design both public and private buildings.

Unfortunately, many of the buildings that we in the design professions considered to be the "best" when they were built in the past twenty-five years are now considered, by critics and professionals alike, to be rather sterile in appearance and unfriendly in image. In other words, the problem with the style of these buildings as regards the Federal Government may not be that they lack dignity, but that they are overdignified, pompous, and lacking in human warmth.¹⁴⁴

In his written responses to questions, Knight provided insight into GSA's design process. Designers generally believed that if they submitted a "safe" and noncontroversial design, they were more likely to be selected. GSA tried to avoid the negative press it tended to get if a building was unfavorably received. According to Knight's assessment, the design environment at GSA leaned toward designing typical buildings of the era, since many of the same architects designing commercial buildings for the private sector were also constructing public buildings for GSA.¹⁴⁵

Knight reiterated his belief that architectural design competitions should be explored as a method for bringing more innovative designs to Federal architecture. He also discussed the merits of design-award programs and praised the GSA awards programs as a way of motivating designers and Federal agencies for their new designs as well as historic preservation, adaptive use, interior planning and design, research, and fine arts projects.¹⁴⁶

Assessing the effectiveness of the Kennedy administration's 1962 "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," Knight said that they were typical of previous government declarations, which stated that the government was obligated to construct distinguished buildings. Throughout time, government leaders advocated and/or adopted styles that they felt best conveyed the power of the Federal government: Roman or Greek classicism, Gothic Revival, Beaux Arts, etc. In 1931, the American Institute of Architects enunciated design principles without invoking a preference for a particular style, stating that Federal buildings across the country should proclaim the highest standards of enduring architecture and attention should be paid to the design traditions in the local communities where new buildings are located. The 1962 "Guiding Principles" similarly called for a high design standard without endorsing a national style. However, according to Knight, no indication is given as to how high standards could be achieved, other than suggesting that design ideas flow from the private sector to the government, which, Knight pointed out, has not always guaranteed good design in the past.¹⁴⁷

As part of his written submittal to the subcommittee, Knight specified that he did not believe that quality of design should be equated with beauty, but instead with the usefulness of the building to tenants and visitors resulting from the innovation of the architects.¹⁴⁸

Many of the experts who testified before the subcommittee reiterated the same thoughts. Most felt Federal architecture was generally disappointing and encouraged new selection processes for Federal architects, including design competitions. Despite the perceived repetition, the testimony is particularly revealing in that many of the nation's experts were of like minds when evaluating Modern Federal buildings.

Other Critical Assessments¹⁴⁹

Other architectural critics and noteworthy publications offered assessments of the state of Federal design. In 1969, *Progressive Architecture* published an article calling Federal architecture "indifferent" and blamed the government's architect selection process for much of the problem, stating:

The fount of political loyalty and patronage, Washington, D.C., bubbles unceasingly, keeping an undistinguished group of architects afloat with Government work, as well as several contractors who apparently are specially qualified to receive repeated Government contracts....

Multimillion-dollar Federal office buildings affront the public, which not only pays, but also has to look at them, and the system that leads to the selection of "political" designers is never discussed above a whisper.¹⁵⁰

The article further condemned GSA's neglect of the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture" issued by the Kennedy administration as well as the selection of members of nationwide and regional GSA panels (although the concept of the panels themselves was not criticized).¹⁵¹

Similarly, Ada Louise Huxtable, architecture critic for *The New York Times*, wrote an insightful article, bluntly titled "Must Bad Buildings Be the Norm?" in 1973. Beginning the article with "Hope springs eternal for Federal design. And falls on its face with predictable regularity," Huxtable continued this vein of dismay throughout her article, stating that the Federal government did not have able people in place to discern good design from bad. Despite numerous efforts and "eloquent talk" about reformation and improvement, Huxtable was skeptical of any real progress in the area, primarily because politics was intrinsically linked with Federal building—the way architects were selected, construction contracts awarded, and political favors rewarded.¹⁵²

Shortly after Huxtable's article appeared, Dennis Farney wrote a more hopeful assessment of Federal architecture in *The Wall Street Journal*. While reporting the criticisms of Philip Johnson, who acerbically suggested that the best remedy for substandard Federal architecture in Washington, D.C., would be to "tear down the city, leave the landmarks, and start over," Farney also praised then-Acting Administrator of GSA Arthur Sampson. Progress made under Sampson included the institution of an awards program that recognized Victor Lundy's U.S. Tax Court in Washington (which Huxtable praised for its "timeless sense of balance, order and serenity that is genuine classicism"¹⁵³) and Harry Weese & Associates' Federal Correction Center and Parking Facility in Chicago.¹⁵⁴

In an attempt to raise awareness of the problem of substandard design, the Federal government sponsored the First Federal Design Assembly in 1973. The conference focused not only on architecture, but also on other areas of design, such as signage, agency logos, and even postage stamp design. While assessments of the success of the assembly were mixed, most attendees conceded that it was helpful to have top designers in their fields exposing public administrators to examples of successful design.¹⁵⁵

Critiques of GSA's buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s were generally harsh, and while GSA and the Federal government attempted to rectify design issues, few positive reviews of Federal architecture from the study period exist. Beginning with the "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," each Presidential administration tried to breathe new life into the dull Federal designs cropping up across the nation. New directives and initiatives to improve Federal architecture and beautify public buildings appear to have had minimal impact, and the anticipated widespread progress toward developing Federal buildings that exemplified the "finest in contemporary architectural thought" as stated in the "Guiding Principles" never occurred. ■



WALLACE F. BENNETT FEDERAL BUILDING, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH | DESERET ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS AND SNEDAKER, BUDD, MONROE & ASSOCIATES | 1963 | REAVELEY ENGINEERS & ASSOCIATES, INC. | 2001

CASE STUDY **Wallace F. Bennett Federal Building**

After seismic vulnerability studies indicated that the 1963 Wallace F. Bennett Federal Building in Salt Lake City, Utah, could not survive a powerful earthquake, GSA undertook a seismic upgrade of the building in 1999. GSA used cutting-edge technology called unbonded brace frame (UBF) that had been successfully used in Japan for more than 15 years to improve the safety of the building. Despite the popularity of this technology in Japan, few buildings in the United States had incorporated UBFs, and the Wallace F. Bennett Building was the first public building to use it.

While upgrades to the Bennett building originally focused on seismic requirements, the project evolved into an exterior recladding of the entire building.



Initial GSA research did not indicate that the building was historically or architecturally significant, so the architect was able to design substantial alterations. The existing precast exterior concrete panels were removed and replaced with a new, energy-efficient curtain wall system, and blast-resistant windows were installed. A redesigned entrance and lobby were added under GSA's *First Impressions* program. The building remained occupied throughout the entire renovation. Since completion in 2001, the project has won several awards, including two GSA Design Awards.



ENTRANCE SHOWN BEFORE UPGRADES (ABOVE), AND AFTER UPGRADES HAD BEEN COMPLETED (UPPER RIGHT).

15

REINVESTING IN GSA'S MODERN BUILDINGS

Despite the fact that GSA and the Federal government did not always achieve the design goals and standards of the Modern era, GSA has many buildings from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s to manage. Some buildings have serious structural and material problems, while others feature quality materials that have been maintained and continue to perform well for tenants and visitors. In 2002, GSA prepared "Reinvesting in the American Workplace," a study reviewing a subset of its recent renovation projects and outlining proposed projects. While many of the completed and proposed projects involved building infrastructure and systems such as HVAC renovations and asbestos removal, other elements, such as lobby, elevator, and restroom modernizations and office window enlargements, were directed at improving the experiences of visitors and tenants.¹⁵⁶

Many renovations are directly related to building codes that have been changed since the buildings' construction. Sprinkler systems may need to be either overhauled or installed or restroom doors widened to meet current accessibility requirements. In many cases, these renovations are costly. Executing multiple projects while allowing tenants to continue working, coupled with GSA's capital expenditures in such buildings, demonstrates the importance of evaluating GSA's position regarding reinvesting in buildings of this era.¹⁵⁷

Since the bombing of the Alfred B. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 and the events of September 11, 2001, security issues have been of prime importance, and many proposed alterations to Federal buildings are the result of new public safety concerns. Perimeter security and accommodating new security equipment are among the important issues.

Some buildings require less of a fiscal outlay, either because more modest repairs are needed or because the buildings themselves are smaller in size. As a result of improvements, buildings' incomes often increase, illustrating that GSA's capital investments can be recovered in rental fees and tenant retention when occupants are satisfied with office space that meets their needs.¹⁵⁸ ■



LOBBY, FEDERAL BUILDING, U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE,
RICHLAND, WASHINGTON | CULLER, GALE, MARTELL, NORRI & DAVIS
AND FUNK, MURRAY & JOHNSON | 1965



U.S. COURTHOUSE AND FEDERAL BUILDING, CENTRAL ISLIP
NEW YORK | RICHARD MEIER & PARTNERS ARCHITECTS | 1993-2000

MODERN BUILDING EVALUATION GUIDELINES

16

To meet the challenge of managing its diverse collection of Modern architecture, GSA has developed this historic context study on its buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. By generating this historic context, GSA has created a framework within which to make informed decisions as to their potential historic significance—that is their current and/or future eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places—and, therefore, their future treatment. This report was written to provide GSA's Regional Preservation Officers and Building Managers, State Historic Preservation Officers, and others charged with the evaluation of these Modern buildings with background information on the architectural and political climates in which they were constructed. This data expedites the evaluation process of buildings from these Modern decades.

The decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s were selected because they mark the era when GSA, established in 1949, began constructing Federal buildings in large numbers. Buildings from these years comprise much of GSA's inventory. GSA handles questions regarding these buildings on a regular basis, and is faced with the question of whether to reinvest in these aging structures or to remove them from its inventory and renovate or construct other more suitable buildings.

Because the majority of buildings covered in the study period are less than 50 years old, they do not literally fall under the requirements of Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended)—which state that Federal agencies must identify and consider their historic buildings when undertaking any changes that may impact them. However, buildings less than 50 years of age that may be exceptionally significant because of their architecture or association with historic events or persons would be evaluated according to guidelines put forth in the National Register Bulletin 22, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties That Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years*. Because of the relatively recent construction dates, these buildings must be shown to have exceptional significance. In most cases, GSA buildings from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s will not be exceptionally significant, but may, upon reaching 50 years of age, be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under standard National Register criteria as put forth in National Register Bulletin 15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. Regardless of the age of the building, the National Register criteria provide excellent and accepted guidance to determine the eligibility of a building.

GSA has not yet nominated any of its Modern buildings to the National Register, but has determined, in conjunction with State Historic Preservation Officers, that certain buildings are eligible and has treated the buildings accordingly. GSA's management approach is to evaluate and subsequently treat significant—or in some cases, potentially significant—buildings in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, but not necessarily to seek formal listing for its Modern buildings.

The evaluation of buildings of the recent past can be a difficult task. A skeptical general public often sees buildings of the Modern era as being expendable, or cold and offensive, or functionally obsolete. Others may overinflate the importance of individual buildings as judged against the large number of buildings of the Modern era. It is important to avoid the tendency to allow personal taste in architecture to outweigh legitimate criteria for determining the historic significance of these buildings. The following list of questions can serve as a general guide to considering the potential significance of a property in GSA's Modern-era building stock. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of qualities included in evaluations of significance, but a tool for prompting thoughtful evaluation of the properties and identifying where further investigation is needed.

- Is the building the work of a twentieth-century master architect, whose work had a profound influence on the course of American architecture? Is it a formative work within the overall portfolio of design? Alternatively, is it a distinctly lesser work of a master architect or the work of professionals of only modest renown?
- Is it an extremely successful example of a Modern-era style, such as Expressionism, Formalism, or Brutalism? Is it an important landmark that paved the way for the major stylistic shift to Modern Federal architecture? Alternatively, is it lacking in design quality or is it one of a great number of repetitive unsuccessful designs?
- Does it exemplify the design philosophy of the Modern era? Does it make exceptional use of Modern-era materials or artistic components? Does it contain public art by notable artists? Is it significant because of a monumental plaza or landscape design by a noted landscape architect? Does it display exceptional qualities of design, such as integration of interior and exterior design concepts and vocabularies? Alternatively, does it make rote use of preexisting design philosophy? Is it merely a typical building of its time?
- Did it serve as a groundbreaking model that influenced other Federal buildings in the United States in its technological advances, functionality, framing systems, materials selection, or space design? Alternatively, does it regress to an earlier type or technology, or is it part of a large group of similar and typical types or technologies?
- Is it an outstanding example of a Federal program seeking quality design, such as President Kennedy's "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture," the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, or the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act? Alternatively, did it fail to respond to such programs?

- Does it exemplify social goals broadly embraced in the United States, such as energy efficiency, historic preservation, handicapped access, the eradication of urban decay and blight? Alternatively, does it fail to address these social goals?
- Is it a public building that reflects the dignified presence of the Federal government in a superior way? Does it significantly enhance its environment? Is it an important part of a city plan or Federal district master plan? Is it an exceptional architectural and social focal point of a small town? Does it represent an extraordinary example of functionally and aesthetically housing Federal workers and missions? Alternatively, is it inadequate or lacking in symbolism of the Federal government in its community?
- Does it significantly reflect a clear link between GSA's philosophies and architectural programs? Is it tied exceptionally well to the Art-in-Architecture Program, GSA's selection process for architects and engineers, or design directives? Alternatively, does it ignore these programs or does it display only modest success in meeting the goals of these programs?
- Is it an outstanding model for combining cost efficiency and functional utility? Alternatively, is its quality and integrity flawed by cost-cutting measures, poor-quality materials, or shoddy craftsmanship?
- Is it the principal venue for a historical event exceptionally important to the history of the country, state, or region? Is it the site of an important government action, event, or other historical occasion? Alternatively, is there no link to significant historical events?
- Is it exceptionally tied to the productive accomplishments of a person important to the history of the country, state, or region? Did a significant historical figure or President have a particular link to the site? Alternatively, is there no such link to an important person?
- Does it contribute to a potential historic district? Is it a contributing element to a collection of buildings from the same era, such as an architecturally integrated Federal complex or campus? Is it an important architectural component in a downtown area? Alternatively, is it an unimportant element when compared with surrounding buildings?
- Is it exceptionally true to its original architectural design, period of significance, and historic character? Does it display exceptional qualities of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association? Alternatively, has it been extensively altered or remodeled, is it missing key design features, or has it deteriorated to the point of no longer exhibiting its original architectural character? ■



JOHN F. KENNEDY FEDERAL BUILDING,
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS |
WALTER GROPIUS AND THE ARCHITECTS
COLLABORATIVE | 1964-66

A PROFILE OF GSA'S MODERN BUILDINGS

17

For this study of GSA's buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, a subset of properties was reviewed to produce a broad chronological historic context statement that would serve as an effective tool for judging the importance of individual buildings in the future. (See Chapter 16, "Modern Building Evaluation Guidelines.") GSA's Regional Historic Preservation Officers provided photographs and data on a select set of buildings from their respective regions. Examples included large Federal buildings in urban areas as well as more modest structures located in small towns. In some cases, project information or conditions assessments were provided. Also, throughout the course of the two-year study, numerous other buildings were analyzed as research was conducted through other sources. GSA's portfolio from this era contains more than 550 buildings. Approximately 350 of these are Federal buildings and courthouses. They total nearly 75 million square feet of space, with 44 buildings over 500,000 square feet and 14 buildings over 1 million square feet. About 75 warehouses contain over 8 million square feet of space. Another 32 structures serve as the primary buildings at border stations. The remaining buildings constructed during the study period mostly serve as garages and support facilities.

Because of the sheer volume of buildings, it was impossible to visit, evaluate, or categorize the entire collection in a substantial way. However, after reviewing the accumulated building data, the following general conclusions were drawn:

1. Within GSA's holdings, a select group qualify as Modern masterpieces with high levels of architectural significance. Internationally recognized Modern architects designed these buildings, which are often excellent examples of a style or the architect's work, and they retain a high degree of integrity. They include the headquarters building for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development by Marcel Breuer, the U.S. Tax Court by Victor Lundy, the John F. Kennedy Federal Building by Walter Gropius and The Architects Collaborative, and Chicago's Federal Center by Mies van der Rohe. It seems likely that GSA has already identified, either formally or informally, the buildings in this elite subset.
2. A group of GSA Modern buildings are excellent examples of their style or were constructed by distinguished local architects and are notable examples of their work. While the majority of these buildings are not exceptionally significant, they would likely be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places upon reaching 50 years of age if their integrity is not compromised in the intervening years.
3. Select GSA buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s were constructed using high-quality materials and finishes. Often, these buildings were located in larger cities and were among the more prominent Federal buildings in the state or region. Overall, these buildings appear to have fewer serious problems with material failure than minor buildings that were constructed quickly using inexpensive materials.

4. The majority of buildings from the study period are typical examples of midsize office buildings that closely reflect private-sector office buildings constructed during the same era. Because GSA was using private-sector and not government architects to design its buildings during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, this finding was expected. Most of these buildings will likely not prove to be significant or eligible for listing in the National Register. However, evaluations based solely on visual analysis without historic research are incomplete and could yield inaccurate findings.

5. GSA's inventory also includes numerous small buildings, such as border patrol stations and post offices, located within small communities. While these buildings may not appear to be significant, their roles in their respective communities or as symbols of important themes in history should be evaluated.

6. According to information provided by GSA, many of the buildings constructed during the study period are in need of renovations. In some cases, these buildings are in need of major structural overhauls because of material failures. In other cases, alterations are needed to make the buildings more efficient and pleasant places to work and conduct business.

7. Some buildings constructed during the study period have undergone insensitive renovations in intervening years, obscuring or removing character-defining features of the original buildings.

8. Despite directives by the Federal government and GSA to blend Modern buildings with the surrounding neighborhoods, photographs show GSA buildings from the study period are sometimes incompatible with their surrounding communities. In many cases, the buildings are out of scale with adjacent residential and commercial areas or feature dramatically different materials from those of existing buildings.

9. Few buildings have been identified to date that appear to be the direct result of design-related GSA initiatives or congressional acts. While certain components and recommendations of these directives were incorporated in later buildings, in many cases, there seems to be a certain disconnect between mandates and their actual execution. Similarly, Presidential directives to improve the quality of Federal architecture were generally worded and relatively brief. Lacking specific instructions on how to achieve that goal, these mandates were routinely issued by almost all of the administrations during the study period, but measuring the response to these calls and the success of subsequent buildings is difficult and somewhat subjective.

10. During the Modern era, landscapes—particularly those of midsize to large buildings—were often designed to relate directly to architecture and were treated as integral components of the overall design. Others were designed by GSA with little attention to the greater design scheme. In many cases, the landscapes of GSA's Modern buildings have been neglected or insensitively altered.

11. Many of the GSA buildings from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s have undergone some degree of renovation. This does not preclude them from being eligible for listing in the National Register. Changes that preserve the character-defining features of a building and do not interfere with the building's ability to convey its significance are acceptable. As described in National Register Bulletin 15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, the seven qualities of integrity are location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. ■

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CONCLUSION

GSA continues to improve its methods of evaluating and maintaining its Modern buildings. There are no clear-cut answers, easy categorizations, or broadly applied methods for evaluating this set of buildings. Key decision-makers should be familiar with the history and potential significance of their buildings prior to undertaking projects that may affect character-defining features. Continued study of GSA's buildings—as new sources and new scholarly evaluations of Modernism evolve—will further refine the evaluation of GSA's Modern architecture. Initial evaluation of GSA's Modern-era buildings shows many are not architecturally or historically significant, and can be substantially altered to lengthen their life spans and make them more pleasant places to work and visit. For the select group of buildings that currently display exceptional significance or would be eligible for the National Register upon reaching 50 years of age, innovative solutions from informed and qualified professionals can preserve the character of the buildings while resolving issues of functionality, cost, safety, efficiency, and quality of space and public experience. ■

Initial evaluation of GSA's Modern-era buildings shows many are not architecturally or historically significant, and can be substantially altered to lengthen their life spans and make them more pleasant places to work and visit.



FEDERAL BUILDING, SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA |
DREYFUS & BLACKFORD | 1967

¹ John Peter, *The Oral History of Modern Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 10.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ U.S. General Services Administration, "Reinvesting in the American Workplace," July 2002, 2-3.

⁵ From the *Freedom Without Fortresses* symposium held at the National Building Museum, Washington, D.C., November 27, 2001.

⁶ Lois Craig and the staff of the Federal Architecture Project, *The Federal Presence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1977), 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹² *Ibid.*, 202-203.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 239-240.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁷ Carole Rifkind, *A Field Guide to Contemporary Architecture* (New York and London: Dutton, 1998), 105.

¹⁸ Craig et al., *Federal Presence*, 282.

¹⁹ Rifkind, *Field Guide to Contemporary Architecture*, 104.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

²¹ This architectural trend of regionalism continued with varying degrees of force (and design success) throughout the twentieth century and endures within some Federal agencies today.

²² Rifkind, *Field Guide to Contemporary Architecture*, 105.

²³ Craig et al., *Federal Presence*, 438.

²⁴ Antoinette J. Lee, *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect's Office* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 285-286.

²⁵ Craig et al., *Federal Presence*, 438.

²⁶ Lee, *Architects to the Nation*, 286.

²⁷ *Federal Architecture: Multiple-Use Facilities*. Staff Report for the Federal Architecture Task Force, November 1974, 19-20. From the files of the Center for Historic Buildings, U.S. General Services Administration.

²⁸ U.S. Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, *Office of General Services, Supply Activities: A Report to the Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949), 10-11.

²⁹ Traceries, "Built for the People of the United States of America: The History of the Public Buildings Service (Draft)," completed for the U.S. General Services Administration, 1998, 3.15.

³⁰ J.M Richards, *An Introduction to Modern Architecture* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1940 and 1962), 28.

³¹ Peter, *Oral History*, 291.

³² *Ibid.*, 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁶ Traceries, "Built for the People (Draft)," 13.13.

³⁷ Peter, *Oral History*, 41.

³⁸ Lee, *Architects to the Nation*, 288-291.

³⁹ Traceries, "Built for the People (Draft)," 13.16-17.

⁴⁰ Francis D. Lethbridge, FAIA, "The Architecture of Washington, D.C.," introduction to *The AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C.*, 2nd ed., by Christopher Weeks (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 14. Lethbridge's introduction was written to accompany the first edition of the book, published in 1965.

⁴¹ Traceries, "Built for the People (Draft)," 13.16.

⁴² U.S. General Services Administration, *Annual Report of the Administrator of General Services, 1962* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), 1.

⁴³ *The Origins of the Public Buildings Service Administration History: Final Report*, August 31, 1994.

⁴⁴ "Pershing Park," Historic American Buildings Survey DC-695, 3.

⁴⁵ Letter of Transmittal to President John F. Kennedy from the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space, June 1, 1962.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture." *Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space*. June 1, 1962.

⁴⁹ "The Redevelopment of Pennsylvania Avenue." *Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space*. June 1, 1962.

⁵⁰ U.S. General Services Administration, *Annual Report of the Administrator of General Services, 1964* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² U.S. General Services Administration, *Annual Report, 1962, 27*.

⁵³ U.S. General Services Administration, *Program for the Beautification of Public Buildings*, 1965, n.p.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ J. Roland Snyder, "The Role of GSA" *Architecture* (+) 6 (1963-64): unpagged.

⁵⁷ See Dedication of Courts Building Program, United States Court of Claims and United States Court of Customs and Patent Appeals, Washington, D.C., September 20, 1967. See also "Respecting the Architectural Traditions of Lafayette Square]" From the files of the Center for Historic Buildings, U.S. General Services Administration.

⁵⁸ For detailed descriptions of these styles, see Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1996).

⁵⁹ Lee, *Architects to the Nation*, 288-291. Yasko was referred to in numerous documents and articles as "Supervising Architect" but the actual position name was changed to "Assistant Commissioner for Design and Construction" in 1956 and was located within the Public Buildings Service of GSA.

⁶⁰ See "Byron Rogers Federal Building and Courthouse, Denver, Colorado." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Completed by Robinson & Associates, Inc., 2000.

⁶¹ U.S. General Services Administration, *Annual Report of the Administrator of General Services, 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), 4.

⁶² U.S. General Services Administration, *General Services Administration Annual Report* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1970), 10.

⁶³ *U.S. Statutes at Large* 86 (1972): 216-217.

⁶⁴ Richard M. Nixon, "Message on Design," White House correspondence, May 16, 1972. See also Wolf Von Eckardt, "Design for Government," *Washington Post*, May 18, 1972.

⁶⁵ Rifkind, *Field Guide to Contemporary Architecture*, 132.

⁶⁶ Other sections of the 1949 Act allowed GSA to perform services for nonfederal agencies.

⁶⁷ Memorandum from the Office of the General Counsel for GSA to the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service, May 5, 1972. Quoted in *Federal Architecture: Multiple-Use Facilities*. Staff Report for the Federal Architecture Task Force, November 1974, 20-21. From the files of the Center for Historic Buildings, General Services Administration. The Public Buildings Act of 1959 defines "public building" as "any building whether for single or multi tenant occupancy, its grounds, approaches, and appurtenances, which is generally suitable for office or storage space or both for the use of one or more executive agencies or mixed ownership corporations, and shall include: (i) Federal office buildings, (ii) post offices, (iii) customhouses, (iv) courthouses, (v) appraisers stores, (vi) border inspection facilities, (vii) warehouses, (viii) record centers, (ix) relocation facilities, (x) similar Federal facilities, and (xi) any other buildings or construction projects the inclusion of which the President may deem, from time to time hereafter, to be justified in the public interest." Buildings not encompassed in this definition of "public buildings" included buildings and construction projects on the public domain, on property owned by the United States in foreign countries, on Native American and Eskimo lands held in trust by the United States, any building on land associated with agricultural, recreation, or conservation purposes, including research purposes, used in connection with river, harbor, flood control, reclamation, power, chemical, or manufacturing or development projects, used in connection with housing/ residential projects, on military or Veterans' Administration installations, or any other type of building that the President may deem as justified in the public interest.

⁶⁸ See the Public Buildings Act of 1959, 73 Stat. 479; 40 USC 601 et seq.

⁶⁹ Traceries, "Built for the People (Draft)," 14.16.

⁷⁰ U.S. General Services Administration, *General Services Administration Annual Report* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1973), 24.

⁷¹ Lee, *Architects to the Nation*, 293-294.

⁷² Paul Hodge, "New GSA Building Has Ice Rink, Café," *Washington Post*, November 24, 1977, and "Another Step Forward: Design for Mixed Use," *Architectural Record*, December 1978, 106-109. See also "Groundbreaking Ceremony Program," Federal Home Loan Bank Board Building, November 25, 1974 and "Federal Architecture: Why Not the Best?" *Architectural Record*, December 1978, 83-87.

⁷³ See "Federal Architecture: A New Era," an issue of *Architecture* devoted to the history and current design of Federal architecture, January 1996.

⁷⁴ "A Museum for the Space Age," *Architectural Record*, March 1965, 140-142. See also Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee, *Buildings of the District of Columbia* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 91.

⁷⁵ GSA Order PBS 3410.1, February 1959.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ GSA Order PBS P 3425.3, January 30, 1962.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ See GSA Order PBS 3400.6, August 22, 1962. The National Building Codes were not statutory in nature but were promulgated by professional groups representing the Bureau of Standards, the Fire Protection Association, the National Board of Fire Underwriters, universities, manufacturers, and research organizations. The Codes were designed to provide a uniformly high standard for construction throughout the United States and were adopted in many municipalities.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* The same document also implies that many local building codes "are obsolete in relation to modern building practices" and states that GSA does not attempt to follow them "in detail."

⁸² GSA Order PBS P 3425.3 CHGE 6, October 11, 1963.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ GSA Order PBS P 3425.3, January 30, 1962.

⁸⁵ GSA Order PBS P 3425.3 CHGE 6, October 11, 1963.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ GSA Order PBS 3440.2, March 5, 1969.

⁸⁸ U.S. General Services Administration, "Design Criteria for GSA Supply Distribution Facilities," Washington, D.C., November 19, 1970, 1-1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-1.1.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-2.9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 3-3.3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 3-3.1, 3-3.3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-1.

⁹⁵ GSA Order PBS P 3425.3, January 30, 1962.

⁹⁶ GSA Order PBS 3410.1, February 1959.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Donald Thalacker, *The Place of Art in the World of Architecture* (New York and London: Chelsea House, 1980), 215.

¹⁰⁰ GSA Order PBS P 3425.3 CHGE 6, October 11, 1963.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ "GSA Raises Percentage for Arts-in-Architecture and Expands the Concept," *AIA Journal*, October 1977, 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ GSA Order PBS P 3425.3 CHGE 6, October 11, 1963.

¹⁰⁷ Peter, *Oral History*, 180-181.

¹⁰⁸ Building Dedication Ceremony Program, September 15, 1967. From the files of the U.S. General Services Administration. On June 30, 1972, the building was renamed the George H. Fallon Federal Building.

¹⁰⁹ Ceremony Program, October 30, 1970. From the files of the U.S. General Services Administration. It appears as if the ceremony was to initiate the final phase of construction.

¹¹⁰ Bernard Boutin, GSA Administrator, in "Foreword," in U.S. Public Buildings Service, *Pension Building, Historical Study No. 1*, quoted in Traceries, "Built for the People of the United States of America."

¹¹¹ Craig et al., *Federal Presence*, 440.

¹¹² Ground Breaking Ceremony Program, September 12, 1975. From the files of the U.S. General Services Administration.

¹¹³ Don DeMichael, "A GSA Energy Conservation Lab Grows in Manchester," *Specifying Engineer*, August 1975, 59-71. See also Stewart Powell, "Energy-Saving Office Building," *Washington Post*, February 10, 1974. Also in 1975, a Federal building in Saginaw, Michigan, was constructed with similar energy-conservation measures. While no measure of either building's success is available, it does not appear that the energy conservation systems employed had any long-term impact on GSA's methods of construction.

¹¹⁴ Stewart L. Udall, "Leadership for a Great Federal Architecture," *Architecture* (+) 6 (1963-64): n.p.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ The transcript of the Senate Subcommittee Hearing does not correct grammar, sentence fragments, or other errors by the speakers. All quotes are uncorrected and appear as they do in the public record. See U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Buildings and Grounds of the Committee on Public Works. *The Need of Architectural Improvement in the Design of Federal Buildings*. 95th Cong., 1st sess., 24 January 1977.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Buildings and Grounds of the Committee on Public Works. *The Need of Architectural Improvement in the Design of Federal Buildings*. 95th Cong., 1st sess., 24 January 1977, 1-2.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5, 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 7, 9.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 32. GSA does not have complete files on its early award programs. It remains unclear which buildings were recognized for meritorious design.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 43-45.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 62. This problem, typical in many public buildings constructed in the 1960s and 70s, was recognized more than 25 years ago and continues to be one that GSA rectifies during building modernizations and renovations.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-85.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

¹⁴⁹ Relatively few contemporary articles of major critical value were located as part of this study.

¹⁵⁰ "The Federal Client," *Progressive Architecture*, January 1969, n.p.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Ada Louise Huxtable, "Must Bad Buildings Be the Norm?" *New York Times*, March 11, 1973.

¹⁵³ Ada Louise Huxtable, "Architecture: Full Speed Forward," *New York Times*, October 1, 1967. This article followed one from the previous week titled "Full Speed Backward," which criticized the design of the James Madison Building of the Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁴ Dennis Farney, "Better Buildings?" *Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 1973.

¹⁵⁵ Sarah Booth Conroy, "By Accident or by Design," *Washington Post*, April 8, 1973.

¹⁵⁶ U.S. General Services Administration, "Reinvesting in the American Workplace," 2-3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

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