

THE OLD ST. LOUIS POST OFFICE



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

*Cover:
Architect's drawing of the Old Post Office, taken from
a woodcut appearing in Harper's Weekly on May 9, 1874.*

THE OLD ST. LOUIS POST OFFICE



SUMMARY REPORT
For
THE ADVISORY COUNCIL
On
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY
AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

JULY 1970

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study of the Old St. Louis Post Office has been prepared under the auspices of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Department of the Interior. The study was directed by S. Allen Chambers, Jr., of the National Register of Historic Places, with the assistance of Nancy Beinke, A. Craig Morrison, and David Yost of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Mr. Joseph Watterson, Chief, Division of Historic Architecture, served as editor.

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General view of the Old Post Office. Olive Street facade is to the left, and the Eighth Street facade to the right. The wall surfaces are highly articulated with recessed window and door openings divided by pilasters and columns. The depressed areaway or "moat" can be seen between the building and the sidewalks. (Photo by Paul Piaget, 1965.)

INTRODUCTION

Declaring "that the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic past," and realizing that the preservation of these tangible reminders of the past should be encouraged by the Federal Government, the 89th Congress, on October 15, 1966, passed Public Law 89-665, the National Historic Preservation Act.

This law authorized the Secretary of the Interior, among other things, "to expand and maintain a national register of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture," to be known as the National Register of Historic Places.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation is also a creation of Public Law 89-665. Among its several duties, the Council is required to "advise the President and Congress on matters relative to historic preservation." One particular application of this duty is identified as Section 106 of Public Law 89-665. It reads as follows:

The head of any Federal agency having direct or indirect jurisdiction over a proposed Federal or federally assisted undertaking in any State and the head of any Federal department or independent agency having authority to license any undertaking shall, prior to the approval of the expenditure of any Federal funds on the undertaking or prior to the issuance of any license, as the case may be, take into account the effect of the undertaking on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in the National Register. The head of any such Federal agency shall afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation established under title II of this Act a reasonable opportunity to comment with regard to such undertaking.

The Old Post Office (originally known as the United States Court House, Custom House, and Post Office) in St. Louis, Missouri, was entered into the National Register on November 22, 1968.

At present, custody and accountability for the structure rests with the United States General Services Administration. The General Services Administration plans to vacate the building early in 1971, and has received a proposal to convey the property to the city of St. Louis in exchange for a city block adjacent to the present Federal Office Building at 1520 Market Street, which block is to be developed as an urgently needed parking facility adjacent to the Federal Building. The Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended, and the Public Buildings Act of 1959 provide for land acquisition for such projects. However, since funds are presently not available for the purchase of this property, the General Services Administration is considering the exchange of properties as the means to acquire a site for its parking facility. If such an exchange is effected, the city may do with the Old Post Office as it wishes, which could mean its demolition and sale of the land to a private developer to return the property to the tax rolls.

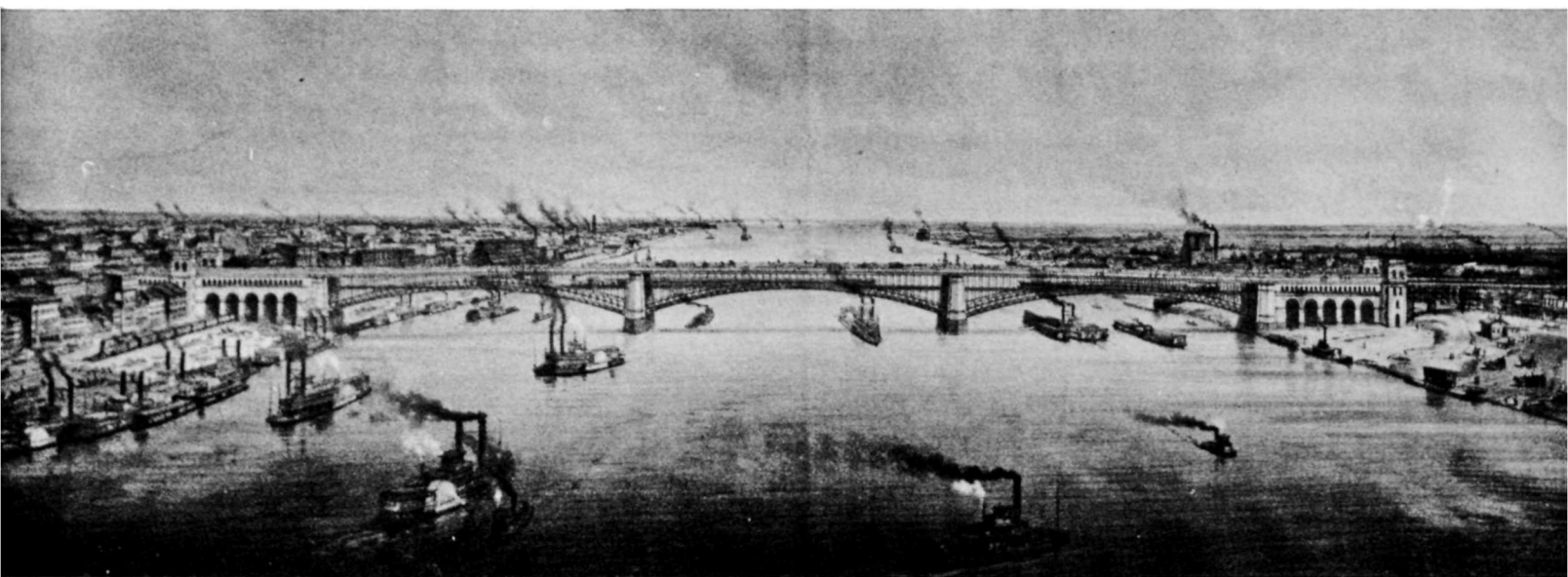
In the event that the Old Post Office be declared surplus property, it could be transferred, without monetary consideration, to an eligible local governmental body for use as a historic monument for the benefit of the public.

In light of these developments, and in compliance with the aforementioned Section 106 of Public Law 89-665, the General Services Administration has asked for comments from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Accordingly, this report has been prepared to aid the Council in its deliberations when it offers its comments at its quarterly meeting on August 5-6, 1970.

HISTORY
1873-1935

St. Louis in 1870 was what might be termed a "boom town." In the decade from 1860-1870, the value of manufacturing in the city increased 296 percent. Not only did St. Louis escape damage during the Civil War, it prospered, as the Chief Quartermaster spent \$180,000,000 in the city during the conflict. Orders for clothing and supplies for the Union helped bring many of the city's industries to maturity.

Although the steamboat era, the basis for an earlier upsurge in the city's economic and physical growth, had passed, it was in 1870 that the famous New Orleans to St. Louis race between the Natchez and the Robert E. Lee was held. Taking the place of the steamboats and their north-south routes were the railroads, which had begun playing their part in shipping raw materials to the East and finished products to the West. In 1870, the Eads Bridge, accommodating the railroad on its lower level, was being erected. A marvel of construction, as it had the longest fixed-end metal arches ever built, the bridge may be seen as symbolizing the energy, growth, and expectation of the city at the time. Unfortunately, the decade of the '70's was not to live up



The Bridge at St. Louis. Lithograph after a drawing by F. Welcker, 1874. A contemporary view of St. Louis in the '70s. (Courtesy Library of Congress.)

to expectations. The Bank Panic of 1873 and the subsequent depression had a profound effect on the city. One result was that a dramatic decline in construction occurred.

It was also in the early 1870's that the idea of a new structure to house all Federal offices in the growing city was first formulated. In 1859, only 11 years earlier, the United States Government had completed an Italianate structure at 3rd and Olive Streets to house Federal offices in the city. However, this structure, later known as the Old Custom House, was now deemed too small to accommodate all the offices it was called upon to house.

On December 13, 1871, George A. Halsey, Chairman of the United States Committee of Public Buildings and Grounds, wrote Secretary of the Treasury George S. Boutwell asking the cost of a new building and the amount necessary for an appropriation.

On June 4, 1872, the new Federal building project began in earnest with the instituting of condemnation proceedings to secure the block bordered by Olive, Locust, 8th, and 9th Streets. On September 3 of the same year, a favorable decree was rendered by the St. Louis County Circuit Court and the property was acquired. The total cost paid to the several owners of property in the block was \$368,882.65. This figure, which at first glance may seem excessive, is accounted for by the fact that the block was then solidly built up with residential structures, many of them quite substantial.

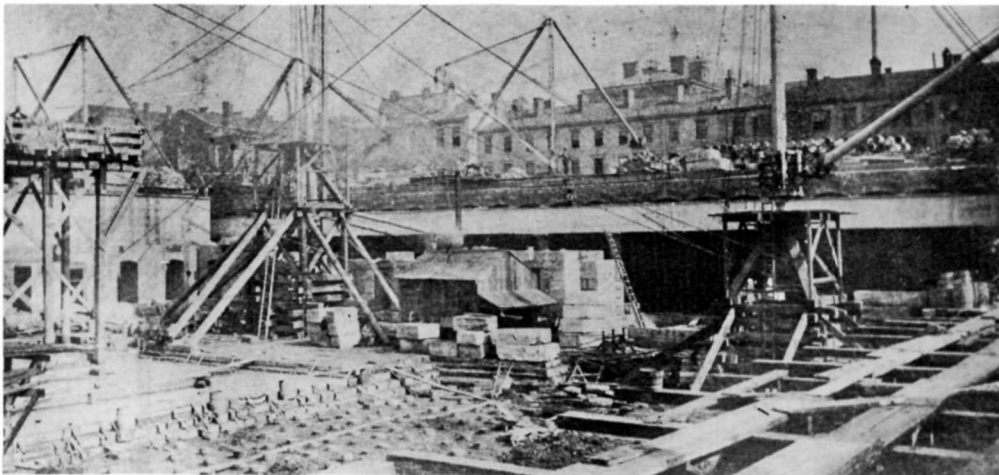
Actual planning of the structure seems to have begun prior to the rendering of the decree. In a letter dated September 9, 1872, Thomas Walsh, Superintendent of Construction, gave advice to Alfred B. Mullett, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, the Federal agency then responsible for the erection of such buildings. Walsh offered two ideas relating to the building: first, that the main facade be on Olive Street, as it was the southern exposure, and second, that the building house only the Post Office, as he felt the existing structure was adequate for the Custom House and Subtreasury.

As designed, the Olive Street facade did become the principal one, but Walsh's second idea was completely ignored. When completed in 1884, not only did the building serve as Post Office, Custom House, Court House, and Subtreasury, it also housed the Collector of Internal Revenue, lighthouse and steamboat inspectors, and the U.S. Army Engineers. In its role as one of the three sub-treasuries in the country, the building's sub-basement vaults often housed as much as four or five million dollars in specie.

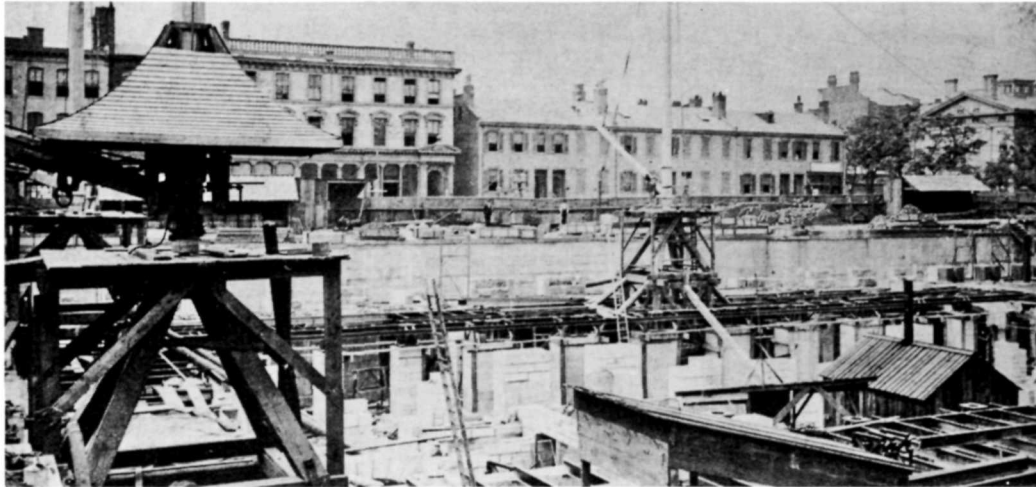
The first construction contract, for foundation work, was awarded on September 2, 1873, in spite of the fact that several property owners were still protesting the condemnation suit, which was not resolved until May 23, 1874, with the State Supreme Court's confirmation of the Circuit Court's decision.

Once the legal hurdles were overcome, other obstacles, of a physical nature, began to appear. The most dramatic of these occurred during the course of excavation for the foundations, when it was discovered that the block rested on a bed of quicksand. In 1876 William Conklin gave the following description of the difficulty in his St. Louis Illustrated:

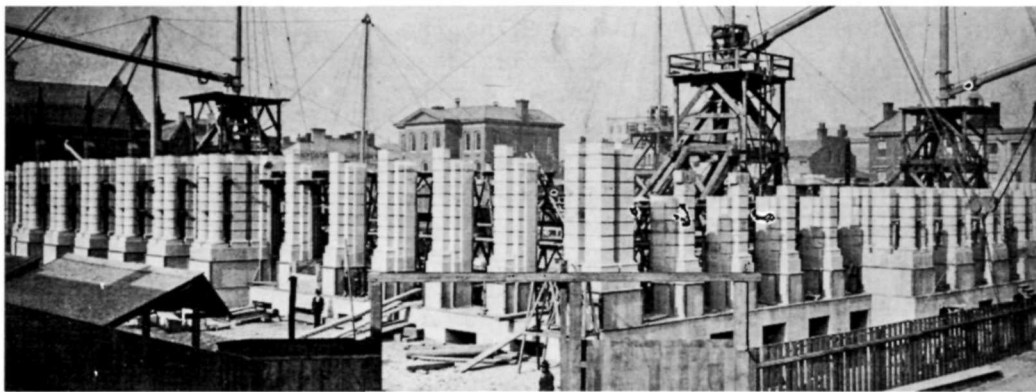
The weight of the neighboring buildings superincumbent above a soil of such quality communicated a powerful impulse to the movement: a force of eight hundred men, toiling day and night, with not as much a pause allowed in the work as Sunday church devotions consume, was powerless to stay the stealthy tide. It was terrible as an army with banners. Around the opening the earth was observed to be rapidly sinking; on all sides the surface of the ground showed great rents, as when an earthquake had riven the land. Some of the streets tending thitherward dropped into a nearly perpendicular line; Locust Street fell like a rope suspended into an ellipse-end curve. Dr. Eliot's church was likely to be swallowed up; the mischance had assumed its most alarming features...A prompt remedy was demanded to put an end to this undermining and obliteration. More than forty feet intervened between the scene of labor and the underlying. Sands were accumulating beyond all efforts of removal; springs issuing suddenly if the stratum below was penetrated, and on the borders swift demolition threatening.



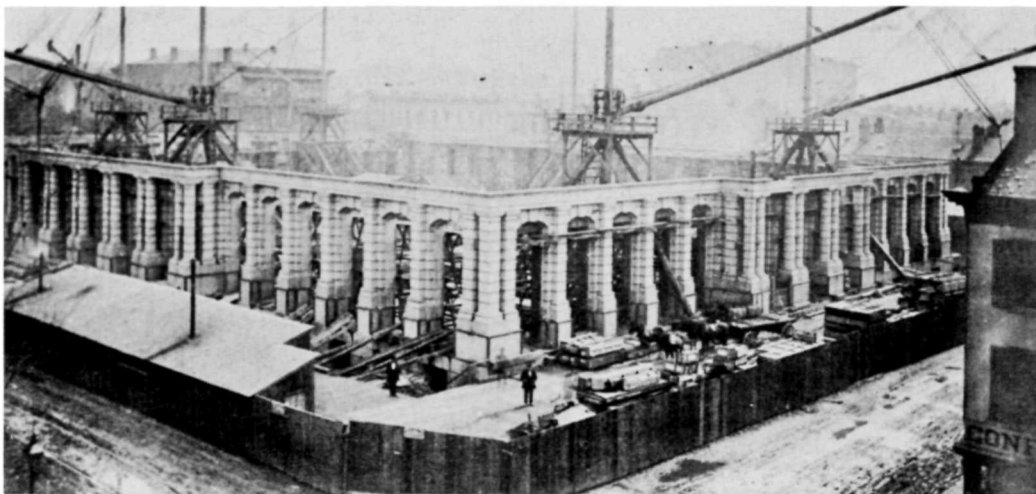
Construction photograph of 1876 showing the tops of the wooden pilings which were driven through quicksand to bedrock to support the building.



March, 1877



September, 1877



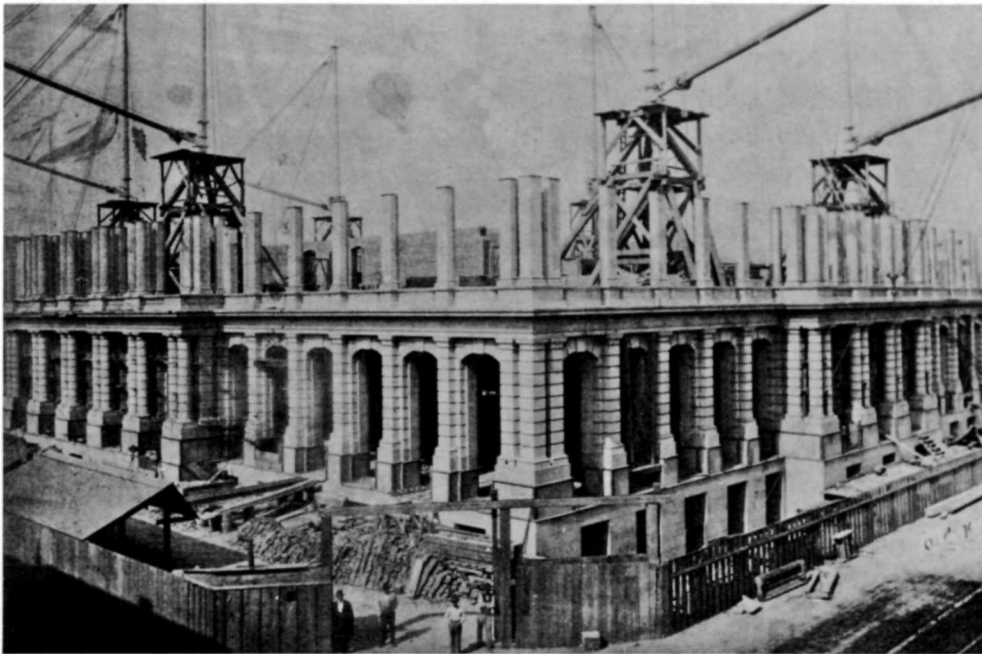
November, 1879

The sequence of photographs on pages 5-7 shows the slow construction progress between 1877 and 1880. (Courtesy Citizens' Old Post Office Committee.)

To solve the problem, huge Missouri pine logs were driven down to the bedrock. Some 500 bales of cotton were packed around these piles, and then covered with a four-foot layer of concrete. This foundation has continued to serve the building well, and even today there are no telltale cracks caused by settling.

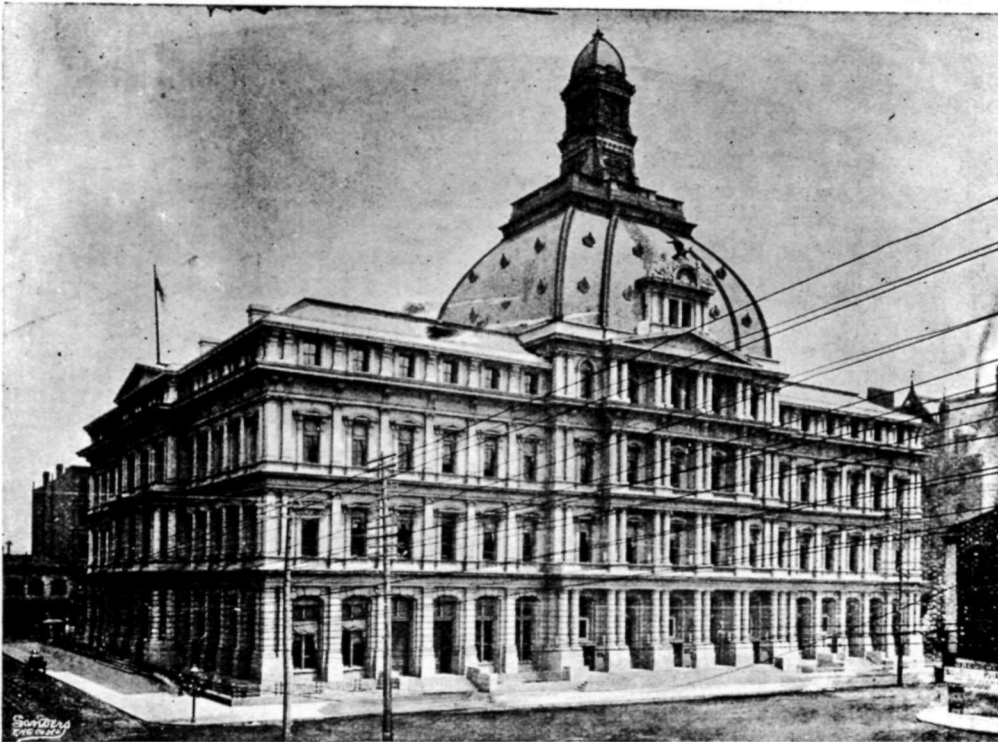
Even after this initial difficulty was surmounted, construction proceeded very slowly, due in part to the extreme care which went into the construction and details of the impressive and impregnable structure. Sliding iron shutters had to be ordered, produced, and fitted for every opening; granite for the upper stories had to be ordered and shipped from Maine, and then precision cut and fitted. Pediments for the windows are reported to have cost \$400 each and the carved columns and capitals, with which the building is amply supplied, \$800 each, though several accounts give the figures of \$1,700 and \$1,500 each.

This discrepancy in accounting for the costs of these elements is indicative of another problem which plagued construction and is partly responsible for the slow progress made. Much scandal accompanied the construction, especially in connection with the Maine granite, which was found to be of an inferior quality. Eventually, Walsh and his assistant, as well as the building's contractor, were indicted in a conspiracy to defraud the government. Although the indictment failed, Walsh was forced to leave the job.



March, 1880

The building was finally completed and fully occupied in March 1884. While the original estimate for the purchase of the site and construction had been in the neighborhood of \$4,000,000, the final tally of construction costs alone gave a figure of \$5,686,854.68. This made it the costliest building which had been erected in St. Louis at that time.



*The completed Post Office as it appeared ca. 1890.
(Courtesy Missouri Historical Society.)*

For those who equate value in buildings only with historical and personal association, the Old Post Office has played a substantial role in the judicial history of the City, State, and Nation. It has been said, and with justification, that there was "more history made in the Federal Courts located on the third floor than in any other department of the building." Other spaces in the building served primarily to handle the routine Federal business of a midwest metropolis.

When the first courts convened in the building in March 1884, their work was largely the handling of civil cases, but beginning in 1919 there was such a flood of criminal work in addition to the civil suits that the Federal District Court had as much work as it could handle. The Railroad Reorganization

Act, patent suits, and the Volstead Act proliferated many cases which were heard in these rooms.

At a meeting of the Bar Association of St. Louis on May 2, 1939, Judge Chester Davis, then on the Federal Bench, said that the Federal judges who occupied the court rooms in the building at Eighth and Olive over a period of 51 years were probably the outstanding group of Federal District Judges in the Country. Beginning with Judge Treat, there followed Judge Ames Thayer, Judge Elmer Adams, Judge David Dyer, and Judge Gustavus Finkelburg. Probably the one who handled more work than any other during his time on the Federal Bench from 1919 to 1939 was Charles B. Faris. The Flood Control Act brought an extensive land condemnation program presenting novel questions of law. The Railroad Reorganization proceedings, under a new law, were pending when Judge Faris was promoted to the Court of Appeals by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in February, 1935.

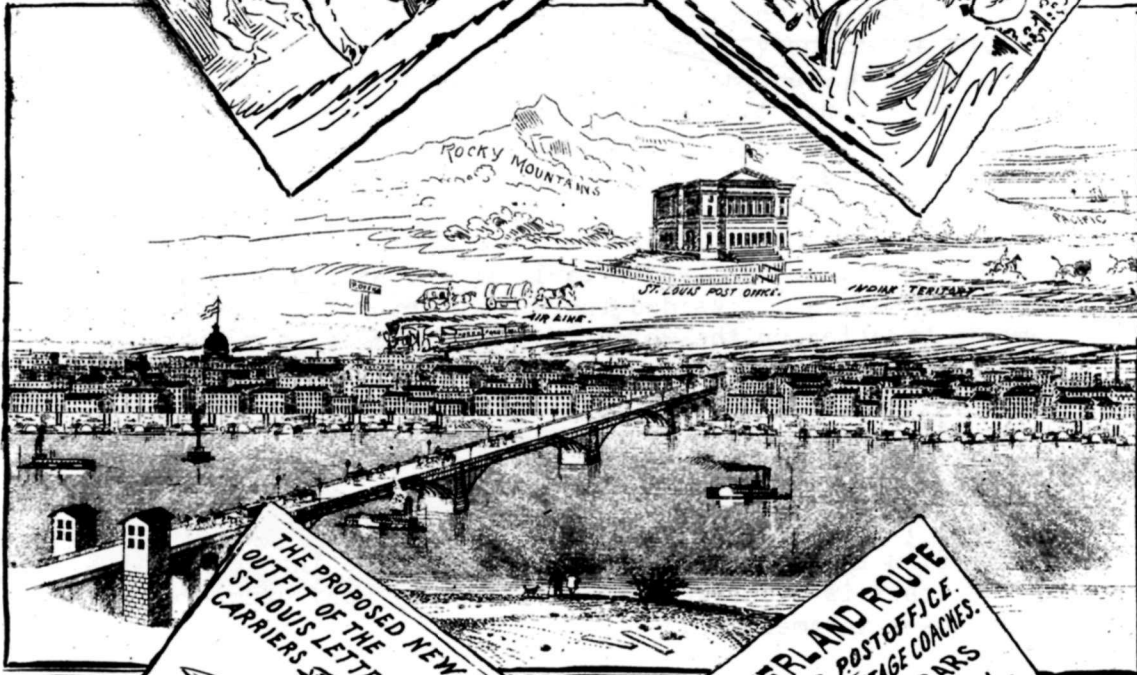
This court, organized before the year that Missouri entered the Union (1821), has been notable in the Nation for the quality of men who presided there. Judge Dyer gained national fame in breaking up the whiskey ring of the Grant administration before he came to the Federal Bench; and then his years from 1907, when he was appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt, until his retirement mark a period of distinction in the legal field, in which he played a large part.

However, it must be admitted that while judicial decisions rendered in the building had an impact on the interpretation of law, this is a characteristic shared by many other Federal courthouses in America.

More important than the fact that some positive events of historical consequence took place here is the abstract historical sense the structure imparts. The Old Post Office serves as the primary, and one of the few remaining, tangible links with an important era in St. Louis' past. The city has preserved its old Cathedral of St. Louis (1831-34) and the Old Courthouse (1839-62), Classic Revival reminders of the early 19th-century history of the city. The Old Post Office, belonging to the period of pain and determination and then confidence and exuberance following the Civil War, is equally worthy of preservation.

The Old Post Office is significant primarily as a visible link with the City's and the Nation's past, and because of its structural and architectural merit.

**A NEW ENOCH ARDEN
MR. JONES OF ST. LOUIS GOING TO
THE NEW POST OFFICE TO
GET A LETTER AND HIS
RETURN.**



**SHORT OVERLAND ROUTE
TO THE ST. LOUIS POSTOFFICE.
MOST ELEGANT STAGE COACHES.
PULMANS SLEEPING CARS
ATTACHED TO THE TRAIN.
ONLY \$70.50 For the ROUND TRIP.
34 MILES AND 2 HOURS SAVED.
A DELIGHTFUL PLACE FOR
BUFFALO HUNTERS.
THOUSAND MILESTICKET
WILL DO FOR TWO OR
THREE TRIPS.
FOR SALE AT A DISCOUNT.**

**THE SITE
OF OUR NEW POSTOFFICE,
TAKEN BY OUR SPECIAL ARTIST**

A. McLEAN LITH.

Cartoon from Puck Magazine, ca. 1872.

SITE

The decision made in the 1870's to place the new Federal Building on Olive Street between 8th and 9th Streets met with ridicule and criticism from every quarter. Even Puck magazine joined the ruckus with the printing about 1872 of the cartoon shown to the left.

Business-oriented opponents argued that the site was so far to the west that it would be inconvenient for the daily transactions so easily handled at the 3rd and Olive location, then in the heart of the business section. Opposition was equally firm from individuals living in the area, who resented the encroachment of such an establishment in a residential area. Even more strenuous were the objections of those who felt that corrupt politics had played a part in the site choice. Mullett agreed to change the location if the citizens would raise an additional \$200,000 required to purchase a block under consideration at a then more central location, but when the money could not be raised, the question of the site was settled.

View west on Olive Street at Ninth, ca. 1865, showing the residential character of the neighborhood. The Post Office occupies the site of the houses seen at the right in this photograph. (Courtesy Missouri Historical Society.)

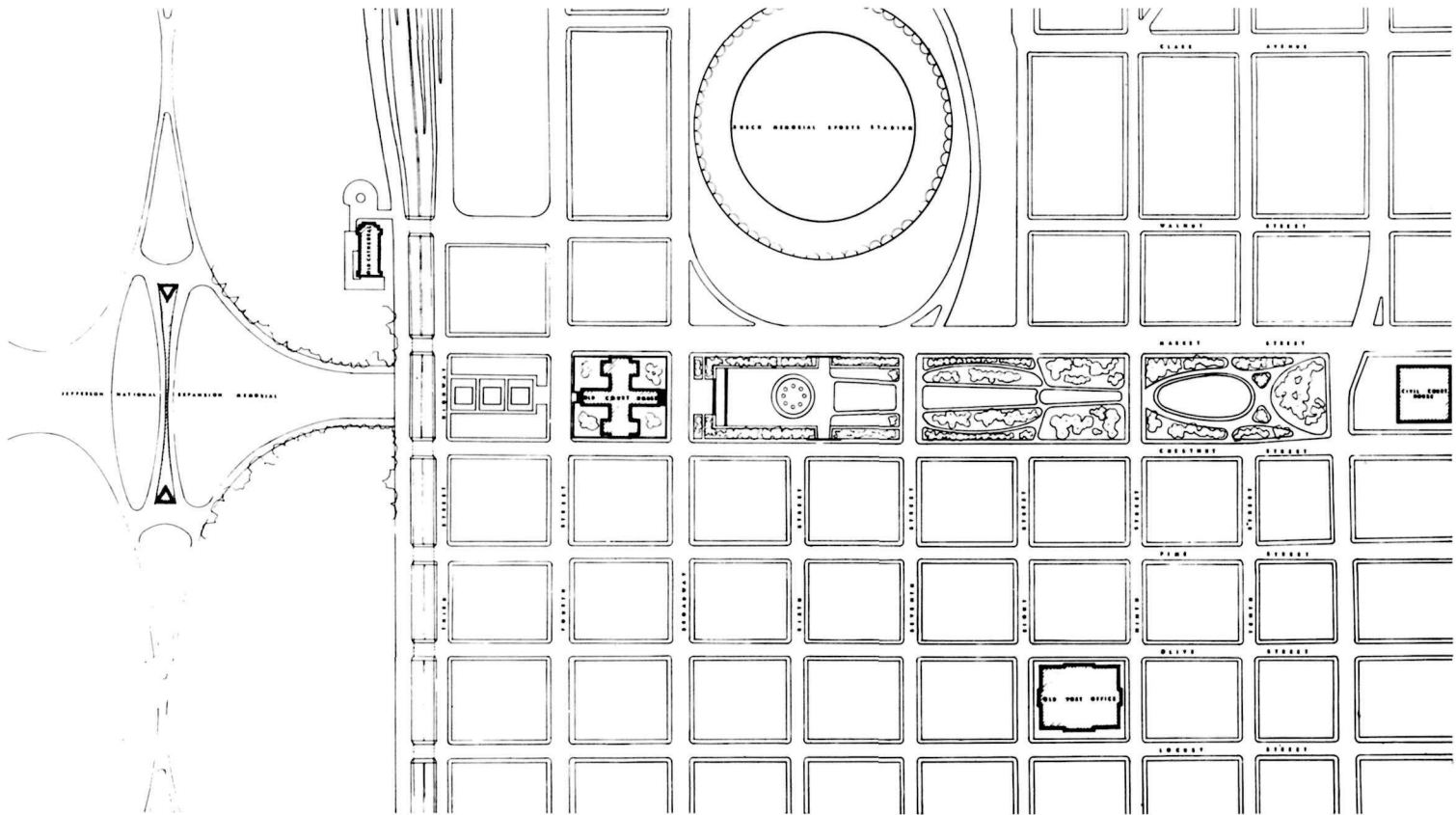


The foresight of the planners was shortly proved. The Old Post Office marked the beginning of the westward movement of the business center of the city, and is today in the very heart of the business district, surrounded by the most dense cluster of business buildings in the city. When it was built, the Old Post Office overshadowed its neighboring residences. Today it is overshadowed by the tall commercial establishments which have taken the place of houses and churches.

One notable feature of the site facilitates comprehension of the unity and monumentality of the Old Post Office. A broad sidewalk and surrounding moat on all sides put the building approximately 24 feet back from the curb. This set-back effectively increases the width of the street corridor around the Old Post Office and creates a sense of openness and brightness not present in the more deeply shadowed corridors of adjacent blocks. The openness creates a relief or counter-balance for the sense of enclosure experienced in neighboring blocks.



Aerial view showing the density of high-rise business structures surrounding the Old Post Office. (Courtesy Arteago Photos.)



Map showing the relationship of the Old Post Office to other downtown St. Louis landmarks. To the east (left on map) are the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, the Old Cathedral, and the Old Court House. To the west is the Civil Court House. (Map prepared 1964 by William D. Peckham, AIA.)

Much of the discussion surrounding the fate of the Old Post Office is centered, directly or indirectly, on the fact of its location. Its prime location, from a business point of view, marks the site's potential to contribute a great deal in tax revenue to the city. On the other hand, its prime location would be a tremendous asset if it were to serve as a civic center, visitors' center, or a number of other uses which have been proposed and merit serious consideration.



Philadelphia City Hall (begun 1871, John J. McArthur, Jr., architect) is an outstanding example of the Second Empire style. Once threatened with demolition, this extraordinarily ornate structure has been restored and cleaned and is now a much admired landmark and symbol of the city. (Photo by Cervin Robinson, 1958.)

SECOND EMPIRE STYLE

In his American Architecture Since 1780, Marcus Whiffen has the following to say about the Second Empire style:

The hallmark of the style is the high mansard roof, with a curb around the top of the visible slopes. Dormer windows are universal, both wall dormers and roof dormers being employed (sometimes in the same building); they take many shapes, including the circular. The chimneys are important elements in the composition of the upper part of the building and are classically detailed. In larger buildings projecting pavilions, central or terminal or both, are usual; each pavilion has its own roof, sometimes with convex slopes. Superimposed orders occur sometimes; the colossal order was not employed. In general, buildings of the Second Empire style are tall, boldly modeled, and emphatically three-dimensional in effect.

One can imagine the author standing before the Old St. Louis Post Office while writing this description, so complete and excellent an example of the style it is.

The Second Empire style, taking its name from the reign of Napoleon III (1852-1870), is essentially French in its origins. The most important structure executed in the style, both for its own impressiveness and the influence it exerted was the New Louvre, a huge extension to the old Palace, constructed between 1852-57. As this was one of the first great public works of the French Second Empire, the style name naturally followed.

In America, the heyday of this style occurred during the administration of President Grant (1869-77). Because of this, and since the style found its truest and perhaps most popular expression in many of the numerous public and governmental buildings erected then, American examples are often referred to as being in the "General Grant style."

As opposed to the earlier styles, primarily Classic Revival, buildings in the Second Empire style were far more elaborate and decorative. While Second Empire design uses classical elements, it enlarges upon them, and employs new non-classical methods of translating these designs into buildings. The



The former State, War, and Navy Building in Washington, D.C. Built 1871-1888. Mullett's most important work in the Second French Empire style, this building rivals McArthur's Philadelphia City Hall as the grandest example of the style in the nation. (Photo by Ronald S. Comedy, 1969.)

rapid industrial and technological expansion following the Civil War produced both these new building fashions and a new affluence which demanded and found expression in architectural forms more ostentatious than the restrained and dignified classical temple.

The Second Empire style was particularly appropriate for the massive buildings erected during this period by the Federal Government. Perhaps more than any style employed in American architecture, these buildings express the spirit of the times in which they were built. They were true products of a still young nation, recently recovered from its Civil War, and experiencing great expansion and a new sense of confidence.

Generally considered the two masterpieces of the style in America are Mullett's State, War, and Navy Building in Washington, D.C., and McArthur's Philadelphia City Hall.

Parallels between Mullett's Washington building, now the Executive Office Building, and the St. Louis building are legion. The State, War, and Navy was built between 1871-1888, and the Old Post Office from 1877-1884. Over and over, the same elements appear in both buildings, and one wonders if the same working drawings for certain details could not have been exchanged from one building to the other.

As a style, the Second French Empire is perhaps of too recent a vintage to be properly appreciated. Of the six monumental projects executed by Mullett in this style, only two remain--the Old State, War, and Navy Building in Washington and the St. Louis Post Office--and these two are among the most impressive examples of the style ever erected in America.



Olive Street entrance pavilion of Old Post Office. Coupled columns, segmental and triangular pediments over windows, and cornices acting as belt courses are all reminiscent of the State, War, and Navy Building. (Courtesy Arteaga Photos.)



Alfred Bult Mullett, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, 1866-1874.

THE ARCHITECT - ALFRED B. MULLETT

Alfred Bult Mullett (1834-1890) served as Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department from 1866 until 1874. His tenure of office coincided with an accelerated government building program following the Civil War, and Mullett was responsible for the design of many public buildings in cities and towns throughout the country. The buildings erected by the Treasury Department while Mullett held the office of Supervising Architect are unexcelled by any American structures of their time in scale and solidity of construction.

Mullett was born in Taunton, England, on April 7, 1834. In 1843 his family emigrated to the United States, settling in Glendale, Ohio, a suburb of Cincinnati. Mullett received his academic training in Ohio and Europe, and in 1860 was employed in the office of the noted Greek Revival architect, Isaiah Rogers, who had moved to Cincinnati in 1848. Rogers became Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department in 1862 and brought Mullett to Washington as a member of his staff. Mullett's rise in rank was rapid, and in 1866 Secretary of the Treasury Hugh McCulloch appointed him to the post of Supervising Architect.

Mullett inherited the classical tradition of Federal building from his predecessor and mentor, Rogers. In Washington he completed Robert Mills' Treasury Building by adding a north wing, adhering closely to the classic style in which Ammi B. Young and Rogers had built the south and west wings. Mullett's Post Office and Courthouse in Portland, Maine, and his Custom House in Portland, Oregon, also reflect the style which had become so identified with Government buildings of the young nation.

However, the Classic Revival had run its course by the late 1860's, and governmental buildings, as well as other public and private buildings, were beginning to reflect other influences. Among the many styles of the middle and late 19th century, the Second Empire style was most favored for government buildings. As Supervising Architect for the

Treasury Department, Mullett was responsible for many Federal buildings erected in this lavish style, among them post offices, assay offices, custom houses, and hospitals.

In all, Mullett designed and erected approximately 32 buildings during his eight-year tenure as Supervising Architect of the Treasury. These 32 structures may be divided according to three major style groups. Four buildings were in the Classic Revival style, fourteen in the Italianate style and fourteen in the Second Empire. That the latter style was Mullett's favorite milieu may be gathered from the fact that of the eight structures which cost over a million dollars, six were in that idiom. The two exceptions were the Old San Francisco Mint and the north wing of the Treasury Building in Washington, the style of which was already determined by earlier construction. Both of these structures were in the Classic Revival style. Mullett seems to have used the Italianate style for smaller structures, and none of the buildings erected in this style cost over \$500,000.



U.S. Court House and Post Office in Portland, Maine. Built 1867-1873. One of the numerous smaller government buildings designed by Mullett and a fine example of his work in the Classic Revival style, this structure was demolished in 1965. (Photo copy of 1868 perspective by Von Koerber.)

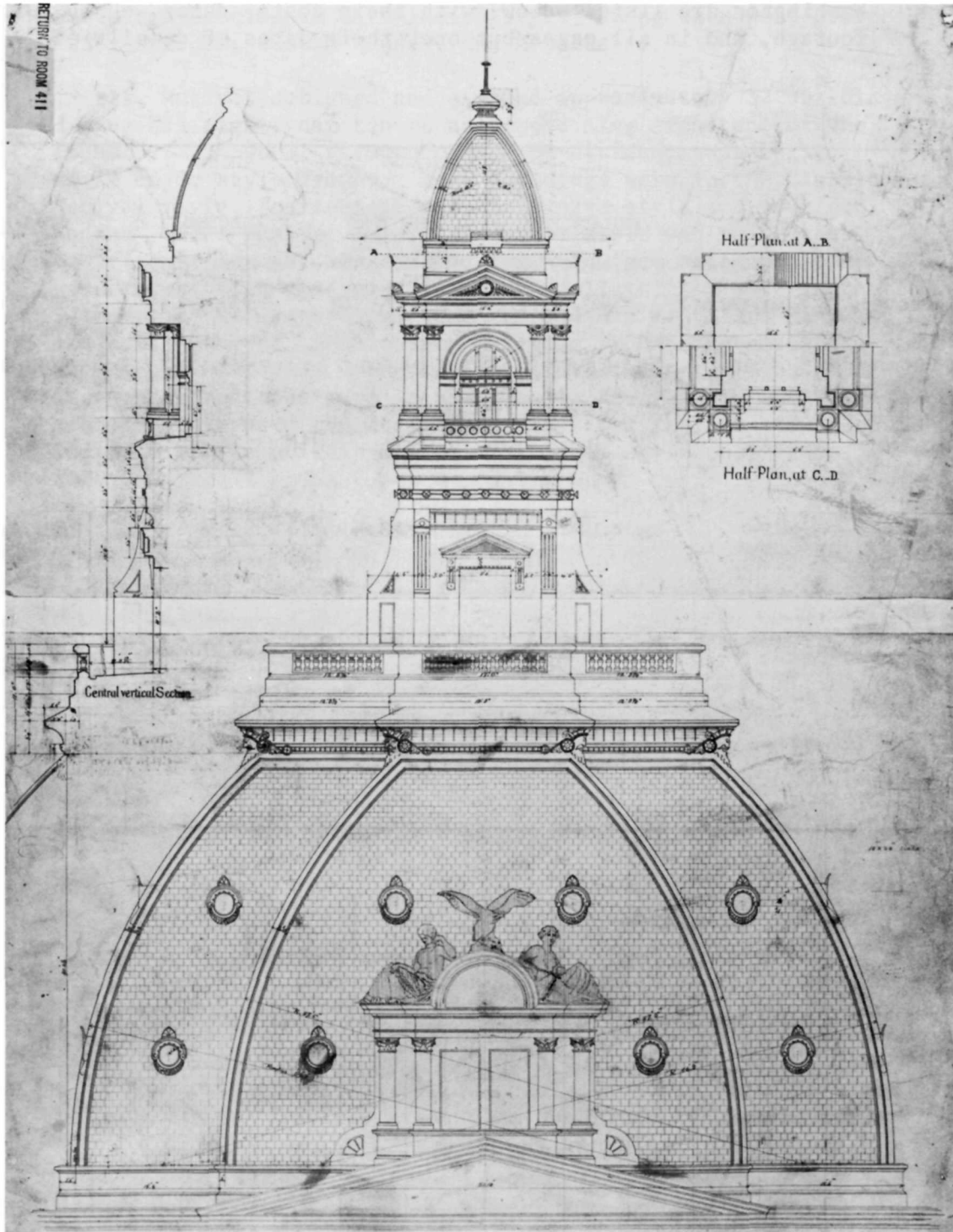
Mullett's five major Second Empire structures outside of Washington are listed below, with their costs, dates, cubic footage, and in all cases but one, their dates of demolition.

	<u>BOSTON</u>	<u>PHILADELPHIA</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>CINCINNATI</u>	<u>ST. LOUIS</u>
Site	\$1,329,095.84	\$1,483,097.00	\$500,000.00	\$708,026.00	\$368,882.65
Cost of Bldg.	4,623,122.47	4,623,943.49	8,549,832.63	5,088,382.35	5,686,854.68
Cubic Contents	5,098,100	7,378,900	8,334,200	7,883,500	5,885,000
Date of Completion	1885	1884	1880	1885	1884
Date of Demolition	c.1940	c.1942	1938	1936	Still standing and in use

Compiled by John A. Bryan, Architect, 1967.

The fact that the St. Louis building is the sole survivor of these five major examples of Mullett's work in the Second Empire style should be a point in favor of its preservation.

Although the State, War, and Navy Building in Washington was the capstone of Mullett's career, personal conflicts during the building's long period of construction eventually led to his resignation and the end of his career of public service. He continued in private architectural practice in Washington, D.C., until October 20, 1890, when he took his own life in a fit of despondency over the failure to receive compensation claimed for his work done many years earlier, on the State, War, and Navy Building.



Architect' drawing of the dome showing ornamental belvedere, now removed.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Exterior

The Old St. Louis Post Office, occupying the greater part of a city block, is 234 feet long on the Olive and Locust Street facades, and 180 feet on the sides facing 8th and 9th Streets, exclusive of the moat which surrounds it. While the building is essentially a solid rectangle at the basement and first floor levels, it becomes a hollow rectangle above that. Interior offices and halls on the top three stories are lighted by windows facing an 87 x 70 foot central light court (see illustration on page 12). This light court, now solidly roofed at the second floor level, was originally equipped with a skylight.

The total height of the building, from street level to the top of the dome, is 125 feet. Including the basement and sub-basement, there are six stories.

The floor of the sub-basement is 28-1/2 feet below the Olive Street sidewalk, and the foundation goes 8 feet below this.

Designed as an integral part of the structure was the 8-1/2 feet wide, 25 feet deep moat, which surrounds the structure on all four sides. (A portion of the moat on the Locust Street facade was covered over to allow for a driveway for mail trucks.) This moat or areaway was of course designed primarily to give ventilation and light to the basements, and perhaps only psychologically as a deterrent to any would-be attackers.

Both the Olive and Locust Street facades are 17 bays in length, the 8th and 9th Street facades, 13 bays. The wall surfaces on all facades are richly articulated with recessed window and door openings, while the bays themselves are separated by pilasters.

Slightly projecting pavilions, which are capped with pediments at the roof level, center the elevations facing 8th and 9th Streets. On the first two floors of these pavilions, porticoes of three bays, separated by four groups of paired columns, break out even further from the body of the structure.

The central portions of the Locust and Olive Street facades are similarly, but more elaborately, delineated. Here the pedimented pavilions are five bays broad. On the ground level, the porticoes extend the full five-bay width of the pavilions. On the upper levels, however, the porticoes themselves are three bays wide. That on the Olive Street facade extends the full height of the building, while the Locust Street example extends only to the top of the third story. Window and door openings are capped by segmental arches at the rusticated main floor level, by segmental pediments at the second floor level, by triangular pediments at the third floor level, and are square-capped at the fourth, or attic, level. This is the identical sequence followed in the State, War, and Navy Building in Washington. All windows above the main floor have wooden, double-hung, two-over-two-light sash, and are set in cast-iron frames.

Of the four very similar elevations, that on Olive Street (the south facade) is given prominence and identification as the main facade by the presence of the crowning slate-covered mansard dome. The original ornamental belvedere, now removed as an economy measure, formerly gave even more prominence to



Ninth Street pavilion, showing rusticated columns, pilasters, and walls at the first floor level. (Photo by Paul Piaget, 1965.)



Near view of the mansard dome on the Olive Street facade which was originally topped by an ornamental belvedere. (Photo by Paul Piaget, 1965.)

this facade. Essentially, the dome crowns the five-bay projection in the center of the facade, but it also has a projection over the three central bays. Set into this segment of the dome is one of the most prominent and well-known elements of the building--the double attic window crowned by Daniel Chester French's sculpture, "America at War and Peace." This monumental group is one of the first major commissions of the famous sculptor, who is best known for his statue of the seated Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

On the various stories, the pilasters and columns follow the correct classical sequence. At the ground level, rusticated Roman Doric pilasters divide the bays; on the second floor, Ionic; and on the third floor, Corinthian pilasters. The cornices which top these pilasters and columns, and which act as belt courses defining the various floor levels, are freely interpreted. That separating the third floor from the attic story has an exaggerated soffit which is partially supported by brackets centered above the pilasters, and which from ground level appears to be the building's top-most cornice.

The bays of the pavilion and portico on the Olive Street facade at the attic level are again separated by Corinthian pilasters. However, the attic bays of the rest of the building are separated by pilasters which are stylistically related to the Eastlake school, as if the architect had run out of traditional classical elements but still had one more story to decorate. The capitals of these pilasters project to act as brackets supporting their cornice, which is capped by the slate roof.



This view of the Ninth Street and Locust Street (rear) facades clearly shows the superimposition of classical orders. (Photo by Paul Piaget, 1965.)

Interior

For a building of such solid construction, the interior of the Old Post Office presents an unusual sense of openness and light. On the main floor, the windows are seven feet wide and are divided by wall segments only five feet wide. These proportions are reversed on the floors above. To give an idea of the scale of interior spaces, both basements have ceilings 16 feet high, the main floor has a ceiling 26 feet high, and the ceilings of each of the top three floors are 22 feet high. The third floor court rooms, extending through the attic, have 35-foot ceilings.

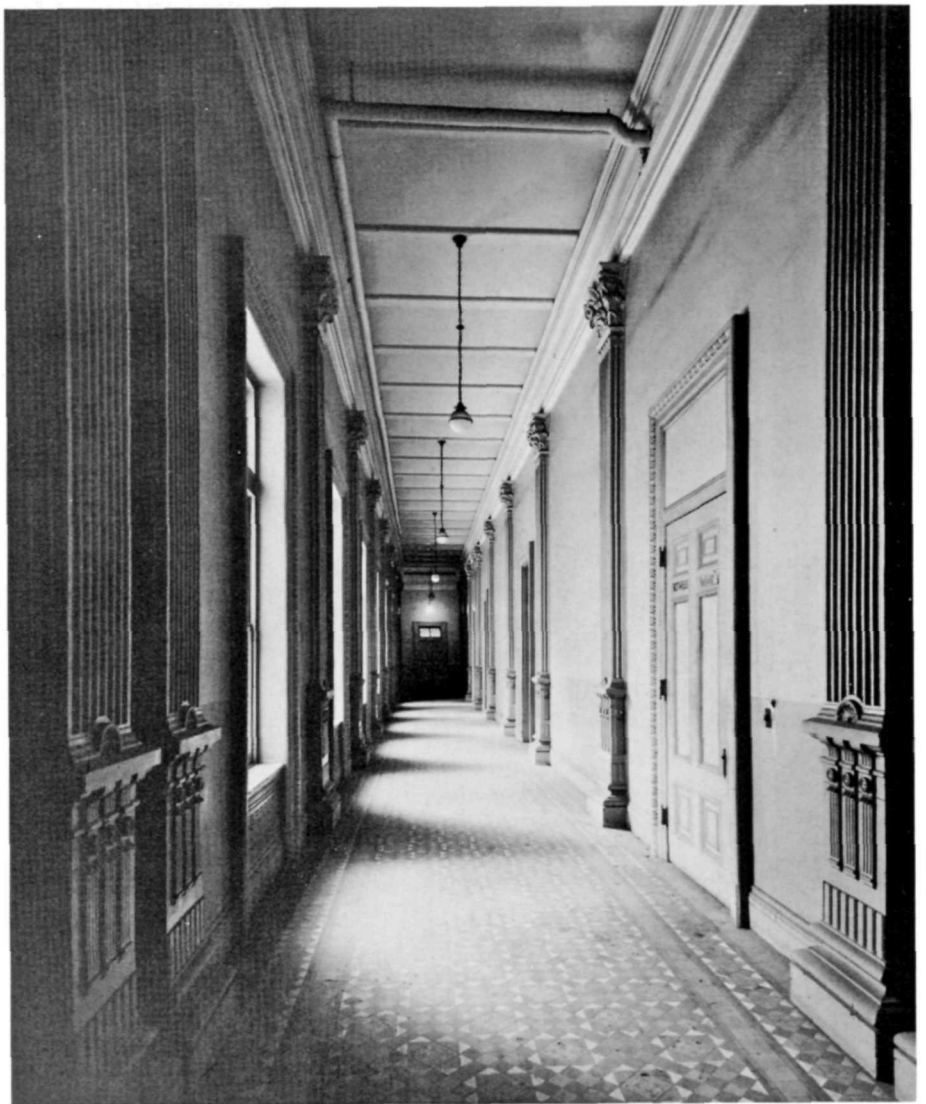
As the building was designed primarily to house the daily affairs of the Federal Government in the city, there are few large, impressive halls or spaces, except for the court rooms. Essentially, the character of the interior is established by the fine quality of design and materials used in details and in the finish. This quality is consistent throughout the building. No particular spaces were singled out to receive excessive decoration at the expense of other less frequently-noticed areas. Among interior features of note are the cast-iron moldings framing windows and doors, ornamental plaster cornices and medallions, ceramic tile floors and stair treads, art glass windows, bronze doorknobs displaying the Seal of the United States, cast-iron ventilating grilles pierced in ornamental patterns, red Italian Bologna marble mantels, and the two grand cast-iron staircases.

Wood was used minimally in the interior and then primarily for decorative purposes. Interior doors are of solid mahogany, two inches thick. One particularly interesting use of wood is on the staircase handrails, where it is said to have been employed to give a warmer touch than iron.

As on the exterior, pilasters are used to divide bays within the building. In the long halls, the use of these elements provides necessary breaks to keep the spaces from appearing unnecessarily long and narrow.



Large chamber. Finish includes marble wainscoat, cast-iron mouldings and ventilation grilles, and plaster ornamentation. Window at center has sheet iron shutters closed.



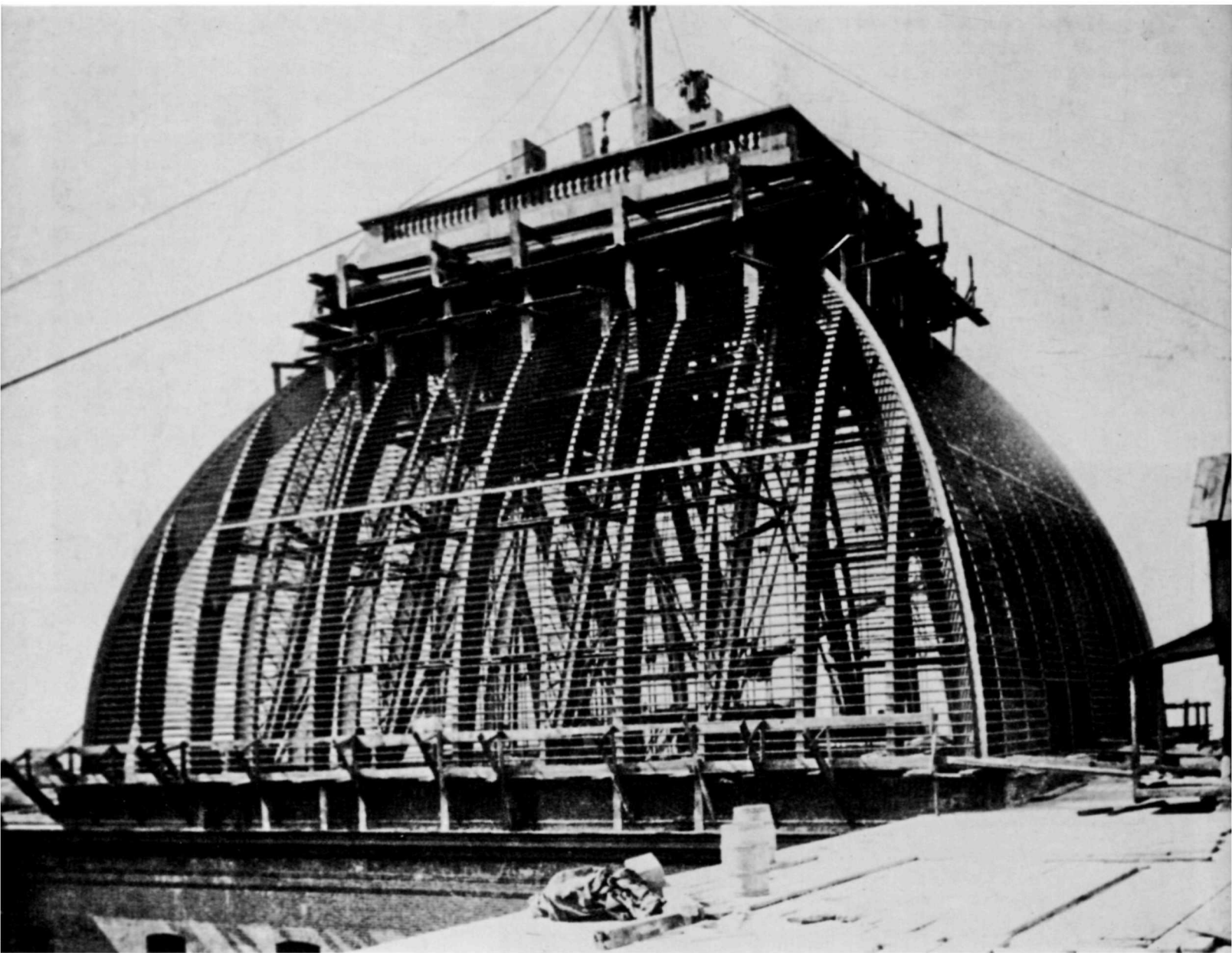
Typical corridor, with pilasters articulating the long walls. The flooring is ceramic tile.

(Photos by Paul Piaget, 1965.)

First floor Post Office. Outlets for circulating hot air heating systems are in the column bases.



Stairway. Treads are of ceramic tile, risers and balustrades are of cast-iron. Handrail is wood.



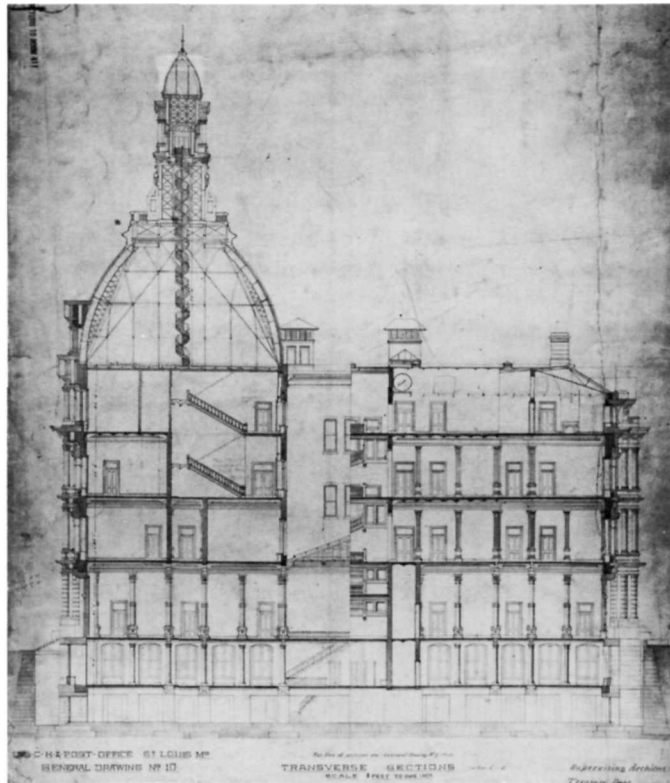
The dome under construction, September, 1880. All structural elements are cast iron, accounting, along with the slate roof, for the 550 ton weight ascribed to this feature of the building. Although exterior work had progressed to this point by 1880, another four years elapsed before the building was occupied.

STRUCTURE

The Old Post Office rests on concrete foundations which extend eight feet below the sub-basement floor and in turn rest on pilings. The stone used in the foundation walls, which are five feet thick and extend to the first floor sill line, is red rose granite quarried at Iron Mountain, Missouri. Above this, the exterior walls are of grey granite shipped from Hurricane Island, Maine. These walls taper from four to three feet. Surmounting the structure is the cast-iron, slate-covered dome, which is said to weigh 550 tons. Interior bearing and partition walls, for the most part, are of brick construction.

Though essentially a masonry structure, the Old Post Office also exhibits a virtuoso performance of applications of then-new technological advances. As might be gathered from the above materials, fireproof construction was an utmost consideration for the building. It was in 1871 that the Chicago fire, which focused attention on the necessity of fireproof construction throughout the country, had occurred. Fireproof floor construction was accomplished by building arches between the bottom flanges of the iron beams with ordinary bricks on edge, exactly as in arches over windows in masonry buildings. Metal lath was fastened to the bottoms of the beams and the entire ceiling was then plastered. The girders were furred with steel members which were covered with metal lath, and plastering was then applied to the lath. These are the large ornamental plaster beams which are so prominent in the ceilings.

Heavy one-and-one-half-inch-thick sheet-iron sliding shutters pull out from the walls to cover all exterior openings. That these were part of the fireproof considerations rather than a device to protect the building in case of mob violence or siege, as has been supposed, is gathered from the fact that they were ordered from the "U.S. Fireproof Shutter Company." They were similar to shutters used on the Federal buildings in New York and Boston, also designed by Mullett. The one-and-one-half-inch diameter holes found in the shutters, which have been described as gunport holes, are also found in drawings of a "Fire Proof Shutter" patented December 27, 1881, by G.L. Dammon. These holes, in both the patent drawings and in



Transverse section, showing exclusive use of cast-iron columns as interior supports.

the shutters in St. Louis, actually pierce only through the outside plate of the sheet metal to the one-half-inch air space and do not go through the inner plate. Similarly, the "moat" surrounding the structure should be looked upon as an areaway to light the basement floors and as a retaining wall, not as an aid in defense.

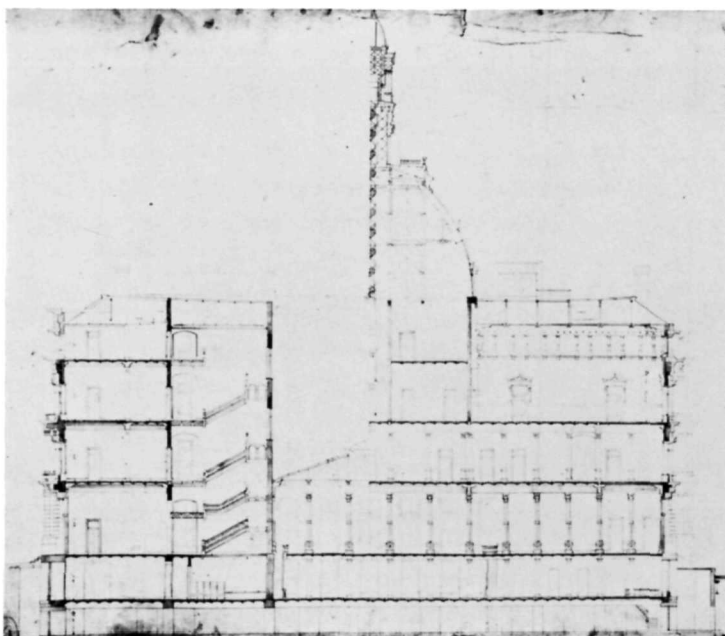
However, with its fireproof construction, the fact that the openings could be sealed, and with the presence of the moat, the Old Post Office did present an impregnable aspect, and it could be safely said that these elements gave it the air of at least a psychological fortress.

There are many other significant features illustrating the adaptation of technological advances. Of the five elevators with which the building was originally equipped, two served exclusively for mail, two for passengers, and one for freight. This was one of the most extensive uses of elevators in any building at the time. On the main floor, air was warmed by

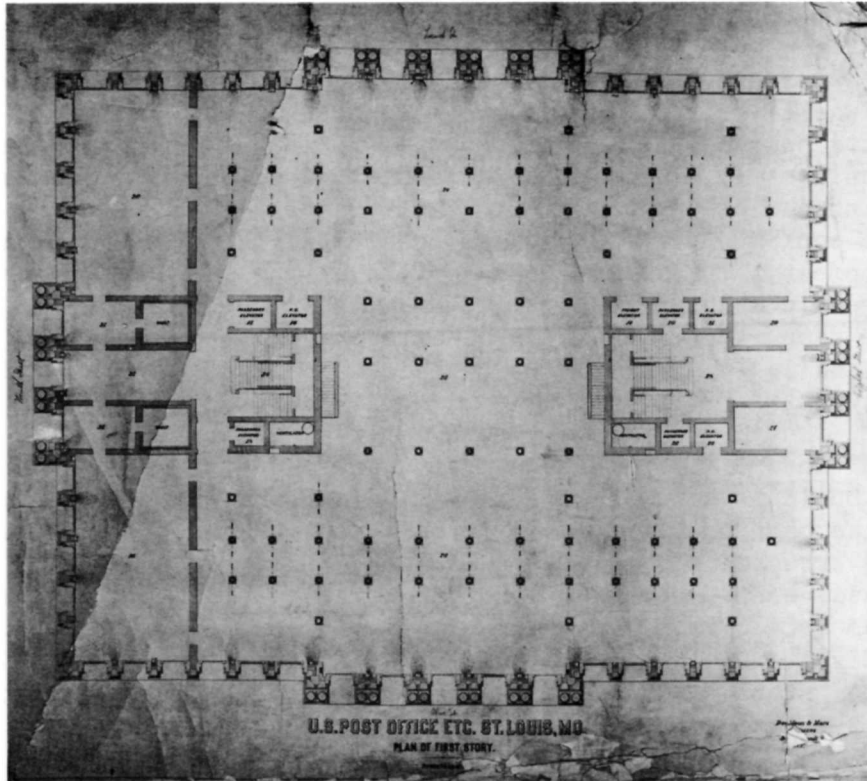
hot water radiators located under the windows, and this hot air was circulated to the upper floors by means of intake shafts housed in the bases of the ornate cast-iron columns. Fireplaces in all principal rooms provided adequate heating during the milder spring and fall months. All fireplaces were equipped with ash chutes leading to the basement levels. Equipment for heating the water, lighting and power plants, hydraulic elevator equipment, and the building's own well were then located in the sub-basement. The structure was originally lighted by gas, but electric lights were installed early in the 20th century.

Simultaneous with the construction of the building itself was the building of a railroad tunnel along the 8th Street side of the basement, with a large platform for the transfer of mail brought in by train via the Eads Bridge. Due to the excessive smoke brought into the building from coal-burning steam locomotives, this tunnel was sealed off and the idea of direct rail communication for mail service given up. The tunnel still exists and is used as a facility for railroad freight trains entering the city from Eads Bridge.

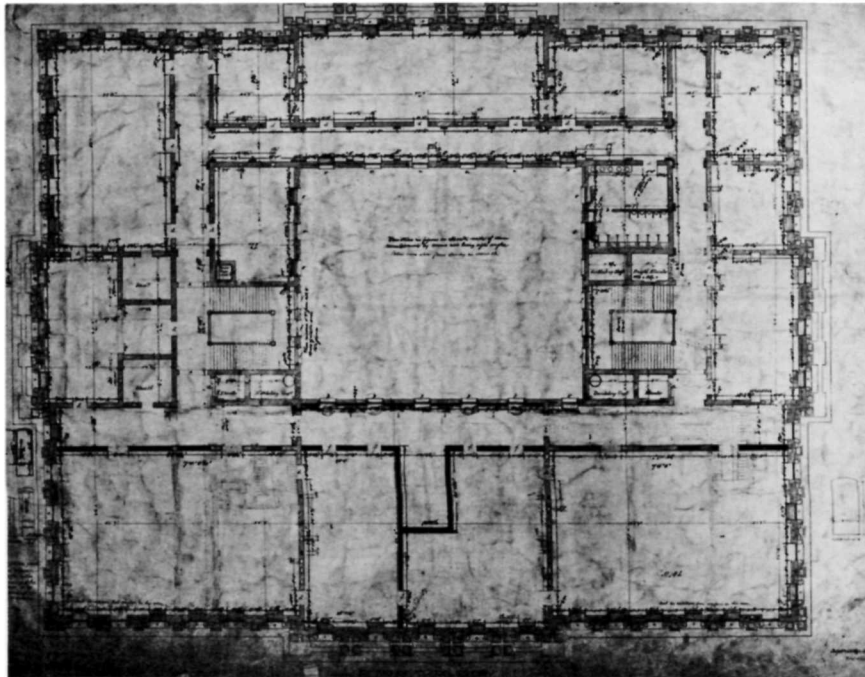
Due to the care taken in the construction, the quality of materials, and the competence of those in charge of the work, the structure is in excellent condition, both internally and externally.



Longitudinal section. Courtroom is seen at upper right, extending through two ordinary floors.



First floor plan. Use of cast-iron columns as supporting members enabled the Post Office to have a large unencumbered space for its operations. The large number of elevators, separated according to usage, is notable for this early date.



Plan of third story. The two large rooms at lower left and right corners are the courtrooms. The inner light court allows natural light to reach the long corridors.

RECENT HISTORY AND PRESERVATION INVOLVEMENT
1935-1970

The last gavel sounded in the court rooms of the Old Post Office on November 8, 1935. The next court session was held in the new United States Custom and Court House at 12th and Market Streets, which was completed that year. One by one, most of the other Federal offices left the building, to be housed in newer, more commodious quarters throughout the city. While the Old Post Office served its purpose longer than its predecessor, it too was now beginning to be looked upon as antiquated and obsolete.

With construction of a new Federal Office Building at 15th and Market Streets in 1961, the future of the old structure was uncertain indeed. By this time, the only Federal tenant was the Post Office Department, and now even this was a branch station.

Declaring that upon completion of the new building the Old Post Office would become excess to its needs, and that its disposal was contemplated, the General Services Administration, February 21, 1961, requested the Secretary of the Interior to advise if the building had national historical significance within the meaning of the Historic Sites Act of August 21, 1935.

An investigation and report were made by Merrill J. Mattes, Historian, Region II, National Park Service, the results of which were reported to the General Services Administration on April 28, 1961.

The National Park Service advised the General Services Administration at this time that the building was of significance "for its architectural distinction rather than for historical importance to the Nation." While concluding that the preservation of the structure as an historical and architectural monument by the National Park Service was not feasible, the Park Service advised that it was worthy of being considered for placement in the surplus property category, which, under the Federal Surplus Property Act of June 30, 1949, would allow for its possible disposition without cost to the State of Missouri or the municipal or county government of St. Louis for uses that would preserve the architectural character of the building.

It should be noted that this determination of the National Park Service was based on the fact that the building was to be declared surplus by the General Services Administration. At this time the building was not being considered by the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings under its Theme Studies for possible designation as a National Historic Landmark.

It was also at this time that concerted preservation activities began in earnest. One of the first voices to be heard in the chorus was that of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which in 1960 had given an official opinion that the building had architectural significance and should be preserved.

The July, 1961 issue of Architectural Forum carried an illustrated article entitled "Will Rebuilding Save This Landmark?" which gave details of a plan calling for renovating the building. This plan was sponsored by the Landmarks Association of St. Louis. However, it was also in the early 1960's that opposition to the building's preservation began to be heard. The Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis, Downtown in St. Louis, Inc., the Board of Aldermen, the City of St. Louis, as represented by Mayor Raymond Tucker, and others joined in a resolution stating that the cost of rehabilitating the structure would be an excessive and unnecessary burden to the taxpayers and urging the General Services Administration to sell the property.

The St. Louis chapter of the American Institute of Architects, soon to join the preservation vanguard, did not come out in favor of or in opposition to preservation at this time, due to the differences of opinion in its membership.

A final decision remained in abeyance, as the General Services Administration did not take action on the National Park Service's report. As the Post Office Department was still using the structure, it was not declared surplus.

By 1964, the threats to the Old Post Office had assumed greater proportions with the decision by the General Services Administration to demolish it and erect a new Federal Office Building on the site. The Federal Building at 15th and Market Streets, completed in 1962, had already become inadequate. Authorization

for a new building on the Post Office site was given by the Committee on Public Works of the Senate and House of Representatives on April 4, 1964.

Counteracting this action was a proposal given by the preservationists. By now local sentiment for saving the building was gathered in an organization entitled "The Committee to Save the Old Post Office in St. Louis," under the chairmanship of Austin P. Leland. Representing themselves as well as the Landmarks Association of St. Louis, Inc., and the St. Louis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, which by now was actively in favor of preservation, this group made a presentation to the General Services Administration on October 8, 1964, making a proposal to retain and convert the building into facilities for a Federal Office Building.

While lauding their efforts, the General Services Administration did not accept the proposal, and on January 25, 1965, having analyzed it, gave an opinion that it did not serve the best interests of the Government and that plans to proceed with the replacement of the Old Post Office would continue. Also noted in this opinion was the fact that the "National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings [had] not listed this building [as an historical landmark]."

The Committee to Save the Old Post Office posted its objections to this decision and petitioned for a rehearing. In this petition they were joined by a resolution, passed on February 19, 1965, of the St. Louis Board of Aldermen urging the saving of the structure.

By March, 1965, an award had been given by the General Services Administration for the design of the new Federal building, though it was to be canceled in 1967 before the work was completed.

Feeling that the National Park Service's position had not been clearly stated in the January statement of the General Services Administration, the 1961 report was reviewed by the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments at its April 1965 meeting. The Board confirmed the earlier report and stressed the possibility of preservation under the Federal Surplus Property Act of June 30, 1949, under which, as has been stated, the building could be saved through disposition, without cost, to a local or state governing body.

This position was endorsed by then Secretary of the Interior Udall. Other preservation activities continued during this period. The National Convention of the American Institute of Architects, meeting in St. Louis in June, 1964, passed a resolution declaring itself unqualifiedly in favor of preservation. On October 5, 1964, the National Trust for Historic Preservation again urged retention of the structure. By February, 1965, the building had been included in the Historic American Buildings Survey.

On June 28, 1965, Lawson B. Knott, Jr., Administrator, General Services Administration, advised Secretary Udall that, although the building did not adequately serve the post office, there was a need for a post office and space for Federal offices in the area, and that no suitable alternate site had been found. Consequently, the building could not be declared surplus, since it was needed and used by Federal agencies. The continued need for the site was the basis on which the proposal for a new building was made to the Bureau of the Budget and the Committees on Public Works of the Senate and House of Representatives.

At this point, a temporary reprieve was granted the building. In spite of efforts pro and con on the local and national level, this reprieve came from the fact that no funds for the construction of a new Federal building were included in the President's Budget for fiscal year 1967, and that no funds for demolition and/or construction would be available until July 1, 1967.

In January, 1966, the Committee to Save the Old Post Office again met in Washington with the General Services Administration. Also present, and urging preservation with adaptive use of the building were St. Louis' Mayor, Alfonso J. Cervantes, Morris Ketchum, President of the American Institute of Architects, and Gordon Gray, Chairman of the Board of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Essentially, the proposal called for converting the Old Post Office into a civic center and the erection of a new Federal Office Building on a nearby site.

The General Services Administration gave assurances that this proposal would be considered.

In October, 1967, the National Trust for Historic Preservation held its annual convention in St. Louis. Delegates were given

the opportunity to tour the building, and on October 21 a resolution was passed concerning the building. Declaring that "the Old Post Office [presented] issues that are national in scope and the proper concern of all citizens of this country," the resolution stated that the National Trust was "heartily in favor of preserving the Old Post Office as a monument to this country's rejuvenative spirit in times of crisis and proudly maintained as a civic and cultural center for the enjoyment of St. Louisans and of visitors to this historic city."

In addition to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and other bodies whose resolutions have been noted, the building's preservation and adaptive use were also endorsed by the Society of Architectural Historians, the Missouri Historical Society and 52 organizations in St. Louis.

In July, 1968, the General Services Administration announced it would lease a new building to be constructed at the corner of 12th Boulevard and Olive Street. While it was noted that this decision did not mean plans for the Old Post Office to be demolished had been canceled, it at least gave preservationists tacit assurance that the execution had been temporarily stayed.

In November, 1968, Joseph Jaeger, Jr., the Missouri State Liaison Officer responsible for implementing the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), nominated the Old Post Office to the National Register of Historic Places. On November 22, 1968, the Old Post Office became the first property in Missouri to be entered on the Register by this procedure.

Acceptance on the National Register gave the property the protection afforded under Section 106 of Public Law 89-665, quoted in the introduction of this report. In addition to this recognition on the part of the National Park Service, the building is being investigated by the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings under the Theme Study of Nineteenth-Century American Architecture for possible designation as being eligible for National Historic Landmark status. The field study of the building has been completed, and will be presented at the October, 1970, meeting of the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments.

The current situation may be briefly summarized. No funds are available at the present for construction of a new building. Consequently, space has been rented in a new building at 12th and Olive Streets. When this space is ready, the post office will move into it, and from the standpoint of Federal tenants, the Old Post Office will be vacant.

Obviously, the building will not be allowed to stand vacant, nor should it be. Because the General Services Administration will have to make a decision regarding its disposition in the near future, it has requested the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, under the responsibility given Federal agencies under Section 106 of Public Law 89-665, to offer its comments.

