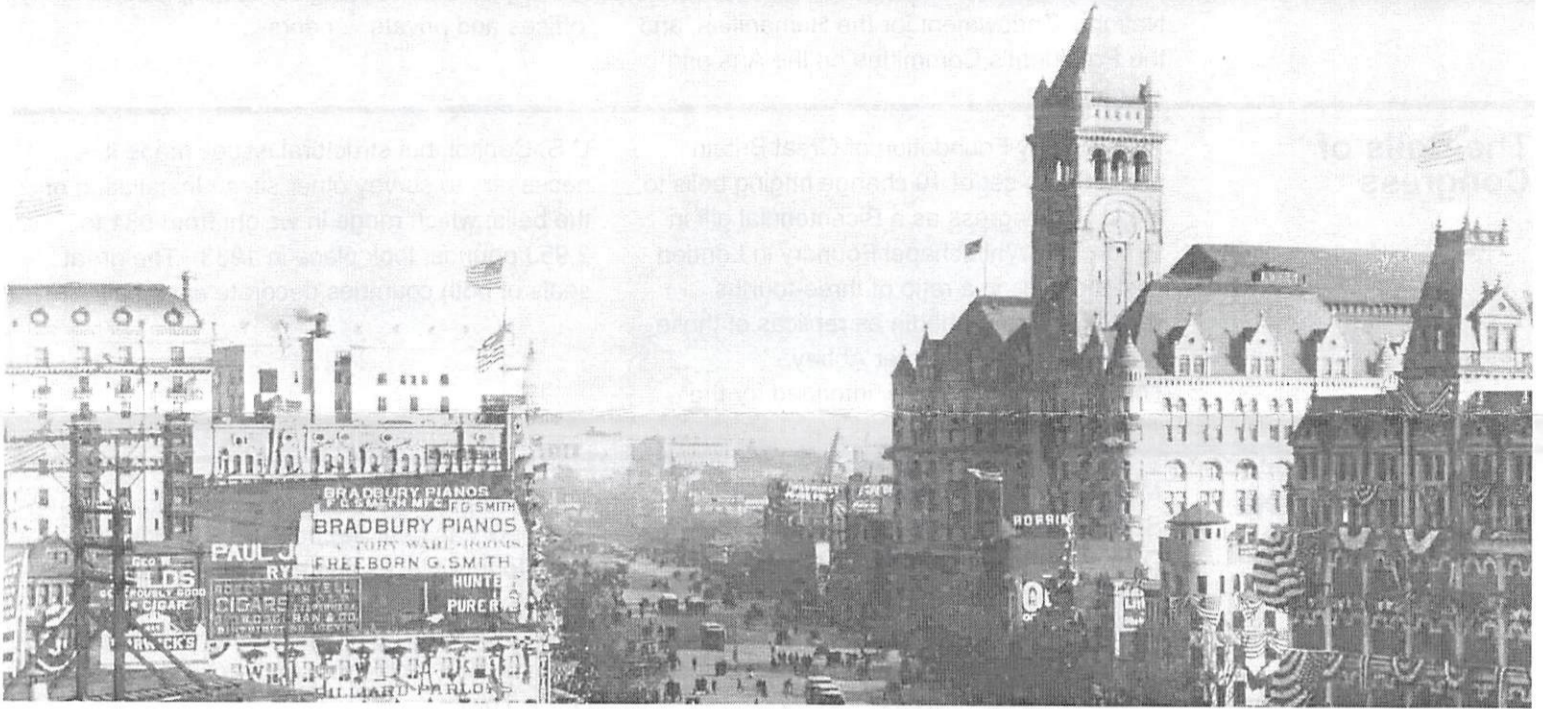


Old Post Office Tower

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

In Cooperation with General
Services Administration



Introduction to the Old Post Office Tower

The Old Post Office Tower is a federally protected site offering picturesque views of the nation's capital. From the 270-foot observation deck visitors are treated to a view overlooking several of the United States' prized structures. The Capitol, White House, Washington Monument, Pentagon, Smithsonian Museums, Supreme Court, and Lincoln Memorial are easily observed from the 12th-floor. On a clear day visibility may exceed 12 miles. National Park Service rangers are on duty at the lobby, ninth floor, and observation deck to educate visitors about the 110-year-old building and surrounding attractions.

The Post Office Years

The United States Government constructed the Postal Building between 1892 and 1899. The architect behind this masterpiece was Willoughby J. Edbrooke, better known for co-designing the Georgia State Capitol. Edbrooke took his inspiration from the famed architect H.H. Richardson's design for the Allegheny County Court House in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Originally the building contained the Washington, D.C.

post office, the Postal Department Headquarters, and the Dead Letters Museum. The Dead Letters Museum provided an interesting display of items that the U.S. Post Office was unable to deliver. Thousands of stored items were kept in the museum. Two noteworthy exhibits were a lock of hair from President Garfield's assassin and a set of Benjamin Franklin's account books.

Decline of the Old Post Office

The Old Post Office Tower faced potential razing in 1934 after the Postal Department Headquarters moved to the newer Ariel Rios building which currently houses the Environmental Protection Agency. Locals considered the Old Post Office Tower unappealing due to changing tastes in architecture and the construction of distinctly different government buildings in the Federal Triangle area. The onset of the Great Depression and diversion of federal funds to more critical needs spared the Old Post Office Tower its first proposed demolition. From

1935 to 1978, the Old Post Office building accommodated many government offices including the D.C. field office and training operations for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. By the mid- 1970s, disrepair, fires, and piles of trash were commonplace throughout unused building spaces. Metal sheets covered the glass atrium. The interior was so dim that one could not see the ceiling from the lower levels.

Rescue and Restoration

In 1970, the U.S. Congress approved permits for a second attempt to demolish the Old Post Office Tower. Nancy Hanks, then chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, found this troubling. "Old buildings are like old friends," she informed Congress. "They reassure people in times of rapid change. They encourage people to dream about their cities - to think before they build, to consider alternatives before they tear

down." Hanks' testimony inspired concerned citizens to picket and protest demolition. In the end, the government saved the Old Post Office Tower and placed it on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. President Ronald Reagan rededicated the renovated Old Post Office Tower in 1983 as The Nancy Hanks Center.

The Old Post Office Tower Today

The Old Post Office Tower continues to house government offices. It is the headquarters of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the President's Committee on the Arts and

Humanities. The passing of the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act in 1976 enabled Washingtonians and visitors to enjoy the capital's first setting combining federal offices and private vendors.

The Bells of Congress

The Ditchley Foundation of Great Britain presented a set of 10 change ringing bells to the U.S. Congress as a Bicentennial gift in 1976. The Whitechapel Foundry in London cast the bells in a ratio of three-fourths copper to one-fourth tin as replicas of those in London's Westminster Abbey. The bells were originally intended for the

U.S. Capitol, but structural issues made it necessary to survey other sites. Installation of the bells, which range in weight from 581 to 2,953 pounds, took place in 1983. The great seals of both countries decorate each bell.

The Washington Ringing Society

Members of the Washington Ringing Society, a volunteer group based in the District of Columbia area, ring the bells during federal holidays and on days of national significance and state occasion. The Washington Ringing Society practices method ringing of the bells every

Thursday from 7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. Listeners can hear the bells for a radius of three to four blocks and enjoy them best on the Pennsylvania Avenue side of the tower. Visitors can view and learn about the bells on the ninth and 10th floors of the Old Post Office Tower.

Pennsylvania Avenue National Historical Park

Pennsylvania Avenue serves as a physical link between the executive and legislative branches of the United States government and provides a direct route between the Capitol and White House. Planned in 1791 by Pierre Charles L'Enfant, "America's Main Street" has seen every inaugural procession since 1801 when Thomas Jefferson traveled the dirt road on foot to his new address at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. Although modern presidents may travel Pennsylvania Avenue in an armored limousine, walking the symbolic 1.5-mile parade route has become a tradition for visitors from across the country and around the world. Along with serving as a path between two

major sites of power, Pennsylvania Avenue hosts innumerable protests, celebrations, and gatherings of Americans whose voices, ideas, and cheers will not go unheard.

View the entire span of Pennsylvania Avenue National Historical Park from the observation deck at the Old Post Office Tower. Imagine Pennsylvania Avenue lined with Lombardy Poplars as Jefferson took his historic stroll or picture recent American presidents following the same route. Experience "America's Main Street" and the timelessness of a park where history thrives and continues its course in the present day.

Did You Know?

- ❖ The total amount spent for ground acquisition and building prior to occupancy in 1899 exceeded \$3.2 million.
- ❖ The Old Post Office Tower was the first federal building erected on Pennsylvania Avenue, the first steel frame building constructed in Washington, D.C., and the first government building designed with its own electrical power plant.
- ❖ On May 15, 1918 postal officials gathered in the Old Post Office Tower to witness the first scheduled airmail flight take off from what is now West Potomac Park.
- ❖ The Old Post Office Tower's clock hands were originally five and seven feet long.
- ❖ Masons shipped the building's exterior granite from Vinalhaven, Maine quarries.
- ❖ Live music performances frequently take place on the Old Post Office Tower's ground floor.
- ❖ Pennsylvania Avenue National Historical Park includes the United States Navy Memorial, the American Expeditionary Forces Memorial, Pershing Park, Freedom Plaza, John Marshall Park, and many additional sculptures.

For More Information

The Old Post Office Tower is administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service in cooperation with General Services Administration. The site is fully accessible. For more information, contact the Superintendent at:

National Mall and Memorial Parks
900 Ohio Drive, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024
202-606-8691