

PRESENTING

THE RONALD REAGAN BUILDING AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTER

THE CROWN JEWEL OF PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

An 1890's newspaper article called the Federal Triangle area "the plague spot of Washington," where brothels and saloons flourished side by side with offices of the city's four daily newspapers and its leading banks, theaters, and hotels. "Grover Cleveland," the paper reported, "can sit in his bedroom at the White House and survey this entire territory." The article cited 50 saloons and 109 "bawdy-houses," most of them selling liquor without proper licenses.

The neighborhood was known as "Hooker's Division," after Civil War General Joseph Hooker, whose troops sought entertainment in the saloons and brothels during their off-duty hours. While the term "hooker" actually originated earlier in the "red-light district" of Corlear's Hook in New York City, its use here undoubtedly helped popularize it.

The army—and many of the prostitutes—left after the war, and "Hooker's Division" became a working class neighborhood of brick and wooden row houses fronting the streets, with alley dwellings for poorer folk in the interior parts. Among its businesses were a brass foundry, a carriage works, several restaurants, a wood and coal yard, a bakery, and a variety of shops. By the turn of the century, however, the character of the neighborhood had changed again, and nearly all of its buildings were once more brothels and saloons.

In the early 1900's, city planners, architects, and government officials launched a movement to resurrect Pierre L'Enfant's glorious plan for the Nation's capital. Congress outlawed prostitution in 1914, and the brothels were closed. The Federal Triangle remained a mixed residential-commercial-industrial neighborhood until the late 1920's, when Congress authorized purchase of the land for Government buildings. A master plan

was developed under the leadership of Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, whose department was responsible for Federal building projects.

The great surge of construction that followed yielded eight monumental buildings between 6th and 15th Streets. By the mid-1930's, however, the country was deep in the Depression, and building stopped for lack of money. What was to have been the Federal Triangle's Great Plaza was left with only a memorial fountain to Oscar Straus, diplomat and Secretary of Commerce and Labor. The rest of the site was paved over and used as a parking lot for more than 50 years.

Archaeological work prior to excavation for the Ronald Reagan Building uncovered more than 250,000 remnants of more than a century of daily life, as well as parts of a petrified tree believed to be 65 million years old. Discoveries included perfume, beer, and liquor bottles from the brothels and saloons—many with their labels intact—along with buttons, garter hooks, combs, pipes, jewelry, glass, and pottery. Animal bones revealed what people ate (beef steaks and roasts at the brothels, but cheaper cuts of meat in the working class households), and seeds showed what they grew in their gardens.

Today, the Federal Triangle has its plaza, its restored Oscar Straus fountain, and more. With its skylight soaring upward and its Trade Center reaching out to the world, with its landscaped plazas and entrances on all sides, the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center links the attractions of Washington's Mall to the city's downtown business and commercial area. The former "plague spot" now has a "crown jewel."

Top, early 20th century photograph from the Library of Congress shows the Federal Triangle in its last years as a neighborhood; bottom, the "crown jewel," offset by its pre-Depression neighbors (photo by Carol M. Highsmith Photography).



Photographs: Building exteriors, Henry Driver; skylight, © Eric Schiller; renderings courtesy of Benjamin Thompson & Associates, Inc.

IN PERSPECTIVE....

"Federal Triangle," the area in which the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center is located, refers to the right triangle formed by the intersection of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, with Pennsylvania Avenue as its hypotenuse.

The building contains 3.1 million gross square feet. This compares to:

- 2.1 million in the Empire State Building
- 3.45 million in Chicago's Sears Tower
- 6.5 million in the Pentagon

If the building were a skyscraper with 20,000-square-foot floors, it would be 155 stories high.

The basement floor is 7.7 acres.
A typical office floor is 5.7 acres.

The atrium skylight has one acre of glass in 1,240 pieces.

The exterior contains 42,000 slabs of Indiana limestone.

The building's 250,000 cubic yards of concrete would pave a two-lane highway 106 miles long.

There are:

- 13,000 doors
- 904 windows
- 21,000 light fixtures
- 85 elevators
- 8 escalators
- 94 stairways
- 26 underground loading docks
- 2,500 miles of wiring
- 5 million square feet of drywall



Welcome to the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, a crossroads of government, business, and commerce in the heart of the Nation's capital.

This building completes the redevelopment of Pennsylvania Avenue envisioned by President John F. Kennedy nearly 40 years ago. During his 1961 inaugural parade, President Kennedy noted the run-down shops on the north side of the "Avenue of the Presidents." The line of Federal buildings on the south side, most of them built in the late 1920's and early 1930's in the neoclassical style—was rudely punctuated by an 11-acre parking lot.

"DIGNITY AND STABILITY"

By the late 1980's, the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation—a public-private partnership established in 1972—had guided a remarkable facelift of the north side of the avenue. The parking lot on the south side remained an eyesore, with up to 2,000 vehicles dotting a parcel of land worth \$300 million. Proposals for building on the site came and went until Congress, in 1987, passed the Federal Triangle Development Act authorizing a Federal building complex and international cultural and trade center. In the law, Congress specified that the building "reflect the symbolic importance and historic character of Pennsylvania Avenue and the Nation's Capital" and "represent the dignity and stability of the Federal Government."

Subsequent financial analysis showed that the cultural center would not be self-supporting. Although construction had already begun, the interior design was altered to eliminate several theaters and enhance the office and trade center spaces. Congress voted unanimously in 1995 to name the building after the President who signed the legislation authorizing its construction.



The building contains 3.1 million gross square feet and is the second largest Government building after the Pentagon. Of the 1.9 million occupiable square feet, 1.4 million provide workspace for Federal employees and for the Smithsonian Institution's Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Government and commercial offices dealing with international trade, a ballroom, a two-story exhibit hall, a 620-seat auditorium equipped for simultaneous translation, a conference center, a formal reception hall, "corporate showcase" retail space, four restaurants, and a 980-seat food court occupy the remaining half-million square feet.

The National Capital Region of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) manages the Federal office space. GSA has contracted with a private company—Trade Center Management Associates—to oversee the other facilities.

CHALLENGE AND LEGACY

The complex was designed by Pei, Cobb, Freed & Partners of New York City, in association with Ellerbe Beckett, Architects and Engineers, of Washington, DC. Lead architect James Ingo Freed and his design team had a truly unique

challenge. They would define the last vacant piece of land on Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and the White House. They would complete the great complex of buildings whose construction was halted by the Depression. And—almost at the dawn of the 21st century—they would leave a statement about the relationship between traditional and contemporary architecture for future generations.

Mr. Freed describes the building's exterior design as "a contemporary reading of the neoclassical style." Its forms and surfaces are classically derived without being stylistically pure. For example, there is no fluting on the columns and pilasters. The impression throughout is one of soft curves rather than sharp angles. The building's base is clad in granite, and the remainder contains 42,000 slabs of rusticated and panelized limestone from the same Indiana quarry as the other Federal Triangle buildings. The five-acre roof's terra cotta tile matches that of the surrounding buildings.

The domed rotunda on Pennsylvania Avenue is the International Trade Center's "front door." Standing at a point where the powerful direction of the Avenue previously appeared to dissipate, the rotunda's gentle curve draws pedestrians walking either way into the landscaped plaza and an ever-widening circle of activity. The plaza is punctuated by an octagonal pavilion containing a two-story restaurant and topped by a belvedere reception room.

Beyond the pavilion lies the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Plaza, where the curved wall that anchors the Reagan Building's southeast corner continues the circular facade of the Ariel Rios Building, giving the entire space a sense of



completion. Sculptures by Martin Puryear (*Bearing Witness*) and Stephen Robin (*Federal Triangle Flowers*) grace the Plaza. The Woodrow Wilson Memorial is inside the building at the Plaza's south end. From the Plaza, a walkway leads to the Mellon Auditorium's pedestrian passageways, providing access to the Smithsonian museums and the Mall. One level below, on the Concourse level, the Plaza Court provides outdoor space for two restaurants and connects to the Federal Triangle Metro station.

The building's 14th Street side is the principal entrance to the Federal offices. Standing opposite the long and very strong facade of the Department of Commerce building, the Ronald Reagan Building falls back in another gentle

curve, creating an urban room with a pavilion at each end. The passerby is thus spared the tunnel effect that would have resulted from a straighter facade. The Oscar Straus Memorial Fountain has been restored and returned to its original location.



DRAMA IN GLASS

Inside the 14th Street entrance, the eight-story foyer gives way to the building's most dramatic feature, a cone-shaped, horizontal glass skylight that soars from 35 to 125 feet over the 170-foot-diameter atrium. The skylight contains 1,240 pieces of glass and covers an entire acre. GSA commissioned Keith Sonnier to create the neon and glass sculpture *Route Zenith* for the atrium's eastern end. As it widens from 30 to 110 feet, the atrium serves as the pedestrian "spine" of the building, leading past the retail shops and out to the Woodrow Wilson Plaza and the Federal Triangle Metro station.

Diagonal walkways reach out from the 14th Street foyer at the same angles as Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues diverge from the Capitol. Tributary walkways on both the concourse and ground levels connect to the rotunda. At ground level, this walkway is a glass-enclosed gallery paralleling the exterior plaza arcade.

The building's five underground levels are contained by a concrete slurry wall 90 feet deep and 39 inches thick. The wall was needed because of the wetness of the site—a creek once flowed at its southern edge—and to preserve the foundation of the 1908 John Wilson Building next door. Excavators removed some 1.1 million cubic yards of soil, carrying away 110,000 truckloads.

Tunnels connect the building to the Federal Triangle Metro stop and the Department of Commerce and U.S. Customs Service buildings. Parking for nearly 2,000 cars—the same number that could be parked on the surface parking lot that once occupied the site—is available on four underground levels.