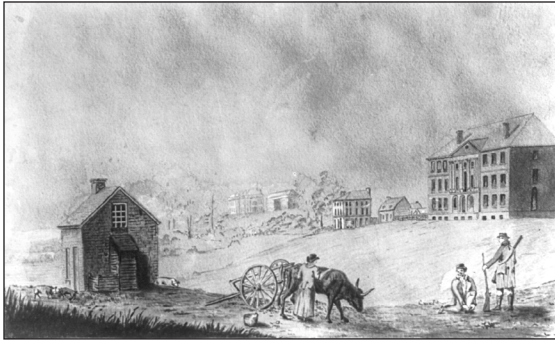


Post Office Headquarters Sites in Washington, DC

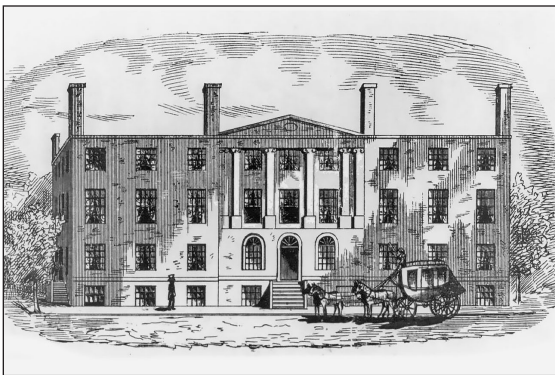
On May 15, 1800, President John Adams directed the heads of federal agencies to move from Philadelphia to the nation's new capital, the city of Washington. All federal offices were expected to be open for business in exactly one month. Abraham Bradley, the First Assistant Postmaster General, supervised the move of postal headquarters. Bradley was able to fit all of the office's records and furniture into two wagons.



A view of Washington in 1803



The Crocker House as it appeared in 1800



Blodget's Hotel circa 1820



The General Post Office Building in 1846

❶ Dr. John Crocker's House, June 1800 to late 1801.

On June 2, 1800, Bradley wrote to a friend, "We arrived here on Friday last having had a pleasant journey... I have... taken a large three-story house... which will accommodate the office, and my family, and the Postmaster's office; it is about equidistant from the President's House and from the Capitol."¹ Headquarters was located on the second floor of the house, which was owned by Dr. John Crocker and was located at the northwest corner of 9th and E Streets, NW. The building also housed the Washington City Post Office, along with Bradley's family. Bradley foresaw a bright future for Washington. On June 11, he wrote to Postmaster General Joseph Habersham: "The situation of the city is extremely pleasant and it will probably become the greatest city in America."² The site of Dr. Crocker's house is now occupied by an office building at 901 E Street, NW.

❷ Public Building West of the President's House, 1801 to late 1812.

In its day, this building was known as the War Office, the New Building, and "the public building west of the President's house." The west end was near 17th Street just above F Street, where the Eisenhower Executive Office Building now stands. Its 25 rooms housed postal headquarters, the city Post Office, the Patent Office, and the departments of War, Navy, and State.

❸ Blodget's Hotel, late 1812 to December 15, 1836.

In 1812, postal headquarters moved into the Union Public Hotel, better known as Blodget's. It was a three-story brick structure at the northeast corner of 8th and E Streets, NW. The government purchased the building in 1810; it also housed the Patent Office. As British troops set fire to the public buildings of Washington on the morning of August 25, 1814, William Thornton, head of the Patent Office, persuaded British officers to spare the Patent Office. Blodget's was one of the few public buildings left unscathed. With the Capitol in ruins, Congress met in the building from September 1814 to March 1815. Blodget's was destroyed by fire on December 15, 1836, and many postal and patent records were lost to the flames.

❹ Fuller's Hotel, December 1836 to December 1841.

In December 1836, postal headquarters moved to Fuller's Hotel on the northwest corner of 14th and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, where the Willard Hotel now stands. In 1837 and again in 1838, Postmaster General Amos Kendall reminded the President that a permanent, fireproof building was urgently needed. In his 1838 annual report, Kendall warned: "The valuable books and papers of this department are in constant peril from the combustible nature of the building now occupied. It has a shingle roof and much wood work within, and in the department and the Auditor's office there are daily about seventy fires."³ On March 3, 1839, Congress authorized construction of a new, fireproof building for postal headquarters.

❺ General Post Office Building, 701 E Street, NW, 1841 to 1899.

The first building erected specifically to serve as postal headquarters was constructed on the former site of Blodget's Hotel, on the block between 7th, 8th, E and F Streets, NW. Among the first gas-heated public buildings in the city, it also had one of the first central power, heating and lighting plants. After postal headquarters moved to a new building in 1899, the building housed a variety of federal agencies. For much of the 20th century, it housed the U.S. Tariff Commission and was known as the Tariff Building. After a period of vacancy, it was renovated and reopened in 2002 as the Hotel Monaco.



The Old Post Office Building in 1899



The New Post Office Building in 1934



U.S. Postal Service Headquarters in 1973

⑥ Old Post Office Building, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, 1899 to 1934.

In November 1899, headquarters moved to a new granite building at the southeast corner of 12th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. Rising 315 feet, the building's clock tower makes it the tallest structure downtown, except for the Washington Monument. Tragedy struck on September 30, 1899, when, as the building was being readied for its grand opening, Postmaster James Willett fell down an elevator shaft, 90 feet to his death. The building housed both the city's Post Office and Post Office Department headquarters until September 1914, when the city Post Office moved to a new building next to Union Station. After postal headquarters moved into new, larger quarters directly across 12th Street in June 1934, the building housed several federal agencies. In the 1970s, the building was redeveloped as mixed retail and office space; in 2016, a luxury hotel opened in the building. The historic clock tower is managed by the National Park Service and is open to the public daily.

⑦ New Post Office Building, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, 1934 to 1973.

The new postal headquarters building, on the southwest corner of 12th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, was designed in the Classical Revival architectural style. It has an unusual footprint of two semicircles placed back to back with side wings, resulting in the dramatic sweeping façade. It was one of the first buildings to be decorated by the New Deal's Section of Painting and Sculpture. Twenty-eight American artists were commissioned to decorate the new building from 1935 to 1938. The exterior is adorned with sculpture and bas relief panels depicting the history of the postal system; numerous murals and sculptures decorate the interior. After Postal Service headquarters relocated in 1973, the building was occupied by several federal agencies, including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). In 1985, it was named in honor of ATF special agent Ariel Rios, who was killed in the line of duty. In 2012, Congress renamed it the William Jefferson Clinton Federal Building, in honor of our 42nd president. Today the building houses the headquarters of the Environmental Protection Agency. The Benjamin Franklin Station of the Washington Post Office has been located in the building since it opened in 1934.

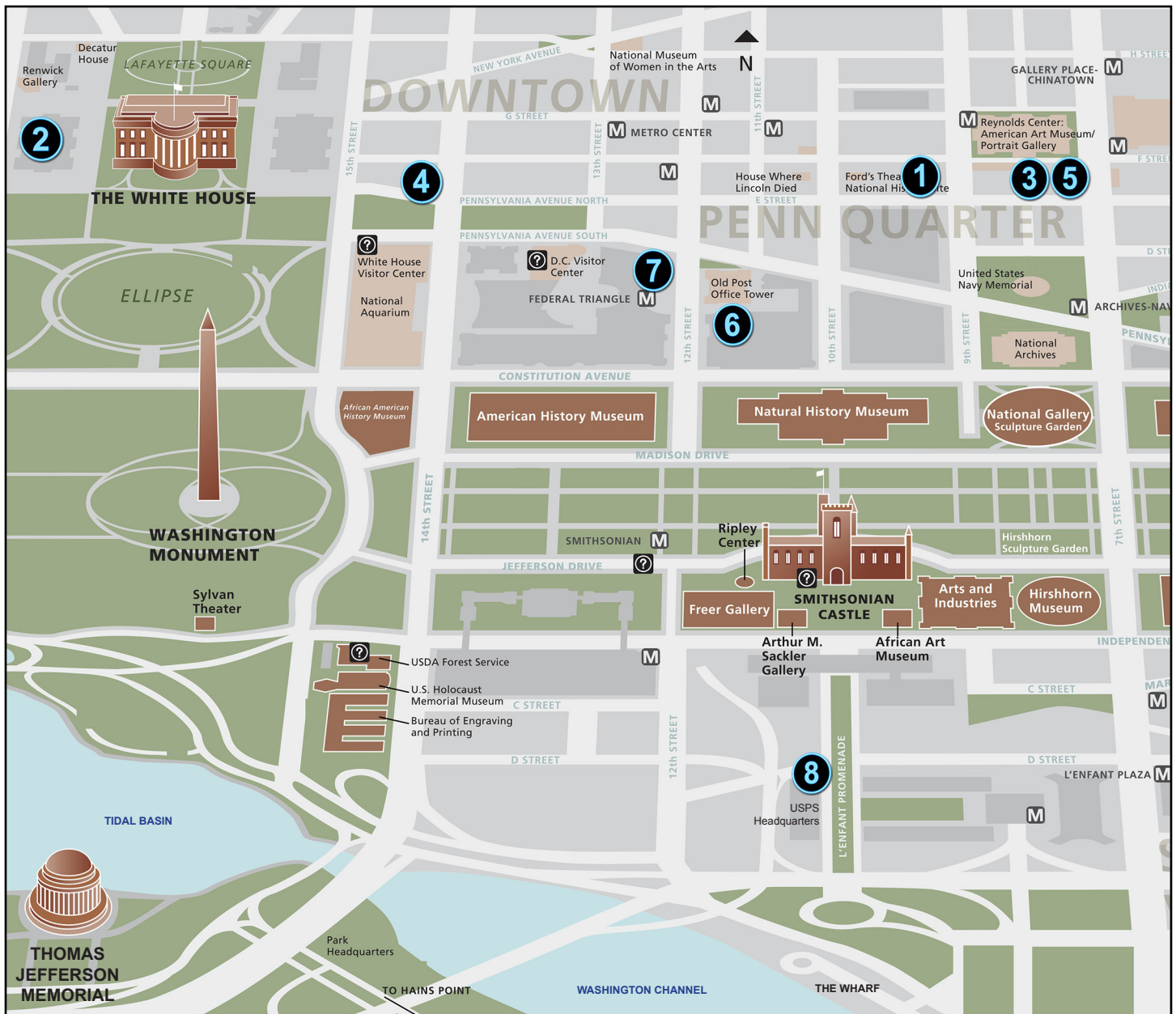
⑧ USPS Headquarters, 475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW, since April 1973.

The redevelopment of the L'Enfant Plaza area in the 1960s was one of the first urban renewal projects in the U.S. – a planned mix of residential, retail, and office space. Construction of the building was completed in August 1971; it was originally intended to house media organizations. In 1972, the Postal Service purchased the L'Enfant Plaza building for its headquarters. It was designed by the Czech American architect Vlastimil Koubek. It has more than one million square feet of interior space, including a multi-level parking garage underneath the building. The main lobby is paneled with 18½ foot slabs of Travertine marble mined in Persia and fabricated in Italy.

HISTORIAN
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE
MAY 2020

Notes:

1. Charles S. Bradley, *The Bradley Family and the Times in Which They Lived* (Washington, DC: Columbia Historical Society, 1903), 130-133, <https://archive.org/details/jstor-40066823> (accessed May 19, 2020).
 2. Ibid.
 3. *Annual Report of the Postmaster General, 1838*, 667.
- All images prior to 1973 courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



Map courtesy of the National Park Service

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- ❶ Dr. John Crocker's House, June 1800 to late 1801
- ❷ Public Building West of the President's House, 1801 to late 1812
- ❸ Blodget's Hotel, late 1812 to December 15, 1836
- ❹ Fuller's Hotel, December 1836 to December 1841
- ❺ General Post Office Building, 701 E Street, NW, 1841 to 1899
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