

Happy 50th Birthday Orville and Wilbur Wright Buildings

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On Friday November 22, 1963, Washington, DC, and Baily's Cross Roads, VA-based FAA employees began moving into their new headquarters building at 800 Independence Ave., SW. Despite the dreary and rainy day, employees expressed excitement about finally having the entire headquarters operation located in the same building. Moving day, a much anticipated event, however, quickly became somber as news of President John F. Kennedy's assassination became known. Despite the tragedy, and as helicopters could be heard above returning the president's family to the White House, FAA employees continued to move into their new home.



Dispensary and Emergency

Prior to the move into the new FAA building, employees were scattered around the city in 9 locations. They worked in World War II era temporary buildings located between Constitution and Independence Avenues. Those buildings, according to many, housed some of the biggest rats in DC. In addition to the temporary buildings, agency personnel also worked out of the Mather Building at 916 G Street, NW, and the Columbian Building at 416 5th St., NW. The administrator's offices could be in the Dispensary and Emergency Hospital at 1711 New York Avenue.

Preparations for the building that eventually became FAA headquarters had been in the works long before there was a FAA or even a CAA. Between 1930 and 1941, the federal government began purchasing parcels of land along Independence Ave., eventually amassing a five-acre site. Building design for the FOB 10A-B complex began in 1956, and in 1957 the General Services Administration (GSA) designated the buildings for general office space.

When the Federal Aviation Agency began operations in December 1958, Administrator "Pete" Quesada began lobbying for the FOB 10A-B complex for the new agency. His efforts succeeded and in August 1959, GSA advised FAA that it would be assigned to FOB 10A and to 142,000 square feet in FOB 10B. Since FAA would occupy both buildings an underground tunnel would connect the two. NASA, also created in 1958, would occupy the rest of FOB 10B.



FOB 10A-B construction site

In 1960 Congress approved FOB 10A-B as FAA and NASA headquarters and appropriated \$38,326,500 for the project. GSA determined construction of the two buildings would be handled

as one project. With funding set, GSA hoped to get construction started as soon as possible. On July 19, 1960, GSA contacted FAA and gave the agency three weeks to submit special requirements for the new building (clinic, auditorium, conference rooms, administrator's suites, library, credit union, a basic structural pad on top of the building for later construction of a helipad, etc.), instead of the normal four months for that type of activity. GSA opened construction bids on December 20, 1960, and awarded joint venture architectural and engineering contracts for Federal Office Building 10A and B to Holabird & Root & Burgee, Chicago, IL, and Carroll, Grisdale & Van Alen, Philadelphia, PA, on January 3, 1961. J.W. Bateson Company, Dallas, TX, served as the general contractor for the project.

Much to FAA's chagrin, GSA recalled the FAA space in FOB 10B and reassigned it to NASA in July 1961. To accommodate the loss of FOB10B, GSA agreed to relocate FAA's printing plant and photographic and vibration laboratory to Building 159 in the Naval Weapons Plant at 2nd and M streets, SW (Washington Navy Yard), and to hire a design firm to recommend how to best use the space in FOB 10A. It fell to Designs for Business, a New York City interior design firm, to figure out how to fit all of FAA's employees (based on projected 1966 staffing of 3,963 people) into the one space. The design firm, however, determined only 3,245 people could be accommodated in the building. And, that could only be accomplished by reducing the GSA average space use of 153.3 square feet per person to 132 square feet per person (the per person footage included conference rooms, mail room, message centers, etc.). In addition, by having only a few individual offices and keeping the areas along the windows as open bays, more employees could be accommodated. The FAA agreed to the plan, and in effect, pioneered what became today's cubicle villages, minus the partitions.



Interior of new FAA HQ building

Employees were allocated a 5x5 foot workspace, division chiefs occupied 15x20 foot offices, and assistant division chiefs and branch chiefs had 10x15 foot offices. Employee work areas were located in 150-foot wide areas centered on each floor and extending from one end of the building to another. As FAA explained, "the outer work areas near windows will be the most spacious, well lighted, pleasant places to work in the building." The design, according to FAA officials, "permits easy movement throughout the building. The uncluttered straight

corridors will cut walking time to a minimum. It will take 1 minute to walk from front to back and only 2 ½ minutes to walk the length of the building." Each floor had a different paint scheme designed to be a visual "traffic direction system," which allowed people entering the building or moving within it to find their way to the various floors, branches, and sections through the medium of color.

The first floor of the building housed the receptionist, personnel recruitment office, an exhibit area, mail room, message center, kitchen area, and press room. The first-floor press room, “is handy for newsmen hurrying to make a deadline” after press conferences, and “after conferring with FAA officials on a ‘hot’ project.” The second floor cafeteria provided hot and cold meals in three serving lines. Four hot meal specials were featured daily. The cafeteria also featured a bakery where employees could purchase pastries, pies, cakes, and bread. A separate executive dining room was located on another floor.



The new building was GSA’s largest building to date (FOB 10B the smallest):

- 1,250,000 gross square feet with approximately 531,000 net usable square feet
- 433 feet long
- 213 wide
- 150 feet high
- 2 basement floors
- 10 floors above ground level
- 1,008 windows, each approximately 8x8 feet
- Window frames and trim made of bronze
- Concrete and steel structure faced with white marble
- Cost \$22,640,984

Postscript: On April 30, 2004, President George W. Bush signed legislation into law renaming FOB 10A and 10B after Orville and Wilbur Wright. The measure, approved by Congress earlier in the year, renamed the agency’s Federal Building 10A at 800 Independence Ave., SW, the Orville Wright Federal Building, and Federal Building 10B at 600 Independence Ave., SW, as the Wilbur Wright Federal Building. FAA officially rededicated the buildings on July 8.