



## JOHN MINOR WISDOM U.S. COURT OF APPEALS BUILDING

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA



AS STEWARD OF MORE THAN 460 HISTORIC BUILDINGS PROVIDING 61 MILLION SQUARE FEET OF SPACE, THE U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (GSA) IS PLEASED TO CELEBRATE AMERICA'S ARCHITECTURAL TREASURES THROUGH THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS HERITAGE PROGRAM.

HISTORICALLY, FEDERAL PUBLIC BUILDINGS WERE DESIGNED TO WELCOME VISITORS AND TO CONVEY THE IMPORTANT ROLE THE GOVERNMENT PLAYED IN THE DAILY LIVES OF ITS CITIZENS. INTEGRATED INTO THE DESIGN OF MANY OF THESE BUILDINGS ARE INSCRIPTIONS AND WORKS OF ART DEPICTING THE CIVIL FUNCTIONS HOUSED WITHIN THEM. IT IS A TESTAMENT TO THE DURABILITY OF THESE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS THAT MANY OF THESE BUILDINGS CONTINUE TO SERVE THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY WERE ORIGINALLY BUILT, WHILE OTHERS DEMONSTRATE THE ABILITY OF HISTORIC PUBLIC BUILDINGS TO SERVE NEW FUNCTIONS. AS PART OF ITS COMMITMENT TO URBAN REINVESTMENT AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION, GSA IS WORKING TO MAINTAIN THE ARCHITECTURAL EXCELLENCE OF AMERICA'S PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND ALSO KEEP THEM SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE. JOINING ITS FEDERAL PARTNERS IN SUPPORT OF PRESERVE AMERICA, EXECUTIVE ORDER 13287, GSA IS FOSTERING INCREASED PUBLIC USE, ENJOYMENT, AND APPRECIATION OF ITS HISTORIC BUILDINGS. GSA CONTINUES THE TRADITION OF BUILDING TOMORROW'S PUBLIC LANDMARKS THROUGH ITS DESIGN EXCELLENCE PROGRAM.

ABOVE:  
PLASTER WALL ORNAMENT IN LOBBY

COVER:  
THE LOBBY FEATURES A VAULTED CEILING SUPPORTED BY TUSCAN COLUMNS  
ALL PHOTOS: CAROL M. HIGHSMITH PHOTOGRAPHY, INC.



U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ARCHITECT  
CENTER FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS  
PUBLIC BUILDINGS HERITAGE PROGRAM

U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

## BUILDING HISTORY

THE JOHN MINOR WISDOM U.S. COURT OF APPEALS BUILDING ORIGINALLY SERVED AS THE U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURTHOUSE. IN 1908, THE NEW YORK ARCHITECTURAL FIRM HALE AND ROGERS WON A DESIGN COMPETITION FOR THE BUILDING AND U.S. TREASURY DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS APPROVED THE PLANS IN 1909. WORKERS BROKE GROUND LATER THAT YEAR ON THE SITE, WHICH ENCOMPASSES THE BLOCK BOUNDED BY LAFAYETTE, CAMP, MAGAZINE, AND CAPDEVILLE STREETS OVERLOOKING LAFAYETTE SQUARE. THE DATE 1912 IS INCISED ON THE FRIEZE ON THE LAFAYETTE STREET SIDE, BUT THE INTERIOR WAS NOT FINISHED UNTIL 1915, WITH EMPLOYEES OCCUPYING THEIR OFFICES THE FOLLOWING YEAR. ORIGINALLY, THE POST OFFICE OCCUPIED THE ENTIRE FIRST FLOOR, WHILE THE DISTRICT COURT AND COURT OF APPEALS WERE LOCATED ON THE SECOND FLOOR. EXECUTIVE BRANCH AGENCIES WERE ON THE THIRD LEVEL.

IN 1961, NEEDING ADDITIONAL SPACE, THE POST OFFICE MOVED TO A NEW FACILITY. TWO YEARS LATER, THE COURTS ALSO VACATED. THE BUILDING WAS UNOCCUPIED UNTIL 1965, WHEN IT SERVED AS A PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL FOR THREE YEARS AFTER HURRICANE BETSY DESTROYED McDONOUGH 35 HIGH SCHOOL. BETWEEN 1971 AND 1972, THE BUILDING UNDERWENT AN EXTENSIVE RESTORATION. UPON COMPLETION, THE FIFTH CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS RETURNED TO THE BUILDING AS ITS ONLY TENANT. THE BUILDING WAS LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES IN 1974 AND HAS BEEN FEATURED IN SEVERAL FILMS AND TELEVISION SHOWS.

IN 1994, THE BUILDING WAS RENAMED TO HONOR JOHN MINOR WISDOM, A RESPECTED JUDGE WHO SERVED ON THE FIFTH CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS FROM 1957 UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1999. WISDOM STRONGLY PROMOTED CIVIL RIGHTS AND ISSUED LANDMARK DECISIONS THAT SUPPORTED SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND VOTER RIGHTS. IN 1993, PRESIDENT WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON AWARDED HIM THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM, THE NATION'S HIGHEST CIVILIAN HONOR.

DURING HURRICANE KATRINA IN 2005, WIND AND RAIN DAMAGED THE BUILDING, BUT THERE WAS NO FLOODING. THE FIFTH CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS JUDGES AND STAFF BRIEFLY RELOCATED TO OTHER CITIES AND TOWNS IN THE REGION BECAUSE OF DAMAGE AND POWER OUTAGES, BUT RETURNED TO THE BUILDING FOUR MONTHS LATER. IN 2000 AND 2007, THE BUILDING WAS IDENTIFIED AS NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT IN TWO NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, CIVIL RIGHTS, NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK THEME STUDIES. IN 2015, GSA AND BUILDING TENANTS CELEBRATED THE BUILDING'S CENTENNIAL.

SCULPTURE REPRESENTING  
HISTORY, AGRICULTURE,  
INDUSTRY, AND ARTS



## ARCHITECTURE

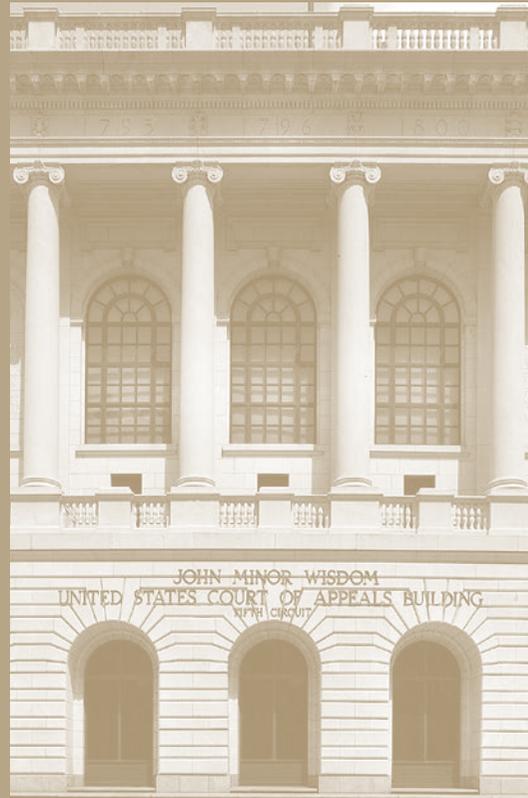
THE JOHN MINOR WISDOM U.S. COURT OF APPEALS BUILDING IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE REVIVAL STYLE OF ARCHITECTURE. DURING ITS CONSTRUCTION, WRITER RUSSELL F. WHITEHEAD CALLED IT “THE MOST IMPORTANT PUBLIC BUILDING OF THE NEW SOUTH.” THE BUILDING WAS CONSTRUCTED WITH REGIONAL BUILDING MATERIALS, INCLUDING MISSISSIPPI AND LOUISIANA PINE, TENNESSEE AND GEORGIA MARBLE, AND LOUISIANA GUM.

THE MONUMENTAL THREE-STORY BUILDING IS FACED IN WHITE CHEROKEE, GEORGIA, MARBLE ATOP A GRAY GRANITE BASE. THE FIRST STORY IS ARTICULATED WITH DEEPLY INCISED HORIZONTAL STRIATIONS, WHILE THE MARBLE ON THE UPPER STORIES IS CUT IN SMOOTH ASHLAR BLOCKS. ROUND-ARCH OPENINGS DOMINATE THE FIRST STORY. DRAMATIC IONIC COLONNADES ON THE CAMP AND MAGAZINE STREET ELEVATIONS SUPPORT A CORNICE INSCRIBED WITH THE NAMES OF CHIEF JUSTICES OF THE SUPREME COURT.

PROJECTING CORNER PAVILIONS RISE SLIGHTLY ABOVE THE ROOFLINE. EACH PAVILION CONTAINS AN ORNATE ARCHED OPENING FLANKED BY FREESTANDING AND ATTACHED MARBLE COLUMNS STRIATED TO MATCH THE PATTERN ON THE STREET LEVEL. THE COLUMNS SUPPORT ENTABLATURES THAT INCLUDE CLASSICAL BALUSTRADES. WINDOWS WITH ORNATELY CARVED HOODS FEATURING SPLIT PEDIMENTS AND EAGLE-AND-SHIELD MOTIFS ARE DIRECTLY ABOVE THE ARCHED OPENINGS. IONIC PILASTERS SEPARATE WINDOWS ON THE UPPER STORIES OF THE PAVILIONS. A BALUSTRADE RUNS BETWEEN EACH OF THE



PAVILIONS AT THE ROOFLINE, TOPPING THE RECESSED PORTION OF EACH ELEVATION. OTHER EXTERIOR ELEMENTS TYPICAL TO THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE REVIVAL STYLE OF ARCHITECTURE INCLUDE CLASSICAL FEATURES SUCH AS PEDIMENTS, TRIGLYPHS, AND DENTILS, WHICH ARE INTERSPERSED WITH FOLIATED AND FLORAL DESIGNS. A UNIQUE DETAIL IS THE ARCH KEYSTONES THAT HAVE CARVED FISH-SCALE PATTERNS.



LEFT: CLASSICAL DETAILS INCLUDE THE TWO-STORY IONIC COLONNADE

FAR LEFT: A DECORATIVE CARTOUCHE TOPS THE BUILDING

RIGHT: COLOSSAL ROOF SCULPTURE

BELOW: COURTROOM FEATURING AN ORNATE PLASTER CEILING AND CORINTHIAN PILASTERS

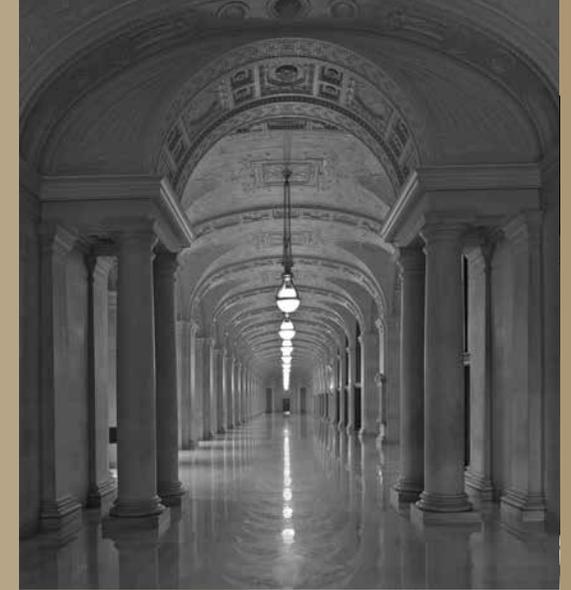


PERHAPS THE MOST STRIKING EXTERIOR FEATURES OF THE BUILDING ARE THE GROUPINGS OF FOUR COLOSSAL STATUES PLACED AT EACH OF THE BUILDING’S CORNERS. THESE COPPER AND BRONZE SCULPTURES ARE TITLED *HISTORY*, *AGRICULTURE*, *INDUSTRY*, AND *ARTS*.

EACH FEMALE FIGURE HOLDS AN ITEM ASSOCIATED WITH THE CONCEPT IT REPRESENTS. *HISTORY* WEARS A BONNET; *AGRICULTURE* HOLDS A CORNUCOPIA; *INDUSTRY* HOLDS A TOOL; AND *ARTS* HOLDS A FLOWER. THE FIGURES ARE SEATED AROUND AN ARMILLARY SPHERE BANDED BY THE SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC. EACH SCULPTURE IS TWELVE FEET HIGH AND WEIGHS ONE TON. THE RENOWNED PICCIRILLI BROTHERS, EXPERT MARBLE CARVERS WHO ALSO EXECUTED DANIEL CHESTER FRENCH’S STATUE OF PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL, CREATED THE SCULPTURES FROM DRAWINGS BY ARCHITECT JAMES GAMBLE ROGERS.

THE EMPHASIS OF THE 1971 TO 1972 RESTORATION EFFORT WAS THE IMPRESSIVE PUBLIC INTERIOR SPACES, WHICH WERE RETURNED TO THEIR ORIGINAL GRANDEUR. THE FIRST-FLOOR LOBBY IS AN L-SHAPED SPACE WITH MARBLE COLUMNS THAT SUPPORT AN ELABORATE CAST-PLASTER VAULTED CEILING. THE CEILING IS RICHLY DECORATED WITH BAS-RELIEF FLORAL MEDALLIONS AND MOTIFS, GEOMETRIC KEY DESIGNS, AND ALLEGORICAL FIGURES. SPHERICAL LIGHTS ARE HELD IN PLACE BY BRONZE PENDANT FIXTURES THAT DESCEND FROM THE VAULTED CEILING. THE LAW LIBRARY OCCUPIES THE ORIGINAL POSTAL WORK AREA ON THE FIRST FLOOR.

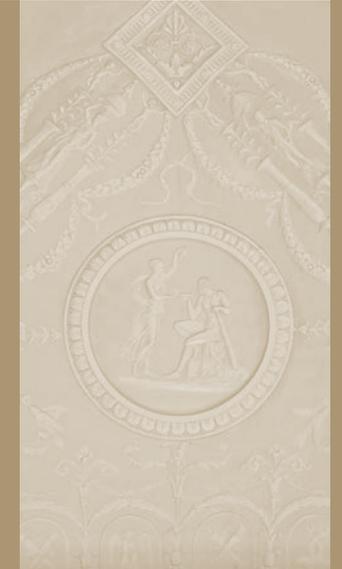
THREE COURTROOMS, EACH WITH AN ENTRY LOBBY WITH MARBLE WAINSCOT WALLS, ARE LOCATED ON THE SECOND FLOOR. THE COURTROOMS ARE PANELED IN POLISHED GUMWOOD, AND BRONZE CHANDELIERS HANG FROM THE CEILING. DISTINCTIVE WALL SCONCES, WHICH HAVE LARGE WHITE GLOBES SUPPORTED BY EITHER CAST-BRONZE EAGLES OR SNAKES, ILLUMINATE THE SPACES. THE IMPRESSIVE CENTRAL EN BANC COURTROOM WAS DESIGNED TO SEAT ALL OF THE ACTIVE JUDGES ON THE COURT OF APPEALS SIMULTANEOUSLY SO THAT THEY CAN HEAR IMPORTANT CASES TOGETHER. THE PLASTER CEILING FEATURES MEDALLIONS AND OTHER SYMBOLS AND HAS BEEN FINISHED WITH A BRONZE GLAZE.



ABOVE: FIRST-FLOOR LOBBY WITH ORIGINAL LIGHT FIXTURES

RIGHT: RICHLY DECORATED LOBBY CEILING

BELOW: JOHN MINOR WISDOM U.S. COURT OF APPEALS BUILDING



### BUILDING FACTS

LOCATION:  
600 CAMP STREET

ARCHITECT:  
HALE AND ROGERS

CONSTRUCTION DATES:  
1909–1915

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE:  
ITALIAN RENAISSANCE REVIVAL

LANDMARK STATUS:  
LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

PRIMARY MATERIALS:  
MARBLE

PROMINENT FEATURES:  
IONIC COLONNADES  
GREAT HALL  
ROOFTOP SCULPTURES



1909

CONSTRUCTION COMMENCES

1912

ROOF SCULPTURES  
INSTALLED

1915

CONSTRUCTION COMPLETED  
AT A COST OF \$2 MILLION  
AND BUILDING OCCUPIED

1961

POST OFFICE  
VACATES BUILDING

1972

RESTORATION COMPLETED

1974

BUILDING LISTED IN  
THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
OF HISTORIC PLACES

1994

BUILDING RENAMED TO  
HONOR JOHN MINOR WISDOM

2000

BUILDING IDENTIFIED AS  
NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT  
FOR NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARK DESIGNATION

2015

BUILDING CENTENNIAL  
IS CELEBRATED