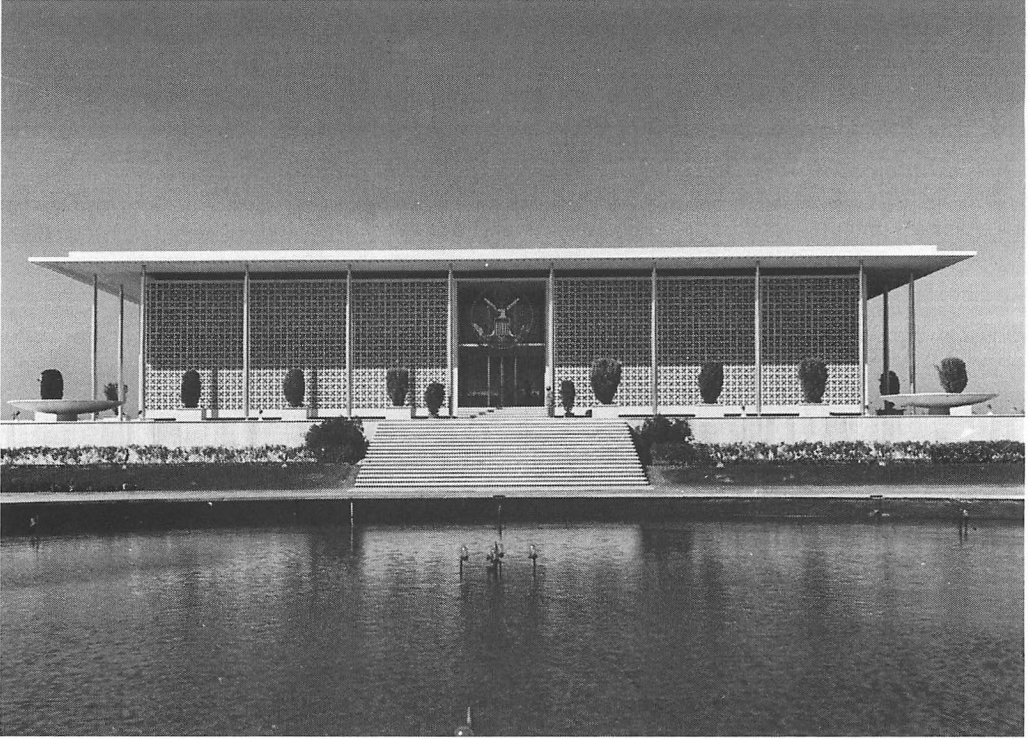


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1. New Delhi, U.S. Embassy, Edward Durell Stone, 1954–59. Photograph courtesy U.S. Department of State.

The State Department and the Politics of Preservation

Why Few U.S. Embassies Are Landmarks

It is just possible that the U.S. State Department really doesn't want to know its history. This curious observation occurs to me after decades of piecing together the unexplored past associated with the most tangible evidence of America's overseas diplomatic presence: its embassies. Those buildings cannot speak for themselves, but when documented they tell a remarkable story of political and cultural aspiration and diplomatic accomplishment set amidst an ever changing and challenging landscape.

One would think that knowing as much as possible about these buildings would be a priority for the department that buys, builds, and maintains properties overseas. One would think so particularly when spokesmen for the department publicly state that caring for properties that are recognized as historically significant furthers its diplomatic agenda. But this is not necessarily so.

It certainly was not so back in the 1950s and '60s when records pertaining to embassies were periodically "destroyed and thrown out," according to William McCullough, assistant director for building and design at the State Department's Office of Foreign Buildings Operations (FBO).¹ Interviewed in 1992, McCullough described how "nobody paid attention" when things regularly disappeared. One administrative officer, he said, packed up old deeds to historic properties and other papers, possibly documents pertaining to Jefferson's tenure as ambassador, and simply took them with him when he left FBO.

This was certainly peculiar as records management procedure, but not unusual for an office routinely ignoring the mandate to send its official records to the National Archives for processing and storage. FBO preferred instead to stash one-of-a-kind archives in desk drawers or what was ominously described to this researcher as "off-site." The failure to convey records to NARA is the main reason researchers, including many scholars from overseas, can find so little about the acquisition, design, and construction of U.S. diplomatic buildings among State Department archives at College Park.

Linking Modern Architecture to Public Diplomacy

William Slayton took the helm of FBO in 1978. What was unusual about Slayton, according to McCullough, was that he was "one director who desperately wanted to have a history written."²

To that end, his interests coincided with those of Bates Lowry, director of the National Building Museum, who proposed an opening exhibition on U.S. embassy architecture as a way of launching Washington's first and only museum dedicated to buildings.

In 1980, Slayton agreed to collaborate with Lowry on an exhibition. As Lowry's sole curator, I huddled with him in a corner of the still unrestored Pension Building trying to imagine how to gather information on buildings neither of us could identify. He assured me that nothing had been written on the subject. He was right.

Slayton came to FBO from the American Institute of Architects, the professional organization of U.S. architects. Although not an architect himself, he was eager to celebrate the contributions private architects had made to the State Department's architectural legacy. Lowry hoped to present mid-century modern masterpieces, such as Edward Durrell Stone's popularly acclaimed landmark in New Delhi or Eero Saarinen's more hotly debated one in London; Slayton hoped to include embassy work in progress by architects he had commissioned, including Frederic Bassetti, Frank Gehry, George Hartman, Richard Meier, James Stewart Polshek, Ben Thompson, and Harry Wolf.³

At FBO back in 1980, librarian/archivist Lore Mika presided over a note card collection, hand-written job lists, boxed slide files, and a wondrous Lectriever, jam-packed with everything from snapshots of plumbing to professional photographs of finished projects by architects from Gropius and Breuer to those with no names at all. While perusing her records, I learned from Ms. Mika that she was the wife of a U.S. Foreign Service officer posted to Ouagadougou. Working with her was the beginning of my education in the geography of the State Department.

But I quickly found that information on those lists and cards was incomplete and not accurate enough to be used as the basis for an exhibition. The files comingled projects that were built with those that were never built. John Carl Warnecke's embassy project in Bangkok and Charles Goodman's in Reykjavik, two that were never built, were listed among those that were.⁴ And incorrect architects were linked to some projects—Mies van de Rohe was listed for Mexico City on one list when that commission went to Southwestern Architects, and Goodman's name was paired with Lima, when the architects for that project were Keyes & Lethbridge.⁵ It was also almost impossible to distinguish among projects for which programs had changed, as occurred in Tangier where architect Hugh Stubbins designed two totally different projects, years apart.

For a variety of reasons, including a lack of funds and bad timing, possibly the result of the 444-day hostage crisis

centered on the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the museum canceled its plans for the exhibition. There was, however, an unexpected windfall. On leaving the museum, I eventually returned to graduate school, wrote a doctoral dissertation based on a paper I published in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (1990), and expanded that dissertation into a book, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (1998).

So Slayton got a history after all—if that was what he really wanted. Those who knew him professionally thought he was maybe more interested in furthering the interests of star architects with high-profile commissions abroad than he was in calling attention to the design dimension of public diplomacy. The several FBO directors who followed him were Foreign Service officers who were less expansive and more practical minded. All were open with historical records, but what they had to share was limited. Even the minutes of the celebrated architectural review panel, among the most valuable of the historical records stored at FBO, were incomplete on their own.⁶

State Historians Do Not Chronicle Buildings

For a more complete picture of State Department operations, I turned to its Historian's Office, assuming that an office, staffed by historians, would share my enthusiasm for fact. It did, but there was a caveat—what the Office of the Historian focuses on is the publication of the official documentary record of U.S. foreign relations, and compiling and publishing those records is such a cosmic endeavor that there is no apparent time or money for foreign relations involving buildings. Dr. William Z. Slany was historian of the Department of State when I was most involved in my research; it was he who told me that building history was simply beyond the purview of what his office could handle. But instead of suggesting that my project was unimportant, he enthusiastically approved it and directed his staff historians to assist me however they could. In the days before the Internet, that help was crucial. I could not have pieced together the history without the copies of internal (not classified!) State/FBO correspondence they shared or the ongoing fact-checking support he and his staff provided.⁷

It is worth noting, however, that within the State Department the Historian's Office operates within the Bureau of Public Affairs, reporting to the under secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, who reports directly to the secretary of state. By contrast, FBO reports to the under secretary for Management, a different division entirely. Thus Dr. Slany had no connection whatsoever to FBO. Neither he nor his successors were in any position to recommend archival improvements there—or anything else, for that matter. How FBO kept its records (or did not) was its own business.

Cohen Introduces Heritage Mandate

For FBO to change its own relationship to history, change had to come from within the management sphere itself, and that is precisely what happened. Under Secretary for Management Bonnie Cohen came to State in 1997 from the Interior Department, where she served as assistant secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget. Before that, she had been at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, where she had honed a strong interest in history and preservation. At State, Cohen found herself responsible not only for FBO but also for the Foreign Service Institute and bureaus related to diplomatic security, administration, human resources, the State Department's diplomatic reception rooms, foreign missions in D.C., and more. She reported directly to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

It was Under Secretary Cohen who led the drive that first made "preservation" a respectable word at the State Department, if not a totally workable or trusted policy priority, and it was she who facilitated the creation of the *Secretary's Register of Culturally Significant Property*, an ambitious effort launched in 2000 to publicize diplomatic holdings of exceptional importance and spotlight the Department's rich and largely unrecognized architectural and cultural history.

Among Cohen's early moves as under secretary was her implementation of a new policy aimed at bringing foreign buildings into alignment with President Bill Clinton's 1996 Executive Order on Federal Buildings in the United States, an order that directed the government to locate domestic federal facilities in older buildings in downtown areas to stimulate growth in those areas and save historic structures.⁸ She directed FBO to do much the same thing with foreign buildings—to utilize and maintain, where possible, "historic properties and districts, especially those located in central business areas," and to do so in accordance with "guidelines established in 1990 by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects," as long as those guidelines did not conflict with preservation guidelines of the host nation.

On March 16, 1998, Cohen wrote to Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, citing the new policy as an "important step linking the domestic building policy of the United States with our operations overseas." She explained, "We have, with the help of the Trust . . . done our best to take account of preservation as we, the country's owner and operator of buildings overseas, do the United States' business."⁹ Deputy Assistant Secretary Patsy Thomasson signed the directive on behalf of FBO.¹⁰ But just five months later, in August, terrorists attacked U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam killing 224 people and injuring more than

SECRETARY'S REGISTER OF CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT PROPERTY (in order listed):

Tangier, (former) legation, Morocco (2001)
Prague, *Schoenborn Palace*, chancery, Czech Republic (2001)
Tokyo, ambassador's residence, Japan (2001)
Seoul, legation, embassy guest house, South Korea (2001)
Rome, *Palazzo Margherita & Twin Villas*, chancery, Italy (2001)
Paris, *Hôtel Talleyrand*, chancery annex, Paris, France (2001)
London, *Winfield House*, ambassador's residence, England (2001)
Buenos Aires, *Palacio Bosch*, ambassador's residence, Argentina (2002)
Tirana, chancery and former residence, Albania (2004)
New Delhi, embassy compound, India (2004)
Hanoi, ambassador's residence, Vietnam (2004)
Oslo, *Villa Otium*, ambassador's residence, Norway (2004)
Alexandria, American Center, Egypt (2006)
Madrid, *Byne House*, DCM residence, Spain (2006)
Manila, chancery, The Philippines (2006)
Athens, chancery, Greece (2006)
Brussels, *Truman Hall* (NATO), Belgium (2006)
Rome, *Villa Taverna*, ambassador's residence, Italy (2008)
Prague, *Villa Petschek*, ambassador's residence, Czech Republic (2008)
Paris, *Hôtel Rothschild*, ambassador's residence, France (2008)
Baguio, ambassador's residence, The Philippines (2012)
Florence, *Palazzo Canevaro*, consulate, Italy (2012)
Moscow, *Spaso House*, ambassador's residence, Russia (2012)
Tripoli, The American Cemetery, Libya (2012)
Washington, D.C., *Blair House*, diplomatic guest house, United States (2012)
Casablanca, *Villa Mirador*, consulate general's residence, Morocco (2014)

2. *Secretary's Register of Culturally Significant Property*, 2014.

4,000; the optimistic idea of locating new U.S. embassies in densely built-up historic downtown districts quickly faded as a planning option.

This was probably the first time, however, that anyone proposed applying Interior guidelines to State properties (aside, perhaps, from the aberrant listing of the old Tangier Legation on the National Register of Historic Places). And it was the first time that FBO officially recognized "preservation" as a planning priority. Until that time, no one at FBO had dared to utter that very charged word.

After all, many at FBO erroneously equated preservation with protection and/or permanence, neither of which were deemed well suited to diplomatic facilities that needed to respond to changes in foreign policy and be able to adapt to a rapidly changing political landscape. There may have been pride in having the Tangier Legation listed on the National Register and also designated a National Historic Landmark, but few at State wanted constraints on their properties imposed

by Interior, a Cabinet-level agency with a different outlook and agenda.

Architects List State's Historic Properties

There were individuals, however, who championed creating some sort of comparable list as a way to recognize the large number of historically significant properties owned and leased by the State Department. Chief architect Patrick Collins was perhaps the most ardent supporter of this idea within FBO. With the addition of preservation architect Kevin Lee Sarring to his staff and support from those at FBO concerned with art and furnishings, Collins was able to push his idea forward with Cohen as under secretary.

First, Collins created an ad hoc committee of cultural resource professionals within FBO. Sarring, assisted by architect Robert Parke, began by identifying ninety-five key properties using modified preservation criteria such as those in use at Interior. By July 1998, FBO had expanded that collection into an inventory of some 155 properties identified as architecturally, culturally, or historically significant.¹¹

Not only did that initial list include shared cultural assets such as the Palazzo Corpi in Istanbul, one of America's first embassies when purchased in 1907, and Spaso House in Moscow or the former Rothschild mansion in Paris, both purchased for use as ambassador's residences, but it also included landmarks that gave American diplomacy high visibility at the height of the Cold War when the State Department commissioned prominent modernists to design new embassies in Accra, Athens, Baghdad, Dublin, Karachi, London, New Delhi, The Hague, and other world capitals.

That first list of 155 properties was not exhaustive, but it was broadly inclusive—listing some buildings that had been already sold or abandoned, such as Harry Weese's in Accra (the U.S. Embassy had moved out in 1983)—underscoring its intended value as a historical resource.¹² This is a key point, because later Departmental efforts clearly sought to downplay the scope of the original intent.

When published in August 1998, *The Architecture of Diplomacy* included chronological lists of State Department properties, dates, names of architects, and history—most previously unexamined. Under Secretary Cohen greeted the book with enthusiasm and hosted a State Department event in its honor. Based on that work, she asked me to submit a proposal that could be used as a prototype for an inventory of what she called “heritage properties.”

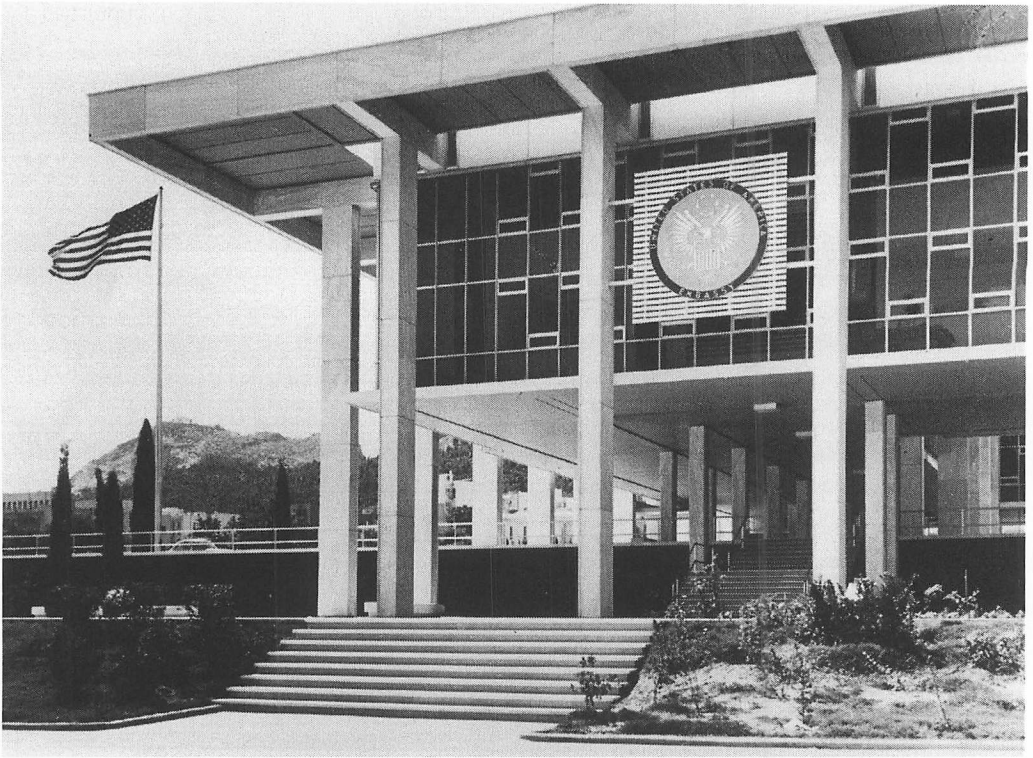
Early in 1999, I submitted a proposal to her identifying sixteen properties that played a significant role in U.S. history



3. Accra, former U.S. Embassy. Harry Weese (1956–59). Embassy decommissioned in 1983 and photographed here in 2001. Photograph copyright E. Gill Lui, 2001.

as a result of architectural and/or diplomatic distinction or because of local distinction of some other sort.¹³ Thinking that a representative sample would be best, I selected properties that represented each of State's geographic bureaus and also each of the major types of buildings for which FBO was responsible: residences and office buildings; purchased/leased and purpose-built; and historic landmarks with local significance versus those with specific ties to themes of U.S. (e.g., the Barbary Wars) or world history (e.g. mid-century modern architecture). I did this unaware of parallel efforts ongoing at FBO. The sixteen examples included: Havana ER; Helsinki EOB; Istanbul COB *Palazzo Corpi*; London EOB; Moscow ER *Spaso House*; New Delhi EOB compound; Rio de Janeiro COB; Paris EO BX *Hôtel Talleyrand*; Paris ER *Hôtel Pontalba*; Prague EOB *Schoenborn Palace*; Prague ER *Petchek Palace*; Riga EOB; Shanghai COB; Tangier LEG; Tokyo DCMR; Tokyo ER.¹⁴

I learned of FBO's similar involvement in documentation efforts when I was invited to collaborate on another proposal concerning mid-century modern buildings commissioned by FBO at the heyday of its postwar building program.¹⁵ The original title on that proposal was: "U.S. Embassies Built by the State Department in New Delhi, Karachi, Baghdad, Accra, London, The Hague, Athens, and Dublin between 1954 and 1964."¹⁶ It ended up shortened to "Embassies of the Cold War:



4. Athens, U.S. Embassy. Walter Gropius/TAC (1956–61). Building currently being rehabilitated. Functions have been moved to adjacent high-security annex. Photograph courtesy U.S. Department of State.

Incubators of Contextual Modernism” when FBO submitted it for a Millennium Award honoring eight great American modernists, five of whom were also AIA Gold Medal winners.¹⁷

Albright Launches Expansive *Register* in 2000

By late in 2000, the various proposals, together with material culled from the extensive inventory FBO had already prepared, combined to form the *Secretary of State’s Register of Culturally Significant Property*. Records, including an “Action Memorandum” from Under Secretary Cohen to Secretary Albright, make it clear that the Register was never intended as a honorary list of a few notable properties, but was intended as nothing less than “an official list of overseas property, architecture and other significant objects important to the diplomatic history of the United States.”¹⁸

In her memorandum, Cohen explained that the Register was meant to be analogous to the *National Register of Historic Places* maintained by the Secretary of the Interior, and she also explicitly stated that Registry status would in no way interfere with the Department’s ability to alter or sell property. Moreover, she said, Registry status had the potential to boost property value. She cited the Office of Foreign Buildings Operations as the entity charged with implementing policies connected to the Register and its Cultural Resources Committee as the planning group that would determine inclusion based on these criteria:

1. Designation or acknowledgment by a government as a significant property
2. Part of the United States' overseas heritage
3. Association with a significant historical event of person
4. Important architecture and/or by an important architect
5. Distinctive theme or assembly
6. Unique object or visual feature
7. Archeological site

Further, Cohen asked Secretary Albright to approve developing background information on selected properties as a way of launching the project and reaching out to the diplomatic community and the larger general public, and invited the Secretary to host an inaugural ceremony.¹⁹

Just before leaving office, on January 4, 2001, Albright announced the Register at a ceremony held appropriately in the Diplomatic Reception Rooms at Main State. Standing among easels featuring posters showing seven prototype properties, she made it clear that the Register highlighted the value of more than 150 similar properties. She declared the Register a means of providing all such properties with “greater visibility and protection as landmarks” and explained that the new roster in its entirety was “part of President Clinton’s millennial effort to save America’s cultural treasures and history and promote the nation’s arts and humanities.”²⁰

The selected properties included six shared cultural assets, purchased or received as gifts by the USG for diplomatic use, and one overseas American landmark, the ambassador’s residence in Tokyo, among the earliest projects built after Congress funded site acquisition and embassy construction for the first time as part of a program to improve U.S. representation abroad. The seven shared assets included: **Tangier** Old Legation (acquired 1821); **Prague** EOB *Schoenborn Palace* (purchased 1925); **Tokyo** ER (Raymond & Magonigle, 1926–31, built by USG); **Seoul** Old Legation/Guest House (purchased 1888); **Rome** EOB *Palazzo Margherita & Twin Villas* (purchased 1946 & 1931); **Paris** EOBX *Hôtel Talleyrand* (purchased 1950); and **London** ER *Winfield House* (acquired 1946).

The optimism of that moment evaporated later that year in a series political upheavals and international explosions. What Secretary Albright aptly described as a chance to capture and share history was lost — at least then. The Register never expanded as hoped or expected, but grew only in piecemeal fashion for more than a decade, buffeted by political and personal whims. One such decision was to eliminate from consideration any property that had been sold or might be sold. That effectively erased those properties from historical memory.



5. Karachi, former U.S. Consulate General, which had been the Embassy until 1960, when Pakistan's capital moved to Islamabad. Neutra & Alexander (1955–59). This building was decommissioned in 2011. Photograph courtesy U.S. Department of State.

Some already lost in that fashion include the former U.S. Embassy in Ottawa (1928–32), a neoclassical palazzo designed by noted American architect Cass Gilbert just before he designed the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., his last major work. Other embassies similarly lost include those in Karachi, Baghdad, Accra, London, and The Hague—five of the eight identified by FBO in its 1999 millennium proposal as key landmarks of the Cold War era.²¹

OBO Narrows Register's Focus

What happened in 2001 that led to such a change in direction? After becoming secretary of state, Colin Powell reorganized FBO, installing General Charles Williams (who earned his

military title in the Army Corps of Engineers), as head of the foreign building program. Powell had Williams report directly to him, and FBO was renamed to reflect its new status as a bureau within the department. The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) formally replaced FBO on May 15, 2001. Williams, who enjoyed a panoramic view of the Kennedy Center and Main State beyond from his penthouse offices in Rosslyn, Virginia, preferred to manage a compartmentalized bureaucracy in which the individual parts could communicate only through him. He installed himself as chief operating officer and sent a clear message to subordinates to align themselves with his priorities. Openness was not among those priorities.

Responding to brutal terrorist attacks on diplomats, soldiers, and civilians in and near U.S. embassies in Beirut, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and at scores of other targets worldwide, the 1999 the Overseas Presence Advisory Panel (OPAP) had condemned the “shockingly shabby” conditions at many State Department facilities. That led Congress to enact the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act (SECCA), which codified security requirements, such as the 100-foot setback, for the first time. OBO faced challenges markedly different from those faced by its predecessor, FBO, even before those challenges multiplied again on September 11, 2001.

Pushed by Congress to come to terms with the security mandate that had been so difficult for FBO to confront, OBO transformed its building program in short order. To his credit, Williams oversaw the construction of more than fifty new embassies and consulates providing U.S. diplomats with sorely needed safe and modern workplaces. In so doing, however, he introduced a “standard embassy design” (SED), used design/build to give direct control to individual general contractors, and he allowed real estate professionals to make what were in fact diplomatic and strategic decisions about embassy location. He ultimately alienated diplomats, who condemned walled and inaccessible embassy enclaves that compromised the conduct of diplomacy.²² He also alienated architects, who played only a limited role in the design/build process used to create those enclaves. He drew further ire from design professionals when he abandoned State’s highly acclaimed architectural review panel in 2004, its fiftieth anniversary year.

Williams also seized upon the ambient fear to restrict access to records, photos, and people. Routine requests for photos of widely published embassy buildings for use even in lectures required his approval, and that approval was often denied. If Williams was apprehensive about lending photos for academic use, he was certainly not keen on expanding a Register for popular dissemination. Only ten properties were added to the historical list, which was little touted during

6. Oslo, U.S. Ambassador's Residence, *Villa Otium* (detail over entrance). Jugendstil landmark designed by Henrik Bull in 1911, purchased by USG as U.S. Legation in 1924. Photograph by Robert Loeffler, 2011.



his tenure.²³ The ten he added were: Buenos Aires ER *Palacio Bosch* (purchased 1929); Hanoi ER (purchased 1995); New Delhi EOB (Edward Durell Stone, 1954–59, built by USG); Oslo ER, former LEG, *Villa Otium* (purchased 1924); Tirana EOB (Wyeth & Sullivan, 1929, built by USG); Alexandria American Center (purchased 1962); Athens EOB (TAC, Walter Gropius, 1956–61, built by USG); Brussels U.S. Mission to NATO *Truman Hall* (acquired 1984); Madrid DCMR *Byne House* (purchased 1944); and Manila EOB (Juan M. de Guzman, 1934).²⁴

More than how many or few he added, Williams changed the list's fundamental purpose when he had it labeled "honorific" to assuage doubts about the selection process. That term appears in 2004 in a memo from Williams to Secretary Powell asking the secretary to approve adding properties in New Delhi, Tirana, Hanoi, and Oslo to the Register. In that memo, Williams included the phrase: "Registration is honorific and insures that necessary alterations preserve cultural value."²⁵ The term "honorific" appears in subsequent publications and is still used to describe the Register's purpose.

There is a big difference between a list that is intended as “an official list of overseas property, architecture and other significant objects important to the diplomatic history of the United States” and one that is merely honorific.²⁶ The U.S. Postal Service, for example, pays homage to great Americans by creating postage stamps in their honor, but USPS makes no pretense at trying to create stamps honoring all the Americans who have played important roles at making this country great. It has an *honorific* program. If the National Portrait Gallery collected only the portraits of those Americans who appeared on postage stamps, its collection would be little more than a skewed sample. We could never know our history from it— unless the point of such a history is quite different from what we, as historians, think it is. An honorific list is little more than a public relations gesture on behalf of those who compile it, awarding recognition for compliance or where there is opportunity for political gain, and denying it where there is no ostensible gain. The decision to list only currently owned property on the Register, for example, suggests that the State Department sees no reason to honor “lost” property, no matter how significant its role in American architectural, cultural, or diplomatic history. Certainly, this is a loss to historians who want to better understand our overseas presence, how it has evolved and how it is likely to change in the future. If we erase the past from our records, we can study only the present, and that is, indeed, a chilling thought.

Preservation Policy: More False Starts

Williams departed OBO in a scandal concerning the construction of the mega-embassy in Baghdad in 2007. Foreign Service officers Richard Shinnick and Adam Namm followed him as acting OBO directors and restored a sense of balance to the organization. It was under Shinnick’s tenure as OBO director, *ad interim*, that Vivien Woofter was named to coordinate a newly created Cultural Heritage Branch (CHB) within OBO.

After a forty-year career with the federal government— at GSA, the White House, and more recently as head of FBO’s interior design and furnishings division— Woofter became heritage preservation officer of the new office. In October 2008, with strong support from Under Secretary of State for Management Patrick Kennedy, Woofter organized an ambitious symposium, “Saving the Department’s Treasures”— the first program to bring together curators, conservators, preservation officers, architects, engineers, housekeepers, and interior designers to address how to care for furniture, art, and artifacts owned by the State Department.²⁷

In welcoming guests to the symposium, Under Secretary Kennedy cited the creation of the Cultural Heritage Branch as

evidence that at last “our significant properties and collections will have a permanent champion.”²⁸ With talks by experts from Winterthur and the Smithsonian, and presentations from others who shared experiences ranging from caring for antiques at England’s Waddesdon Manor to maintaining masonry at Canterbury Cathedral, the symposium covered a wide range of conservation issues.

Regarding OBO cultural assets, director Shinnick declared that the CHB would prepare maintenance programs for all properties on the Secretary’s Register and also for other assets within OBO’s purview. In addition, he said, the CHB would determine eligibility for Register listing of additional properties. As Woofter explained it, the goal of OBO’s new cultural management program was nothing less than to “develop a world class stewardship program dedicated to the proper conservation and maintenance of the Department’s culturally significant properties and assets.”²⁹

But the excitement of that moment, like several other propitious moments before it, faded fast. OBO had added three properties to its Register in 2008, five in 2012, and one in 2014, but to outside observers the additions were beginning to seem increasingly curious and even far-fetched.

The new additions included: Paris ER *Hôtel Rothschild* (purchased 1948); Prague ER *Villa Petschek* (purchased 1948); Rome ER *Villa Taverna* (purchased 1948); Baguio ER (purchased 1938); Florence COB (purchased 1947), Moscow ER *Spaso House* (purchased 1934), Tripoli The American Cemetery (1804/2004), Washington, D.C., *Blair House* (purchased 1942), and Casablanca CGR *Villa Mirador* (purchased 1947).³⁰ While some were definitely distinguished, others seemed out of place on a list that omitted so many shoo-in landmarks. One such is the former Embassy in Ottawa. Another is the splendid *Palazzo Corpi* in Istanbul, the first USG-owned diplomatic facility in Europe, still owned by the State Department but currently leased to a Turkish developer for use as a luxury hotel and private club that also accommodates a public restaurant, a bar, and the Istanbul offices of the Hollings Center for International Dialogue.

Although it makes perfect sense for OBO to list purchased/gift properties on its Register as a way of showing respect for shared cultural heritage, it makes no sense to list such properties to the exclusion of those designed by U.S. architects and built by the State Department as part of a foreign building program that has largely defined America’s overseas diplomatic presence since the early days of the Cold War. Out of the twenty-six properties on the Register, only five were built by the USG: 1) Tokyo ER and 2) Tirana ER/EOB — under



7. Istanbul, former U.S. Consulate General, *Palazzo Corpi*, now *Soho House*. Photograph copyright Caroline Mesrobian Hickman, 2015.

the auspices of the Foreign Services Buildings Commission; 3) New Delhi EOB and 4) Athens EOB—under the auspices of FBO; and 5) Manila EOB—under a special congressional appropriation. The remaining twenty-one were either acquired by gift or purchased. That suggests not only a preoccupation with acquired properties to the exclusion of those designed for the purpose of serving as diplomatic facilities, a particular challenge to American architects and engineers, but also a strong desire to use the Register as a means to win favor with host governments by citing shared assets, not as a means of documenting what is most “important to the diplomatic history of the United States.”

Essentially, it is prioritizing public diplomacy over history, if the two need to be at odds. But they need not be at odds if the Register were to expand, for example, by adding most of the 140 historic properties built by the USG and identified *The Architecture of Diplomacy*. Columbia’s Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library acquired the research papers associated with that book in 2014.³¹ OBO has yet to investigate that research collection, but the fact that OBO often finds itself searching for items, from missing pages of minutes about the original design for New Delhi to an entirely missing 1987 feasibility study for the Tokyo DCMR, does suggest that its own historical resources are incomplete. Expanding the Register and the materials that



8. Istanbul, former U.S. Consulate General, *Palazzo Corpi*, now *Soho House*. Photograph copyright Caroline Mesrobian Hickman, 2015.

support it is one way to enhance our understanding of history, to develop what Woofter earlier described as “a world class stewardship program.”

Woofter herself resurfaced in 2013 with the title “Heritage Conservation Advisor” and a new cause called the *Fund to Conserve*, a public/private partnership with the goal of raising funds to restore and maintain cultural property at embassies abroad. In its inaugural pamphlet, the Fund showed photos of old and new buildings, including the former Legation in Tangier (acquired 1821) and the new Embassy in Ottawa (1999), along with paintings, artifacts, and antiques. The little publication, also available online, raised more questions than it answered. Its definitions were vague, its agenda was unclear, and it was impossible to tell how this Fund differed from others ostensibly dedicated to similar purposes. Thinking, mistakenly, it seems, that the publication could use close editing, I submitted a list of questions/suggestions to OBO’s director at that time. My queries included these:

1. How are you defining preservation versus conservation?
2. How expansive is your definition of “culturally significant property”? Do you include art, furniture, furnishings, and also buildings and gardens? What about personal papers, photographs, maps, souvenirs, flags, representation of eagles, official seals, clothing,

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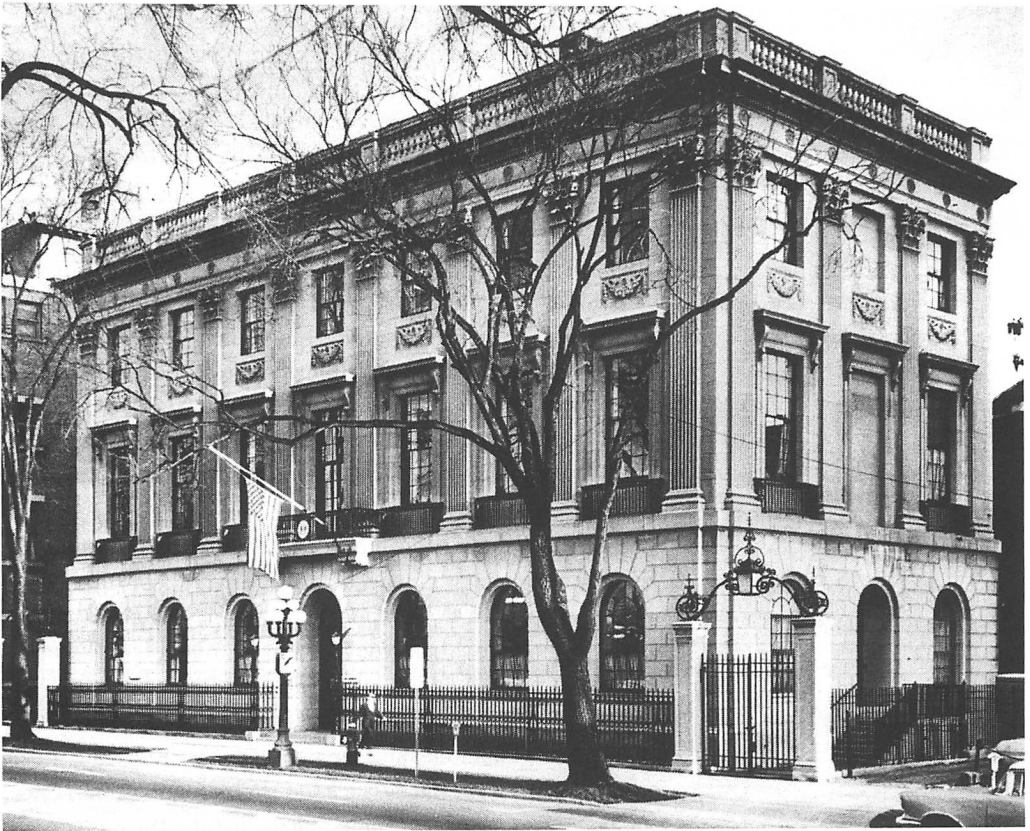
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9. Ottawa, former U.S. Embassy, previously the American Legation. Cass Gilbert (1928–32). When the U.S. Embassy moved to a new facility nearby in 1999, this building was transferred to the government of Canada. Although it was supposed to become the Portrait Gallery of Canada, that has never occurred. But the government of Canada listed it on the Canadian Register in 2010 citing heritage character derived from its architecture, its history (both American and Canadian associations), and its environmental significance. Photograph courtesy U.S. Department of State.

artifacts—more or less? Explain. This affects potential donations.

3. From your *Fund to Conserve* booklet, it is impossible to know what the Fund hopes to accomplish, who heads it, and how it differs from other groups. How does it differ from *Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies* (FAPE), for example? How does it connect to your *Art in Embassies Program*? Or to the *U.S. Diplomacy Center*, State's new museum of diplomacy that will have its own collection of artifacts and culturally significant diplomatic objects?
4. Who at OBO is responsible for reports on historic structures; how are selections made for such studies?
5. Why doesn't the Register include properties that have been sold or could be sold? Many are among the most important in terms of our architectural and diplomatic history.
6. Could OBO add historians as professional advisors, such as the architects and industry representatives included on the IAP? State's Historian's Office also has an advisory panel, but those historians do not know architecture. With more than 3,500 properties worldwide, there is plenty of history within OBO's purview. Would this not be a good idea?

State Names New Heritage “Champion”

After two years of waiting, when it seemed evident that no one at OBO wanted to answer my questions, or no one *could* answer them, a piece of mildly encouraging news emerged—once again the State Department was reorganizing its heritage mandate, creating a newly constituted Office of Cultural Heritage within OBO, and seeking a director for that office. Soon after, Tobin Tracey, AIA, a professional preservation architect, was named to fill the slot. Tracey came to OBO from the National Park Service, where since 2004 he had been responsible for the maintenance and preservation of the historic portion of the White House. A graduate of Iowa State University, with a master of arts in historic preservation from Goucher, he headed a private architectural practice based in New England for twenty years before joining the Park Service.

If I had to explain this move, I’d say that Under Secretary Kennedy decided it was time, finally, to ensure that cultural heritage does have a “permanent champion.”³² Even back in 2008, it was evident that Woofter, though indefatigable and politically savvy, could not direct such an effort by herself. Given OBO’s deeply vested interests, the advantages of bringing in outside expertise, and the necessity for up-to-date professional know-how, Tracey is a good choice for an agency once again on the verge of contemplating its history. The question is whether he will be allowed to do what he says he wants to do and deems necessary?

In an interview last November, Tracey acknowledged that he was just learning the ropes at OBO, and expressed cautious optimism about the task ahead. As he sees it, his first two challenges involve documentation: to identify culturally significant properties and to prepare what he calls “cultural significance studies” for them.³³ Together with his staff, he has already identified 130 “significant” properties from those owned or held by the State Department on long-term leases. (This compilation is most likely an updated version of the 2000 inventory—mainly the 155 properties minus those sold since that time or likely to be sold.) Using criteria drawn from Interior Department definitions, Tracey proposes to study the 130 properties to determine individual significance, to recommend additions to the existing Register, and to determine “preservation zones” to guide future improvements. The studies will form the basis for a stewardship program embracing all tangible diplomatic assets abroad, including art, antiques, furniture, landscapes, artifacts, and buildings.

“Exploring ways to make cultural assets more open to the public,” Tracey says, is his third challenge. Eager to find new ways to gather and disseminate history, he is already imagining how he might share it via embassy open houses, virtual



10. London, U.S. Embassy. Eero Saarinen (1956–60). Trimmed in gold-colored anodized aluminum with a thirty-five-foot wide eagle on top overlooking Grosvenor Square. Photograph copyright Balthazar Korab, 1960, from Library of Congress, Balthazar Korab Archive.

tours, website resources, books, or using other media. As to gathering it, he has begun talks with Oxford University and with Iowa State University about a joint project involving Iowa’s new historic preservation program, and other such projects could follow.

What Tracey cannot really discuss is the matter of transparency—one of the biggest challenges he confronts—because if his effort is to succeed as he envisions it, it needs to be open and collaborative. It needs to involve critical thinking on the multiple meanings attached to the terms *cultural asset*, *preservation*, *conservation*, and *significance*, and needs to better explain preservation to its various stakeholders as a planning strategy and not an end in itself. The secretive atmosphere that infuses so much discourse at OBO—not to be confused with a rightful concern for security—poses a real challenge to any administrator who strives to bring together information, people, and properties to expand knowledge and then to disseminate what is learned.

The risk of losing landmarks before they are documented is another major challenge. Structures in London, The Hague, and Oslo are among the many that are now being replaced. Tracey regrets that he lacks the resources to study such properties. Although each is undergoing a “decommissioning” process according to OBO protocols, that process is nothing he can more precisely explain. If it includes careful photographic documentation of architectural details, such as Saarinen’s anodized aluminum “stars,” for example, no one can say. This is where a little more transparency would be helpful—because



11. London, U.S. Embassy. Eero Saarinen (1956–60). Consular Section on first floor, with diagrid structural system above. Photograph copyright Balthazar Korab, 1960, from Library of Congress, Balthazar Korab Archive.

once an American-owned landmark such as London is lost, whether it is sold for demolition or reuse, it is gone. It may remain accessible as a structure, but in a new role elements are altered and the symbolic significance shifts. Thus meaning has time value that suffers from delay. With a conspicuous American eagle perched on its rooftop (an official symbol of USG presence that really should not have been construed as a permanent fixture by those who listed the building) and flanked at its base by statues of General Dwight Eisenhower and President Ronald Reagan, and with another statue of President Franklin Roosevelt and American war memorials in the park, Grosvenor Square is still a place steeped in American heritage and meriting recognition as such. Fully documenting the Saarinen building as the last marker of a U.S. diplomatic presence dating to 1785 would be a step in that direction — perhaps on a new *Secretary's List of Lost Landmarks*?

Why Reject History?

Maybe the London experience provides one clue as to why State has exhibited such a reluctance to know its past? In 2009, the City of Westminster granted the U.S. Embassy Grade II listed status as a protected local landmark.³⁴ Qatar's sovereign wealth fund purchased the chancery a month later for an estimated £500 million. According to published reports, the



Bouwen aan diplomatie

De Amerikaanse ambassade in Den Haag
Marcel Breuer, 1956-1959

Cultuurhistorische verkenning
Wijnand Galema, Fransje Hooimeijer

12. The Hague, U.S. Embassy, featured on cover of “Building Diplomacy, The American Embassy in The Hague, Marcel Breuer, 1956–59,” historic preservation report prepared in 2008 by Wijnand Galema et al., for The City of The Hague, which takes ownership of the Breuer building when the U.S. Embassy moves soon to a new suburban facility. Publication courtesy of The City of the Hague, Department of Urban Development (Rotterdam).

225,000 square foot building could be worth up to £1 billion when developed as a mixed-use project.³⁵ But if the Qataris had been able to demolish the landmark or alter its façade, could the sales price have gone higher? Maybe not, in a city that values the past. But maybe so—especially when that past was never much admired. And what if the buyer happens to have unlimited wealth and is readily spending it on London real estate? After all, Mayfair is already becoming London’s most exclusive residential neighborhood. Encircled by some of the

most expensive flats in the city, Grosvenor Square had one flat advertised at £18 million in 2014, and prices are expected to top £10,000 per square foot within a decade.³⁶

If Embassy officials feared that “protecting” it as a historic structure would depress the Embassy’s resale value, they might have hoped to avoid such a designation instead of welcoming it. They might even have looked askance at the historical sources that enabled such a listing.

Under Secretary Cohen predicted that a Register listing might boost property values, but it is possible, too, that others at State expect just the opposite and act intentionally or unintentionally to try to prevent prices from falling. Those who think they are thus protecting our assets see history as a foe. If we know too much about our overseas properties and maybe recognize them as important to our history, other nations will realize they are important, follow our example, and list them as significant locally—that might interfere with our ability to alter them or sell them at top dollar for redevelopment. Knowing little and saying nothing thus could be the best policy from the standpoint of real estate management. And it would also make sense as a way of keeping easy ammunition away from zealous preservationists or others who might want to go to bat on behalf of faraway landmarks that lack a ready constituency closer to home.

That is what happened, for example, in Karachi where Arif Belgaumi, a young Pakistani architect, tried unsuccessfully to rally the international community on behalf of the former U.S. Consulate, designed by Neutra & Alexander at the height of the Cold War. As Belgaumi pointed out in 2011,

The decommissioning of the old US Consulate raised questions about the future of this modern masterpiece and perhaps presents opportunities for promoting US–Pakistan relations. The building is one of the few public buildings by Richard J. Neutra, an accomplished master of the late Modern Movement. As a fine example of the 1950s International Style, it is representative of the ferment and debate current at the time about the nature of architecture. The building is a part of world architectural heritage and particularly that of the United States and Pakistan. And as such must be preserved.³⁷

The State Department is not in the business of saving actual buildings for posterity, nor should it be, but alarm over that prospect is enough, it seems, to dampen any enthusiasm for finding other ways of engaging in cultural diplomacy that embraces such assets. Over time, that reluctance, coupled with an ahistorical attitude, has evolved as a survival mechanism

providing protection for those working in the real estate operation that is OBO. And it is probably the greatest threat to the heritage mandate.

This is no time to yearn for old-fashioned diplomacy, a nostalgic past, or buildings that are outdated and vulnerable. Documentation is the best way of capturing the diplomatic past and informing its future. The new Cultural Heritage Office can best meet the challenges ahead by focusing on ways to escape its insularity, making the most of its professional expertise, and connecting with other entities that collect and manage cultural assets both inside the State Department and beyond to strengthen its stewardship program. A good first step would be finding a link to the U.S. Diplomacy Center, the new museum within the State Department that aims to explore the past, present and future of U.S. diplomacy in order to see that our diplomatic buildings play a role in what is explored and presented there. And if as Tracey says, “Caring for distinguished historic properties in our portfolio furthers our diplomatic mission,” then this could be just the right moment to embrace history broadly as a way of instilling confidence in that mission.

Biography

Jane C. Loeffler is a planner and architectural historian and author of *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (1998, 2011). For her work, she received the Secretary's Open Forum Distinguished Public Service Award from the U.S. Department of State in 1998 and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations Outstanding Recognition Award in 2010.

Dedicated to the memory of Russell V. Keune, whose recent loss deprives us of a pioneer in historic preservation.

Notes

¹ William McCullough, interview with author, May 18, 1992. The Jane C. Loeffler Collection of Research Papers on American Embassies, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University (Hereafter “Avery”).

² Ibid. Although McCullough claimed that Paul Serey was asked to write a history, I don't think he actually wrote one. Rather, he seems to have repurposed an internal history that had been compiled earlier by OH/PA, ending around 1958–60. I received a copy of that document from Serey himself and another from OH/PA. It is available in Avery, under the title: “Inauguration of the Foreign Service Buildings Program.”

³ Jane C. Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), 238.

⁴ FBO historical document labeled “Early List from FBO.” Avery.

⁵ FBO historical document titled “Embassy Buildings,” hand-dated circa 1960–61. Avery.

⁶ Minutes of the FBO Architectural Advisory Committee (also known as the Panel and Board and briefly as Consultants), for the period January 21, 1954—February 12, 1981. Avery.

⁷ William Z. Slany, Official State Department endorsement letters, July 12, 1990 and January 24, 1996, Avery.

⁸ Executive Order No. 13006, “Locating Federal Facilities on Historic Properties in Our Nation's Cities” (May 21, 1996), Fed. Reg. 61/102 (May 24, 1996), 26071. Avery.

⁹ Bonnie R. Cohen to Richard Moe, March 16, 1998. Avery.

¹⁰ A/FBO Policy and Procedures Directive No. RE005 (March 3, 1998), *Acquisition and Preservation of Historically, Architecturally, or Culturally Significant Property Overseas*. Avery.

¹¹ “Culturally Significant Properties Inventory (Draft)” and labeled “A/FBO/AP/RE/RPM-Ellen Enriquez,” dated June 29, 1998, 16 pgs. Avery.

¹² Not every historically significant building was included on the 1998 draft listing of *Culturally Significant Properties Inventory*. The most notable omission of those buildings built by the USG was the U.S. Embassy, Ottawa, designed by Cass Gilbert in 1928. The most notable omission of those purchased by the USG was the Tokyo residence for the deputy chief of mission (DCMR), ascribed to several architects, but attributed to celebrated modernist Antonin Raymond by Sibley Jennings in his 1987 feasibility study of renovations to that structure. It appears that Jennings was retained to prepare that study by the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, not by FBO in Washington, although an FBO representative assisted him. For further information, see J. L. Sibley Jennings, AIA, & Associates, Architects, *Feasibility Study, Proposed Remodeling of Architectural, Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing Systems for the Residence of the Deputy Chief of Mission (Property Number Xo4006), Tokyo, Japan, 1987* in Avery. A Raymond building would certainly have belonged in any inventory of architecturally important structures had it been recognized by FBO at the time.

¹³ Loeffler to Bonnie R. Cohen, "Heritage Property Proposal as Millennium 2000 Project." (February 11, 1999), Avery.

¹⁴ Abbreviations used: EOB = embassy office building (chancery); EOBX = embassy office building annex; COB = consular office building (consulate); ER = embassy residence or ambassador's residence; DCMR = deputy chief of mission residence; LEG = former legation property.

¹⁵ Loeffler, "The Architecture of Diplomacy: Heyday of the U. S. Embassy-Building Program, 1954–1960," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, September 1990: 251–78.

¹⁶ Loeffler with FBO, "Embassies of the Cold War: Incubators of Contextual Modernism," Avery.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* See also AIA Gold Medal winners listed in research files. Avery.

¹⁸ Bonnie R. Cohen to The Secretary, *Action Memorandum* on the "Secretary of State's Register of Culturally Significant Property," November 7, 2000. Avery.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Remarks by Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright at M Reception, Celebrating the establishment of the Secretary of State's Register of Culturally Significant Property, January 4, 2000, distributed by Office of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Avery.

²¹ See Wijnand Galema and Fransje Hooimeijer, *Bouwen aan diplomatie, De Amerikaanse ambassade in Den Haag*, Marcel Breuer, 1956–1959. The City of The Hague, Department of Urban Development (Rotterdam) December 2008. In preparation for decommissioning of the Breuer building and the move of the U.S. Embassy to its new campus-like location in the suburb of Wassenaar, the City of The Hague commissioned a preservation study of the Breuer building. That study outlines possible adaptive re-use options for the landmark structure. Much detested locally for many years, it is now beginning to be appreciated as a landmark of mid-century modernism. The City of The Hague will acquire the building as part of the transfer agreement with the USG.

²² *Effective Diplomacy and the Future of U.S. Embassies*: Hearings of the National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, 110th Congress, 2nd Session (January 23, 2008) (statements of Thomas Pickering, former U.S. ambassador and under secretary of State for Political Affairs; Marc Grossman, former U.S. ambassador and under secretary of State for Political Affairs; and Jane Loeffler, visiting associate professor, University of Maryland).

²³ Williams's tenure at OBO was from March 12, 2001 to December 31, 2007.

²⁴ According to the U.S. Embassy, Manila, the Manila Chancery was established by the Philippine Independence Act passed by U.S. Congress on March 24, 1934, and the Philippine government donated some seventeen acres of land, most of it underwater, for the seaside compound. The *Register* listing suggests that the chancery was built by the USG. That appears to be so, but as the Embassy notes, the project was funded under a special congressional appropriation, probably not under the aegis of the Foreign Service Buildings Commission. Some copies of FSBC records are available in Loeffler Collection, Avery. Six original volumes of FSBC minutes were stored at FBO when viewed there by this author in 1992.

²⁵ Charles E. Williams to The Secretary, *Action Memorandum* on the "Register of Culturally Significant Property," April 5, 2004. Avery.

²⁶ Cohen, *Action Memorandum*, November 7, 2000.

²⁷ Department of State, Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, Cultural Heritage Program Symposium: *Saving the Department's Treasures* (October 6, 2008), 31 pgs. Avery.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The American Cemetery in Tripoli is a memorial to the thirteen U.S. Navy sailors killed in the explosion of the ketch *Intrepid* off the coast of Libya in the First Barbary War (1804). The property has long been contested ground. The 2004 Normalization Agreement between the United States and Libya established the cemetery as USG property for the first time with the Libyan government agreeing to provide legal protection to the site. The U.S. Embassy oversees it as a diplomatic property under the jurisdiction of the State Department. Veterans groups have protested the arrangement. It is not clear exactly why this property was added to the Secretary's Register, but there must have been a political purpose as its cultural history is still disputed.

³¹ Columbia University, "Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library Acquires Jane C. Loeffler Embassy Archives," Press Release (September 3, 2014); and Adil Mughal, "New Avery acquisition brings together diplomatic history, architecture," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, September 22, 2014.

³² Patrick Kennedy, letter in *Saving the Department's Treasures*.

³³ Thomas P. Marotta e-mail follow up to Loeffler regarding Tracey interview with Loeffler (November 3, 2015) at OBO, November 19, 2015.

³⁴ City of Westminster, *Listing of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest*, LS/PP/JH/85860 or MRB/USA/1/2 Schedule listing for United States of America Embassy, Grosvenor Square, 503983 II DCMS (October 20, 2009), Avery.

³⁵ Chris Bourke, "U.S. Embassy Building in London Sold to Qatari Diar," (November 3, 2009), <http://www.bloomberg.com>; "Revealed: London's £3 BILLION embassy sell-off bonanza," (August 22, 2013), <http://www.standard.co.uk>; Keith Allen, "Yours for £18m: Flat with a View of Grosvenor Square," (March 13, 2014), <http://www.standard.co.uk>.

³⁶ See City of Westminster, *Listing*. Three sources are cited in the listing: one short published journal article (1960), one unpublished report from *English Heritage*, (2007), and one book, Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy* (1998).

³⁷ Arif Belgaumi, "Remembering Neutra's Embassy," *The Express Tribune* (February 21, 2011). See also "The Neutra Embassy Building in Karachi, Pakistan: A Petition to Save Modernism," <http://www.archdaily.com>.

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