

Security and Rules a Concern for the ‘Force’

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While researching items of interest for designers working on the Graphics Project (see page 4), Information and Records Division staffer **Frank Evina** discovered a venerable memorandum from the Register of Copyrights:

To the Clerks of the Copyright Department:

It seems advisable to remind the clerks of the Copyright Office of the rule of the office that friends calling on members of the force should be received outside the railing, at the west end of the room where seats have been provided for this purpose.

It may sometimes occur that a caller will inadvertently enter the room by one of the other doors, and go directly to your desk without realizing that there has been any violation of the office rules in so doing. In such case you are expected to courteously request your friend to accompany you to the portion of the room designated above, without making any reference to the rules of the office.

Thorvald Solberg, Register of Copyrights

The above instruction has been read by each of the clerks....

Written more than a century ago on January 23, 1901, and signed by Register of Copyrights Solberg, the memo reminds staffers, then called “the force,” of rules regarding visitors to their work spaces. Were visitors a distraction, or was the Register concerned about security?

The photo above, taken by Washington, D.C. photographer Levin Handy, depicts the Copyright Office as it appeared about 1920. The wood railing that divided the space used by “the force” from that used by visitors is clearly visible. The gate, swung open, suggests a friendly atmosphere. ©