

Fifty Years Ago: The Copyright Office Moves to Crystal City

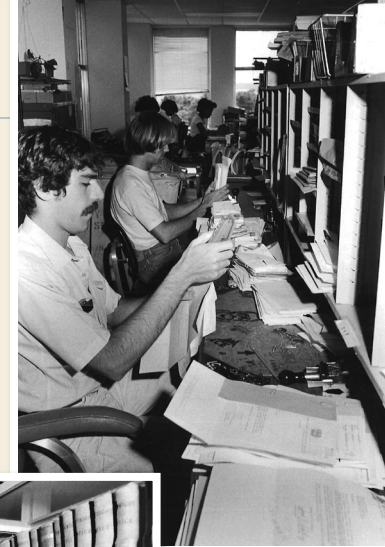
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In March 1969, the Copyright Office moved from the Annex Building (now the Adams Building) of the Library of Congress to a temporary space in Crystal City in Arlington, Virginia. The Office stayed there until September 1980, when it moved into the newly built Madison Building.

Copyright registration became a function of the Library of Congress in 1870, before any of the current Library buildings had opened. A government appropriations bill established the Copyright Office as a separate department within the Library of Congress in 1897, and the Library moved out of the Capitol into its own building—now known as the Jefferson Building—later that year.

In 1939, the Annex Building opened, and the Copyright Office occupied the first floor. According to the *Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for Fiscal Year 1937*, “On the south front [of the Annex Building] a handsome flight of steps rises to the first floor, which is given over to the Copyright Office. This separate entrance lends dignity to that government agency in keeping with its important function.”

During World War II, part of the space occupied by the Copyright Office was taken for war-related activities, and after the war, the Library kept the space for the expansion of other Library functions. However, the volume of copyright registrations—and thus the number of Office staff members—began to grow, and there was not



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enough space. In August 1968, preliminary discussions had begun concerning the feasibility of moving the Office to Crystal City. The Library formally announced the move in November 1968, and in March 1969, the Office packed up and moved across the river to Virginia.

Move coordinators had to pay special attention to provide adequate shelving and to distribute heavy items to remain within the weight limits of the building. Items moved consisted of approximately 6,000 pieces of furniture and equipment, 14,000 volumes of record books, 9,000 reference volumes (including the Copyright Office Library), 7,000 linear feet of correspondence, and 25,000,000 catalog cards.

The move began March 17, and Benjamin Rudd, librarian and general attorney, became the first occupant of the new space. As the move continued, news broke midday March 28 that former President Eisenhower passed away. As the last trucks carrying Office furniture and equipment left Capitol Hill, the area around the Library was cordoned off to handle the crowds that would visit the Capitol, where his body was to lay in state. The

Monday after the move was an official holiday to mourn Eisenhower’s passing.

The Office lost approximately 20 percent of its staff due to the move, mostly from transportation issues, but it quickly hired new staff members. Business went on as usual, and the Office continued to register copyrights.

During the time of the move, the Office registered hundreds of telephone directories, covering most of the United States. It also registered issues of the *Sears Catalog*, *Reader’s Digest*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. It registered editorial cartoons by Herbert L. Block (known as Herblock) as well as Mickey Mouse comics by Disney and Iron Man comics by Marvel. And it registered songs by Burt Bacharach, Neil Diamond, and the song “Reflected,” the first single by a little-known band Alice Cooper (led by Vincent Furnier before he became Alice Cooper).

Fifty years later, the Office is registering the same types of works as well as new media the staff couldn’t possibly have imagined in 1969. The Copyright Office is still here to serve the public and protect their creative works. ©