

As prepared for delivery

**Richard C. Lee United States Courthouse
100th Anniversary Celebration
Remarks by Chris Averill, Regional Administrator
U.S. General Services Administration
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Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Judge Underhill, for your kind introduction. And thank you to the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut - the *oldest* district court in the country, having come into existence on September 26, 1789 - for inviting GSA to participate in this celebration. The District Court and the entire Second Circuit have been tremendous partners of GSA, and I look forward to further enhancing that collaborative relationship.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize how fortunate we are to have Justice Sotomayor with us today. Thank you for your presence and your wonderful remarks. And since I never obtained a law degree, I suspect this is the closest I will ever come to arguing before the Supreme Court. So - May It Please Your Honor.

It is also great to see Connecticut's Senior Senator, Senator Blumenthal, here today. Thank you for your support of GSA over the years.

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of this courthouse, it is fitting that we recognize the history of the structure and its location in the city. The story of the Richard C. Lee United States Courthouse rightfully begins in 1638, when New Haven was settled and became the first planned city in the new world. In those days, the majestic New Haven Green was the city's marketplace, and in subsequent years played host to a variety of civic institutions, from churches and schools; to militia parade grounds and cemeteries; to prisons and state houses. It was at the core of what made New Haven a unique place. As former President William Howard Taft once remarked, "The Green has so well fulfilled its original purpose of providing a center for the life of the city, that the history of New Haven is the history of the Green."

Over the years, other civic structures that still exist began to line the perimeter of the Green. City Hall was added at the outset of the Civil War, while the Ives Memorial Library joined the square in 1911. By the early 20th Century, plans were underway to add a new federal building to the historic space, as the 1859 post office, which also housed the District Court, had become dilapidated. A 1910 city planning report from the New Haven Civic Improvement Commission, authored by architect Cass Gilbert and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, advised that the style, materials, and scale of the new building should respect the character of existing public buildings around the Green.

At that time, the Treasury Department was responsible for government real estate, and it enlisted the assistance of James Gamble Rogers, the famed architect behind many of the buildings across the Green at Yale University. To convey the dignity of the Federal government - to be “representative of the mighty Nation which is erecting it,” as Col. Isaac Ullman, President of the New Haven Chamber of Commerce at the time, noted - Rogers designed the courthouse in the Classical Revival style that we see today.

The purpose of the new building was clear, as noted by many of the speakers at the 1914 groundbreaking ceremony, perhaps none more eloquently than William Malburn, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury: “In this building will be localized the great functions of the Federal Government, and here, your city and State are brought in touch with and made parts of the whole country, and, indeed, the whole world.”

This federal building would result in the average citizen experiencing what Malburn called “a quickening of his pride and patriotism and a realization of the power and importance of the country to which he has sworn allegiance.”

I would note, apropos of nothing, that when the citizens of New Haven gathered to witness the opening of this building a century ago, just as we do here today, the Boston Red Sox were reigning World Series Champions. Regrettably, it looks like Justice Sotomayor’s Yankees will have something to say about that this season.

Furthermore, to properly place the Lee Courthouse in New Haven’s historical context, I should note that shortly thereafter, the city witnessed the advent of apizza, with Frank Pepe opening its doors in 1925 and, about a decade later, State Street Apizza - now Modern - and Sally’s joined the scene. I’m not suggesting that there’s any connection between the opening of the Courthouse and the birth of apizza, but I couldn’t neglect pointing out that the Lee predates even these venerable New Haven institutions!

In all seriousness, congratulations to the United States Courts and, in particular, the District of Connecticut on this wonderful milestone. As I have said before at similar events at the Courts, I am frequently reminded of George Washington's remark to Edmund Randolph that, "the due administration of justice is the firmest pillar of good government." I truly believe that there can be no more important mission for GSA than to serve the Courts, and I am honored to be able to play a role in this effort.

I must also recognize the hard work of the GSA team, from our Regional Public Buildings Commissioner, Glenn Rotondo, to our great on-site facilities management staff, in continuing to make this special building shine, as both a tribute to the rule of law, and a reminder of Mayor Lee's legacy here in New Haven.

At that 1914 groundbreaking ceremony, Col. Ullman of the New Haven Chamber of Commerce offered the following entreaty: "may this noble structure, when completed, continue to stand as an object lesson to generations yet unborn of the dignity and power and greatness of our beloved country." We, the "generations yet unborn," are here today to testify that indeed, the Lee Courthouse remains the beacon of justice and grandeur originally envisioned more than a century ago.

Thank you.