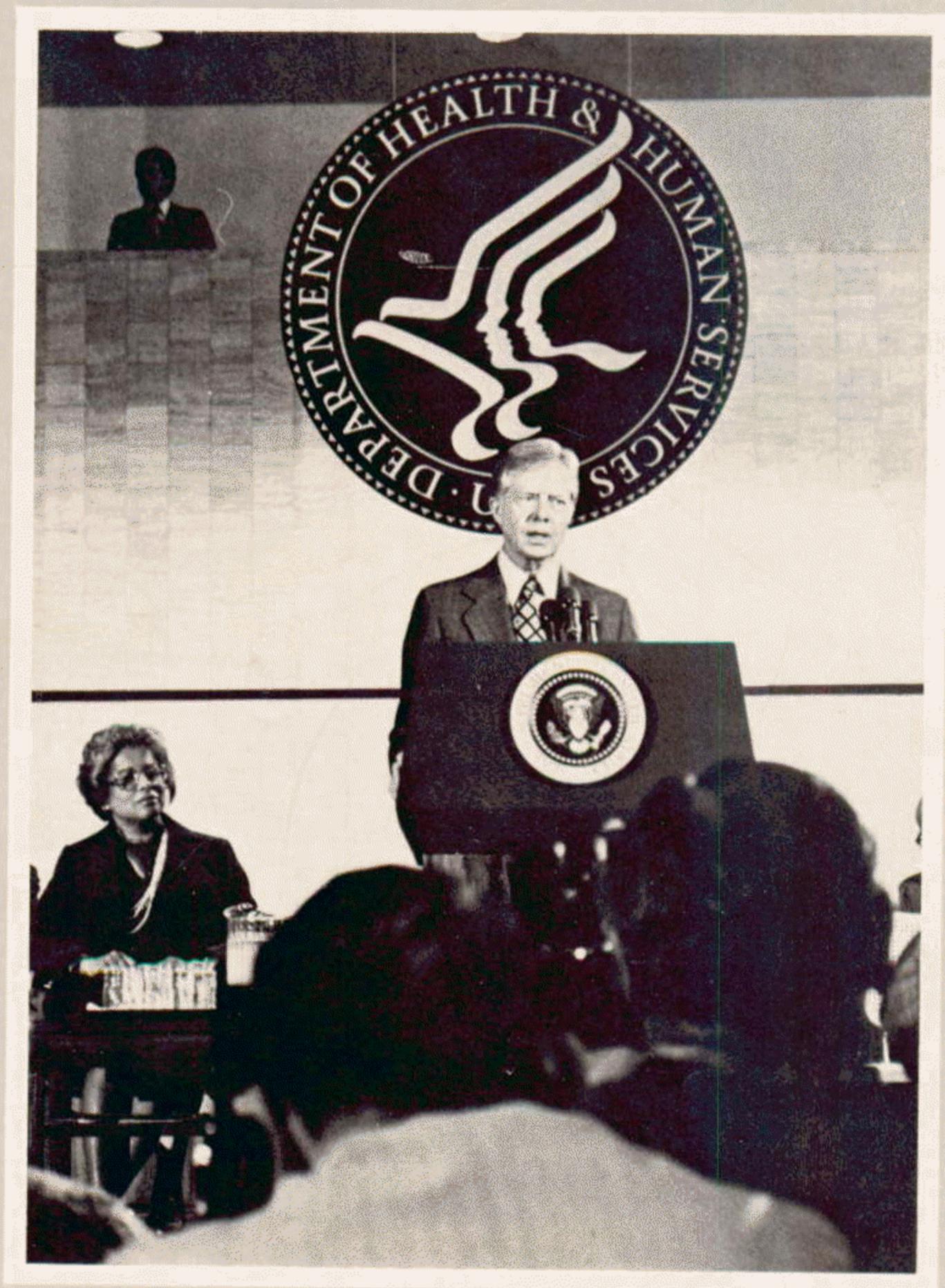


Oasis

JULY 1980



President Speaks
At Launching
Of New Department

One last look on leaving

ON FEBRUARY 1, 1980, some 5,200 Office of Central Records Operations (OCRO) employees began moving into the new Metro West Building in Baltimore. This month, that move will be completed, and when it is, a chapter in SSA history will be closed. That chapter concerns SSA's occupation of three rented buildings in the city's downtown area.

The oldest of the buildings, the Civic-Howard, was built by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1902 on property formerly occupied by a paper warehouse. The B&O situated the building at Howard and Lombard Streets, exactly halfway between Camden Station and its main office at the corner of Baltimore and Charles Streets, and appropriately named it the "B&O Annex."

In those days, downtown wasn't all commercial. Located near the building on Lombard Street were five colonial-style homes.

An article in the August 27, 1902, *Evening Sun* called Lombard Street "a great highway in the early days of electric cars in the Baltimore nineties. What man or woman who is older than 40," the article asked, "does not remember what a great streetcar exchange point the junction of Howard and Lombard Streets was in the days when streetcars were the only means of moving about for the larger part of the population?"

The Great Baltimore Fire of 1904

spared the B&O Annex, although it reduced the major part of the downtown area to rubble and ashes.

When the B&O moved its operations out of the Annex, the building was rented to many other organizations. They included a shirt factory, which moved out of the building in 1962, when the B&O sold the building, and the Baltimore City Health Department Maternity Center, which still occupies the third floor.

Many people still call it the B&O Annex, and the marble scrolls atop the 6-story structure proclaim this as its name, even though SSA renamed it the Civic-Howard Building. This latter name was chosen because the Civic Center is just across the street and Howard Street runs alongside. Approximately 700 SSAers worked in the Civic-Howard Building before the Metro West Building opened.

SSA didn't occupy the building until 1965, when the Woodlawn offices became overcrowded. Before moving to Woodlawn in 1960, SSA rented the Equitable, Faulkner, Miller, Standard Oil, Candler, and Paca-Pratt Buildings, to name a few.

Mildred Stokes, Examining Section Chief of OCRO's Reports Analysis Branch, recalls that when the circus was in town, employees in the Civic-Howard Building used to be able to watch the elephants being washed in the streets. "And we could see the parade as it went up Hopkins Plaza," she said.

Mildred also recalled a day last December when Maryland Governor Harry Hughes and Comptroller Louis Goldstein toured the Civic-Howard Building. "They knew we were going to be moving out shortly, and they inspected the building for



possible office space for the State," she explained. "I guess they didn't like it, though, since as far as I know nothing more has been said about it."

Bob Lilly, who was Assistant Bureau Director for Operations, BDP, when he retired, remembers inspecting the building before SSA moved in in 1965. "It was very old-fashioned and in a sad state when we acquired it," he said. "The owner had to spend \$1 million on renovations in order to rent it to SSA. A mezzanine was added on the first floor, when the 20-foot ceiling was dropped, creating additional work-space. They tiled the floors, lowered all the ceilings, and put in indirect fluorescent lighting.

"They also locked the lower basement to isolate it from the train tunnels that run beneath it. The tunnels connected the old Mt. Royal Station and Camden Station."

About 6 or 7 years ago SSA was considering renting the basement to store statements of earnings. But the possibility was dropped when space became available in an abandoned limestone mine in Pennsylvania.

The thing Bob remembered most about his inspection was the number of bathrooms. "There were as many as 24 wash basins on a floor -12 on either side of the lavatories. They took out all of those fixtures and revamped the whole scheme." However, many of the fixtures were reused and were still there when SSA moved out.

Within a few blocks of the Civic-Howard Building is the Paca-Pratt Building, built in 1904 during the reconstruction period following the Great Fire. The name comes from the fact that it is located on the corner of Paca and Pratt Streets. Pratt Street was named after Enoch

Pratt (1808 - 1896), who used much of the fortune he made in his iron business to establish a main library and six branches in Baltimore. Paca Street was named after William Paca, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and Governor of Maryland from 1782 to 1785.

The building originally housed the Henry Sonneborn and Company clothing factory, and was known by that name until the late 1930s. SSA moved into the building soon after its birth and remained there until 1960, when the Woodlawn complex opened.

Within 5 years we moved back into the building due to the large staff needed to handle Medicare and other social security programs. It housed as many as 2,000 employees.

In its earlier days, the building was lighted by incandescent bulbs and cooled by open windows and slow-moving fans hanging from the towering ceilings.

Occasionally, employees would get heat leave, which was more common to the night shift since the humidity went up at night. The temperature had to be 95 and the humidity 55 for at least an hour before leave could be granted.

While SSA occupied the building, other tenants over the years included the Aetna Shirt Company, a drug company, and Zamoiski's, an appliance distributor from which employees were occasionally able to buy goods at wholesale prices.

"I liked the Paca-Pratt Building," says Social Insurance Clerk **Mary Rideout**. "Although it was an old building, there were a lot of conveniences nearby, and the employees were closer there. We were one big happy family. There were lunchtime concerts at Hopkins Plaza that we could walk to if we liked, and we were close to restaurants and shopping. We had frequent fire drills, which gave everyone a chance to get

out and walk around the building for a while.

"The most unforgettable thing that happened to me while I was there was getting stuck in the elevator for an hour and a half!"

The newest of the last three downtown structures to be rented by SSA is the 707 North Calvert Street Building, constructed in 1959 for the Internal Revenue Service. IRS used it until 1967, when the agency moved to the Federal Office Building across the street. SSA was still outgrowing the Woodlawn buildings at that time, so BDP's Division of Claims Operations moved in 2 months after IRS left.

The 707 Building required only few modifications. Partitions were torn down and the walls received a fresh coat of paint, but other than that, the building remained basically the same. About 900 headquarters employees were located there. It's still home for the Baltimore (Dwtn.) District Office,

Danny Filipowicz, Deputy Chief, Claims Development Branch II, recalls the move into the building. "Not too many people were happy about the relocation then, just as there was anxiety about the move 'to Metro West. But after a year or so, people began to like their new surroundings. We were 7 blocks away from the downtown business district, and there were lots of restaurants and shops nearby.

"Traffic court was right across the street. More than once I spent my lunchtime in court listening to the cases.

"During the hurricane in 1972, all the employees were let out early because there was some risk that one of the dams further up Jones Falls would collapse. It never did, but they let us go early just in case."

The fate of the three downtown Baltimore buildings is uncertain at this time. At last report, the State of Maryland was considering renting the 707 Building to house one of its departments. And the owners of the other two buildings were seeking new tenants. □

