

DEPOSIT
CHRISTMAS TREE
ORNAMENTS
FOR SERVICE HOSPITALS
HERE



CHAPTER 6

Life of GPO

“...as wholesome an atmosphere
as can be found in any industrial
plant in the world”.

The first major transformation in GPO's ongoing history was already underway when Congress created the agency in 1861: the craft-based printing shop of Cornelius Wendell was on its way to becoming an industrialized workplace, a printing factory. By 1905, this transformation was complete, and in the first years of the century successive administrations sought to make the large and growing workforce more efficient and more productive.

It was in this era that reformers attacked poor industrial working conditions with remedies that sought to make the lives of workers easier. Medical care, improved sanitation, attention to safety and accidents, and relaxation and recreational opportunities all sought to create workers who were healthier and better able to do good work.

GPO enthusiastically joined this progressive trend with a host of workplace improvements, activities, programs, organizations, and teams that made the Big Shop more like a self-contained city than ever. Beginning with the introduction of a medical department in 1903, and continuing with the building modifications in the 1920s that introduced the cafeteria, Harding Hall, relaxation and recreational space that included a bowling alley, and an employee-managed association that sponsored musical organizations, sports teams, and events like plays, movies, and dances. GPO's life, in the production areas and offices as well as in non-working areas, was closely linked with the lives of its employees.

These progressive era reforms and organizations, augmented over the years, are still in evidence in today's GPO, from the annual cycle of holiday and other special observances, to the Medical Section, to the organizations and teams that still operate, changing and adapting as GPO has transformed itself, again and again, over its 155 years.



When George H. Carter became Public Printer in 1921, he immediately began a program of sweeping Progressive Era workplace improvements that sought to improve employee morale and productivity by making life inside the buildings a bit more pleasant. GPO had never had a place for meals to be eaten, and having food sold, stored, and consumed in the workrooms of the plant caused a variety of difficulties. Carter directed an operating surplus at making the previously cramped and leaky attic story of Building 1 a full 8th floor, and put in it a cafeteria and other amenities that greatly improved the working life of GPO employees. This is the cafeteria seating area, about 1923.



The cafeteria served hundreds of employees daily on all shifts. Lunch and dinner breaks were just 30 minutes, so serving lines and seating areas were bustling. Photo circa 1925.



Everything from a light breakfast to full hot meals were served, with daily specials and a host of desserts. Photo circa 1930.



The cafeteria was operated by an employee-supported association to which all employees automatically belonged, and which many supported with a nominal membership fee. Here Public Printer A.E. Giegengack and some of his executive staff receive their membership cards during the 1930s.



The renovation of Building 1 that created the cafeteria included an impressive kitchen ...



... and bakery. Photos circa 1930.



The cafeteria received a streamlined chrome makeover in the late 1950s.



Upper level managers had their own dining room built during the 1929 renovation of the cafeteria and Harding Hall. The Refectory was furnished with matched oak paneling and a stone fireplace, as shown in this photo from the 1930s. It is used today for special events and meetings.



The renovation of Building 1 also created a new assembly room, named for President Warren G. Harding. Harding Hall featured a stage for musical and theatrical performances, a good piano, and space that could be filled with seating, or cleared for dances and other activities. Photo circa 1925.



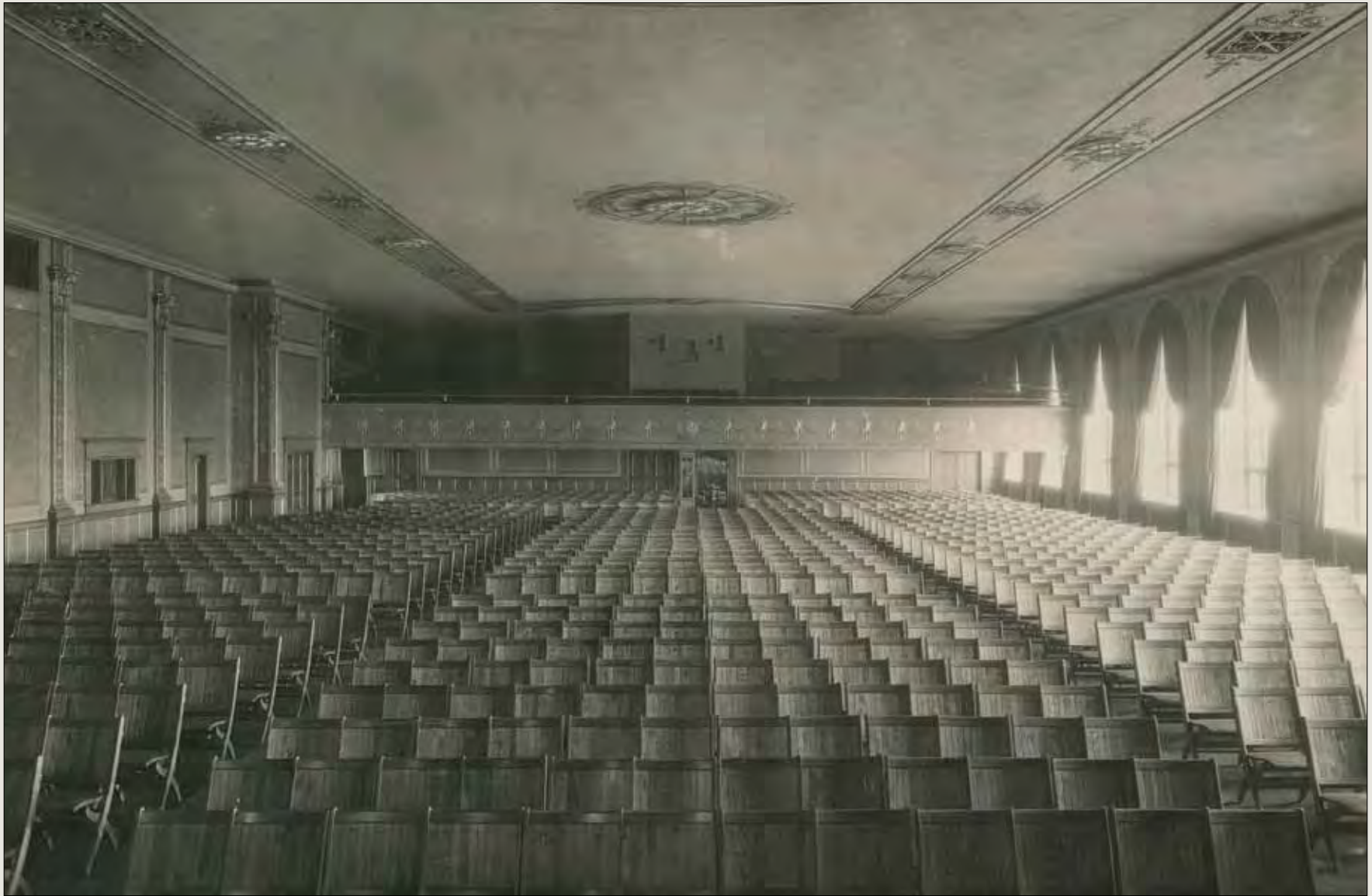
These views give an idea of its orientation, with the stage in the north east corner and the elevators and stairway beyond. Although remodeling raised the ceiling to make a full story, the hall still had a much lower ceiling than today.



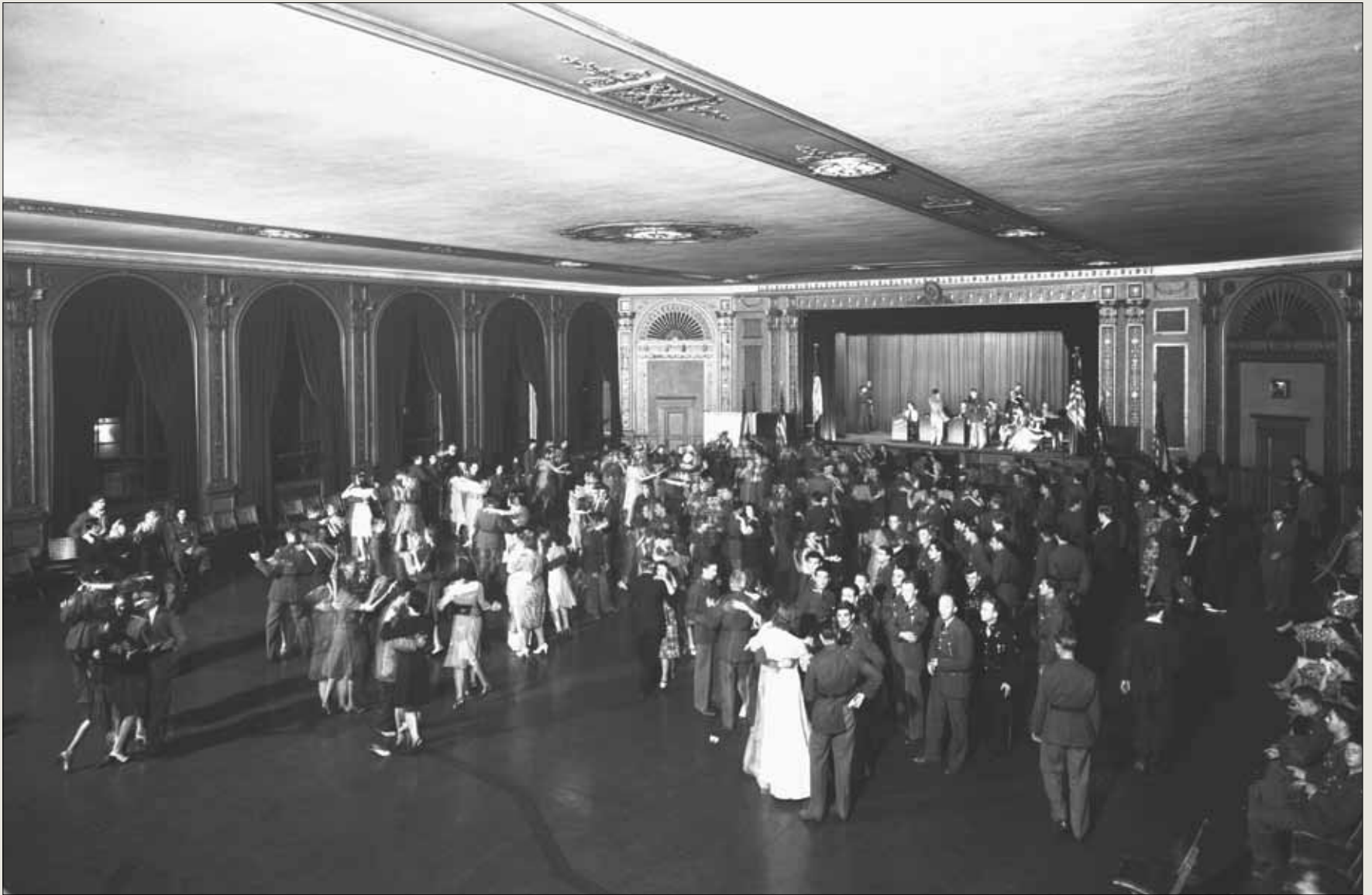
The octagonal gazebo could be used as a bandstand for dances or other purposes. Photo circa 1925.



Harding Hall was renovated in 1930. The ceiling was raised again, and a fully rigged stage was added . . .



. . . along with a balcony for additional seating. The hall now seated 1,800. Photo circa 1930.



Harding Hall continued to be the scene of concerts, lectures, films, celebrations, and dances like this one raising funds for war bonds in 1941.



Every December since Harding Hall was dedicated on Christmas Eve, 1921, a Christmas tree and model train layout have brightened the holiday season. This photo is from 1922.



Generations of GPO employees and their families have enjoyed the annual tradition of "tree and trains." Photo circa 1950.



In the 1980s, GPO began to welcome families from the surrounding community for an open house that featured the tree and trains.



One of the most popular of the workplace innovations of Mr. Carter's administration was a duckpin bowling alley. It originally had 4 lanes. Photo circa 1925.



The bowling alley was home to men's and women's leagues on all shifts. Photo circa 1940.



Duckpin bowling, a variation on 10-pin bowling, uses smaller pins and a ball about 5 in in diameter with no finger holes. It was a regional preference in the Baltimore and Washington area. In their first form, the GPO lanes lacked automatic pin setters. Photo circa 1930.



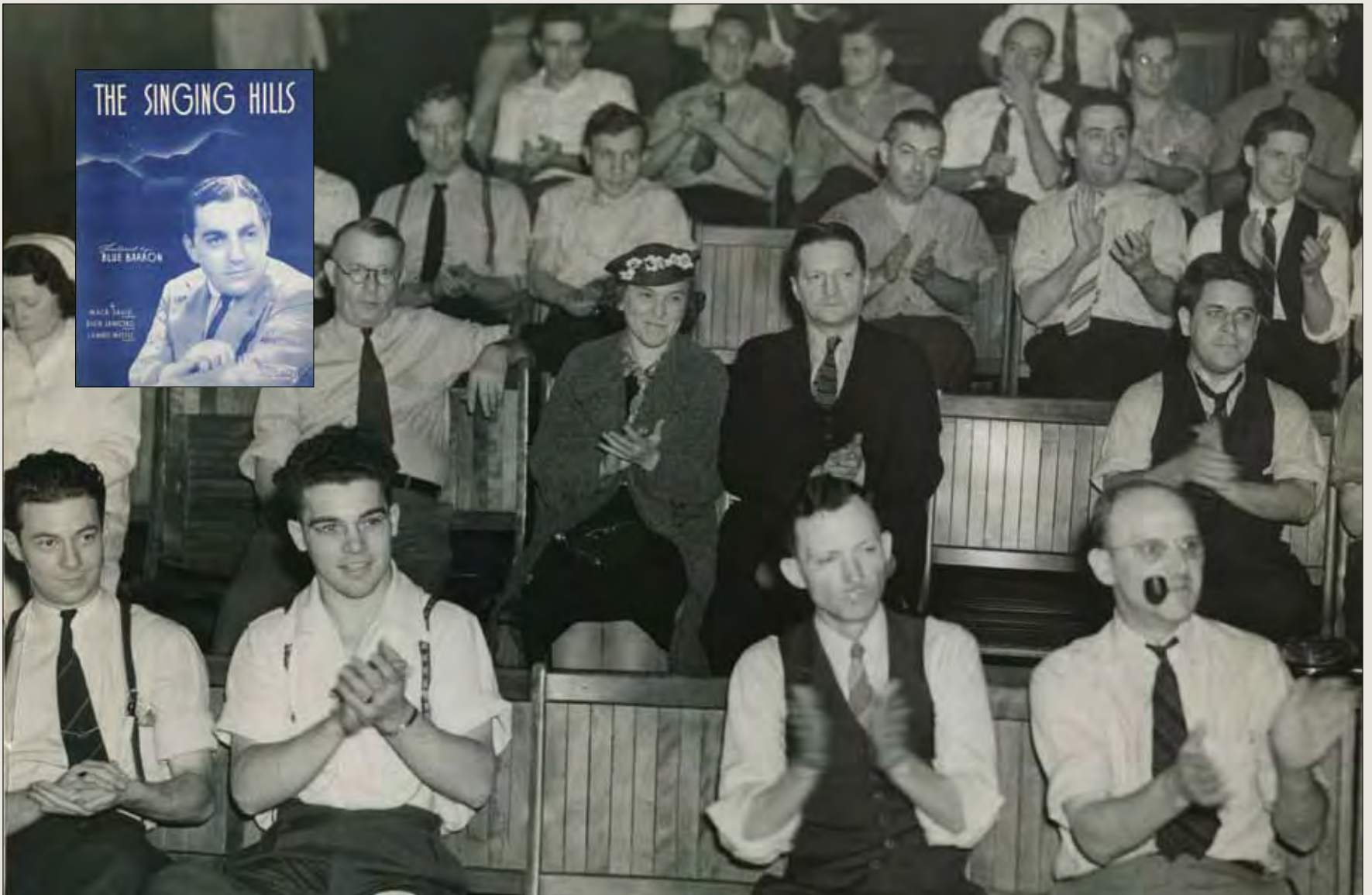
The bowling alley was renovated several times. After World War II two additional lanes were added.



Beside the bowling alleys was the Green Room, a large lounge and meeting space furnished with comfortable furniture. Photo circa 1930.



The association that operated the cafeteria also served as an umbrella organization for musical groups, clubs, sports teams, and other activities. GPO's orchestra played weekly at lunch and dinner breaks, and at concerts and dances throughout the year.



The description attached to this photo describes it as the audience at a GPO orchestra concert applauding a performance of the popular favorite "The Singing Hills," in 1940.



GPO also boasted choral groups. The two pictured here date from the era of forced segregation. Both the white chorus pictured on this page and the counterpart for African-American employees on the following page were very popular.



GPO's African-American chorus, directed by Ethel M. Gray, was in demand for performances all over the District and on the radio. Photo circa 1935.



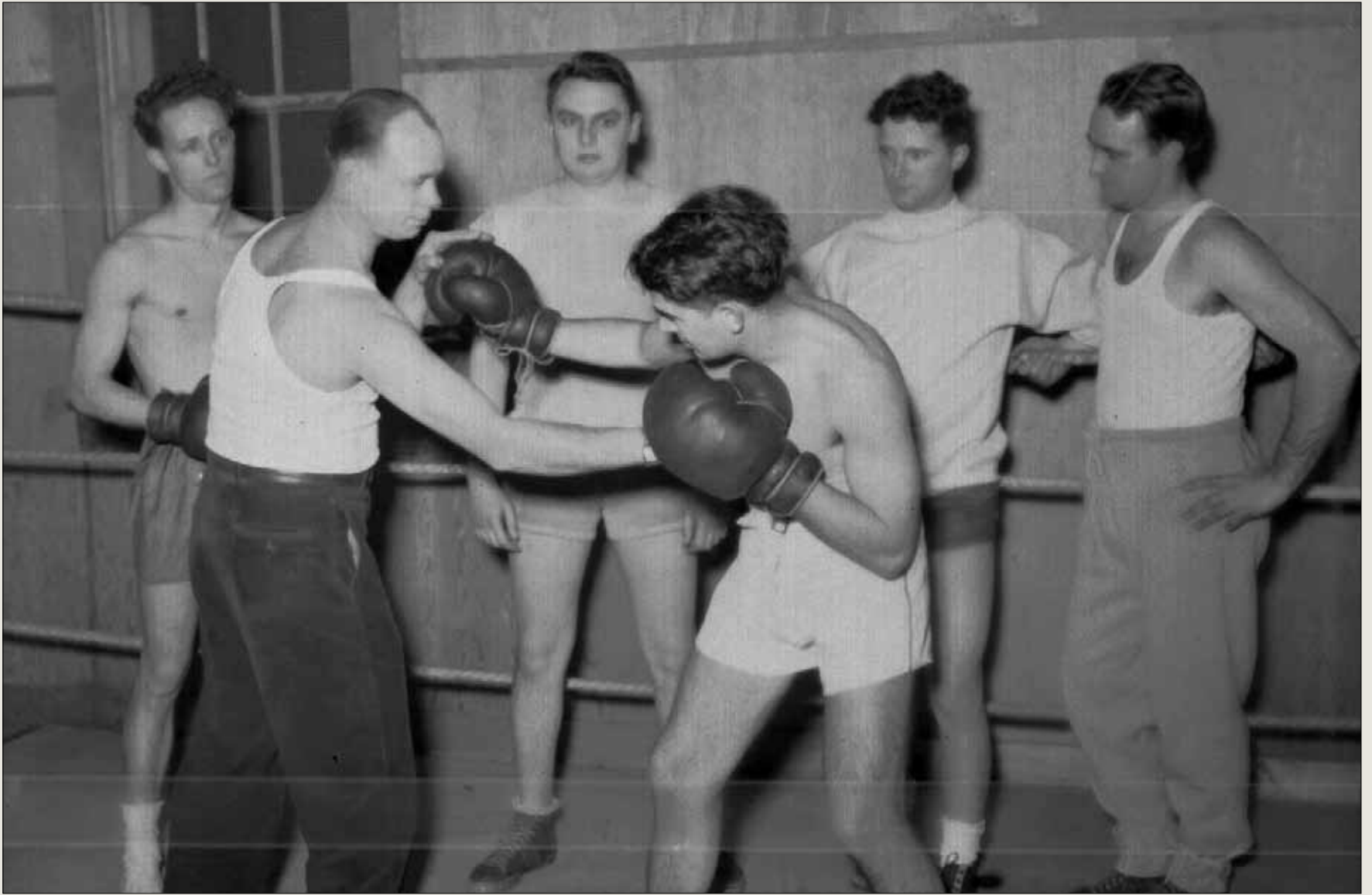
The GPO Choir lived on long after the era of segregation, and performed for holidays, official events, and observances. In this photo from the 1980s, the GPO choir sings carols in one of the production areas.



Many sports teams have existed over the years. This men's basketball team is from the 1940s.



This baseball team was league champion in the "Colored Departmental League" in 1922, during the era of segregation.



GPO's Boxing Club during the 1940s.



The Women's Rifle Club, during the 1940s.



GPO employees have supported many charitable causes. This booth in Harding Hall encouraged membership in the Red Cross, during the 1920s.



GPO's drive for the March of Dimes, during the 1930s.



This group of African-American women is sewing for the war effort during World War II. President Truman finally ended official segregation in Government offices following the war.



After World War I, veterans groups became a very important part of the life of GPO. GPO's American Legion Post had about 450 members in the mid-1930s, and its band played at civic and patriotic occasions all over the District.



The organization for African-American World War I veterans during the era of segregation was the United Veterans of American Wars. The Col. Charles Young Unit is shown here in the 1930s.



GPO has honored its war veterans on the first floor landing in Building 1 ever since a GPO employee, Charles A.R. Jacobs, who was killed at the battle of Ypres in World War I, lay in repose on the landing before his burial at Arlington National Cemetery in 1926. The Veterans Landing has been refurbished and expanded numerous times. Photo circa 1975.



Beginning in 1983, GPO's Veterans Memorial Landing has been the scene of a wreath-laying ceremony each Veterans Day.



GPO has historically been a workplace where employees achieve long records of service. The two longest serving were W. Andrew Smith, longtime Congressional Record clerk, who served 68 years, until his death in 1941...



... and Virginia F. Saunders, who served as Congressional Documents Specialist until her death in 2009 following 63 years of service.



GPO first created a medical office in 1903 and eventually operated a complete Medical Section that dealt with emergencies, screening, occupational health issues, vaccinations, and routine health concerns. This photo is from the 1910s.



The Medical Section was considered comprehensive and advanced in the 1920s.



The Medical Section, shown here in the 1960s, was equipped for treating emergencies ...



... and offered health screenings, such as this one for glaucoma.

An employee has a chest x-ray.
Photo circa 1950.



DO NOT
SPIT ON THE FLOOR
TO DO SO MAY
SPREAD DISEASE

REGULATIONS TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF
TUBERCULOSIS IN GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS,
OFFICES, AND WORKSHOPS.

1. All persons in Government employ are positively forbidden to spit upon the floors.

2. Rooms, hallways, corridors, and lavatories shall be freely aired and effectually cleaned at least once a day and not during working hours.

3. Spittoons shall receive a daily cleansing with very hot water and when placed ready for use must contain a small quantity of water.

4. Dust must be removed as completely as possible by means of dampened cloths or mops. It should never be needlessly stirred up by a broom or duster, as this practice only spreads the dust and germs.

5. Floors of tiling, brick, or stone must be frequently scoured with soap and water.

6. The senior clerks in charge of work-rooms will take measures to secure during working hours the admission of as much fresh air and sunshine as the conditions will permit.

7. The use of individual drinking glasses is recommended.

8. Persons in Government employ who suffer from pulmonary tuberculosis shall when possible be separated from others while at work.

9. Such persons will not be permitted to use the public spittoons, but must provide themselves with individual sputum receivers, preferably of easily destructible material, and carry these with them on arrival and on departure. They will be held strictly responsible for the disposal and destruction of their own sputum, so that no other person's health may be endangered therefrom.

10. Such persons must provide their own drinking glasses, soap, and towels, and shall not use those provided for the general use.

11. Plainly printed notices, reading as follows: "DO NOT SPIT ON THE FLOOR; TO DO SO MAY SPREAD DISEASE," shall be prominently posted in rooms, hallways, corridors, and lavatories of public buildings.

Prepared by the Committee on Prevention of Tuberculosis in Government buildings in accordance with Executive Order of December 7, 1906.

Hand in hand with the Medical Section, GPO's concern for a safe and sanitary workplace has a long history. This poster from the early 20th century reminded employees of this concern.



In an era when many printers chewed tobacco, the cuspidor was an essential tool in maintaining a sanitary workplace. This machine washed the hundreds of cuspidors that were distributed around the building daily. Photo circa 1935.



Much of GPO's history saw a very large workforce, working around the clock, producing printed documents on very tight schedules. A system of clocks and bells alerted employees to the start and end of shifts and breaks, and various systems of chimes and bells conveyed other types of messages. This console in Building 1 controlled the various bell systems in the 1940s. The bells remained in use until the 1980s.

Buildings 1 and 3 in 2016.





A Note on the Photographs

All the photographs in this book, unless otherwise credited, are from GPO's collection. A selection of GPO's digitized historical photographs is available online at www.gpo.gov/about/gpohistory/.

Colophon

The text for *Picturing the Big Shop* is set in Helvetica Neue, a digital version of the neo-grotesque sans serif typeface designed in 1957 by Max Miedinger for the Haas Type Foundry in Switzerland. GPO began to use sans serif grotesque (or gothic) typefaces for hot metal composition in the 1940s. Helvetica seems to have joined the GPO type catalog with the introduction of Linotron and large-scale phototypesetting in 1967.

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