

FOR RELEASE
OCTOBER 25, 1934
3 P.M.

THE NEW HOME OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

ADDRESS

by

HONORABLE HOMER CUMMINGS

Attorney General of the United States

at the Dedication of

The Department of Justice Building

October 25, 1934.

3 P.M.

MR. PRESIDENT, MR. CHIEF JUSTICE, MR. CHAIRMAN,
DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

It affords me great happiness to welcome you to the dedication of the new abode of the Department of Justice.

In the language of Holy Writ, "They went unto their own home," and, again, "When ye come into a house, salute it".

Truly, at last, we have come home and, in saluting this magnificent edifice, let us indulge the hope that it may always house what is truly a Department of Justice; and be a temple in which judgment, compassion and understanding, may ever find habitation and in which that fire "which burns at the heart of the world and whose name is Justice" may never die.

It is interesting to recall that during the greater part of its 145 years of existence the legal department of the United States has been a governmental wanderer, with no local habitation of its own and, for more than half that period, without an authoritative name. This has been due, no doubt, to the rather unusual manner of its development. Every other executive branch of the national government was established by the Congress as a separate department at the time of its inception, but the Department of Justice is a product of the evolutionary process.

The post of Attorney General was created by the Judiciary Act of September 24, 1789; but it was an office that was created, not a department. Edmund Randolph, of Virginia, became the first Attorney General. His compensation was fixed at the modest sum of \$1,500 per year.

Later he submitted various suggestions for the improvement of the service and, somewhat plaintively, pointed out the urgent need for, at least, one

clerk. President Washington made these recommendations the basis of a special message to the Congress. The Committee to which the matter was referred reported favorably, but the Congress, evidently unimpressed, took no action.

It is not, therefore, surprising that Attorney General Randolph described himself as "a sort of mongrel between the State and the United States; called an officer of some rank under the latter, and yet thrust out to get a livelihood in the former."

With the removal of the seat of government to Washington, the various departments were housed in nondescript buildings grouped about the President's house. No accommodations whatever were provided for the Attorney General. He was expected to furnish his own quarters, fuel, stationery and clerk. He was "the forgotten man" of his day.

President Madison, in a message to the Congress, movingly described the hardships which resulted from the failure to deal adequately with this situation. Nevertheless, the Congress, still unimpressed, took no action.

The suggestions which had been made by President Madison were renewed by President Monroe, and the Congress, in 1818, provided \$1,000 for the employment of a clerk, and, in 1819, \$500 for office rooms, stationery, and incidental expenses. In 1822 the Attorney General was furnished with his first official quarters, -- one room on the second floor of the old War Department building. There the office was maintained until 1839 when the Attorney General, whose staff now consisted of a clerk and a messenger, and who had acquired the nucleus of a library, moved into rooms located on

the second floor of the Treasury Building.

Sixteen years later the office was removed to its third home, a brick building on the southeast corner of Fifteenth and F Streets. Here it remained until 1861, when, upon the completion of the south wing of the Treasury, a suite of rooms was provided on the first floor of the new addition.

Finally, after eighty-one years of existence, the office of the Attorney General had expanded to such an extent, both in functions and in personnel, that it became, in reality, one of the executive departments of the Government. In recognition of this fact, the Congress enacted the law of June 22, 1870, entitled "An Act to establish the Department of Justice." This act provided that the Attorney General should be the head of the Department, created the office of Solicitor General and provided for two Assistant Attorneys General. It gave to the Attorney General the direction and control of United States Attorneys and all other counsel employed on behalf of the United States, and vested in him supervisory powers over the accounts of District Attorneys, Marshals, clerks, and other officers of the Federal courts.

After the creation of the Department of Justice, the Attorney General and his immediate staff remained in the south wing of the Treasury Building, while the Solicitor General and one Assistant Attorney General, with their clerical forces, were quartered on F Street, near Fourteenth, and the other Assistant Attorney General had to be content with a room in the cheerless basement of the Capitol.

In 1871, the Attorney General leased for a period of ten years the second, third and fourth floors of the Freedmen's Bank Building on Pennsylvania Avenue; and the entire department occupied this space, with the

exception of one Assistant Attorney General who still retained his gloomy quarters in the subterranean fastnesses of the Capitol. In 1882 the Congress authorized the purchase of the Freedmen's Bank building. This was the first real home of the Department of Justice. But it was not to be a permanent one. The Department remained there until 1899, when the Congress passed an act reciting that "the building now occupied by the Department of Justice is too small for its purpose, is unsafe, overcrowded, and dangerously overloaded, and has been pronounced unsafe, after examination by the proper officials of the Treasury Department." The sum of one million dollars was appropriated for the erection of a new building.

After the approval of this Act, the old building was abandoned and demolished to make way for the new structure. Meanwhile, the Attorney General and his personal staff took up their abode in the Baltic Hotel on K Street, between Vermont Avenue and Fifteenth Street. The other members of the Department were distributed in various parts of the city; and the library was placed in the old Corcoran Art Gallery. But, once more, the hope that the Department was to have a home of its own failed of realization, for it was found that a suitable building could not be erected for the sum provided; and the Congress promptly rescinded the appropriation.

After the lapse of several years, and to relieve an almost intolerable situation, the Attorney General leased the building at the northeast corner of Vermont Avenue and K Street. This building, until a few days ago, has been occupied by a major portion of the office force. It proved to be so inadequate in size that it was necessary to secure space in seven additional buildings.

I have indulged in this recital of the vicissitudes and wanderings of the Department of Justice that you may realize with what keen delight we, at last, take possession of our permanent home. You can easily visualize the growth and size of the Department by merely looking at this handsome and imposing structure.

We are grateful to the Congress for the foresight and thoughtful consideration which provided the funds for its erection. We salute, with profound appreciation, our immediate predecessors, as well as those who designed this beautiful building, and all who have had a part in its construction, for the care and wisdom which they brought to their difficult task.

Our thoughts turn, also, with abiding gratitude to the long line of devoted public servants who, since 1789, have served in this Department and whose labors have ever been actuated by a lofty spirit of patriotism. To their zeal and to their probity may be attributed the high place in the public confidence which is the priceless heritage of the Department of Justice.

With us, at this hour, I seem to feel the quickening presence of these giants of other days - Edmund Randolph, William Pinkney, William Wirt, Roger Brooke Taney, Isaac Toucey, Caleb Cushing, Jeremiah S. Black, William M. Evarts, Richard Olney, Judson Harmon, Joseph McKenna - and a host of others whose high labors in the cause of justice have hallowed this spot. In literal truth this great building is their monument. With humble hearts and a certain sacred pride we take it from their hands and dedicate ourselves to the purposes to which they devoted their lives.

May its doors never be closed to those who would do Justice, or to those who suffer from Injustice, and may those who rule over it rise to that lofty vision of the founders of the Twelfth Century Law School at Bologna who visualized Justice as "clothed with dignity, ineffably shining with reason and equity, and supported by religion, loyalty, charity, retribution, reverence and truth".