

# FBI: Top Secrets at Top Cost

By Aaron Latham

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When J. Edgar Hoover and architects of the General Services Administration met to plan the new Federal Bureau of Investigation building, they never set eyes on one another.

"We talked through a closed door," says architect Karel Yasko, who goes on to explain that he and several others went to the Justice Department to see Hoover to settle several design problems. But the director sent word out that he was indisposed.

Hoover reclined on a couch in his inner sanctuary; the architect sat in an

outer office; FBI agents carried messages back and forth between the two rooms.

Yasko recalls that non-meeting as typical of the curious way in which the new FBI headquarters, now under construction in the block-square crater across from the Justice Department, was planned.

What certainly will be the world's fanciest police station already is the costliest and one of the most delayed U.S. government buildings.

At the center of the building will stand more than a half-million square feet of FBI files—taking up one-

third of the total floor space—containing all kinds of information on all the people the bureau keeps tabs on.

In the work area, more space has been set aside for "domestic intelligence" than for criminal investigations.

Construction has not yet reached ground level, but the estimated cost has already climbed from \$60 million in 1962 to a record \$102.5 million. (The old record was \$87 million, for the Rayburn House Office Building.)

And the total figure is not yet in since the new headquarters, for which excavation began in 1967, is not ex-

pected to be completed until 1974.

The building on Pennsylvania Avenue between 9th and 10th Streets NW, has been on the drawing boards since the 1950s, but was changed from one design to another for several years, then ran into funding delays and labor strikes.

All the while, building costs rose faster than the new headquarters—almost 10 per cent a year.

The last of the concrete and steel for the second and third basements was finally set in place last week; contracts for the first basement are to be let shortly.

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## BUREAU, From B1

### Atomic Reactor Wanted

The FBI wanted to install a nuclear reactor on the bottom floor of this new substructure, but someone—no one will say who—killed the idea.

The 4-foot-thick concrete walls, which were to have housed the bureau's atom-driven electric generator, have been quietly scrubbed from the blueprints.

William Donlin Jr., regional business director for the General Services Administration, which is overseeing the actual construction, says simply, "A proton generator was not considered an agency requirement."

But the nation's police headquarters will not be stripped of all the modern conveniences.

The FBI is getting underground garages, auto repair shops and a car wash complete with a scrub-and-dry unit.

To make sure that its agents are as well tuned as its cars, the bureau is installing a basement gymnasium, exercise room, locker room with showers and a therapeutic room (complete with massage tables, a whirlpool bath and a hip exercise unit).

### Dropes and Shape

GSA officials deny reports that Hoover selected everything in the new building right down to the color of

the drapes.

They say that Hoover has stayed in the background—the way he did that day he was indisposed.

But he has caused GSA a few problems. The first had to do with the shape of the building. Hoover wanted a box. The FBI files were to be at the center of the building with all the offices stacked around them.

Nathaniel Owings, chairman of the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission, took one look at the proposal and decided that if the FBI were allowed to build what one person described as the world's largest file cabinet, the "grand design" of the avenue was doomed.

"To my surprise," says Yasko, "Hoover went along."

This change of plans marked the building's first long delay. The redesigning, by C. F. Murphy & Associates of Chicago, took 1½ years.

GSA says that the FBI left the shape of the building to the architects, but the bureau did provide a list of its space requirements.

The largest single, space requirement was for files—over 550,000 square feet. They also asked for almost 190,000 feet for administration; 80,000 for laboratories; 60,000 for training; 35,000 for domestic intelligence, but only 23,000 for general investigation.

The smallest space needed

was for executive offices: 14,000 square feet. Yasko says that on special orders from Hoover, these are not to be posh.

"Even Hoover's office will be simple," he says. "At first, he even refused to have private toilet facilities."

Hoover's suite will, however, be directly above the gymnasium, exercise and therapeutic rooms.

### An Old Fortress

The building resembles an old fortress: four connecting concrete wings ranged around an open courtyard.

The new headquarters will be eight stories high in front and 11 stories toward the rear, the three additional floors composing roof deck which will extend over the main building.

By 1964, the FBI had detailed plans that it could present to the Fine Arts Commission. A minor flap arose when the commissioners suggested that the building have free standing columns. Hoover said that the columns would provide ideal cover for assassins. Fine Arts acquiesced.

The new design was approved by the Fine Arts Commission and the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission. All that it lacked was approval by Congress, and that

took years.

The project almost passed the Capitol Hill roadblock in the summer of 1966, but at the last minute the Senate cut the building from the Independent Offices Appropriations bill as an economy measure.

#### **First Contract Awarded**

The first contract was finally awarded to Norair Engineering Corp. in the fall of 1967 and excavation began. But even then there were delays, the longest caused by a three-month construction strike.

Donlin hopes to let the contracts for the superstructure in 1971.

But there could once again be a delay, depending on how Congress disposes of a request now before it for \$69.8 million to pay for the work.

In 1962, two new federal structures were announced, the FBI headquarters, then estimated at \$60 million, and the Housing and Urban Development building, estimated at \$32 million.

The HUD building was started in 1965, finished in 1968, and cost \$27.7 million, about \$4 million less than expected.

The FBI building, conceived the same year as HUD, has hardly proved to be comparable.



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# CITY LIFE

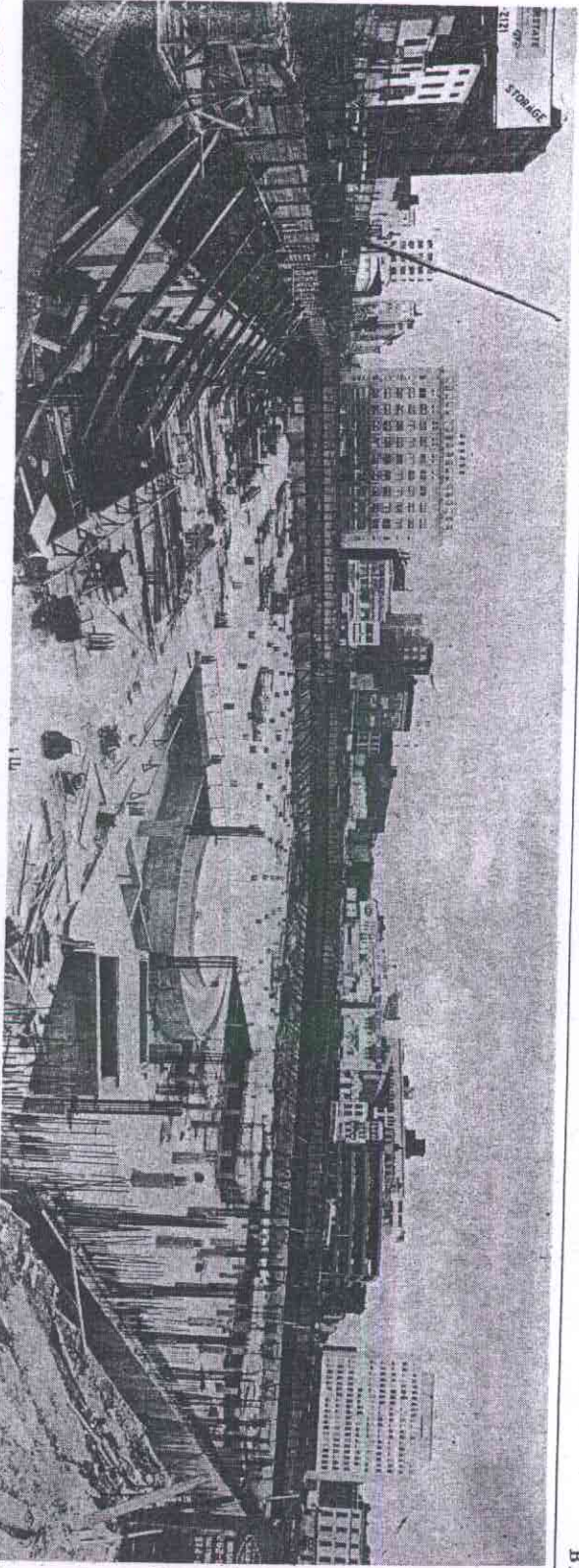
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A forest of steel piling marks construction site of new FBI headquarters that covers entire block of Pennsylvania Avenue NW. So far two of three basement floors have been finished, and estimated costs have climbed to record \$162.5 million.

By Charles D. Webb—The Washington Post