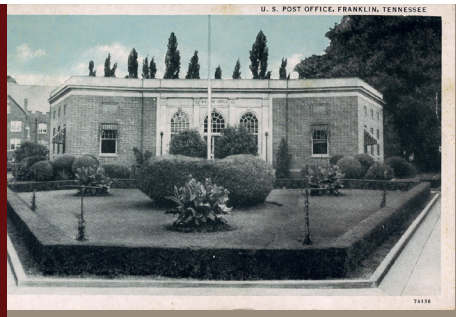

106 SUCCESS STORY

A Historic Community Takes Charge of Preserving a Local Icon

Franklin, Tennessee

"Saving the post office, using 106 review, in downtown Franklin was a seminal and seamlessly uncontroversial preservation project during a time of unprecedented growth and change for our town. The people of Franklin, from school age children to senior citizen groups, recognized the importance of preserving this historic building as a social hub and economic anchor to our small town."

— RUDY JORDAN
Former Executive Director of the Heritage Foundation and the Downtown Franklin Association

Photos: Above, 1926 postcard view of the Franklin Post Office; Right, 1925 view of the rear, and the post office today (photos courtesy the Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County)

THE STORY

Franklin, Tennessee, was founded in 1799 and named for Benjamin Franklin–the first postmaster of the United States. Built in 1925 at the town's most important downtown intersection, Five Points, the United States Post Office building has long been a treasured and vital venue that enjoys strong community support. The post office is a contributing structure in the 15-block downtown National Register of Historic Places Historic District. Franklin also is a Tennessee Main Street and Preserve America Community.

THE PROJECT

In the early 1990s the United States Postal Service (USPS) determined that the downtown location was inadequate. It built a new structure on the fringes of town with the intention to move the entire postal operation there. Part of a national trend, the agency planned to shut down the downtown operation and dispose of the building. Franklin and Williamson County residents and government officials were not pleased with the proposed closure. The public wanted postal services to continue to be available in the historic structure that was a center of civic life. The USPS considered continued postal operation inefficient and wanted to dispose of the old building and move all services to the new location.

THE 106 PROCESS

The USPS, the federal agency carrying out this project, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of the property when adverse effects are likely to ensue.

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Postmaster Assistant H.S. Reynolds and Postmaster Charles S. Moss in front of the Franklin Post Office next door to City Hall ca. 1898

Photos: Above, a view from 1925; Top Right, Postmaster Assistant H.S. Reynolds and Postmaster Charles S. Moss in front of the former post office, ca 1898 (both courtesy the Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County); Bottom Right, Fourth Avenue and Main Street in downtown Franklin present day (photo courtesy Ichabod, Wikimedia Commons)

Consultation rapidly revealed that local people and governments were strongly motivated to save the building and maintain a presence for the USPS in downtown at Five Points. When the closure was announced, a grass-roots movement to preserve the structure and its core public functions was created and sprang into action. This citizen involvement generated extensive publicity in the media, including designation of this facility in the 1991 National Trust for Historic Preservation's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. Through the Section 106 negotiations, the USPS agreed to convey ownership of the building to local government with a covenant that required any future modification, rehabilitation, or alteration to conform to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

THE SUCCESS

Through the Section 106 process, the USPS conveyed the structure at cost of $225,000 to Williamson County with protective covenants in the deed. A contractor continued to operate a postal substation where letterboxes and the primary postal services were offered. Today, a major bank is planning to lease the property, maintain a customer service postal operation, and rehabilitate the building by restoration of arched windows and replacement of an intrusive accessibility ramp. The Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County, which has had its offices in the building since it was obtained by the county, will be allowed to remain in the old post office.

More than 20 years after the USPS decided to dispose of the building and move most of its core operations elsewhere, the protective covenants included in the sale as a result of the Section 106 process continue to ensure the preservation of the structure. Broad community support for keeping the historic building and its core function intact found a vehicle in federal historic preservation law to achieve an outstanding success.

Consulting Parties:

United States Postal Service

ACHP

Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office

Williamson County

City of Franklin

Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County

National Trust for Historic Preservation

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to **www.achp.gov**

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