



PRESS RELEASE
October 23, 2019

CONTACT
Robin Tabora: (203) 773-2140

Richard C. Lee United States Courthouse Celebrates 100 Years at the Heart of New Haven

On Saturday, October 19, 2019, before an audience of more than 150 guests, the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut and the U.S. General Services Administration joined together in a special ceremonial session for the centennial celebration of the Richard C. Lee United States Courthouse located in New Haven. The Honorable Sonia Sotomayor, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, and Richard Blumenthal, United States Senator, were among the dignitaries present.

The courthouse is an architecturally and historically noteworthy building in the life of New Haven. The cornerstone of the courthouse was set in place on June 4, 1914, by former President William Howard Taft, who also delivered the chief address. Construction was completed, and the Court - as well as other Federal agencies - began operating in the new courthouse in 1919. Throughout its history, the Classical Revival edifice has played center stage to some of the most significant court cases in Connecticut history. The building today is home to the United States District Court of Connecticut.

Noting some of the historic cases to have come before the Court, Stefan R. Underhill, Chief Judge, said: "Importantly, these notable cases are only the tip of the iceberg. Every day litigants come into this courthouse where they are treated with dignity and respect by our court staff, and are heard with patience and wisdom by our judges. In sum, this great building is where good people give life to the promise of justice. We owe all of those good people, past and present, a debt of gratitude."

Speakers noted that the location of the building – on the east side of the 1638 New Haven Green – highlights the importance of the structure and its place in history. The Green is one of the earliest European urban planning efforts in the American colonies, and it has long been a location for significant civic buildings as well as historical events.

Justice Sotomayor said: "Today, 100 years later, the Lee Courthouse continues to demonstrate the majesty of our democracy and add significance and importance to the City of New Haven. Within these halls walk people from all paths of life, seeking to be heard; seeking mercy and justice. The judges of this Courthouse have served it with distinction and honor – serving all those who have entered these halls with dignity, respect and dedication."

“To this day, the Richard C. Lee United States Courthouse ranks among the most distinguished of New Haven's public buildings,” said GSA New England Regional Administrator Chris Averill. “Its imposing, classically inspired exterior remains much the same as originally constructed, making the courthouse a jewel of the United States government's owned building portfolio. I am thrilled GSA was invited to participate in this wonderful celebration, and congratulate the United States District Court of Connecticut on this monumental occasion.”

Famed architect James Gamble Rogers, known for his work at nearby Yale University and other institutions of higher education, designed the building, which was constructed between 1913 and 1919. The building originally served as a courthouse and post office, although the post office moved to another location in 1979. After undergoing a massive renovation and restoration, the building reopened in 1985 with a ceremony of rededication for the exclusive use of the federal courts and other federal agencies.

“I have always believed that buildings have souls[,]” Sotomayor went on to say. “They shape the experience of the people who live, work or visit in them. This beautiful building in its longevity of service and dedication to the public weal has always conveyed the great seriousness of the courts' work as well as the endurance of law as an institution. It has been a mighty fortress that inspires confidence in our system of government.”

The United States District Court for the District of Connecticut is one of the original 13 courts established by the Judiciary Act of 1789. The District has eight active judges, six senior judges, and five magistrate judges. Court proceedings are held in federal courthouses located in Bridgeport, New Haven, and Hartford. The District has jurisdiction over and summons jurors from the counties of Fairfield, New Haven, New London, Middlesex, Hartford, Litchfield, Tolland, and Windham. Appeals from the Court are heard by the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

###