This month we look at an area of our building that, previously, few visitors were able to see—the Postmaster’s Suite. Located near the western end of the Historic Lobby, adjacent to the Gross Gallery, this suite of rooms was the office of Washington, D.C.’s city postmaster for 72 years, from 1914 to 1986.

For many of those years, the Washington City postmaster was a plum job, personally appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. Frequently, it was seen as a stepping-stone to one of the department’s four assistant postmaster general posts. For example, Otto Praeger was the first City postmaster to occupy these rooms. Later, as second assistant postmaster general, he was a key figure in the development of early U.S. government air mail service.

This suite of rooms was mostly undisturbed during two major remodeling projects in 1932-35 and 1957-59, and so it retains much original material, especially in the elaborate private office. The walls and coffered ceiling are Circassian walnut. The parquet floors are mahogany and oak. The ornamental clock over the doorway is bronze.

We are repurposing this majestic setting as a gallery space to hold changing exhibitions. Most of the Gross Stamp Gallery exhibitions are designed to be permanent, which, in the museum world, means a lifespan of about thirty years. But we need to give people a reason to keep coming back! So these beautiful rooms are being fitted with freestanding display cases that will allow us to open a new exhibit every 12 to 18 months.

The first exhibit to open in this space will be called Favorite Finds, bringing together an assortment of philatelic items from the collections of members of the museum’s Council of Philatelists, philatelic curators, and museum supporters. Undoubtedly the star attraction of this exhibit will be three of the most famous U.S. postmaster provisional pieces in existence, all loaned by William H. Gross. Planning for replacement exhibits all the way out to 2018 is already underway.

Before I go, I want to share with you a construction photo shown above of the Gross Gallery taken on May 2, 2013, my deadline for submitting this column. It shows the area that will become Mail Marks History, as well as the Byrne Education Loft above the gallery. Already you can see the stunning stained-glass effect provided by the Windows Into America project. Here Chief Hollow Horn Bear gazes imperturbably onto Washington’s Massachusetts Avenue, exactly one hundred years after he visited the District for the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson.