

Happy 70th Birthday, Tower Federal Credit Union

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With no fanfare, the NSA Personnel Division Monthly Operational Summary for March 1953 stated “Organization of the Arlington Hall Federal Credit Union* was completed on 3 March, and will be full operation on 1 April.” However, according to the National Credit Union Administration, Charter Number 08333 was issued on January 1, 1953. So, it’s still anyone’s guess as to the precise date on which, as the story goes, seven NSA employees each contributed \$5.00 to establish a credit union.

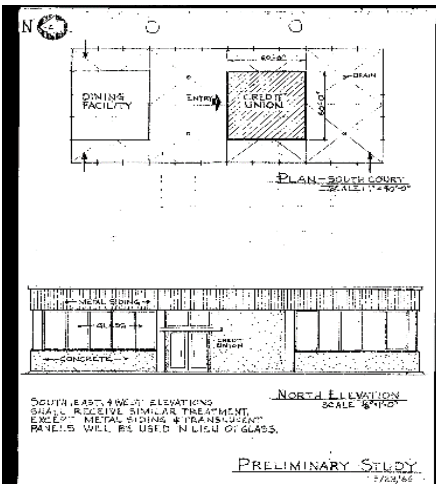
By the time NSA Bulletin Number 27-53 announced this to the workforce on May 4, 1953, the name had been changed to the NSA Federal Employees’ Credit Union, the express purpose of which was to “promote systematic savings among members and to provide them with a ready source of loans, at low rates, for provident or productive purposes.” After an initial \$.25 entrance fee, a new member could apply for a low-interest loan (1% per month) by subscribing for at least one \$5.00 share – payable in \$.25



Early NSA Credit Union office space

installments. The credit union office was originally housed in Room 3 of the Arlington Hall Station (AHS) cafeteria basement with service available every Friday from 1130-1230 and 1630-1700. By January 1954, membership had grown to 908, the share balance to \$31,803.69, and the loan balance to \$28,049.80. Just like its parent organization, the NSA Credit Union had also outgrown its office space and was in search of alternative permanent quarters.

NSA and the credit union successfully completed their moves to Ft. Meade, Maryland in 1957. The NSA Credit Union moved into office spaces in the commercial area of the new operations building, Room 1C107. This space would long serve its purpose—too long in the opinion of some—but by the end of 1965, 425 square feet was just too small. Credit Union President Eliot Pearl wrote to Colonel Kenneth Holbert, the chief of NSA’s Operational Support Group, requesting a minimum of 1200 additional square feet. Pearl explained that membership had grown to 8200 and seven full-time staff still worked in the “same physically inadequate, poorly ventilated office space that was allocated to the Credit Union initially.” There was no private office space for financial counseling of members or supervisory meetings with employees. Committee meetings and conferences were usually held in the cafeteria. Holbert delegated the issue to Eric Smith of the Office of Logistics, but Holbert was skeptical that Pearl actually needed 1200 square feet.



Proposed Credit Union building, 1966

Despite not getting his entire requested space allocation, Pearl commended Smith's constructive cooperation to Holbert in a glowing letter dated February 18, 1966. By March, loan operations were being conducted in Room 1C170, while the manager's office and teller operations remained in 1C107. A few months later, Facilities Division Chief John Bartlett informed Pearl that his organization had selected a site in the south court of Building No. 9800 (OPS 1) on which to build a separate, permanent structure to house the credit union. If approved by NSA, the construction project would need Department of the Army approval in order to proceed.

Meanwhile, 1966 saw another significant change. NSA Regulation Number 11-1, issued on February 15, provided "the policies and procedures relating to the administration of the NSA Federal Credit Union." However, the September edition of the NSA Newsletter featured the Tower Federal Credit Union's July Growth in Operations report. This was the first time the credit union was referred to as Tower Federal in the newsletter, but no explanation was offered for the name change.

As it turns out, the credit union and its NSA sponsor were growing in size and scope, so the credit union board decided to put some separation between the two organizations. This was around the time that NSA built its new nine-story headquarters building that was nicknamed "the Tower." Credit union board member Martin Maltenfort joked that if the building was called "the Tower," then that would make the credit union "Tower Federal Credit Union." The name stuck. Surprisingly, Change 1 to Regulation 11-1, issued on March 27, 1967, did not reflect the institution's new name. It wasn't until January 16, 1970 that a reissued Regulation 11-1 used the name Tower Federal Credit Union (TFCU).

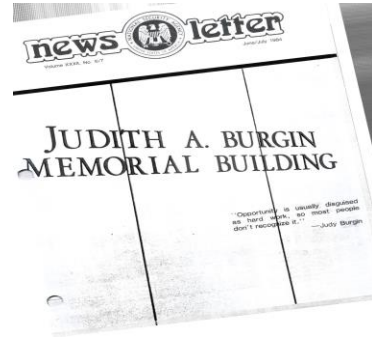
Bartlett's proposal for a credit union building never came to fruition, but in 1972 NSA realized it was running out of mission space in the operations building and needed the credit union, bank, barbershop, and drugstore to find other accommodations. Facing this reality, TFCU's Board of Directors decided on June 7, 1973 to build its own office building at NSA's Gatehouse #4 on .23 acres of land on Herczog Road between Engstrom Road and Towler Road, leased from the Department of Defense for 15 years at \$250.00 per year. On November 16, 1975 the new \$1.2M, 13,570 square foot office building was dedicated in a ceremony attended by a gaggle of luminaries including Congresswomen Marjorie Holt and Gladys Noon Spellman, as well as retired NSA Director of Civilian Personnel and first president of the credit union, William Holleran.



New home of the TFCU, mid-1970s

Two years later, because of changes to credit union regulations that allowed for expanded services such as checking and mortgages and the need to computerize those services, TFCU found that it had miscalculated its projected space needs for the new building. It was now looking for an additional 2600 square feet in the form of a prefabricated building to be built contiguous to the S-Building (COMSEC, OPS3 [Rowlett]). This structure would eventually house a special branch of the TFCU.

The main building was rededicated on June 2, 1984 as the “Burgin Building” in honor of Judith Burgin, who before her untimely death in 1983 had been a TFCU branch manager, teller supervisor, and consumer compliance officer. She had helped usher in such innovations as variable rate loans, automatic teller machines, standardized user-friendly loan applications, and disability loan insurance for members. Under the terms of the original lease agreement, ownership of the Burgin Building reverted back to Fort Meade in October 1999, but it retained the name.



TFCU opened its first “community branch” outside of NSA facilities in the Old Mill Plaza shopping center—complete with drive-through teller window—in 1989. The following year, December 22 saw the grand opening of the new Laurel branch on Sandy Spring Road between Route 198 and Van Dusen Road, which now serves as its headquarters.



Present-day branch of the TFCU

Today, Tower Federal Credit Union is the largest federal credit union in Maryland with over \$4.2 billion in assets providing financial products and services to over 220,000 members worldwide. There are 12 branches in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, and Prince George’s counties and five branches at Fort Meade, as well as state-of-the-art online and mobile banking technology and a network of 47,000 ATMs.

So, Happy Birthday, TFCU and many happy returns!

* The main difference between credit unions and banks is that credit unions are nonprofit institutions while banks are for-profit. A credit union is set up as a cooperative and is owned by its members—usually individuals who share a common bond. A credit union’s mission is to provide its members with the best terms it can afford for their financial products. Credit unions do not have to worry about making profits for shareholders. (Source: Forbes Advisor, <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/banking/difference-between-bank-and-credit-union/>)

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Central Maryland Chamber of Commerce web site, <https://web.centralmarylandchamber.org/Credit->

Email from OPS3 Building Manager to Patrick Bomgardner, author, January 26, 2023.

(U) P131 has reviewed and determined the attached document titled **“Happy 70th Birthday Tower Federal Credit Union (TFCU),” PP-23-0312**, to be **UNCLASSIFIED** and **Approved for Public Release** with no restriction on venue or medium.