

# LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

2026 Q2



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- Create career opportunities and fuel economic growth in Douglas County for generations.

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LAWRENCE & DOUGLAS CO [ IN PERSPECTIVE ]

# Preserving the Past

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by Pat Michaelis, Ph.D., Historical Research & Archival Consulting  
photos provided by BCBSKS

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Renovations continue on Lawrence's old post office,  
bought and being preserved by  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas.



The former U.S. Post Office, at 645 New Hampshire St., was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2002. Because it is on the National Register, the building is eligible for state and federal historic preservation tax credits. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas (BCBSKS), which purchased the building in 2019 to relocate its disaster recovery site from Topeka, researched the building's history so as to make upgrades to the building while keeping its original character.

"When we learned that the old post office was on the market, we realized that we could do so much more than just have a disaster recovery site," Matt All, BCBSKS president and CEO says. "We could put down roots in the heart of Lawrence and give employees a great place to work. These kinds of opportunities don't come around very often, and we jumped at it."

## The History

Lawrence's first post office opened Jan. 13, 1855. It was located in the home of Carmi W. Babcock. In the following years, the post office relocated several times. In 1870, it moved into the Bowersock Opera House on Massachusetts Street, owned by Justin DeWitt Bowersock. He was instrumental in acquiring an appropriation for a post office for Lawrence in 1902, but he and several other congressmen had been lobbying for the post office since the late 1890s, when Bowersock first introduced a bill for \$75,000 to determine a site for the erection of the building in December 1899. The appropriation was approved in 1902. The *Lawrence Journal* reported that Bowersock had sacrificed financially by supporting the new building instead of continuing to operate the post office in his opera house.

Postcard image of the U.S. Post Office building in Lawrence, as viewed from the southeast.

The date of this image is unknown, but it shows the operations of the post office in the early 1900s.



Built at a cost of \$60,000 under the direction of James Knox Taylor, supervising architect of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the post office was the first federal building in Lawrence and was secured for the city by Congressman Bowersock, who was also a prominent local businessman. At the time of its opening, it was the fourth busiest post office in the state.

In 1906, postal employees moved into the new building. By 1907, the Lawrence facility had been designated a first-class post office with over \$40,000 in transactions. These total receipts were only surpassed by Kansas City, Topeka and Wichita. In eight years, business had doubled, and discussions of the need for a larger space began.

Thus, the building was renovated in 1930. During the remodeling, employees were located temporarily in the old Weaver's building and moved back to the remodeled facility on Oct. 13, 1930. This construction more than doubled the size of the original building. The interior remodeling removed many nonoriginal partitions. The two-story interior was opened up, and paint was removed from the skylights. Wooden windows and floors were repaired, and matching glass globes were installed on the chandeliers.

The building served as Lawrence's post office until 1973. It then became the home for The University of Kansas's Continuing Education department. In September 2001, it became home to the *Lawrence Journal-World* and 6News newsrooms.



Post Office, Lawrence, Kansas

## Where Things Stand

The current renovation (started in summer 2025) began with the exterior of the building and included the following:

- repainted window trim
- washed the building and repaired any damaged masonry
- reconditioned the two front entry lamp posts
- replaced a damaged front step and reset the other granite slabs to bring back the original tread
- rebuilt the foundation of the three exterior staircases (south and east sides of the building)
- updated railings with hardware accurate to the time period
- uncovered brass elements of the outdoor lighting sconces.



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*The newly renovated interior vestibule of BCBSKS*

The interior renovation at the Lawrence facility is designed to update and modernize the interior spaces while still respecting the building's historic character. Utilizing numerous historic photographs, BCBSKS plans to return finishes to how they looked when new. Designers are focusing on the first-floor, 1906 period at the front of the facility. This includes restoration of flooring, lighting and the main entry. From there, the focus will shift to the remaining 1930s portion of the first and second floors. There will be more intentional modernization in this area geared toward a modern workforce.

Sales and executive staff are among those who work in the building regularly. In addition to desks for workers to drop in and use, the building also includes several conference rooms to support meetings, regional collaboration and hybrid work. Its location at the north end of Massachusetts Street makes it convenient for employees to take advantage of restaurants and stores on their lunch hours and breaks.

Employees will benefit from a more functional, modern and comfortable work environment that better supports collaboration and daily needs of a modern workforce. Improvements include updated technology and restrooms, conference and huddle spaces, improved break room amenities and refreshed office areas. The facility allows for an in-office experience for employees closer to the Lawrence and Kansas City areas while also serving the business continuity needs in the event of an interruption at the Topeka campus.

Since the exterior renovation was completed, the current timeline is for the remaining phases of the renovation. The second phase is to design the interior for the original 1906 structure, which is expected to be completed this year. Phase 3 will focus on the 1930s additions to the first and second floor, with completion projected for 2027. The basement will be last and is expected to be completed in 2028.

The renovation has already been recognized by local preservationists. The Lawrence Preservation Alliance has awarded BCBSKS one of its 2025 Summer Preservation in Progress (PIP) Awards for the work taking place on the old post office. PIP awards recognize those performing preservation work to improve a structure, promote preservation concepts or set the stage for future preservation efforts.

One of the original goals BCBSKS had for the building was to provide a space for disaster recovery activities. For example, the extra space will provide the company with additional room during a time of crisis or to host employees from other locations for large meetings, with all the Downtown Lawrence amenities within easy walking distance.

Mitch Sexton, manager of the renovation project, counts this project as among his favorites in his time at BCBSKS. "It's almost like the building is living and breathing," Mitch says. "You can't help but love that building."

"I hope we give employees a great place to work in Downtown Lawrence and a sense of pride that we're doing our part to preserve a piece of Lawrence and Kansas history," President and CEO All says. "And I hope the Lawrence community sees that we truly love our state, from small towns to cities like Lawrence. When you do your work from a place of love and respect for your community, great things are possible.

"It's a beautiful example of early 20th-century architecture, with its brick facade, lampposts, tall ceilings and windows. It's a real treasure," All continues. "I'm proud that we can be its steward and help restore some of its features. I think that's part of being a truly local company—respecting and celebrating what makes each community unique." ▲

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