





# CIVIC IMPROVEMENTS

The dawn of the twentieth century brought a new interest in the capital city and its place in American culture. Washington had been the seat of government for a century, variously nurtured or starved by the officials it served, but growing steadily until it boasted over a quarter million souls. Monumental buildings like the Capitol; the White House; the Navy, War, and State Building; and the Library of Congress were the pride of America. They represented a staggering investment that helped silence talk of relocating the capital. Proposals for additional government buildings were being made, particularly for sites along the Mall and on Capitol Hill. For some civic leaders the new century seemed a good time to study the city's history, examine its present situation, and explore its potential for improvement. Spurred by the so-called City Beautiful Movement, prophets of urban America hoped to reform and embellish urban areas, making them healthy by building extensive parklands and dignified by erecting beautiful buildings and monuments. Although the movement was rooted in the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, its national laboratory was Washington, with Capitol Hill becoming a large part of the noble experiment.

When the American Institute of Architects held its 1900 annual meeting in Washington, its members lobbied Congress for an official commission to examine the city's future development and architectural enhancement. They found a willing partner in Michigan Senator James McMillan, chairman of the Committee on the District of Columbia, who would sponsor legislation creating the Senate Park Commission in 1901. Members of this commission, some of the country's leading design professionals, would advise the government on the capital's future. The "McMillan Commission," as the Senate Park Commission was also known, was chaired by Daniel Burnham, a Chicago architect best remembered for the edict "Make no little plans; They have no magic to stir men's blood." Burnham and his colleagues—architect Charles McKim, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens—proposed sweeping changes to Washington's monumental core. Aiming to reverse decades of neglect and thoughtless development, the commission sought to make the city a world-class capital, ornamented with handsome buildings, parks, plazas, and landscapes. Of prime importance was the Mall, which would be cleared of the unsightly train tracks and railroad stations that Congress had permitted to be built there, thinned of the forest that had grown thick over the years, and restored to the formal *tapis vert* that Pierre L'Enfant had intended. The commission proposed a phalanx of marble buildings for Capitol Hill to replace the stores, saloons, hotels,

**Laying the Cornerstone of the Senate Office Building (Detail)**  
July 31, 1906

and houses overlooking the Capitol grounds. Such a classical enclave, designed with unity, harmony, and symmetry, would be a more worthy neighbor.

In January 1902 the Senate Park Commission issued its report. An exhibition of its work, consisting of scale models of the city showing before and after conditions, photographs, and renderings, was put on display at the new Corcoran Gallery of Art near the White House so that citizens could come to have a look at their future. Senator McMillan escorted President Theodore Roosevelt around the exhibit, viewing the large and impressive models from an elevated platform. The spirit of urban reform struck a chord with the progressive president, who expressed enthusiasm for the commission's work.

While the Senate Park Commission's exhibit was inside, black crepe shrouded the outside of the Corcoran Gallery in memory of Edward Clark, a faithful public trustee who had recently died. No sign of mourning was found at the Capitol, where he had worked since 1851, but Washington's premier art museum publicly grieved the city's loss. The office of architect of the Capitol was vacant for the first time in thirty-six years, and, the need to name a successor soon pitted leaders in Congress against those who guarded the prerogatives of the architectural profession.

During Clark's lengthy illness it had been assumed by many in Congress that his popular and hardworking assistant, Elliott Woods, would be elevated to the post in due time. In an institution that puts great stock in tradition and continuity, it seemed only right to promote Clark's assistant in the same way that Clark, who had been Walter's assistant, had been promoted in 1865. Over the previous four years Woods had been the de facto architect of the Capitol, and it was fitting to confer on him the title of office along with its responsibilities and salary (which had stood at \$4,500 a year since 1851). But the fact that Woods was not an architect bothered leaders of the architectural profession. Especially disturbed was Glenn Brown, the secretary of the American Institute of Architects and author of the two-volume *History of the United States Capitol*, who had designs of his own on Clark's post. Chief among Brown's supporters was J. R. Proctor, the chairman of the Civil Service Commission and a friend of President Roosevelt.

He actively promoted Brown to succeed Clark in the architect's job.<sup>1</sup>

In a matter of hours after Clark's death, however, the political machinery in Congress geared up to steer Woods into the architect's office. Some thought that his chances could be spoiled only if he were found to be a Democrat. Telegrams from his home state of Indiana poured in with testaments to his loyalty to the GOP. Complicating the situation was Woods' father, who apparently had abandoned the party and caused some questions regarding his son's politics. Representative Jesse Overstreet of Indianapolis, where Woods grew up, received a telegram from a local politico that set the record straight: the father may have quit the Republican party, but "the boy stuck."<sup>2</sup> Another telegram supporting Woods was sent to Roosevelt by Senator Matt Quay, the political boss of Pennsylvania. Quay was the chairman of the Committee on the Organization, Conduct, and Expenditures in the Executive Department, a potent position that readily gave him entree to the president. William Hepburn of Iowa contacted fellow representatives, urging them to write Roosevelt in support of Woods' promotion. He was alarmed that a "society of architects" was attempting to interfere in the matter.

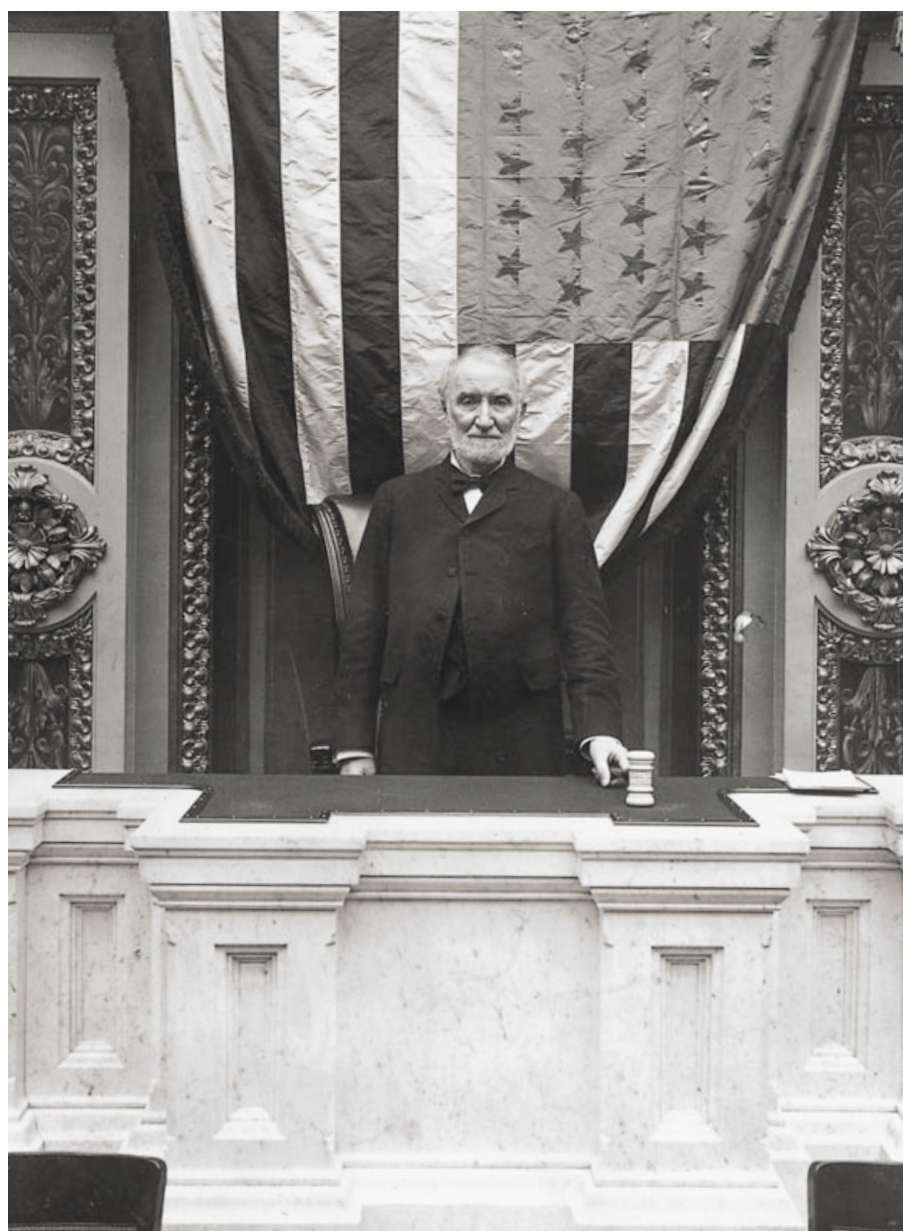
As telegrams and letters piled up on Roosevelt's desk, the American Institute of Architects quietly expressed concern at the possibility of a non architect becoming architect of the Capitol. Two of the institute's officers, President Charles McKim and Secretary Glenn Brown, were leading opponents of Woods' appointment. As a member of the Senate Park Commission, McKim understood that its future success required cooperation from key civic and government figures, and among these was the architect of the Capitol. In February 1902, Brown published an article entitled "The Twentieth Century Washington" in *House and Garden* magazine, informing the public about proposals to restore the federal city to the way Washington and L'Enfant had envisioned it.<sup>3</sup> Part of the focus of the McMillan Commission was the area around the Capitol, which was seen as a precinct devoted exclusively to classical government buildings and gardens. Other areas near the Capitol would be affected by the commission's proposals, and it would need a sympathetic partner in Clark's old job. McKim did not think Woods was such a person and supported Brown for the post. He was, after

all, the leading authority on the history of the Capitol, a man well acquainted with the intricacies of its construction history and details, as well as a respected architect. Few doubted that Roosevelt would listen to McKim, who within a few months would embark on a joint project to remodel and redecorate the White House. With McKim's support, and that of other influential men in Washington, Brown had reason to believe that the office of architect of the Capitol would be his for the asking.

On the other hand, Representative Joseph Cannon of Illinois, the powerful chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations and future Speaker, did not care a fig for McKim, nor did he have much use for the Senate Park Commission or the American Institute of Architects. He felt snubbed when Senator McMillan proceeded with the Park Commission without the consent or participation of the House of Representatives. In his view, these bodies were meddling, and he especially did not appreciate the American Institute of Architects telling Congress who should be appointed architect of the Capitol. Cannon went to see Roosevelt about the matter, fortified by a petition signed by forty members of Congress supporting Elliott Woods, and explained that, unless Woods was appointed to the post, the president's relations with the House and Senate would become unnecessarily strained. According to Cannon, it was the prerogative of Congress to say who should fill the position that was, in fact, their chief housekeeper.

Brown and McKim were no match for Joe Cannon and others in Congress who lined up behind their man. Roosevelt agreed to appoint Woods but wanted the job title changed. Cannon suggested calling the officer "superintendent" instead of "architect" if it would help quiet critics. This was easily done and on February 14, 1902, Congress enacted an appropriation bill that contained language to effect the change.<sup>4</sup> All the powers and authority of the architect's position were vested in a new "Superintendent of the Capitol Building and Grounds," whose office remained under the Department of the Interior. The office and the salary were exactly the same but the head of the agency would no longer be an architect. Five days later Roosevelt appointed Woods to the newly renamed post.

Looking back on the episode, Brown blamed his loss to Woods (whom he consistently referred



**Joseph G. Cannon at the Speaker's Rostrum**

ca. 1903

Library of Congress

*A* representative from Illinois, Cannon (1836–1926) was chairman of the Appropriations Committee for eight years before becoming Speaker of the House in 1903. He is remembered mainly for the tight control he exercised over legislative activities, but he also took a considerable interest in the Capitol and the accommodations of the House of Representatives. The first office building designed for the House, a building that bears his name today, was begun soon after he became Speaker. He unsuccessfully pushed for the east front extension as a means to ease crowded conditions in the Capitol. The American Institute of Architects came up against Cannon's power when it tried to influence the appointment of the next architect of the Capitol when the office became vacant in 1902. Cannon repelled the institute's initiatives and steered Elliott Woods into the office. He remained Woods' champion throughout their service on Capitol Hill.





**Elliott Woods in  
His Laboratory**  
ca. 1910

*Aside from his regular duties as superintendent of the Capitol, Woods (1865–1923) enjoyed scientific experiments with wireless telegraphy and X-rays. His laboratory was located at the corner of Delaware Avenue and C Street, N. E.*

to as “Wood” in his memoir), on Roosevelt’s inexperience and lack of backbone. “This was early in Roosevelt’s administration,” Brown wrote almost thirty years later, “and he had no desire to antagonize Congress as he did in later years.”<sup>5</sup> Brown remained a lifelong critic of Woods’ performance at the Capitol, even after the superintendent was welcomed into the American Institute of Architects as a full-fledged member in 1921.

## CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE BUILDINGS

The census of 1900 increased the membership of the House of Representatives to 391, up an astonishing 148 seats in the half-century since the Capitol was last enlarged. Rearranging seats and buying smaller desks made it possible to accommodate members comfortably on the floor of the chamber, but elsewhere overcrowding was a problem. Committee rooms remained in short supply, and restaurants, barber shops, and bathing rooms were severely

taxed. About fifty-six members could have offices in the Capitol, and these were usually provided by virtue of a chairman’s use of a committee room as his personal office.

Members of the House were envious of the Senate, which in 1891 acquired an office building in the form of a converted apartment building. The Maltby House, located at the corner of New Jersey Avenue and B Street north (modern day Constitution Avenue), was only three years old when the government purchased the property and remodeled the apartments into eighty-one offices and committee rooms. In 1893, the government purchased Benjamin Butler’s ponderous stone mansion on B Street south (modern day Independence Avenue). It was too small for congressional offices and the Coast and Geodetic Survey moved in instead.

At that time, acting architect of the Capitol Elliott Woods, old August Schoenborn, and local contract architects were working on preliminary schemes for a House office building. Four squares of land south of the Capitol were considered as possible locations, and schematic designs were created to help develop preliminary cost estimates. No matter where the new office building was located, it was to be connected to the Capitol via an underground tunnel. The tunnel would carry pedestrian and truck traffic, as well as electrical conduits and steam pipes. A new power plant connected with the office building would be built to serve it, the Capitol, and the Library of Congress. Woods promised that members would be able to reach the floor of the House through the tunnel as quickly as from any committee room in the terrace.

Woods submitted plans and elevations showing six possible designs for an office building suited to city squares south of the Capitol. All were for three-story structures with an Ionic order standing on a rusticated ground floor. Their similarity and deference to the basic composition of the Capitol were obvious. Woods explained his initial ideas about the style and character of the proposed building in his annual report for 1902:

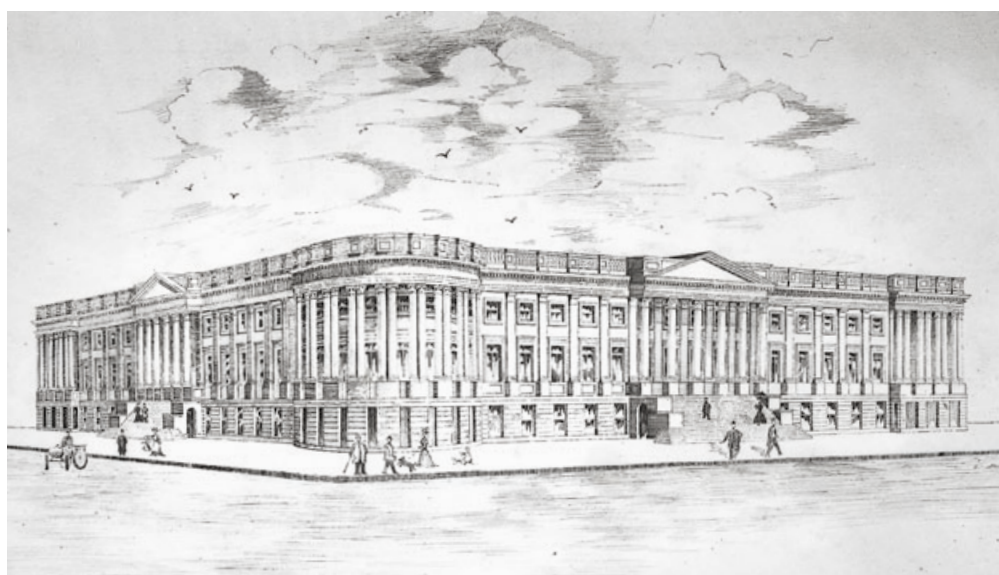
In view of the proximity of the proposed new structure to the Capitol building, the construction should be carried out on classic lines. The idea had been carried out in the sketches. The exterior walls of the new building should be either of marble or granite, preferably the former. The interior would be constructed largely of steel and terra-cotta and other fireproof

materials. The court walls would be faced with enamel brick conducive to cleanliness and good lighting for the interior rooms.<sup>6</sup>

The smallest proposed version of a House office building contained 285 offices and another ninety-five rooms intended for folding rooms (where outgoing mail was handled), storage, or work shops. Designs for larger buildings accommodated more than 400 offices with 125 support rooms. Woods estimated that it would cost about \$2,500,000 to construct the smaller building, while the larger versions would cost about \$4,300,000.

The Civil Appropriations Act of March 3, 1903, authorized the creation of a commission to oversee construction of a new office building for the House of Representatives and provided \$750,000 to begin the project. Serving on the commission were Joe Cannon of Illinois (elected Speaker later that year), William Hepburn of Iowa, and James D. Richardson of Tennessee. Woods was designated by law to direct and supervise construction and to make all the necessary contractual arrangements. The idea of using a supervising commission to oversee construction of the House office building was entirely new and a welcome improvement over the old way of doing business. Unlike the time when Latrobe or Walter answered to the executive branch, enduring attacks in Congress from members who felt helpless and ignored, the commission of two Republicans and one Democrat provided appropriate project oversight within the House of Representatives itself. The bipartisan commission also protected the work from the sort of politically motivated scrutiny that had characterized past projects. Woods' friendly relationship with the Speaker was another propitious sign that the work would proceed smoothly.

In one of its first actions, the commission decided to build the new office building on a large parcel bounded by First Street east, B Street south (modern day Independence Avenue), New Jersey Avenue, and C Street south. The site was convenient and the ground was level and solid. A corner of the property lay over the path of a proposed railroad tunnel carrying southbound trains from Washington's new Union Station, but that was not considered an insurmountable problem. The secretary of interior was asked to initiate condemnation proceedings to obtain title to the square, the assessed value of which was about \$250,000. Demo-



**House Office Building Design "C" by Elliott Woods  
1902**

*This was one of six preliminary designs for an office building worked up by the superintendent of the Capitol.*

lition of existing structures (mainly nineteenth-century commercial buildings overlooking the Capitol and residential row houses facing side streets) began on February 1, 1904, and excavation on the site began that summer. Tracks were constructed across the east plaza in front of the Capitol for trains transporting dirt from the House office building site to the site of Union Station, which needed fill material. (One of the first and finest accomplishments of the McMillan Commission, the city's new railroad station permitted removal of the old stations and tracks cluttering the Mall.)

After the site was selected, the commission decided how the building would be designed. Cannon seemed particularly averse to spending money to hire an architect who would charge 5 or 6 percent of the construction cost and add an unnecessary expense to the project. He thought that Woods and his staff could do the work just as well and far more cheaply: they had already worked up several competent designs and there was no need to go elsewhere for architectural assistance. But it was Woods himself who understood the limitations of his organization in the design field, realizing that





### **John M. Carrère and Thomas Hastings**

ca. 1890

The American Institute of Architects Archives, Washington, D.C.

*T*he son of a Baltimore coffee merchant, Carrère (1858–1911) was born in Rio De Janeiro, studied in Switzerland, and graduated from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1882. Returning to America, he was a draftsman in the office of McKim, Mead & White before forming a partnership with Thomas Hastings (1860–1929), a native New Yorker who was also a graduate of the Ecole.

From the commencement of their work together, Carrère and Hastings attracted wealthy clients, enjoying widespread success and celebrity. Their first important patron was Henry Flagler, for whom they designed the Ponce DeLeon Hotel and the Flagler Memorial Presbyterian Church in St. Augustine, Florida, and “Whitehall,” Flagler’s Palm Beach estate. Great mansions were the firm’s specialty—clients included Mrs. Richard Townsend of Washington, D. C.; Mrs. Richard Grambrill of Newport, Rhode Island; Murray Guggenheim of Elberton, New Jersey; William K. Vanderbilt of Great Neck, New York; and Alfred I. duPont of Wilmington, Delaware.

Following a nationwide competition, the firm of Carrère & Hastings was commissioned to design the New York Public Library, which was completed in 1911. The Jefferson Hotel in Richmond, Virginia, the Agricultural Building at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, and the National Amphitheater at Arlington Cemetery were other notable commissions. From 1904 to 1929, the firm provided most of the architectural services required by the United States Congress.

Both partners were active in the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Architecture League of New York. Carrère was a founder of the New York Art Commission, a director of the American Academy at Rome, and a member of the National Academy of Design. Hastings was awarded the Royal Institute of British Architects’ Gold Medal and was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor by the French government.

the building would be scrutinized by the architectural profession—in particular, the AIA. He wanted the authority to hire a consulting architect.

Striking a middle course, the commission charged Woods with planning the new House office building, writing specifications, and overseeing construction. A drafting room would be operated under his direction and he would act as the general contractor. Consulting architects would be hired to ensure a first-rate design, but they would not be allowed to charge a percentage fee. Instead, the consultants would be given a flat fee of \$10,000 per year. Finding a firm with the requisite prestige that would also accept the terms allowed by the commission could well have been a daunting task. Happily, however, it did not take Woods long to become acquainted with one of the nation’s most fashionable firms. Partners John Carrère and Thomas Hastings were society architects, with elegant Beaux Arts tastes perfectly suited to the needs of their wealthy clients. The firm was held in high esteem by the AIA and would surely help Woods in any public relations problems that might arise in the future. (Charles McKim was Thomas Hastings’s “best man” when he married in 1900.)

On April 8, 1904, Woods laid before the commission a letter from Thomas Hastings in which he agreed without a word of equivocation to four general stipulations: the working drawings would be produced in Washington under Woods' supervision; the fee was satisfactory; the general layout of the interior already devised by Woods was acceptable, but his firm would become responsible for its "correct" architectural effect; and a suitable exterior architectural effect would be devised. With considerable solemnity Hastings pledged to render Woods services with "full loyalty and confidence."<sup>7</sup> On April 11, 1904, the commission accepted Woods' recommendation to hire Carrère & Hastings as consulting architects, beginning a friendly and mutually beneficial association that lasted a quarter-century.

Woods set up a drafting room to produce detailed working drawings for the building, and he hired Oscar Wenderoth, an architect associated with Carrère & Hastings, to serve as head draftsman. (Wenderoth later served as supervising architect of the treasury, 1912–1915.) Owen Brainard, another of the architects' close associates, was retained as consulting engineer. Not only would Wenderoth work out the details of the new House office building; he and his men would also plan a new office building for the Senate. Four months earlier, the Senate had created its own commission to oversee construction of an office building for its use, a building mirroring its counterpart on the other side of the Capitol's east garden as proposed by the McMillan Commission. (As it turned out, the Maltby House had been built on unstable ground and was showing alarming signs of structural failure.) A new building for the Senate would complement the House office building, ensuring that neither body was better accommodated than the other. Miscellaneous projects relating to the office buildings, such as plans for the connecting tunnels and designs for furniture, were also addressed in Wenderoth's drafting room. Schemes for rebuilding the House chamber and other tasks were handled there as well.<sup>8</sup>

Of the partners, Thomas Hastings was considered the better designer, and John Carrère was the businessman who handled clients. For their work in Washington, however, Hastings took responsibility for the House office building and

Carrère had charge of the Senate office building. The two buildings were nearly identical on the outside, designed as elegant yet deferential backdrops to the Capitol. Although dominant features such as domes or pediments were avoided, smaller details were plentiful and rich. Facing the Capitol grounds were colonnades almost 300 feet long with thirty-four paired Doric columns standing on a ground-story base. End pavilions featured large arched windows framed by columns. Pilasters continued the Doric order along secondary elevations, while the backs of both office buildings were originally left perfectly plain. A continuous balustrade masked a low roof. The design was inspired by the Gardes-Meubles on the Place de la Concorde and the great colonnade at the Louvre in Paris.

The principal entrance to each office building was located at the corner closest to the Capitol. No hint was made on the outside to indicate that a rotunda fifty-seven feet in diameter lay just behind the entrance. It functioned as the main lobby and the introduction to the building's interior grandeur. Using Woods' plan for a grand circular vestibule, Carrère & Hastings designed a ring of eighteen Corinthian columns standing on an arcade and supporting a coffered dome. Opposite the entrance was placed a broad, split staircase leading to the most sumptuous room in the building—the caucus room. The procession into the building, through the rotunda, up the stairs, and into the caucus room, was both clear and compelling. While originally intended to be copies of Statuary Hall, the caucus rooms were redesigned as rectangular two-story spaces fifty-two feet wide and seventy-four feet long. The flat ceilings were divided into panels and decorated with a variety of molded plaster ornaments highlighted with gold leaf. In the House caucus room the walls were lined with Corinthian pilasters, while its counterpart in the Senate office building had freestanding Corinthian columns twenty-seven feet high in white Vermont marble. Tall arched windows looked onto interior courtyards lined with Indiana limestone. The House office building's court was fully enclosed from the beginning, but the one at the Senate office building remained a three-sided yard until 1931. The First Street addition, begun that year, enclosed the courtyard with a fourth side.





**Committee on Military Affairs, House Office Building**  
ca. 1908

*M*ost committee rooms in the first House office building were functional and businesslike.



**Member's Office**  
1907

*T*his photograph was taken after the interior of the House office building was finished but before it was occupied. The central table was manufactured by Gimbel Brothers of New York, the tufted “Turkish” chair was made by the Julius Lansburgh Company of Washington, while the remaining furnishings were ordered from John Wanamaker of Philadelphia.



**Construction of the House Office Building**  
1906

*T*he first House office building was designed by the New York firm of Carrère & Hastings using plans developed by Elliott Woods. The principal feature of the exterior was a colonnade 300 feet long with paired Doric columns, which are shown here with only their bases in place.





### **House Office Building Caucus Room**

ca. 1908

*A* versatile chamber for hearings, meetings, and receptions, the caucus room was an elegant design with coupled Corinthian pilasters, a marble floor, and a richly ornamented plaster ceiling. It was similar in scale and spirit to the east room at the White House, which Charles McKim redesigned for Theodore Roosevelt in 1902.



### **House Office Building**

1908

*T*he design of the House office building acknowledged its accessory role in the architectural hierarchy of the Capitol complex.

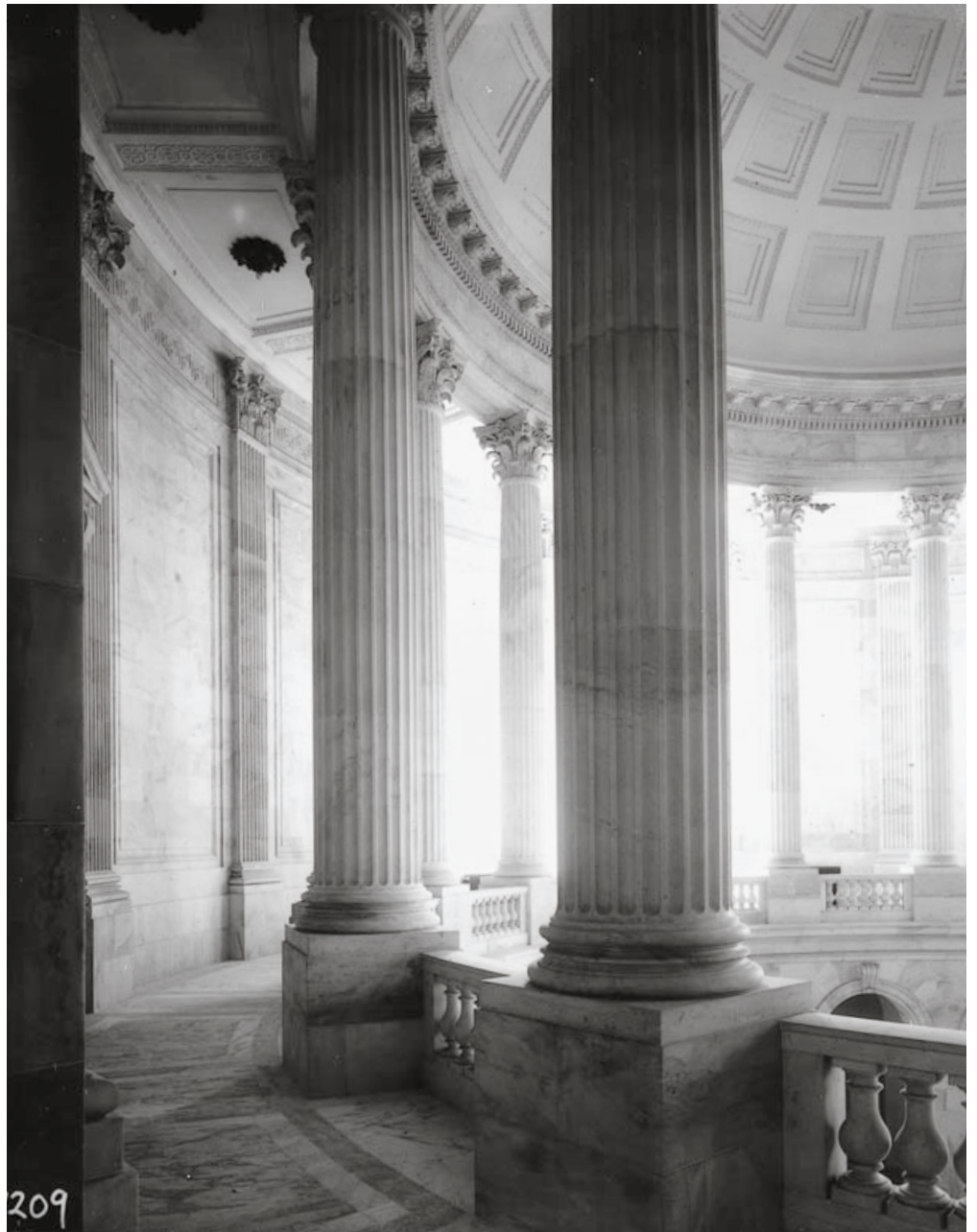


On December 12, 1908, the House office building opened for business. For the first time in the nation's history each representative had an office, actually a modest room averaging fifteen and a half feet wide and twenty-three feet long. Modern in every respect, the offices were outfitted with telephones, lavatories (supplying hot, cold, and iced water), steam heat, and forced-air ventilation. In addition, fourteen rooms were available for committees. Ninety-eight suites and eight committee rooms were provided in the Senate office building, which opened on March 5, 1909. A Philadelphia paper took note of the beautiful new office buildings as they neared completion in Washington, observing in its headline that legislators were being "Good To Themselves":

Each division of the nation's Legislature will have a stately edifice of its own and the combined cost of the two is placed at about five million dollars. In the building for the Representatives there will be a fine office for every member of the House. The Senators will each have a three-room suite, including a bathroom, in the edifice devoted to their use. All expenses for heat, light, maintenance, and attendants will be paid by the government. A special little subway road will transport the lawmakers free of charge between the Capitol and the splendid structures erected for their comfort and convenience.

The laborer is worthy of his hire, no doubt; and he is likewise worthy of suitable housing while he is performing his work. Yet it is also to be remembered that Congress, besides providing for the creation of these semi-palatial "annexes," has voted to increase the salary of every Senator and Representative from \$5,000 to \$7,500—while at the same time by a little adroit legislative juggling, each of them is entitled to an extra fifteen hundred dollars yearly for clerk hire, which he may spend for that purpose, or put it in his pocket.<sup>9</sup>

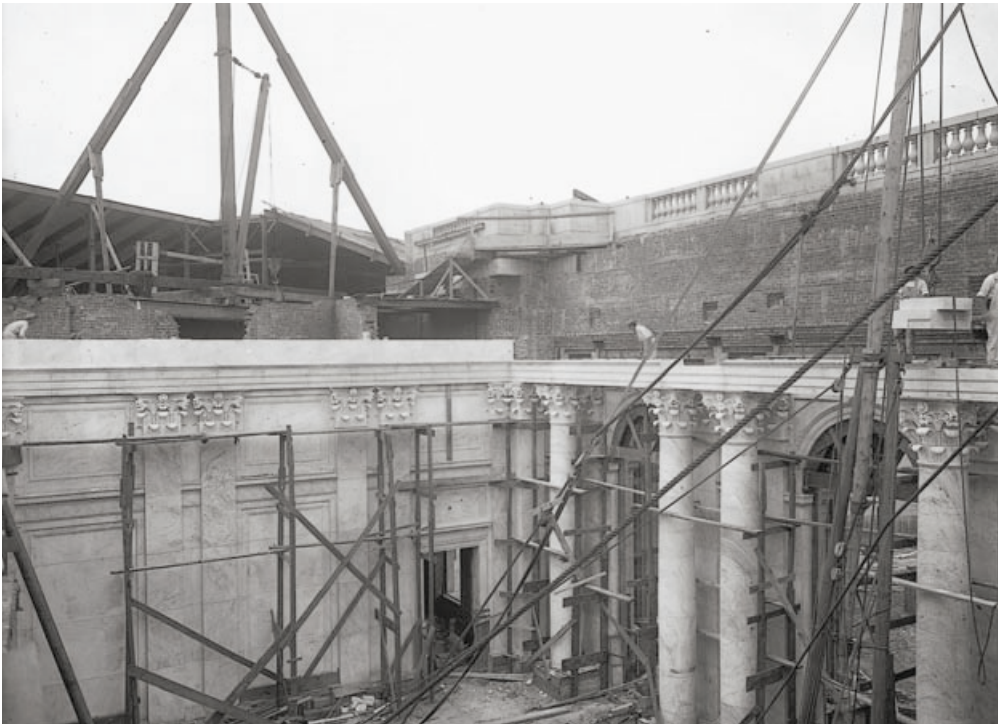
While hardly biting, the article took a dim view of congressional luxury purchased with the people's pocketbook. Unlike publicity concerning the Capitol, stories about congressional office buildings seemed not so much about civic improvements as about personal extravagance on the part of elected officials. Nothing was ever too good for the Capitol, but everything was too good in the legislative office buildings. Despite the evidence of judicious economy and good urban design that usually governed



### **Rotunda, Senate Office Building**

**1909**

*E*xcept for the plaster dome, the rotunda was made entirely of white marble.



**Senate Caucus Room Under Construction**  
1908

*A*lthough initially smaller, the Senate Office Building cost more than its counterpart built for the House of Representatives. One reason for the discrepancy was the use of more costly materials for the interior. Here workmen are setting a stone for the caucus room's entablature, which was marble like the room's columns, walls, and floor.



**Committee Room, Senate Office Building**  
1909

*S*till missing its clock and sconces, this room was photographed just before the Senate office building opened. Leather-covered chairs and conference table, crystal chandeliers, and a marble mantle contribute to the impression of a corporate board room.



**Senate Office Building**  
ca. 1909

*W*hile the design of the office buildings may have avoided architectural competition with the Capitol, it did not shy away from rich details. Particularly notable were the plaques carved with plumed helmets, eagles, banners, flags, trophies, and other symbols.



such projects, this pattern of thinking in the press persisted throughout the twentieth century.

## THE BONUS

*D*espite occasional snide comments, the office buildings were hailed as great successes. At no time in the history of Capitol Hill had construction projects of such magnitude been bathed in such harmony. Woods was applauded for administrative tranquility and smooth operations, but the two commissions and the two consulting architects deserved a good deal of credit as well. The superintendent was congratulated for saving the government more than \$100,000 that otherwise would have been paid to

architects charging a percentage fee. Instead, Woods drew only his salary and rendered the same service as a highly paid professional architect. On February 28, 1911, James A. Tawney of Minnesota, chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, introduced legislation to pay Woods \$7,500 for preparing the plans and specifications and superintending the construction of the House office building. Even considering this unprecedented gratuity, he argued, the government still got the best of the bargain:

These buildings were constructed under the supervision of the Superintendent of the Capitol at an expense not only within the bare limit of cost, but considerably below the limit of cost. There would have been paid for architect's fees on the House Office Building on the basis of 5 per cent \$158,000. As it was the supervisory and architectural work actually cost the Government the sum of \$88,000, or only 2.7 per cent of the cost of the building. . . . Out of this a sum of \$31,703.95 was paid for the services of the consulting architect [Carrère & Hastings], and a further sum of \$11,000 for special engineering services, which ordinarily the client has to pay. The total net saving to the Government on architectural cost alone on this building has actually been \$70,027.44.

I have a similar statement with regard to the saving on the Senate Office Building. Now, the net saving to the Government on the entire construction has been \$140,855.<sup>10</sup>

James R. Mann of Illinois supported the extraordinary measure, asserting that the completion of construction without cost overruns was “largely owing to the common sense and to the constant care of Mr. Woods.”<sup>11</sup> But William E. Cox of Indiana spoke against the appropriation, telling



### Capitol Power Plant

1910

*A*uthorized in 1904, the power plant was built to supply electricity and heat to the new congressional office buildings, the Capitol, the Library of Congress, and other public buildings. This photograph shows the twin chimneys at their original height of 212 feet.

While electrical production ceased in 1951, the facility has been expanded five times to keep up with heating and cooling demands.

his colleagues that Woods was only doing his duty, and that it was unnecessary to give a bonus for mere competence and efficiency. He also objected to the House providing the superintendent with a bonus when the Senate might not follow suit. That would be unfair. Thetus Sims of Tennessee declared his intention to support the measure as a matter of sound policy. He complained that the House depended too often on the executive branch or on outside experts for advice and it was time to reward their own officers who performed so well. He said:

I think this is something more than a mere personal compliment to Mr. Woods. I think we ought to rely on our own servants and use them as much as we can. Mr. Woods would have, the same as any other man, the pride of having his name connected with this great building, and would perhaps regard that as compensation enough, but I think it is absolutely niggardly on our part not to give him something. I think there is a higher consideration than any contract that can be made. Let us have more of this thing done hereafter, instead of employing experts outside of this House, who have no pride in the success of the economics that may have been attempted by this House.<sup>12</sup>

A final tribute to Woods drew applause from members of the House. Four days later the Senate considered additional compensation for the superintendent in the amount of \$5,000, but the figure was soon raised to equal that granted by the House. Both appropriations were approved at the end of the 61st Congress. Along with funds to buy flags and fertilizers, Woods was granted \$15,000 for his extraordinary services.

## BROODING OVER THE CAPITOL

Newspapers of the day carried stories describing Woods' energy and devotion to the Capitol. "Uncle Joe" Cannon was quoted in one article as saying: "I do not know how Elliott Woods could be overworked unless he was hitched double with a mule." The masthead of the story read: "Broods Over The U. S. Capitol Like A Mother Over Only Child: Elliott Woods Finds Joy in His Work, and Plenty of Work to Keep Him Joyful." Woods was given credit for wear-

ing many hats while acting so nonchalantly that few people could guess that the man stayed so busy:

Woods is extremely versatile, he is Uncle Sam's builder in the National Capital; he is a clever musician and composer; he is an all-round scientist, antedating the bureau of standards in many important tests; he is custodian of a unique art collection of very great value; he has cut down the death rate of Congress by original innovations for ventilation and sanitation—and withal he is extremely modest.

He is managing director of a complete little city with a scientific laboratory, blacksmith shop, machine shop, carpenter and cabinet making shop, electric shop, painters and glaziers, tinners and roofers, stone masons, plumbers and gas fitters, jacks of all trades.<sup>13</sup>

Visitors to Woods' laboratory near the Senate office building sometimes found the superintendent playing the violin or working at an operatic composition. He also relaxed by conducting experiments with X-rays or exchanging telegraphic messages with ships at sea. Especially favored were ships carrying cargo destined for Capitol Hill, such as freighters bringing marble from Vermont, New York, or Georgia for the office buildings. According to one account, Woods was in the habit of warming his dinner in one of the boiler rooms in the Capitol alongside some of his employees. He also joined them in a kazoo band that occasionally annoyed policemen who were napping nearby. These harmless recreations were well deserved, as newspapers liked to report, because Woods was otherwise the "busiest man in Washington."

Around the Capitol, routine maintenance was varied as ever. Old gas chandeliers were replaced by new bronze electric fixtures with milk glass shades and downward-pointing light bulbs. At the end of January 1903, Woods despatched a cart to the White House to haul back crystal chandeliers and other furnishings purchased at Roosevelt's auction, which cleared out the "Victorian" accretions cluttering the residence. As part of his own housecleaning, Woods hired men, dogs, and ferrets to hunt and destroy rats in the Capitol. Releafing picture frames, relaying floor tiles, preparing a sign with the command "Pull The Chain" for a water closet, and buying new cherry toilet seats (at six dollars apiece) were other examples of small projects that kept Woods and his staff busy.



## Two Designs for Architectural Improvements in the Rotunda

by August Schoenborn  
ca. 1901

To bring the rotunda up to twentieth-century standards of classical grandeur, the architect of the Capitol sought ideas for redecorating the room with marble columns, marble walls, and other artistic additions. None of the ideas were implemented.



Macnichol & Sons, a local painting firm, was hired year after year to keep the interior finishes fresh. Typical projects included painting the Senate document room in simple tints or treating the walls and ceiling in the Supreme Court chamber with an “asbestive coating.” They were hired to remove paint from interior stonework, beginning with the lower walls of the rotunda in 1905. Outside, the Macnichol firm usually received the quadrennial contract to paint the dome, which required 4,200 gallons of paint and kept thirty-five men occupied for two months. Inside, decorative painting was introduced into areas that needed sprucing up. Complaints were occasionally made by those who compared the Capitol’s haphazard decorations with the well-orchestrated and harmonious interiors at the Library of Congress. While the complaints were not particularly fair, they initiated a spate of improvements by various artists. One project was a redecoration of Statuary Hall and the lobbies around the House chamber. Joseph Rakemann, an artist who had worked under Brumidi, began decorating the walls of Statuary Hall in the summer of 1902, painting them to resemble huge blocks of marble. The ceiling was also painted in a variety of colors highlighted with gold leaf. Pleasant little scenes of Mount Vernon, Arlington House, and the Washington Monument were painted in the connecting corridor, near where the Columbus doors once hung. Another artist, Elmer Garnsey of New York, had charge of decorating the new offices and committee rooms in the old library space.

In the spring of 1905, Gutzon Borglum, a sculptor later famous for Mount Rushmore, was paid \$250 for suggesting improvements to the rotunda. He proposed removing the eight history paintings, lining the walls with marble, erecting pairs of tall Ionic columns, re-trimming the doorways, and placing sculptural panels above them. A new marble frieze representing American society would replace the unfinished painted frieze. Borglum’s suggestions would have transformed the rotunda into a room on par with the Beaux Arts interiors being built in great urban libraries, train stations, and state capitols at the beginning of the century. His scheme, however, went nowhere and the only significant work on the rotunda during this period was the “restoration” of the stone walls that removed layer after layer of paint and whitewash. The work was termed a restoration in spite of the fact that paint was an





**The Rotunda**  
ca. 1910

*B*elieving that the walls of the rotunda were originally bare, the superintendent of the Capitol removed paint from the stonework, shown here soon after the “restoration” was completed.

original finish. Another contribution to the Capitol rotunda was made in 1907 when Woods installed a marble disk ten inches in diameter in the center of the floor. Despite proposals for major architectural embellishments, the little marble disk and the clean stone walls were the only modifications made to the rotunda during this period.

Woods’ policy of stone “restoration” extended to the ornamental air shaft (called today the “small Senate rotunda”), where he removed the white paint from Latrobe’s tobacco columns to reveal the brownish sandstone for the first time since the 1820s. The bare stone stood in stark contrast to the white plaster walls, creating an unexpected clash of colors and finishes, which the superintendent found disagreeable. In an effort to reconcile the different materials, Woods proposed replacing the plaster with an imitation stone to complement

the “restored” stone columns. Unwilling to make such a drastic change without professional concurrence, he wrote to Carrère & Hastings:

You will remember that we have been making some extensive restorations in the Capitol, whereby a large portion of the old sandstone work has been brought to light.

... If it is the proper thing to do I would like to remove the plaster from the walls and give them a coat of stucco which would resemble the other stone and, in fact, be of such a character as practically become a stone. The vestibule would then appear to be entirely of stone.

This method, you will understand, is not an attempt at imitation by painting, but it is an imitation by the use of actual building material.

Will you kindly inform me if this is architecturally correct or whether or not such procedure might bring criticism?<sup>14</sup>



In a few days Woods had an answer. The firm declared that the proposal was “entirely reasonable and architecturally correct,” citing precedents in Europe and America. It declared that the best and most current example of this type of treatment was found at the Pennsylvania railroad station in New York City, a monumental work by McKim, Mead & White. Travertine from Rome lined part of the walls, while the rest was “stucco cast to look exactly like real stone. There were structural reasons for not using stone throughout and reasons of architectural harmony for adopting the substitute.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus assured by the highest authorities in New York, Woods instructed his assistant David Lynn to escort representatives from the Washington construction firm of Richardson & Burgess around the Capitol to look at painted plaster that might be replaced by imitation sandstone. Aside from the small Senate rotunda, they looked at heavily-traveled areas in the center building such as the passages on the ground floor, the crypt, and the vestibule in front of Statuary Hall (called today the “small House rotunda”). They proposed to do the work for cost plus 15 percent, an offer that was accepted on August 22, 1910. Soon, Richardson & Burgess began removing old plaster and installing the imitation sandstone that has proven to be a durable (and impossible to precisely replicate) surface material.

## “COMPLETING” THE CAPITOL

In the early days of Woods’ term, the east front extension joined the list of civic improvements planned for Capitol Hill. The idea had received little notice since Walter first proposed it in 1863, although most of Edward Clark’s annual reports contained a line or two describing the advantages such an addition would have. Congressional nonchalance in the Gilded Age was superseded in the early twentieth century by an attitude more hospitable to ambitious civic improvements that would tout America’s growing wealth, power, and self-confidence. Congress appropriated \$1,500 in 1902 to give Woods the funds to prepare plans and estimates

for an extension to the east front. In his report Woods submitted Walter’s forty-year-old drawings and wrote that they would guide the project:

Walter has left as a heritage the plans which I now present you for consideration. He had left us a picture of his conception of the completed Capitol. What greater tribute to his remarkable genius could be paid than to say that, if completed in accordance with his plans, the Capitol will gain a splendid addition, and yet, as one views it from the view point supposed in the perspective, it is still the Capitol.

It would seem sacrilege to offer any other plan for consideration than the Walter plan. We may be safely guided by the thought, the effort, and the production of this great man’s genius.<sup>16</sup>

Woods estimated the east front extension would cost \$2,300,000. Joe Cannon took the matter before the House on February 10, 1903, and spoke in favor of the addition. He solemnly declared that, despite its grandeur and magnificence, the Capitol was an unfinished building. The additions built in the 1850s and 1860s were just the beginning of a more extensive program of enlargements. Using a familiar argument, Cannon cited the growth of the nation, the number of states, the population, and the number of representatives in Congress as justifications for a bigger Capitol:

I am not an old man—I fancy I am not, but it is within my recollection as a boy, after I had begun taking some notice of public affairs as they were referred to in the few newspapers that we had back in 1850, as a lad of 14, reading that Congress had authorized the extension of the Capitol building; then year after year progress was reported on the dome, this wing, the other wing, and finally as I recollect, there was substantial completion—not full completion—along in the early sixties . . .

But by the time the extension was determined upon we had 23,000,000 of people in the United States, 30 states—a population of 23,191,876 to be exact. The membership in the House, including delegates, was 173. Each Representative represented 134,000 people. There were 36 committees of the House. The minimum membership of any committee was 3 and the maximum 9. The number of States represented in Congress was 31. In 1900 the population was 76,000,000 plus. The membership of the next House, the Fifty-eighth Congress, will be 389, as against 173 a half century ago. Each representative will represent 190,000 people. There are now 45 committees of the present House,

as against 31 of the House a half century ago. The minimum membership of the committee is 5 and the maximum 17, as against 9 of a half century ago.<sup>17</sup>

Cannon cited the architectural reason for the extension and invited his colleagues to look up at the skirt of the dome and see for themselves how it appeared to hover in thin air over the east portico. He was neither particularly careful about the facts of the case, nor especially honest in manipulating the details of the building's history, but he made the east front extension sound like the logical next step in the Capitol's development:

The central extension would be 55 feet beyond the wall line of the present wing. Now, gentlemen will notice that the western extension has lately been put into committee rooms for the House and Senate. That was completed according to the original design. The corresponding extension on the east was never built. If gentlemen want to verify—if it needs any verification—if you will go out and look at the Dome on the east side, looking at the main wall of the building, you will see that the Dome extends 9 or 10 feet beyond the main wall to the east . . .

Now, I submit that the time has come, not only for an office building for the House, but for the completion of this Capitol.<sup>18</sup>

Cannon's last remark drew loud applause. He was also applauded when he spoke of the happy condition of the treasury, which permitted the extension to be funded with ease. Yet John H. Stephens of Texas challenged the contention that the east extension was simply a continuation of an ongoing (but stalled) project. In his view, the extension was an entirely new building and, therefore, required committee hearings and authorizing legislation. Despite Cannon's best efforts, the House took a cautious view of the question. On March 3, 1903, \$7,000 was appropriated for study models of the Capitol showing the architectural effect of the proposed addition.

Before the models were begun, Woods and Cannon thought it would be wise to employ Carrère & Hastings to help with the extension design. Apparently, Woods no longer felt that the Walter design was the only one to consider. On April 28, 1904, Congress established a six-man commission comprising three senators and three representatives for the "extension and completion" of the

Capitol. Among its duties, the commission would study and report on the idea of refacing the west elevation of the old Capitol with marble, replacing the west terrace steps with marble, and providing sculpture for the House pediment. Within two days of its creation, the commission hired Carrère & Hastings to assist in its multifaceted mission.

On December 27, 1904, Carrère & Hastings finished its report, which presented two schemes for the extension. The first envisioned a modest extension twelve feet deep, just enough to place a masonry wall under the skirt of the dome. This would provide the appearance of support that the dome seemed to require, but it would add little usable space on the interior: only two new rooms and several storage alcoves would be gained. The second scheme called for an extension thirty-two and a half feet deep, adding eighteen new rooms per floor as well as a corridor connecting the House and Senate wings. Both plans called for widening the new central portico by the addition of two columns, which would create a broader pediment. Thus, the central portico would become the dominant one, befitting its importance. Although its origins are unclear, Carrère & Hastings also presented a "Supplementary Report" showing the structural changes to the rotunda and surrounding areas necessary to replicate the dome in marble.

In stating the opinions of the firm, Carrère & Hastings declared a decided preference for the first extension scheme. It changed the Capitol the least, and it solved the architectural problem just as well as the larger addition. They recommended preserving the forecourt and condemned the idea of bringing the central portico in line with the porticoes of the two wings. That alignment would obscure the view of the wings when seen from an oblique angle. This admonition was not a rebuke to Walter, whom they thought had been obliged in his day to provide an extension with as many rooms as possible. Now that office buildings were under way, the need for additional rooms in the Capitol was not as urgent.

On other matters, Carrère & Hastings recommended that the west front be refaced with marble, exactly reproducing every detail of the historic facade. There was no pressing architectural problem to solve on that side of the building, but the deteriorated sandstone walls—with some of its



carved details held together by paint—was an embarrassing sight. Olmsted's stairs were also worn, and the firm recommended replacing the bluestone steps with marble. Finally, they estimated \$55,000 would be needed to commission a sculptural group for the long-vacant House pediment. In all, Carrère & Hastings described \$1,333,000 worth of improvements, but the pediment sculpture was the only item approved.

In the days of Captain Meigs, several sculptors wanted the commission to fill the House pediment with something equivalent to Crawford's *Progress of Civilization*. In the Pierce and Buchanan administrations Henry Kirke Brown, Erastus Dow Palmer, and a few other artists presented designs that were not accepted for various reasons. In 1869 Clark Mills' son Theophilus came close to landing a commission for a group of sixteen figures representing the emancipation of slaves. His extravagant fee (\$130,000), however, doomed the project. In 1879 Launt Thompson of New York proposed a sentimental group illustrative of "Peace and Plenty," but his plan went nowhere as well. By the dawn of the twentieth century Gutzon Borlum and Charles Neihaus were working on designs that they hoped would persuade Congress to fill the empty pediment. The time was finally propitious for such civic improvements, after decades of what has been termed "official disinterest."<sup>19</sup>

Borlum produced a composition entitled *The Building of a Nation*, while Neihaus' group was called simply *The Law*. Unfortunately, each artist estimated that his works would cost about \$110,000, or twice what Carrère & Hastings suggested. These prices did nothing to smooth the way for congressional approval, and the project stalled for a while. In 1908, Representative Samuel McCall of Massachusetts nudged it along by asking Woods how much money should be included for the House pediment in a bill he planned to introduce. The superintendent replied that \$55,000 was needed for statuary and about \$20,000 was needed for contingencies. McCall's legislation was approved on April 16, 1908, and the pediment appeared destined to be completed at last.

As soon as the money became available, Woods contacted Neihaus about doing the pediment for the sum stipulated in McCall's bill. The sculptor agreed, but the final decision was left up to mem-

bers of yet another commission, this one made up of members of the Joint Committee on the Library (including McCall), the Speaker, and the superintendent. The commission returned to Carrère & Hastings for advice and the firm recommended four eminent artists, including John Quincy Adams Ward, who replied that at age seventy-eight he was simply too old to consider doing it: he recommending Paul Wayland Bartlett instead.<sup>20</sup> Bartlett had collaborated with Ward on the pediment for the New York Stock Exchange, a work fairly equivalent to the House pediment. A second endorsement was given by National Sculpture Society. On May 26, 1908, Bartlett was given the contract subject to the approval of the commission. Without lifting a finger on his own behalf, Bartlett bested some of America's most prominent artists, some of whom had spent large parts of their careers vying for the job.

While in Paris during the summer of 1908 Bartlett received photographs of the House pediment annotated with its dimensions. He modeled small clay maquettes for a work called *The Apotheosis of Democracy* that would be further refined and developed as his ideas matured over the course of the project. Two central figures representing *Peace Protecting Genius* stood between a group entitled *The Power of Labor: Agriculture* and another called *The Power of Labor: Industry*. Bartlett finished the first two sketches in September 1908, and upon returning to America he showed them to Woods, Cannon, McCall, and other members of the pediment commission. They approved the concept and basic design on February 16, 1909.

By the terms of his contract, Bartlett had three years to finish the sculpture, yet it would actually take more than seven years to complete and install. Curiosity about the project was strong, both in France and America. Periodicals, such as *Scribner's Magazine*, carried illustrated articles that gave the public a look at the great work destined for the Capitol. As time wore on, Bartlett was twice able to extend the deadline with Woods' blessing. The superintendent advised the Speaker that it was better to suffer delay rather than hurry the work and suffer an inferior product. Most of the figures were sculpted in France and, one by one, shipped to New York, where Italian-born

carvers replicated the models in Georgia marble. The finished products were sent to Bartlett's Washington studio, near Union Station. There the city's elite, including Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, came to have a close look. In the summer of 1916 *The Apotheosis of Democracy* was finally completed and installed in the pediment that had stood empty since 1865. The magnificent work was unveiled during a ceremony held on August 2.

## RETHINKING THE HOUSE CHAMBER AGAIN

The day before Bartlett's composition was approved by the pediment committee, Samuel McCall reported on another matter related to improvements for the House of Representatives. As the result of a resolution passed on May 12, 1908, the Committee on the Library investigated the acoustics, ventilation, and general accommodations of the House chamber. This latest study had a long pedigree that could be traced to the time when representatives first complained in 1857 about the "artificial" air they were obliged to breathe. This time, however, McCall looked into other matters as well. His committee was asked to consult with architects about a complete reconstruction of the room to place it in direct contact with the south wall and thereby take advantage of the windows there. Reducing the size of the room so as to make speaking and hearing easier, was another topic of consideration. Woods was directed to report to the Speaker about the issues before the committee. As usual, he turned immediately to Carrère & Hastings for help.

### Unveiling of *The Apotheosis of Democracy* 1916

Paul Bartlett was commissioned in 1908 to create sculpture for the House pediment, which had stood empty for forty-three years.

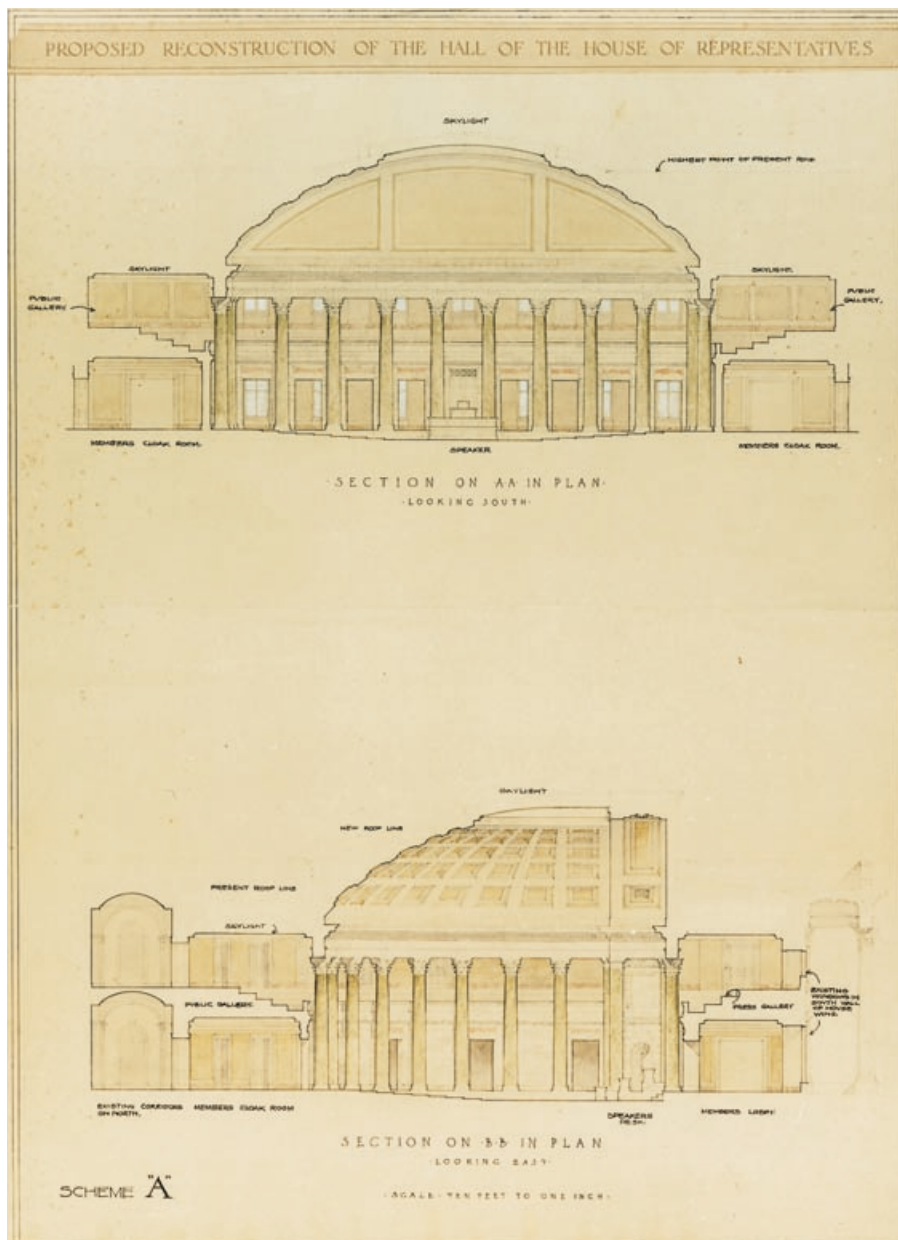


***Peace  
Protecting Genius***  
by Paul Bartlett  
ca. 1908

These figures in *The Apotheosis of Democracy* were the focal point of Bartlett's composition. Represented as a winged youth holding the lamp of knowledge, the figure of Genius is protected by a resolute figure of Peace crowned by a laurel wreath.







**Scheme “A” for Rebuilding the House Chamber**  
by Carrère & Hastings, 1908

*S*tatuary Hall was the model for this scheme to rebuild the House chamber.

There was nothing new about the complaints regarding the hall’s ventilation, nor was the proposed solution novel. Removing the south wall would allow windows in the members’ retiring room and the press gallery to light and ventilate the chamber. Carrère & Hastings developed at least five designs for rebuilding the chamber with

these windows as part of the scheme. One was a reproduction of Statuary Hall, a sentimental favorite of Woods and the consulting architects. Two other options would have created rectangular chambers somewhat smaller than the one in use. One retained the long axis parallel to the south wall; the other rotated the axis ninety degrees, placing the Speaker’s chair in the center of the east wall. Although the latter design offered some structural advantages, it found no favor with Woods, who called it “faulty.”

In each proposal, emphasis was placed on reducing the size of the floor and the gallery and increasing the size of the cloakrooms and the number of seats on the floor. The arrangements were developed using the superintendent’s considerable experience with the existing room as well as Carrère & Hastings’ experience designing auditoriums and theaters in New York. The firm also studied materials about the legislative halls of England, France, Germany, Austria, and other European nations collected by McCall. The foreign halls were found to be equally divided between rectangular and semicircular chambers, and all but the British Parliament (in which legislators faced each other on benches) arranged seats in concentric rows, like those already set up in the House and Senate chambers.

Reducing the size of the House chamber was a goal of this reconstruction project, and it was given close attention in the report that McCall communicated to the full House on February 15, 1909. He noted that there was “no critic of repute who has written about the House of Representatives who has not commented upon the inordinate dimensions of the chamber and its adverse effect upon debate and deliberation.”<sup>21</sup> After citing a few examples, McCall quoted at length from *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics*, Woodrow Wilson’s classic look at congressional domination of American government published in 1885. It was written while Wilson pursued a doctorate in political science at John Hopkins University and contained insightful observations about the room in which the House conducted its business:

There are, to begin with, physical and *architectural* reasons why businesslike debate of public affairs by the House of Representatives is out of the question. To those who visit the galleries of the representative Chamber during



**Scheme “B” for Rebuilding the House Chamber**  
by Carrère & Hastings, 1908

a session of the House these reasons are as obvious as they are astonishing.

It would be natural to expect that a body which meets ostensibly for consultation and deliberation should hold its sittings in a room small enough to admit of a easy interchange of views and a ready concert of action, where its members would be brought into close, sympathetic contact; and it is nothing less than astonishing to find it spread at large through the vast spaces of such a chamber as the Hall of the House of Representatives, where there are no close ranks of cooperating parties, but each Member has a roomy desk and an easy revolving chair; where broad aisles spread and stretch themselves; where ample, soft-carpeted areas lie about the spacious desks of the Speaker and clerk; where deep galleries reach back from the outer limits of the wide passages which lie beyond the “bar”: an immense, capacious chamber, disposing its giant dimensions freely beneath the great level lacunar ceiling through whose glass panels the full light of day pours in. The most vivid impression the visitor gets in looking over that vast hall is the impression of space.

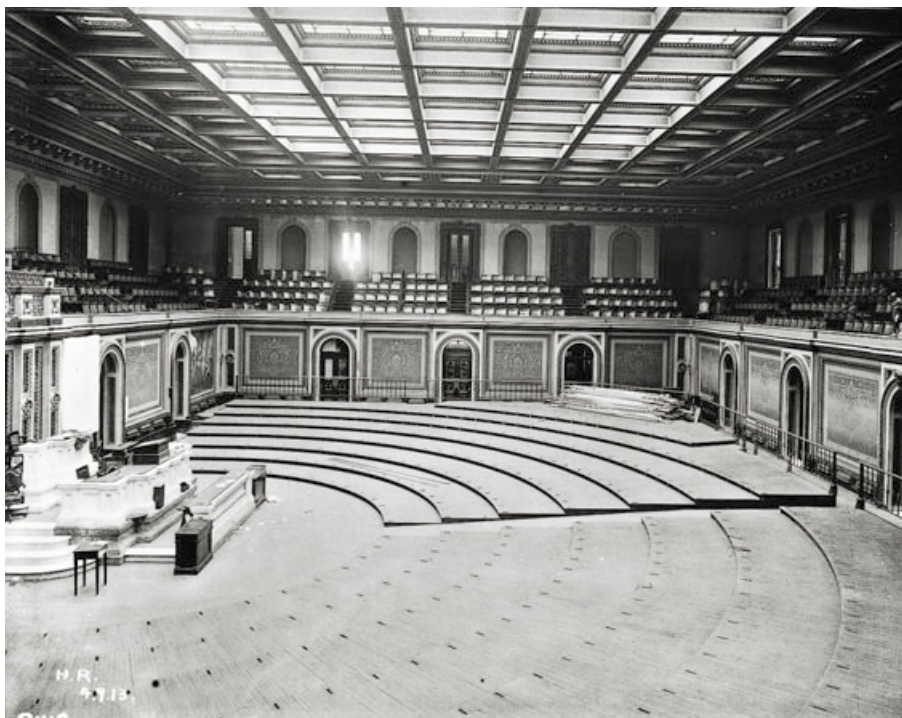
A speaker must have a voice like O’Connell’s, the practical visitor is apt to think as he sits in the gallery, to fill even the silent spaces of that

*R*emoving the press gallery and the members’ retiring room would allow a reconstructed House chamber to have windows.

room: how much more to overcome the disorderly noises that buzz and rattle through it when the Representatives are assembled—a voice clear, sonorous, dominant, like the voice of a clarion. One who speaks there with the voice and lungs of the ordinary mortal must content himself with the audience of those Members in his own immediate neighborhood, whose ears he rudely assails in vehement efforts to command the attention of those beyond them, and who, therefore, can not choose but hear him.<sup>22</sup>

McCall speculated that the magnitude of the hall had diminished the influence of the House of Representatives over the years. Why were the great orators in the history of the House—Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John Quincy Adams—associated with the old hall while no one serving in the new chamber could match former oratorical





**House Chamber with a New Floor (top) and New Seating (bottom)  
1913**

*A*n increased membership following the census of 1910 caused 450 fixed seats to be installed in place of desks and chairs. The new arrangement permitted more space for aisles, thus making it easier and quieter to move about the room.

greatness or political influence? The fault, he concluded, was the size of the chamber rather than the quality of the nation's representatives.

McCall informed the House that the Library Committee had digested the information presented by the consulting architects and disapproved the superintendent's recommendation of scheme "A," the one based on the Statuary Hall prototype. He stated that it would appear ridiculous to have nearly identical chambers situated so close by—one filled with statues and the other with the people's representatives. In addition, the chance of encountering acoustical problems in the half-domed chamber should not be risked. His committee, therefore, recommended scheme "B," a plan promising great architectural improvement as well as a better room for debate. It reduced the floor area by 2,220 square feet and the gallery by more than 3,200 square feet. The size of the cloak rooms was increased by 3,700 square feet.

Despite the elegance of the new hall that McCall proposed, members of the House were not prepared to undertake such drastic action quite yet. Compelling arguments in favor of a smaller chamber were opposed by those who could not understand why it should be shrunk just when the House was about to gain forty-four new members. The idea to reconstruct the chamber was eventually doomed by the census of 1910, which increased the number of representatives to 435—a number destined not to change. Instead of being resized, the chamber was subjected to the latest in a long series of rearrangements. On January 10, 1913, the House voted \$25,000 to buy new furniture to accommodate 450 seats on yet another new floor. The Francis H. Bacon company of Boston supplied roomy chairs and two large tables for the leadership. (Bacon, an old friend of Thomas Hastings, had also made much of the furniture for the House and Senate office buildings.) Gone forever were the individual desks that took up so much room, but the more spacious aisles made movement about the hall easier and less disruptive.

The latest increase in the membership of the House obliged the enlargement of its five-year-old office building as well. Forty-eight new rooms were built in the attic by cutting the roof beams and lifting a new roof into place while the building remained open and fully occupied. All the new





### Stair Repair 1915

After ninety years of wear, the sandstone steps leading to the central portico were taken up in the summer of 1915 and replaced with granite. Workmen laid tar-soaked sheets as a waterproofing measure before installing the new treads.



### The Grounds ca. 1910

Since 1867 the Capitol grounds have been under the care of the architect of the Capitol. Keeping the grass cut (top) and the trees healthy (bottom) are two important parts of the job.



rooms faced the interior courtyard, while the sloping roof that faced the streets provided space for a narrow corridor and dark, but handy, storage rooms under the eaves. Five elevators were extended to serve the new fifth floor, which was occupied in 1914.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

*D*espite the nation's reluctance to enter into European conflicts, unprovoked attacks by German submarines against American shipping finally forced President Wilson to ask Congress for a declaration of war on April 2, 1917. Neutrality had not sustained peace, and the president promised that joining France, England, Russia, and other Allied Powers in the fight against the Central Powers would make the world "safe for democracy." Along with the troops and gas masks, the world war exported such treasured American images as the stars and stripes, Uncle Sam, and the Capitol's dome into the European theater, pressing America's message of determination, confidence, and moral uprightness. At home, the Capitol stood unfortified and open as always. As a boost to morale, flood lights were installed to illuminate the dome and its crowning statue. Lights were usually left on until midnight. The only defensive measure taken to secure the building during World War I was to hang new iron gates at the main entrances, which were closed and locked only at night.

The Capitol's calm appearance during the war helped keep spirits high without hinting at the deteriorating relations between the president and Congress that took place inside. With the end of the war came a retreat from world affairs that suited America's isolationist mood, and its attention returned to the heady business of making money. Wilsonian idealism was a burden most Americans happily traded for the "normalcy" of Warren G. Harding, as lighthearted a president as the nation had ever seen.

A spirit of peace and prosperity pervaded society in the happy-go-lucky days leading up to Harding's campaign and election. One small example of the national good mood occurred unexpectedly in early 1921, when Elliott Woods was elected an

honorary member of the Washington chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The ill will that once existed between the Institute and the superintendent melted away as the architectural community of Washington recognized that Woods was responsible for some of the city's best new buildings. At the same time, Speaker Joe Cannon was afoot in the House of Representatives with a bill to restore the title of Woods' office to *architect* of the Capitol. On January 13, 1921, Cannon addressed the House about the superintendent's service on Capitol Hill and beyond:

Mr. Woods is aging, but he is as competent today as he ever was. He is the best architect that I ever met. He had charge of the construction of the buildings here; he had charge of the Court of Claims building, which was overhauled by him; and he had charge of the courthouse down here. You are familiar with his work. He has done whatever he was called on to do without any increase of salary, so far as that is concerned, and he is not asking for it. He is not a very old man. I think he is between 50 and 60 years of age, but as he is getting along in years he would like to be called "architect."<sup>23</sup>

James R. Mann of Illinois remembered the days when Woods' office was called "architect of the Capitol" and considered the restoration of the title a worthwhile—although mostly sentimental—gesture. He understood that it meant a great deal to the superintendent, who had earned the title by virtue of his successful architectural projects. Mann also corrected a misapprehension held by a few members, who thought the measure would create a new position with new demands on the treasury. Mann made it clear that only the name of the office would be affected and no additional expense would be incurred. With its opponents thus assured, the measure was approved. Under the provisions of the Legislative Act signed on March 3, 1921, the office of "superintendent of the Capitol" was restored to its old title of "architect of the Capitol." Harding took the oath of office as the nation's 29th president the next day.

Woods was exceedingly gratified by the congressional action that restored the noble title of his office. He placed announcements in the local newspapers to inform businessmen of the change and was soon greeted with letters of congratulation. Typical of such correspondence was a letter from

James Tanner, a District court official and a fellow Hoosier who had known Woods since his youth:

Speaking very seriously, I desire to say that I think that Congress, under the leadership of old Uncle Joe, has done a mighty just thing in adding the peacock feather they did to your tiara. You have repaired, embellished and glorified so much of our much abused city that it was your absolute due. I do not consider it a compliment to you, I consider it justice.<sup>24</sup>

No one was happier than Thomas Hastings. His association with Woods over almost twenty years had developed into a close friendship, and he wished to further Woods' standing by making him a full-fledged member of the American Institute of Architects. Hastings told his friend that he wanted to have the "real joy" of delivering full membership to him.<sup>25</sup> Woods, however, thought his status as an honorary member of the Washington chapter was not enough to promote him to full membership and advised Hastings to drop the matter. He was just as grateful for the mere proposal. Undeterred, Hastings placed Woods' name in nomination and asked Electus D. Litchfield and Henry Bacon, other prominent New York architects, to second it. Hastings told Woods that he was confident that the nomination would go through with flying colors. "Three cheers," Hastings wrote, "if anyone should be in the institute you should certainly be, and we will receive you with open arms."<sup>26</sup> On May 7, 1921, the secretary of the AIA informed Woods of his election. He was honored to join the professional association that once scorned him.

Unfortunately, Woods had only two years to enjoy the cherished title of architect of the Capitol. In the summer of 1923, while on vacation at Spring Lake, New Jersey, he died of heart failure at age 59. Vice President Calvin Coolidge and Speaker Frederick H. Gillett were among the honorary pall bearers at his funeral. Soon after the last rites were concluded, senators, representatives, and the employees of the office were busy writing President Harding about Woods' successor. The near unanimous choice was David Lynn, who had worked in the architect's office since 1901. (Glenn Brown wanted to be considered again but was advised not to meddle in the "family affairs" of Capitol Hill.) Lynn had begun as a laborer and worked his way through increasingly responsible jobs, such as foreman of cleaners,

watchman, and civil engineer, before becoming Woods' trusted assistant; indeed, his climb through the ranks paralleled Woods' own career under Edward Clark. He was from an old Maryland family, handsome and agreeable, and blessed with a knack for making friends in high places. Senior senators such as Furnifold M. Simmons of North Carolina, Oscar Underwood of Alabama, and Charles Culberson of Texas sent testimonials to the president regarding his suitability for the architect's job. Simmons wrote:

Although I am a member of the Minority Party, I think that our personal relations will render my recommendation in the matter of filling the vacancy not unwelcome to you. When you were in the Senate you must have yourself met

### Capitol Storeroom

ca. 1915

*B*y the early twentieth century, a room originally used as a restaurant (modern day SB-17) served as a storeroom stocked with such supplies as cakes of soap; bundles of rope, hose, and wire; bins of spare plumbing parts; and cans of French zinc. Seated at the desk is the superintendent's right-hand man, David Lynn (1873–1961), who would succeed Elliott Woods in 1923.





Mr. David Lynn. . . I earnestly hope that you will decide to appoint Mr. Lynn. Mr. Lynn is a Civil engineer of long experience, a gentleman of the highest character, and he is personally very popular with all of us who have come in contact with him.<sup>27</sup>

Simmons' recommendation was echoed by numerous senators and congressmen who wrote from their homes while away from Washington's summer heat. Employees of the architect's office submitted a petition to the White House supporting Lynn. Congress was in recess when Woods' death occurred, and the president himself was about to embark on a trip west for recreation and to explain his administration's faltering policies. On August 2, 1923, while in San Francisco, Harding suddenly died of a stroke. Three weeks later and with little fanfare, President Coolidge appointed David Lynn architect of the Capitol.

The transition from Woods to Lynn was seamless. Newspaper articles about the new architect

described Lynn as having grown up in the office, deserving the post by virtue of his intimate knowledge of the Capitol and the details of the job. He was usually referred to as the "fifth" architect of the Capitol, a numerical designation that Lynn himself probably created. The new architect was an amateur historian and genealogist who liked the idea that his office traced its roots to Washington's administration. While a part of the office was indeed an heir to the functions of the board of commissioners that Washington appointed in 1791, Lynn looked upon Dr. William Thornton as his professional forefather, citing him as the "first" architect of the Capitol. Lynn thought that Washington had appointed Thornton in 1793 to an office with the title of "architect of the Capitol," and no one questioned the matter. Similarly, Latrobe was designated the "second" architect, Bulfinch was the "third," and Walter was the "fourth." The actual evolution of the office was honorable and

**Senate  
Barber Shop**  
ca. 1925

*F*rom 1860 to 1980, the Senate barber shop occupied a room in the old north wing (modern day S-145) first designated as a committee room in the Hallet-Thornton era floor plans. Following the fire of 1814, the room was occupied by the chief clerk of the Supreme Court.

Conveniences such as bathing rooms and barber shops were provided during a time when most legislators lodged in boarding houses or hotels, where such facilities were either crowded or nonexistent. Shaving mugs personalized with senators' names were stored in the cabinet near the entrance.

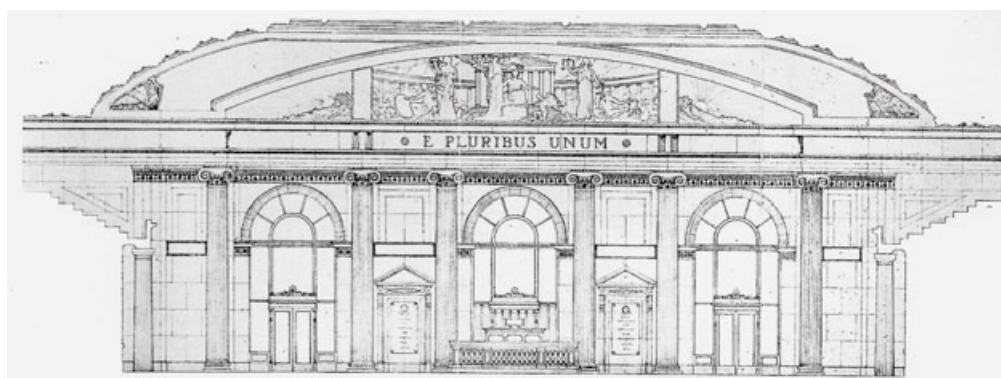


interesting, but it was also far too complicated to recite so easily. (Thornton never held an office with the title “architect of the Capitol,” for example, and Latrobe and Bulfinch both worked under contract and did not occupy a government office as such.) While overly simplistic and fundamentally inaccurate, Lynn’s view of his office helped bolster the pedigree of the position he now held.

## RETHINKING THE SENATE CHAMBER AGAIN

*O*n June 7, 1924, a busy day at the end of a long session of Congress, the Senate passed a resolution directing the architect of the Capitol to consult with reputable architects to improve the “living conditions of the Senate Chamber.”<sup>28</sup> With a note of irony, Senator William Borah of Idaho asked if the measure would bring the Senate in “touch with the outside world,” prompting Senator Royal S. Copeland of New York, from the Committee on Rules, to reply that it was a distinct possibility. The veiled reference to windows and a more comfortable chamber led the Senate to adopt the measure unanimously. It was the latest in a series of attempts to reconstruct the Senate chamber and to overcome Captain Meigs’ legacy of a windowless room.

Instinctively, Lynn turned to Carrère & Hastings for assistance. Within five months the firm developed a design for rebuilding the chamber and adjacent rooms. To improve the space’s acoustic qualities as well as its architectural treatment, Carrère & Hastings proposed to rebuild it in the form of a semicircle, covered by a low half dome. They cited Statuary Hall as the source of inspiration, saying that the new design “adhered strictly to the best traditions of the early part of the nineteenth century as evolved from the highest development of classical types.”<sup>29</sup> Three two-story windows on the north wall would have provided an agreeable light, free from the direct glare of the sun. Little change to the outside appearance would have been noticed, but on the interior the marble room, president’s room, vice-president’s office, and press galleries would be sacrificed. Mechanical



### Design for a New Senate Chamber

by Carrère & Hastings, 1924

*C*arrère & Hastings’ proposal for the new Senate chamber included the Ionic order along the north wall and Doric columns supporting a semicircular gallery. Three tall arched windows would have provided the natural light and air that some felt were vital to good health. Air-conditioning and the stock market crash put an end to the project.

ventilation would still be needed to augment the air introduced from the windows, but an investigation into the equipment and cost would wait until after the improvements were authorized. The cost of the new chamber was estimated at \$450,000.

The design Carrère & Hastings proposed was a straightforward plan with a row of engaged Ionic columns placed along the north wall framing the windows and the central podium. Copied from the Ionic of the Erechtheion in Athens, the order was the same one that Latrobe used in the old Senate chamber. A lower ring of Doric columns carried the semicircular gallery opposite the windowed wall. For acoustical reasons the domed ceiling was kept low and deeply coffered. Walls were depicted as perfectly smooth blocks of marble or some other fine stone. The overall effect was masculine and stately, an elegant essay in the neoclassical revival style—expressed, in this instance, with Grecian orders. According to one account, Thomas Hastings considered Walter’s “early Victorian” interior “too dreary and formidable for members of the Senate to maintain a cheerful frame of mind.” The new design was more “cheerful” by virtue of its “early Colonial” inspiration.<sup>30</sup> Despite such haphazard use of architectural and historical terms (Grecian architecture is hardly “colonial,” for instance),



the notion that the new design would rid the Senate chamber of its Victorian gloom by introducing architectural splendors from the early republic was a new twist in an old saga. Earlier complaints had been focused only on the lack of fresh air, but now the architectural style of the chamber was condemned as well.

Senator Copeland of New York was the principal proponent of relocating the chamber. A medical doctor by training, he was a former commissioner of public health, and president of the New York Board of Health, who had gained a national reputation through radio broadcasts and writings devoted to health issues. He now found himself greatly disturbed by the lack of fresh air in the Senate chamber. "I think it is a shame," he said sadly, "to see men in this chamber sicken and suffer as they do."<sup>31</sup> Finance Committee chairman Reed Smoot of Utah, who had served in the Senate since 1903, backed the move as well. He claimed that his health had been impaired by his long service in the windowless chamber and declared that the time had come to rebuild the room.

In 1927, while Copeland and Smoot worked for the adoption of Carrère & Hastings' plan, a commission of experts was formed to advise the architect of the Capitol about a new and wondrous improvement in the science of ventilation called "air conditioning." The commission's chairman was a professor of public health at Yale University, while other members of the eleven-person board included doctors, mechanical and sanitary engineers, and leading experts on ventilation. Hearings were held and the matter was fully discussed before going before the Committees on Appropriations. With relative ease, \$323,000 was secured to install "dehumidifying air conditioning apparatus with automatically controlled ducts" in both the House and Senate chambers.

The Carrier Engineering Corporation won the bidding to air-condition the two chambers and adjacent cloak rooms. Air was introduced into the chambers through diffusers in the iron ceilings, which were supplied by ducts that snaked across the roofs and eventually descended to the equipment rooms under the terrace. One group of registers was placed directly over the floor area, and a separate ring of diffusers was placed over the galleries. By this means an "invisible partition" was

created, allowing the temperature at the floor level to be unaffected by the number of persons in the galleries.<sup>32</sup> Two additional zones were installed, one each for the Republican and Democratic cloak rooms. Work was completed on the hall of the House by December 3, 1928, the opening of the second session of the 70th Congress, but it was deferred in the Senate while relocation of the chamber was being discussed.

During the first session of the 71st Congress the Senate chamber was fitted with an air-conditioning system. The equipment was operational by August 1929, bringing welcome relief to senators suffering through an unusual session that had begun on April 15. Calling its product "Manufactured Weather," the Carrier Corporation correctly predicted that its ventilation system would have a profound effect on the operations of Congress:

Whether it be biting cold or raw or insufferably, enervatingly, prostratingly hot and humid *outside, inside* the historic walls of Congress it will always be comfortable, not only, but healthful, invigorating, inspiring.

Manufactured Weather may, indeed, have a profound effect upon our governmental system! Congress may voluntarily remain in session throughout the summer,—in order that our Congressmen may be protected from the intolerable discomforts and dangers of the ordinary outdoor weather!<sup>33</sup>

Cooler air in the summer brought relief to be sure, but the major health benefit of "manufactured weather" was the control of humidity. The dry air used to heat the legislative chambers in winter was blamed for such ailments as grippe, influenza, bronchitis, and the common cold. Indoor air deficient in moisture was, according to the Carrier Corporation, "a menace to Health, ruinous to Comfort."<sup>34</sup> The benefits of air conditioning might not be as noticeable in winter, but its effects on health were welcome in all seasons.

The novelty of air conditioning promised to startle some senators unaccustomed to cool, dry air in summertime. Lynn had notices printed to assure them that there was nothing to worry about when experiencing an air-conditioned room for the first time. After explaining the mechanics of the new system he wrote:

The sensation of chill experienced upon entering the Senate Chamber is due principally to the dryness of the air causing the evaporation

of the slight amount of moisture of the skin. After the completion of this evaporation the body will be perfectly comfortable, for the actual difference in temperature between the inside and outside air is very small. No fear may be felt by the occupants of the Senate Chamber from the conditions produced by this new system of ventilation and air conditioning.<sup>35</sup>

Once the chamber was air-conditioned Senators Copeland and Smoot dropped their crusade to relocate the room. The Senate chamber had joined the hall of the House to become one of the two most comfortable rooms in the Capitol. Despite its “gloomy Victorian” appearance, it felt wonderfully modern. A few months after the air conditioning was turned on, two unrelated factors conspired to doom the relocation project forever. The project’s artistic director, Thomas Hastings, died of an appendicitis on October 22, 1929, two days before the great New York stock market crash—Black Thursday.

Air conditioning quickly became an indispensable part of life on Capitol Hill. In 1935, Congress appropriated \$2.5 million to provide the rest of the Capitol and the office buildings with this new form of ventilation. The Carrier Corporation won the contract to air-condition the Capitol, while two of its competitors were hired for the office buildings. Central refrigeration equipment was installed at the Capitol power plant, whence chilled water was conducted to the various buildings through underground tunnels. At the Capitol, holes were cut in floors and walls to make way for metal duct work. Once again the massive structure proved capable of sustaining the loss of building materials (mainly brick) without any threat to its stability.

## THE GROWING CAMPUS

 Although Senator Smoot eventually abandoned his efforts to have the Senate chamber rebuilt, he was instrumental in relocating the Supreme Court into its own building. In 1925, he proposed to spend fifty million dollars on new buildings in the federal city, and the chief justice of the United States, William Howard Taft, had a project in mind to help use part of the money. Taft took it upon himself to urge Congress to authorize a new home for the

Court, thus ending its “temporary” status as a guest of the Senate. For the past century and a quarter, the Court had borrowed space in the old north wing; it had been using the old Senate chamber for its proceedings since 1860. Whenever the Senate was provided with more space, the Supreme Court fell heir to a little more room as well. This was true when the old library space was converted into offices in 1900 and true again when the Senate office building opened in 1909. In both cases, although the Supreme Court gained a few rooms in the Capitol, there was still not enough space for each justice to have an office, and, as a result, most worked at home.

Chief Justice Taft argued that the present accommodations for the Court were woefully inadequate, certainly less convenient than what a lower court would find acceptable. Lawyers coming before the Court had no place to work, no table to use when making last-minute changes in their cases, no chair to sit on while reading a brief. They did not even have a place to put their coats and hats. While a mere symptom of a larger problem, this lack of basic accommodations for attorneys had an adverse effect on the Court. When Associate Justice Willis Van Devanter testified before a House committee considering a new building for the Supreme Court, he asserted that the lack of facilities for out-of-town attorneys accounted for some ill-prepared presentations, which, in turn, wasted the Court’s time.

In December 1928, Congress responded to Taft’s initiative by creating the United States Supreme Court Building Commission. The success of earlier commissions for the House and Senate office buildings had led the way for a new one, which would steer its project over the next seven years. Taft was designated chairman and was joined by Van Devanter, the chairmen and ranking members of the Committees on Public Buildings of the House and Senate, and the architect of the Capitol.

Like the commissions that came before it, this one produced magnificent results with virtually no acrimony. Deciding upon the architect, for instance, was an easy task. While Lynn would have undoubtedly recommended Carrère & Hastings for the job, the chief justice had already established a close relationship with Cass Gilbert of New York. Gilbert was another giant in the architectural



## Portrait of Cass Gilbert

by Robert Aitken  
ca. 1933

Collection of the Supreme  
Court of the United States

*G*ilbert (1859–1934) studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and spent his early career working for McKim, Mead & White. In 1895 he won the competition for the Minnesota State Capitol, a project that earned him a national reputation. The Woolworth Building in New York, one of his most famous works, was the tallest building in the world when it was completed in 1913. Many of Gilbert's buildings were classical, including the Treasury Annex (1918) and the U. S. Chamber of Commerce Building (1924), both located in Washington. His last work, the U. S. Supreme Court, was perhaps his crowning achievement.



profession whom Taft had (when president) appointed to the Commission of Fine Arts in 1910. With Chief Justice Taft's encouragement, Gilbert began sketching designs for the Supreme Court in 1926.

As recommended earlier by the McMillan Commission, the site favored by the commission for the new Supreme Court building was on First Street east, directly across from the Capitol between Maryland Avenue and East Capitol Street. Two other locations were also mentioned, but neither was seriously considered. Judiciary Square, the Court's intended location on the L'Enfant plan, was already occupied by the massive brick Pension Building (now home of the National Building Museum). Another site near the Tidal basin was a possibility, but it was reserved for an unspecified monument by the McMillan Commission; the Jefferson Memorial was later built there. Gilbert did not like the site across from the Capitol because of its subordinate position and because Maryland Avenue, one of L'Enfant's diagonal streets, made it irregular. Nor did he like the idea of building next to the baronial Library of Congress. Gilbert proposed creating a new park for the Court about half a mile directly east of the Capitol, but that would have entailed the condemnation and destruction

of hundreds of post Civil War row houses—a time-consuming and expensive undertaking. Notwithstanding Gilbert's views, the site for the Supreme Court was not changed from the spot specified by the McMillan Commission.

Gilbert was formally commissioned to design the Supreme Court building in April 1929. Soon the architect and his assistants showed a preliminary design, along with an estimate of the cost of materials and labor for the complicated undertaking. Their work was approved by the commission, and, on May 25, 1929, the Speaker was informed that the new Supreme Court building would cost \$9,740,000. The funds were appropriated on December 20, and demolition of the residential structures on the site was begun soon thereafter. On February 3, 1930, with the funding secure and the project well under way, the ailing chief justice retired from the Court and from the commission. The following day Gilbert wrote Taft an affectionate note that read in part:

I have felt it to be a great honor to be selected by you as the architect of the new Supreme Court building and I have endeavored to make a design which shall be worthy of its great purpose and of your ideal. I shall always think of you as the real author of the project and the one to whose vision we shall owe a suitable housing for the Supreme Court of the United States. It will, in fact, be a monument to your honored name.<sup>36</sup>

The design of the Supreme Court building achieved a balance between classical grandeur and quiet dignity, appropriate for the nation's highest court. Unlike the Library of Congress building next door (a textbook example of the flamboyant Beaux Arts style), the Supreme Court was designed in a quieter, more reserved style now termed neoclassical revival. The building was a steel frame structure faced with white marble. The facade was about 300 feet wide with a central temple-like pavilion fronted by a monumental portico of sixteen Corinthian columns supporting an elaborate entablature. The commanding central section was flanked by lower wings in the Ionic order. Four spacious courts provided the interior with unexpected sources of light and air. The plan carefully and deliberately separated the justices' working areas from the public, ensuring privacy and quiet. Visitors approached the building by way of a long flight of marble steps leading to the portico and a grand rectangular vestibule



### Supreme Court

*O*f the many architectural improvements made on Capitol Hill during the twentieth century, perhaps the most significant was the new building for the U. S. Supreme Court, which was finished in 1935. (1958 photograph.)

### Supreme Court Law Library

ca. 1935

*T*he law library is one of America's great Georgian revival interiors.

(called the “Great Hall”), thirty feet high and lined with Doric columns. Straight ahead was the courtroom, a space about sixty-four feet square and lighted by side windows behind screens of Ionic columns. Although the court room could have been larger, Taft wanted to preserve much of the intimacy that he liked in the court room in the Capitol. Above the court was the law library, an elegant room paneled in oak with carvings of appropriate emblems and allegorical figures.

While the Supreme Court building was under way, a second office building was being planned for the House of Representatives. In 1925 Congress appropriated a modest sum (\$2,500) to allow Lynn to work up plans and estimates for an addition to the existing House office building and another set of documents for an entirely new structure. He asked Carrère & Hastings to examine the possibility of enlarging the existing building, while a consortium of local architects known as the Allied Architects was hired by Lynn to develop preliminary designs for a new office building. The additional space gained by either scheme would allow each member to occupy two rooms and





**Longworth House  
Office Building,  
Preliminary Lobby  
Design**  
by the Allied Architects  
ca. 1930

*The* second House office building was designed in the restrained neoclassical revival style.



**Longworth House Office Building**  
ca. 1935

*The* central portico of the second House office building was inspired by one of the city's early landmarks—the Washington City Hall by George Hadfield (1820).

would provide more committee rooms, staff space, and support areas as well.

Carrère & Hastings responded with a plan to build a plain structure in the courtyard of the 1908 building. By lowering the ceiling heights in the new annex and tucking a few offices in the attic, the scheme could provide a total of 375 new rooms. The firm proposed to use steel frame construction and face it with limestone to match the finish of the existing court. It would be provided with the usual plumbing, electricity, heating, and elevators and would cost an estimated three million dollars.

During discussions with the Allied Architects, Lynn indicated that a new House office building should not be monumental, but rather be a serviceable, economical building, simple and dignified. Apparently, some in Congress considered their Carrère & Hastings building too regal and felt that a new structure should be less so. With that in mind, the architects developed two schemes. One included 266 office suites, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, a rooftop lounge, various storage rooms, and auxiliary offices and would cost a total of about six and a half million dollars. A second, more expensive scheme provided much the same facilities but also accommodated a few more offices and a 100-car garage. It was essentially two structures connected underground. Both schemes were designed without high ceilings or “pretentious” corridors, providing suites that reflected intensive study and thought. Each member's suite included a private office with built-in storage cabinets and a private entrance, a large general office that could accommodate two desks and a waiting area, a storage room, and a single lavatory.

The final design was an improvement over the first schemes proposed by the Allied Architects, but the general modesty of their early designs prevailed. The garage and gymnasium were dropped in favor of more offices and a large assembly room, which became home to the Committee on Ways and Means. Because of the building's position on a sloping site, its rusticated granite base varied in height: nearly invisible in front, it would stand a full story above ground in the rear. Above the base were five principal floors faced with marble. Ionic columns supporting a simple entablature were used for the building's five porticoes; the principal one, facing the Capitol, was topped by a pediment.

Two additional stories were partially hidden by a marble balustrade.

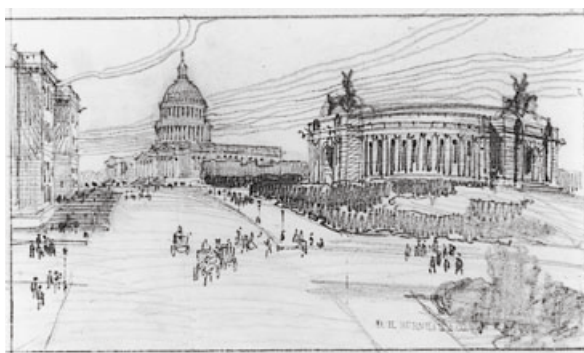
The issue of funding an additional office building for the House of Representatives was debated back and forth until March 4, 1929, when \$8.4 million was appropriated for a new building. Without ceremony the cornerstone was laid on June 24, 1932, and the building was finished less than a year later. It was first occupied on April 20, 1933. Like its contemporaries, the Jefferson Memorial and National Gallery of Art, the second House office building was a fine example of the neoclassical revival style popular for public buildings in the second quarter of the twentieth century.

The third project that Lynn directed on the Capitol's growing campus was initiated a few days before the additional House office building appropriation was passed. On February 28, 1929, Congress allocated \$10,000 for preliminary plans and estimates to complete the Senate office building by constructing an addition on First Street east. Other improvements, such as a new architectural treatment for the C Street elevation, were contemplated as well. Once the "back" of the building, the C Street side came to unforeseen prominence when the Capitol grounds were extended to Union Station. The streets once lined with residences, hotels, and businesses were cleared and the land was turned into a park, creating a view from Union Station to the unadorned rear of the Senate office building. Acquisition of land through purchase and condemnation began in 1910, and the project continued over the next thirty years under a series of commissions. In all, eighteen city squares would be annexed into the Capitol grounds at a cost of more than ten million dollars. Informally, David Lynn asked Thomas Hastings for ideas about architectural and landscape improvements. A similar request was made to the architect of Union Station, Daniel Burnham, who proposed several schemes for a memorial to President Lincoln in the new park. William E. Parsons of Chicago, however, was retained in 1927 to develop a master plan for the area that included new walks, fountains, an underground garage, and other landscape improvements.

On July 18, 1929, Thomas Hastings was hired to draw preliminary designs for an addition to the First Street side of the Senate office building,



**View of the  
Enlarged Grounds  
1931**



**Proposal for a  
Memorial to Abraham Lincoln  
by Daniel Burnham, ca. 1910**

*The site for a memorial to the martyred president was a subject of controversy during the early twentieth century. Some influential politicians, including Joseph Cannon, wanted the memorial built on Capitol Hill, while others favored a site at the western end of the Mall. This sketch shows one of several designs that Daniel Burnham created for a Lincoln Memorial intended for the park about to be created between the Capitol and Union Station.*

*The land between Union Station and the Capitol was acquired by the government between 1910 and 1940 and developed into a park. An underground garage—the first on Capitol Hill—was provided beneath the new park.*





### **Completion of U. S. Senate Office Building**

by Nathan Wyeth and Francis P. Sullivan, ca. 1930

*Although the basic design was provided by Carrère & Hastings, two Washington architects were responsible for the working drawings of the First Street addition to the Senate Office Building. Part of the project included refacing the C Street elevation with columns and an entablature to present a fine face for those coming to the city from nearby Union Station.*

improvements to the existing C Street elevation, and the landscape treatment of the courtyard. In the new addition, twenty-four three-room suites, two committee rooms, and the usual stairs, elevators, and rest rooms were provided. The C Street elevation was redesigned with pilasters (later changed to columns) and ornaments belonging to the Doric order. In November, a month after Hastings' death, Theodore I. Coe, representing the Carrère & Hastings firm, reported that the First Street addition would cost about \$2,231,000, while other improvements intended to finish the Senate office building were estimated at an additional \$883,000. Congress appropriated the funds to complete the building on February 20, 1931. With both principals of the Carrère & Hastings firm dead, Lynn hired two local architects, Nathan Wyeth and Francis P. Sullivan, to prepare working drawings. Wyeth was a veteran of Carrère & Hastings' Washington office and a future municipal architect of the Dis-

trict of Columbia. In September, the First Street wing was underway and the project was completed by the end of June 1933.

Despite the deepening economic depression that marked the last days of Herbert Hoover's administration, Lynn presided over an increasing inventory of construction projects. Many had been in the planning stages before the depression broke, but the timing of the unprecedented construction activity on Capitol Hill during the early 1930s was a welcome boon to thousands of workmen who otherwise faced unemployment. Major projects were undertaken at the western and eastern extremes of the Capitol grounds. Just before Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration on March 4, 1933, the new home for the Botanic Garden was finished. By relocating the garden, its old site cleared the vista to the Grant Memorial from the Mall, as directed by the McMillan Commission. On June 28, 1933, Lynn signed a contract with the Hechinger Engineering Corporation to clear a site east of the Library of Congress to prepare for the construction of an annex. Already under way was an addition to the back of the library, which was to contain the rare book collection and a reading room, a card catalogue room, a garage, a loading dock, extensive underground storage rooms, and shops.

While the sound and dust of construction activity were everywhere around it, the Capitol





## U. S. Botanic Garden Conservatory

Chartered by Congress in 1820, the Botanic Garden is the oldest continually operating facility of its kind in the United States. Its first home was located behind the Patent Office and was constructed in 1842 to house a collection of exotic flora brought to Washington from the South Seas by a naval exploring expedition. When the Patent Office was enlarged in the 1850s, the collection was transferred to a new greenhouse built on the Mall at the foot of Capitol Hill.

At the turn of the century the McMillan Commission proposed to clear away extraneous buildings from the Mall to return it to an open park as envisioned by Pierre L'Enfant. Accordingly, a new conservatory for the Botanic Garden was designed by the Chicago firm of Bennett, Parsons & Frost and begun in the fall of 1931 on a site just south of the Mall. The facade is rusticated limestone with tall arched openings with keystones carved with images of Pan, Pomona, Triton, and Flora. This aerial view looking northwest shows the extensive greenhouses and tall palm court at the rear of the building. The framing of the greenhouses was the first structural use of aluminum alloy in a major American building. (1982 photograph.)



## Bartholdi Park

ca. 1932

Construction of the new U. S. Botanic Garden included relocating the Bartholdi Fountain to its own park. Behind the fountain is a residential structure designed by the project architects, Bennett, Parsons & Frost of Chicago. It served briefly as the official residence of the garden's director but has been occupied by the garden's offices since 1934.



## Adams Building of the Library of Congress

ca. 1938

The Washington partnership of Pierson & Wilson was responsible for the design of the library's second building, now named for President John Adams after being known for years simply as "the Annex." A restrained and finely detailed art deco building, it features an exterior clad with Georgia marble. Its apparent bulk was reduced by holding the upper two floors back and projecting the end bays. Bronze entrance doors by Lee Lawrie depict persons important to the history of writing.

When the building opened in 1938, the Library's shelving capacity tripled to fifteen million volumes. A silent pneumatic system whisked books in leather pouches from the annex to the main reading room across the street in a breathtaking twenty-eight seconds.



## Statuary Hall

Photograph by Underwood & Underwood, 1932

By the early 1930s the arrangement of statues appeared haphazard and their weight threatened to overload the floor. In 1933 authorization was given to distribute the collection throughout the Capitol and display fewer pieces in Statuary Hall itself.

itself stood relatively unchanged during the 1930s. The first half of the decade saw only one notable interior project: on February 24, 1933, Congress authorized the architect of the Capitol to rearrange and relocate statues in the Statuary Hall collection. The collection had grown to sixty-eight pieces, overcrowding the former House chamber and threatening to overload the floor. Removing some statues to other parts of the Capitol allowed the remaining pieces to be shown to advantage and helped restore dignity to that historic room.

After the Supreme Court vacated the Capitol in June of 1935, a number of rooms in the old north wing were turned back to the Senate. The old law library on the first floor was kept as a reference library, while the Courtroom above (the old Senate chamber) was left virtually untouched. Other rooms, however, were remodeled and refitted for use by various Senate offices. Wood floors that had been laid over the original brick floors were removed and replaced with new concrete covered with rubber tile or white oak. Electrical wiring and plumbing were updated and the rooms were equipped with an air-conditioning system. Among the new tenants in the old Court space were the Senate sergeant at arms and the disbursing office.

## REBUILDING THE CHAMBERS

*O*n July 14, 1938, Lynn hired a structural engineer, Thomas W. Marshall, to inspect the roofs over the north and south wings. Lynn was worried about their safety, for they remained virtually as Captain Meigs had left them in the 1850s. By twentieth-century standards, Marshall concluded, they were “entirely obsolete.” He described the roof structure and its general deficiencies succinctly:

The roof trusses over both wings are made up of rolled-iron deck beams as top chord members, cast-iron web struts and wrought-iron eye bar bottom chords and web ties, all pin connected, a type of truss long since superseded by the all steel truss with riveted connections. The cast-iron struts and wrought-iron eye bars are of satisfactory sizes and are not over stressed. The top chord deck beams and the connecting pins are definitely deficient in size



and are greatly over stressed. The lateral bracing between trusses is light in weight, unsatisfactory in arrangement and detail, and generally deficient as compared with modern designs.<sup>37</sup>

Marshall recommended removing the old roofs and replacing them with structural steel and concrete. He estimated that the work would cost \$585,000.

Marshall made his report in November 1938, and two months later Lynn requested funds to replace the roofs. Hearings were held, and engineers from the National Bureau of Standards, the Navy Yard, and the Treasury Department were called to verify Marshall’s computations and conclusions. All agreed that the roofs were unsafe. Instead of granting Lynn’s request, however, the House provided a small sum to hire two additional experts from private industry to reexamine the question. Senator Tom Connally of Texas and Representative Louis C. Rabaut of Michigan were appointed to oversee independent tests conducted by the head engineer from the American Institute of Steel Construction and another distinguished engineer in private practice from Baltimore. While the test results were being analyzed, Lynn, Connally, Rabaut, and the consulting engineers climbed up to the space over the chambers and had a firsthand look around. Again, all agreed that Marshall’s conclusions were correct, except that perhaps the safety issue might be even more urgent than generally believed.

On June 27, 1940, Congress granted the funds needed to put new roofs over the wings. Marshall was retained as a consultant and Lynn began making the necessary arrangements to carry out the

### Hall of Columns

*S*ome of the statues from Statuary Hall were placed in the hall of columns, which proved perfectly suited for the purpose.

In the 1920s a new black and white marble floor was installed here and elsewhere in the House wing, replacing worn Minton tiles in heavily traveled corridors. Thomas Hastings provided the design for the new floors. (1963 photograph.)



ambitious project. Before long, however, it became clear that strains on the steel industry would make it impossible to conduct the work while Europe was embroiled in war. Just five days before the roof appropriation passed, Paris fell to Nazi invaders. Norway and Denmark had been overrun in April, and they were followed by the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg in May. Although the United States was at peace with the belligerents, its future was interwoven with the fate of British resistance. In late 1940 and early 1941, the Roosevelt administration devised ways to assist Prime Minister Winston Churchill, with programs such as “Lend-lease,” while staying clear of a declaration of war.

Recognizing that roof problems at the Capitol took a back seat to more pressing global matters, Lynn constructed temporary supports to allay fears about the ceilings crashing down around the heads of the nation’s legislators. After the close of business on November 22, 1940, the House and Senate vacated their chambers until January 3, 1941. During this period, the Senate took up temporary quarters in its old chamber, while the House met in the Ways and Means Committee room in the new office building across the street. While the chambers were vacant, each ceiling was jacked up and its

weight was transferred to structural steel frames held on columns erected along the gallery walls. Due to wartime conditions, these temporary supports would remain in place until 1949.

During the interim, it occurred to some senators that the roof replacement might be a good opportunity to make other improvements in their chamber. Noise in the galleries was readily admitted to be the major source of annoyance, and although some senators mumbled and others were hard of hearing, the solution to the hearing problems was thought to lie in the realms of acoustics and architecture. Lighting and redecoration were other issues of interest. To investigate these matters, a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds was authorized to hold hearings.

With Senator Charles O. Andrews of Florida presiding, the subcommittee held its broad, vague, and freewheeling hearings on October 24 and 27, 1941. David Lynn led the testimony with a description and history of the Senate chamber. He then introduced the idea of installing a new ceiling, one that had been devised in consultation with five distinguished engineers representing the sciences of acoustics, structure, lighting, electricity, and air conditioning. In addition to men of science, Lynn had consulted men of art—Francis P. Sullivan, an architect, and Ezra Winter, a painter. Sullivan had worked with the architect of the Capitol while the Senate office building was being enlarged and was now serving as the chairman of the Committee on the National Capital for the American Institute of Architects. He helped establish the Historic American Building Survey and became interested in the Capitol thirty years earlier through a friendship with Glenn Brown. Ezra Winter had devised the color schemes in the Supreme Court building and painted murals in the new Library of Congress annex.

Providing a new ceiling was thought to be a single solution to multiple problems. Instead of relying on a skylight, the room would be indirectly illuminated through cove lighting housed in an elliptical recess in the center of the ceiling. Artificial light would provide a dependable, even, and steady illumination, free from the distracting vagaries of outside weather and cloud conditions. Removing the hard metal and glass overhead would

### Senate Chamber ca. 1949

*From 1940 until work on the new roof began nine years later, a steel frame supported the iron and glass ceiling over the Senate chamber. The support was necessary to prevent the dangerously weak ceiling from falling. A similar precaution was employed in the House chamber.*



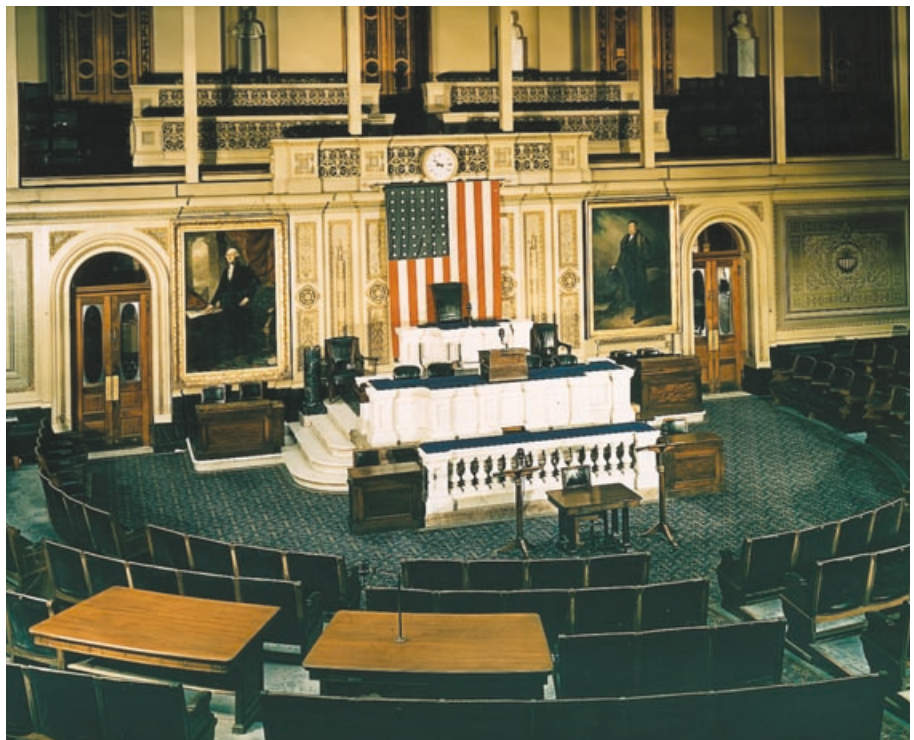


also improve acoustics. The new ceiling could be made with a special acoustical plaster border around a perforated steel center, which would permit air to fall gently and evenly into the chamber. Noise from the galleries could be muffled by new chairs with upholstered backs and seats that folded without unnerving squeaks. A new color scheme could be developed to tie the old and new work together and give the room a more up-to-date look.

No one seemed particularly interested in defending the architectural effect of the old ceiling or its place within the overall design of the historic chamber. Only Sullivan admitted to even a slight hesitation in recommending a new ceiling.<sup>38</sup> The style of the room, one of the high points in the rococo taste of mid-nineteenth-century decorative arts, was now indefensible to the many who preferred the sleek, modern look of steel and glass or the nostalgic look of Williamsburg and the colonial revival taste. In either case, Walter's interior was out of fashion, condemned as "Victorian," and therefore the very definition of bad taste in the 1930s and 1940s.

Andrews' subcommittee reported favorably on the new ceiling recommendation. The full committee adopted the measure in the early days of 1942, and the Senate included a request for funds necessary to pay for it in the Legislative Appropriations Bill for 1943. Citing wartime conditions, however, the House of Representatives struck it out. In the meantime, Lynn and his consultants continued to study the chambers, and in 1945, with the end of World War II in sight, they proposed a more sweeping remodeling scheme. Senator Andrews supported the expanded remodeling project, helping steer legislation through the Senate to authorize it. Prodded by Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas, the House of Representatives suddenly joined the Senate in the pursuit of a more modern chamber. On July 6 and 10, 1945, the House Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds held hearings on the subject of installing a new ceiling over the hall of the House, as well as the idea of remodeling the rest of the room. On July 17, Congress passed legislation to enlarge the roof project to include new ceilings over the two chambers as well as new interior designs.

Francis P. Sullivan was retained as the associate architect for the venture. Senators and



**Senate Chamber (top) and House Chamber (bottom)**  
photographs by Theodor Horydczak, ca. 1949

Library of Congress

*These are the only known color photographs of the chambers taken prior to their 1949–1950 remodeling.*



representatives on the project committees wanted the new interiors reviewed by the Commission of Fine Arts, a permanent legacy of the McMillan Commission and the government's watchdog on design matters in the nation's capital. The commission, in turn, made arrangements for Paul Cret (one of its members) to serve as a consulting architect. A brilliant designer, Cret was noted particularly for his creative blend of modern and classical idioms; however, his death on September 8, 1945, forced the commission to look elsewhere for assistance. The commission recommended Cret's successor firm, Harbeson, Hough, Livingston & Larson of Philadelphia, for the job.

On February 22, 1946, the associate and consulting architects presented their plans for the Senate and House chambers to the Commission of Fine Arts, the architect of the Capitol, and the members of the House and Senate committees. In explaining their design motives in the new plans the architects stated that

there seemed to be no point in preserving the existing character of the architecture of the two Chambers of the period of 1860. . . . There are in the Capitol two contrasting periods of architecture, that of the period of the Early Republic, and that of the period of 1860; to introduce a third and different period would be a mistake. Therefore it was agreed to return to the architecture of the Early Republic.<sup>39</sup>

The Commission of Fine Arts approved the designs unanimously. While no word of dissent has survived in the records, the commission's swift acceptance of the designs may have been a case of professional camaraderie rather than good judgment. Few connoisseurs today look upon the designs with satisfaction, nor has any student of Federal period architecture discovered either authenticity or wit among the details. The new chamber designs were pastiches of vaguely classical designs, pursued without conviction or vigor, sometimes without knowledge or even concern about the proper disposition or scale of classical ornament. Clearly the designers were uncomfortable with the genre, insufficiently acquainted with either the spirit or details of the architecture they sought to imitate. Yet, few architects of that generation could have done much better. It was a time when historicism was undervalued by the architectural profession, and its practitioners were discouraged from studying the past. Engineering

concerns took top priority in the new House and Senate chambers.

The Commission of Fine Arts made a few suggestions to improve the designs. Its members thought that Brumidi's painting in the House chamber (*Cornwallis Sues for Cessation of Hostilities Under the Flag of Truce*) should be removed for its immediate preservation and eventual relocation. They recommended that a covering of fabric, rather than acoustical tiles, be installed to muffle sounds coming from the gallery.<sup>40</sup> For the Senate chamber, they suggested minor adjustments to simplify the ceiling's ornaments and to lengthen its central ellipse. Niches were eliminated from the upper walls of the House chamber and marble plaques substituted in their place. Sculptural embellishments and appropriate quotations were recommended for both chambers.

Work was expected to begin during the summer of 1947, but inflation in a construction industry still recovering from the effects of the war put project financing into jeopardy. Only one bid was received, and the company frankly admitted that its offer contained a large contingency to allow for fluctuations in the marketplace. The bid was rejected and Lynn recommended deferring the project for a year until conditions became more settled.

On October 28, 1948, ten years after Thomas Marshall first reported on the condition of the roofs, the Consolidated Engineering Company of Baltimore was contracted to rebuild the roofs and remodel the chambers. To minimize disruption, work was divided into two phases. In the first phase, which began in June 1949 and ended in December, the old roofs were removed and the new ones built, the new ceilings were installed, and the gallery level was remodeled. The lower parts of the chambers were remodeled in the second phase, which ran from July to December 1950.

As the work neared completion, the Washington press corps greeted the new chambers with unquestioning approval. One article claimed that the chambers now had a "theatrical splendor" and told its readers that the new "Technicolor" halls would be opened for inspection soon. No complaints of noise from the gallery were expected because of the new "non creaking seats" and because the floors had been covered with "sound-muffling linoleum." Rich, deep wood paneling

## Senate Chamber

1998

*The bravado of Walter's high "Victorian" chamber gave way to a vaguely "colonial" look that post-World War II designers found comfortable and reassuring.*

awaited members of the House, whereas the vice president's podium in the Senate was now Italian marble instead of the old walnut desk used formerly. The chambers were ready for the "persnickety" inspection of legislators "in the same critical manner as an aging actress tests her lighting." Those who had already seen the work told the architect of the Capitol that they liked the renovations, which would put the Congress on par with the Supreme Court and the White House.<sup>41</sup> Both chambers were finished on schedule and were ready for use on the first day of 1951.

At the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue the White House was in the midst of a complete interior reconstruction undertaken by the Truman administration. The old sandstone walls, built and restored by James Hoban, were propped up from within while a new steel and concrete structure was prepared for installation. Some of the interiors by McKim, Mead & White, installed in 1902 by Theodore Roosevelt, had been removed, reconditioned, and reinstalled. Other interior features were new, but very little (except the floor plan) remained from the early history of the house. As was the case with the House and Senate chambers, the President's House underwent its own transformation, incorporating a new structure wrapped within old walls. In this period, the urge to preserve the past was not as strong as the love of modern amenities, nor as motivating as a frightening report from a structural engineer. By mid-century, "progress" was more about originality and innovation than about the classicism and harmony that had been the goals of idealistic architects and planners fifty years earlier. Nevertheless, although its day had passed, the City Beautiful Movement had, in fact, transformed Capitol Hill into an especially pleasing enclave of classical grandeur, one of the more notable successes of that high-minded movement.



## House Chamber

1995

*With the colorful ceiling removed and other nineteenth-century decorations banished, the House chamber was redesigned in a so-called "Early Republic" style. Electronic voting was added in 1973 and television coverage began in 1979.*