



CALM AND CALAMITY

With Captain Meigs out of the picture, Walter's professional life returned to normal. He was not acquainted with William B. Franklin but believed their relationship could only be an improvement over the past. Work on the dome could now resume and the extension could proceed under agreeable circumstances. Yet, just as peace in the office was restored, ominous clouds of war were getting thicker. Hotheads on both sides of the slavery issue fired the rhetoric to the boiling point and prospects for the nation's future were looking ever more bleak. Just as the Capitol extension office entered an amicable period, belligerents north and south were careening headlong into a fratricidal bloodbath.

Captain Franklin of the Corps of Topographical Engineers came to Washington in the fall of 1857 to serve as the army secretary of the Lighthouse Board, a bureau of the Treasury Department. Franklin was on the board for a year and a half before going to Illinois to investigate a damaged bridge over the Mississippi River.¹ He returned to Washington just as the troubles between Meigs and the secretary of war reached the breaking point. On October 31, 1859, Floyd asked Secretary of the Treasury Howell Cobb to relieve Franklin so he could take Meigs' job. Franklin regretted the circumstances that brought him to the Capitol, believ-

ing that the secretary of war had treated Meigs badly. Like most people in Washington, he was well aware of Floyd's glaring faults, his lack of integrity, and unscrupulous political practices, and Franklin feared that his own reputation would become tainted by a close association with him. Yet the appointment brought welcome prestige to his career and his corps. "The change is pleasant in one respect," Franklin wrote, "that it shows to the other Corps that they are not the only people in the Army who can do things, and that their clay is not entirely superior to that of which other men are made."² For his part Meigs was concerned about Franklin's untested political instincts and worried that he was unaware of the many dangers surrounding the job.³ Yet Franklin was not a total stranger to the ways of the capital city. When he was ten years old, his father had been elected clerk of the House of Representatives, serving five years until his death in 1838. As an adult, Franklin and his wife had lived among the city's military and social elite for more than two years before he was placed in charge of the Capitol extension and new dome.

On November 3, 1859, Walter met Franklin for the first time and spent several hours discussing business with him. After the meeting, Walter wrote a hasty note to Rice giving word of his initial impression of the new supervising engineer:

I find him as far as I can now judge, every thing that could be desired; he is kind, affable, gentlemanly, liberal in his views, and determined

Marble Cutters (Detail)

1860

not to interfere with any body's rights or immunities. Our interview was cordial, and perfectly agreeable and satisfactory in every particular. —What a contrast with the scamp that preceded him!⁴

The first topic of discussion was the unresolved matter of column shafts. They agreed to prepare a statement asking Congress to allow monoliths of Italian marble or to let the shafts be made of four or five pieces of American marble. Work on the dome—work that had been stalled for a year and a half—was the second topic. The change of command liberated a tall stack of drawings from Walter's office, where they had piled up during the conflict. Under Meigs' regime photographic copies of each drawing would have been sent to the usual foundries to solicit bids. But with so many drawings calling for so many castings, bidding each one separately would entail a great deal of work and waste more time. Either Walter, Franklin, Floyd, or (more likely) Charles Fowler suggested that the entire project be placed under a single contract to expedite matters. Fowler's firm, the Janes, Fowler, Kirtland Company of New York (successor to Janes, Beebe & Company), was prepared to cast, deliver, and install all remaining iron for the dome at a fixed price. Still in Washington and still adept at stirring up trouble, Meigs got wind of the scheme and claimed that it was illegal to award such a contract without competition. Annoyed, Walter hoped the army would ship his adversary to a faraway post and leave him in peace. Grumbling to Rice, Walter wrote: "Meigs is still about poisoning everybody he can. I wish they would send him to Pekin [sic] to teach the celestials how to make forts."⁵

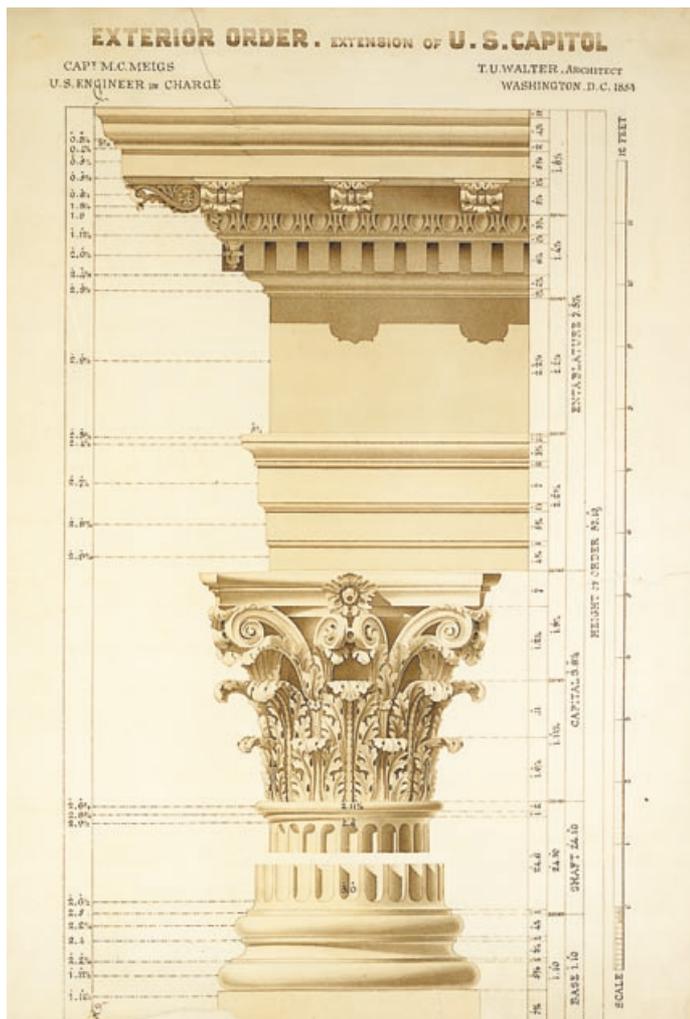
A month after Franklin assumed his post at the Capitol, the first session of the 36th Congress began. Over the preceding summer and fall, the nation's attention had been focused on two exciting events. Stephen Douglas returned to the Senate following a closely watched election in Illinois, where he was challenged by a former one-term congressman named Abraham Lincoln. The election was decided on the issue of the treatment and expansion of slavery in the territories and brought Lincoln into the national spotlight. Another exciting development occurred just three days before Congress met: the fanatical abolitionist John Brown was executed for his ill-fated raid on the government arsenal at Harper's Ferry. The raid was part

of a plan to instigate a massive slave revolt. Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lee led a detachment of marines to capture Brown, whom some considered a madman best committed to an insane asylum. His death by hanging produced another martyr for the abolitionist cause.

Members of the House gathered in their vast new chamber on December 5, 1859, to begin what turned out to be a protracted process of electing a Speaker. The desks and chairs had been removed from the room and curving benches installed in their place. The alteration was ordered at the close of the previous session as an experiment to help those who found it difficult to hear. The problem was not acoustics, but rather the sheer size of the chamber, which put great distances between members. Contracting the seating by eliminating the desks and chairs was considered a practical way to bring individuals closer together so they could hear each other. Seated on the new benches, members began to vote for a Speaker soon after the session opened. It took forty-four votes, cast over a two-month period, finally to elect William Pennington of New Jersey, who was serving his first and only term in the House of Representatives. With no congressional record on slavery, or any other issue, to make people angry, Pennington's main qualification was a lack of enemies.

Walter watched from the sidelines as the Senate appointed members to the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds. Two of his personal friends, Daniel Clark of New Hampshire and James Doolittle of Wisconsin, were named to the committee, as was Anthony Kennedy of Maryland. Jesse D. Bright of Indiana was appointed chairman. Walter felt that the committee would be in favor of using Italian marble for the exterior columns, reasoning that his friends would be loyal to him, their friend from Maryland would be loyal to them, and the chairman "will do anything [Jefferson] Davis wants and Davis is crazy for Italian."⁶ But regardless of the committee's disposition towards authorizing Italian marble, the secretary of war was still very much opposed to the idea. Only American marble would do, and it would be particularly attractive if it could be bought from a southern Democrat.

Despite Walter's preference for Italian marble, the firm of Rice, Baird & Heebner was never allowed to submit a sample of foreign stone for consideration. Instead, the company submitted six



Exterior Order

by Thomas U. Walter, 1854

Typical of Walter's fine draftsmanship, this drawing illustrates the elements, proportion, and dimensions of the Capitol's exterior Corinthian order. Unlike those on the old building, the extension's column shafts were fluted.

shafts, the secretary of war now ordered Franklin to take the necessary steps to purchase 100 blocks of Maryland marble from Connolly. A few days later Franklin responded in a letter spelling out his objections to the order. The letter was brief and polite, but by questioning the legality of the department's action the captain was bound to remind his superiors of Meigs and his meticulous ways. Franklin doubted the legality of the order because Rice & Baird's contract had not been annulled, there was no money (yet) to pay for the marble, and there was some ambiguity regarding Connolly's price. Franklin was also under the impression that if Rice & Baird forfeited that part of their contract dealing with columns, the remainder of their contract would be voided as well. The supply of Lee marble would come to a halt and another marble would be used to finish the outside of the extension.

Floyd was not happy with Franklin's letter. He wished the supervising engineer had spoken up earlier and in person, without resorting to a formal letter of protest. "Such a procedure would have been more in harmony with the cordial relations heretofore subsisting between us," Floyd wrote, "and in more strict conformity to the peculiar rights and duties which are prescribed by our official positions." Each of Franklin's points was addressed in a tone and manner that conveyed the secretary's displeasure. As to the illegality of the order, Floyd was quick to pull rank: "I do not deign to wound your feelings when I remind you that it is scarcely your duty to decide upon the legality of my orders. . . . The Attorney General is my legal adviser, and it is to him that I look when I am involved in legal doubts." Discrepancies in the prices offered by Connolly were dismissed as "too small to be made an impediment to the accomplishment of so desirable an object."

Nothing Franklin had written altered Floyd's decision to buy marble from Connolly. When made

specimens of American marble for the Capitol's outside columns. Four were from Vermont (Rutland, Danby, and two from Dorset Mountain), and one each was from Baltimore County, Maryland and Dover, New York. Franklin tested the samples and reported that none was strong enough nor did any of the quarries have enough stone to fill the order.

Another marble merchant, John F. Connolly, wrote the secretary of war about the loss he suffered when the president stepped in and put a stop to his contract. Six months had passed since Floyd ordered Meigs to purchase the column shafts from Connolly (at \$1,550 per block), which had led him to build a spur from his quarry near Baltimore to the Northern Central railroad. He undertook the investment based on his belief that the government was ready to buy his marble. Contrary to Walter's steadfast preference for Italian marble

aware of the matter, President Buchanan agreed that the secretary's order was probably illegal but he was too weak to act. He simply let well enough alone.⁷ In one last protest, the firm of Rice, Baird & Heebner wrote the secretary to complain that the proposed deal violated its contract. Among other injustices, the partners pointed out that their offer of \$1,400 per shaft was a lower bid than Connolly's offer by \$150 apiece. Floyd dismissed the protest,

citing the firm's failure to deliver the shafts as the reason for which the government was forced to look elsewhere. Considering the "procrastination and delay," he thought that Rice, Baird & Heebner was being let off the hook in a most lenient fashion. On March 20, 1860, Floyd issued an order to purchase 100 monolithic shafts for \$1,550 each. Four days later, the House Committee on Expenditures in the War Department declared Floyd's action illegal because it placed an order with a contractor before there was money in the treasury to pay for it. Floyd's order was also found to be in violation of the government's contract with Rice, Baird & Heebner. The committee reasoned that to buy Connolly's marble through Rice's firm would save the government \$15,000. It upheld each of Captain Franklin's objections, yet Floyd was not forced to take corrective measures for nearly three months. In the Civil Appropriation Bill of 1861, approved on June 25, 1860, the War Department was formally directed to purchase Connolly's marble through Rice, Baird & Heebner. In a last-minute move Congress foiled Floyd's efforts to sidestep the marble contractor and enrich a person who was undoubtedly a political supporter.

Even before Congress passed its directive, Rice, Baird & Heebner had delivered the first four blocks of Connolly's marble to the Capitol. There were eight more blocks at the quarry ready to be



Marble Delivery

1860

*O*ne of the first column shafts from Connolly's quarry arrived at the Capitol on June 15, 1860. It came to Washington by railroad and was pulled on carriages from the station to the Capitol by a team of horses.

Marble Cutters

1860

*S*trong-armed masons transformed rough blocks of Maryland marble into perfectly shaped and fluted column shafts, working under canvas tents that protected them from sun and rain.



put on railroad cars and transported to Washington. The appearance of the marble greatly annoyed Walter, who did not think it fit for such a grand building.⁸ Provost & Winter's workmen dressed the stones in tents put up to protect them from the sun. (But the tents did not protect pedestrians from the danger of flying spalls propelled by the hammers and chisels wielded by strong-armed masons.⁹) It took about 114 working days to boast, cut, turn, and smooth each shaft. About the same amount of time was necessary to flute it, and seventy-eight days were needed for rubbing and polishing. It cost \$728 to transform each rough block into a perfectly shaped and fluted shaft, while an additional \$242 was allowed the contractor for setting it in place and for profit.¹⁰ Thus, from the quarry to the Capitol, each column shaft cost \$2,370 installed.

DOMES CONTRACT

*W*hile Floyd's handling of the marble business was unethical, it illustrated the War Department's free-wheeling approach to its business affairs and the administration's willingness to use contracts to satisfy political ends. A contract with Janes, Fowler & Kirtland to complete the dome also had legal questions, but it resulted in enormous savings of time and money.

The contract to finish the dome came about in an unusual manner. On December 1, 1859, Captain Franklin wrote Janes, Fowler, Kirtland & Company asking for a bid on the dome's skin.¹¹ A similar letter was sent to J. M. Reed, president of the Architectural Iron Works in New York. His letters also asked about prices for pieces of the framework delivered and ready to install. These were Franklin's first communications with foundries and the first orders in fourteen months for the dome's ironwork.

The day after they received Franklin's letter, Janes, Fowler & Kirtland offered to cast and deliver the skin of the outer dome for four and a half cents per pound and to install it for one and a half cents per pound. The trusses would cost three cents a pound if all the staging and hoisting apparatus were supplied by the government. Having answered

Franklin's questions, the firm unexpectedly proposed to execute all remaining work—both casting and installing—for seven cents a pound saying:

We have examined the plans for the dome, and we find the design of what remains to be done above the work now being put up, is so dependent, the one part on the other, that it forms a whole that cannot well be divided; and the frame-work and the skin bear such relations to each other as to make it important that both should be made in the same shop; our experience in what we have already done, proves to us the advantage to government as well to the mechanics, of having all the work done at the same establishment; we therefore propose to execute all that remains to be done to the dome, including the putting up of the entire work, exclusive only of staging and hoisting, as before expressed, *for seven cents per pound, (7¢)*.¹²

Franklin forwarded the voluntary proposal to the secretary of war, who replied that, since the offer relieved the government of considerable work and responsibility, accepting it would be "true economy." Unfortunately, the department did not have the authority to accept the offer because there was not enough money appropriated to finish the dome. But if the company understood the situation and was agreeable, Franklin was authorized to buy all remaining ironwork for the dome from Janes, Fowler, Kirtland & Company for seven cents a pound.¹³

As soon as Floyd accepted the offer without opening the work to competition, he came under pressure to reverse the decision. Through Senator Davis, Meigs stirred up the matter in Congress, saying that Janes, Fowler, Kirtland & Company actually offered to finish the work for six cents but somehow got a penny more through Floyd's shenanigans.¹⁴ Walter advised the ironworkers to include scaffolds and hoisting in their bid to help calm the growing storm. This was done and, despite Meigs' best efforts, congressional grumbling died down. After small matters were resolved during the next few weeks, the agreement was approved on February 15, 1860.

The dome had risen to 129 feet above the ground when Janes, Fowler, Kirtland & Company took responsibility for erecting the rest. Walter welcomed the deal and had worked diligently behind the scenes on its behalf. Yet, soon after the contract was signed, he found the contractor's own

diligence to be noticeably lacking and was obliged to plead that more men be put on the job:

I sincerely wish you would *greatly* increase your force on the Dome—you are suffering in public estimation by the slowness with which the work goes on, and I shall find it impossible to stem the storm of public opinion for you much longer if stronger demonstrations are not speedily made—you will observe that the slowness of your progress was one of the subjects of the Senate resolutions, and if you don't hurry up matters very quick you may look for further action—they are quieted for present, and I think all trouble over in reference to the Dome, if you let people see you are in earnest . . .¹⁵

With the dome rising slowly outside, the art commission assembled in the Capitol to write its report. It had been formed on May 15, 1859, when President Buchanan appointed Henry K. Brown (a sculptor), James R. Lambdin (a portrait painter), and John F. Kensett (a landscape painter) as its members. In June, the three artists met in Washington to organize, inspect the public buildings in the city, interview Meigs and Walter, and begin formulating recommendations for the future decoration of the Capitol. The commission issued its one and only report on George Washington's birthday, February 22, 1860. After a predictable preface about the importance of the Capitol and its art, the commission wrote that, except for the works by Crawford and Rogers, the money spent on decoration had been "misapplied." American history was the foremost subject worthy of the Capitol, they maintained, yet little history could be found among the decorations. They were unimpressed by the replication of European art in the Capitol and asserted that when foreign artists attempted American subjects the results were far from satisfactory:

We are shown in the Capitol a room in the style of the 'Loggia of Raphael;' another in that of Pompeii; a third after the manner of the Baths of Titus; and even in the rooms where American subjects have been attempted, they are so foreign in treatment, so overlaid and subordinated by symbols and impertinent ornaments that we hardly recognize them.

Having casually dismissed five years of work by Brumidi and other artists, the commission proceeded to map out future decorations. The rotunda was the point of departure. The 300-foot long frieze intended for sculpture was ripe for didactic material such as "Freedom, civil and religious." In the

chambers, the subject of the art should be legislative history. Busts of the first two vice presidents should be commissioned for the Senate chamber, with James Madison and Fisher Ames honored in the House with busts or statues. "It is the opinion of the commission," they wrote, "that far greater sobriety should be given these halls in their general effect to render them less distracting to the eye." While perfectly appropriate to military uniforms and banners, the gaudy colors were too diverting for the House and Senate chambers and should be replaced.

Paintings in the Supreme Court should reflect judicial history, significant discoveries and inventions should be depicted on canvasses hung in the corridors leading from the rotunda to the chambers, and lobbies should be decorated with paintings showing scenes of pioneer life. Passages that were not well lighted should be decorated with simple flat colors. Stucco ornamentation should be avoided because of "constant mutilation." (In any event, its use was "cheap and showy.") Affixing bronze ornaments to doors was cited as another instance of misguided taste: viewed from afar, the metal appeared as so many "unintelligible dark spots incapable of light and shade in themselves." If ornamentation was required, the commission suggested that it should be carved from the same wood used in the door's construction.

Most of Meigs' decorative program was laid waste in the devastating appraisal by the art commission. Only sculptures by Crawford and Rogers were spared the blanket condemnation. Their works were praised as entirely suited to the purposes for which they were designed, and they had the distinct advantage of being by American artists. The commissioners hoped that Crawford's plaster models, which Meigs had sent to West Point, would become the nucleus of a national school of art. After digressing briefly to touch on the importance of landscape improvements and redesigning the national coinage, the commission ended its report with a list of works of art to carry out its recommendations: eight paintings, eight statues, and two colossal busts, with a total cost of \$169,000.

The first and only art commission appointed to recommend how the Capitol should be decorated had little effect. Despite the high moral and patriotic tone of its message, the report failed to convince Congress that more or different decorations

were needed. In hindsight, it appears that most of the commission's appeals to the country's history—a summons to honor her past—plainly ignored current conditions. As the cancer of slavery ate away at the nation, the art commission perhaps saw patriotic decorations as one way to rekindle a sense of loyalty, a way to calm passions and restore national pride.

A MORE CHEERFUL SENATE CHAMBER

One of the recommendations made by the art commission was to fill the niches in the Senate retiring room (modern day S-215) with \$20,000 worth of statuary. Designed for the exclusive use of senators wishing privacy and relaxation, the retiring room was one of the most elegantly finished spaces in the Capitol. Its walls were lined with Tennessee marble, tall mirrors were positioned opposite windows to maximize light, and white marble Corinthian columns supported a deeply paneled and carved marble ceiling. Except for the tile floor, the room was composed entirely of marble. Indeed, it was then (as now) more commonly referred to as the “marble room.” Next door was an elaborately painted chamber set aside for the use of the president during his infrequent visits to the Capitol (modern day S-216). These rooms ranked high in the roster of the extension's great interiors, yet both were nearly lost in a scheme to relocate the Senate chamber. On March 19, 1860, Senator John P. Hale of New Hampshire offered a resolution inquiring into the cost of moving the chamber to the outside walls in order to provide the room with windows.

Walter thought the reason some senators wanted windows was merely for “cheerfulness,” a chance to admire a view and catch a breath of fresh air.¹⁶ Senator Davis sprang to his feet to object to the resolution because it asked Walter rather than Captain Franklin for a report and it also sidestepped the Senate Committee on Public Buildings. Never wanting to give the architect credit for anything, Davis said that the engineer was surely “a better constructor than the architect.”¹⁷ Hale replied that he did not care if protocol directed the inquiry to the superintendent or the architect,



Senators' Retiring Room
ca. 1890

An eclectic collection of tufted furniture, supplemented by a few wooden rocking chairs and a spittoon, was used to furnish one of the grandest rooms in America.

but he wanted plans and cost estimates in hand before the question was referred to the Committee on Public Buildings.

Franklin responded to the inquiry on April 9, 1860.¹⁸ Relocating the chamber to the north wall would cause the demolition of the marble room, the president's room, and the vice president's office. It would also require reconstruction of half

Design for Removing Senate Chamber From the Centre of the Wing to the North and West Fronts Per Senate Resolution of March 19, 1860
by Thomas U. Walter
1860

The Senate chamber was only a year old when the first attempt was made to relocate it in order to provide the room with windows. Of the several plans made by the architect, this was the one preferred by those who supported the move. The Senate rejected the scheme on June 11, 1860.

of the north wing's interior structure from the basement to the roof. If the interior ironwork were reused, the cost of that plan would be \$165,000. Alternatively, rebuilding the Senate chamber in the northwest corner of the wing would cost \$200,000 but offered the advantages of having windows on two sides of the room and saving the marble room. The president's room would be sacrificed in either scheme. Franklin estimated that it would require two years to rebuild the Senate chamber upon either plan.

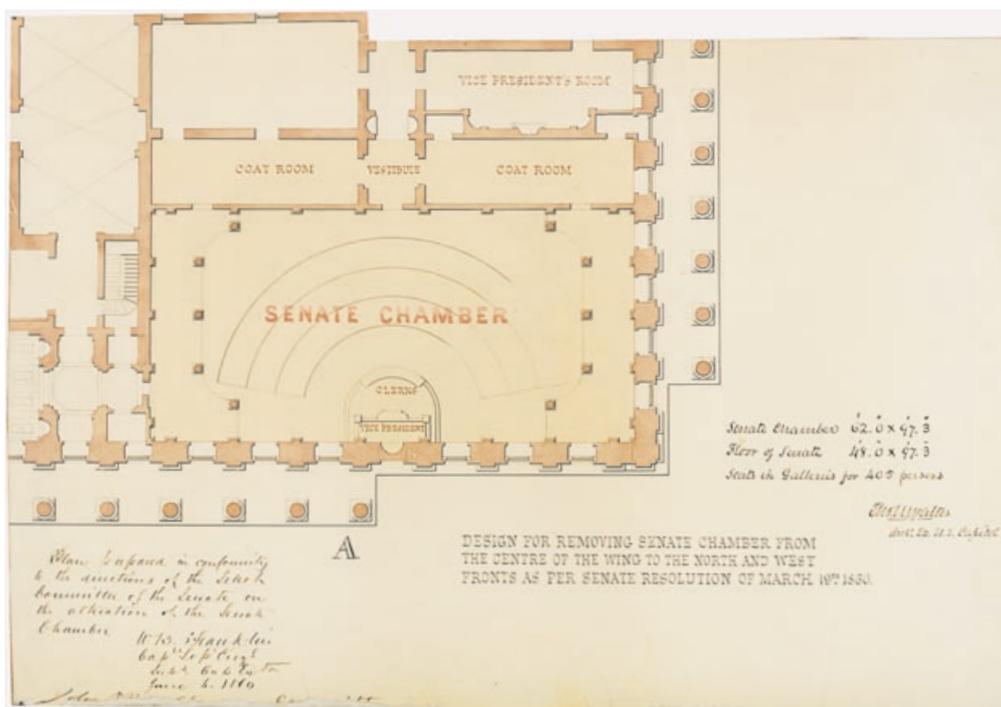
On the afternoon of June 11, 1860, near the end of the first session of the 36th Congress, the Senate discussed several matters relating to the art commission, alterations in the old Capitol, and the possibility of relocating its chamber. Robert Toombs of Georgia started the discussion by offering an amendment to repeal all laws creating an art commission. Senator Davis thought that if the commission were to be abolished, perhaps it was time to abolish the architect's position as well. Toombs did not understand the correlation, which Davis then explained: "The drawings are already made, and as there is no appropriation for the building, of course there is no use for him."¹⁹ While the senator from Mississippi was being spiteful, Walter's friends were quick to defend the architect and his posi-

tion. Daniel Clark of New Hampshire argued that if the architect's job were abolished the extension would never be completed. Davis' reply rehased his rather skewed view of Walter's professional duties and accomplishments:

... after the appointment of the late superintendent, Captain Meigs, the architect, became, in fact, a draughtsman. He made plans under Captain Meigs, who was both the constructor and architect in fact, though he never took the name. The drawings have now been completed, and as the present architect failed utterly as a constructor, as was shown by the report of the committee, when he was in charge of construction, I do not see what duties he can have to perform, except to draw his salary. I look upon it, therefore, as a useless expense. The plans are complete. Construction is what remains to be done, not designs.²⁰

Clark had no desire to fight the battle between Walter and Meigs on the floor of the Senate. He simply wanted the extension finished and considered Walter the best person to see the work to its end. If he were dismissed, the job would be left to Franklin, whom he called "a comparative stranger." According to Davis, that argument called for Meigs' reinstatement. Alfred Iverson of Georgia supported Davis, saying there was no further need for architectural services and the government would do well to save the expense of Walter's salary. "He came here poor," Iverson mistakenly said of the architect, "and now he is rich." James Doolittle of Wisconsin declared that the whole question revolved around Davis' support for Meigs and Floyd's support for Walter. It was an old "misunderstanding," one that should not be discussed when an appropriation bill was under consideration. He called for a vote on Davis' amendment, which was soundly defeated. By a comfortable margin, Walter had sustained yet another assault from the powerful Mississippi senator.

The Senate returned to the question of abolishing the art commission. Meigs' friend, James Pearce of Maryland, gave a blistering appraisal of the commission's labors on behalf of American art. He thought that its members had little to show for a year's work when they wrote their "little report," and he was alarmed at their suggestion to spend nearly \$170,000 on new decorations. There was no call for additional ornamentation at that time and Pearce did not know what the commission would do in the future. He had heard a rumor that the



members of the commission wanted a salary of \$3,000 apiece, desired an office with a messenger, and had given other signs of wanting a permanent place in government. For his part, Pearce desired to see an end to any claim the commission might place upon the federal purse or public taste. Toombs' amendment to abolish the commission was readily agreed to.

In the next order of business, Senator Jesse D. Bright of Indiana, chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, offered an amendment to appropriate \$45,000 to convert the old Senate chamber for the Supreme Court's use, to convert the old courtroom on the first floor into a law library, and to refit other rooms in the old north wing for the Court's benefit. John Hale of New Hampshire questioned the wisdom of proceeding while the matter of rebuilding the Senate chamber was still undecided. If that work were authorized, the Senate would need a place to meet and their old room seemed perfect. He wished to see the matter postponed until the other question was decided. He then introduced legislation to remove the chamber to the northwest corner of the wing and to provide \$200,000 for the work. In a spirited rejoinder, Senator Davis defended the room's position in the center of the wing:

The great object has been to separate the Senate Chamber from exterior noise, and relieve the deliberations of the body from any confusion which might be outside the Capitol. All the heating and ventilation have been directed towards the present location of the Chamber. To remove it now into a wing, a room which cannot be made exactly suited to the purpose, which never can be brought to compare favorably at all with the one in which we are now sitting, seems to me an idiosyncrasy on the part of the Senator from New Hampshire . . .²¹

With biting sarcasm, Davis continued his defense of the chamber by inviting Senator Hale to leave the room any time he wished to gaze out a window. The Senate would miss his counsel, but if the matter were so important, then he should by all means leave and find a window. In Davis' opinion there was no reason to abandon the present chamber, a room that "must attract the admiration of every one who sees it, and which, in its acoustic effects, is as perfect as any room of its size I ever saw."²²

Senator Hale claimed to have been unable to hear anything Davis had said. But he remarked that praise for the appearance of the chamber was an exercise in personal taste that could not be debated. Its arrangement, however, was another matter. He considered the heating and ventilation so bad and so unnatural that he doubted many new senators would survive their six-year term in the room. The Senate chamber, he declared, was an utter failure. His committee had seen Walter's original plan for the north wing with the chamber located in the northwest corner and noted with pleasure its similarity to the proposed alteration. Repositioning the chamber would result in a far superior room with windows and a smaller gallery. More than 1,000 people could be accommodated in the present gallery, which presented too great a distraction. The proposed alteration would reduce the seating capacity to 400, a more manageable number. It would also bring daylight and fresh air directly into the room.²³ When Hale's motion was put to a vote, however, only nine senators supported the relocation. While soundly defeated, the window issue would be revisited from time to time over the next sixty-five years.

The discussion next turned to refitting the former Senate chamber for the Supreme Court. Anthony Kennedy of Maryland, Trusten Polk of Missouri, and Robert Johnson of Arkansas spoke against the matter as too expensive. "I am in favor of fitting up these rooms in [a] very handsome style," Kennedy said, "but, for the life of me, I do not see how it will take \$45,000 to do it."²⁴ George Pugh of Ohio decried the Supreme Court's present location in the "cellar" and hoped the Senate would agree to the proposed improvement. James Mason of Virginia thought the only reason to move the Supreme Court was to give the old Senate chamber a new use. He declared: "I think we are somewhat in the condition known to many of us who have had the misfortune to build a new house. The difficulty is to know what to do with the old one."²⁵ James Bayard of Delaware disagreed. He stated it had always been understood that the Supreme Court would take over the old Senate chamber and that the old courtroom would be refitted as a law library. Inadequate space for books caused inconvenience in the old library (modern day S-146 and 146-A), and the growing



Supreme Court Chamber
ca. 1900

*M*inor modifications made in 1860 transformed the former Senate chamber into a courtroom. A level floor replaced the terraced platform formerly occupied by senators' desks; the justices' bench was placed where the vice president's rostrum had once stood. The semicircular visitor gallery was also removed.

collection needed better accommodations. Stephen Mallory of Florida was against the measure simply because he hoped the Senate would return to its old room. He also thought the money requested was more than enough to build the Supreme Court its own building.

The cost of converting rooms in the old north wing for the Supreme Court was the principal objection most senators had to the plan. Other figures were substituted for the original \$45,000, ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000. One senator thought the conversions would require more structural modifications than anyone suspected and would result in a more expensive project than anyone realized. Robert Johnson thought that it was not fair to vote so much money for the Supreme



Law Library
ca. 1900

*I*n 1860 the Supreme Court's library moved into the former courtroom, where it stayed for the next seventy-five years.

Court when senators were unwilling to vote funds for their own comfort.²⁶

After almost two hours of discussion and votes on various matters—abolishing the art commission, sustaining Walter, refusing to relocate the Senate chamber—a vote was finally taken on Bright's amendment to convert the old Senate chamber into a courtroom. The amount of money available for the project, including the transformation of the old courtroom into a law library, was reduced to \$25,000 to help make the appropriation palatable to reticent senators. By a vote of twenty-two to seventeen, the legislation finally passed.

The House of Representatives went along with the Senate's actions. When it debated the appropriation for 1861, a few members worried that some of the money might be used to further the decorations and wondered about the future role of the art commission. There seemed to be little support for the continuation of the commission, as no new art was envisioned for the foreseeable future. But the issue gave members an opportunity to express their opinions about the decorations around them, which inspired the usual oratorical flourishes. With eloquence and imagination, Morrison Harris of Maryland took aim at the work of foreign artists in the Capitol:

... the whole building appears to have been delivered over to the gross and flashy conceits of second-rate German or Italian fresco painters, who have covered the walls of the corridors and committee-rooms with inappropriate designs of flowers and fruits, Venuses, bacchantes, flying dragons with heads of chicken cocks, and curious combinations neither human, divine, mythological, nor allegorical.²⁷

When the votes were counted, the House agreed to abolish the commission and to limit the appropriation to the work necessary to finish the wings: no funds could be expended on paintings or sculpture. On June 9, 1860, \$300,000 was given for the extension, an unexpectedly large sum considering the state of the treasury.

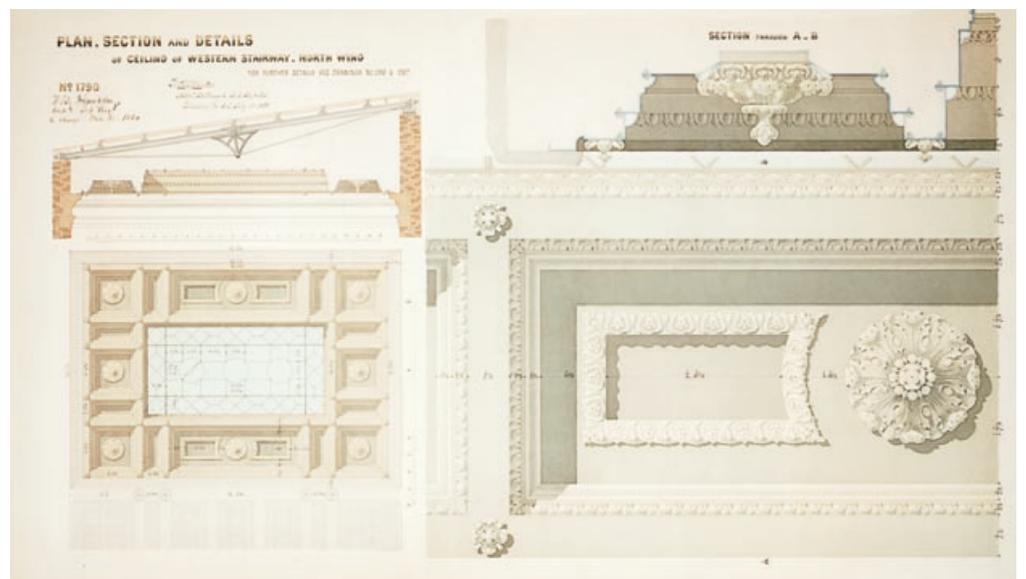
THE UNION UNHINGED

With the political climate more bluster than ever, the first session of the 36th Congress ended on June 25, 1860. By then the presidential campaign was well under way and the nation resounded with the sounds of marching bands, parades, and red-hot oratory. Democrats met in Charleston to nominate a candidate, but delegates split over the issue of federal protection of slavery in the territories. Supporters of the proposition walked out after the 57th ballot. The convention reconvened in Baltimore, where Stephen Douglas was nominated. National Democrats representing the hardliners who walked out in Charleston reconvened in Baltimore as well, naming Vice President John C. Breckinridge as their candidate for the nation's highest office. Mean-

while, the Constitutional Union party, a loose confederation of old Whigs and remnants of the Know-Nothing party, named John Bell of Tennessee as its candidate. All would face stiff opposition from the united Republican party and its candidate, Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. He captured the party's nod on the third ballot at its convention held in Chicago in May.

When funds became available on July 1, work resumed on the extension. During the previous seven months little was done due to the lack of money. A few men were employed at the sawmill getting marble paving ready for the porticoes, but no work was done on the wings except some routine painting and gilding. Once work resumed, it again concentrated on the porticoes, and the boasting, cutting, turning, fluting, and polishing of column shafts. By the first week in November 1860, sixteen shafts had been delivered and Franklin reported that their appearance was better than anticipated.²⁸

From time to time, Franklin and Walter took carriage rides out Bladensburg Road to visit Clark



Plan, Section, and Details of Ceiling of Western Staircase, North Wing

by Thomas U. Walter, 1858

Janes, Fowler, Kirtland & Company received the contract for the ceilings over the four public stairs in August 1860.

Mills at his foundry near the Maryland state line. Mills was a sculptor of considerable renown whose spirited statue of Andrew Jackson across from the President's House was the first equestrian statue cast in the United States. Teaching himself by trial and error, Mills cast the work himself in 1849–1852. Now he was busy casting Crawford's statue of Freedom for the top of the Capitol's new dome.

As was the case with most other projects connected with the Capitol during this period, selecting the person to cast the statue was a political decision. Crawford had wanted to send the model to the Royal Bavarian Foundry in Munich, where he expected the casting would be superior to that available elsewhere—especially in America. A cargo of bronze would also be safer to ship across the Atlantic than a cargo of plaster. Earlier, Meigs had wanted to melt down old bronze cannons to cast the statue, making it a tribute to military men and their accomplishments. In 1857, he told Senator Pearce: "I wish to make this great work, not only an object of national pride as a work of art, but also a memorial of battles won on sea and land in the struggle which gained and since maintained our independence."²⁹ Both Walter and Franklin wanted James T. Ames of Chicopee, Massachusetts, to do the job. Ames had extensive experience casting statues for sculptors and cannons for the War Department. Clark Mills, however, made quite an impression on his own behalf by calling on the secretary of war arm-in-arm with the entire congressional delegation from his home state, South Carolina. When Walter learned of the extraordinary visit, he went immediately to see Floyd to persuade him that Ames was better qualified. Knowing that the administration always looked to appease southern politicians, Walter informed Ames of the situation and advised him to counter that influence if he could:

outside pressure (from members of Congress from the south) was so great as to make it a very embarrassing question with him [Floyd], and much as he desired to gratify Capt. F[ranklin] and myself in the matter he was afraid that he would have to "*give in*". . . . We have done all we could but our influence is only professional and that, you know, makes but little show in politics. . . . Can't you make some movement through [the Secretary of the Navy] Mr. Toucey—he is from your region, and a word from him to the Secy. of War would be potent.³⁰

The doubts apparent in Walter's letter were borne out when the secretary of war ordered Franklin to draw up a contract with Clark Mills. On April 8, 1860, Mills proposed to do the work for \$25,000, asking for a \$10,000 cash advance. Thinking the cost too high, Franklin appealed to the secretary for permission to open the job for bids, but Floyd would not budge. South Carolina's senators and representatives were too powerful to be toyed with. Franklin was, however, allowed to negotiate with Mills, and they struck a deal whereby the government would rent Mills' foundry and pay him \$400 a month for his professional services. The government would supply all materials. Despite Meigs' hope, the bronze was made from Lake Superior copper and tin bought in New York rather than obtained from melted cannons. For every pound of copper used, one ounce of tin and one half ounce of zinc were added to produce bronze. It cost about \$20,000 to cast the statue and haul it to the Capitol.

When Franklin finished his 1860 annual report on November 6, there was little to recount beyond a description of masons working on the column shafts and other tasks relating to the porticoes. He reported that the benches had been removed from the House chamber and the desks and chairs restored. While the report was rather uninteresting, that particular day was not. The first exterior column was set in place on the east side of the House connecting corridor, and Franklin, a lifelong Democrat, cast his presidential vote for Abraham Lincoln. Earlier that year he said that the corruption in the Buchanan administration had turned him away from the Democratic party and he was "leaning towards the rail splitter."³¹

While the majority of voters leaned away from the "rail splitter," Lincoln won the election by a wide margin in the electoral college. As soon as this result was known, the sectional time bomb that had been ticking for decades finally exploded. Although Lincoln was not an abolitionist, he wanted slavery contained. Southern extremists saw his election as the perfect time to break away from the north and its dominating power, which threatened their "peculiar institution." The legislature of South Carolina remained in session during the election, and when it learned of Lincoln's victory it called a convention to determine the state's

course. Even before the convention met, South Carolina's senators began to withdraw from Congress. On November 10, 1860, Senator James Chestnut withdrew, followed by James H. Hammond the next day. When South Carolina seceded on December 20, her six representatives in the House withdrew immediately. In January, the states of Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Georgia followed suit. On a single day—January 21, 1861—five southern senators, including Jefferson Davis, withdrew from Congress. (While many politicians were leaving Washington, the lone representative from the new state of Kansas took his seat in the House on January 20.) The following month Texas joined the secession movement and the Confederate States of America was formed in Montgomery, Alabama. Jefferson Davis was named its provisional president.

Benjamin B. French, an ardent supporter of the north, noted in his journal that one of the column shafts being wrought on the Capitol grounds split on the day that South Carolina left the Union. He suspected that the accident was actually a terrible omen. Walter, too, was taken by the coincidence, telling Rice that the huge stone “went for *Secession*.” He thought everything in the nation was headed for secession except his colleague Edward Clark, who had recently gotten married: “our old friend Clark, . . . he goes in for Union.”³²

Although Buchanan deemed secession illegal, he also thought the president lacked the constitutional authority necessary to force states back into the Union. One of the few concrete actions he took was a reorganization of the cabinet. Secessionists were rooted out and sent packing. The first to go was John B. Floyd, whose sympathies with the secession movement had never been well disguised. He left Washington on December 29, but not before sending arms and ammunition south, where he hoped they would eventually fall into rebel hands.

During the first week in February, Walter watched the city fill with troops, some of whom were quartered across from his home on F Street, NW. He awakened with “drums beating to arms” in the morning and endured the sound of the bugle throughout the day. If Virginia seceded, he was prepared to depart the next day. “I shall leave here as soon as they begin to burn gunpowder,” he told one of his adult children, “I don’t like the smell of it.”³³ He owned a fine lot in the quiet Germantown



Column Shaft Installation

1860

Among those observing the scene were Senator Jefferson Davis and Thomas U. Walter (with hand on hip). These unlikely companions watched as the fourth and final shaft was positioned on the east side of the House connecting corridor. The photograph was taken a few weeks before Davis left the Senate when Mississippi withdrew from the Union.

section of Philadelphia and was in the process of building a house there. But Walter was not sure he would live peacefully among “black republicans who have brought these horrid evils upon us.” Perhaps he would wait out the war in Europe, but whatever course he took, the future looked grim—his financial prospects were bleak. He explained the situation to a close friend:

We have come to the conclusion today that the country is to be torn asunder, that war and fighting are to be the fashion for the next decade, and that we shall lose at least \$50,000 in this district alone, and all for an abstraction—a mere phantom in the brain of northern fanatics—a thing that don't concern them, and never did—they have, however, made it concern me to some purpose; my wrath against northern aggression is quite up to the boiling point.

I want to get away from this place; I hate politicians of *every* stripe with a perfect hatred, and would like to get out of the din of their degrading strife, but I very much fear that while we live in this country we are destined to live in the midst of its tumults and its broils wherever we may go.³⁴

MEIGS' RETURN

fter Floyd's departure, the War Department was run by the postmaster general, Joseph Holt of Kentucky. Being prone to reverse Floyd's decisions, Holt recalled Meigs to Washington and again gave him charge of the aqueduct.³⁵ Since October 1860, Meigs had been detailed to Fort Jefferson on the Dry Tortugas in Florida, where he had been banished by the former secretary of war. By February 25, 1861, he was back at the aqueduct and trying to recapture his place at the Capitol. That day Meigs wrote Franklin a remarkable letter, telling his friend and fellow army officer that God had sent him back to Washington so he could install the statue of Freedom on top of the new dome:

I have always held a firm conviction that, with or without effort on my part, if God spared my life, I should place the Statue of American Freedom upon the Dome of the Capitol; and, having a firm faith in the justice of God, and in his providence, which overrules all things great and small, for good, I believe that I shall yet do this.

'Finis coronat opus'

To this end I invite your cooperation.³⁶

Franklin was not particularly sympathetic to Meigs' candid letter. Despite the former headaches with Floyd, he was enjoying working at the Capitol and thought the experience would prepare him for a future career in civilian life. He neither understood why Meigs wanted to return to the Capitol, when the Washington Aqueduct gave him so much to do, nor did he want to give up his own occupation merely to be placed “on the shelf.”³⁷

Amid the confusion marking the close of Buchanan's administration, Secretary Holt replaced Franklin with Meigs at the head of the Capitol extension and new dome projects. He took charge on February 27, 1861, arriving at the office the next day. Quite unexpectedly, Walter paid him a courtesy call; he was greeted with growls and sneers. A description of the unpleasant encounter was written by Walter the following day:

Under the best advice I called on Meigs yesterday at 12¼ P.M. just 15 minutes after he ascended the throne (Franklin was present). Bowing to M. as I entered the room I said ‘*good morning Capt. Meigs, I have called to pay my respects to you on your reassuming the charge of the works with which I am connected.*’ He looked daggers at me, and gave a grunt, gnashing his teeth and turned his head away from me. Not the least discomfited, as soon as I had finished my address to him, I turned to Capt. Franklin and pleasantly said ‘*and to you Capt. F. I have come to bid good bye.*’ Thus ended the first act. I am not sorry I did it, tough job as it was.³⁸

Meigs soon wrote Walter a letter dismissing him from the position of architect of the Capitol extension. He declared that Walter's continuation in office would not promote the public interest and he therefore had “the honor to inform you that your services are dispensed with from this date.”³⁹ Meigs' letter was written on March 2, 1861, just two days before Abraham Lincoln took office. Prudently, Walter waited a couple of days before making his reply. On March 5, he wrote to remind Meigs that his appointment was presidential and that he therefore was under no obligation to leave office at the presumptuous order of a mere army captain:

I take occasion, very respectfully to say that my connection with the public works, which were placed in your charge during the past weeks, depends upon the will of the President of the

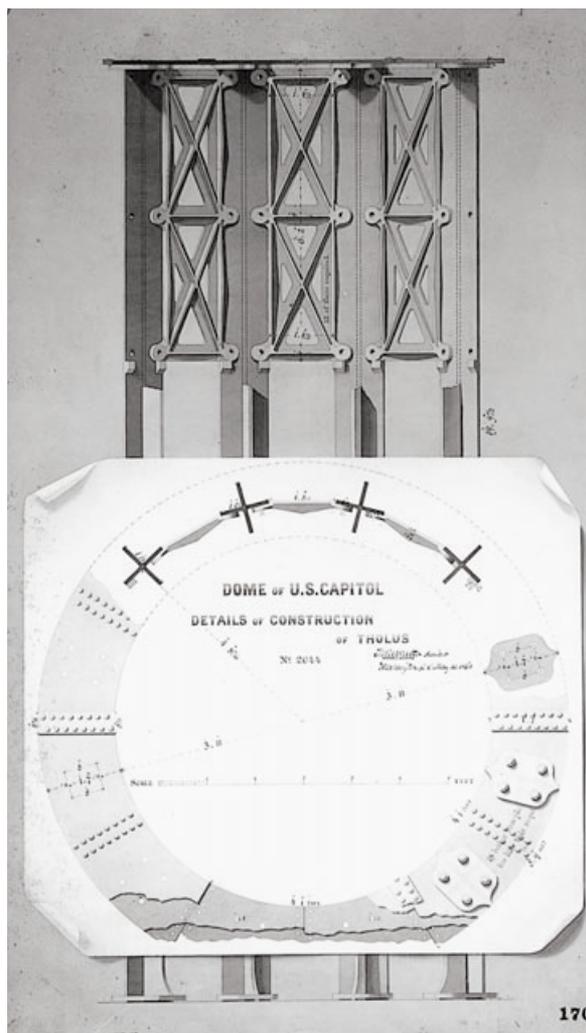
United States, and is in no way at your disposal as your letter assumes. . . . As your letter has no bearing whatever upon my official relations to Government, I decline to recognize the authority it affects.⁴⁰

Upon receiving this statement, Meigs asked the commissioner of public buildings to post a guard at Walter's office door to prevent him from removing public property. Commissioner John B. Blake obliged and Walter took the opportunity to visit Philadelphia and Germantown while the administration sorted the matter out. While in Pennsylvania he attended to some personal business regarding his new house and conferred with friends to plot his next move. Returning to Washington, the architect regretted that the works were interrupted by the change in command and noted that the mood among the workmen was uncertain. In a letter to Charles Fowler, who had a question about the dome, Walter wrote:

I can't give you any information about the Dome as I have no access to Meigs, and all the clerks, receivers, messengers, &c &c are frightened out of their gizzards—Meigs don't come here and I don't suppose he will, until he gets me off (provided that he can do that thing) he stays at home and writes and fusses; he is afraid to see me, for fear I will speak to him as I did the other day viz, politely; that kind of salutation of mine almost killed him; I don't think he would survive another scene of the kind; he turned the color of the 'ashes of rose,' let down his two ports upon me, and screwed his mouth as though he had just had a bite of indian turnip—poor fellow, let him alone and he will soon do the business himself.⁴¹

At the architect's urging, John Rice and Pennsylvania's state treasurer, Henry D. Moore, came to Washington to have a word with their mutual friend and political ally from the Keystone State, Simon Cameron, who was Lincoln's secretary of war designate. "I have my friends all ready to jump on the Secy. of war as soon as he enters on his duties," Walter informed Fowler.⁴² Unlike former disputes, this one was settled quickly. Three days after his Senate confirmation, Cameron issued an order prohibiting Meigs from interfering further with the architect. The order was issued on March 14, 1861, and, among other things, illustrated a welcome decisiveness on the part of the new administration.

Meigs was furious that his order was overturned. He reacted with a long, labored letter to Cameron that attempted to establish his "official



Details of Construction of Tholus

by Thomas U. Walter
1861

Walter drew a plan of the tholus's structural elements on what appeared as a sheet of paper laying on top of another drawing showing the same subject in elevation. Indulging in artistic exercises such as tromp l'oeil helped the architect through the tough times when Captain Meigs returned to the Capitol and attempted to fire him.

authority and very sufficient reasons for putting an end to Mr. Walter's connection with the public works under my charge."⁴³ He pointed out that Walter's appointment was authorized in an appropriation bill passed in 1850 and argued that the appointment expired when the first appropriation ran out. He quoted the law transferring the works to the War Department, placing supervision and control of the extension in his hands. Despite the complete and absolute power he held over Walter, Meigs claimed that he at first found it useful to keep the architect in office and that he had been treated with benevolence. Page after page the letter described Walter's insubordination and intrigues, his lack of gratitude, and his attempt to "blacken my character and to rob me of reputation and position." But the remarkable thing about Meigs' letter was the number of times he quoted documents supporting his positions that were writ-

ten by the nation's premier *persona non grata*, Jefferson Davis. Considering Davis' recent ascension to the presidency of the Confederate States of America, Meigs' reliance on the former secretary's authority and opinion was a stunning tactical error. He delivered the letter personally to the secretary of war, who was in no mood to read about such things. Cameron abruptly dismissed Meigs, who left with his long letter unread.⁴⁴ At the end of the episode the only person removed was the watchman outside Walter's office door.

A week after Meigs' first letter to Cameron, he wrote a second one questioning the legality of the government's dome contract with Janes, Fowler, Kirtland & Company. He recited the chronology of events leading up to the contract,

Union Troops at the Capitol

1861

Library of Congress

*A*t the beginning of the Civil War, the U. S. Army occupied the Capitol as a hospital and bakery, while as many as 4,000 troops were quartered in every available room and corner.



claiming it was illegally signed without the benefit of competition. He also claimed that the firm offered to furnish and install the ironwork for six cents but received seven cents per pound. In the first contention Meigs was correct but in the second he was not. Considering the irregularities marring the agreement, Meigs doubted that any contract existed between the two parties, and administering the government's end of the agreement, therefore, made him uncomfortable.⁴⁵ He was also convinced that the price paid the contractor was too high. He admitted that if the work was advertised it was entirely possible that it would be contracted at an even higher price—but at least the contract would be legal.

Walter thought that Meigs was out to ruin his good friend Charles Fowler and to throw doubt on Captain Franklin's reputation. At the heart of the issue, however, were the legality of the dome contract and the business practices of the previous administration. Before the War Department could answer Meigs' letter, President Lincoln dispatched him to the Gulf of Mexico to resupply federal troops at Fort Pickens in Pensacola. (A similar expedition was headed to Fort Sumter in Charleston.) Meigs placed his brother-in-law, Captain John N. Macomb of the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers, temporarily in charge of the extension office during his absence. Meigs left on April 3 and was gone a month. Having completed his mission successfully, he returned to a city gripped by panic and fear. After thirty hours of bombardment, Fort Sumter had fallen to southern guns on April 13, 1861. The dreaded War Between the States had begun. Virginia joined the confederacy on April 17; North Carolina and Tennessee soon followed.

The day after the surrender of Fort Sumter, President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 troops to serve in the army for three months. Many came to the federal city and occupied the public buildings and grounds as barracks and camps: troops quartered in the architect's office made it impossible to work. At the War Department Walter encountered men who expected "hot times" but felt that work on the public buildings would continue. "No body's hurt and nothing's the matter, hence no interference with the public works is necessary," he was

told. The next day he sent war news to his son, who had written his father asking for money:

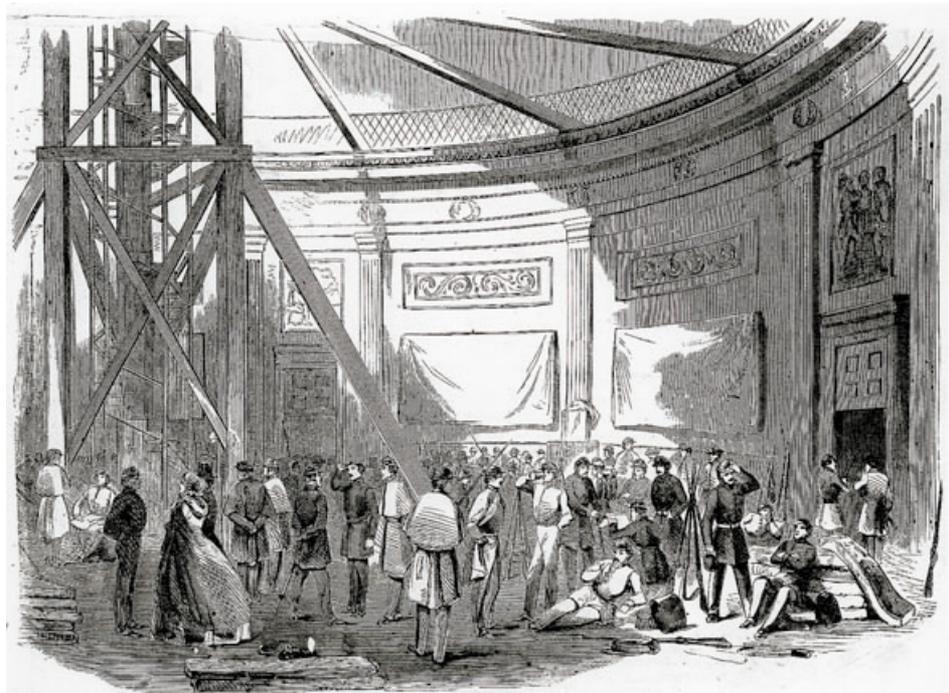
We are here in the midst of war. We expect every moment the clash of arms around us—business is at an end. Every hole and corner of Washington is filled with soldiers; guns are planted along the Potomac to meet Virginia when she comes; Harper’s ferry was taken this morning & blown up. My office is at this moment while I write filled with soldiers.—The Capitol itself is turned into a barracks; there will be 30,000 troops here by tomorrow night. This is no time for money arrangements—property is valueless—business is dead.⁴⁶

By April 20, Walter had decided to pack his family and move to the safety of Germantown. While his residence was still under construction, he rented a house and gave instructions to the landlord for fixing the front porch, building a fence, and “rat-ifying” the cellar.⁴⁷ Although it took three days, he was able to move his wife, three daughters, and young son to Germantown during the last week in April and return to Washington by the first of May. His trip back to the federal city was “unpleasant and tedious.”⁴⁸ Rumor that the way to Washington was clear turned out to be untrue. Railroads, ships, and hotels were clogged with people fleeing their homes in Washington and Baltimore. His passage down the Chesapeake was stormy and the food at his Baltimore hotel was miserable. At seven o’clock in the morning he was at the train station, where he found cars crowded and ticket prices wildly inflated. Upon reaching Washington, he went to his residence where furniture and 150 boxes of household goods were ready to be sent north. He rode to Georgetown to arrange shipment by propeller ship, but due to the general exodus, the competition for space on ships leaving Washington was stiff. Gloomy and pessimistic, Walter wrote his wife:

Washington is nothing but a military encampment. I am glad you are out of it—Every body who could get off has gone—half the houses are shut up. They say that it is the safest place in the country, but who cares for safety in such a place as this? —I believe it is safe, but it is demoralized and business is at an end, I think a perpetual end. This will never be any thing of a place again—so I fear.⁴⁹

The day Fort Sumter fell the Capitol was commandeered by the military. The commissioner of public buildings “cheerfully” admitted troops into

the building, but he wanted time to ensure the preservation of its contents.⁵⁰ In a few days, however, it was overrun with soldiers and supplies, resulting in the inevitable damage to the building’s fabric and furnishings. It was difficult to navigate corridors filled to the ceilings with barrels of flour, pork, beef, and crackers.⁵¹ Bakeries with gas-fired ovens were set up in basement rooms and under the terrace. Constructed under the supervision of Lieutenant T. J. Cate of the Sixth Massachusetts Infantry, the bakeries were capable of turning out 16,000 loaves of bread each day. Marble mantels were removed from the rooms and stored in the tomb long ago prepared for George Washington’s remains. Soldiers passed bread through windows to be loaded onto wagons waiting in the courtyards. Smoke from the ovens wafted through the Library of Congress’ windows, causing damage to books and works of art. The Senate chamber was “alive



Troops in the Rotunda

Harper's Weekly, 1861

At the beginning of hostilities, the Eighth Massachusetts Regiment was bivouacked in the rotunda while dome construction continued overhead. The scaffold used to build the dome stood in the center of the room, while cloth covers protected the historical paintings.

with lice” brought in by filthy soldiers camping there.⁵² But the worst conditions were caused by the woeful inadequacy of the sanitary facilities used by thousands of troops now living in the Capitol. While apologetic for bringing the subject up, Walter described the sordid conditions in a letter to his wife on May 3, 1861:

Several thousands more troops arrived yesterday—the city swarms with them; they say there are 30,000 here—There are 4,000 in the Capitol, with all their provisions, ammunition and baggage, and the smell is awful.—The building is like one grand water closet—every hole and corner is defiled—one of the Capitol police says there are cart loads of ____ in the dark corners; Mr. Denham says in one of the water closets rooms where he made an attempt to step in, some 200 at least must have used the floor. . . . It is sad to see the defacement of the

building every where. These are nasty things to talk to a lady about, but ladies ought to know what vile uses the most elegant things are devoted to in times of war.⁵³

A YEAR'S INTERIM

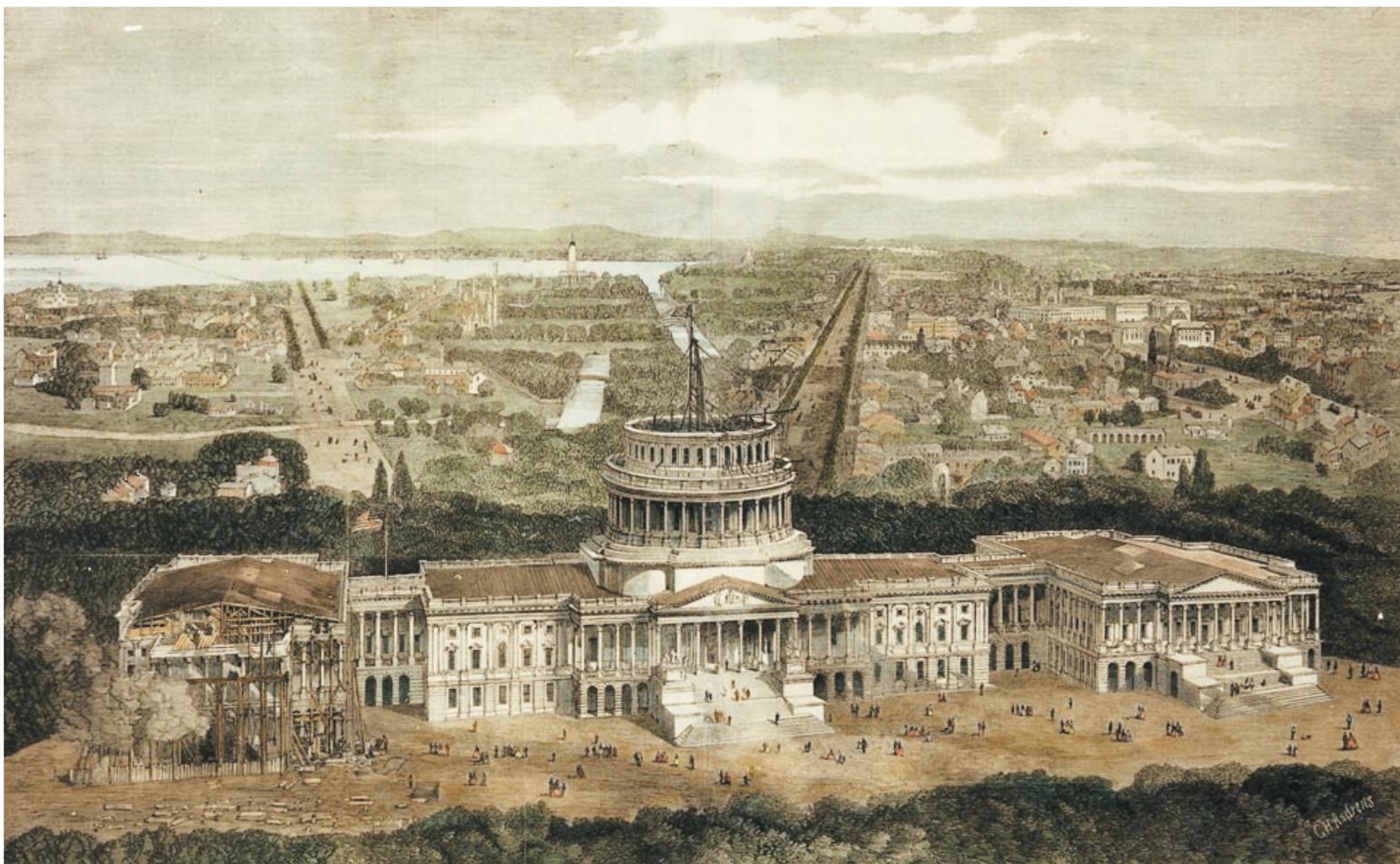
*D*espite Walter's hopes to continue work during the war, Meigs issued an order stopping construction at half past three on May 15, 1861. Only a small band of clerks was retained to sort through documents, pay bills, and close the books. Walter gathered personal papers from his office and wrote Captain Macomb to say he was leaving immediately for Germantown. Two days later, the secretary of war wrote

Dome Construction 1861

*W*hen the Civil War began, construction of the dome had reached the top of the drum's second story. During the first year of the war, the iron contractor continued building the dome despite not being paid for its labor and materials.

Visible in the foreground are Union troops and the back of Crawford's statue of America, the central figure of *Progress of Civilization* destined for the Senate pediment.





***Bird's-eye View of the City of Washington
with Capitol in Foreground***

by George Henry Andrews, 1861

Janes, Fowler, Kirtland & Company, advising the firm not to expect payment for any further work on the dome until the country's financial outlook improved.⁵⁴ Thinking the matter over, Charles Fowler and his partners determined that there was no choice but to continue to hoist and bolt ironwork on the dome. They had 1.3 million pounds of iron stockpiled on site, and walking away from such valuable material would be irresponsible and costly. Instead, the firm decided to continue building the dome, trusting the government to pay when times were better. A small force was kept at work throughout the time Janes, Fowler, Kirtland's contract was suspended, so that "the sound of the hammer [was never] stopped on the national Capitol a single moment during all our civil troubles."⁵⁵ (Thus, contrary to a popular twentieth-century legend, President Lincoln was not responsible for the continuation of the dome during the war.)

The Illustrated London News of May 25, 1861, published this wood engraving showing the Capitol at the commencement of the Civil War. Andrews indulged in artistic license by showing the Senate portico finished and the House portico under construction—a scene that lay four years in the future.

Despite troubled times, Meigs revived the dormant art program by commissioning a painting for the western staircase in the House wing. He saw a study by Emanuel Leutze of a picture representing westward emigration, which the artist proposed to execute for \$20,000. On May 23, 1861, he forwarded the proposal to the secretary of war with a recommendation that it be accepted. "It would be a pity to defer it," he wrote, "even amid the shock of arms."⁵⁶ Cameron immediately disapproved the suggestion, as the nation had only a month earlier embarked upon a war of uncertain duration and cost.

Meigs would not take no for an answer. Ten days after he was promoted to quartermaster general, he wrote the secretary another letter about the painting. He saw the project as one way the government could assure the nation of its confidence in the successful outcome of the conflict:

The people do not intend to permit rebellious hands to deface the Capitol, & they probably would hail with joy such evidence of the determination & confidence of the Government. . . . I would be gratified, all other expenditures upon the building having been stopped, to see in this time of rebellion one artist at least employed in illustrating our Western Conquest.⁵⁷

On July 2, 1861, two days before opening of the 37th Congress, the secretary of war relented and approved the plan to decorate the staircase with a monumental painting entitled *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*. Leutze was given two years to complete the work. The New York *Evening Post* noticed the irony of proceeding with the Capitol's decoration during times of war and wrote sarcastically: "With due respect to the government and the artist, we think we have several stern realities to deal with just now, without dabbling in the allegorical."⁵⁸

While Leutze visited Colorado to see Pike's Peak and other western landscapes to prepare his painting, other works of art were being removed from the Capitol for safekeeping. George P. A. Healy's portraits of John Tyler and James Buchanan were on display in the rotunda when war broke out and were in danger of being vandalized by angry mobs. Condemned as a traitor, Tyler was a member of the Provisional Congress of the Confederacy, and the commissioner of public buildings asked the Speaker's permission to remove his portrait—"the subject of so much vituperation"—to a storeroom.⁵⁹ The portrait of James Buchanan was placed in the commissioner's office "to protect it from threatened indignity."⁶⁰ As the painting was Healy's property, the artist was asked to make arrangements for its safety.

Walter was in Washington for the opening of Congress, hoping to interest politicians in the resumption of work. He also labored alone in the drafting room preparing designs for the time when workmen would return. (He found that he could accomplish much more when not distracted by assistants.) He daydreamed about the works being

returned to the Interior Department and having a clerk take care of disbursements while he would act as the general superintendent. This would "undo what Jeff Davis did and put things back to their original status," he said.⁶¹ But the politicians could talk only of war, and Walter got nowhere with them or his vision of the future management of the works. Returning to Philadelphia at the end of July, he told Alexander Provost that "members of Congress, without an exception, were averse to making any move in any way that did not bear directly on '*crushing out the rebellion*.'"⁶²

Throughout the summer and fall of 1861, Walter visited or wrote people whom he thought could help restart the works. While he missed his salary, he missed his occupation more. (The government later reimbursed the wages he lost that year.) He returned to Washington while Congress was in session, went to Harrisburg to see Henry Moore, and traveled to New York to confer with Charles Fowler. He was not able to generate much enthusiasm for his cause. One of his few allies in the matter was Benjamin B. French, whom Lincoln had reinstated as commissioner of public buildings. French called Congress' attention to the war's effects on the Capitol, the damage caused by the troops and bakeries, and the boost to morale that would be felt if the works were continued. He was not persuaded that saving a little money was worth the symbolic cost of keeping the works shut down: "When it is considered that less than one-fourth of a single day's expenditure in carrying on the war would complete the Capitol, can it be that Congress will suffer it to remain an unfinished monument of exultation for the enemies of the Union?"⁶³

When construction resumed, it was important to Walter that work not continue under the War Department. It may have seemed obvious that the War Department had too much responsibility at that particular moment, but Meigs—for one—did not want the department to relinquish control. Walter knew that a fight lay ahead but had faith that most people would see eye-to-eye with his position. In a letter to Fowler, he spelled out four compelling reasons to transfer the works from the War Department to the Department of the Interior:

1st. The War Department is not the place for civil works; they are just the things that the Home Department was originated to take care

of; they were put into that Department by the Whig administration of Mr. Fillmore—just the place they ought to be, and there they would have remained, and been completed long ago, had it not been for that atrocious wretch, Jeff Davis; it was he who removed them, and it would be exceedingly graceful for an administration kindred to Mr. Fillmore's to put them back again.—2nd. The War Department expresses itself . . . as desirous to get rid of them.—3rd. The Interior Department is desirous to have them; —and 4th. Such a transfer is a virtual resumption of the Public works, and the moral effect of such a resumption would be equal in Europe to half a dozen victories.⁶⁴

In the Senate, the matter of resuming work on the Capitol extension under the secretary of the interior was taken up on March 5, 1862. As chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings, Solomon Foot of Vermont spoke at length in its favor. Foot made it clear that the proposed transfer was not a reflection of the War Department's honesty or capacity, but a simple acknowledgment that it had more pressing duties. He praised the new secretary of war, Edwin Stanton of Ohio, who had replaced Simon Cameron some months earlier. Stanton was a man of "distinguished ability, of high integrity, of uncommon business capacity, and of devoted loyalty," but "has not an hour of time to give to the direction of this work."⁶⁵ General Meigs was also a "gentleman of a very high order of talent, of great energy, and of remarkable executive ability," but he, too, had no time to dabble in the Capitol works: "His hands are full of other matters," Foot rightly declared.

Foot noted that the Department of the Interior had not quite enough to do, while the War Department had too much work. It was vital to continue construction because the wings were suffering from water filtering into areas that should have been protected by porticoes. It would cost more in the future to repair the damaged plaster, ornaments, and paint than to resume work at the present time. Enough money remained from unexpended appropriations to fund the work, and none of the money would be used to buy needless things like works of art. "We are only asking so much as is absolutely necessary to protect this magnificent and costly structure from further and from lasting injury in consequence of its present exposed condition."⁶⁶



Dome Construction 1862

Slow but steady progress was made on the dome's cupola during the first full year of the Civil War. To the right is the Botanic Garden's Gothic greenhouse located at the eastern end of the Mall.

Senator William Pitt Fessenden of Maine, chairman of the Committee on Finance and a Meigs ally, opposed Foot's proposal. Despite assurances to the contrary, he took the measure as a rebuke of General Meigs' management as well as a waste of money during wartime. He wanted the Capitol to "stand as it is, comparatively, until better days."⁶⁷ And he was decidedly opposed to the idea that the work might go on under an "eminent architect," a quarrelsome man whom he thought would "spend this money when we have no money to spare." He continued his defense of Meigs at Walter's inevitable expense:

General Meigs has not asked to be relieved at all. He has adopted his policy. The whole thing is now in charge of men whom he left here sufficient to take care of what has been done. If he said that he had no time to attend to it, if he wanted to be relieved from the superintendence of the work, if the War Department asked to be relieved from it, it would be a different affair; but they ask no such thing. It is a movement outside of them, and the movement comes in connection with this gentleman, who has been so desirous from the beginning to control this work, and who has a quarrel with the War Department from the beginning to end, and been turned out once or twice; I mean

Mr. Walter, the architect. This seems to be a good chance for him to get control of the work again. I am opposed to that.⁶⁸

In response, Senator Foot widened the debate to include a discussion on the whole subject of military control of civilian construction projects. It was a subject that had been aired many times before, but this time Jefferson Davis' role in the matter was sharply ridiculed. The high cost of the extension, the change in the floor plans that brought the chambers into the center of each wing, and the painted decorations were all condemned as "*the military plans, the Jefferson Davis plans.*"⁶⁹ While all the old arguments against military control had been heard before, the evocation of Davis' name was a useful new tool that Foot wielded to advantage.

With only three votes against it, the joint resolution to resume work under the Interior Department passed the Senate easily. It was then taken up by the House on April 14, 1862. Robert McKnight of Pittsburgh thought that anyone who wished to keep the works in the War Department was only interested in keeping the quartermaster general happy. "It would seem that this is to be kept as a nest egg for General Meigs after this war is over," he noted suspiciously. McKnight supported resumption in order to protect the expensive materials that were stored on the Capitol grounds:

The capitals and columns ready to be put up are every day mutilated by strangers and soldiers who visit the city. They knock off cornices and put them into their pockets to carry away with them as memorials of their trip to Washington. I think that all these capitals ought to be put up. Let us at least pass this resolution and protect this building, which has cost us so much, from the inclemencies of the weather.⁷⁰

The chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings, Charles Russell Train of Massachusetts, acknowledged that opponents of the resolution saw it "as a blow at General Meigs," with whom he had no quarrel. Yet he could not understand why the superintendent had not taken measures to protect the extension or to allow the contractors to continue with the dome. (They were proceeding on their own, but without compensation.) To delay the completion of the Capitol until the close of the war, as General Meigs wanted, would mean that the works would be "rotted down, and that

new ones [would] have to be constructed at an expense of thousands of dollars."⁷¹ Train was asked about projects other than the Capitol and dome under Meigs' control, and he replied:

He has control of the water works and the extension of the Post Office building. Now the water works will tumble in before this war is over, and then we will have to begin again unless the work is transferred from the hands of General Meigs to those of somebody who can attend to it. He has a laudable ambition to distinguish himself by the completion of all these works. It would be a nice little entertainment for the decline of his life. But in the mean time are we to suffer loss because he will not allow Mr. Walter, who has far more judgment and capacity than General Meigs, to complete the dome?⁷²

After Train declared his committee unanimously in favor of the resolution, it passed the House of Representatives with only six members voting against it.⁷³ President Lincoln approved the legislation on April 16, 1862, and the secretary of the interior immediately put Walter back in charge. For Meigs the transfer of authority was surely a disappointment, but it also allowed him to devote his full energy to the critical role of quartermaster general. For Walter it was a welcome vote of confidence after a nine-year association that had degenerated from goodwill to discord.

BACK IN THE OFFICE

aleb Smith of Indiana, the secretary of the interior, was given a tour of the Capitol by Walter soon after the works were placed under his department. They went all over the building, from top to bottom, and the secretary seemed surprised and pleased with his new responsibility.⁷⁴ After the tour, Walter began work on a report to the department describing the condition of the Capitol extension and giving an estimate of the cost of finishing it, exclusive of ornamental and decorative designs.⁷⁵ A constant stream of visitors (most of whom wanted work) interrupted his writing. Walter found visits from sculptor Horatio Stone, who came armed with a portfolio of "absurd designs," particularly annoying.⁷⁶ Knowing that the report would be scrutinized by everyone in town, he wanted to make it

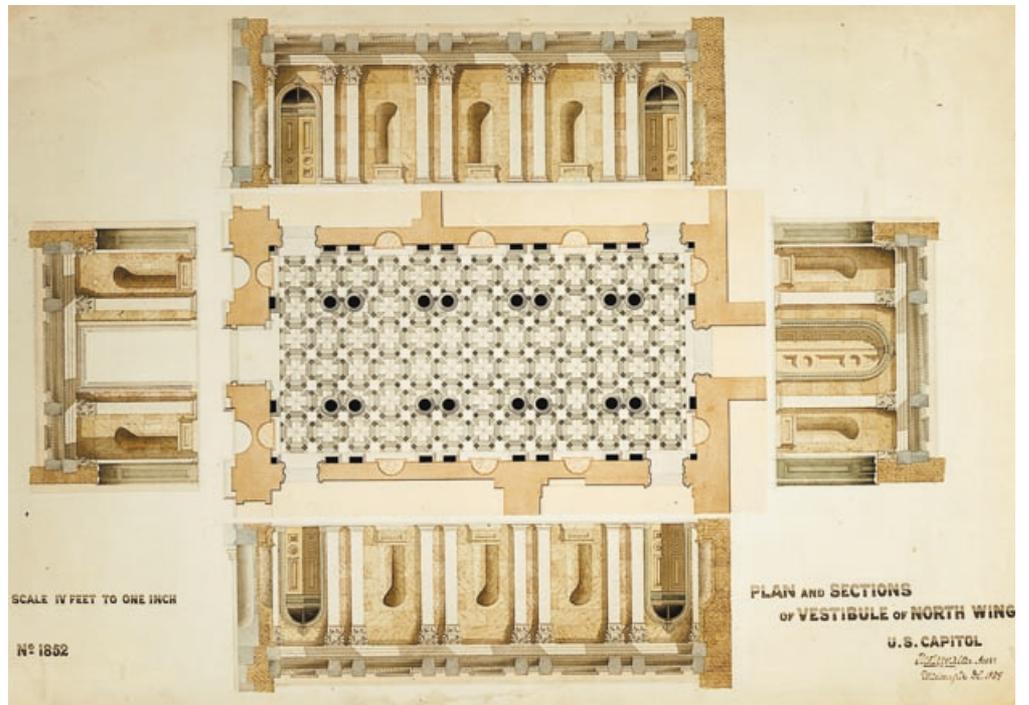
as good as possible; indeed, he told his wife that it would be the most important document he ever wrote.⁷⁷ But this burden notwithstanding, he was immensely thankful to be back at work. Edward Clark was back in the office as a superintendent, Thomas C. Magruder took Zephaniah Denham's place as chief clerk, and Benjamin B. French was made disbursing officer while retaining the job of commissioner of public buildings. "I feel very thankful," Walter wrote his wife, "for the providential turn our things have taken."

Walter finished his report on May 8, 1862, and immediately sent it to the printer. He stated that the only work remaining to be done on the interior of the extension was to lay the marble tiling in the principal vestibule of the north wing. Trimings for some openings could not be installed until the bronze doors were received. Eleven columns had been raised on the outside (all on connecting corridors), leaving eighty-nine to be erected. Twenty-one of these were on hand. Outstanding liabilities for works of art included Leutze's painting and the cost of casting three



Plan and Sections of Vestibule of North Wing
by Thomas U. Walter, 1859

The passage leading from the east portico to the Senate chamber was one of the most elaborate interiors in the Capitol extension. Marble columns with corn leaves, tobacco leaves, and magnolia flowers blended into the Corinthian capitals were especially elegant and appropriate features. Wall niches were intended to hold busts of worthy citizens. The pattern of the black and white marble floor was simplified when it was installed during the Civil War



Senate Vestibule

Despite modern elevators occupying the side aisles, Walter's colonnaded vestibule remains a grand space. Directly ahead are the original maple doors at the entrance to the Senate chamber. A similar but smaller vestibule was provided in the House wing. (1977 photograph.)



Ceiling of Senate Vestibule

Marble columns and beams support the ceiling with its decorative glass panels. Deeply carved egg-and-dart moldings outline the ceiling panels. (1977 photograph.)

bronze doors. He reported that there was a balance of more than \$345,000 in the treasury in favor of the extension and estimated that another \$600,000 would be needed to finish the wings. More than \$138,000 was available for the dome, and that was enough for a year's work.

Once work resumed, it concentrated on the porticoes. Five columns were necessary to complete the connecting corridor colonnades, and



Senate Portico Construction

1862

*S*ecretary of the Interior Caleb Smith was among the dignitaries who gathered on November 28, 1862, to observe the second column shaft being put into place.

these were the first things attended to. As a favor to Senator Foot, the main portico of the Senate wing came next. Walter hoped to have it completed before Congress returned in December, but as the building season wore on it became clear that such hopes were unrealistic. Blocks of marble cut on compound curves to form the groin vaults over the carriageway were beautifully executed and installed without incident, but trouble with other parts of the marble work threatened delay. In October, several column shafts, bases, and capitals sat on the ground waiting for pedestals. The pedestals were not huge pieces of marble—just four and a half feet square and three feet tall—but the quarry found it difficult to supply them. Walter wrote Rice saying that it was a sin to leave the columns lying in the mud merely for the want of pedestals.⁷⁸

The slow progress on this one portico led the secretary of the interior to wonder about the wisdom of building all six porticoes called for in Walter's design. He suggested that the two side and two west porticoes be abandoned, an idea Walter called "horrible." The secretary was also thinking about ordering shafts made up of pieces of Lee marble to supplement Connolly's monoliths. Connolly's column shafts were not only slow in arriving but some were blemished by deposits of pyrites that weakened the stone and marred its looks. Such stones had always been condemned in the past, but now Walter was more forgiving. He made a careful examination of each block to determine the probable danger of the deposits staining the marble or decomposing. If the danger seemed slight, he was inclined to approve the suspect stone in order to avoid delay.⁷⁹ Despite this liberal policy Walter was able to install only two of the twenty-two columns on the Senate portico by the end of November, just before the opening of Congress.

Understandably, war conditions made it difficult to proceed peacefully on the works. In late August the second battle of Bull Run sent Union troops scurrying in retreat to Washington as the Confederate Army made advances toward the capital only 35 miles away. On August 29, 1862, Walter told Provost that rumors were flying that Chain Bridge had been blown up and that "rebels are all around us."⁸⁰ Three days later the wounded were being brought to the Capitol, where more than 1,000 beds were set up in the rotunda, in

the old hall of the House, and in the corridors. On September 2, the assistant adjutant general ordered all employees at the Capitol to organize into an armed company for the defense of Washington. Following the battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862,—the bloodiest day of the entire war—more sick and dying men were transported to Washington. This latest wave of war wounded made working in the building intolerable. The “filth and stench and live stock in the Capitol” compelled Walter to remove his office to one of the shops.⁸¹ He soon had a cheap frame office building constructed in the east garden, where he and his staff worked in relative peace and quiet.

With wagons thundering by, the wounded going in, and bodies coming out, there was scarcely a place in the Capitol or on the grounds that could be considered peaceful. French was particularly annoyed by the livestock that roamed Washington, damaging public property. To the superintendent of the metropolitan police he asked that steps be taken against

the hog, goat, and geese nuisance now suffered to triumph over all law . . . hogs can not be kept out of the Capitol enclosure and have done much damage to the newly painted iron lying in front of the Capitol ready for the new dome—so much that it is necessary to renew

the painting where it has been rubbed off or discolored by the hogs, at more expense than all the hogs are worth.⁸²

French had good reason to worry about animals rubbing off or “discoloring” the painted ironwork. Shortly before the commissioner lodged his complaint, Walter estimated that it would take ten men 600 days to paint the remaining ironwork using 50,000 pounds of white lead, oil, and drying. Before being hoisted each piece of iron was painted inside and out—including the edges—with pure white lead ground in oil. Once in place, the joints were puttied and the iron was painted again. Walter intended to have the entire structure painted inside and out with two more coats after the dome was finished.⁸³ James Galway was awarded the contract to paint the ironwork. His bid of fifteen cents per pound of paint (which

View of Washington City, D. C.
by Edward Sache, 1862

*T*his romanticized view of the federal city showed both the Capitol and the Washington Monument finished. At the time this picture was drawn, the upper parts of the dome were not yet completed; they were in fact never intended to be any color other than white.



included brushes, pots, and supervision as well as \$1.75 per day wage for painters) was accepted over several other offers.⁸⁴

French was anxious to ready the Capitol for the opening of the third session of the 37th Congress on December 1, 1862. The building had suffered considerably while occupied by the army as its bakery, barrack, and hospital, and it would take time and money to repair the damage. For this purpose he had been able to secure an appropriation of \$8,000 at the end of the previous session, but the army would not vacate the building until ordered out by the president. French went to see Lincoln about removing the bakery and asked to be shielded from congressional censure if the army was still using the Capitol when Congress reconvened.⁸⁵ By the middle of October the soldiers were gone but the rooms once used as bakeries were in ruins. All the mantels were missing and no one could say what happened to them. Chandeliers had also been torn out and scattered in fragments over the rooms and corridors. For whatever good it would do, French scolded the secretary of war about the army's "strip & waste" policy.⁸⁶ French had the rooms restored, hoping that the "Capitol may hereafter be left to its legitimate uses, and not be defaced and disfigured by military occupation."⁸⁷

When Congress returned, it faced, among more important military matters, two funding requests from the Department of the Interior for work on the Capitol. Half a million dollars was requested for the extension and \$200,000 for the dome. The requests were greeted with little opposition, although Rowland E. Trowbridge, a representative from Michigan, spoke against giving money while the war was still going on. He thought that Meigs had the right idea when he shut things down, and he could see no reason to spend money on anything but "the crushing out of this wicked rebellion, and the preservation and restoration of their government."⁸⁸ Others thought work should continue but wished to scale back funding. Congress decided that \$150,000 was all that the nation could afford for the extension. Walter noted that with money left over from previous appropriations the sum available for 1863 would be about all that could be used considering the scarcity of workmen. The money for the dome was given without complaint or discussion. Both appropriations passed on March 3, 1863.

Walter's plan for the 1863 building season sought to accomplish two high-profile objects: finishing the eastern porticoes and mounting the statue of Freedom on top of the dome. He wanted to finish the platforms, carriage ways, and steps; hoist and set thirty columns; and complete the entablatures and pediments before Congress returned. He also wanted to position the statue as part of the Fourth of July ceremonies and finish the outside of the dome by the first of December. His expectations, however, proved unrealistic.

On May 28, 1862, the secretary of the interior and his wife accompanied the commissioner and the architect on a ride to Clark Mills' foundry to inspect the statue of Freedom. According to French, the figure was magnificent and the workmanship was "exceedingly well done."⁸⁹ Secretary Smith accepted the work and provisions were made to remove it to the eastern garden in front of the Capitol, where it would stand until the dome was ready to receive it. Mills instructed Capitol workmen about the assembly details so that no mistake would be made when their turn came to disassemble the statue's five sections and reassemble them on top of the dome.

While a work of art in bronze would crown the outer dome, a painted work of art would crown the inner dome. The painting (covering 4,664 square feet) was conceived when Walter revised the dome design in 1859. It would appear to hover over the eye of the inner dome and would be illuminated by sunlight reflected off huge mirrors. The painting would be lighted differently in morning and afternoon, in winter and summer. Light and shadow would be in constant movement depending on the weather and the season. By night, hundreds of gas jets would illuminate the work evenly. A great painting seen unexpectedly through the eye of the inner dome was a breathtaking way to finish off the interior of the new dome. Only Brumidi could do the job.

On August 18, 1862, Walter wrote Brumidi asking him to furnish a design for the painting and to name his fee. After making some preliminary studies, the artist replied with a description of a final design: an apotheosis (elevation to divine status) of George Washington ringed by six groups representing War, Science, Marine, Commerce, Manufacturing, and Agriculture. The composition was an imaginative combination of historical and

allegorical figures, of classical mythology and contemporary technology, of great men and noble ideas. It had to be painted, as Brumidi said, in “the most decided character possible” so that it would appear intelligible from 180 feet away.⁹⁰ Because the fresco was to be painted on a concave surface, the perspective of the composition also had to be carefully worked out.

Brumidi asked for \$50,000 to prepare the full-sized cartoons and to execute his design. The architect agreed that there was “no picture in the world that will at all compare with this in magnitude, and in difficulty of execution,” but thought that wartime conditions would not justify such expenditure. Walter asked that the price be lowered and that the artist consider “some sacrifice to accomplish so great an achievement.”⁹¹ In other words, Walter suggested that whatever might be lost financially would be recouped in greater celebrity. Brumidi immediately reduced his price to \$40,000, hoping it would meet with the architect’s views of economy.⁹² Walter recommended that the government accept the offer and pointed out: “The design is probably the grandest, and the most imposing that has ever been executed in the world. . . . The grandeur of this picture, the great distance at which it will be seen, and the peculiarity of its light will render it intensely imposing.”⁹³

Walter gave Brumidi word of official approval on March 11, 1863, soon after Congress passed the dome appropriation for the year. In a few weeks, the artist began working on the cartoons using a full-scale model of the canopy built by the Capitol’s carpenters. By the first week in May, however, a new secretary of the interior, John P. Usher of Indiana, questioned the legality of contracting with Brumidi when there was a prohibition against artistic decorations. Walter was obliged to send the new secretary copies of all correspondence relating to Brumidi and his painting for the dome’s canopy. He argued that the painting was an inseparable part of the dome’s design and not merely a decoration. Nevertheless, the secretary suspended Brumidi’s contract for the *Apotheosis of Washington* until July. Growing weary of government ways, Walter told his wife:

The secy. has made an attack on us about Brumidi’s contract, and I have sent to the Dept. all the correspondence. I suppose he will try to upset it. Well let him do it; —if he does I shall

resign. I am heartily tired of this small business; I dare not blow my nose without “*an order from the Department.*” The said secy. has never been on the works in his life, and yet he assumes to manage even the smallest details of it. This is another source of excitement and annoyance, but I must fight it through.⁹⁴

In another instance of meddling for no apparent reason, Usher removed chief clerk Thomas Magruder from the Capitol extension office and replaced him with Clement West, one of Walter’s former apprentices. The change was unannounced and Walter felt sorry for his former clerk, but he was happy to have West again in the office. The secretary then removed B. B. French as the disbursing agent and gave that responsibility to West. French’s position as the commissioner of public buildings, however, remained unchanged. The secretary also dismissed Edward Clark, but later reversed himself at Walter’s request.

By the end of April 1863, Walter was compelled to face the fact that the statue of Freedom was not going to be put up on the Fourth of July. He told Fowler: “our 4th of July frolic is *no go.*”⁹⁵ Fowler’s man in Washington, John Cuddy, told Walter that it would be impossible to begin the tholus until all the heavy ornaments were installed on the cupola. Installing three ornaments a day, it would take about forty days to complete that part of the work. Even if the weather remained fine, the tholus could not be begun until the first of August at the earliest.

As July 4th approached, Walter decided to take a few weeks off to visit his new home in Germantown and proceed to Atlantic City for a cool respite by the sea. It was just as well he did not have to supervise placement of the statue of Freedom, as the heat of a Washington summer and the headaches of his office made the prospect of a few days of mental and physical rest most welcome.⁹⁶ While in Germantown, he was pleased to learn from the secretary of the interior that Brumidi’s contract had been reconfirmed, but the best news came from Vicksburg and Gettysburg. When he heard of the decisive Union victories in those places, Walter took them as signs of the war’s imminent conclusion. “The war news,” he wrote, “is truly encouraging—The rebellion is on its last legs, and I doubt not that before Congress meets again, the Union will be virtually restored.”⁹⁷



N. E. View of the United States Capitol, Washington, D. C.

by Henry Sartain, 1863

*P*ublished during the darkest days of the Civil War, this view of the Capitol anticipated completion of the great building and the restoration of peace. The artist showed well-dressed citizens strolling amid a few tranquil soldiers.

Back at his desk after a vacation that had turned out hot, rainy, and not particularly restful, Walter noted that the last ornament for the exterior of the dome was put into place on August 22 and the first piece of the tholus was bolted on two days later. He expected that the structural skeleton of the tholus would take about three weeks to install, but a shortage of manpower—a common complaint in wartime—threatened delay. And even when workmen could be found, it was difficult to keep them working so high above the ground. Strong riggers were as susceptible as anyone else to acrophobia or vertigo, and many simply refused to go up so high. Some found courage in strong drink, including a rigger borrowed from the Navy

Yard who regularly got drunk on the job; the Capitol's own head machinist, Charles F. Thomas, drank his share with the Navy Yard man. Walter wondered why accidents were not more common and hoped to find sober riggers in Baltimore.

PUTTING ON THE “TRIMMINGS”

*W*hile Walter worried about the drinking habits of his workmen, he learned that the Columbus doors by Randolph Rogers had arrived in New York from the Royal Bavarian Foundry in Munich. The doors would soon be sent to Washington for installation between the old hall of the House of Representatives and the connecting corridor leading to the new House chamber. Although Walter had been opposed to many of Meigs' decorating schemes, he was pleased at the prospects of installing this work in the Capitol. “This door will

attract more attention,” he wrote his wife, “than any work of art ever seen in this country.”⁹⁸ The doors were sent in six sections and Walter thought that only James T. Ames could be trusted to put the whole assembly back together. Ames was duly engaged and part of the rotunda was fenced off for a workshop, where he and an assistant assembled the doors, finishing the installation on December 1, 1863. Walter told his Philadelphia lawyer that the doors alone were worth a trip to Washington. The barrister was also invited to inspect Crawford’s statuary in the Senate pediment, which had just been put into place, as well as the reclining figures of Justice and History positioned over the principal door to the north wing. The “trimmings,” as Walter called the statuary, were being put up rapidly.⁹⁹

By the end of November work on the tholus had progressed to the point when it was time to prepare *Freedom* for its ascent to the top of the dome. Workmen disassembled the five sections and “pickled” them in acid washes to produce a bronze patina. “We are going on finely with the pickling of Mrs. Freedom,” Walter wrote Rice, “she looks as bright as a new copper cent.”¹⁰⁰

On a rainy Tuesday, November 24, 1863, the first section of the statue was set into place. The second section followed the next day. Three days later, the third section was placed during increasingly stormy weather. Attempts to hoist the fourth section were made on Monday, November 30, but failed due to a strong northwest wind and freezing temperatures. The next day workmen were successful in placing the fourth section of *Freedom* on top of the dome.

Walter set noon on December 2, 1863, as the time and day when the fifth and final section of the statue would be bolted into place. A celebration seemed in order. The commissioner of public buildings suggested a day of speeches and drinking, but Walter wanted something more solemn and dignified. In consultation with the War Department, he determined to have a battery of artillery at the Capitol fire a salute of thirty-five rounds (one for each state) as soon as the head was put into place. A response from the forts around Washington would follow.¹⁰¹ The War Department was prepared “to burn as much saltpeter on the occasion as we may desire.”¹⁰² At the appointed hour,

Columbus Doors by Randolph Rogers

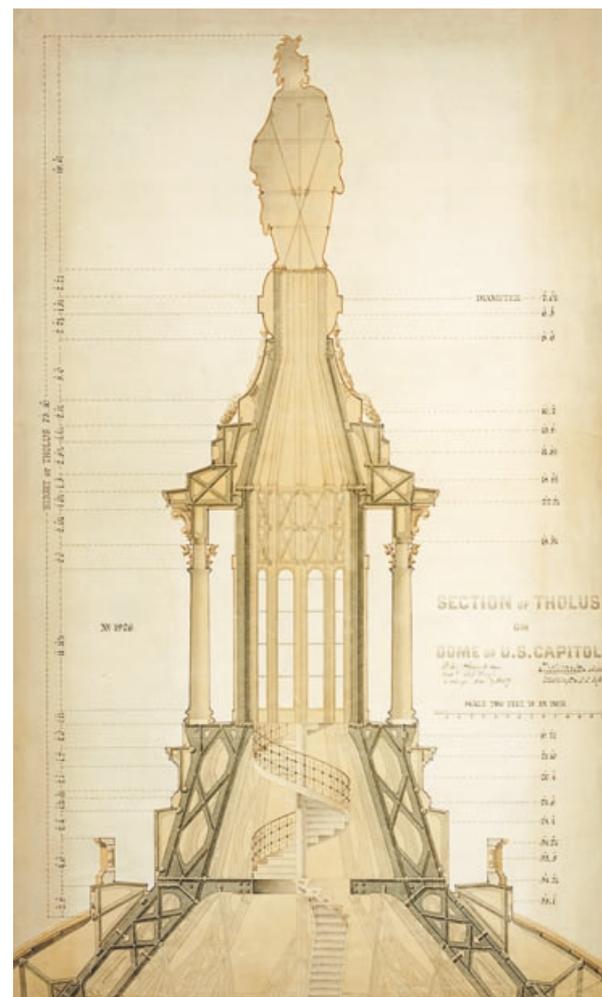
Commissioned in 1855, the bronze doors were installed in the House connecting corridor in 1863. (They were relocated to the east portico in 1871.) Nine panels depict events in the Columbus’ life, sixteen statuettes portray historical personages, and four figures represent the continents. (1991 photograph.)



**Elevation (left)
and Section (right)
of the Tholus**

by Thomas U. Walter
1859

Revisions made
in 1859 enlarged the
diameter of the tholus
to accommodate the
statue of Freedom.



the head and shoulders of Crawford's allegorical statue of Freedom began its journey to the top of the Capitol dome. At quarter past noon it was set into place by Charles F. Thomas, who unfurled an American flag over its head as soon as the deed was done. He and his men were given orders not to wave their hats or attempt to make a speech. (Walter had earlier discovered a printed version of a long speech Thomas planned to give and put a stop to it.) He wanted "the head put on as a matter of every day work."¹⁰³

The symbolic nature of *Freedom's* placement on top of the dome, coming as it did amidst civil war, was not lost on those who witnessed the ceremony. Writing for the *New York Tribune* one correspondent (who did not realize that the statue faces east, toward Maryland) wrote:

During more than two years of our struggle, while the national cause seemed weak, she has patiently waited and watched below: now that

victory crowns our advances and the conspirators are being hedged in and vanquished everywhere, and the bonds are being freed, she comes forward, the cynosure of thousands of eyes, her face turned rebukingly toward Virginia and her hand outstretched as if in guaranty of National Unity and Personal Freedom.¹⁰⁴

Walter was more interested in the effect of the statue as seen from the ground. He was generally satisfied, warmly praising Crawford's taste and talent, but condemned the headdress with uncharacteristic severity:

Mr. Crawford has made a success of it, except so far as it relates to the buzzard on the head. I would like to cut this excrescence off, but have no authority. The proportions, and the entire bearing of the figure are faultless. I did not like it so well on the ground but Mr. Crawford knew what he was about.¹⁰⁵

The headdress worn by *Freedom* has always been its most controversial feature. Walter was

almost granted permission to remove it on February 28, 1863, when Robert McKnight of Pennsylvania introduced a resolution in the House to dispense with the “nondescript ornament.” The resolution, however, was ruled out of order.¹⁰⁶ The architect’s dislike of the headdress was long lived; describing it five and a half years after the statue’s installation, he wrote:

It is an eagle so disposed as to constitute a cap, without being a cap—a helmet without being a helmet. The beak looks towards the front, and the plumage ruffles over the top in such a way as to render it impossible to form any idea of its design from the distance at which it is viewed.¹⁰⁷

Reactions to the artistic merit of the statue now positioned on top of the dome were varied, but everyone agreed that the celebration itself was a success. Walter was relieved that the event had gone off so well. The day before had been cold and windy and the possibility of an accident had preyed on his mind: the eyes of the nation were on him, and any blunder would ruin him in an instant. So it was with considerable relief and satisfaction that Walter described the event to his wife as one both stirring and uneventful:

I have succeeded in putting on the head of the statue without accident. Her ladyship looks placid and beautiful—much better than I expected. There was an immense crowd to witness the operation, and everything was done with propriety and dignity. I have had thousands of congratulations on this great event, and a general regret was expressed that you were prevented from witnessing this triumph.¹⁰⁸

While cannons continued to make the ground tremble, Walter went back to his office to finish out the day at work. Nearby, Benjamin B. French was sulking in his own office, suffering a wound to his pride inflicted by those officials who neglected to invite him to the ceremony. “Being Commissioner of Public Buildings, and, by law, charged with the care of all the Public Buildings,” French wrote bitterly in his journal that evening,

I thought that those having the control of putting up the statue, under John P. Usher, the present Secretary of the Interior, would have done me the trifling honor of notifying me, *officially*, when it was to be done, and have requested my presence on the occasion, but it was not done, and I remained in my office. Freedom now stands on the Dome of the Capi-

tol of the United States—may she stand there forever not only in form, but in *spirit*.¹⁰⁹

Five days after the statue was put into position, the first session of the 38th Congress began. Although construction debris was seen everywhere, the dome and the extension were beginning to look complete. The north wing still lacked its side and western porticoes, but the magnificent eastern portico with its massive flight of marble steps, stately Corinthian columns, rich entablature, and pediment displaying Crawford’s *Progress of Civilization* was complete at long last. Its counterpart on the south wing was under way with most of the steps in place, but none of the columns had been hoisted. Overall, the extension was looking quite finished and handsome while the dome added mightily to the Capitol’s impression of grandeur.

Capitol, Looking Southwest

1863

*S*oon after *Freedom* was mounted on top of the dome, the scaffold was removed to reveal the sculpture’s silhouette. At the same time the east portico of the Senate wing was nearing completion.



Walter described the condition of the works in his annual report dated November 1, 1863, which the secretary of the interior submitted to Congress a month later. Much of the report dealt with problems at the Lee quarry and the difficulties in transporting stone to Washington. Everything inside the two wings was finished but there was some damage to plaster and paint caused by faulty gutters. To stop the leaks Walter proposed to line the iron gutters with wood logs and cover them with copper. Problems with the corrugated copper roof were also worrisome, but temporary fixes had to be substituted for permanent solutions because of the war. An account was given of all the marble, granite, brick, and cement consumed in building the extension since 1851. Walter also recounted the history of the statuary bought for the Capitol, noting what had been delivered and what was still expected. He did not like where the Columbus doors had been installed and preferred to relocate them to the Capitol's "front door"—the door leading from the central portico into the rotunda. But that had the disadvantage of exposing the doors to outside weather conditions, which might damage some of their fine details. Then, quite matter-of-factly, Walter stated that the Columbus doors should eventually be removed to an inner vestibule in a new east front extension:

The eastern portico of the old building will certainly be taken down at no very distant day, and the front be extended eastward, at least to the front line of the wings, so as to complete the architectural group, and at the same time, afford additional accommodations to the legislative department of the government.¹¹⁰

Thus, before the extension and dome were even complete Walter was calling for another addition to the Capitol—this one to cover the central portion of the east front. Embarrassed by cracked sandstone clotted with thick layers of paint, Walter wanted to bury the old walls under a sparkling marble addition that would stand a fair comparison with the elegance and sophistication of the new wings. By bringing Bulfinch's portico out from its position under the dome's skirt, he could also remove the visual impression that the dome was not stable. Adding committee rooms and offices, while always welcome, was to him a secondary consideration. Walter repeated the east front extension recommendation in his 1864 annual

report, just as his successors would do in their own reports over the next ninety years.

“TERRIBLE PROCRASTINATION”

The more the extension and dome appeared finished, the more Congress seemed anxious to be through with the construction business. The din of working men and machines had greeted Congress for more than a dozen years, and there were some who were mightily tired of the commotion. “Congress expects a finish all around before they leave,” Walter informed John Rice emphatically, “and a finish *must* be made.”¹¹¹ Senator Foot kept up his regular inspection tours, making sure all that could be done to finish up was being done. Progress on the east portico of the south wing was particularly slow due to troubles at the quarry. The dome also showed little progress, because of the scarcity of workmen in New York and Washington. Walter pleaded with the ironworkers to find more men to put on the job, both to demonstrate a go-ahead zeal and to spare him from annoying criticisms. At the end of January 1864 he asked Charles Fowler:

What has become of you? . . . We are getting along with the work outside very slowly, partly on account of bad weather, partly on account of the going out of the boiler of the engine, and partly on account of your force being too limited for so grand a work. I had hoped to have Brumidi at work on the canopy before this, but we have as yet no show for it whatever. If it is in your power to push on this work, I would take it as a particular favor if you would do it.¹¹²

A few weeks later, Walter again pleaded with Fowler to speed the exterior work. Inside, the old wooden ceiling and tripod that Meigs had built in the rotunda at the beginning of the project were finally removed. A new platform built on wood trusses spanned the rotunda, held by the dome's ribs; it was to be used by Brumidi whenever he was allowed to begin painting the *Apotheosis of Washington*. The artist was ready to start and grew impatient for the canopy to be installed. The delay left him without an income and he wanted a cash advance. Walter tried to placate him, while at the same time finding it difficult to escape rebukes

from disgruntled legislators every time it happened to rain. Because the tholus was unfinished, rainwater flooded the rotunda, bringing “down upon our heads the condensed ire of both houses of Congress.”¹¹³ To push the work, at least 100 more men were needed. “The idea of driving on this enormous work with 5 or 6 men,” Walter wrote in desperation, “seems more like . . . sending a corporal guard to defeat Lee and capture Richmond.”¹¹⁴

Pleading did little good, however, and Walter was helpless to control the pace of progress towards what he had come to regard as the light at the end of a very long tunnel. His irritation grew on two levels. Professionally, the dome was the only work that offered a challenge, and its completion would free him to retire. Personally, he was anxious to quit the capital city, which he routinely called “wretched,” and return to Germantown to live among family and friends. But month after month, his simple goals were frustrated by the “terrible procrastination” of the iron workers whose employment he had done so much to secure.

The first session of the 38th Congress finished work on July 4, 1864. Two days before the gavel fell, President Lincoln approved a \$300,000 appropriation for the extension, which reserved \$1,500 to fund a special Committee on Ventilation. Once again, some members were unhappy with their windowless chambers and wanted improvements made to the air they were obliged to breathe. Some considered the air unhealthful while others thought it just smelled bad. James Brooks, a representative from New York City, compared it unfavorably to the air found in some of the nation’s worst urban slums:

Why, sir, our tenement houses in New York, some of them fifty, sixty, or one hundred feet under ground, some of them ten or twelve stories high, are better supplied with air; their tenants enjoy better ventilation than we who live within these gorgeous rooms, in this magnificent Capitol, amid this gold, surrounded by these pictures, reposing upon these luxurious seats. Sir, I would rather sit upon a broken bench under some leafy tree in the open air in some wild woods than to submit to the miserable confinement within this Hall.¹¹⁵

While the complaints were nothing new, there was a new agitator roaming the halls of Congress, an architect claiming to have originated the plans of the two wings and therefore to be the only one

who knew how to ventilate them properly. Charles Frederick Anderson had returned to Washington to press his claim against the government for unpaid architectural services. In his own mind, the fact that the extension housed centrally located chambers—a feature of his failed entry in the Senate competition of 1850—was reason to believe that he deserved credit and compensation for the extension as built. While they agreed on very little, both Meigs and Walter thought Anderson was mentally deranged. Anderson had shown his designs to Meigs (it is unclear when that meeting took place) but there is no evidence that they influenced the engineer when he ordered changes to the floor plans. Anderson’s claim as the architect of the extension was dismissed by Meigs as “rascality or craziness.”¹¹⁶ Among Walter’s kinder epithets were “atrocious scamp” and an “intolerable pest.”¹¹⁷ Yet there were some gullible men in Congress who, taken in by Anderson’s bluster and self promotion, wanted to use the \$1,500 ventilation money to commission him to solve the problem of stale and smelly air. They also supported Anderson’s claim that \$7,500 was due him for designs that were executed by others. When Walter condemned Anderson’s claim as utterly preposterous, Anderson sued him for libel and demanded \$50,000 in damages. (The suit went to court after Walter’s retirement, dragged on through months of legal proceedings, and ended abruptly upon Anderson’s death in July 1867.)

NATIONAL STATUARY HALL

*O*n July 2, 1864, Congress passed a bill written by Justin Morrill of Vermont aimed at preserving the old hall of the House, a room that, except for some plaster models on display and peddlers selling goods, had stood empty for more than six years. The bill reserved \$15,000 from the extension appropriation to convert the old House chamber into a “National Statuary Hall.”¹¹⁸ It was an early instance of what modern preservationists call “adaptive reuse.”

The fate of the old hall had been under discussion for some time. Before the extension was

begun, there were plans to eventually convert the room into a library or an art gallery. The latter idea was usually deemed impractical due to the lack of wall space. In an early study for the Capitol extension Walter eliminated the old hall altogether, designing two floors of committee rooms in its place. Now, however, the new hall was in use and the fate of the old one was no longer just an academic issue. In some people, the room invoked a sentimental feeling, a reverence for the past that was fairly unusual for Americans of the period. The grand colonnade that had given Latrobe such heartache was universally admired, as were the beautifully painted ceiling and elegant sculpture. Yet it was not the architecture that motivated Morrill; rather, it was the memory of the people who once sat in the chamber that made it a sacred place. One of Morrill's colleagues, Robert Schenck of Ohio, spoke of the old hall with affection and eloquently contrasted its glorious past with its degraded present:

I never pass through the old hall of the House of Representatives without feeling myself reproached by the spirits that haunt that place. I look around to see where the venerable John Quincy Adams trembled in his seat and voted and I see a huckster woman selling ginger bread. I look to see where Calhoun sat—for there was a time when we might speak with reverence even of him—I look to see where he sat and where Clay sat and I find a woman selling oranges and root beer. I look around the floor where these men stood and uttered their patriotic sentiments in the day when patriotic sentiments were heard with reverence everywhere and by every man and I see a floor rotting and trembling under my tread.¹¹⁹

As it stood, the room was “draped in cobwebs and carpeted with dust, tobacco, and apple pomace.”¹²⁰ A newspaper in Morrill's home state described the old hall as a “barn-like store room for invalid furniture, where a brisk business is carried on in pies and lemonade for the crowds who throng the Capitol. These peddlers should be driven from the temple of state, whose walls once echoed the accents of Clay and Benton . . . Webster or Douglas.”¹²¹

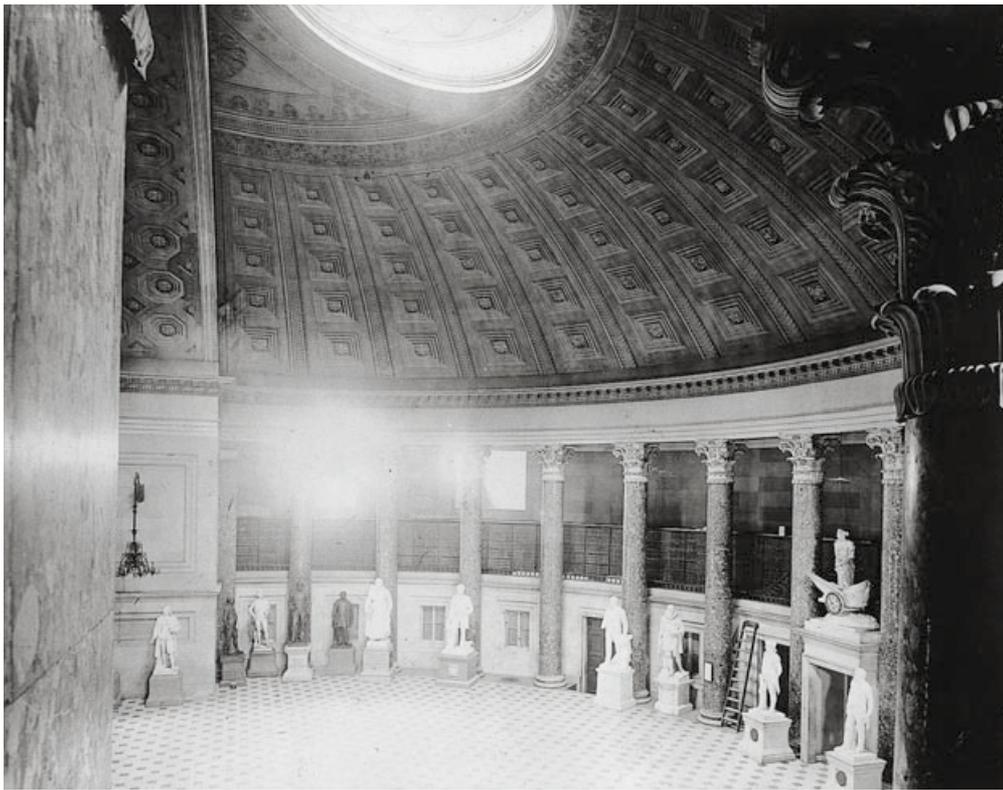
Morrill planned to preserve the historic chamber's dignity by giving the hall a new function. It would be set aside for the display of commemorative statues of worthy persons whom the states might wish to honor in the nation's Capitol. There

would be no restriction on whom the states might select except that the person depicted would have to be deceased. The statues could be either bronze or marble. Morrill was quite certain that the room would soon house a splendid collection of statuary brought to the Capitol at no cost to the federal government and hoped that the legislation would stimulate the art of sculpture in America.¹²²

To prepare the old hall for its new use, the terraced wooden floor would be removed and a level marble floor built in its place. There seemed to be plenty of scrap Italian and Massachusetts white marble in Rice, Baird & Heebner's stone yard, so only black accent tiles would have to be purchased. In addition, the legislation directed that a pair of high railings be built through the center of the room to create a clear passage from the rotunda to the south wing while offering protection to the statuary.

Converting the old House chamber into National Statuary Hall was undertaken by the commissioner of public buildings, B. B. French. He, in turn, relied on Walter to design and supervise construction. The architect originally estimated that the new floor would cost \$24,000, but the Senate reduced the figure to \$15,000 to economize and Walter feared the lower amount would be insufficient. Aggravating the situation were troubles with the workmen. Just before he ordered a surplus block of white Italian marble sawed into floor tiles, Provost & Winter's men went on strike for higher wages. The stone workers demanded an increase of a dollar a day over their current wage of three dollars, but Walter thought they really just wanted an excuse to quit and leave town before the next army draft. Not only was the new floor for Statuary Hall delayed, but work on the east portico of the House wing was adversely affected as well. Rather than risk a forfeiture of their contract, Provost & Winter yielded to the workmen's demands. To a friend, Walter explained the effects of inflation, paper money, and the war on the workmen:

I have great difficulty in carrying on the Public works on account of the want of hands and the increases of wages—the contractors made their bargains with the Govt. in *gold times*, but they are compelled to take their pay in *legal tenders*, which makes the present exorbitant prices very hard on them, and causes “strikes” and interruptions that greatly retard the work.¹²³



Statuary Hall

ca. 1890

*S*tatues donated by the states were not the only things occupying Statuary Hall in the late nineteenth century. An overflow of books from the Library of Congress was shelved on the former visitor's gallery. The smooth wooden ceiling was painted to imitate a three-dimensional dome with coffers.

On October 4, 1864, Walter hired Henry Parry of New York to dress and lay the white octagonal tiles for the floor for seventy-five cents apiece. The 2,268 black tiles ordered from James Baird began arriving from Philadelphia on October 19. Walter's design for a seven-foot-high bronzed iron railing was manufactured by Janes, Fowler, Kirtland & Company.

During the summer and fall of 1864 the Union Army scored a series of victories that lifted northern spirits considerably. In August, Admiral David G. Farragut captured Mobile Bay. Atlanta fell to General William T. Sherman on the first of September. The breadbasket of the Confederacy, the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, was in Union hands by October. Petersburg was under siege and Richmond was next. The Lincoln administration had earlier looked upon the approaching 1864 election with dread but now enjoyed a commanding lead. With each victory, opposition from Radical Republicans melted away, and Lincoln won reelection by a comfortable 55 percent in November. Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, the only southern senator to remain loyal to the Union, was elected vice president.

On December 5, 1864, the second session of the 38th Congress began. The special Committee on Ventilation set up earlier that summer was still at work. It conducted experiments with the assistance of Joseph Henry of the Smithsonian Institution and Dr. Charles M. Witherill, a chemist and physicist. Robert Briggs, who had played a leading role in the original design of the heating and ventilation system, was asked to assist. At first, Walter wanted Briggs to install water jets in the ventilation shafts to increase the air's humidity but worried about the odors they would create. He then hit upon the idea of putting "evaporating reservoirs" in the ducts to purify the air by steam, an experiment that he hoped would appease the grumbling members of Congress until more "philosophical conclusions" could be scientifically drawn.¹²⁴

In his yearly accounting to Congress, Walter told of the arrival of the plaster model for one of Crawford's sets of doors. The doors depicted events in the life of George Washington, along with Revolutionary War scenes. Sent from Italy by Crawford's widow, the doors arrived in New York in four boxes. The cargo was forwarded to Chicopee, where James T. Ames had been hired to

Capitol with the Proposed East Front Extension

by Thomas U. Walter
1865

Walter's initial proposal for an east front extension would have brought the central portico out the same distance as the wings. A marble veneer would have replaced the old sandstone in order that the entire elevation might be faced with the same material. The wisdom of Walter's proposal was debated intermittently for nine decades.

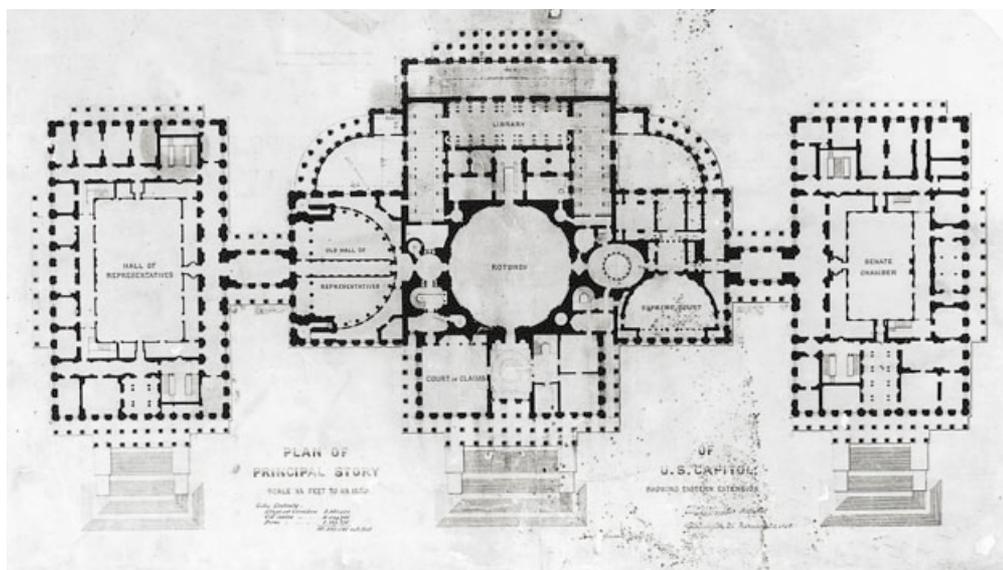
After he left office in 1865, Walter's drawing of the east front extension remained at the Capitol. This image is an 1866 engraving of a photograph taken of the (now lost) original rendering.



Plan of the Capitol with Additions to the East and West Fronts

by Thomas U. Walter, 1865

The proposed east front extension included a room for the Court of Claims and a lobby in front of the rotunda door. Suggested improvements to the west front included several new rooms for the Library of Congress as well as three new porticoes.



cast the plaster models in bronze. He also reported that the doors were unsurpassed works of art and bore “the marks of Mr. Crawford’s superior genius.”¹²⁵ He was glad that Ames was given the commission to cast the doors because it would result in a thoroughly American masterpiece.

AT WIT’S END

During the early days of 1865 Walter worked on a perspective drawing showing the design for his proposed east front extension, though most politicians felt it would be years before the country would be prepared to fund such an improvement. Although that project stood little chance of approval, the time was right to fund an extension to the Library of Congress. An appropriation of \$160,000 was given on March 2, 1865, to triple the space for the library. When Walter designed the iron library in 1852, its eventual expansion into adjacent committee rooms was planned as well. Once these rooms were vacated, they could be dismantled and rebuilt into tall, airy spaces surrounded by iron galleries similar to those in the central library. While the general outline of the library extension had been worked out years earlier, following passage of the

appropriation Walter prepared the working drawings at the request of the Joint Committee on the Library. On March 14, he submitted the plans to the secretary of the interior for approval. Soon Usher asked Walter to contact Janes & Kirtland (Charles Fowler had recently left the company) to see if the firm would build the library extension at the same prices it had received in 1852. Not surprisingly, it answered in the negative.

Following the secretary's next set of instructions, Walter prepared specifications and had photographic copies made of the architectural drawings. These were sent to seven foundries capable of doing the work. One set of bidding documents went to Janes & Kirtland and another set went to Charles Fowler. Walter worried about Fowler's access to the machinery, tools, and furnaces necessary for the work, but Fowler had made arrangements with his former partners and Walter trusted him to do a good job if his bid were accepted. Hayward & Bartlett of Baltimore and the Architectural Ironworks of New York were also among the better-known firms asked to submit bids. The bidding was not advertised because of the risk of having to accept somebody who would "botch" the job.¹²⁶ Invited bids were to be opened at noon on April 26, 1865.

While Walter waited for the library bids to arrive, the city was overjoyed at the fall of the Confederate capital and the ending of the bloodiest war in American history. News of the capture of Richmond reached Washington on April 3, 1865, and the administration ordered the public buildings illuminated the following evening. B. B. French had just enough time to prepare an unusual display at the Capitol:

I had the 23rd verse of the 118th Psalm printed on cloth, in enormous letters, as a transparency, and stretched on a frame the entire length of the top of the western portico, over the Library of Congress—viz., "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." It was lighted with gas and made a very brilliant display, and was a marked feature, as it could be read far up the Avenue.¹²⁷

At the conclusion of the final military engagement of the war, Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox on April 9. Jefferson Davis escaped capture and was on his way to Georgia, where federal troops caught up with him on May 10. Slavery was in its final days,

but there remained plenty of questions about the future of former slaves. Looming ahead was a long period of national healing. As is always the case, the human price of war was terrible. Over half a million Union soldiers were dead or wounded. The number of Confederate casualties was unknown. Just as the north celebrated the war's end, however, the world was shocked by the murder of the president. On Good Friday, April 14, 1865, Lincoln was shot while watching a comedy at Ford's Theater in Washington. He died in a rooming house across the street the next morning. Horrified and dismayed, Walter was convinced that the calamity was without parallel in world history.¹²⁸ This Sunday school teacher found it particularly appalling that the murder occurred in a theater, which he likened to a bawdy house.

Lincoln's assassination sank the city into a blur of confusion and grief. His body lay in state in the White House's east room, where the funeral was held on April 19. It was then taken to the rotunda of the Capitol. Thousands of people silently passed the coffin as it rested on a catafalque draped in

Capitol, Looking Northeast

1865

*T*aken while the nation mourned the death of President Lincoln, this photograph shows flags at half staff and black bunting on the columns.



black cloth hastily sewn by the wife of the commissioner of public buildings. The tripod scaffold having recently been removed, the only sign of construction was the platform over the eye on the inner dome, where Brumidi normally worked on his painting.

Walter attended neither the funeral at the Executive Mansion nor the lying in state in the rotunda. Cynical and depressed, he was strangely peeved that the tragic events interrupted work at the Capitol. Uncertainties about the makeup of Andrew Johnson's cabinet also worried him. Before the assassination, John P. Usher had announced his intention to retire as secretary of the interior effective May 15, and Lincoln had nominated James Harlan of Iowa to take his place. Considering that Harlan and the new president were political enemies, it was unclear whether the appointment would stand.

In the meantime, Walter received four bids for the library extension. (Three of the seven foundries contacted had declined to participate.) The bids were forwarded to Usher for direction. Fowler's bid of \$169,900 was the lowest and, after consultation with Senator Jacob Collamer of Vermont, the chairman of the Joint Committee on the Library, it was accepted. The bid was slightly more than the appropriation, but Collamer thought the difference too trifling to delay the project. Walter informed Fowler of the decision on May 1, 1865.

Fowler sent a crew of workmen to Washington on May 8 to begin demolition of the old floors, walls, arches, and vaults. The work filled the Capitol with thousands of bricks, piles of rubbish, and choking clouds of plaster dust. Having been detained in Germantown by an injury to his young son's leg, Walter was unable to be at the Capitol for the first few days of the work. He returned on May 15 and first went to inspect Brumidi's progress; he found that the center group showing Washington flanked by Fame and Liberty was finished, and the artist was about to begin the group representing Science. Leaving the dome, Walter went to pay his respects to Secretary Harlan on his first day in office, later describing him as "sweet as sugar."¹²⁹ Harlan wanted to meet with both Walter and French sometime soon to discuss the Capitol, a prospect that did not please the architect. He had recently heard that the com-

missioner was stirring up trouble by questioning Walter's contracting practices.

After only a few days in office, Secretary Harlan dismissed the heads of the Bureau of Indian affairs, the Census Bureau, and the commissioner of patents. He fired any clerk over sixty and replaced them with younger men. Walt Whitman, who was working as a clerk in the department, was fired because Harlan considered *Leaves of Grass* immoral (a sentiment widely held at the time).¹³⁰ To prepare for his housecleaning at the Capitol, Harlan asked French to report on the state of affairs there. Without explaining the circumstances, the commissioner told the new secretary that the contract for the library extension was a violation of the law requiring advertised bids. He also complained that the library project rightly belonged in his office and not with the architect of the Capitol extension. Harlan agreed and issued a hasty and ill-conceived order canceling Fowler's contract and bringing the library project to a sudden standstill. He also transferred all public works in Washington to French's office. The unexpected action removed Walter from his position as head of the Capitol extension and the new dome, as well as the library extension project. Harlan issued the order on May 25 and Walter resigned the next day, effective June 1, 1865.

Walter had discussed resigning for some time but never said exactly when he expected to make the move. Usually he mentioned the completion of the dome as the most appropriate time to leave. He advised his daughters not to expect to spend another Christmas in Washington and told his friends and associates to expect his resignation at any time. Yet, when he finally acted upon the long-standing threat, there was a sense that he had acted on impulse, hoping that the mere mention of resignation would force the secretary to reverse his obnoxious order. Walter's letter of resignation called attention to the fact that while serving as architect of the Capitol extension he designed many other structures for the government, including the new dome, the Post Office extension, and the Patent Office extension, for which he had not been paid. (In 1899, twelve years after his death, Walter's daughters received \$14,000 for their father's extra services.) He advised the administration that the works at the Capitol were so far

advanced that the services of an architect were not required. Edward Clark, who intended to succeed Walter, asked that this section of the resignation letter be expunged but was ignored—for some time, Walter had thought Clark a bit too eager to fill his shoes.

What few possessions Walter had with him in his rented room were packed up and sent to Germantown. In the office he gathered personal papers and drafting equipment for the trip home. He believed that architectural drawings belong to the architect and began packing more than 2,000 to take with him. August Schoenborn stood helplessly watching fourteen years of government work being boxed up for shipment to a private residence in Pennsylvania. He tried to persuade Clark to say something in protest, but found that he did not care to cause a fuss. They would manage without drawings.

At the close of business on May 31, 1865, Walter wrote French a letter, transferring all the books, papers, and furniture in his possession as the “late architect of the U. S. Capitol extension & c.”¹³¹ The next day he left Washington just before noon and by supper time was reunited with his family in Germantown. Thus concluded one of the most productive and thankless chapters in the life of a great American architect. During his fourteen years in Washington, Walter transformed an idiosyncratic building into an inspiring monument, one ranking high on the world’s roster of architec-

tural achievements. Bearing down on him had been five presidents, five secretaries of the interior, five secretaries of war, two supervising army engineers, and countless committee chairmen, senators, and representatives. Some of these associations had been cordial and productive, yet too many were not. His career in Washington was not free of questionable exploits, particularly during the Floyd years, yet for the most part he had conducted himself honorably and well. Through it all the extension steadily breathed new life into the old building, renewing its spirit with every stone laid. Without doubt, the magnificent dome was the singular transforming element. Its commanding presence over the city changed the perception of the nation’s capital forever. Impressed at the sight of the great white dome, Europeans no longer sneered and Americans gained a welcome sense of national pride. The image of the Capitol and its new dome was etched in the memories of countless soldiers as they marched through Washington to face an uncertain future. Few people, however, were interested in thanking the man who was mainly responsible for the architectural triumph that now crowned Capitol Hill. For all the works of magnificence that sprang from his mind, for all the headaches he endured, and for the lasting legacy of honor to his country, Walter left the city without so much as a handshake or a word of farewell at the train station.