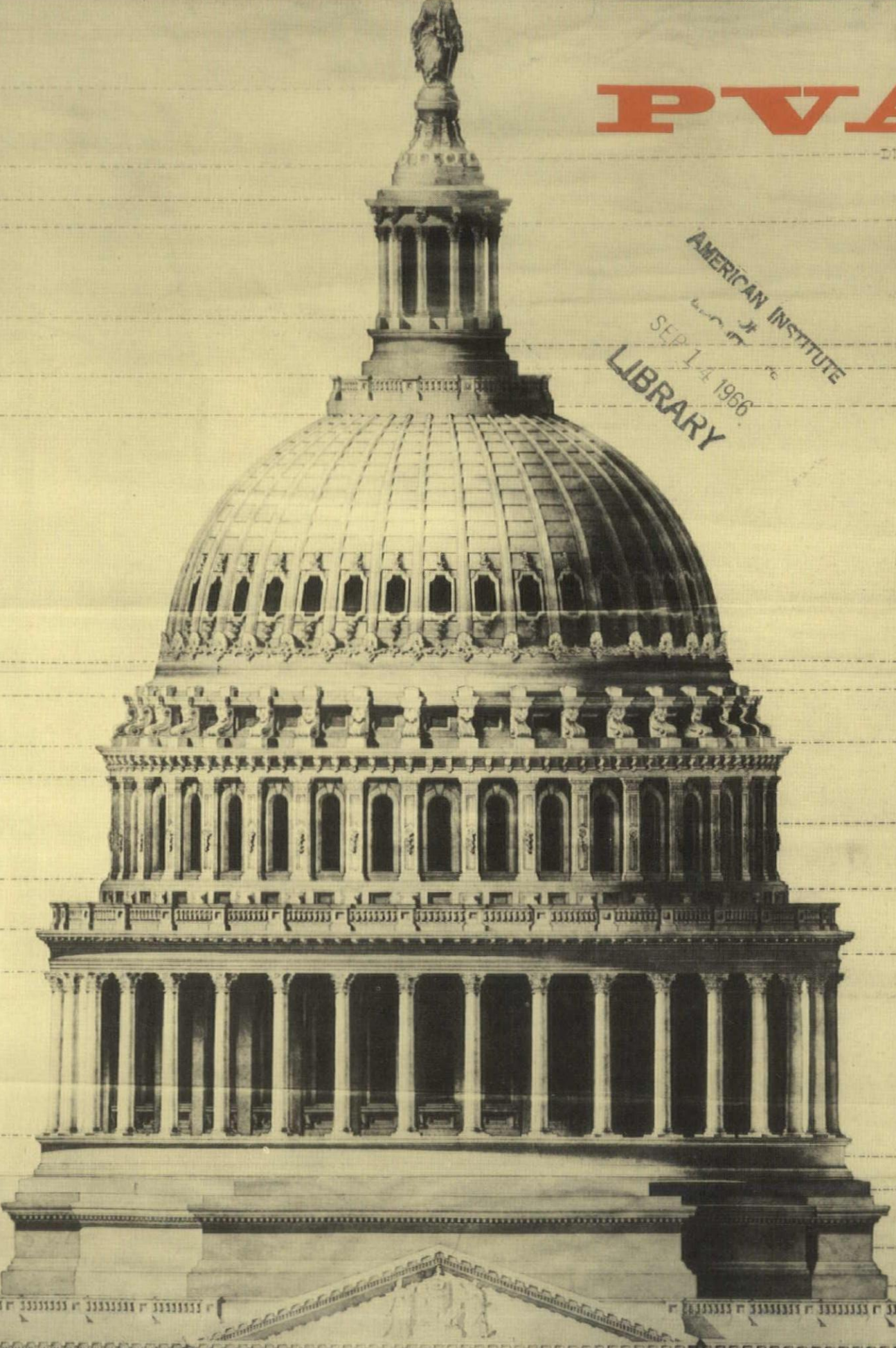


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WEST FRONT STORY

POTOMAC VALLEY ARCHITECT

July/August 1966 • Volume 10, No. 1

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This issue would not have been possible without the cooperation of the office of J. George Stewart, Architect of the Capitol, and Neil Greene of our staff who, through his interest, devoted much time to the research required to produce such an issue.

ON THE COVER

Drawings of Thomas U. Walter's nine million pound, high cast iron dome which replaced Bulfinch's low copper-covered wooden earlier dome.

SIXTH BIENNIAL PROGRAM FOR AWARDS IN ARCHITECTURE 1965-66

The Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects announces its biennial event for architects registered in the state of Maryland. To be eligible, the works must be located in the Metropolitan Area encompassing Montgomery County, Prince Georges County and the District of Columbia. Chapter members, however, may submit work executed elsewhere.

Deadline for the event is September 30, 1966 and the fee is \$15.00 for the first mount and \$10.00 for each additional mount.

Jurors will be announced after submissions are in, and winners will be announced at a dinner subsequent to the judgment.

Those interested may obtain programs from either the Potomac Valley or Washington-Metropolitan Chapter offices. It is our hope that many will participate to keep this competition the outstanding event that it has become.

DENNIS W. MADDEN STATE ORGANIZATION PRESIDENT

Potomac Valley Chapter member Dennis W. Madden is currently fulfilling his duties as president of the Maryland Council of Architects, Inc. Denny adds this distinction to his long list of services to the profession, having served on the chapter Executive Committee in all capacities from director through the presidency. He is also a member of the Maryland Board of Architectural Review. A graduate of Catholic University's School of Architecture, he is a principal in the firm of Walton & Madden, practicing in Riverdale, Md.

JOSEPH C. DENNISON ELECTED PRESIDENT OF CSI CHAPTER

Joe Dennison, Associate member of Potomac Valley Chapter, was recently elected president of the D. C. Metropolitan Chapter of Construction Specifications Institute. He had previously served as a member of the board of directors and as vice-president. An active member of this AIA chapter, Joe has been Business Manager of PVA since the publication's inception and also handled advertising for CSI. He has been with the firm of Ronald S. Senseman for 20 years where he holds the position of Chief Draftsman.

CSI TRI-REGIONAL CONFERENCE

The Baltimore Chapter of the Construction Specifications Institute will host the 7th Annual Tri-Regional Conference, September 30-October 2, 1966 at the Holiday Inn in downtown Baltimore. The theme is "A Look Into the Future of the Construction Industry." Along with technical sessions and a special program for the ladies, samples of "Instant Specwriting" will be seen. For pre-registration information contact the Potomac Valley Chapter Office: 588-1125.

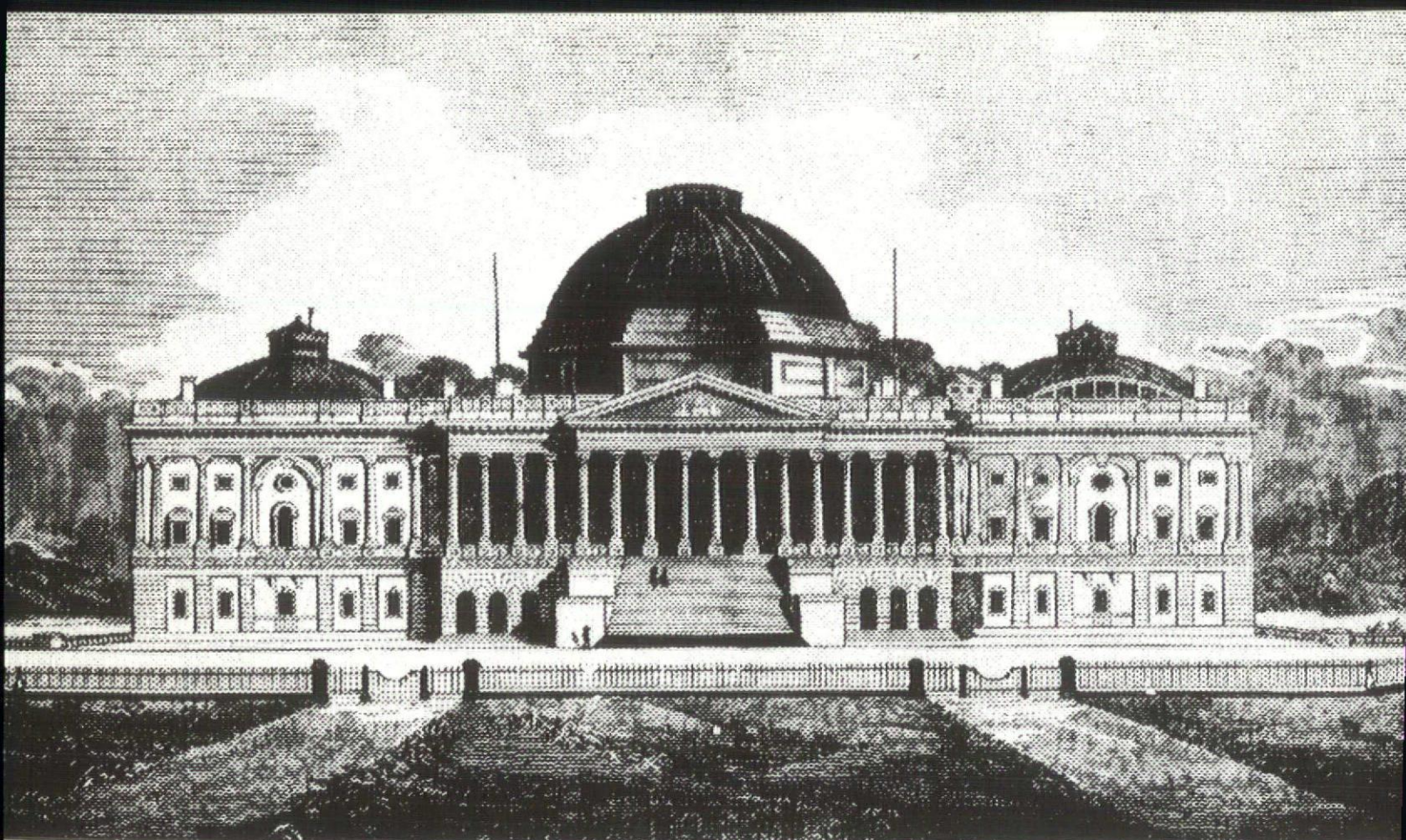
The Potomac Valley Chapter joins the family of associate member, William R. Wakeham and his wife, Marilyn in mourning the tragic loss of their daughter Lisa.

THE WEST FRONT STORY

When recently asked our opinion concerning the proposed addition to the west front of the U.S. Capitol building, we had to admit, despite the fact that there has been a great deal written on the subject recently, it has not been of the calibre or breadth to permit one to formulate any but a purely emotional opinion. We had determined to keep our open mind until time permitted a closer scrutiny of the need and the proposal. Being also realistic, we appreciated that to do this would take a great deal of time and would necessitate becoming a Capitol specialist; and we questioned our ability in this regard. Unfortunately, too few of us are sufficiently schooled to such a task.

However, we do feel that we could have been better informed by the press, and to this end we decided to devote this issue, so that we, as well as our readers may gain a better understanding of the problems, the proposed solution, and the positions of the Capitol Architect and the American Institute of Architects in this matter concerning our most important building and symbol, the U. S. Capitol.

... Hilleary



OUR HERITAGE

No other building in the world seems more bound with the lives of its people than the United States Capitol, which is the core of our ideals of freedom and democracy as well as the center of our system of representative government.

When, in our infancy, a site was chosen for the proposed building at the west end of Jenkins Hill, L'Enfant proclaimed "It is a pedestal waiting for a monument." A competition followed site selection but the fourteen (or sixteen, debatable) entries all proved unsatisfactory, and some quite ludicrous.

William Thornton, a versatile young physician, gained permission to submit a late proposal and, though not ethical, his design captivated the eyes and judgment of all. Washington felt it "A design of grandeur, simplicity and convenience." His plan provided a nearly square center section surmounted by a low dome and flanked on the north and south with rectangular wings. Stephen Hallet, who had placed second in the competition was placed in charge of construction, an unwise choice resulting in much conflict and pressure for modifications during construction. He was dismissed from the job in 1794 and Thornton, by then a Commissioner, was able to protect his plan through completion of the original House and Senate wings even though money, good materials and skilled labor were scarce. (These problems were to contribute to the dilemma of our time.)

The original north wing was completed under Superintendent of Construction Hoban, and with the exception of small details was ready to welcome the legislators from the Philadelphia seat in 1800. The first joint session was held November 22, 1800, the 32 member Senate, 106 member House, the Supreme Court, the Circuit Court and the Library of Congress sharing one building. As construction progressed, occupation became a game of "musical chairs" as to who moved where, and who moved back, and when. The Representatives moved in 1801 to the section known as the "oven." This was demolished in 1804 and they moved back to the old section for 3 years until their own chambers were ready.

Thomas Jefferson, known for his interest in architecture, was President in 1803 when Benjamin Latrobe became the architect of the Capitol. With such enthusiastic support, Latrobe poured out his genius on the interiors producing such features as his corn and tobacco capitals replacing the usual classical orders.

By 1812 there were two wings to accommodate the more than 500 lawmakers, the south by Latrobe and the north under Hallet, Hadfield and Hoban. Wooden passageways connected the two buildings when in 1814 Admiral Cockburne led the British in burning the House and Senate wings and although damage was extensive, total destruction was forestalled by a driving rainstorm. Latrobe set about immediate renovation between 1815 and 1817 strengthening and restoring both wings, enlarging the Senate and House Chambers before resigning in 1817 because of disagreement with the commissioners.

Charles Bulfinch of Boston succeeded Latrobe and continued the work planned by Thornton and Latrobe adding the long planned central portion, its east and west fronts and the rotunda. By 1829, when the position of Capitol architect was abolished, the building of Acquia creek sandstone stood 351 feet 7½ inches long, at the ground level, 282 feet 10½ inches deep, dominated by its low Bulfinch dome. It was to remain this way for about a quarter of a century.

By 1851, with the increasing demand for space, Thomas U. Walter of Philadelphia was commissioned to design the Senate and House wings. These extensions necessitated the addition of a new dome for a balanced proportion. Accordingly, the Thornton planned, Bulfinch designed dome of copper and wood was replaced with Walter's twin shelled cast iron structure. Weighing approximately 9 million pounds with a diameter of 135 feet 5 inches and a height of 180 feet 3 inches from floor to apex, this dome is considered an engineering feat. It was capped with the Statue of Freedom modeled by Thomas Crawford and was cast in bronze in northeast Washington.

President Lincoln was criticized for his use of funds in continuing construction during the critical period of the Civil War. He is reputed to have said, "If people see the Capitol going on, it is a sign we intend the union to go on."

Aside from minor alterations and the installation of improving conveniences the exterior of the Capitol building has remained unaltered until fairly recently except for the addition of the terrace. Walter made various studies between 1864 and 1872 for extensions both to the east and west, endorsed by architects Clark and Wood. In 1904 Carrere & Hastings were commissioned to study possible expansion of space, producing two schemes, which were voted down. However it was their scheme "B" which was to awaken new interest in our time, when the need for space as well as maintenance exerted their pressures.



LOSS OF ORNAMENTATION

RECENT HISTORY

The Urgency of Space and Maintenance

Recently proposed alterations and additions found their inspiration in a proposal made more than sixty years ago. Carrere & Hastings scheme "B" dating from 1904 provided for the extension of the East front, refacing of the west central area with marble and the reconstruction of the west steps. This proposal suggests that deterioration even then was manifest and that additional space was even then a need.

The extension project was authorized by the act of August 5, 1955, as amended by the act of February 14, 1956, March 31, 1961 and the act of December 30, 1963.

Under the direction of the Commission for the Extension composed of President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Minority Leader of the Senate, the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives and the Architect of the Capitol, authorization was given to proceed essentially with Scheme "B" of 1904 with certain added space requirements. Accordingly, Roscoe De Witt, Fred L. Hardison, Alfred Easton Poor, Albert Homer Swanke, and Jesse M. Shelton were retained to carry out the

architectural and engineering services with advisory architectural assistance from John Harbeson, Henry R. Shepley and Arthur Brown.

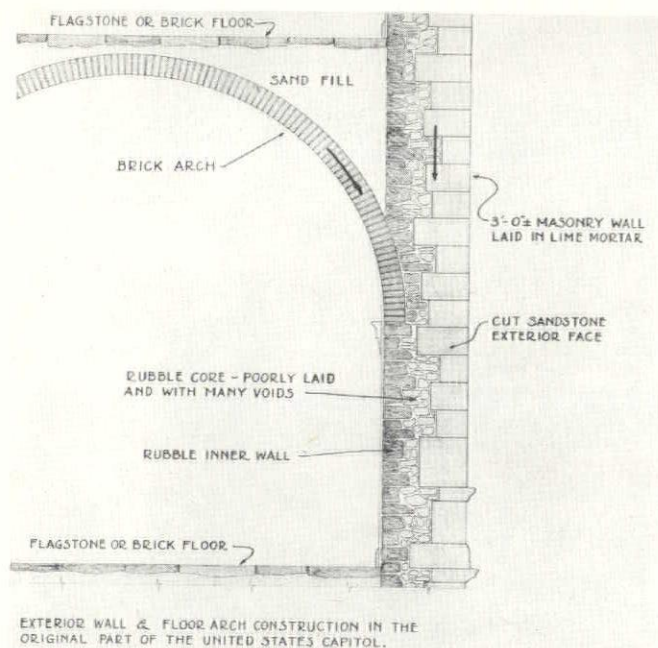
In lieu of the marble facing proposal for the west face, this team proposed a west central extension, constructed of marble, and buttressing rather than replacing the rapidly deteriorating sandstone Thornton-Latrobe-Bulfinch facade. At that point, the Commission approved the east front extension leaving the west front for later action.

In 1963 the Commission authorized an expenditure of \$125,000 to retain a non-governmental engineering firm to study the structural condition of the west central portion. A contract was made with the engineering firm, Thompson & Lichtner Co., Inc. of Brookline, Massachusetts to provide these services.

Their findings were not encouraging and causes of the rapid deterioration were several; poor reconstruction work following the burning early in the nineteenth century; loads in excess of the safe bearing capacity of the masonry in the center section, causing a shift in position and the very visible cracking which

extends through the masonry; failure of lintels with resultant instability leading to eventual partial collapse; penetration of moisture forcing stone out of place; freezing and thawing action widening the cracks and a regrettable core construction between the outer and inner stone facings indicating unburnt mortar and unground oyster shells.

Based on their findings, they recommended a buttress for the whole west side, best accomplished with an extension providing lateral stability. Retention and repair of the existing walls was not recommended since it would require hazardous removal of much of the facing or visible disfiguring metal ties through the building's face, leaving walls and foundation still of inferior construction. Nor did they recommend facing the existing wall with new marble, since the wall itself



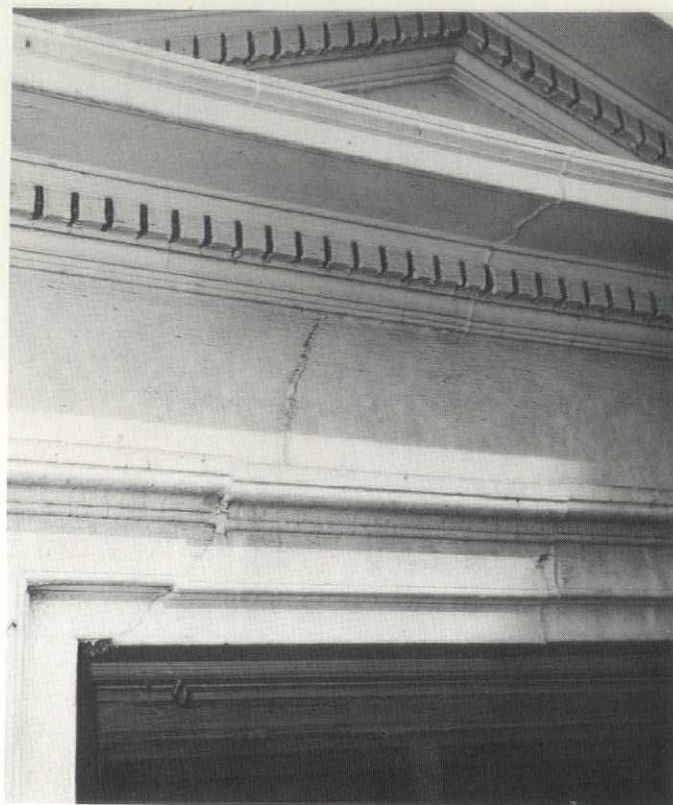
STRUCTURAL SYSTEM

would remain inferior and preservation of historic architecture would thus be defeated. Removal and replacement was not recommended for the same reason. Should any of these unrecommended methods be employed in an attempt to save the existing west face, work would take from five to ten years and would require evacuation of much of the office and work area of the west side and the closing of public areas.

The findings of the Thompson and Lichtner Co., Inc. were verified by the New York firm of Mueser, Rutledge, Wentworth and Johnston, consulting engineers.

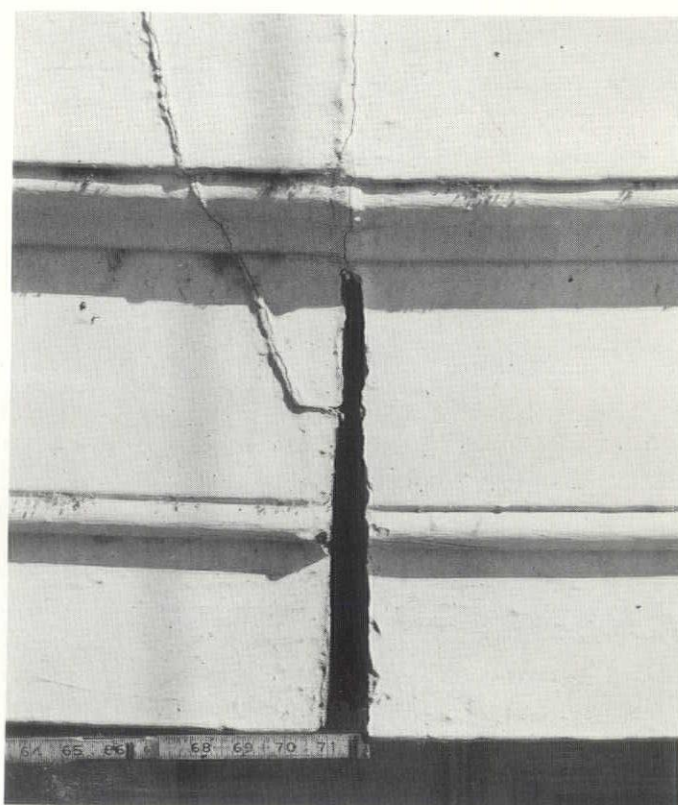
Modifications to the proposed extension of 1957 were accomplished by the commissioned architects to bring their extension proposal into full conformity with the structural recommendations.

This recent history leading to this presently proposed preliminary design brings us to the controversy of the moment, whether to accept or reject their proposal.



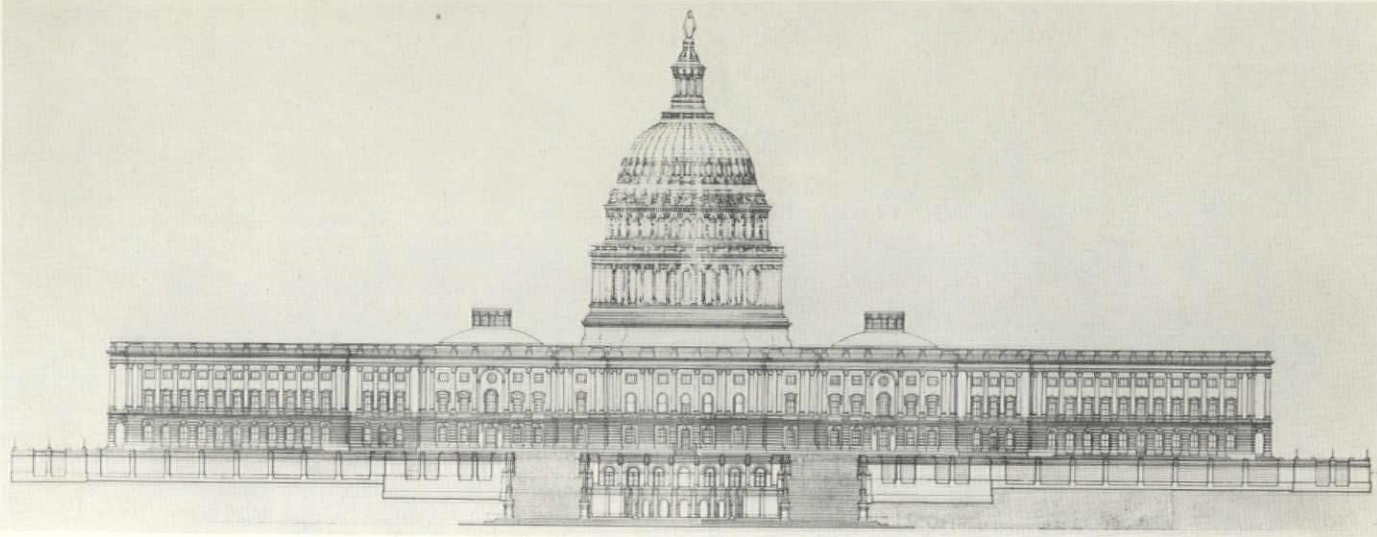
LINTEL FAILURE

CRACKS THROUGH THE MASONRY





A DESIGN CRITIQUE
OF THE
EXISTING WEST FRONT



The United States Capitol as designed by Dr. William Thornton, could have been the finest piece of Capitol architecture of the Federal Period in the United States, had it been built according to design; but despite the wishes of Presidents Washington and Jefferson that the design be faithfully carried out, changes were effected by Thornton's successors Hallet, Hadfield, Latrobe and Bulfinch. Only Architect Hoban, who had successfully won the competition for the White House, attempted to keep harmony and adhere to the original design. Consequently, the near-perfect original design was altered by the addition of wings to the central portico, steps up to the central portico, a high dome instead of the lower Pantheon-type dome by Thornton, a revised treatment for the west central wing, and changed moldings, details and carving from one portion to another — resulting in a composite, not totally harmonious whole.

The addition of wings to the east central portico of four-column bays on each side served to create an architectural defect in that the round-headed windows now located under the added portico wings center on the second of four bays. It was generally the custom in classic work of perfection to center such motifs on the center of an odd number of bays in order to place such features in the exact center. Thomas U. Walter, Architect, in his 1876 study and Carrere & Hastings, Architects, in their 1904 study planned to enlarge the central portion of the portico from eight to ten columns which would have automatically taken care of this defect. This could also have been taken care of at the time the East Front was extended except that a faithful reproduction of the existing facade was required by the Congressional Commission.

One of the serious defects of the present west facade is the conflict between the small, almost domestic, central portico and the later enlarged dome. The present portico was in proportion with the original Bulfinch dome, but suffers by scale comparison with the present one. The north and south facades of the west central wing have an unstudied quality with a single pilaster at the external corner and a double and single pilaster at the internal corner, unlike all other corners which have double pilasters on the external corners and single pilasters at the internal corners. The Senate and the House Wing additions,

also added by Walter, further impair the aesthetic quality of this structure on the west side accentuating the indentations from the west central wing. In plan, the present Senate and House wings are too massive and the connecting wings too narrow in relation to the original composition. A further weakness is the long horizontal, unbroken balustrade at the roof line. It appears as though the dome could be moved along the top as in a toy model.

Certain modifications could enhance the west facade. A pediment as suggested by Latrobe, Bulfinch, Walter, Clark and Olmsted would certainly improve matters, as would the enlargement of the portico as suggested in drawings attributed to Walter and Olmsted. Further, the west central stairways bear no relationship to the building and arrive rather awkwardly in relation to the west central facade.

Various notable architects have commented on the less-successful design of the West Front:

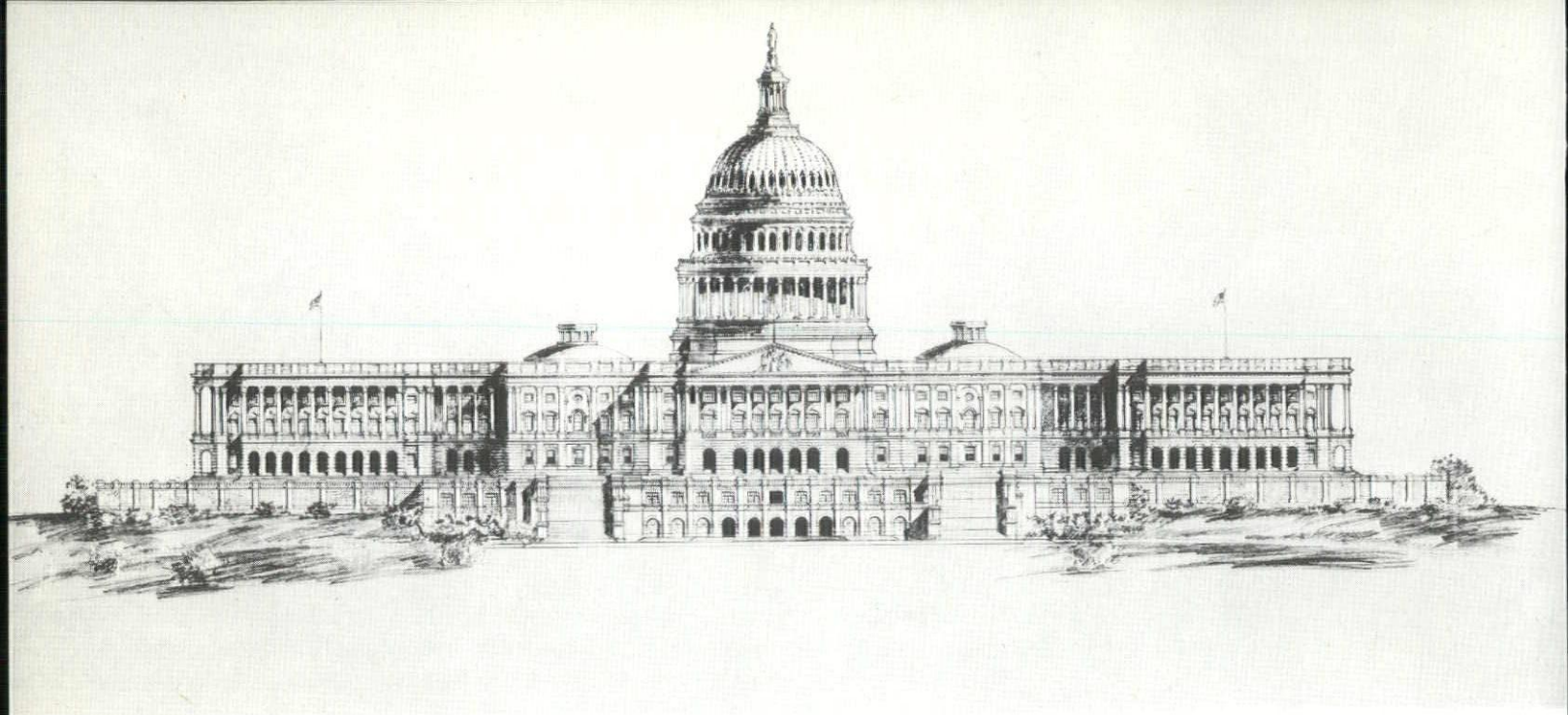
Advisory Architects, Brown, Harbeson and Shepley, stated in their report on the Extension of the Capitol, June 11, 1957:

... The West Front of the Capitol is less successful as an architectural composition than the East Front. Although adequate for the original building, it is not suited to the enlarged composition resulting from the addition of the wings and of the present dome.

Architect Ralph Walker, designated Architect of the Century and awarded the 100 Year Gold Medal by The American Institute of Architects; Lorimer Rich, FAIA; and Douglas Hasket, an architectural editor; urged in a memorandum, dated July 3, 1958:

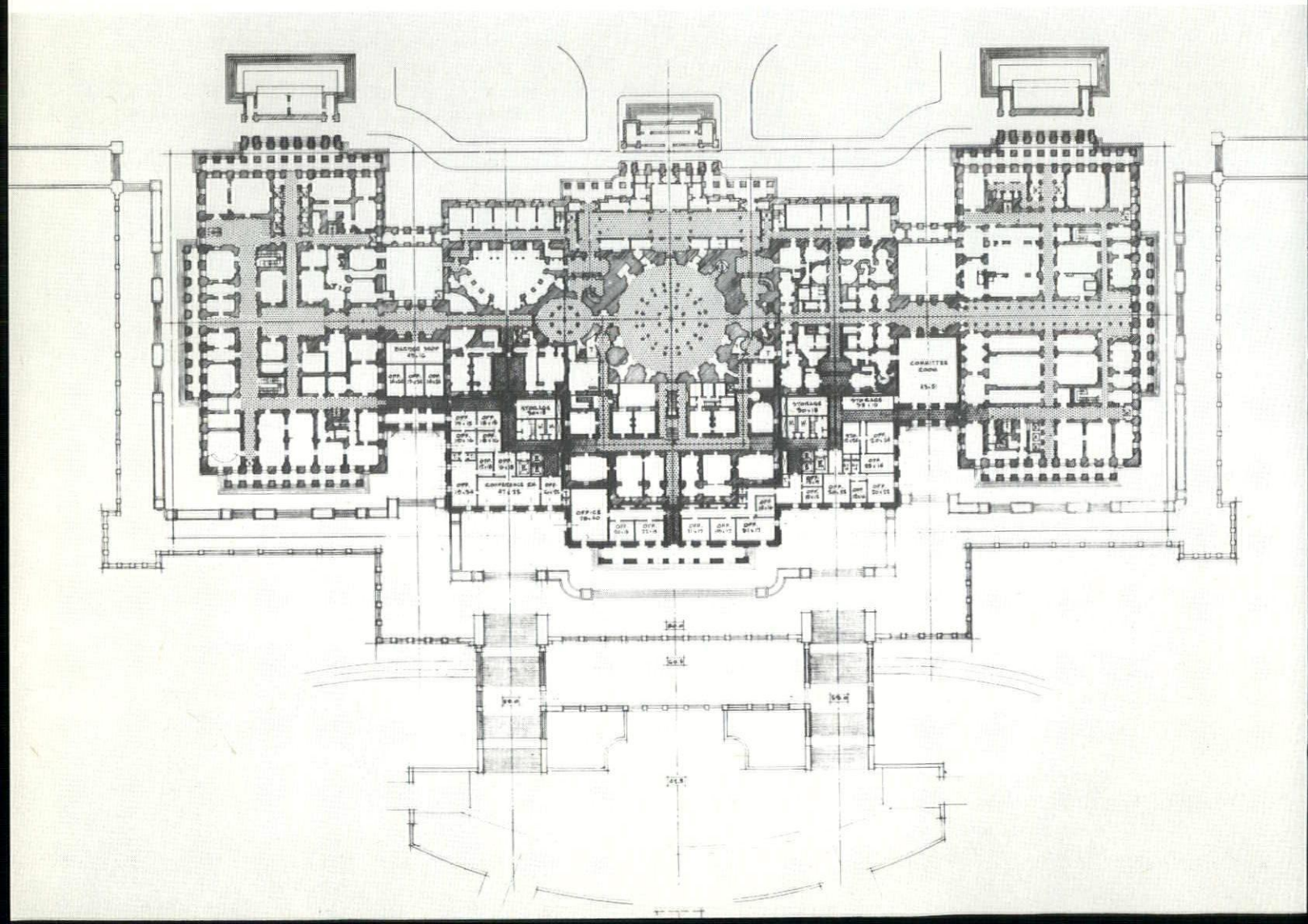
... The real needs of Congress could in any event be best cared for by extending the building to the west where there is no great architectural masterpiece to be preserved.

Due to the many subtle departures from the propriety of the original design by Thornton in 1793, and as a result of contributions by many, the building has developed a certain naive quality. This quality has, however, endeared itself to many. Finer and more perfect examples of Capitol architecture can be found in the original portions of the State Capitols of the first thirteen states of our Republic, such as at Richmond, Virginia; Annapolis, Maryland; Dover, Delaware; Boston, Massachusetts to mention a few.



PROJECT — PROPOSED EXTENSION — WEST FRONT

PROJECT — PROPOSED PLAN AT FIRST FLOOR



THE WEST FRONT STORY

A.I.A. POSITION

WASHINGTON, D. C., June 24, 1966 — A request by The American Institute of Architects that the Commission for the Extension of the Capitol "reconsider and reverse its approval" of the proposed extension of the West Front of the Capitol was addressed to all five members of the Commission in a letter from Morris Ketchum, Jr., FAIA, President of the AIA. Master planning under a new impartial advisory panel of leading professionals was also urged.

While recognizing that the West Front must be structurally strengthened and that efficient functioning of the Congress will require additional space now and in the future, the Institute stated that "something other than continual expansion of the Capitol must be planned."

The letter urged "that rather than build in a piece-meal fashion, now is the time to prepare a workable master plan to accommodate present and projected space requirements." To accomplish this, Mr. Ketchum recommended the establishment of "an impartial advisory panel of recognized professionals to advise on all Capitol Hill design and construction."

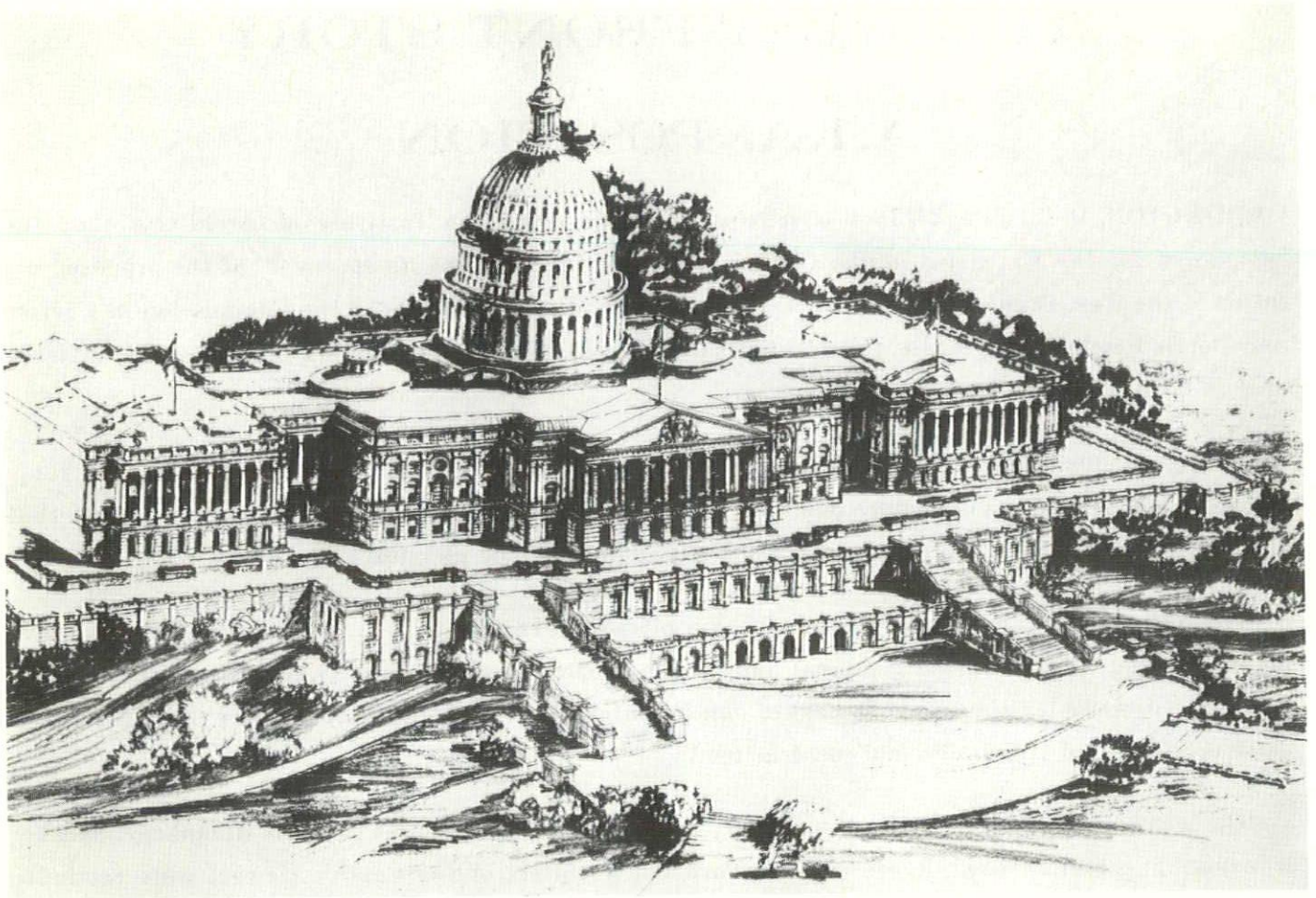
The members of the Commission on the Extension of the Capitol, Vice-President Humphrey, Speaker McCormack, Senator Dirksen, Representative Ford and Architect of the Capitol Stewart were reminded of the AIA's long-standing position that expansion must be stopped "while the last external vestiges of the work done by Thornton, Bulfinch and Olmsted still remain as examples of our National heritage."

A.I.A. News Release

In recommending restudy of the west front proposal by an impartial advisory panel, the A.I.A. is in no way discrediting the ability of the practitioners who designed the extension nor the quality of their design per se, but are questioning the premise on which the design was based — extension for preservation.

We indorse this plan of action, for certainly in an age when too much happens too fast we cannot lavish too much attention on our most cherished symbol, the Capitol. There is the possibility that, after restudying the problem, this committee may reach the conclusion that what has been planned is the best solution after all. Whatever the outcome, we hope for a unification of opinion based more on logic than on pure emotion.

Since so many varying opinions have been voiced so far, we cannot pass up the opportunity of adding one of our own, which may or may not have been given previous consideration — that should the buttressing effect of some type of extension prove necessary, perhaps the existing facade could be preserved in an interior space free from the ravages of exposure to be enjoyed in an atmosphere more sympathetic to preservation.



POINT OF VIEW

Neil R. Greene

The documentation to this point from more than two dozen sources is at best only superficial, for many volumes have been written recently about our nation's proudest symbol. It is essential after this brief review, to direct our attention to a meaningful solution and a practical rationalization of the many arguments.

I shall attempt to present here my argument which I believe represents the most recent appraisal of facts and opinion, and perhaps the least emotional to be published. Our Capitol has grown, as has the nation, in war and peace, beauty and error, poor and plenty, jealousy and controversy, pride and sacrifice. The walls, vaults, and domes evolve an emotion, so deeply rooted as to inspire in us an aura of the mystic. With hesitation we dare to criticize the Capitol, but with concern and sincerity many have gone on record. I propose to defend the extension of the West Front of the Capitol and request the reader to follow the logic of my argument, emotion aside.

The arguments for the West Front Extension, as those of the successful East Front are threefold. First, that serious deterioration is accelerating and buttressing appears to be the recommended method of support; second, that additional space is required now to

accommodate the needs of the Government, the public and related services; third, that the extensions could provide for correction of numerous architectural inconsistencies resulting from cumulative efforts, consolidating the Capitol's many elements into a totally unified composition.

I preface the argument by indicating I would not be in favor of extension if practical restoration were possible. Structurally I believe the argument for extension is strongest since the condition of the West Front is more serious than was the condition of the East Front prior to its extension. In examining the engineering reports, one can only deduct that restoration would be more expensive than the proposed new construction. The reports, and personal interviews indicate the present unpredictable character of the structure, the possibility of massive failures, inherent shortcomings of sandstone, tedious time consuming restoration, and the relocation and temporary housing of hundreds of Capitol personnel outside of the Capitol for a period of up to ten years.

The Commission for the Extension of the Capitol, and their advisory architects, recognized the structural problems imposed by the dome upon its supports, and

the more recently pronounced stresses of the stabilized East Front upon that of the West. The West Front extension was proposed to buttress the existing Thornton, Latrobe, Bulfinch structure. Examination of the typical wall detail clearly discloses the difficulty of restoration. To restore the entire existing West Front, the interior and exterior structure would have to first be vacated; then be uniformly supported on shoring while the face material, which is bearing, is removed, to a total height of five floors of masonry. During the ten-year period that this work would be in progress, and after the shoring had been removed, there would be no guarantee that the structure would achieve a balance of weight distribution (principle of bearing wall construction), and that the arches and barrel vaults would not fail. This is indeed an unpredictable course and one that is questionable with the lives of our nation's leaders at stake.

The second argument in favor of extension is the need for additional space, improved circulation and improvement of services, facilities and functions relative to Government and the visiting public. The planned extension provides for 25 percent area increase of 139,250 square feet at a cost of \$34,209,850. This estimated cost buys the space, includes the cost of relocation, preparation foundations, granite and marble, the super-structure, interior furnishings, and contingencies. This last great volume which can effectively be added harmoniously to the structure has been carefully programmed by the Commission on the Extension of the Capitol, and planned by the six nationally known advisory consultants.

The plan provides for the support of the growing needs of the Government and a visiting public whose numbers have grown from 100,000 in 1935, 1,000,000 in 1955, 6,300,000 in 1965 and an expected 11,600,000 in 1975. The magnitude of providing the proper services and amenities to the public; the isolation of space, offices and meeting rooms of the members of Congress, and their staffs, would be accommodated in grandeur befitting the nation's Capitol and its people. The provision of a magnificent visitors information center, so well received in Colonial Williamsburg, along with new cafeterias, washrooms, elevators, and escalators, will modernize the West Side of the Capitol that has been so long neglected.

The third argument in favor of extension involves the purity of classic design, aesthetics and proportion, and the legitimacy of restoration. In the architectural critique it is mentioned that the major inconsistencies are in the design of the present West Front and that the proposed design strengthens the entire composition. The proposed addition of the pediment and the broadened central portico provides a fitting base for Thomas U. Walter's dome that dwarfed the earlier design and has been one of the greatest architectural shortcomings of the West Front. The provision for Olmsted's great stairway to be relocated and aligned with the axis of the Senate Library, and the upper part of Statuary Hall, can best be appreciated as one sees the west front's most popular vantage point on the Mall.

The belief in the legitimacy of restoration of this building or other buildings, requires one to ask why restore and preserve in the first place. Buildings are preserved because of their uniqueness, beauty, style, purity, authenticity, association with a great event, age, charm, magnitude, period, legal covenants, present and future utilization, sentiment and symbolism. All these criteria apply to the Capitol for it is a composite of the nation's history. To decide if the West Front of the Capitol should be faithfully restored, the inherent structural defects and the incalculable remedial cost as well as the need for space and services, should be justification for not considering restoration.

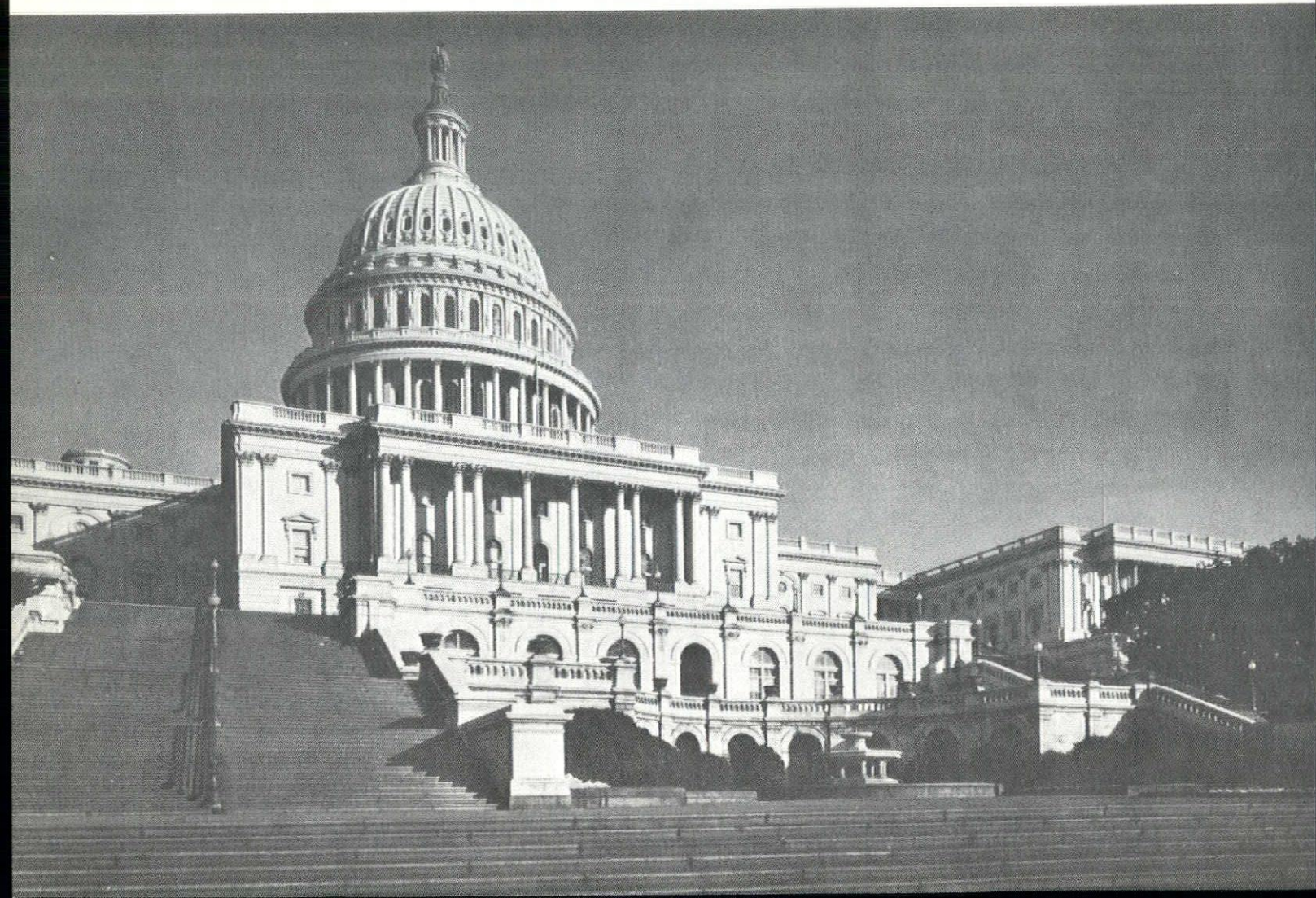
However, let us proceed with the following line of reasoning regarding restoration of the original facade of the Central portico and wings. First, I believe it would be legitimate and authentic to repair the sandstone of the West Front in place, but reckless to try. Second, to replace the facade with new sandstone, not the original, is not authentic and still uses an inferior material. Third, from the legitimacy standpoint, the use of marble in preparing a copy of the Thornton-Latrobe-Bulfinch facade is reproduction falsification because it is no longer the historical original. It should also be questioned if either sandstone or marble were used, should the errors in the window heads, design of pilasters, domestic portico, etc., be preserved for posterity when they could be corrected in the new material?

To further argue the point, if buttressing is the only logical direction, should the extension be in sandstone or marble, with the same errors in design projected forty-four feet forward; or should the classic details be corrected. I believe if the Capitol, because of structural, spatial, functional and aesthetic needs, must be extended, then it should be carefully copied from the classic vocabulary of the better examples of the Capitol.

Emotional and sentimental feelings about history are part of our tradition, but these may neither be logical nor practical. We should present to our nation and other nations, symbolized in our Capitol, the harmony of design through our best efforts and leave to the architectural text the proud moments and follies of design. Mario E. Campioli, A.I.A., the Assistant Architect of the Capitol, has made it clear that the West Front extension is what he would consider the last logical addition that can be made to the Capitol and that this design approaches the finest arrangement of architectural elements and details to effectively balance the composition within the proportions and framework already established.

This is my point of view on "The West Front Story." I present it here because I believe the entire story has never been told and with all the fanfare, the competent architects who were associated with this project development, consultants and advisors from five cities, all masters of classic design, were never given good press or a public hearing. I am personally convinced of the wisdom of their solution.

More Capitol Punishment



BY FRANCIS D. LETHBRIDGE, AIA

Chairman of the Joint Committee on Landmarks for the National Capital and a practicing architect in Washington, D.C., the author presents his views on the West Front extension.

IT WAS EIGHT YEARS AGO that a public hearing was held on the proposed extension of the United States Capitol, and to read the transcript of that hearing today makes one realize that more than just the eastern facade of the building has changed. Some of the architects who appeared before the Senate Committee on that occasion have passed beyond any further controversy, and others, in their efforts to prevent alteration of the East Front, so compromised their position on extensions to the West Front that they have since had little to say publicly on the subject.

The Architect of the Capitol, J. George Stewart, nevertheless, has persisted in his intention to carry out all of the proposed "improvements" described in his report of August 1957, and the time draws near when any further discussion on the merits of the West Front extension will be purely academic.

The arguments for the East Front extension, it will be recalled, were threefold. First, that the change would correct an architectural inconsistency that had occurred at the time the new dome was erected over the walls of the existing rotunda, causing the skirt of the dome to project over the front portico, a flaw that the architect of the dome, Thomas U. Walter, had been anxious to rectify from the time of its construction. Second, that the original sandstone and rubble walls of the older, central portion of the building were in poor structural condition, and that the surface of the porous Acquia sandstone was corroded and caked with the innumerable coats of paint that had been applied since 1819. Third, that the additional space obtained by moving the east wall 32 feet 6 inches forward was needed by Congress in addition to that space which might be obtained by the proposed extension of the West Front.

Opponents of the change, on the other hand, argued that the original walls had unique historical values which should be preserved; that the projection of the dome beyond the walls of the building had been a happy esthetic accident which should be perpetuated; and that the cost of the extension, in terms of space gained, was outrageously high.

In retrospect it appears clear that the first argument for the East Front extension—that of improving the architectural relationship of the front portico to the dome—was a valid one, and that the new relationship of the central portion of the building to the wings is an acceptable change, if no improvement. It was undeniably true that serious problems of erosion and structural failure were present, but it was never established that they could not have been corrected without the construction of new walls some distance forward of the old, if this had been considered of paramount importance. This last point is still a real issue, for the central portion of the West Front is today in essentially the same state of disrepair as was the East Front eight years ago. It is only fair to point out that the Architect of the Capitol, and the consultants who have been retained by him to study the structural problems, have never argued that the conditions of the exterior walls could not be corrected except by building new outside walls to buttress them. They have merely said this method of reconstruction would be effective and economical, that it would provide additional space and would be least disruptive to continued activities within the building.

The Associated Architects* who were commissioned "to furnish necessary architectural and engineering services for the extension of the Capitol and other authorized changes and improvements" developed the need, to use Mr. Stewart's words, for 139,250 additional square feet of floor space to accommodate present needs of Congress, with some allowance for future growth. Since the extension of the east central front has already provided 44,930 square feet of the total, the remaining 94,320 square feet are scheduled for construction in the proposed extension of the West Front.

It has been proposed that the Senate and House restaurant facilities be moved to the west terrace, together with an additional visitors' and employees' restaurant, their combined area to be about 55,000 square feet with seating accommodations for 1,305 persons. In addition to the new Capitol restaurant space, the West Front additions are scheduled to provide 8 committee rooms, 55 offices, 7 storage rooms and extensive additions to the facilities for vertical circulation in the building, including 6 passenger elevators, 2 freight elevators and 6 escalators.

*Roscoe DeWitt and Fred L. Hardison of Dallas; Alfred Easton Poor and Albert Homer Swanke of New York City; and Jesse M. Shelton and Alan G. Stanford of Atlanta.

Obviously, the proposed extension of the West Front is in response to these estimated needs, some of which, such as the improvements in vertical circulation, would be difficult, if not impossible to build without further enlarging the central portion of the building. We are in no position to challenge these needs without the benefit of an up-to-date study, but we should challenge whether providing this additional space by further alteration of the Capitol is going to be at a price—historically or esthetically—that is too great to pay. Specifically the questions to be answered are these:

1) Should the walls of the West Front be repaired or restored in their present position?

2) Should the entire facade of the central portion of the West Front be rebuilt some distance forward of the present walls?

3) Should the West Front be redesigned and rebuilt in a basically different manner some distance forward of the present walls?

Probably few people are aware that it is the third alternative which is being carried forward at the present time by the Architect of the Capitol. The report of August 1957 states, "It is proposed to extend the basement story of the west central portion of the Capitol, across the courtyards, to the west terrace structure. It is also proposed to partially extend the west terrace structure and to relocate the west steps and approaches. It is further proposed to extend the original north and south wings of the west central portion of the Capitol, and the House and Senate connections, by erection of additions to these portions of the central structure, from the first floor to the attic floor, inclusive; also, *to enlarge the West Portico.*" (See plan at the end of the article.)

The widening of the west portico, if carried out, will alter the proportions of the entire West Front, will obliterate all external evidence of the original Thornton-Latrobe wings and will present a broad, almost unbroken facade at the line of the House and Senate Wings. The proposed terrace alterations will also radically change the appearance of that structure from the Capitol grounds, for the two great flights of steps designed by Olmsted which cascade down from either side of the central portico will be moved so far apart as to present an entirely different effect. Another subtlety will be lost as well, for these flights now terminate at walks which are an extension of the lines of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues, the terminus of L'Enfant's *patte d'oie*.

Let us return, however, to the first alternative—preservation or restoration of the existing walls.

It can be seen from an examination of the proposed plan of extension that preservation in this instance is not simply a matter of preserving the stones and mortar of the old walls, but rather a question of preserving the present proportions of the building, of preserving any visible evidence of the original work of Thornton, Latrobe or Bulfinch, and of preserving the quality of the design of Olmsted's terraces and grounds. There is no reasonable doubt that extensive repairs are required, and it would probably be perverse at this point, with the East Front reconstruction completed in marble, to insist that the damaged sandstone be replaced with the original material.

The recommendations of Carrere & Hastings in 1905 were to extend the East Front in marble, but to reface the West Front in marble *in its present position*. Those preservationists who were vigorously espousing the cause of Senate Bill S-2883 in 1958, to "eliminate the requirement that the extension, reconstruction and replacement of the central portion of the United States Capitol be in substantial accord with Scheme B [the Carrere & Hastings recommendations] of the architectural plan of March 3, 1905," might well at this point be arguing that the Architect of the Capitol be held strictly to that plan.

The existing Senate and House dining rooms were enlarged to an adequate size when the East Front was extended, so that an additional dining room for employees and visitors might be provided within the space between the existing steps on the west terrace, even though that arrangement would probably involve a less efficient separation of kitchen facilities.

There is no esthetic or practical reason why the courts between the west side of the Capitol and the terraces cannot be developed as interior spaces as proposed, and it is quite possible that a well-designed revision of the north and south terraces could provide an amount of space for offices and committee rooms equivalent to or greater than that provided under Scheme C, the proposed extension of the West Front.

The charge by the Joint Committee on Landmarks of the National Capital that the present plans amount to "historical vandalism" was anticipated by Mr. Stewart as early as 1958 when he said, "From the viewpoint of those concerned with sentiment and with the preservation of the Capitol intact, in its present state and condition, it must be remembered that extension of the West Front also affects the work of our first three architects and, on such basis, would fall into the same category of 'desecration' and 'vandalism' as is alleged against the East Front extension. Should

it happen that the same hue and cry which has been raised over the extension of the East Front should occur if the extension of the West Front were attempted, the Congress would really be in a sorry plight for adequate space in which to do its work."

That this "sorry plight" isn't necessarily so is made clear in his own report from the Associated Architects. It outlined five additional possible solutions to future needs for expansion, the first two of which involve extension of the House and Senate Wings, but the last three of which are concerned with further possible revisions of the terrace area. Mr. Stewart was guilty of some exaggeration, too, in his fears that "sentimentalists" would insist upon "preservation intact, in its present state and condition."

The architecture of the Capitol is inextricably bound up with its history, with the men who designed the building as well as the men who have helped to make the country's history within its walls. It is the wonderful building it is, in part at least, because it still exhibits each of the stages of its development as a distinct part in the composition of the total mass of the building.

I have never heard an argument for the proposed changes to the West Front saying there would be an effort to improve the existing work of Thornton, Latrobe, Bulfinch, Walter and Olmsted. Whether this is simply modesty on the part of the architects, or a stern conviction that "form follows function," I cannot tell. I would maintain, nevertheless, that such changes are undesirable even if they were improvements in form, for they would destroy or obscure something of even greater value.

There is bound to be a limit to the amount of space that can be added to the main body of the Capitol without its becoming a formless and confused mass, and that limit might as well be accepted now as 10 years from now when irreparable damage might already have been committed. It is a procedure, furthermore, that can never hope to solve all of the foreseeable future needs of Congress, for which purpose a new study and master plan of the entire Capitol grounds should be prepared.

The second alternative of reconstructing the west central facade, in its present form but some distance forward of the existing walls, is less desirable from the historical-architectural standpoint than restoration in place. But it can be preferred, nonetheless, to currently published plans if the functional advantages of gaining more space above the basement floor cause Congress to insist upon such additions, or if the reconstruction of the ex-

isting walls cannot be accomplished without intolerable interference with the business of the House and Senate.

Now that "the deed has been done" on the East Front, there is a certain classical logic in rebalancing the basically symmetrical form of the plan by adding an equal amount of space on the west side. It would amount to another strip 32 feet 6 inches wide, a distance that represents approximately the width of two bays of the flanking Senate and House Wings. Such a procedure would involve the extension of the central portico as well as the old wings in order to retain their existing relationship to one another.

This would cause further interference with the view of the Capitol dome from points due west of the portico, but less than in the presently proposed plan from an oblique angle. It would probably not seriously affect the long view from the Mall or Pennsylvania Avenue.

It is interesting to note that Olmsted showed an extended west portico on his plans and perspectives of the west terraces at the time they were proposed in 1874. Under such a scheme the image, if not the reality, of the older portions of the building would be preserved and the need for extensive remodeling of the terraces might be eliminated.

The third alternative, which so far as we know is the plan that is now being followed, has already been described. It is the least desirable of the three and should join the file of never-carried-out plans for the Capitol. Such proposals have a history that dates back to the original competition held in the spring of 1792. The brief invitation to submit drawings brought forth a variety of responses, none of which was totally satisfactory to the Commissioners or to the President.

The submissions included a very respectable and conservative Georgian design by Samuel McIntire; a charmingly naive proposal by Philip Hart that in detail is vaguely reminiscent of Independence Hall; an adaptation of Palladio's Villa Rotunda submitted by Samuel Dobie; a strange melange of medieval and Georgian detail on a building that surrounded a square open courtyard by James Diamond of Maryland; and a fairly sophisticated design, to judge by later drawings which have survived, by Stephen (Etienne Sulpice) Hallet, a French emigre who was then residing in Philadelphia.

Thornton's winning design, which was submitted after the close of the competition (setting a precedent for confusion in federal architectural competitions persisting to the present time),

was a far simpler, more monumental conception than any of the previous designs. It was one that more clearly reflected the desires of Washington and Jefferson for a Capitol that would somehow express the strength and virtues of the infant republic.

Thornton never had clear sailing in the execution of his design. He declined to supervise its construction; he lacked the technical experience to carry through the work on a major public building in a day when the architect was obliged to provide truly "comprehensive services." The short-tempered doctor thereupon had a succession of difficulties with Hallet, who was retained as supervising architect, and George Hadfield who later succeeded to the job. Both had sought to alter his design, and the even-tempered James Hoban assumed the responsibility for construction from the year 1798, until the appointment of Benjamin Latrobe in March 1803.

Latrobe brought to the position an already established reputation as an architect of great talent and skill. He was much respected by President Jefferson and managed to impose his own ideas upon the interior design and in plans for the central portion of the building which were carried out, after his retirement in 1817, by Charles Bulfinch who completed the original building in 1829.

Robert Mills, who was Architect of Public Buildings at the time, proposed several forms of extension to the Capitol in the year 1850. Mills' designs deserve special mention for it is hard to believe that they were not the genesis of Walter's final designs for the wings and dome. The few sketches of Mills that have survived are much more like the Capitol as we see it today than were Walter's first competition drawings of the same period, for Mills had already seized upon the idea of a great dome, modeled in scale and form after that of St. Peter's, to be constructed over the foundations of the rotunda.

He evidently was intrigued by the idea of developing the expanded building in the form of a cross, the enlarged dome to act as a dominant focal point at the center, but he also prepared drawings of an extension of wings to the sides attached with an ingenious arrangement of interior courts to prevent blanking the windows of the

older building. Mills' plans were not accepted by the Senate, which insisted that a competition be held, and in 1851 President Millard Fillmore appointed Thomas U. Walter as Architect of the Capitol. Mills at that time was already 70 and died four years later, in March 1855. Walter was 47 and destined to work on the Capitol for the next 14 years.

The list of designs for "the Capitol that never was" continued to the turn of the century, and the more familiar proposals of Carrere & Hastings for expansion of the building in the year 1905 by the survival of two plans for monstrous enlargements submitted by Thomas Walter in 1874, nine years after his retirement as Architect of the Capitol.

Walter had apparently never completely given up an infatuation with his earliest competition studies, which extended a vast interior gallery eastward from the rotunda, and the years he had spent since leaving Washington, working on Philadelphia's City Hall, might have clouded the esthetic judgment of any man. The ubiquitous Washington firm of Smithmeyer & Pelz submitted a grotesque scheme in 1881 that would have left nothing of the original central portion of the building but the rotunda and dome, which they planned to embellish with eight additional domed turrets.

Admittedly the present proposal for the extension of the West Front is more modest than some that have been discarded in the past, but it has neither the merit of sensitive historic preservation nor the merit of bold architectural concepts. It falls to the inevitable level of an unhappy compromise, for it fails to recognize that time has changed what can and cannot be done to this one building that symbolizes the aspirations and growth of the country from the time of its founding through the age of confidence and material prosperity which characterized the last decades of the 19th century.

If the old stones of the Capitol are crumbling let them be restored, or replaced if need be, but let us refrain from padding its bones with layers of rooms until it becomes a shapeless mass signifying nothing but its own bulk. Congress deserves a mid-20th century answer to its space needs, not a misguided mid-19th century alteration to a venerable building deserving of respectful preservation. ■



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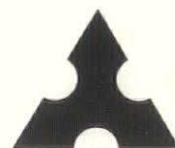
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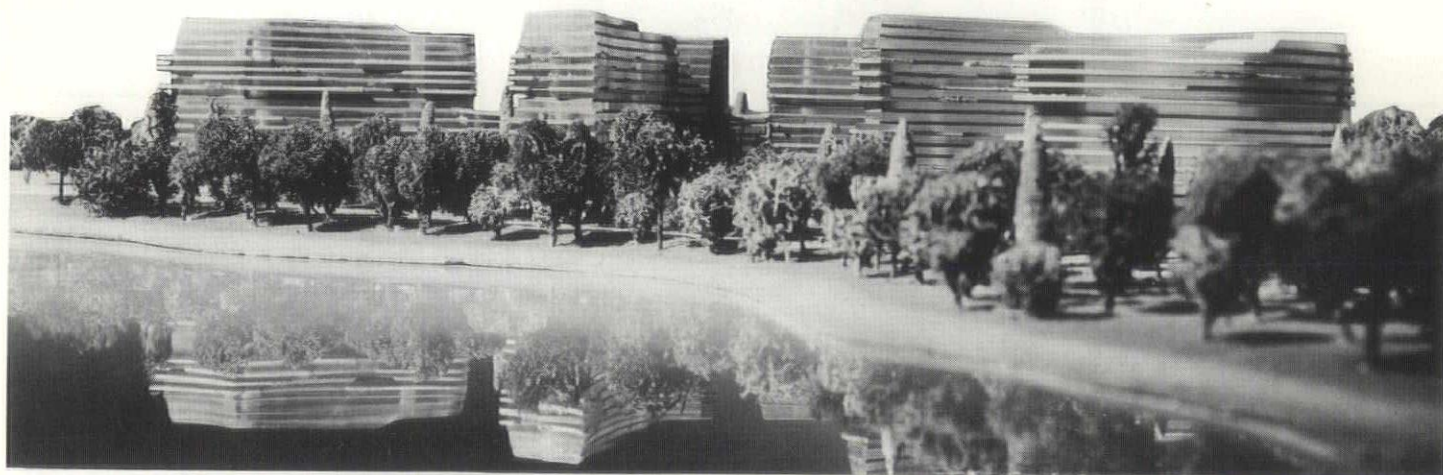
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