



THE CLARK YEARS,

1865–1902

When Walter left Washington, neither the extension nor the dome was complete. A temporary wooden floor closed the eye of the inner dome, blocking views to Brumidi's half-finished *Apotheosis of Washington*. Only one of the porticoes was finished on the outside, but the interiors of the wings were complete. Sheds and shops that littered the grounds were being torn down one by one as they ceased being useful. There was now talk of enlarging and landscaping the grounds, giving them professional attention after their years as a disheveled construction site.

Walter's departure caused some commotion in the office. On June 1, 1865, the commissioner of public buildings appointed his son, B. B. French, Jr., architect of the Capitol extension and wrote Secretary Harlan to inform him of the fact. In a few days the secretary overturned French's act, reminding him that the office was filled by a presidential appointment. French immediately put his son to work as a clerk in the architect's office, bestowing the impressive title of "supervising engineer" upon him.

Within a week of leaving Washington, Walter was notified that the president had accepted his

resignation. Throughout the summer of 1865, however, he thought there would be a change of heart in the administration and awaited a recall. His legal troubles with Anderson and curiosity about the library extension brought him back regularly to Washington. At the commissioner's urging, the secretary of interior ordered the library project advertised for bids, attracting a variety of builders and entrepreneurs. Samuel Strong, the superintendent of the Capitol extension forced out of office in 1852, reappeared as a contractor, as did Charles B. Cluskey, a local architect. Charles Fowler and his former partners, Adrian Janes and Charles Kirtland, also resubmitted bids. The lowest offer, however, was received from the Architectural Iron Works of New York City, which was awarded the contract on June 29, 1865. Under French's supervision work resumed on the library project the following day. Walter soon heard that the ironworkers regretted bidding so low (\$146,000) and were looking for ways to annul their contract. He shuddered at the prospect of construction shortcuts and inferior workmanship that would reflect poorly on him as the architect. But now he was only a sideline observer, viewing the situation from a distance. Walter wrote to the assistant secretary of the interior about the troubled project:

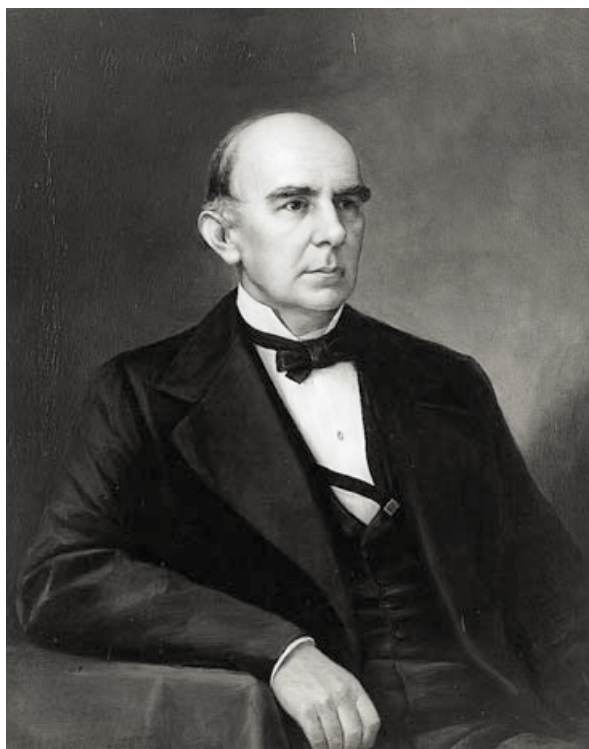
I would not have the responsibility of that work upon me in its present relations and conditions for any consideration the Dept. could suggest. If the Secy. had talked 10 minutes with me on the subject before he put the ball in motion, I

Scene at the Pennsylvania Avenue Entrance to the Capitol at Washington on the Daily Adjournment of Congress (Detail)

by F. Dielman, *Harper's Weekly*, April 28, 1866

think he would have saved himself some trouble—The accounts I have of the anxieties of the contractors are *heart rendering*.¹

Out of office more than a month, Walter remained hopeful that the administration would reconsider his resignation, but the chances were fading fast. Soon after his resignation became official, the secretary of the interior tapped Edward Clark to fill the position temporarily until President Johnson named a successor. When Walter learned



Portrait of Edward Clark

by Constantino Brumidi

ca. 1865

*A*s a student in Walter's office, Clark (1822–1902) moved from Philadelphia to Washington in 1851 to continue his apprenticeship. He worked at various jobs, first for his master and later for Captain Meigs as superintendent of the Patent Office extension.

Clark's fifty-one-year service in the architect's office—thirty-seven as its head—were productive yet unspectacular. He was more comfortable attending to administrative details than solving design challenges, which were left to hired consultants. This management style perfectly suited the times and foreshadowed the way the office would be operated in the twentieth century.

of the arrangement he thought that Clark would refuse a permanent appointment if the office remained under the commissioner. "The Secy. will not find any Architect to accept the office," he wrote naively, "while under the degrading conditions which drove me away."² Walter's high-minded convictions notwithstanding, Clark was hard at work behind the scenes hoping to transform his temporary job into a permanent appointment. Easygoing, practical, and likable, Clark was adept at keeping peace, making friends, and landing jobs. On the strength of his experience and popularity, the president appointed him architect of the Capitol extension on August 30, 1865.

During the 1865 building season, Clark completed the east portico in front of the House wing; he raised the first column on the north portico at the end of August. For the next year's work, he requested and received an appropriation of \$175,000 to continue the porticoes. To expedite matters, Clark abandoned monolithic shafts in favor of using two stones. In April 1866, however, the chairman of the House Committee on Public Buildings wrote the secretary of interior objecting to the shortcut. He wanted to substitute eight new monolithic shafts for the two-piece shafts already in place. The cost would be small and the dignity of the porticoes would be restored.³ Inside, work progressed slowly on the library extension. By mid-October, demolition was complete and the roofs were under way. (The north room was occupied in the fall of 1866, while its counterpart south of the main reading room was finished at the beginning of 1867.) The new marble floor in Statuary Hall was also completed during the year, and the room stood ready to receive commemorative statues from the states.

While on one of his visits to Washington in November 1865, Walter climbed up on the scaffold where Brumidi worked on *The Apotheosis of Washington*. He was disappointed not to find Brumidi but later wrote him: "I like the picture very much; you have greatly improved it both in figures and tone—I think it will be perfect when seen from below."⁴ Although the painting was finished by the time of Walter's unexpected visit, the artist declined to have the scaffold removed until workmen finished installing the gas lights that would illuminate the picture at night: he knew that he might need to make some adjustments after seeing the work



**View of the Capitol
from the Southeast**
ca. 1865

*T*he east portico of the House wing was completed during the summer of 1865.

**Portico Construction
1865**

*T*he first column on the north portico was raised on August 31, 1865. Four additional shafts—two rough and two finished—appear in the foreground.



Detail of Portico Stonework

*T*he ceilings of the porticoes were marble with egg-and-dart moldings outlining the deep coffers. Also seen in this closeup view are the familiar elements of the Corinthian order—the capital with its distinctive acanthus leaves and volutes, and the modillions and dentils belonging to the cornice. (1974 photograph.)



Inner Dome

Construction of the dome was completed in January 1866 when the scaffold was removed below the 4,664-square-foot painting, *The Apotheosis of George Washington*. The gigantic figures appear life-size when seen from the floor 180 feet away. (1990 photograph.)

artificially lit. He also wanted time to retouch the *giornate* (the joints between each day's application of plaster and paint) but was obliged to postpone that job. Five hundred dollars was retained from his fee to cover the cost of repairing the *giornate*, but he was never given the chance to do the work. The scaffold was removed in January 1866, using old sails borrowed from the Navy Yard to catch the dirt that would fall to the rotunda floor.⁵ After more than a decade of hard work by a legion of laborers, riggers, carpenters, machinists, foremen, pattern makers, foundry workers, painters, glaziers, engineers, draftsmen, artists, and an architect—the great iron dome was finished.

B. B. French, Jr., sent Walter a photograph of the completed painting a few weeks after the scaffold came down. The retired architect was impressed with the photography as well as the painting, which he declared “a decided success.” In his opinion the United States government had made quite a bargain with this particular work of art. For creating its counterpart at the Panthéon in Paris, Antoine Jean Gros had been paid 100,000 francs and made a baron, while Brumidi's fresco was one-third larger, ten feet higher, and was a “far better painting.”⁶



The Rotunda

The iron inner dome stands on sandstone walls erected in the early 1820s. (1958 photograph.)

ENLARGING THE GROUNDS

In his annual report for 1865, the commissioner of public buildings called attention to the necessity of enlarging and enclosing the Capitol grounds. The recommendation was nothing new; French himself had called for improving the grounds while commissioner during the Pierce administration eleven years earlier.

The two new wings came within a few feet of A Street north and A Street south, and construction activities had long since caused sections of the old iron fence to be removed. French suggested closing a short stretch of north A Street and the equivalent stretch of south A Street in order to give the grounds additional area. Under French's proposal, the land around the Capitol would have assumed the shape of a "T," growing from thirty-one to forty-one acres. The most attractive aspect of the proposal was that it did not require the government to acquire private property. Closing the streets simply united parcels of publicly owned land, with a minimal financial outlay.

On the last day of the Pierce administration, the Senate debated the idea of closing both A Streets and extending the grounds north and south to both B Streets, a proposal that required the acquisition of two privately owned city squares. Some senators wanted to see the grounds extended even further—all the way to C Streets north and south and west to Third Street. An enlargement of that scale, in some minds, better reflected the importance of the building, but it would also require the purchase of fifteen squares of land and entail considerable expenditure. The more modest of the two schemes was favored by James Bayard of Delaware, chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Buildings, while the more ambitious enlargement was supported by Stephen Douglas of Illinois and William P. Fessenden of Maine. Fessenden was convinced that the grounds would eventually extend to C Streets north and south and argued that it would be more economical to proceed right away rather than wait until rising land values prohibited such acquisitions. In his address to the Senate, Fessenden said:

Now, sir, that we shall be obliged to go to a larger extent on each side of the Capitol, and take in some portion of those grounds is very manifest. In the first place, to a person walking up in this direction, when he arrives at the bottom of the grounds the Capitol can not be seen. It makes no show, or a very small portion of it does so. It does not present the appearance that a building that has cost so much ought to do. Considering for one single moment what the feeling of this country is—that if we are not we are to be the greatest nation on the face of this earth, it would seem very singular to allow the building up of this city to go on, and to be contracted in grounds as we are at present, or must be if what the committee proposes be

adopted, and leave it to the future to clear the buildings surrounding the Capitol at a very much greater cost than would be necessary at the present time.⁷

Against the advice of the Committee on Public Buildings, the Senate agreed on March 3, 1857, to enlarge the grounds to the extensive boundaries advocated by Douglas and Fessenden. Due to cost, however, the measure was defeated in the House.

Year after year, the commissioner or the architect called on Congress to make a decision regarding the Capitol grounds. As different plans were discussed, some land owners in the neighborhood were reluctant to make improvements while others were busily making improvements that would increase the eventual acquisition cost to the government. Uncertainty made it difficult to rent property with long-term leases. In 1860, the district attorney for the District of Columbia was asked to determine the fair cash value of real estate located within the two squares bordering the Capitol grounds along A Streets north and south. On February 13, 1861, Robert Ould reported that it would require about \$500,000 to enlarge the grounds by closing the streets and annexing the two privately owned squares. The grounds would then encompass fifty-eight acres.

The Civil War prevented Congress from making the appropriation necessary to carry out any of the enlargement schemes. In his 1865 annual report, Edward Clark recommended the adoption of the enlargement proposed earlier by B. B. French so that the terracing of the west grounds could begin. In 1866, Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois resurrected Robert Ould's estimate for enlarging the grounds to fifty-eight acres and advocated that the government acquire the land using the appraised values enumerated in 1861. He also proposed landscape improvements. Trumbull noted that the elevation of the ground at First Street east was eight feet higher than the base of the Capitol's center steps, a condition that gave the building a "very low appearance." Removing the high ground in front would improve not only appearances but drainage as well.

After the war the House and Senate Committees on Public Buildings and Grounds annually reported bills authorizing the enlargement of the grounds, and each year objections in the House of Representatives thwarted the legislation. Support



View of the Capitol, Looking Southwest
ca. 1867

After sixteen years, the Capitol extension was completed in 1867. At the time this photograph was taken several small items, such as the stone caps for the cheek blocks of the Senate portico, remained to be installed.



Scene at the Pennsylvania Avenue Entrance to the Capitol at Washington on the Daily Adjournment of Congress
by F. Dielman, *Harper's Weekly*, April 28, 1866

Souvenir vendors wait hopefully as sightseers leave the grounds following an afternoon watching Congress in session.

in the Senate was far greater, but hardly unanimous. Some objected to the expenditure as contrary to the principles of economy, and some objected to any improvement in Washington that would keep the seat of government from moving westward. In 1866, for instance, Senator Jacob Howard of Michigan claimed not to see the necessity of expending money to enlarge the grounds when vast tracts of free land awaited in the Mississippi River valley. In 1870, James Harlan, the former secretary of the interior who had returned to the Senate, presented a petition from the Iowa legislature objecting to any and all appropriations for improvements in the District of Columbia, as the removal of government to the center of the nation was “only a question of time.”⁸ Even if the government stayed in Washington, Harlan insisted, the expense of enlarging the Capitol grounds was “merely a luxury and nothing else. There is no public necessity for making this expenditure at the present time, except to enhance the pleasure of pleasure seekers, those who may desire to recline in the shade of the groves located or to be located on these grounds.”⁹

Regardless of their size, the grounds required upkeep. In 1867, \$20,000 was given to the architect of the Capitol extension for grading, removing work sheds, and improving the grounds and streets around the Capitol. Under the terms of this otherwise minor piece of legislation the architect was put in charge of improvements that in years past would have been the domain of the commissioner of public buildings. The grounds of the Capitol had been under the supervision of the commissioner or a board of commissioners since George Washington appointed the first board in 1791. On March 4, 1867, Radical Republicans in Congress abolished the office of commissioner as a way of punishing Benjamin Brown French for his steadfast loyalty to President Andrew Johnson. Robert Schenck of Ohio ridiculed French on the floor of the House and had the clerk read a poem the commissioner wrote praising the 17th president, which gave members a hearty “jollification.”¹⁰ The humiliating jeer was aimed more at the scorned president, rather than at the author of the innocuous rhyme, but it indicated the political consequence of supporting Johnson.

After the office of commissioner was abolished, its duties were transferred to the chief engineer of the army, General A. A. Humphreys, who, in turn, appointed General Nathaniel Michler engineer in charge of public buildings and grounds. While the change may have been prompted by French's politics, it also addressed the problem that the vast duties of the office had become too much for one man to handle. The army, it was thought, could surely take better care of so much valuable public property in the capital city.

On March 14, 1867, French surrendered books, ledgers, accounts, and other property held by the commissioner of public buildings and accompanied General Michler to see the secretary of the interior. Michler remained in charge of the Capitol for a couple of weeks: on March 30 Congress placed the maintenance of the Capitol building and grounds in the hands of Edward Clark, who was just about to finish work on the extension. Thus, the architect replaced the commissioner as the official with a permanent place in the government with oversight of the Capitol as his principal responsibility. To reflect the expanded jurisdiction of the office, the word "extension" was dropped from Clark's title, who was thereafter called the "architect of the Capitol."

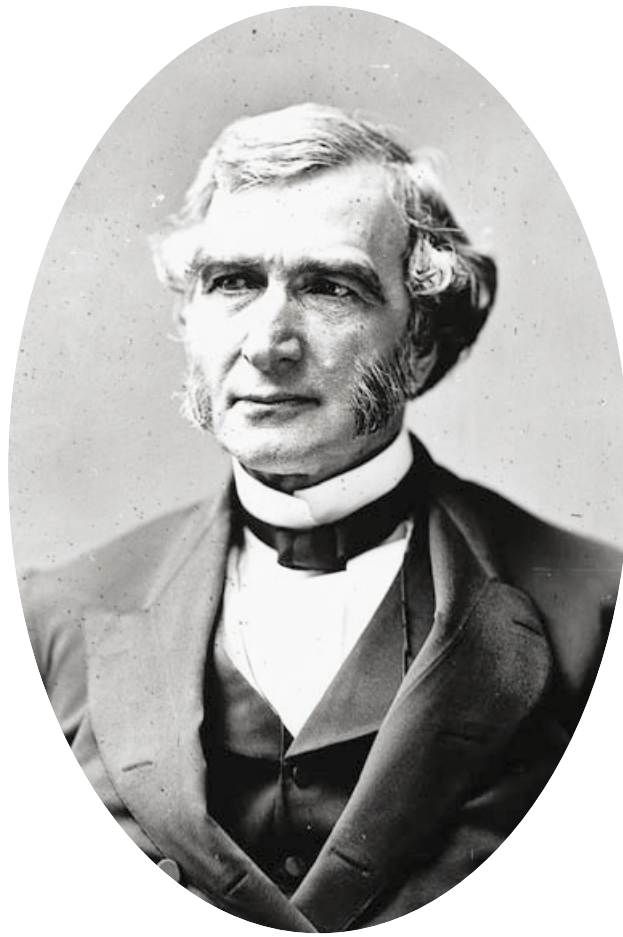
Congress granted the architect of the Capitol a small sum to grade the streets and regulate the grounds around the building. Part of the funds was used to remove work sheds and other obsolete nuisances. In 1868, Clark again urged Congress to decide on a plan for enlarging the grounds. He now recommended extending the grounds to C Streets north and south to ultimately unite them with the Mall and the grounds around the President's House. He envisioned carriage drives connecting these parks through a system of roads, bridges, and underpasses that would carry pleasure vehicles without intersecting with street traffic. "These drives could be so arranged," Clark wrote, "that carriages could run almost from the Capitol to the President's mansion without touching a paved road."¹¹ A similar circulation system, separating those enjoying the park from the traffic merely passing through, had been successfully incorporated into the design of New York's Central Park and may have inspired Clark's proposal.

Year after year Justin Morrill, now in the Senate and chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, introduced legislation to acquire two squares of land to extend the Capitol grounds to B Street north (modern day Constitution Avenue) and B Street south (modern day Independence Avenue). While not as ambitious or grand as some had hoped, it was the most realistic proposal considering the opposition that had been encountered every year in the House of Representatives. On March 5, 1872, the junior senator from Vermont was hopeful that his efforts on behalf of the Capitol grounds would prove successful:

I desire to say to the Senate that this is the same proposition that has passed time and again, year after year, for the addition of two squares of ground on the east side of the Capitol. It seems that the Senate has been unanimously in the opinion that it was good economy to take these two squares, for years, and I should not propose the amendment again only that I understand there is a prospect that the other House will now assent to the proposition.¹²

Morrill's amendment easily passed the Senate. A few days later the House of Representatives took up the matter amid a long and rambling debate. Norton P. Chipman, a delegate from the District of Columbia, praised the beauty and grandeur of the Capitol that so aptly reflected the strength and magnificence of the nation. But as soon as the eyes focused on the grounds, he claimed, it became "a standing reproach and disgrace to the whole people of this country."¹³ The vastly enlarged and newly domed Capitol seemed to demand a suitable landscape setting to correspond with the building's grandeur. It was not dignified, he argued, to have private property so close to the Capitol, property that housed noisy restaurants and bawdy saloons. Delay posed hardships to his constituents on Capitol Hill, who did not know how or whether to proceed with improvements to their property. Only those who wished to see the capital city relocated to the west, people Chipman characterized as "unpatriotic" and "mischievous," would deny the wisdom of acquiring the two squares to enlarge the grounds. "Let us, then," Chipman concluded:

no longer while we point with pride to this great building, and exhibit to our friends and visitors its beauties and the glory of its architecture; let us no longer be obliged, as we conduct them from this splendid monument to American



Justin S. Morrill

ca. 1870

Library of Congress

*D*uring his forty-three years in Washington representing Vermont in Congress, Morrill (1810–1898) exercised considerable influence over public buildings in the capital city. As a congressman, he introduced legislation to convert the old House chamber into National Statuary Hall. This action saved the historic room by giving it a new function and thwarted those who wished to see it rebuilt into offices. As senator, he spearheaded the successful effort to enlarge the Capitol grounds and was instrumental in securing the landscaping services of Frederick Law Olmsted. He supported the idea of moving the Library of Congress out of the Capitol and into a separate facility. He also wished to provide the Supreme Court with a new building, but that proposition failed to win support during his lifetime. In addition to his effect on Capitol Hill, Morrill was instrumental in securing legislation to finish the Washington Monument.

taste, to apologize for the shabby, mean, and disgraceful condition of its surroundings.¹⁴

Horace Maynard of Tennessee agreed, saying it was not right to allow the Capitol to be surrounded by such ordinary buildings and unkept grounds. But James Garfield of Ohio, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee (and future president of the United States) disagreed. He thought the grounds were large enough and did not wish to expend public money to purchase any more. Others pointed to the spectacle of war widows and orphans begging for their “little pensions,” while Congress turned its back on them to spend money foolishly on land acquisitions. Robert B. Roosevelt of New York City thought the treasury could satisfy the claims of all widows and still have enough money for the Capitol grounds. To the great amusement of the House, he claimed with mock alarm that “widows had entire control of the appropriations of this House” and felt that signs should be posted in committee rooms warning of the danger of approaching widows.¹⁵ Others noted the irony of Congress buying land from individuals when it routinely gave land away to rich corporations. Examples of this practice included the train stations built on the Mall without cost to the railroad companies, which reaped huge profits from congressional largess.

After hours of debate, with exhaustive arguments and bewildering digressions, the House failed to reach an agreement that day on Morrill’s plan to enlarge the Capitol grounds. But a month later on April 12, 1872, following another long and grueling afternoon of tedious speeches, the House finally—and narrowly—passed an amended version of the bill. On May 8, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed legislation authorizing the secretary of the interior to purchase private property in the two squares at prices not exceeding the 1861 appraised values. The sum of \$400,000 was appropriated, and the secretary was further directed to auction salvaged building materials and apply the receipts to the project. After two decades of discussion, the Capitol grounds were about to receive some professional attention.

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED

A year after Congress authorized the enlargement of the grounds, Senator Morrill secured an appropriation of \$125,000 for grading, paving, and improving the landscape around the Capitol. Soon after the money became available in March 1873, the senator wrote landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted asking that he develop a new plan for the grounds. “I hope you may feel sufficient interest in this rather national object,” Morrill wrote bluntly, “not to have it botched.”¹⁶ Olmsted was pleased with the offer, but an eye ailment prevented him from attending to the project immediately. Due to Olmsted’s preeminence in his field, Morrill was willing to wait. Clark was relieved at the prospect of Olmsted taking responsibility for landscaping the grounds. “Not having any practice or pretensions to skill as landscape gardener,” he reported to Congress, “I earnestly recommend that a first-class artist in this line may be employed to plan, plant, and lay out the grounds.”¹⁷ This signaled a fundamental change in the way architectural and other design services were provided to Congress. While taking care of day-to-day matters, the architect of the Capitol would now also supervise the work of consultants hired to perform large design tasks. It also began a century-long practice of hiring consulting architects and other designers without competition of any sort.

In the year after Morrill wrote his letter, Olmsted made several trips to Washington to investigate the problems he was about to face. Morrill wanted his thoughts regarding the possibilities for improving the Capitol grounds, as well as any additional advice regarding the landscape situation in Washington. Olmsted set forth an analysis of existing conditions at the Capitol in a letter written on January 26, 1874. Among his keenest concerns was the way in which trees affected views to the Capitol from various directions:

Under present conditions there is no position where the eye of the observer can hold it all in a fair perspective, none from which its proportions are not either concealed or seen in effect a little distorted. The best points of view are on the Northwest and the Northeast—but from these it appears crowding over the edge of a hill and having no proper standing room.



Frederick Law Olmsted

Photograph by Barlett F. Henny, ca. 1895

Courtesy of the National Park Service
Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

*A*fter careers in farming and journalism, Olmsted (1822–1903) became interested in landscape architecture while visiting England. There he discovered the urban park and came to appreciate its role in the health and happiness of city dwellers. Back in America, Olmsted formed a partnership with an English-born architect, Calvert Vaux. In 1858 Olmsted and Vaux were commissioned to execute their plan of Central Park in New York City, which launched Olmsted on a lifelong career as a landscape architect. City parks in Brooklyn, Buffalo, Detroit, and Boston were among his notable public commissions, which built upon the success of Central Park. He also designed numerous college campuses, city squares, and suburban developments. His work at the Capitol confirmed his position at the top of the profession. Olmsted’s landscape plan for George W. Vanderbilt’s “Biltmore” estate in North Carolina was perhaps his most significant private commission. One of Olmsted’s most important and lasting legacies was the scenic conservation of Niagara Falls and the Yosemite Valley.

The face of the hill is broken by two formal terraces which are relatively thin and weak, by no means sustaining in forms and proportion the grandeur of the superimposed mass.

These disadvantages of the Capitol are mainly due to the single fact that the base lines of the wings were not adapted to the ground they stand upon but were laid down with relation to those of the original much smaller central structure, and that the trees now growing about it were planted with no thought of the present building but only with regard to the old one. A

considerable number of those on the East have also been introduced subsequently to the original planting and apparently without reference to the purposes then had in view.

It is chiefly by these trees that the design of the architect is on that side obscured. On the west a few of the permanent trees were probably planted with consideration only for the effect they would have while young and small; others, unquestionably, with the expectation that they would be thinned out. Had this been done at the proper time the Capitol would be seen to much better advantage than it is now and the general effect of the trees would be much more umbrageous as well as more harmonious with its architecture.¹⁸



View of the Capitol, Looking Southeast
1874

*C*losing A Streets north and south and buying two city squares enlarged the grounds immediately around the Capitol to its present size of fifty-eight acres. This view was taken after the streets were closed but before Olmsted's landscape improvements were begun.

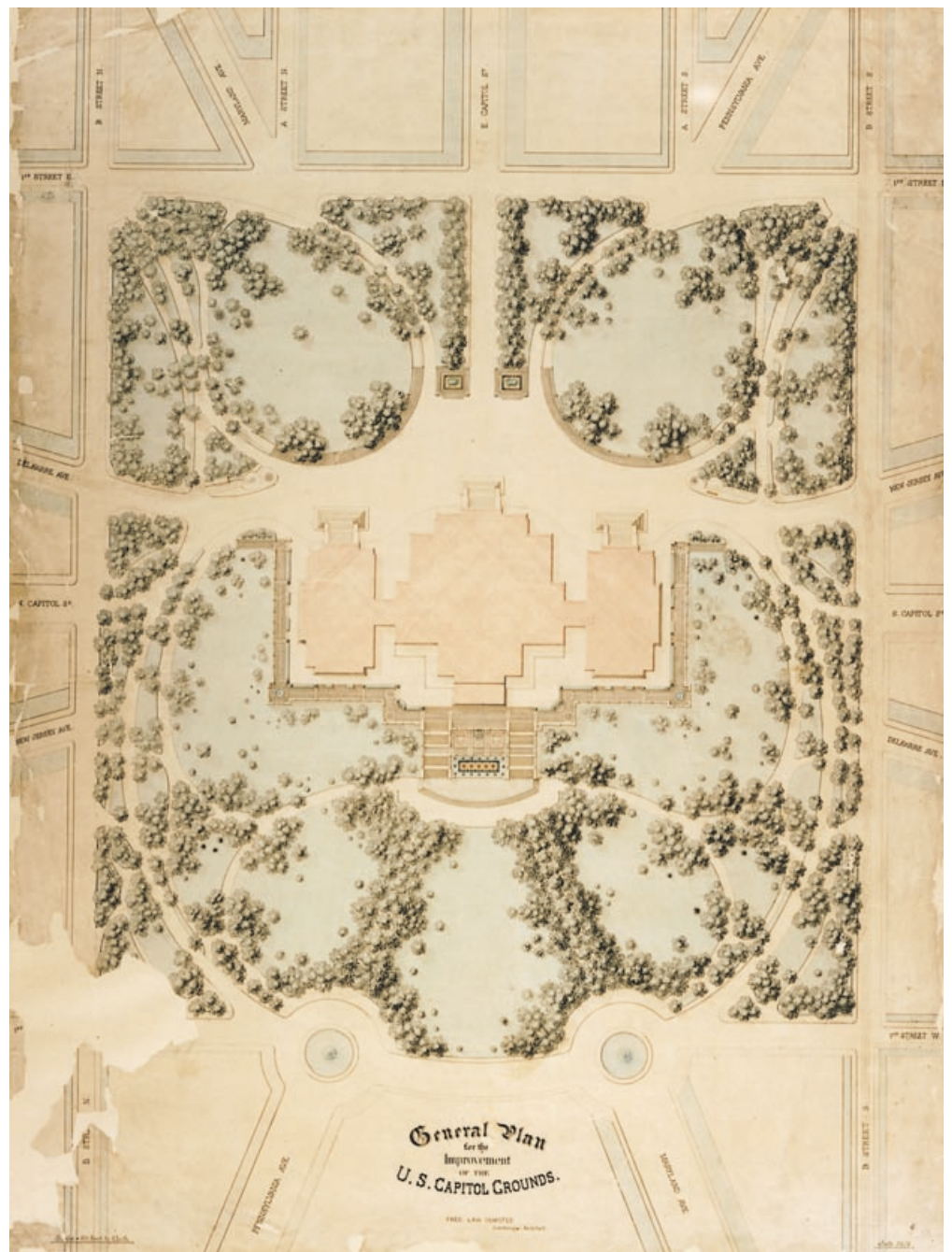
The creation of a more sophisticated landscape for the Capitol was Olmsted's principal mandate. But he also looked forward to making improvements to all the open ground from the Capitol to Lafayette Square north of the President's House. As Clark had suggested earlier, the public lands of the Botanic Garden, the Mall, and the President's Parade Ground (today called the "Ellipse") could be developed under a uniform plan that would impose a degree of harmony amid the disparate parks. As things stood, individual government buildings were surrounded by their own landscapes, which differed in style and effect. The result, Olmsted claimed, was "broken, confused and unsatisfactory." From a citywide perspective, marble, granite, and brick public buildings were sprinkled among cheaper commercial and residential buildings, producing a bewildering effect. "In short," Olmsted scolded, "the Capital of the Union manifests nothing so much as disunity." (A charge of "disunity" was very serious at that time.) A coordinating landscape and better planning would do much to correct the impression of helter-skelter. His recommendations were farsighted, but they would go unheeded until his son helped revive them early in the next century.

On March 27, 1874, Olmsted stated the terms under which he would begin work. He requested an initial fee of \$1,500 for a general design, in addition to traveling expenses. The next day Senator Morrill wrote Olmsted (with the concurrence of James H. Platt, chairman of the House Committee on Public Building and Grounds) to accept the proposal. Morrill soon steered legislation through the Senate authorizing employment of a topographical engineer to survey the grounds and pinpoint every

tree, walk, drive, curb, bench and lamppost on the site. An appropriation of \$3,000 paid the engineering cost as well as Olmsted's initial fee. Taking notice of the movement toward landscape improvements, *Harper's Weekly* reported in its "Home and Foreign Gossip" column of March 7, 1874: "Discussions are going on in Congress in regards to plans for improving and beautifying the grounds surrounding the Capitol in Washington. . . . Great bodies, it is said, move slowly, and when there are several great bodies in charge of a matter, they often do not move at all."¹⁹

By June 1874 Olmsted had fully digested the special problems presented by the Capitol landscape, and he offered his general solution in a single drawing that would guide the project over the next two decades. From the west the Capitol would be approached by pedestrians using two shaded walks following the lines of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues. Gone was the central walk, which was overgrown with trees that blocked a particularly fine view. Secondary curving walks took longer but easier paths up the hill and offered changing prospects of the building and grounds. One of the boldest features of the general plan was the suggestion for a marble terrace to replace the grass berm, which Olmsted thought too puny to uphold visually the stupendous structure above. A new terrace would serve as mighty pedestal for the Capitol and its soaring dome.

As in the past, the principal carriage entrances to the east plaza were from the north and south. A new entrance was created from First Street east. Flanking it were two expansive lawns planted with trees shading the walkways but not blocking views. Much of the open lawn area had once been the site of bars, boarding houses, and other private property. Throughout the plan, Olmsted imposed symmetrical order without geometric formality. Curving walks were used in preference to straight ones, contributing to the sense of informality. Much of what later landscape architects would call the "hard-*scape*"—fences, walks, lamps, and such—shows oriental, classical, and Romanesque influences. The planting conformed to Olmsted's idea of managed scenery. The framing of views was an important aesthetic consideration: on a pragmatic level, Olmsted had also to reconcile the convergence of fifteen streets and avenues. The grounds were to be planted not as an arboretum, but as a park-like setting that



**General Plan for the Improvement of the U. S. Capitol Grounds
by Frederick Law Olmsted, 1874**

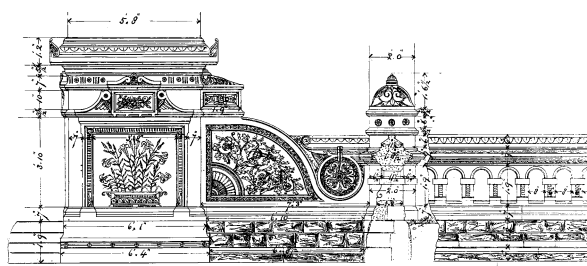
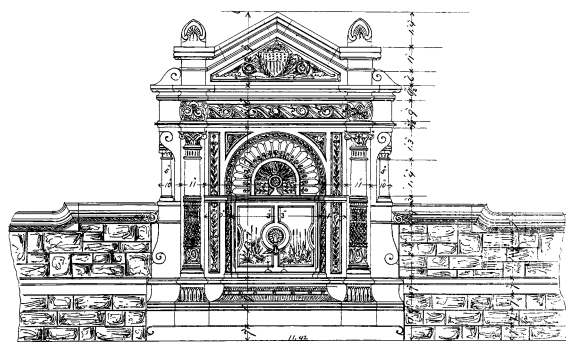
Olmsted presented his overall scheme for landscape improvements in a single drawing, shown here with east at the top. The outline of the Capitol indicated a large east front extension and a more modest addition to the west front, where the Library of Congress was located. The size and shape of these unauthorized additions were presumably provided by the architect of the Capitol.

The most ambitious aspect of Olmsted's proposal was a new marble terrace adjacent to the Capitol's north, south, and west sides. A pair of grand staircases were reached from walks following the lines of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues.

**Designs for a
Fountain (top)
and an Entrance
Pier (bottom)**

by Thomas Wisedell
and Frederick Law
Olmsted, ca. 1875

*T*hese designs
drew upon classical,
Romanesque, and
oriental traditions.



would focus attention on the Capitol. Olmsted carefully and properly kept the landscape as an accessory to the architectural features of the Capitol.

On June 23, 1874, Congress approved Olmsted's plan and put him on an annual salary of \$2,000 to provide general supervision. Along with the approval came an appropriation of \$200,000 to be expended under the direction of the architect of the Capitol. Clark had begun leveling the grounds, filling in, and smoothing the earth before Olmsted's plan was approved, but much remained to be done. In July, Olmsted reported to Senator Morrill that about 400 trees would have to be removed, grading had been contracted at the very reasonable rate of thirty cents per cubic yard, and the search was on for some of the more important ingredients needed for the work ahead, such as "soil, peat, dung, and trees."²⁰ During the first season, 2,500 cubic yards of earth were moved each day. Olmsted was busily designing features and fixtures, such as the low walls bordering the walks and roads and the various lamps needed for lighting the grounds at night. One of his first designs was for the large planters on the east plaza. Each red granite container was to be filled with laurel or other evergreen shrubs in the winter and with callas or papyrus in the summer. Above was an oval bronze vase with a fountain spraying water to create a "constant rainbow

illumination."²¹ At night, the rainbow effect continued under gas lights.

Supervising daily operations was John A. Partridge, whom Olmsted appointed engineer in charge on August 15, 1874. He was described as having "New England training" and being "accustomed to hard work and to nice work, a methodical, deliberate, prudent man, precise and exacting."²² Two years later he was succeeded by F. H. Cobb, who remained on the work until its conclusion. For architectural assistance, Olmsted hired Thomas Wisedell, a native of England who came to America in 1868. He had been an assistant to Olmsted's former partner, Calvert Vaux, and had worked with Olmsted on previous commissions, including Prospect Park in Brooklyn. After Wisedell's death in 1884, architectural services were provided by C. Howard Walker of Boston.

Labor problems plagued the work from the beginning. In mid-August 1874, the first contractor walked off the job, and Clark was obliged to look elsewhere for workers to continue the backbreaking task of grading the grounds. After advertising, he received fourteen bids ranging from fourteen to thirty-five cents per cubic yard. The four lowest bids were accepted. Soon the grounds were visited by a "mob" of laborers demanding an increase in wages of 50 percent. Olmsted looked upon the agitators and saw "25 second class field hands and as many boys and girls . . . a few smarter looking and roguish men." It was hardly a threatening scene: some of the discontented workers napped while others sang hymns.²³ These so-called rowdies were met by the Capitol police, who arrested the ring-leaders and confiscated their weapons. Impressed, the architect testified: "I must say that our Police, which I have always regarded as purely 'ornamental,' proved themselves efficient and 'plucky.'"²⁴

Despite labor problems, progress was made in 1874 on grading and leveling the grounds east of the Capitol. More than 150,000 cubic yards of earth was removed and replaced by new enriched soil on the lawns. A layer of topsoil a foot deep was placed on a fertilized subsoil two and a half feet deep. New gas, sewer, and water pipes were also laid, and the foundations for walks and roads were prepared. The frame office Walter had built in 1862 was cut down the middle, and one half was carted off to a lot adjoining the grounds to be used as the



Capitol Police Force ca. 1870

In 1801, a watchman was employed to guard the Capitol grounds at night, keeping an eye out for persons attempting to steal construction materials or to enter the building illegally. He had no power to make arrests and on occasion had to rely on the Marine Corps for assistance. In 1828, as the Capitol's construction drew to a close and it became a popular tourist destination, a captain and three men were designated as the first Capitol police force. They were expected to protect public property and to expel "disorderly persons, vagrants, and beggars."

Following the Civil War the Capitol police force had grown to three six-man watches. Among the new recruits were African-Americans, who now protected the building that their enslaved forefathers had helped to build. Frederick Douglass, Jr. was one of the first African-Americans to join the Capitol police.

engineer's office. The other half served as Clark's office for a while.

TERRACE AND LIBRARY TANGLE

Improvements to the western grounds were delayed while Congress considered Olmsted's proposal to replace the Bulfinch terrace with a more substantial structure. The improvement would entail a large expense, which had not been previously anticipated, and there were those who could not appreciate the need for such a structure. Complicating the debate was the question of making further enlargements to the Library of Congress, which continually suffered space shortages. The enlargements of the library completed in 1867 were no match for the flood of books, pamphlets, sheet music, engravings, and other materials sent to Washington under the provisions of the Copyright Act of 1870, which required that two copies of any item protected by the law be deposited in the congressional library.

No one doubted the need to provide the library with more room, but there was plenty of disagreement on how that need should be met. Some wanted an addition built on the west front; others proposed removing the library from the Capitol altogether. The first group did not like the idea of a separate library building because of the distance it would place between them and their books. Where to relocate the library facility was another knotty question. Those in the opposing camp could see no end to the library's space needs and warned of the architectural catastrophe of making endless additions to the Capitol. There were merits on both sides of the question, and while the library issue was debated, Olmsted's west terrace would have to wait.

To help sell the idea of a new marble terrace, Olmsted's collaborator, Thomas Wisedell, drew two views of the Capitol's west front. Each rendering showed an addition to the central building fronted by a new portico capped by a broad pediment. Presumably designed in Clark's office, the addition was intended to accommodate a new library extension. The first view showed the old terrace scooped away in the center of the Capitol to make way for the new extension—a condition that intentionally



**The Capitol
with a Proposed
Library Extension**
by Thomas Wisedell
1875

Olmsted hoped this rendering would hasten approval of his terrace design. It showed the Library of Congress enlarged by an extension that would require demolition of the center section of the earthen terrace. The unsightly results seemed to support the need for a marble terrace that could accommodate the library extension.

produced a ridiculous effect. By contrast, the second view showed a sturdy new stone terrace handsomely upholding the library extension. While the library extension was still a question open to debate, Olmsted cleverly used it to help justify his marble terrace.

In January 1875, Clark received a letter from General Montgomery C. Meigs that was critical of Wisedell's renderings. Although he no longer had any direct connection with the Capitol, the opinions of General Meigs still carried a great deal of weight around town. He had no objection to the new terrace, which he called "imposing and beautiful," but he did not like the idea of building an addition to the west center building. In Meigs' opinion, it would harm the appearance of the Capitol when viewed from an angle. The central projection would cut off views to the wings and actually decrease the apparent size of the building. He wrote:

the proposed projection of the central portion of the building, while it will not afford permanent relief to the library, will darken two stories of rooms now not too well lighted, and it will, while costing a large sum, be an actual injury to the effect of the building from the most valuable and important points of view.²⁵

Meigs wrote Olmsted a similar letter. Olmsted replied that he had labored under the impression that the library extension had been practically decided upon and that his terrace had been

designed to accommodate it. In his judgment, the size of the west projection shown in the sketches was about as large as it should be. He thought an addition was acceptable, but agreed that it should be held back as far as possible.

Meigs also asked about the possibility that the terrace might block views to the Capitol, a subject dear to Olmsted's heart. Olmsted described in reply a temporary scaffold that he had built to approximate the height and width of the proposed terrace. The scaffold gave him and others (including Thomas U. Walter, whose name was not mentioned) the opportunity to study and judge the effect the terrace would have on views to the Capitol. To help keep the view open, Olmsted devised a two-level terrace with the first stage five feet lower than the part closer to the building. He concluded: "I think that there is no point of view in which an observer can be expected to place himself, (if my plan is adhered to) at which the Capitol will not appear more stately with the terrace than without."²⁶

On March 3, 1875, Senator Morrill introduced legislation to appropriate \$300,000 to begin the terrace. He acted as if there would be no opposition to the measure: he claimed that every senator who saw the design had approved it. The proposal had the unanimous support of his Committee on Public Buildings, and he had not met a Republican or a Democrat in either house of Congress or any architect who did not agree with making the

improvement. Aside from the grandeur and magnificence of the marble terrace, it would provide fifty-six windowless vaults for storing documents. Morrill maintained that this practical advantage was nevertheless incidental to the main purpose of the terrace, acting as a grand pedestal for the building perched on the brow of a hill.

Any hope of easy passage faded when Senator Allen Thurman of Ohio questioned his colleague from Vermont about vaults under the terrace. He doubted the wisdom of spending so much money “to make some damp vaults to stow away old documents to feed rats . . . of putting these old documents where the moth doth corrupt and where the rats do eat and thrive.”²⁷ Morrill replied by describing conditions at the Treasury building, where the corridors were piled high with documents, and noting that the overflow of copyright books from the Library of Congress needed to be put somewhere. The terrace offered a perfect place to store such items. Thurman still thought it foolish to spend money “to make a cellar to keep old books in.” William B. Allison of Ohio revived the subject of the library extension and advised the Senate not to make the terrace appropriation until “we have settled finally the question of improving the Capitol on the west front.”²⁸

The terrace legislation was tabled soon after Allison took his seat. Morrill waited more than two years to reintroduce it. On June 17, 1878, he submitted an amendment providing \$50,000 to begin work, but he met strong opposition from James B. Beck, the junior senator from Kentucky. Beck ran down a list of expensive federal buildings then under construction, including a new building for the Bureau of Printing and Engraving and a massive new structure for the Navy, War, and State Departments. Every appropriation contained funds for new federal buildings across the country. Now came another request for construction funds “to tear up, under the pretense of improvement, the whole of the west front of the Capitol grounds, to adorn them with stairways, I suppose, which will cost before we get through over a million dollars, probably two.” The senator then took an unusual swipe at Olmsted, whom he implied was self-aggrandizing, wasteful, and lacking in good taste:

If we begin this work now we shall have to spend for five or six consecutive years two, three, or four hundred thousand annually to



Bartholdi Fountain
1876

One of the popular attractions at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia was an iron fountain designed by Frederick August Bartholdi. The base featured aquatic monsters and fishes while three caryatids upheld the wide, shallow basin. Lighted by gas lamps, the fountain made a lively display of fire and water at night.

On November 22, 1876, Bartholdi’s friend Frederick Law Olmsted wrote Edward Clark to say that the fountain was for sale at a reasonable price and to urge him to find a place for it in Washington. He enclosed this drawing in his letter. Following Olmsted’s suggestion, the government paid \$6,000 for the fountain and set it up on the grounds of the Botanic Garden, where it remained until 1927 when the garden was taken off the Mall. It was re-erected in 1932 on its current site in Bartholdi Park, a display garden southwest of the Capitol maintained by the U. S. Botanic Garden.

Bartholdi’s most famous work in America is the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor.

ornament according to the design of somebody who thinks it is going to make him immortal to have his name in the grand plan. We have now a couple of Dutch spittoons standing out on the east front of the Capitol, costing forty or fifty thousand dollars intended, I believe, for fountains. We now find it will require two or three hundred thousand dollars to furnish them with water and fix them up.²⁹

Morrill was annoyed at Beck's sarcastic characterization of the landscape architect as well as his shortsighted vision of future improvements. He asked if it was not strange that Congress made liberal appropriations for buildings everywhere else in the United States, but when it came time to fund work at the Capitol some senators "begrudge every

Statue of John Marshall

by William Wetmore Story

The seated figure of Marshall presided over the Capitol's lower west terrace from 1884 until 1981, when it was relocated to the Supreme Court building. Worn steps leading to the old terrace may also be seen in this ca. 1884 photograph.



little picayune amendment here and compel the completion of these grounds to be procrastinated year after year." Senator Daniel W. Voorhees of Indiana doubted that the improvements under way were any better than the old landscape that had been ripped out. He asked a fellow senator:

if he really believes that this scraggy, ragged line of trees down here are as handsome today as those beautiful chestnuts which lined the walk when he and I first came here together young men in the other branch of Congress. If he answers in the affirmative, I despair of his lines of beauty, of his vision, of his appreciation.³⁰

Morrill again spoke in favor of the appropriation, saying it would cost no more than funding a lighthouse on Lake Superior. The Capitol's outside stairs had been neglected for years and it was time to replace them with something better. Again, Beck opposed the measure, this time citing the unresolved issue regarding the library extension. To him it was folly to build the terrace when it might have to be torn down to make way for a new addition. "It seems to be the general plan all around this Capitol," Beck noted suspiciously, "to put up one year and tear away the next."³¹ The Committee on Appropriations, he said, felt the terrace could wait until the library issue was resolved. Henry B. Anthony of Rhode Island supported Morrill's amendment on economic grounds: after noting the danger of the worn steps, he slyly reminded his colleagues that it cost \$5,000 to bury a member of Congress. Despite that, and other more serious arguments, Morrill's drive to authorize the terrace failed again by a wide margin.

The two prime movers for a separate library building were Ainsworth Spofford, the librarian of Congress, and Timothy Howe of Wisconsin, the Senate's senior member on the Joint Committee on the Library. With their push, Congress authorized a design competition for a new library building and appointed a commission to select a plan. The commission and competition were authorized on March 3, 1873, and more than nine months later the Washington firm of Smithmeyer & Pelz was awarded \$1,500 for its first-place design. (Thomas U. Walter, one of the twenty-seven competitors, was awarded \$100 for his entry.) On June 23, 1874, the competition was reopened and \$2,000 appropriated to acquire additional designs. In August 1874 Senator Howe asked Walter to prepare two designs for the

enlargement of the Capitol. One scheme showed an addition on the west front for the additional accommodation of the library, while an eastern extension addressed the problem of the dome's apparent want of support. The second design omitted the library extension and showed an addition only on the east side of the building. Walter was paid \$1,000 for the drawings, a welcome sum as he waited in vain for a recall to Washington to improve his woefully diminished financial situation.

Despite years of discussion on the matter, the competing factions could not reach an agreement on the best way to accommodate the library's needs. In 1876, Howe's committee recommended a separate building at the foot of Capitol Hill where the Botanic Garden was located, but there were those who still could not accept the idea of the library leaving the Capitol. Congress appointed a committee to reconsider the subject in 1878. The majority of its members reported in favor of a new building located on Judiciary Square, several blocks northwest of the Capitol. A minority favored a location opposite the east plaza, but at least one important consensus had been reached: everyone agreed that the library should have its own building. At the same time, Ainsworth Spofford asked Thomas U. Walter to estimate the cost of enlarging the Capitol for the library and was told that about four million dollars would be needed. The librarian subsequently used Walter's estimate to justify funding a separate facility.


George F. Edmunds, the senior senator from Vermont, was among those who opposed the idea of moving the library out of the Capitol. During an extensive discussion on the matter, which took place on February 11, 1879, he presented four ways of enlarging the Capitol for the accommodation of the library. The most daring was a design prepared by Alfred B. Mullett, who had been supervising architect of the treasury from 1866 until 1874. His plan called for an addition to the east front containing a new chamber for the Supreme Court and a broad corridor in front of the rotunda running north and south to connect the House and Senate wings. The former Supreme Court chamber and adjacent rooms would be turned over to the Library of Congress and the rotunda would become the library's main reading room.³² The suggestion found little support.

President Rutherford B. Hayes wrote in favor of a new building for the Library of Congress in his 1879 annual message. (President Chester Arthur would repeat the recommendation two years later.) In an address to the Senate delivered on March 31, 1879, Justin Morrill lent his support to the idea. *The American Architect and Building News*, the nation's leading architectural journal of the period, happily quoted the senator, who condemned the notion of enlarging the Capitol as "perhaps the greatest blunder now in process of incubation among civilized peoples."³³ With momentum building for a separate facility, another commission was appointed on June 8, 1880, to again examine the long-range needs for the library. Washington architects Edward Clark and John Smithmeyer and Boston architect Alexander Esty were named to the "Joint Select Committee on Additional Accommodations for the Library." Their report, issued on September 29, 1880, strongly and unequivocally recommended a new building to house the congressional library. They calculated that in a very few years the entire Capitol would be needed to shelve the library's holdings. As that was unthinkable, a new building was fully justified.

The report ended talk of extending the Capitol on the west front for the library. It did not, however, put an end to ideas for enlarging the building in other ways. In 1882, an architect from Texas submitted a photograph of a design that would raise the dome and insert two floors of stack space above the rotunda. The idea was seized upon by Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts and others who still wanted to keep the library in the Capitol. To kill the foolish scheme as quickly as possible, Spofford forwarded it to General Meigs for comment, which the engineer gave in his usual thorough and analytical style. After providing a detailed description and analysis of the materials used in the construction of the center building, such as handmade brick, sandstone, and lime mortar, Meigs concluded that no new weight could be safely supported. He was decidedly against the proposal on aesthetic grounds as well. "To raise the center, even if it were safe," he wrote, "would not improve its architecture. . . . Nowhere is to be found a great a building of such rich and graceful composition as the present Capitol of the United States."³⁴

In September 1882, six months after Meigs reported on the dome-raising scheme, Smithmeyer was sent to Europe by the library committee to study national libraries there. In 1885, President Grover Cleveland joined his two predecessors in recommending a new library building in his first message to Congress. Finally, on April 15, 1886, Congress authorized the construction of a building to house its library on First Street east. One half million dollars was appropriated to begin construction, with another \$585,000 allocated to acquire the site. (Unfortunately, the location of the library caused a block of Pennsylvania Avenue to be closed, thus obstructing views to the Capitol from the southeast.) In years to come, the Supreme Court and most congressional members and committees followed the library out of the Capitol into new buildings. The new library had become the first step towards the creation of a Capitol campus.

“FEARFUL BOTCHERY”

 Although the new library building was not funded until 1886, it was widely viewed as a *fait accompli* when Smithmeyer was sent to Europe by Senator Howe's committee four years earlier. At that time, with the question all but settled, Justin Morrill next tried to direct the Senate's attention back to the stalled terrace project. In an appropriation approved on August 7, 1882, he was able to secure a small sum (\$10,000) to construct the permanent approach to the terrace on its northeast corner. Most senators did not realize that the money was intended to begin the terrace—perhaps because Morrill never used the word “terrace,” but spoke only of the “approach.” Yet with that money the terrace made a modest and irreversible beginning in the fall of 1882.

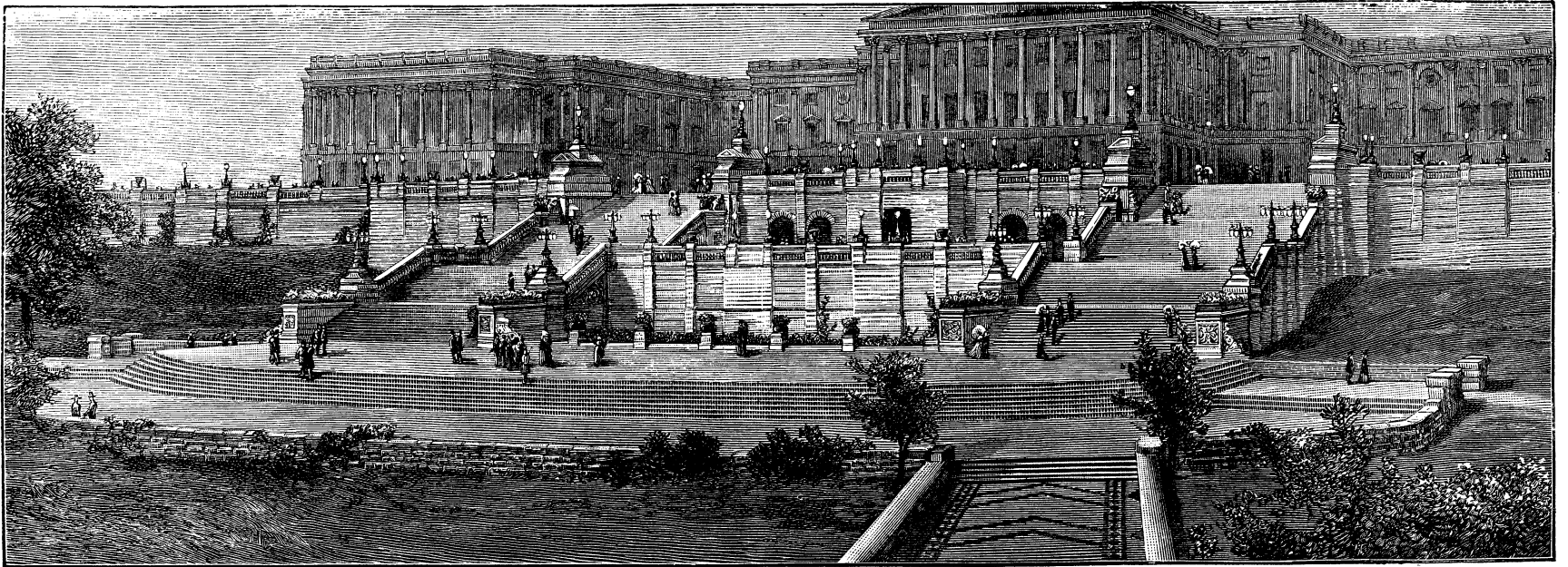
During the next year's discussion on the landscape appropriation, some senators realized what Morrill had done to begin the terrace without stirring up debate. Senator Beck wished that the matter had been discussed openly instead of slipped by in a sneaky maneuver. On the strength of a single, half-finished approach the whole terrace would now have to be built, and he hoped for more forthright dealings in the future.³⁵ One of his allies,

Eugene Hale of Maine, offered an amendment requiring that the cost of future improvements to the Capitol grounds be estimated in detail and illustrated so that everyone would know exactly what was being voted upon. This suggestion was not a censure upon the landscape architect, but rather a simple measure to ensure that the misunderstanding of 1882 would not be repeated in the future. Hale's amendment was agreed to without objections. It was included in the bill appropriating \$65,000 for the Capitol grounds, which President Chester Arthur approved on March 3, 1883.

To comply with Senator Hale's amendment, Olmsted divided the terrace and grand stairs into thirteen parts. He proposed building from the north and south approaches and working westward along the sides of the two wings. Once those sections were completed, the front of the terrace facing the Mall could be begun. The central section and two monumental stairs would be the last parts to be built.

On February 6, 1884, Morrill's Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds reported a bill making available all the funds necessary to finish the terrace. The chairman promoted the terrace as the appropriate base on which the Capitol should stand, more imposing and more handsome than the old dirt terraces. Again, he mentioned the storage rooms (now seventy-four in number), but he also stated that there would also be ten rooms suitable for committees. These rooms looked onto the courtyards between the terrace and the Capitol. Morrill's legislation passed the Senate but was curtailed in a conference with the House. On July 7, 1884, \$60,000 was appropriated to construct one section of the terrace, a stretch along the north side of the Senate wing. The following year Morrill's powers of persuasion were greater: \$200,000 was given for the terrace in 1885.

With construction of the terrace assured, Olmsted quietly resigned his commission in December 1884. He thought it would be best not to divide the supervision among the several parties, as before. Because the terrace was mostly a work of architecture, he felt it should be supervised by Clark's office. When Clark forwarded Olmsted's letter to congressional authorities, he recommended that the landscape architect be retained as an



advisor with an annual stipend of \$500.³⁶ The recommendation was accepted.

As the terrace seemed to be gaining in popularity with legislators, and its annual funding became easier to secure, a proposal suddenly appeared that would have altered the design and threatened untold harm to its effectiveness. When the appropriation for 1886 was being discussed, Senator Hale introduced an amendment to suspend work until a plan could be developed to provide more committee rooms in the terrace with windows looking westward toward the Mall. George G. Vest of Missouri immediately objected to the proposal because it would diminish the apparent strength of the terrace. He explained to his colleagues in the Senate that the idea of windows looking west had originated in their Committee on Appropriations and was opposed in the Committee on Public Buildings.

Aware that Olmsted would want to know what was going on with regard to his terrace, Clark wrote him an account of the window question. Apparently the architect of the Capitol did not think the idea was particularly bad, which surprised and alarmed Olmsted. Immediately writing Morrill, Olmsted urged him “to resist with all your might the proposition to open windows in the terrace wall.”³⁷ He rushed to Washington on February 25, 1886, to persuade Congress not to order win-

dows, concerned that “the fearful botchery” would destroy the impression of strength and solidity. In case his word was not enough, Olmsted brought with him a testimonial from Henry Hobson Richardson, a personal friend and America’s greatest living architect, confirming the correctness of his position. To the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Senator William B. Allison of Ohio, Olmsted explained his objections to windows by describing the importance of an unbroken terrace wall:

There is nothing more necessary . . . in a building than that it should seem to stand firmly; that its base should seem to be immovable. There is a difficulty in making as strong an impression in this respect as it is desirable when an extraordinarily massive structure is placed, as in the case of the Capitol, hanging upon the brow of a hill.

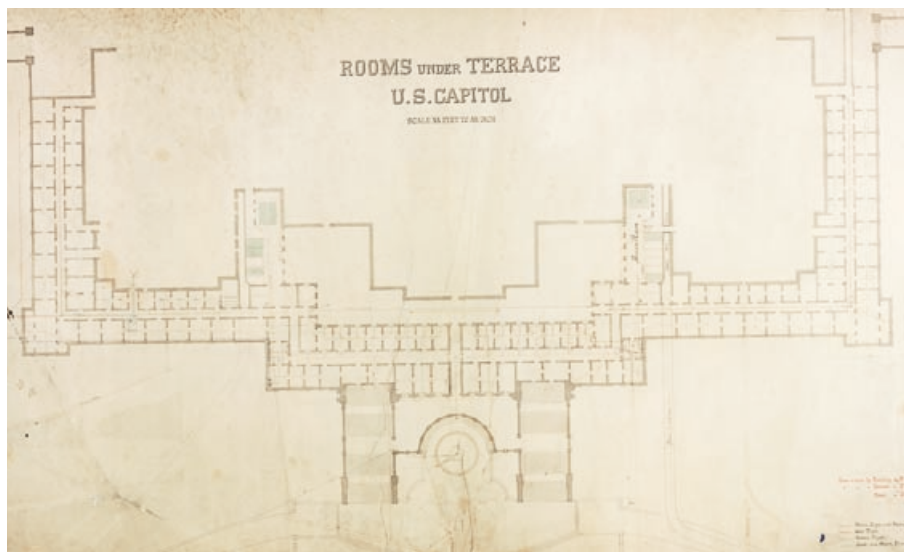
The object of the terrace was to more effectually overcome this difficulty. How was it to be accomplished?

It was proposed to be accomplished by setting a strong wall into the face of the hill in front of the foundations of the building; that is to say, in front of its cellar wall. Such an outer wall, it was calculated, would have the effect upon the eye of a dam holding back whatever on its upper side looked liable to settle toward the down-hill side. Every dollar thus far spent on the terrace, and on the grounds in connection

The Proposed Terrace of the Capitol at Washington

**by Hughson Hawley
1884 or 1885**

*A*longside a detailed description of the terrace written by Olmsted, this drawing was published in *Harper’s Weekly* on December 25, 1885. An addition to the Library of Congress was shown behind a new central portico. The addition was to be supported on Olmsted’s marble terrace, illustrated here in its original form without windows between the two grand staircases.



Rooms Under Terrace

ca. 1890

In 1886 Olmsted rearranged the floor plan of the central portion of the terrace to provide committee rooms with western views. Six rooms were blessed with windows looking west while twenty rooms had windows looking onto courtyards.

This plan was probably drawn in Clark's drafting room and indicated the location of gas, water, steam, and drainage pipes. It also noted that the terraces covered an area of two and two-thirds acres compared to the three and a half acres covered by the Capitol.

with it, has been spent on the supposition that this calculation was soundly made. If it was soundly made, then it will appear that the opening of holes in this wall would leave the same effect as the opening of holes in a dam. It would make the building behind it look less secure in its foundations, less firmly based on the down-hill side.³⁸

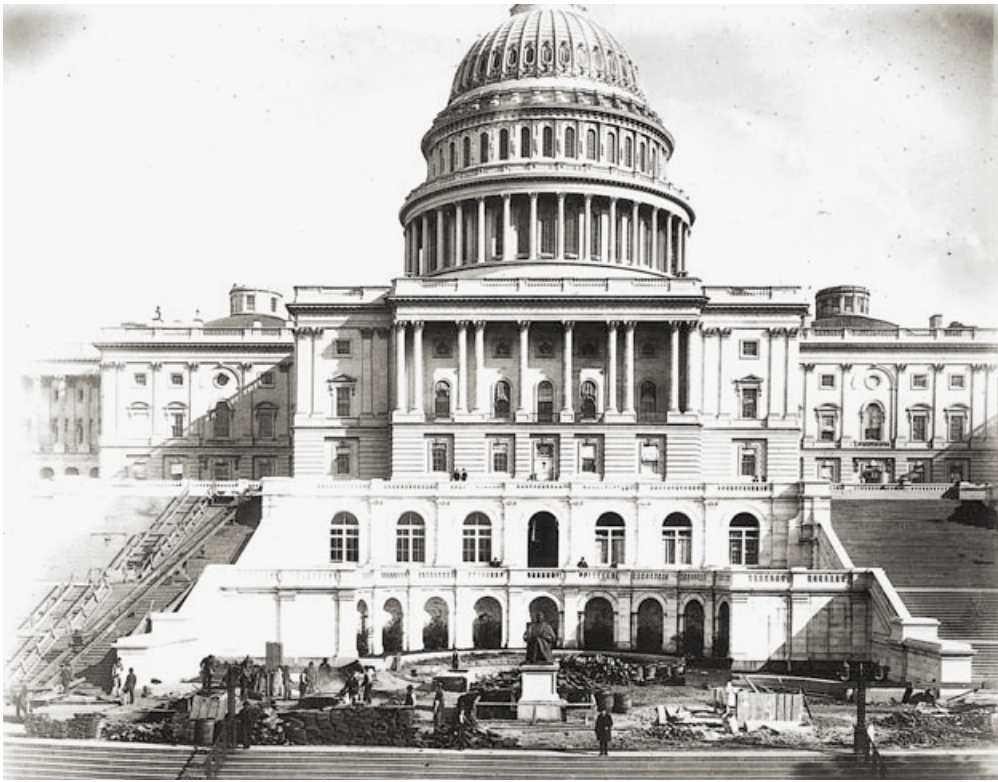
Soon after Olmsted learned of the window problem, he made a small revision to the plan hoping to satisfy the desire for committee rooms with westward views. The original design for the wall between the two monumental staircases called for a central feature (possibly a wall fountain), flanked by four arched openings leading into a crypt that was the vestibule for the rooms under the terrace. Massive piers had been designed for the crypt to support the library extension, but now that the library was moving out of the Capitol, they could be eliminated. In fact, the crypt itself could be eliminated and its space used for a central passage and six committee rooms lighted by western windows. This slight alteration increased the total number of committee rooms to twenty-eight and gratified those in the Senate who wanted some to have a Mall view. It was a simple, effective compromise that was adopted on June 24, 1886. Hale fought Olmsted to the end over the window issue, but was finally “completely whipped, horse, foot, and dragoons.”³⁹ After the revision was accepted, Olmsted's collaborator in Boston, Howard Walker, designed the details of the area between the grand staircases. There he planned a series of Corinthian

pilasters and arched windows with a distinctive Romanesque flavor.

With the crisis defused, the terrace project entered a peaceful period unencumbered by criticism or discord. The appropriation for 1887 was \$175,000, and it was followed by \$330,000 the next year. By the close of the 1888 building season a total of \$740,000 had been expended on the terrace, which by then stood almost complete. Over the next five years small appropriations were made to pay for such things as paving, bronze lamps and vases, railings, and finishing the interior. In 1889, part of the funds was given to provide a fountain between the grand stairs at ground level. It was a simple octagonal bowl upheld by squat granite columns designed in the fashionable Romanesque style.

Year by year, landscape improvements were carried out while the terrace was being built. Trees were ordered from France and England through agents in New York. Shrubs and undergrowth were planted for “variety, cheerfulness, and vivacity.”⁴⁰ Olmsted preferred simple shrubs to large, “showy” flowers, which tended to capture and unduly hold the viewer's attention. Roads were paved with modern surfacing materials such as “Gray's patent macadam,” vulcanized asphalt, bituminous concrete, Grahamite and Trinidad asphalt, and “Van Camp's patent pavement.”⁴¹ Subsoil drains, sewers, and water pipes were laid and scores of lamps—both ornamental and plain—were installed. Underground pipes fed gas to the fixtures while miles of wire were strung to light the lamps by electric sparks. In 1882, gas leaks were discovered to be killing certain shrubs and Clark promised to investigate lighting all of the grounds by electric lamps. (J. P. Hall of New York City was hired in 1897 to substitute 138 electric arc lamps for gas burners.) Footpaths were paved with a variety of materials, including concrete, Seneca and blue stone flagging, Belgian block, and artificial stone (a mixture of cement and sand). Blue stone was used for ordinary edging and black granite from Maine was used for the low coping walls at more prominent locations.

A brick summerhouse was built in 1879–1880 on the western grounds to provide a cool retreat where visitors might have a drink of water and rest a while. Sometimes called the “grotto” or “resting



Terrace Construction
ca. 1888

*T*he space between the stairs was redesigned in 1886 to provide windows for a few committee rooms under the terrace. At the same time, an exedra with pilasters and niches was designed for the lower terrace.



Exedra and Central Fountain
by Frederick Law Olmsted and C. Howard Walker
ca. 1892

*T*he octagonal fountain was designed in the Romanesque style popularized by Olmsted's friend Henry Hobson Richardson.

court," the structure was not part of Olmsted's 1874 plan but was a delicious afterthought that has long been admired for its picturesque character. Clark reported that it was designed to "combine both drinking fountain and a secluded cool retreat, while sufficiently public to prevent its being used

for improper purposes."⁴² More poetically, Olmsted said he designed the fountain to supply a continuous flow of water in several streams "with a view to musical murmurings and moistening the air."⁴³ He planted ivy around the summerhouse to merge it with its surroundings. Water diverted from the old

drinking fountain that Robert Mills had built at the base of the terrace in 1834 was piped into a rock-lined alcove off the summerhouse where delicate ivies were grown for display.

When the summerhouse was finished in 1880, it attracted a great deal of attention—some welcome, some not. Olmsted complained about the ineffective police protection the grounds were receiving. More than 3,000 plants had been stolen and more than 100 persons were observed climbing over the summerhouse on a single Sunday afternoon. Once discovered by recreating visitors, the building's red tile roof was damaged by people rocking back and forth or walking on it. Others beat down plants around the structure. Its popularity also attracted the attention of the press. Olmsted prepared a brief account intended to be carried in the local papers:

When planting about the summer house is well grown the masonry is intended to be all mantled with ivy and the South wind drawing through is to bear at times a slight perfume suggestive of romantic foliage rather than the sweetness of flowers. The overflow of the fountain is designed to produce through an apparatus specially planned for the purpose a succession of sounds suggestive of melody but not a tune and not so loud as to be always distinguished above the tinkling and murmur of the water falling into the cavity below. A window looks into a rocky runlet not a grotto but suggestive of the coolness of a grotto and giv-

ing conditions favorable to the growth of plants proper to cool & moist situations.⁴⁴

A water-powered musical apparatus, a set of chimes referred to as the “carillon,” was indeed built in 1881 at Olmsted's request by Tiffany and Co. of New York. However, it apparently could not be made to function properly in the summerhouse and was placed in storage.

Whenever a massive undertaking such as landscaping the Capitol grounds was under way, there were always those in Congress who tired of being asked yearly for money to finish up. It was true in Latrobe and Bulfinch's day, it was true in Walter's day, and remained equally true in Olmsted and Clark's time. The dashing senator from New York, Roscoe Conkling, seemed to think the landscaping would go on forever and spoke up to protest. As early as 1878, he asked the chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings if the money about to be appropriated for the grounds would finish the project. He had grown tired of the disruption, dirt, noise, and traffic stirred up by the landscaping and hoped the end of work was in sight. Senator Dawes of Massachusetts, who was chairman at the time, urged patience:

I will answer the Senator in the language of the Yankee who told me he was going to New York when it was finished; he did not propose to go there to see the city when it was unfinished. I think that it will be a good many years before the grounds will be finished. I think as the capital grows, as the nation grows, as these grounds about here change, as time's tooth wears away what is erected, there will constantly be expenditure in the line of the suggestion of the Senator from New York.⁴⁵

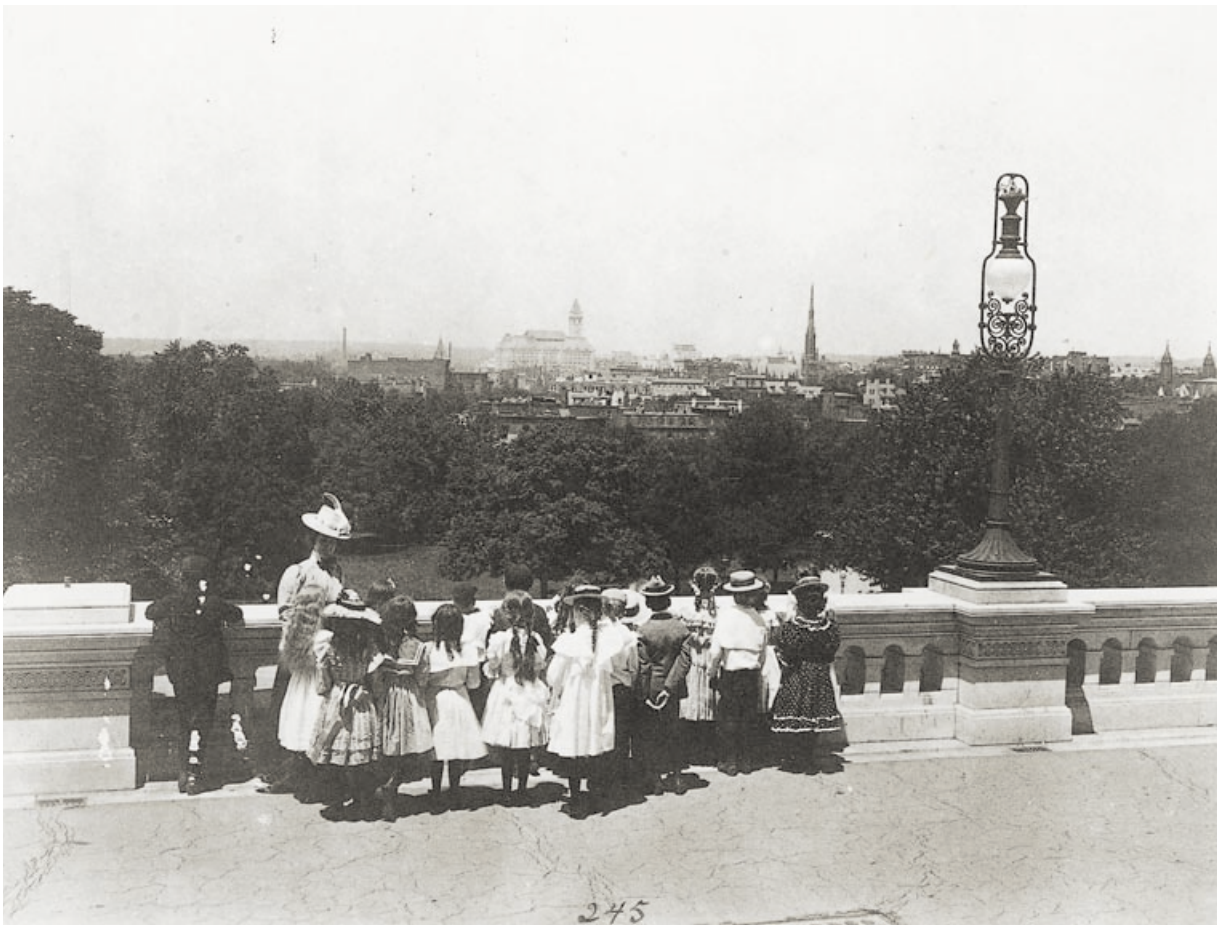
Senator Morrill noted that “pyramidal evergreens” were being planted along parts of the terrace just completed. To his eye these pointed plants were suited more to a Gothic building, where pointed arches, crockets, and spires characterized that architectural style. Because the Capitol was classical, the senator felt that such plants should be avoided on the grounds. He also thought that evergreens covered over too much of the terrace, part of which was faced with beautiful Vermont marble.⁴⁶

Some of the terrace committee rooms were occupied in 1891 and the rest were ready the following year. These were simply finished rooms with oak doors, oak paneled wainscoting, and flat

The Summerhouse

*P*erhaps Olmsted's finest architectural design for the Capitol grounds was the brick summerhouse. The intricate textures and patterns seen on its wall surfaces and around its various openings are a tribute to the bricklayer's craft. (1992 photograph.)





Young Visitors

ca. 1900

Library of Congress

*F*rom the time of its completion, the terrace has been a favorite place to view the city of Washington. Shown here is one of the electric arc lamps that replaced gas lighting on the terrace in 1897.

ceilings made of iron plates. Steam radiators provided heat. The corridors were lighted from above by sidewalk lights; unfortunately, these lights leaked from the beginning. Water also seeped into the committee and storage rooms through plant cases that did not drain properly. Copper lining was installed to contain moisture, but the leaks continued. Indeed, from the time the terraces were completed, annoying and hard-to-find leaks played a continuous role in their history.

UPKEEP & UPDATE

*T*hroughout much of the Clark years, the Capitol was maintained by the architect with an administrative staff of two clerks, one draftsman, and one messenger. Scores of laborers were hired seasonally and there were mechanics on the permanent payroll to take care of the machinery, plumbing, and electrical



The Capitol

ca. 1905

*U*pon completion of the marble terrace, the Capitol no longer appeared as if it were about to slip off the edge of Jenkins Hill.

plant. A few blacksmiths, carpenters, and masons also served under the architect. Clark was responsible for the maintenance of a patchwork building served by a variety of mechanical systems that constantly needed repair or updating. Resourcefulness and American knowhow were routinely called upon to keep the Capitol's creature comforts on par with the latest technological developments. Such innovations as elevators and electric lighting were introduced during this period, while improvements kept the existing mechanical and sanitary plants up to date. Particularly welcome were the additional water closets and wash basins installed where conditions permitted. These and other plumbing modifications snaked pipes around, under, and through massive brick walls and vaults without structural consequences. Repairs to the center building routinely involved removing old wood materials and introducing fireproof substitutes. In 1870 steam heating replaced the coal burning stoves that had been used to warm the rotunda; gradually, it replaced all the furnaces in the center building.

Some members of the House became annoyed at the crowds of tourists who gathered around the *Columbus Doors* at the entrance to the corridor leading to their chamber. In 1870, John Farnsworth of Illinois complained about the great nuisance caused by "strangers" blocking the passage, making it difficult to get by. Some tourists admired the bronze doors so much that they could not resist breaking off pieces to take as souvenirs. Farnsworth wanted to remove the doors to the east entrance of the rotunda, where they could serve "outside duty."⁴⁷ His suggestion spurred a general discussion about enlarging all the doorways from the House to the Senate, which was accompanied by a few humorous remarks; Omar D. Conger of Michigan, for example, observed that the best way to get from the House to the Senate was through the state legislatures (which elected senators at the time). Fernando Wood of New York City objected more seriously to the change because he was tired of seeing the Capitol in a constant state of flux:

I think if there is anything that illustrates the instability of the American character and of American institutions it is the style of architecture that had been adopted periodically with reference to this Capitol. Since the original

erection of the Capitol nearly every Congress, and certainly every Administration, has done something to change it. We have no fixed style of architecture; we have no plan; we have nothing stable; nothing is fixed beyond this periodical disposition of the American people to change, change, change. We no sooner establish one thing, however well and carefully matured, than those who succeed us in public life see some improvement to be made, and make a still further change. This is, however, I regret to say, the physical temperament of the American people.⁴⁸

Those who opposed relocating the *Columbus Doors* noted that it would be necessary to cut away some of the stonework around the entrance to enlarge the opening. Fears that the dome's support might be compromised caused the proposal to be deferred while the architect studied the issue. Clark reported back to Farnsworth in a brief note on June 27, 1870, stating that there were no structural reasons to prevent the work from being done. Thus reassured, Congress ordered the doors rehung at the east central portico in 1871.

Clark's reports and letter books describe hundreds of small things done to the Capitol during his tenure to maintain and modernize the building. On the exterior, old sandstone walls and the iron dome were painted every four years, usually just before an inauguration. Annual painting and whitewashing projects undertaken by private contractors kept the interior fresh and clean. Constantino Brumidi, Emerich Carstens, George Strieby, Joseph Rakemann, G. W. Fosberg, and Charles E. Moberly, among other artists, labored at the ornamental painting and decorations that were extended little by little throughout the Capitol, especially in the Senate wing. Water and gas leaks forced repairmen to remove the Minton tile, which they usually relaid carefully but occasionally put down without regard to surrounding colors or patterns. Canvas window awnings were installed in 1878 to help control the sunlight streaming into the Library of Congress. Small upholstery jobs were carried out by boys at the local reform school, who also made the Capitol's brooms. Barrels of sawdust were purchased for cleaning the stone floors in the old center building. Lighting fixtures were routinely taken down to be repaired, gilded, or bronzed. A Turkish bath was set up in the basement of the Senate wing in 1878. In 1884, Clark paid fifty-four dollars for an enameled French bath

tub to supplement either the Senate's marble tubs or the tin tubs used in the House of Representatives' bathing room. Brackets holding senators' coats in the two cloak rooms were regilded and the name plates reworded and polished as needed. Gilders repaired ornate window valances as well as sundry eagles and shields, also covered in gold leaf. Indian rubber spittoons were placed around the rotunda and in the dome in a never-ending battle against tobacco stains. Grain alcohol was bought by the gallon to keep the cigar lighters in the House cloak rooms in good working order. In 1899, a steam pipe system was installed in the gutters to melt snow. Electric fans made their first appearance in 1890, when Congress worked throughout a long, hot summer. During that same session, Clark bought 1,000 feet of rough boards to hold blocks of ice in an attempt to cool the air pumped into the Senate chamber.

A myriad of such tasks and purchases kept the Capitol working and up to date. Yet, large problems like the ventilation of the House chamber remained unsolved. To a lesser extent, the same complaints of foul and smelly air were heard in the Senate chamber, but the larger room in the south wing was the object of considerable dissatisfaction. Ventilation was a subject that would not—could not—be settled to the satisfaction of every member of Congress.

On February 24, 1871, Thomas A. Jenckes of Rhode Island introduced legislation in the House to improve the chamber's ventilation. His bill authorized \$20,000 to enlarge the shaft through which air was exhausted from the room. It would also pay for adjusting the flues under the floor, enlarging the registers, and buying additional exhaust fans and the steam engines to run them. The main object was removing "vitiating air," which was thought to be stale and perhaps poisonous. Something also had to be done with the floor registers: when the fans were started up in the morning, papers and clouds of dirt and dust were blown into the air, and coughing fits bothered many members.⁴⁹

Soon after Jenckes' legislation was adopted on March 3, 1871, Clark supervised removal and rebuilding of the chamber floor to accommodate additional desks as well as new air vents. Floor registers were replaced by grilles in the risers in an attempt to defeat the dust bowl greeting the

House each morning. The ventilating shaft was enlarged to handle 50,000 cubic feet of exhausted air per minute.

A few members noticed the improved atmospheric conditions in their chamber when they returned to work in the fall of 1871. Yet, within two years there were more proposals to improve the air. A scheme was afoot to enlarge the House chamber by removing the lobbies and rooms standing between it and the outside wall. Like senators before them, members of the House wanted to see daylight and breathe the air from open windows, and they were prepared to enlarge their chamber to reach the south wall. (Coincidentally, the larger chamber would also help accommodate forty new members provided by the decennial census.) Debate on the proposition was held on February 19, 1873, with Benjamin Butler of Massachusetts leading the forces in favor of the alteration and James Garfield of Ohio urging his colleagues to maintain the status quo. Butler asserted that the loss of a few rooms was a small price to pay for access to "the air and the light of heaven."⁵⁰ But Garfield was alarmed at the loss of much more. He called attention to the two beautiful staircases and their exquisite bronze railings that would be sacrificed to the enlargement scheme. The lavish Speaker's office would also be lost. He considered the hall too large already and suggested that, if anything were to be done, it be made smaller. That, he argued, would help members hear more easily. Others did not wish to alter the hall until the next Congress was seated in it, believing that those members should be given the opportunity to decide the merits of the proposal. Michael C. Kerr of Indiana did not wish to anticipate the wishes of the next House (over which he would preside as Speaker). That said, Kerr also stated that he believed the hall was too large and to make it any bigger would be similar to holding sessions in a "ten-acre field."⁵¹

On March 3, 1873, \$40,000 was appropriated to rearrange the hall and improve its ventilation and lighting. Major structural changes were deferred until a plan could be developed and approved by the House. A subcommittee on ventilation and acoustics was appointed by the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds. It, in turn, named five public officials to an advisory board.

Speaker's Room

*I*n 1879 the Speaker moved into a former committee room to allow his former space to be reconfigured into a retiring room for members of the House. (ca. 1900 photograph.)

Joseph Henry, longtime secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, was appointed president of the board. The other members were Thomas Lincoln Casey of the Army Corps of Engineers; Edward Clark, architect of the Capitol; F. Schumann, a civil engineer in the office of the supervising architect of the treasury; and Dr. John Billings, the surgeon general of the army, who was the board's secretary. In a report issued in 1877, the board recommended retaining the existing method of heating, an upward-draft, forced-air system. It could, however, be made more effective by certain alterations. Brick flues under the floor that retained too much heat were changed to galvanized iron. Additional ventilators were added to the roof to exhaust foul air

from the space above the ceiling. An electric bell was installed to communicate with the personnel in charge of the engine rooms in the basement.

Although physical changes to the House chamber were slight, some alterations were made to rooms directly behind it in order to increase the flow of air into the hall. In 1879, the Speaker's office was relocated and its former space (modern day H-213) altered extensively. The fireplace was removed to allow the creation of a tall, wide opening connecting with the Speaker's lobby. The remaining doors were removed and the doorways enlarged. The result was three large unobstructed openings that promoted the circulation of air from southern windows into the House chamber. Brick



Members Retiring Room

*I*n 1879 the end walls of the former Speaker's office were removed and the space united with two adjoining rooms to create a new lounge behind the House chamber. New furniture designed in the Empire revival style was purchased for the room. (ca. 1880 photograph.)

partition walls were removed to join two flanking rooms (modern day H-212 and H-214) with the central area, resulting in a single long space that became the members' retiring room. Removing the walls further facilitated an unencumbered flow of air both throughout the spacious suite and indirectly into the nearby House chamber.

Each attempt to purify the air in the House chamber was followed by a brief period of quiet before the old complaints were heard again—usually louder and more bitter than before. The board of advisors routinely investigated the complaints and always concluded that the air was healthy and the ventilation ample. Dr. Billings went to England to examine the ventilation system in the House of Commons and conferred there with officials in charge. The more data they gathered, the more the board believed that the ventilation system in the House was well devised and properly operated. A scientific analysis of the air, made in 1880 by Dr. Charles Smart of the U. S. Army, found the levels of carbonic impurities insignificant. Another investigation was conducted in 1884 by Dr. J. H. Kidder of the U. S. Navy. He collected sixty-five specimens of air and tested them for carbonic acid, ammonia, and other contaminants. He determined that no more impurities were present in the chamber's air than were usually found in any private home lighted by gas. Ten years later the process was repeated by Dr. J. J. Kinyoun of the Marine Hospital Service, whose conclusions were the same.

All evidence to the contrary, some members persisted in their complaint about foul air. In 1895, Joseph H. Walker of Massachusetts initiated an investigation into the architect's office by accusing Clark of standing in the way of change to the ventilating system. On the floor of the House he declared:

We never can have any decently pure air in this Hall until we reverse the operation by which the air enters the Hall, taking it in at the top instead of at the bottom, and we will never get it done by the present Architect—never in this world . . .

You will not get the Hall ventilated until you have an architect competent in those things, and who will not endeavor in every possible way to defeat every measure of this character brought before him. Until that is done you can not expect proper ventilation of this Hall,

because the present system of not ventilating this Hall is his pet child.⁵²

The irate representative thought that no jail or prison in New England was as badly ventilated as the hall of the House. A storm of indignation would await a county commissioner in Massachusetts if his jail had such foul air as that found in the chamber. Defenders of the architect seized upon that claim and compared the air in the hall to that found in a number of school houses, town halls, and factories in the Bay State. The congressional air was scientifically proven to be as pure as that breathed by the school children of Massachusetts.

Unswayed by science, George Washington Shell of South Carolina, chairman of what had become a full Committee on Ventilation and Acoustics, echoed Walker's concerns in a speech delivered in the House on January 24, 1895. He was greatly alarmed by the unhealthful conditions caused by leaking gas pipes and bad ventilation. Every day he heard complaints about the air, but most distressing was the damage to the health of his fellow representatives. "We see Members carried away from here corpses after very short illnesses," Shell lamented, "and we have been led to suppose that this is occasioned largely by the unhealthy condition of the Hall itself."⁵³ He requested a small sum to finance yet another investigation into the chamber's atmospheric conditions as well as a study of the general sanitary conditions in the Capitol. His committee would also examine the architect's office to see if any change there would promote the health of the nation's legislators.

The results of the investigation were reported on March 2, 1895.⁵⁴ One source of stale or foul-smelling air was determined to be store rooms filled with decaying, musty, and filthy books, rubbish, and waste paper. Obviously, the committee concluded, if the air is vile it must be unhealthy. Also, the kitchen operated by the doorkeeper was too small, unclean, and inadequately ventilated. Impure air was pervasive, striking the nostrils well outside the cooking area. Smoking and chewing tobacco in the chamber were further nuisances affecting air quality: ashes and expectoration found their way into the floor registers, which, therefore, required more regular and thorough cleaning. The report also declared that smelly people who came to loaf in the gallery should be barred from entering the

chamber. Gas leaking from the lighting apparatus above the ceiling should also be fixed. Although still viewed with some suspicion, electric lighting was considered a good candidate to replace gas altogether. Having identified the sources of the foul air, Shell's committee concluded that the architect of the Capitol was not responsible for any of the noxious conditions; the causes were, in fact, under the control of the House's own officers.

The Senate also took a turn at improving its ventilation. In 1872, Senator Morrill asked his colleagues to approve a plan to extend the shaft used to bring air into the chamber. Under the existing arrangement, air from the courtyard between the Capitol and the terrace was brought into the ventilation system and was subject to sudden downdrafts that could suck chimney smoke into the air tunnels. Morrill reminded the Senate of one windy day when its chamber had filled with "gas and sulphurous smoke," a condition he called "very disagreeable."⁵⁵ Moving the air intake farther from the Capitol would help solve the problem.

Senator Lyman Trumbull thought the only solution to the ventilation problem was to rebuild the chamber on the outside walls so that it might have windows. Having served in the windowless chamber since its inauguration, Trumbull said the move was long overdue and especially urgent now that the grounds were being landscaped and the view improved. Roscoe Conkling joined in the protest against the windowless chamber. There was nothing new about the complaint, but Conkling gave it a fresh sting by rubbing salt into an old war wound:

If Jefferson Davis had never engaged in rebellion against his country, I think he would be sufficiently guilty for being responsible, as I understand he is, for cooping up the Senate in this iron box covered with glass. As has been said, who ever heard of putting men or animals in a box inside a building, shut out on every hand from the outer air, then going to work by artificial means and contrivances to pump up and blow up atmosphere so that they shall not be like a rat in an exhausted receiver [i.e., in a vessel from which air had been emptied by a vacuum pump], dying from the want of something to breathe?⁵⁶


William Sprague of Rhode Island agreed, but took the position that to spend any more funds on the chamber was to throw good money after bad:

There is no use of appropriating money for a ventilation which is destructive to the health

and energy of members; and it is passing strange to me that Senators will sit six, eight, and ten hours breathing diseased air, coming here fresh at the beginning of the session, and leaving impaired in health, and intellectually, and in almost every other way.⁵⁷

Despite vocal and occasionally eloquent opposition, Morrill's modest proposal to improve the atmosphere in the chamber was adopted. Workmen soon began cutting a tunnel through the old earthen terrace, lining it with whitewashed brick, and connecting it to the air intake opening in the courtyard. Complaints were soon lodged against the location of the new air intake, however: the unmistakable odor of manure being spread on the grounds easily made its way into the Senate chamber, and animals were occasionally found taking up residence in the tunnel. Before the old terrace was removed and the Olmsted terrace begun, the Senate's ventilating tunnel was placed underground. In 1889 it was connected to a rustic stone tower designed by Olmsted. A similar tower had been built for the ventilation system for the House of Representatives ten years earlier. Both towers were recommended by Robert Briggs, the engineer who designed the original system under Captain Meigs in the 1850s. By raising the air intake well above the dust, smells, and creatures lurking at ground level, Briggs promised that the system would be supplied with the purest air available in Washington.⁵⁸

CENTENNIAL

 At first glance, the Capitol at the end of the nineteenth century gave the impression of a relatively new establishment. The impression was fostered by the landscape improvements that surrounded the building with young trees and by the new terrace, walks, walls, lamps, and fountains. For those who did not look closely, the Capitol defied its age. To many it appeared as though built at one time from a single design. While that impression was entirely at odds with its history, it was a credit to the talents of its architects and builders. What may have appeared as a relatively new building was actually a century old—its 100th anniversary was observed in an impressive ceremony held on September 18, 1893.

The idea for a centennial celebration originated at a meeting of the East Washington Citizens Association held on September 3, 1891. Officials of the city of Washington formed a general committee in the spring of 1893 to oversee preparations. Once the machinery was in place, Congress was consulted. On August 11, 1893, the House passed a resolution allowing members of Congress to participate in a ceremony marking the upcoming anniversary. The Senate agreed to the resolution in a few days. Passage was secured once it was made clear that the cost of the ceremony was to be borne entirely by private citizens. A joint committee of seven representatives and seven senators joined the citizens' group to prepare the Capitol for the event.

The steering committee appointed a score of subcommittees to take care of such duties as coordinating the musical program, or producing badges and souvenirs to raise money. A "rates committee" was appointed to pressure railroads to lower fares to Washington to stimulate attendance. The decorations committee installed grandstands, draped the Capitol with red, white, and blue bunting, and hung huge flags above the speaker's platform. Between the columns of the central portico, the committee arranged a series of gas lights in the form of an arcade. Flanking the grand stairs were large gilded signs honoring the first and present presidents, on one side "1793—Washington" and on the other "1893—Cleveland." The commemoration of the cornerstone's anniversary was destined to be far more spectacular than the original event.

September 18, 1893, was declared a holiday in the city of Washington. The day's program began with a concert by the "centennial chimes" mounted on top of the roof of the Library of Congress, which stood unfinished opposite the Capitol. For an hour, the air was filled with melodies such as *Way Down Upon the Suwannee River*, *The Sweet By and By*, and Wagner's *Wedding March*. As a tribute to the states, thirteen bells were struck forty-four times at the end of the morning's concert. At one o'clock a second concert played from atop the library while a parade left the vicinity of the White House heading for the Capitol. More than 150,000 spectators lined Pennsylvania Avenue, where they watched as President Cleveland and the cabinet,

justices of the Supreme Court, miscellaneous Masons and Odd Fellows, the Society of the Cincinnati, a variety of other patriotic and fraternal organizations, and numerous military regiments and fire companies traveled approximately the same route taken by President Washington's procession in 1793. The parade reached the Capitol before two o'clock and was greeted by the Committee on Invitations. Soon senators and representatives marched out of the rotunda past the *Columbus Doors* and joined their guests on the portico. Positioned nearby were the Marine Band and a chorus of 1,500 voices. Crowds cheered again and again as the participants assembled.

The bishop of Maryland opened the ceremony with an invocation, followed by a warm introduction of the president. Cleveland spoke for a few minutes, recalling that the Capitol was "designed and planned by great and good men as a place where the principles of a free representative government should be developed in patriotic legislation for the benefit of free people."⁵⁹ His address was followed by an oration that lasted two hours. William Wirt Henry of Virginia, a descendant of the fiery patriot Patrick Henry, noted that the day's festivities were the last in a series of centennial celebrations commemorating the most important events of the American Revolution. Henry covered minutely the nation's early struggles and its progress during times of peace and war. He quoted statistics illustrating the progress of the nation, the number of states, population, exports, imports, and treasury receipts. A new and interesting fact showed the nation was blessed with 220,000 miles of telephone lines.

The Marine Band, under director Francesco Fanciulli, played *The Star-Spangled Banner* as Henry took his seat. Vice President Adlai Stevenson spoke on behalf of the Senate, followed by Charles Frederick Crisp, Speaker of the House; Henry Brown, an associate justice of the Supreme Court; and Myron Parker, a commissioner of the District of Columbia. The ceremony concluded with the singing of *America*. According to one account, "The volume of sound from voices of the thousands present was such as had never been heard before on any similar occasion."⁶⁰ That evening, another concert was given by the Marine Band and the centennial chorus. An actor recited

The Star-Spangled Banner while the vast multitude cheered wildly. Fanciulli's composition entitled *A Trip to Mars* ended the day's activities on a celestial note.

By any reckoning, the centennial celebration of the Capitol's cornerstone had been a spectacular success. A full account of the event was compiled by the committee's chairman, General Duncan S. Walker, and printed as a government document in 1896. Included in that work was a brief history of the Capitol written by Edward Clark. In two paragraphs he gave the dimensions of the old Capitol and the extension, the dates when the extension and the new terraces were begun and finished, and the total cost of the Capitol—\$14,455,000. The remainder of the brief essay was an attempt to provide biographical material on the various architects employed on the building from its beginning.

Had Clark known more about the early history of the Capitol, he could have prevented the bronze plaque donated by the citizen's centennial committee from being mounted in the wrong location. On April 23, 1894, Senator Daniel Voorhees of Indiana introduced a joint resolution directing Clark to affix the plaque above the supposed location of the first cornerstone. The resolution passed the Senate without objection and was approved by the House the next day. Soon Clark had the centennial plaque mounted on the south face of the southeast corner of the old north wing. He reasoned that because the old Senate wing was the first part of the Capitol finished it would have therefore been the first—and only—section started in 1793. Clark failed to understand that the whole building was begun in 1793 and curtailed only after the financial conditions of the city soured. Had these facts been known, the tablet would have been installed on the southeast corner of the old south wing.

EXPLOSION

When the Capitol extension was under way in the 1850s, ample provisions were made to supply the vast quantities of gas needed to illuminate the building. Fortunately, it was not often that a night session of Congress coincided with an evening

levee at the President's House: there was not enough gas in the city to fuel the chandeliers in the east room and the illuminating apparatus above the House and Senate chambers at the same time. Among the largest consumers of gas in the Capitol were the 1,083 jets lighting the rotunda. These were installed in 1865 by Samuel Gardnier, using his patented device that permitted multiple gas lights to be ignited simultaneously. An electrical current was sent to magnets that opened the gas supply to the fixtures. Another current was sent to heat wires placed just above the gas jets, and the hot wires lit the fixtures. Thus, by throwing a few remote switches, one person could open and light hundreds of gas lamps at the same time. Turning off the magnets closed the source of gas and extinguished the flames. Gardnier's apparatus was the first application of electricity in the Capitol.

In 1879, the voltaic batteries connected to Gardnier's lighting fixtures in the rotunda and House chamber were replaced with "dynamo-electric machines." The electrician in charge of the House wing, J. H. Rogers, conducted experiments to light the House chamber with electrodes, but the flickering light was distracting and disagreeable. Further experiments were conducted two years later with a "voltaic arc." Rogers was still not happy with the unsteady light, but he thought that electric lighting would eventually be less expensive, cooler, and safer than gas. In 1882, the American Electric Light Company experimented in the Capitol with incandescent lights, but did not achieve valuable results. Three years later the company installed lamps on the terrace, but the effect was unsatisfactory because the bright light attracted too many insects.

In the mid-1880s Clark thought the future of electric lighting at the Capitol would be limited to windowless cloakrooms, lobbies, and other places where artificial lighting was necessary at all hours. However, when the Edison Company for Isolated Lighting was permitted to install lights in the Senate cloakrooms and lobby in 1885, the experiment proved so successful that the Senate approved a measure to extend electric lighting throughout its wing. In 1888, the Sayer-Mann Electric Company of New York City installed 650 lights in the Senate wing. That year the same company was permitted to place 200 lights in the south wing, while the

House Committee on Public Building and Grounds considered the desirability of permanent electric lighting. By 1890 more than 1,150 lights (averaging sixteen candlepower) had been installed in the Capitol and on the terrace.

In 1890, the architect of the Capitol began to recommend that Congress make its own electricity. Electric companies had been leasing dynamos to the government and charging for the electricity consumed, which cost as much as \$200 a month. As the lighting was extended throughout and around the building, operating costs grew accordingly. Clark wanted the authority and money to purchase equipment and operate a power plant himself. In 1895, Congress granted the request and the next year Clark purchased from the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company four engines and dynamos that could light 5,000 lamps. Soon, electric lighting was installed over the glass ceilings above the House and Senate chambers, replacing gas that was sometimes smelly and always dangerous. The gas apparatus caused problems in the winter when heat buildup shattered the skylights on the roof. The problem was solved when the gas was turned off and electric lights were installed in 1896.

While electricity was quickly overtaking gas in the illumination business, there was a lingering suspicion that it could not always be trusted. Flickering light and power outages hampered acceptance of the new technology, and the possibility of electrical shock frightened many a steadfast soul. (President Benjamin Harrison, a veteran of fierce military campaigns during the Civil War, refused to touch electrical switches, employing a White House electrician to operate them for him.) Hybrid chandeliers, outfitted with gas and electric lights, were common. If the weather was hot or the gas pressure was low, the electric lamps could be operated. For a while, both forms of illumination were used at the Capitol, but that peaceful coexistence ended abruptly on a Sunday afternoon in 1898.

Just after five o'clock on November 6, 1898, lieutenant Robert S. Akers of the Capitol police was in his office when a sudden and violent explosion knocked him out of his chair. He ran out of his office and into the ornamental air shaft (today called the "small Senate rotunda"), where he witnessed a scene of terrible destruction. The floor had been blown away and sections of Latrobe's



**The Press Corps
ca. 1895**

*A*t the end of the nineteenth century, members of the press covering the House of Representatives worked below a chandelier that burned both gas and electricity.



**Aftermath of the Gas Explosion
1898**

*T*he stone floor in the ornamental air shaft (today called the "small Senate rotunda") was blown away by the force of the gas explosion that rocked the Capitol on November 6, 1898.

tobacco columns and other pieces of stone had been hurled far and wide. All over the old north wing, windows and doors were blown out. The skylights above the Supreme Court chamber were damaged, as were the cupolas over the main stairway and the air shaft. In the cellar a fire raged with great intensity, burning fiercely from a broken gas meter. Nearby piles of discarded documents were on fire. Flames licked at the woodwork of the elevator shaft located near the entrance to the law library. The room used by the marshal of the Supreme Court (modern day S-229) was heavily damaged, its window blown out and its plaster and woodwork destroyed. Other offices suffered as well, but to a lesser degree. Some arches in the cellar supporting the floors were knocked down and stone and brick paving was thrown up or loosened everywhere.

Because the accident happened on a Sunday afternoon, no one was near the immediate scene, and, luckily, there were no injuries. The city's fire companies hastened to the Capitol when the alarm was sounded. They arrived as flames leaped from the east front windows, but these small fires were put out with relative ease. Firefighters discovered a broken gas meter in the cellar and began to pour water on the flames, but the fire was not easily extinguished. Clark's chief electrician bravely crawled through the maze of pillars and debris and managed to turn off the gas.⁶¹ Firemen worked elsewhere trying to put out smaller fires before flames reached the roof—a tinderbox of dry wood.

Soon after the fires were extinguished, Elliott Woods, an assistant to the old and ailing Edward Clark, asked Glenn Brown and Charles Munroe to make a thorough examination of the north wing and report on the damage. Brown was a prominent local architect and Munroe was a professor of chemistry and an expert on explosives. While the two sleuths went over the north wing and interrogated witnesses, workers began clearing debris. Twenty tons of brick, mortar, and plaster were hauled from the building and dumped temporarily on the east plaza.

Speculation on the cause of the explosion included a theory that the Capitol was bombed by Spanish nationals seeking revenge for the nation's intervention in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. That brief conflict, begun soon after the bat-

tle-ship *Maine* was sunk in Havana harbor on February 15, 1898, was over by August. Although few lives were lost on either side (and most casualties resulted from malaria), Spain was forced to give up Cuba, and the United States gained control of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.

No trace of a bomb could be found. Instead Brown and Munroe blamed a meter that had been leaking gas into the cellar. Heavier than air, coal gas built up from the floor until it reached a pendant lamp, which was left burning to assist attendants from the gas company in their weekly meter reading. The instant the accumulated gas ignited, it exploded with considerable force and sent fire balls flying throughout the old north wing. Brown and Munroe absolved Spain of any involvement and blamed the \$50,000 damage on carelessness and faulty equipment.

Because Congress would return in a few weeks, Woods had little time to repair the damage. Temporary concrete floors were laid, and stone and woodwork were patched and replaced hurriedly. The Supreme Court, whose fall term was already under way, was relocated temporarily to the room of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia (modern day S-211).

Two days after the explosion, a local newspaper carried a story under the eye-catching headline: "CAPITOL NOT FIRE-PROOF; Central Portion of the Building in Danger; GREAT DOME MIGHT FALL." The story noted that the roofs over the old north and south wings were framed with wood and speculated that if the fire had spread to these areas the resulting heat could have destabilized or possibly melted the iron dome. The article was illustrated with plans and a section view of the center part of the Capitol showing the extent of the wooden roof structure as well as the sundry attic areas crammed with books and papers. Editors quoted John Smithmeyer, the architect of the new Library of Congress building, who was also well acquainted with the structural conditions at the Capitol. He credited the promptness and efficiency of the fire departments for containing the fire and, thereby, saving the roofs and dome. If not for their efforts, the Capitol might have been left a ruin, its magnificent dome damaged if not entirely destroyed. The article further recalled a report on the safety of federal buildings that President Hayes

had commissioned following a disastrous fire at the Patent Office in 1877. Apparently, the hazardous conditions at the Capitol had been known for at least twenty years.⁶²

A NEW CENTURY

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Capitol was beset by old and new problems. Roofs over the center section needed to be fireproofed, the ventilation system in the House chamber needed to be overhauled, and something needed to be done with the rooms vacated by the Library of Congress. Unlike the first two concerns, the fate of the old library space was a relatively new issue. Without the slightest hint of sentimental regret, during the spring and summer of 1897 the librarians and their books moved out of the Capitol and into the magnificent new building across the street. Left behind were three iron rooms that were once among the most celebrated specimens of metallic architecture in the world, now empty and without a purpose. Some legislators wanted to retain at least the central room as a reference library, but others wanted the three spaces gutted and rebuilt into committee rooms and offices.

While the future of the old library space was under discussion, interest in building an east front extension was revived and became associated with a proposal to spruce up the rotunda with marble columns, marble walls, and a new mosaic floor. Also, in 1900 the House of Representatives asked the architect's office to investigate the feasibility of building a fireproof structure that would be used for congressional offices; an underground tunnel would connect it to the Capitol. Each idea was proposed in the name of progress, efficiency, convenience, safety, or comfort. During few periods in the history of the Capitol were so many large projects simultaneously under consideration as when the new century began.

As the office of the architect of the Capitol geared up to take on an unprecedented round of improvements, the man who headed the small agency retired. By 1898, old age and failing health had taken their toll on Edward Clark, who turned

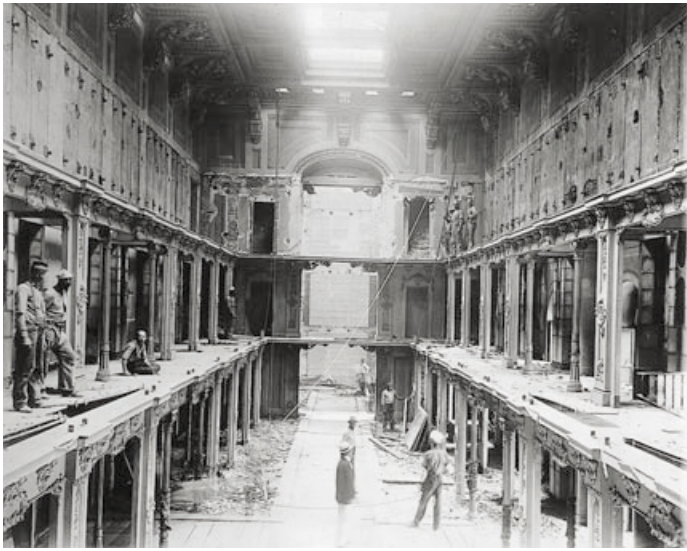


Library of Congress
ca. 1897

The decision to relocate the Library of Congress into a separate facility was reached after years of discussion among politicians, architects, and the persistent librarian of Congress, Ainsworth Spofford. The building was designed by Washington architects Paul Pelz and John Smithmeyer, who took the Paris Opera House as their model. After construction was transferred to the Army Corps of Engineers in 1892, the work was directed by Edward Pearce Casey, who orchestrated a legion of artists and sculptors to decorate the inside and outside of the building. The results were astonishing. Immediately after it opened in 1897, the Library of Congress was widely considered to be the most beautiful, educational, and interesting building in Washington.

over the operation of the office to his assistant Elliott Woods. With congressional permission, Clark retained his title and salary and all official documents still carried his name, but he rarely came to the office or participated in its daily operation. The young, personable, and energetic Woods had joined the architect's office as a clerk in 1885, with the help of Vice President Thomas A. Hendricks. Although without a college education or formal architectural training, he soon proved himself a master of detail, a skillful administrator, and a trustworthy public servant.

On June 6, 1900, Congress authorized the architect of the Capitol to reconstruct the old library space into three floors. The attic level was



Demolition of the Iron Library
1900

*I*t took just five weeks to disassemble the ironwork in Walter's library, which was then sold for scrap.

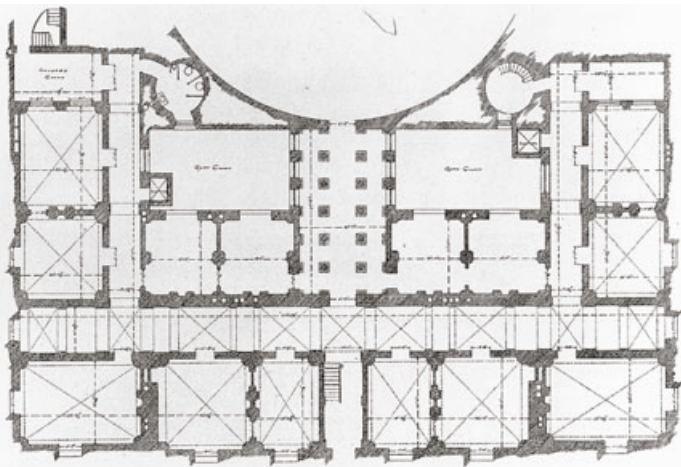


Lobby in the Old Library of Congress Space

*T*he principal feature of the reconstructed library space was a grand lobby with columns, walls, and ceiling made of white Vermont marble. The Ionic details were inspired by the Erechtheion order found in the old Senate chamber. (1964 photograph.)

to be fitted as a reference library, while the rooms on the second and third floors would be divided equally between the House and Senate and used for such purposes as those bodies might choose. Demonstrating extraordinary confidence in Woods' integrity and ability, the legislation did not limit or specify the funds available for the project, appropriating "such sum as is necessary" to carry out the work. It was an unprecedented appropriation.⁶³

Woods repaid the compliment by finishing the reconstruction in just six months. Demolition work began on June 11, 1900, and was completed in five weeks. The old ironwork was sold at an auction, recouping most of the demolition cost. Black and white marble flooring was carefully taken up and relaid in the corridor directly below. Once the



Plan of the Rooms Built in the Old Library of Congress Space
1900

*T*he plan for the new rooms fitted into the former library space was straightforward. Elevators were tucked into courtyards while a staircase was built in the narrow passage leading to the west portico at the bottom of the plan. That stair was soon considered an encumbrance and removed within three years.

rooms were stripped bare, unforeseen structural defects blamed on the 1851 fire and natural settling prompted Woods to take down and rebuild more partitions than he had anticipated. Working two eight-hour shifts a day, masons labored from August 10 to October 15 building new brick partitions, arches, and vaults. Construction and decorative details were approximate copies of the originals in the Capitol, as Woods reported, “with the paramount idea to preserve the sentiments and ideas of the old and historic central building.”⁶⁴ (The details actually resemble those in the Walter extension.) The two courtyards were refaced with glazed brick, which was cleaner and reflected light better than red brick. As soon as conditions permitted, a special fast-drying plaster was applied over the masonry, and the molded ornaments were affixed soon thereafter. Henry Chick of Washington was hired to install the ornamental plaster, for which he was paid 5 percent above cost. Sixteen thousand square feet of tile was bought from the Mosaic Tile Company of Zanesville, Ohio. Time would not permit special patterns to be made. Hot and cold water was piped to a marble lavatory in each room. A forced-air heating and ventilation system was installed to supplement steam radiators. Each room was fitted with a working fireplace, and each fireplace had an Italian marble mantel designed “in keeping with the simple dignity of this building.”⁶⁵ Electrical service was provided through steel conduits placed in the ventilating ducts. The new rooms and corridors were illuminated by 760 lights, and provisions were made for more. Pivot sash windows were used instead of double-hung sash or casements because they were easy to operate and allowed a greater flow of air. The windows were glazed with American plate glass.

When the rooms were finished, just before the opening of the second session of the 56th Congress on December 3, 1900, they were either empty or scantily furnished with left-over pieces. By May 1901, Woods’ office had designed suitable furnishings that were then put out to bid for the House committee rooms. No two were furnished alike, but a typical room had a conference table, a variety of cane-bottom and upholstered chairs, one five-foot-wide roll-top desk, a couch, a

combination bookcase and wardrobe, a clothes tree, and an umbrella stand.

In 1901, Congress appropriated \$153,500 to remove the wooden roofs over the old north and south wings and the west-central building and rebuild them with fireproof materials. The new roofs covered 37,500 square feet and were constructed of steel and concrete covered with copper. For the sake of appearances, the profile of the domical roofs was lowered and the steep pitch gently eased. In order that the lanterns might remain at the same elevation, the new saucer domes were raised on low walls that could not be seen from the ground. These adjustments allowed a habitable attic level to be added to the north wing, but no similar addition could be built above Statuary Hall due to interior conditions.

While the outside work produced only a few subtle changes, the interior alterations to Statuary



Removal of the Roof over the Old Senate Chamber 1901

*F*ollowing the gas explosion of 1898, Congress authorized removal of the old wooden roofs over the north and south wings and construction of new roofs made of fireproof steel and copper. This view shows the roof over the north wing partially removed, exposing the dome over the old Senate chamber (then occupied by the Supreme Court).

Roof Replacement 1901

*O*n September 10, 1901, a small crowd gathered to watch a steel truss being hoisted for the north wing's new fireproof roof.



Hall were more noticeable. Gone was the smooth wooden ceiling painted by Pietro Bonanni in 1819. The ceiling promoted echoes when the room was used for legislative purposes and had been a prime reason the chamber was abandoned by the House of Representatives. James Monroe's order to construct it of wood, against the professional judgment of B. Henry Latrobe, contributed to sour relations with the president during the architect's last days in Washington. Removal of the wooden ceiling and its reconstruction in fireproof materials was a tardy vindication of Latrobe's good sense. The replacement was not masonry, as Latrobe would have used, but structural steel and ornamental plaster. Graduated coffers with rich moldings and flowers alternated between decorated ribs that radiated from the central lantern. The new ceiling unavoidably affected the room's acoustical properties, but Woods hoped that some of its curious echoes would remain to entertain tourists:

One of the features of the Capitol building interesting to visitors was the combination of echoes in the old hall. While mysterious to the ordinary listener, they are readily explained by the laws of acoustics. It was a problem of some interest to preserve these characteristics which have been the pleasure of numerous visitors. To do this and be entirely successful would have required a smooth ceiling exactly as before. Preserving to within five-eighths of an inch variation the contour of the old hall ceiling, and by compromising on the depth to which the new panels might go, the echoes have been saved to a great extent, though somewhat diminished in strength.⁶⁶

While the new ceiling was being put over Statuary Hall, a new floor was being built in the House Chamber. It was the room's third floor in its forty-four-year history and the latest attempt to improve the quality of the air pumped into the chamber. After the floor was removed, glazed tiles were laid and scoured weekly.⁶⁷ The new floor supplied air to the chamber through risers in the platform and



Statuary Hall

*T*his photograph was taken soon after a new fireproof ceiling was placed over Statuary Hall. Unlike its predecessor, this ceiling was designed with three-dimensional coffers and ornaments. (ca. 1902 photograph.)

grills under 400 new desks, each of which was fitted with an electric call button to summon pages. New furniture was also purchased for the cloakrooms and lobbies, and the chamber was repainted in a simpler style than the original Meigs-Brumidi scheme.

Work accomplished around the Capitol in 1900 and 1901 was impressive. Gone was the threat of fire from the old wooden roofs and ceilings that were dangerously close to the dome. Gone too was the iron library: built as a revolutionary response to a fire, it was now a victim of Congress' insatiable appetite for committee rooms and offices. Unfortunately, it was also an irreplaceable loss to the history of American architecture. Thomas U. Walter, the man who created that iron masterpiece, died in 1887 honored but penniless, bitter to the end about the government's failure to pay him for the design of the library, the Capitol dome, and a half-dozen other projects. Walter's poverty rendered him resentful at times about his former pupil Clark's successful career and comfortable life. Privately, he considered his successor ungrateful and unhelpful in times of need.

The annual report that Woods wrote for the year ending June 30, 1902, was the largest in the agency's history. For the first time, the report was extensively illustrated with photographs and drawings that helped explain the work accomplished over the course of the year. Thirty-seven drawings showed such things as the steelwork of the new ceiling over Statuary Hall and the framing plan for the floor in the House chamber. Sixty-eight photographs showed before and after conditions of the roofs and the design of a suggested improvement to the rotunda. Also included in the report were testimonials to the lives of Edward Clark and August Schoenborn, both of whom died in January 1902. Head draftsman since 1851, Schoenborn had, like Clark—begun his Washington years in Walter's drafting room. He was remembered for his "marked artistic and official fidelity" as well as his "even temperament apparently only satisfied by hard work."⁶⁸ Woods was particularly eloquent in the tribute he wrote Clark, his mentor and friend. After briefly sketching Clark's career, he wrote:

I may be pardoned for the expression of my great personal love for him and his character. It is on the experience of seventeen years' service with him that I build my estimate of his



Rebuilding the Floor in the House Chamber 1901

*C*omplaints about the foul air in the House chamber usually resulted in reworking the duct work under the floor. This also provided an opportunity to reconfigure the platforms and risers to accommodate more desks and chairs for additional members.

character. No man was more modest than he. No man oftener lifted his hand to the worthy or more unobtrusively exercised his charitable instincts. Modest and unassuming, his whole life is worthy of emulation. . . .

Probably no man connected with the history of the Capitol building enjoyed more than he the confidence and respect of those whose official and personal life brought them in contact with him.⁶⁹

Clark's death marked the end of a career known mainly through official documents. He left no personal papers to shed light on his intimate thoughts or record his observations on the world around him. His official life was nonetheless long and productive. He had little of Walter's genius for design, yet he was enthusiastic about working with those who did; his collaboration with Olmsted was one case in point. Clark was temperamentally equipped to transform the office from a design atelier to an administrative post, helping set the stage for the tremendous growth of the job during the twentieth century.