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## CHAPTER VI

# THE OLD CAPITOL AS COMPLETED

THE old Capitol was situated in a park of 22½ acres [Plate 87], inclosed by an iron railing.<sup>1</sup> There were nine entrances to the grounds, two each from the north and south for carriages, two on the east and three on the west for pedestrians. The western entrances at the foot of the hill were flanked by two ornamental gate or watch houses [Plate 81]. The fence was of iron, taller than the head of an ordinary man, firmly set in an Aquia Creek sandstone coping, which covered a low wall [Plate 82].

On entering the grounds by the western gates, passing by a fountain, one ascended two flights of steps to the “Grand Terrace” [Plate 88].

Upon the first terrace was the Naval Monument, erected to those who fell in the battle of Tripoli. This was a white marble column, decorated with beaks of vessels and anchors grouped in various positions. On and around the column and base were allegorical figures [Plate 89]. On the socle were the names of those who fell in the battle: Somers, Caldwell, Decatur, Wadsworth, Dorsey, and Israel. The monument rose out of a basin of “water, supplied from the contiguous fountain.” This monument is now at Annapolis. There was an entrance into the sub-basement of the Capitol from the first terrace. Under the archway leading into this entrance was a marble fountain, with water from Smith’s Spring. The second flight of steps landed on the main terrace a few feet below the level of the basement entrance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For an earlier version of this chapter, see Glenn Brown, “History of the United States Capitol,” *American Architect and Building News* 54 (December 5, 1896): 81–83; 55 (January 2, 1897): 3–6; 55 (February 20, 1897): 59–60.

<sup>2</sup>The Naval Monument, erected in 1803 at the Navy Yard in southeast Washington, was moved to the Capitol’s western grounds in 1831 and later transferred to the Naval

The eastern entrance, according to Mills, had spacious gravel walks, through a “dense verdant inclosure of beautiful shrubs and trees, circumscribed by an iron palisade.”<sup>3</sup> An old print, made from a drawing by Wm. A. Pratt, a rural architect and surveyor in 1839, gives a clear idea of the eastern front of the building and its surroundings at this period [Plate 90].

The old Capitol building covered 67,220 square feet of ground. The front was 351 feet 4 inches long. The depth of the wings was 131 feet 6 inches; the central eastern projection, including the steps, 86 feet; the western projection, 83 feet; the height of wings to the top of balustrade, 70 feet; to top of Dome in center, 145 feet. The portico on the east is 160 feet wide, composed of a double row of Corinthian columns, elevated on a rustic basement.

With the exception of the Dome, the central portion of the present Capitol is the old building unchanged on the exterior. The basement of rusticated stonework is surmounted by the Corinthian order. Between the pilasters and columns two stories are grouped. The top of the building is surrounded by a stone balustrade. Over each wing is a low dome, surmounted by a cupola. The central Dome was considered high because it reached a greater altitude than the domes shown on the plans of Thornton and Latrobe, Bulfinch having materially increased its height. The whole exterior walls and porticoes were of Aquia Creek

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Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, in 1860. *Art in the United States Capitol* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978), 409.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Mills, *Guide to the Capitol of the United States, Embracing Every Information Useful to the Visitor Whether Business or Pleasure* (Washington: privately printed, 1834), 13.

sandstone, painted white. The roof of the building, including the Dome, was of wood, covered with copper. The subbasement, under the western portion of the central building, was utilized for committee rooms. The north side was used by the Senate and the south side by the House. On the east of the subbasement were the storerooms and “refectory,” or restaurant.

From the western entrance of the subbasement a stairway leads to the basement story above. On both sides of this stairway a hall leads to the chamber prepared to receive the sarcophagus of George Washington, beneath the center of the crypt.

Plans of the building drawn by Robert Mills in 1846 show the arrangement of the building as it was at this period, with possibly a few slight modifications.<sup>4</sup>

The basement story [Plate 91] was a few feet above the street level on the east and the same distance above the principal terrace on the west. This floor of the Capitol had several entrances on the south, north, east, and west, where they would afford readiest access to the different portions of the building. An arcaded passageway ran under the principal eastern portion. At the north and south ends of this passageway were the vestibule entrances leading to the main stairways of the Senate and House [Plate 92].

The rooms in the north half of the Capitol, except on the third floor and Supreme Court room, were appropriated to the use of the Senate and its committees, while the rooms in the south part were appropriated to the House and its committees, clerks, and other officials.

The central portion of the basement is the crypt—a circular room beneath the Rotunda. The floor of the apartment above is supported on groined arches resting upon Doric columns modeled after those of the

Temple of Paestum [Plate 93]. Leading north from the crypt is a passageway to a central hall lighted from above. This was originally intended for the stairway. The brickwork surrounding it has remained through all the changes. Latrobe removed the stairway which led to the Senate above and placed it in the hall to the east, in a particularly out-of-the-way position, where only those familiar with the plan can find it. From this confined hall one doorway led into the Supreme Court, the other into the marshal’s office. On the west side of the elliptical passageway was a door leading to the Law Library. Farther north, on the west side, were the entrances to the apartments of the clerk of the Supreme Court. Near the north entrance were the rooms of the Attorney-General and judges, west and east of the hall, respectively. The entrances to the court room were from the Senate stairway hall and from the lobby in the center of the building. This room is semicircular in plan, with an arched recess on the west, through which an arcaded passageway ran, and on which the groined-arch ceiling, which covered the whole room, rested. On the east of the room is a colonnade, through which the chamber is lighted [Plate 94]. At the present time the room is used as the Supreme Court library. The columns were modeled on the Doric order. The construction of the walls and supports is particularly massive, as the first domed ceiling of the room failed for want of proper abutments. Complaints were made of the lack of light and ventilation in this room. The floor, as late as 1847, was below the general level. On the south of the crypt a passageway led directly to the southern entrance. The stairway to the House of Representatives is a little to the west of this hall; the space was occupied by committee rooms.<sup>5</sup> A furnace room was in the cellar below for heating the House. The principal story [Plate 95] of the Capitol was reached by the broad

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<sup>4</sup>Brown is referring to the plans published in Robert Mills, *Guide to the Capitol and the National Executive Offices of the United States* (Washington: Wm. Greer, Printer, 1847–48).

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<sup>5</sup>The stairway to the House Chamber was east and not west of the hall Brown described, and it was unlikely that committee rooms were located in a stairway.

flight of steps of the eastern portico, or through the basement from the stairway [Plate 96] in the western projection or by the two circular stairways on the north and south of the crypt. The direct exterior entrances to the Senate and House of Representatives were from the eastern portico. The principal eastern and western entrances opened directly into the Rotunda, which was 96 feet in diameter and 96 feet high [Plate 97].<sup>6</sup> The frescoes shown in the illustration above the second cornice are modern. The circular walls of this apartment, which still remain, are divided by Grecian pilasters into panels. The pilasters are surmounted by a bold entablature ornamented by olive wreaths. Rising from the cornice was a hemispherical dome divided into sunken panels. The panels on the circular wall are appropriated to paintings and bas-reliefs of historical subjects.

The other panels have floral wreaths, in which are placed the heads of Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh, La Salle, and Cabot [Plate 98].

The north door in the Rotunda opens into the small circular hall in which are the “tobacco capitals” [Plates 68, 101] designed by Latrobe. The south door led directly into the vestibule of the House. A door on the west of the vestibule led into the hall of the principal stairway, which runs from the basement to the roof, giving access to the gentlemen’s galleries. The entrances to the ladies’ gallery were in the lobby south of the hall. The circular vestibule south of the Rotunda gave access directly to the lobby of the old House of Representatives [Plate 100]. On the east was a stairway leading to the Library of the House. The Speaker’s, clerks’, and other rooms surrounded the hall. The Hall of Representatives, at the time of its construction and for many years afterwards, was considered by enthusiastic Americans the “most elegant legislative hall in the world” [Plate 99]. The room is a

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<sup>6</sup>Brown was mistaken in thinking there were direct entrances to the House and Senate Chambers from the east portico.

semicircle with a diameter of 96 feet, with a parallelogram on its south side, 73 by 35 feet. The height to the top of entablature is 35 feet, and to the apex of the domed ceiling is 57 feet. The circular colonnade is composed of fourteen columns and two antes. The shafts of breccia from the Potomac are in solid blocks. The capitals are of Italian marble, modeled from those of the monument of Lysicrates. From the entablature springs the dome, decorated by a young Italian painter, named Bonani, who died soon after the completion of this work. Plate 101 shows the old Hall of Representatives in its present condition, now called Statuary Hall.

The apex of the dome is crowned by a lantern, through which abundant light reaches the chamber below. The colonnade of the south is composed of eight columns and three antes, similar to the others. An arch of 72 feet chord springs over the colonnade. In the center of this arch is a plaster cast of a statue of Liberty, on the right of which is an altar entwined by a serpent; at her feet reposes an eagle. Robert Mills commends this group as one of the best pieces by Causici, who died before he was allowed to put it into marble. Under the statue of Liberty, on the frieze of the entablature, is a spread eagle carved in stone by Valaperti, an Italian sculptor.<sup>7</sup>

The ladies’ gallery was on the south, and the public gallery was back of the circular row of columns.<sup>8</sup> The former accommodated two hundred and the latter five hundred people. The space between the columns was draped with crimson curtains, those back of the Speaker’s chair being made of crimson silk, “flowing down as from a center from the top of the capitals of the columns.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Mills, *Guide to the Capitol of the United States*, 33–34.

<sup>8</sup>The ladies’ gallery was removed in 1880. “Rotunda,” RG 40, Subject Files, Curator’s Office, AOC.

<sup>9</sup>Mills, *Guide to the Capitol of the United States*, 35.

Opposite the Speaker's desk, between the draped curtains, was a clock, on which History sits in the winged car of Time.

The appearance of the House as finished and furnished was striking. The Speaker's chair was placed on a platform 4 feet above the level of the hall. This was inclosed by a rich fluted bronze balustrade, surmounted by an impost and brass railing. There were desks on each side for the Speaker. Three feet below the Speaker, on a marble base, was the Clerk's desk, "a rich mahogany table," inclosed below with beautiful curtains of damask silk and above with a dwarf brass railing. Between the columns were sofas on which the members could lounge. Reporters had boxes between the columns, ten spaces being allotted to them. Each member had a desk; the desks were of mahogany and numbered. The floor inclined, rising from the Clerk's desk to the outer wall. On the last row of seats was a bronzed iron railing, with curtains inclosing the space occupied by the members. In the old hall was a painting of Lafayette by a French artist, and one of Washington by Vanderlyn.

The doorway on the north of the Rotunda led through the small elliptical rotunda to the Senate Chamber and its committee rooms. A doorway on the east side of this elliptical apartment led to the main stairway. This marble stairway also gave access to the galleries of the Senate.<sup>10</sup> The western door from the elliptical room led into a hall opening on a toilet and folding rooms, and on a stone stairway that runs from the basement to the roof. From the north the halls passes by the stairway of the ladies' gallery to the vestibule of the Senate, "a quadrangular room lighted from above," with a screen of marble columns on the west, and the entrance to the Senate Chamber on the east [Plate 102].<sup>11</sup>

Back of the colonnade is a hall that gave access to the rooms of the President and Secretary and the other officers of the Senate.

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<sup>10</sup> This extant stairway did not provide access to the Senate galleries.

<sup>11</sup> Mills, *Guide to the Capitol of the United States*, 35.

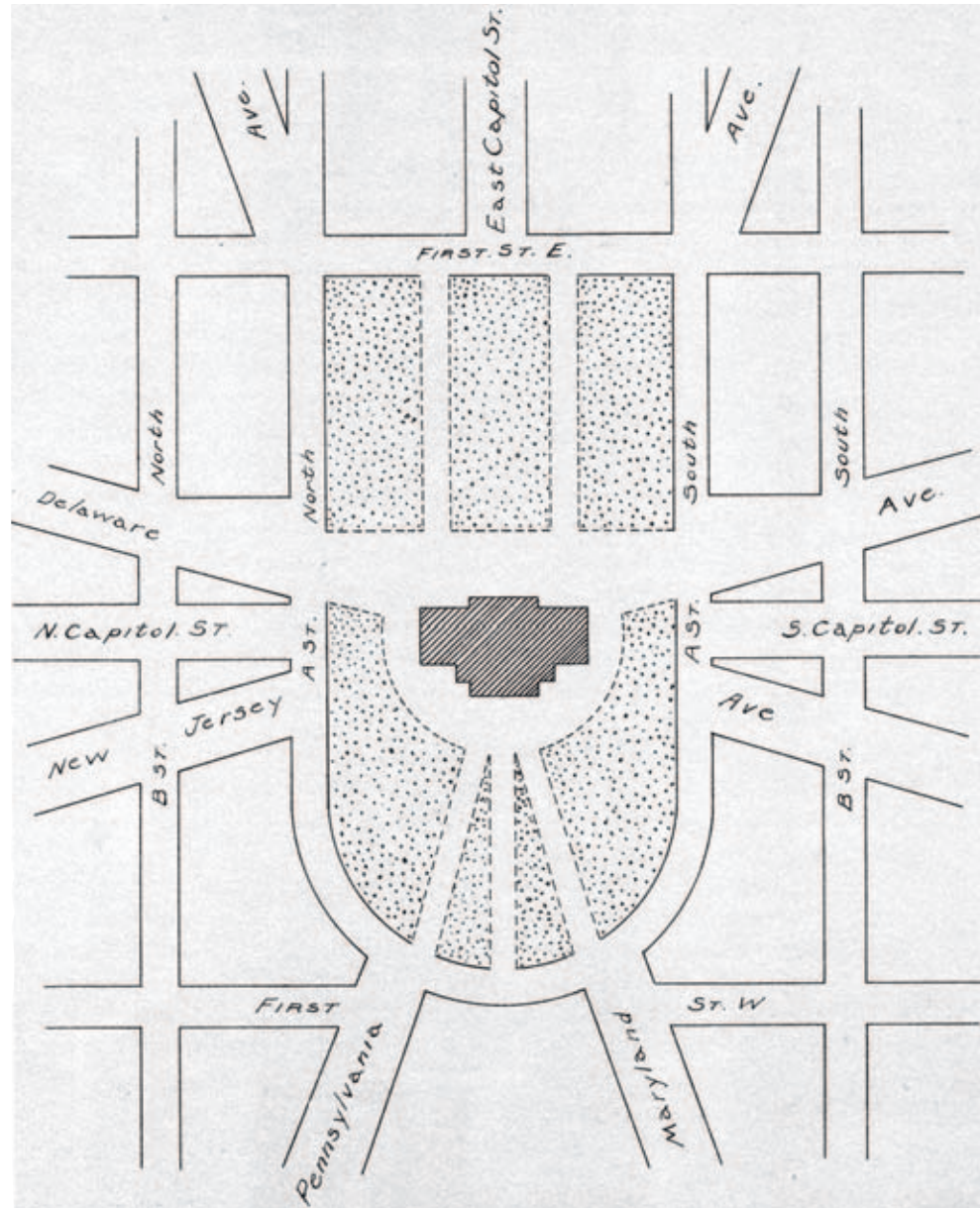
Mills describes the Senate Chamber [Plate 83] as a large semicircular room covered with a dome and richly ornamented with deep sunken panels and circular apertures to admit light from above. Across the chord of the semicircle a screen of columns stretches on each side of the President of the Senate's chair, which was placed in a niche on an elevated platform, in front of which are the desks of the Secretary and Chief Clerk. "The columns are Grecian-Ionic, the shafts being of breccia and the caps of statuary marble. A gallery was supported on the entablature of these columns."<sup>12</sup> In front is another lighter gallery running around the circle of the room, supported by reeded bronzed iron columns surmounted by a rich gilt iron balustrade. Plate 103 shows the condition of the old Senate Chamber in 1900, the semicircular gallery having been removed and the interior fitted up and occupied by the Supreme Court. In this room was a picture of Washington by Rembrandt Peale, which Mills considered the best portrait of Washington in existence. The desks, placed in circles, were of mahogany, each Senator having a desk. "They were on platforms, each row being above the other." Having plain walls and a flat dome, the Senate was a good room in which to speak. Diameter, 75 feet; 45 feet greatest width; 45 feet high. Jonathan Elliott (1830), William Elliott (1837), and Robert Mills (1847) say: "The principal staircases and entrances to the two Houses of Congress are all unworthy of the rooms they communicate with, being confined, dark, and difficult to be found by strangers."<sup>13</sup>

The western door from the Rotunda, passing around both sides of the principal western staircase, leads to the Library [Plate 104], which is situated in the western projection, at the entrance of which are two

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Quotation from Mills, *Guide to the Capitol of the United States*, 43. See also Jonathan Elliott, *Historical Sketches of the Ten-Miles Square Forming the District of Columbia* (Washington: J. Elliot, Jr., 1830) and William Elliot, *The Washington Guide* (Washington: Franck Taylor, 1837).



PLAT OF GROUNDS, 1830.

Brown based this 1896 conjectural drawing on the King plat maps. *Location unknown.*



ASCENT TO THE CAPITOL, WASHINGTON.

ENTRÉE DU CAPITOLE. À WASHINGTON.

DER WEST END CAPITOL HAUPTZU WASHINGTON

LONDON.

PUBLISHED BY GEORGE VIRTUE, 25, IVY LANE.

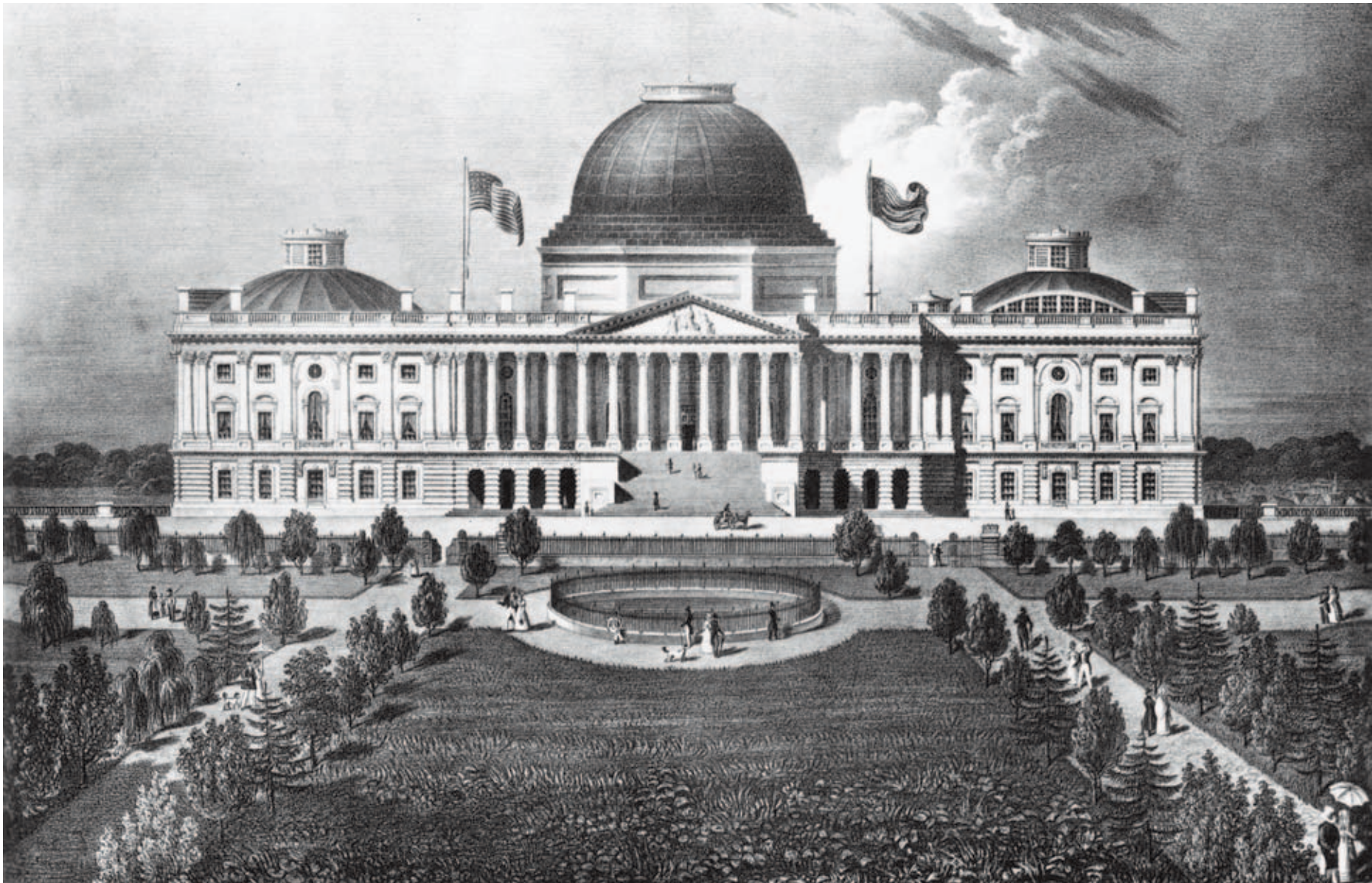
STEPS AND ENTRANCE TO WEST FRONT OF OLD CAPITOL.

Engraving published by George Virtue, ca. 1840.



TRIPOLI NAVAL MONUMENT.

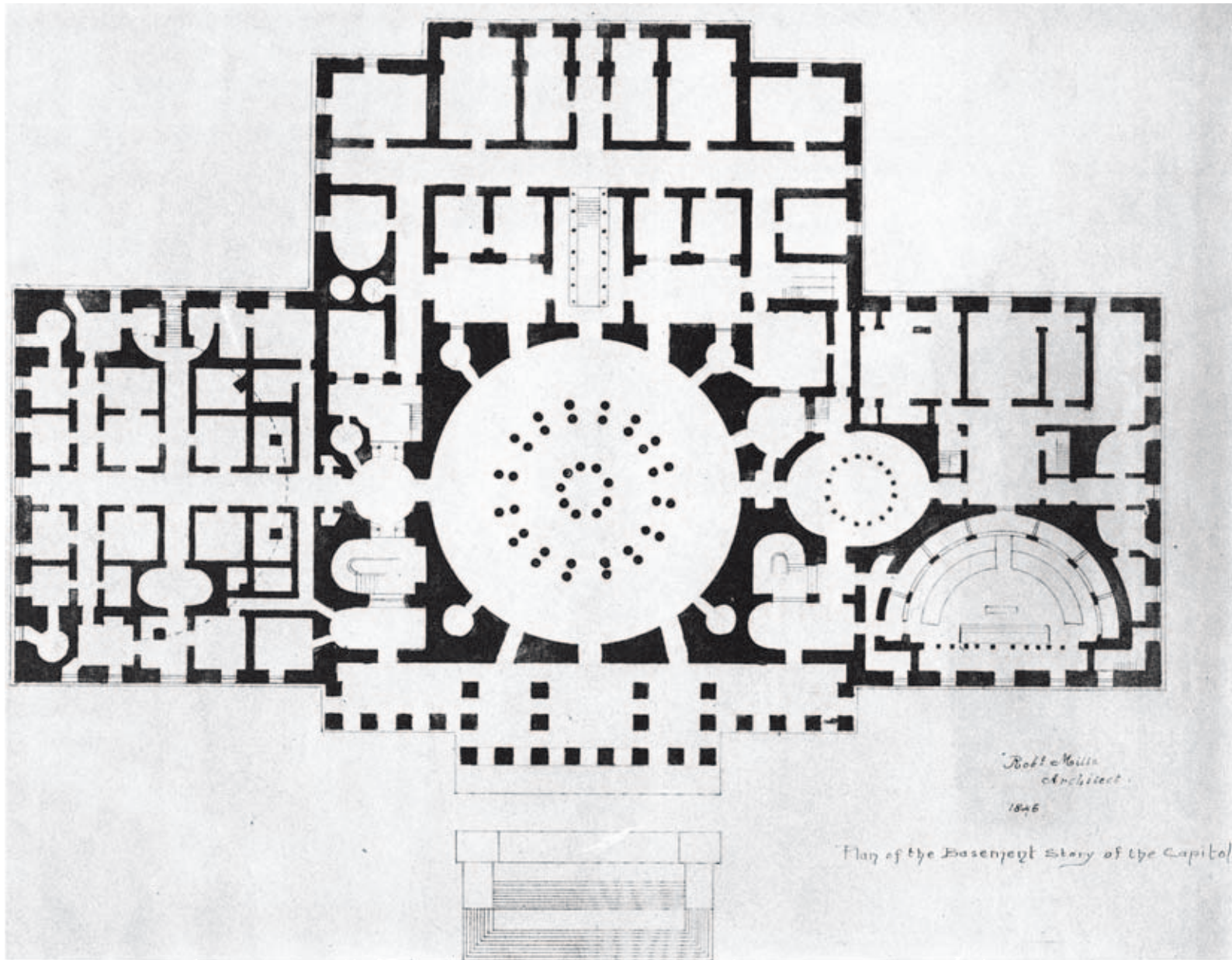
Photograph taken during construction of the Capitol extension.  
The monument was relocated in 1860 to the U.S. Naval Academy Grounds in Annapolis, Maryland.



EAST FRONT OF CAPITOL, FROM LITHOGRAPH, 1830.

“Elevation of the Eastern Front of the Capitol of the United States,” drawn by William A. Pratt, ca. 1832. The reservoir was built about 1832. *Prints and Photographs Division, LC.*





BASEMENT OF OLD CAPITOL, DRAWN BY ROBERT MILLS.  
Signed and dated, 1846. NARA.



VESTIBULE BASEMENT, NORTH WING.

The exterior door became an interior door when the east front extension was built between 1958 and 1962.



THE CRYPT, OLD CAPITOL.

The crypt, which now houses exhibitions and sculpture, was once an informal storage space where bicycles were parked.

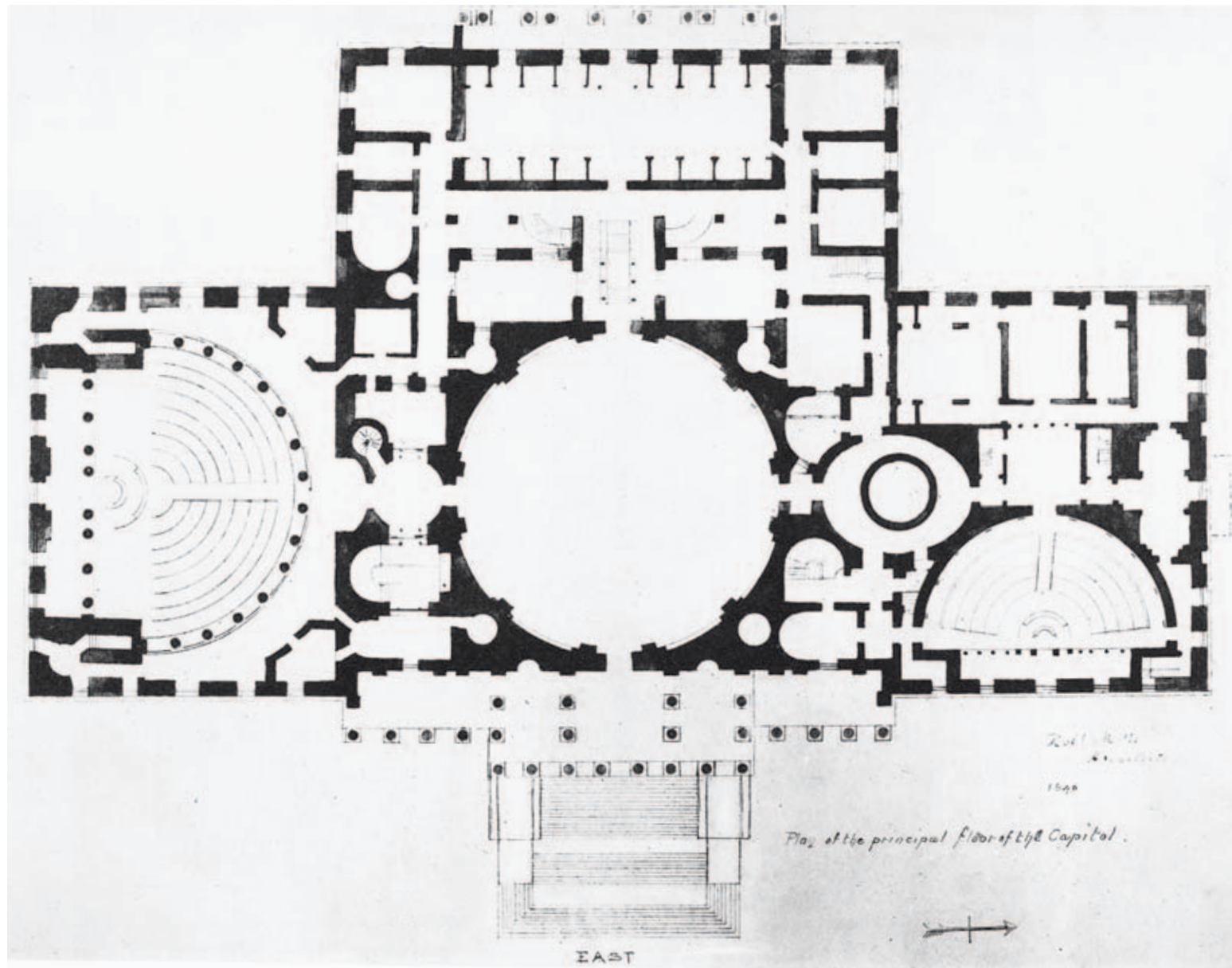


OLD SUPREME COURT ROOM, 1900 A. D. SUPREME COURT LAW LIBRARY.

This rare photograph shows the room's turn-of-the-century use as a library.



The restored Old Supreme Court Chamber, which was opened to the public in 1975, is managed by the U.S. Senate Commission on Art.



PRINCIPAL FLOOR OF OLD CAPITOL, DRAWN BY ROBERT MILLS.

Signed and dated, 1846. NARA.



PRINCIPAL STAIRWAY, CENTRAL PART OF OLD CAPITOL.  
The door at the head of the stairs is the west door of the Rotunda.



THE ROTUNDA.

View looking northeast to the former location of Robert Weir's *Embarkation of the Pilgrims*.  
The painting was moved to its present position in the Rotunda in 1979.





PANEL OVER DOOR, EASTERN PORTICO.  
*Fame and Peace Crowning George Washington*,  
Antonio Capellano, ca. 1827.



PANEL IN ROTUNDA.  
Untitled decorative panel, Francisco Iardella, ca. 1827.



PANEL IN ROTUNDA.  
*Christopher Columbus*, attributed to Francisco Iardella, 1827.



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FROM PAINTING BY SAMUEL FINLEY BREEZE MORSE.  
Oil on canvas, 1822. *Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund.*



LOBBY VESTIBULE, TO OLD HALL OF REPRESENTATIVES.  
This is the oldest surviving space designed in the Greek Revival style in the U.S.A.



VIEW OF OLD HALL OF REPRESENTATIVES, 1900 A. D. HALL OF STATUARY.

Photograph showing the gallery fitted with shelves for books and documents.

The wooden ceiling, painted to appear coffered, was removed in 1901.

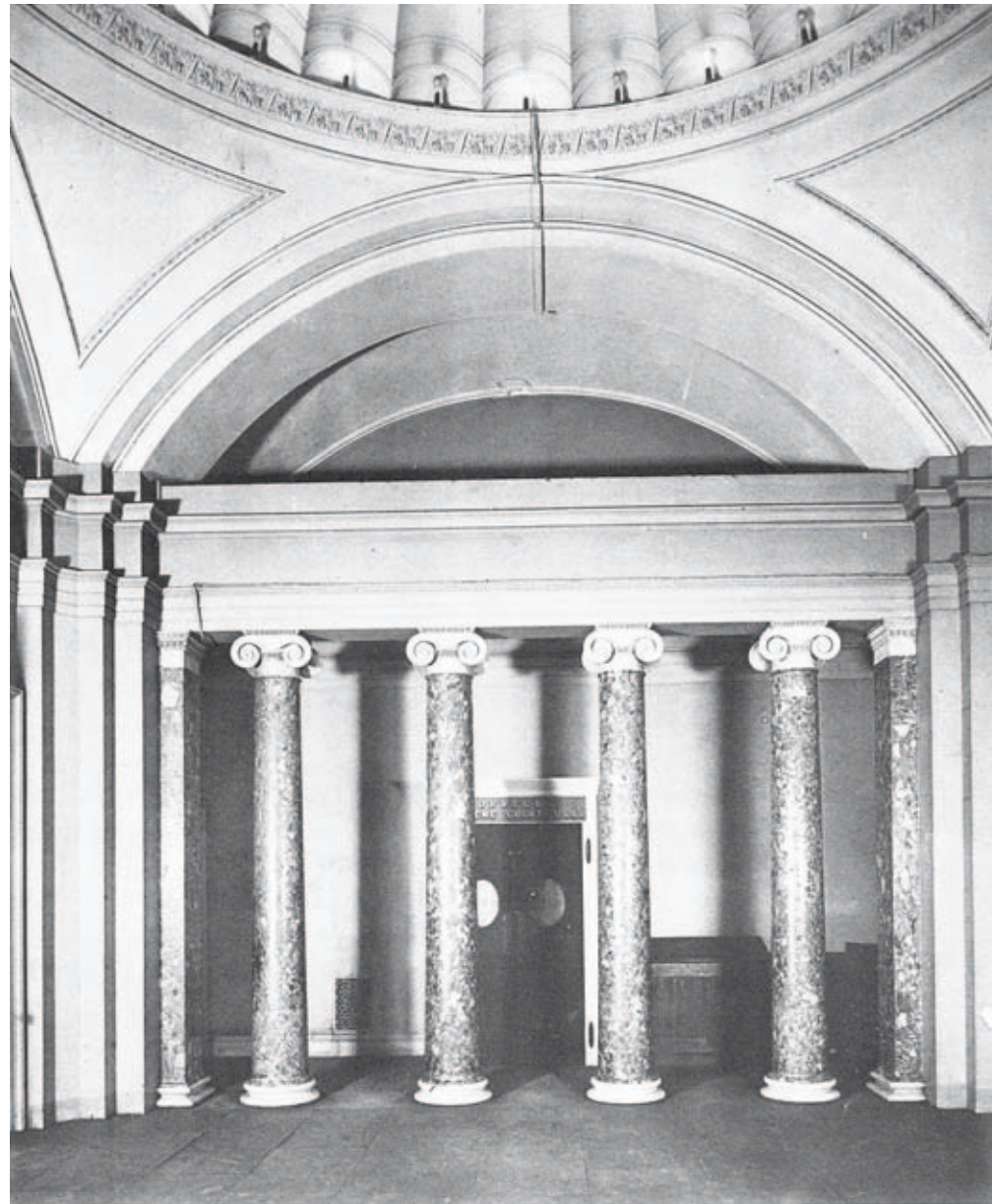


Statuary Hall (Old Hall of the House of Representatives). The fireproof ceiling installed in 1901 was recently restored.



SMALL ROTUNDA, SENATE WING.

View documenting the small rotunda with columns painted white.



SENATE LOBBY, 1900, SUPREME COURT ENTRANCE.

This view depicts the entrance to S-233, which is now the Office of the Republican Leader.



OLD SENATE CHAMBER 1900 A. D., SUPREME COURT.

Photograph depicting the appearance of the space during its use as the Supreme Court between 1860 and 1935.



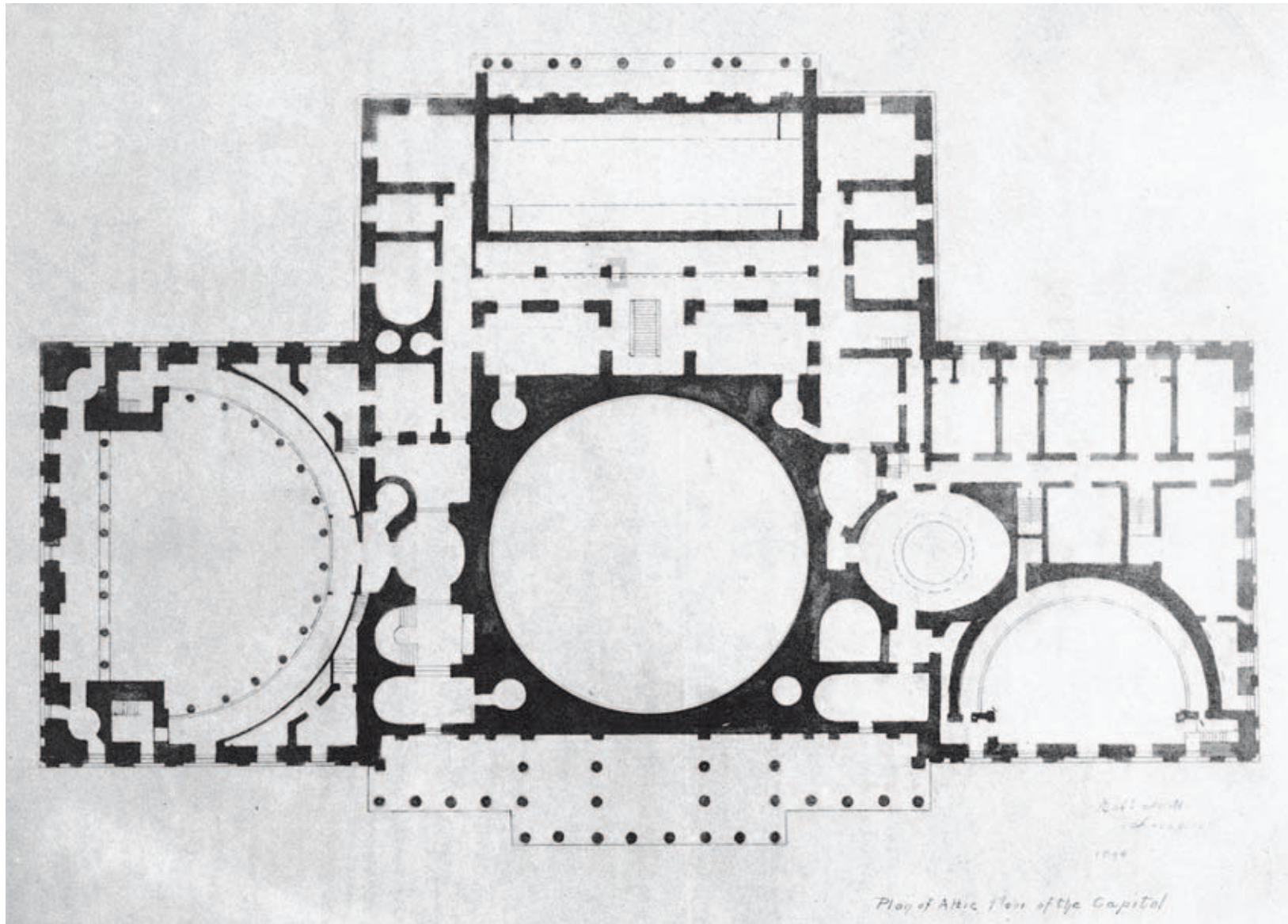


The restored Old Senate Chamber, opened to the public in 1976, is managed by the U.S. Senate Commission on Art.



ENTRANCE TO OLD CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY.

This entrance is no longer extant. The Library of Congress space on the west central side of the Capitol was rebuilt into office space in 1900.



PLAN OF ATTIC STORY, DRAWN BY ROBERT MILLS.

Signed and dated, 1846. NARA.

marble columns modeled from the Octagon Tower in Athens. There are similar columns at the door opening out on the western colonnade. The original Library occupied only the front portion of the building, and was without the two rooms on the north and south which are familiar to visitors at the present time.

The old portion of the room was 92 feet long, 34 feet wide, and 36 feet high. Extending the whole length of the room was (I say was, for the interior has been changed) a series of alcoves ornamented in front with fluted pilasters which, with their entablature, supported two galleries, divided as below into twelve shelved recesses. Above these sprung the great arch forming the ceiling, decorated with enriched panels, borders, and wreaths of flowers, and pierced with three circular ornamented apertures, which admitted the light and ventilated the room. "A table and chair were in each alcove." The cases were glazed and labeled. This room was heated by furnace from below. The stairway to the north of the Rotunda led to the third story, occupied by committee rooms. The stairway continued to the roof, thence on the exterior of and over the roof to the top of the Dome. The House of Representatives, Senate, and Library in height occupied the space of two stories or extended from the principal floor to the roof. The other portions of the attic story were used by the Houses of Congress [Plate 105].<sup>14</sup>

The echoes in the House of Representatives produced such disagreeable results that there was from 1820 to 1836 a continued discussion as to a feasible method of rectifying the trouble.

Bulfinch, in his review upon the subject, says: "Upon Congress being reinstated in the Capitol in 1820, it was found that a difficulty existed both in speaking and hearing in the House of Representatives."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mills, *Guide to the Capitol of the United States*, 46–47.

<sup>15</sup> *Memorial of Charles Bulfinch on the Subject of the Hall of the House of Representatives*, H. report 123 (21–1), Serial 199.

This was attributed to the resonances and echoes occasioned by the unfinished state of the Hall and the dampness of the new work. To remedy these defects draperies were suspended in front of the galleries and between the columns of the prostyle, and carpets were spread in the galleries. In 1821 a committee was appointed "to inquire into the practicability of making such alterations in the present structure of the Hall of the House of Representatives as shall better adapt it to the purposes of a deliberative assembly."<sup>16</sup> This committee consulted Bulfinch, as well as other architects and scientists. Many contradictory theories and reports were the result of these consultations. Bulfinch, in his report of 1821, says that the three following methods had been proposed as a remedy: "(1) To raise the floor; (2) to contract the space by a screen; (3) to form a level ceiling at the foot of the dome."<sup>17</sup> He advocates the last method, although he regrets the effect that it would have upon the appearance of the room. Nothing was done, and another committee was appointed, and a new report was sent in 1822 by Bulfinch, discussing the question, in which he refers to Saunders on Theaters as the best work on the subject, and recommends that a flat ceiling of cloth be stretched over the room as an experiment. Acting on this suggestion canvas was stretched over the whole Hall at the height of the blocking course above the columns. This ceiling put a stop to echoes, but seemed to absorb the whole volume of sound and obstructed the light. It was removed after a few days' service. Another experiment was tried at the next session by putting up a wooden partition between the columns. This was removed after one week's trial.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Report on Alterations in the Hall of Representatives*, February 13, 1823, Committee Report 90 (17–2), Serial 87.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Bulfinch to Silas Wood, January 10, 1821, in *DHC*, 236–237.

<sup>18</sup> Architect of the United States Capitol to the Commissioners of the Public Buildings, January 4, 1822, in *Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Public Buildings*, H. doc. 26 (17–1), Serial 64.

In 1826 William Strickland, of Philadelphia, was employed to act in conjunction with Bulfinch for “devising a plan for improving the Hall so as to make it better suited for the purposes of a deliberative assembly.”<sup>19</sup> A board, consisting of the Secretaries of State and War and the Attorney-General, was authorized to have the scheme which might be recommended by Bulfinch and Strickland, if it met their approval, carried into execution. Strickland visited Washington several times to consult with Bulfinch and the board. He recommended the breaking up of the plain surface of the dome by “numerous deeply sunken panels, bounded by raised styles or margins,” instead of the painted panels which were and are on this surface. As an alternative he suggests a lath-and-plaster flat ceiling above the columns.<sup>20</sup> The matter rested from this time until 1828, when decided objection was raised to the lack of ventilation as well as the deficiency in the acoustic properties of the Hall. Bulfinch reported on this January 24, 1830, recommending a reduction of the height of the galleries so as to get direct communication with windows in the rear, and again insisted on the insertion of the flat plaster ceiling.<sup>21</sup>

January 14, 1830, Robert Mills, who had been one of Latrobe’s assistants, sent a memorial to Congress repeating the views upon the subject which were contained in a memorial from him dated October 22, 1826.<sup>22</sup> He attributed the principal trouble to the walls in the rear of the columns running at different angles, which tended to produce an

<sup>19</sup> “Letter from Henry Clay, Secretary of State, Transmitting a Report to the Board of Inspection, in Respect to Improvements of the Hall of Representatives, February 9, 1827,” in *DHC*, 284–285.

<sup>20</sup> This painted wooden ceiling was removed and replaced with a superstructure of cast steel in 1901. *Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Capitol* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902).

<sup>21</sup> *The Hall of the House of Representatives*, January 25, 1830, H. report 123 (21–1), Serial 199.

<sup>22</sup> *Hall of the House of Representatives, U.S.: Memorial of Robert Mills, of South Carolina*, H. report 83 (21–1), Serial 199, reprinted in *DHC*, 304–307.

infinite variety of echoes, saying: “The fundamental error in the plan of this hall consists in breaking the curve line behind the columns of the gallery and disposing of the walls there in irregular surfaces. To correct this evil it will be absolutely necessary to perfect the curve line, making it parallel to that formed by the semicircular colonnade.” [See Plate 101.] In this suggestion Mills is careful to state that he assumes the ceiling to be built so that it reflects the sound at a proper angle to prevent echoes. Mills recommended a permanent screen parallel with the colonnade, and put on record his positive objection to a flat ceiling, which had been recommended. In a footnote to this memorial Mills calls attention to his ignorance at the time of writing of the fact that another architect had been called in to make a report on the same subject, and states that his scheme could not with propriety be considered until the result of the first one had been ascertained. The report alluded to was made by Charles Bulfinch, January 25, 1830.

February 4, 1832, Robert Mills made a report to the select committee of the House, repeating his former recommendations. In this he asserts that the center of the curved ceiling being about on a level with or above the ear of a man standing in the Hall, all sounds are reflected back to the ear.

The committee in charge recommended: “(1) That the floor be raised to the level of the foot of the columns surrounding the Hall; (2) that the chair of the Speaker be placed near where the principal entrance now is and that the seats of the members be turned so as to preserve their relative positions to the chair; (3) a circular wall to be built back of the third row of seats in the gallery.” “Resolved, That the Committee on Public Buildings cause the Hall of Representatives to be altered according to the plan of Robert Mills, and the expense to be paid out of the contingent fund of the House.”<sup>23</sup> The reports and investigations to

<sup>23</sup> *Alteration of the Hall House of Representatives: Report*, H. report 495 (22–1), in *DHC*, 319–325.

which I have referred, either ignored or tried in a temporary way as an experiment, were not found satisfactory.

After Bulfinch retired, in 1829, repairs to the building were made under the jurisdiction of William Noland as Commissioner of Public Buildings, with Pringle Slight acting as assistant superintendent. Reports to Congress show that water was brought into the Capitol from springs in the neighborhood in 1832. In January, 1834, the old copper roof on the Dome was replaced by a new copper covering.<sup>24</sup>

From 1829 until the appointment of Robert Mills there was no architect in the employment of the Government. Robert Mills applied for the position of Architect of Government Buildings, February 15, 1815, and from that date until his appointment frequently memorialized Congress on questions relating to this work: April 26, 1815, in relation to warming Capitol; October 22, 1822, in relation to acoustics of Capitol; October 11, 1833, in relation to water distribution in Capitol. April 26, 1838, the public buildings were placed under the jurisdiction of the Secretaries of State, Treasury, and War, John Forsyth, Levi Woodbury, and J. R. Poinsett being in office at that date. The following Commissioners of Public Buildings were in charge: William Noland, 1829–1846; Andrew Beaumont, 1846; Charles Douglas, 1847; Ignatius Mudd, 1847–1851; William Easby, appointed March 4, 1851.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See *Public Buildings: Report of the Commissioner of the Public Buildings, of the Expenditure of Appropriations for the Improvement of the Capitol, etc., etc., during the Year 1833*, H. doc. 19 (23–1), Serial 254; *Public Buildings: Report of the Commissioner of the Public Buildings, Transmitting Statements Exhibiting the Amount of Moneys Expended, etc.*, H. doc. 35 (23–2), Serial 272. Joseph Elgar was Commissioner of Public Buildings from 1822 to 1834; he was succeeded by William Noland. Pringle Slight was a carpenter who worked at the Capitol from 1825 until his death in 1860.

<sup>25</sup> Brown's dates of service for some of the commissioners were in error. The correct dates are: William Noland, 1834–1846; Charles Douglas, 1847–49; Ignatius Mudd, 1849–1851.

Under authority conferred upon him by the act of July 4, 1836, President Andrew Jackson appointed Robert Mills, on July 6, 1836, “architect to aid in forming the plans, making proper changes therein from time to time, and seeing to the erection of the new buildings [Treasury and Patent Office] in substantial conformity to the plans hereby adopted.”<sup>26</sup> The salary of Mills was fixed at \$1,800 per annum. On the 26th of October it was increased to \$2,300. May 17, 1839, when the new Post-Office was authorized, his salary was increased to \$2,400, and in October of the same year he was allowed \$500 “for assistance in drawing and copying.”<sup>27</sup> During the period from 1836 to 1851 all matters relating to changes in and the maintenance of the Capitol came under the supervision of Mills.<sup>28</sup> In this way he was able to carry out his suggestions in reference to the improvement of the acoustic properties of the Hall of Representatives. The floor was raised to the level of the floor in the Rotunda and a partition was placed in the rear of the colonnade concentric with it [Plate 95].

On April 5, 1840, Mills made a report on the expediency of lighting the public grounds with carbureted hydrogen as a substitute for oil. After an elaborate review of the subject, he concludes that it would be safer, more manageable, and economical. In 1841 experiments were made with gas-lighting apparatus by Robert Grant. Nothing further seems to have been done in this direction until 1847, when a thorough plan of lighting the building and grounds was begun. A mast over 100

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<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of Mills's appointment and salary, see Douglas E. Evelyn, “The Washington Years: The U.S. Patent Office,” in John M. Bryan, ed., *Robert Mills, Architect* (Washington: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1989), 114.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>28</sup> Brown was mistaken. The commissioners of public buildings, not Robert Mills, had authority over these matters. However, Mills was often consulted for advice and ideas by the commissioners concerning improvements at the Capitol.

feet high was raised on the Dome of the Capitol, on which was placed a lantern 6 feet in diameter. This was to contain the solar gaslight prepared by James Crutchet, giving a light equal to 30,000 candles, and capable, the inventor calculated, of extending its rays as far as Baltimore, 39 miles distant. The interiors of the Senate, House, and Rotunda were to be lighted in the same manner.<sup>29</sup>

The statues of War and Peace [Plate 117], by Luigi Persico, were ordered in 1832, and put in the niches on the western portico about 1837.<sup>30</sup> Statues of the same character are indicated on Thornton's design of 1794.

A few pieces of the old furniture used in the Capitol have been placed in the rooms of the Supreme Court. This furniture, and the present appearance of these rooms, which are used now in connection with the Supreme Court, are shown in Plates 106 and 107.

The Hall of the House was heated at this period (1847) by furnaces, with brass registers set in the floor. The air was first introduced into a mixing chamber, arched with brick, just beneath the floor. The whole floor was kept warm.<sup>31</sup> This was done when the floor was raised by Mills. Very interesting exterior views of the Capitol (1840) were made by Bartlett, an English painter. From these paintings steel engravings were made for the work of N. P. Willis, on American scenery. Plates 88, 108, 109, and 110 show reproductions of these views, one from Pennsylvania avenue looking east and west, another from the roof of the circular porch on the President's House, and a view of the exterior stairway. These illustrations, with a drawing made by W. A. Pratt, rural architect, 1839 [Plate 90], give an idea of the treatment of the grounds and surroundings.

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Mills to the Commissioner of Public Buildings, April 5, 1840, in *Documents Relating to the Bill (S. 329) "to Provide for Lighting the Capitol and the President's Squares, and the Pennsylvania Avenue, with Carburetted Hydrogen Gas*, S. doc. 434 (26-1), Serial 359; Committee on the District of Columbia, *Robert Grant—Gas Lights: Report*, H. report 6 (27-1), Serial 393. Brown's information on the lighting plan may have been derived from plans prepared by Robert Mills in *Contingent Expenses of the House of Representatives, Transmitting Statements of the Expenditures of the Contingent Fund of Said House for the Year 1848*, H. misc. doc. 4 (30-2), Serial 544. For an account of Cruchett's efforts to light the Capitol and its grounds, see Robert R. Hershman, "Gas in Washington," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 50 (1948-50): 137-157.

<sup>30</sup> The statues were placed on the eastern portico. *Art in the United States Capitol* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978), 356.

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<sup>31</sup> William Noland contracted with John Skirving to install warm-air furnaces in the Capitol in 1846. See *Report of the Commissioner of Public Buildings: Letter from the Commissioner of Public Buildings, Transmitting Copies of Contracts, etc.*, H. doc. 14 (29-2), Serial 499.