
FOREWORD

When I was appointed Architect of the Capitol in 1997, a ten-year celebration was under way that marked the bicentennial of the Capitol's initial construction. Four years prior to my arrival, the nation marked the 200th anniversary of the Capitol's cornerstone laying. In the year 2000 Congress celebrated two centuries of residence in what had become the nation's most venerated building. During this bicentennial period, numerous projects and programs were undertaken to give the American people a better understanding of this great building and the ideals that it stands for. Soon after taking office I learned that one of the projects was the preparation of a comprehensive history of the Capitol's design and construction. I have been pleased to lend my support to this very important work.

Within the general story of the Capitol's development lies the history of the office I am honored to hold. The office of Architect of the Capitol in effect began to function in 1791 when President George Washington appointed a three-man commission to oversee work in the new capital city. This included supervision of all construction activities on Capitol Hill—a significant aspect of what my office does today. In 1867 the commission's responsibilities were handed over to Edward Clark, an architect who was then finishing a large expansion project that also involved putting a new dome on top of the Capitol. With the two offices blended, the modern-day Architect of the Capitol became the officer in charge of all aspects of construction and maintenance for government buildings on Capitol Hill.

In reading about the history of the Capitol I am struck by the fact that for more than 200 years it has been a work in progress. Construction of the

building that George Washington had approved was begun in 1793 but was soon altered by an architectural metamorphosis dictated by changing circumstance, fashion, and fortune. Furthermore, as the nation grew so did the Congress and the Capitol. Change and growth seem to be threads that bind the Capitol's history together. At the end of the present volume, mention is made of congressional approval of a Capitol Visitor Center. It has been my privilege to oversee the design of this large underground facility, the construction of which will begin in 2002. It will add greatly to the comfort and security of the millions of visitors who come to the Capitol to see Congress in session and to learn about the great building in which it meets. It also exemplifies the fact that the Capitol is a vital, evolving building.

The office of Architect of the Capitol has diverse responsibilities that include the preservation of the building's historic fabric and many of its works of art. Through publications such as this my office also engages in educational efforts to enhance the public's understanding of the building's complex and fascinating history. With such an understanding often comes a new appreciation for our country's own unique journey over the last two centuries. It also engenders a sense of gratitude for the many men and women who have contributed their special talents to make the Capitol one of the world's greatest buildings. The human aspect of the Capitol's story is a reminder that much of history is biography, and that the nation's autobiography may clearly be seen through the magnificent building known simply as "The Capitol."

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Architect of the Capitol

