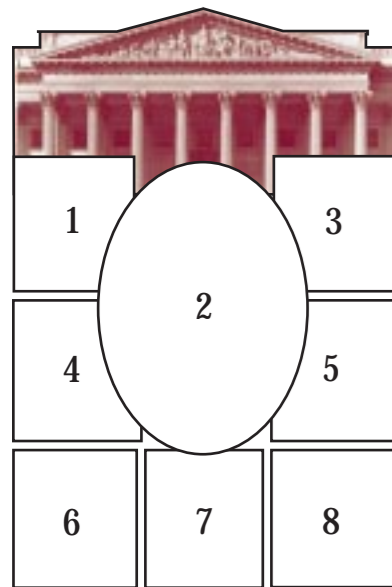


Meigs had an inquiring scientific and engineering mind that enjoyed analyzing how machines and other equipment worked and inventing ways to make them function better. The journal is therefore full of scribbled rough sketches of designs for various devices, including scaffolds and derricks used in building the Capitol dome, a machine for copying marble sculptures, a cast-iron die for use with a steam hammer to punch out eyes for the roof, and a temporary roof to cover the Rotunda during construction of the new dome.

In his daily work, Meigs came into contact not only with his workmen, their supervisors, and the contractors, but also with members of Congress, cabinet officers, military officials, and Presidents Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan. He encountered artists and others seeking commissions for work on the Capitol extension and visitors eager to be shown over the site. His relationships with all of these individuals come alive in the pages of his journal.

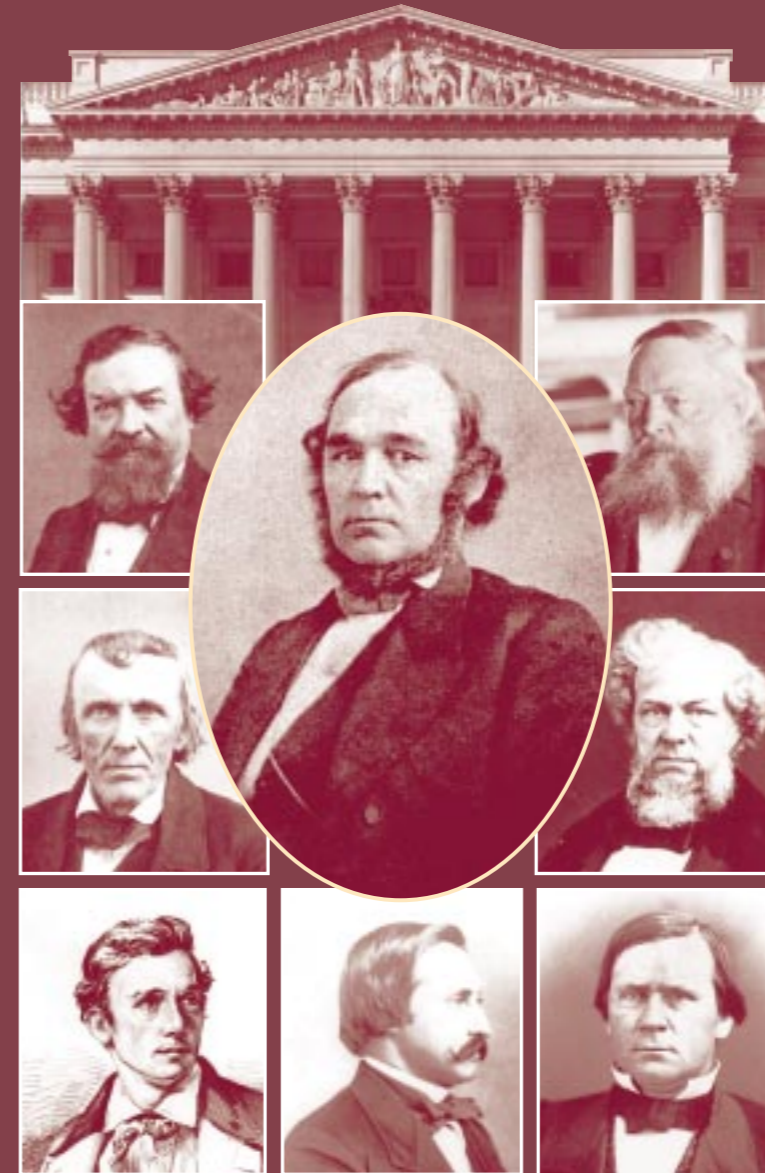
The Meigs transcription and publication project has been a collaborative effort—extending over ten years—among various congressional offices, including the Architect of the Capitol; the Legislative Resource Center in the Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives; the Senate Curator and the Senate Historical Office, both within the Office of the Secretary of the Senate; and with valued assistance from staff of the Library of Congress. A retired Official Reporter of Debates for the Senate translated the shorthand, with financial support from the Senate Bicentennial Commission for the years 1853–1859 and the United States Capitol Historical Society for 1861.



Cover Photographs

1. Constantino Brumidi
2. Montgomery C. Meigs
3. August C. Schoenborn
4. Pringle Slight
5. Thomas U. Walter
6. Thomas Crawford
7. Alfred L. Rives
8. William B. Franklin

**CAPITOL BUILDER:
THE SHORTHAND JOURNALS
OF MONTGOMERY C. MEIGS
1853–1859, 1861**



A Project to Commemorate the
United States Capitol Bicentennial
1800-2000

A Project to Commemorate the United States Capitol Bicentennial 1800-2000

CAPITOL BUILDER: THE SHORTHAND JOURNALS OF MONTGOMERY C. MEIGS 1853–1859, 1861

Capitol Builder: The Shorthand Journals of Montgomery C. Meigs, 1853–1859, 1861.

For nearly 150 years, a documentary treasure of great potential value to the study of the American history was available only to those few readers familiar with the archaic shorthand system of Sir Isaac Pitman. Now, that formidable code has been deciphered to provide to a wide audience rich new information about politics and life in mid-nineteenth-century Washington, D.C.

In March 1853, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis assigned U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Captain Montgomery C. Meigs (1816-1892) to supervise construction of an extension to the United States Capitol. This project was designed to provide spacious new quarters for the House and Senate, whose chambers had become increasingly overcrowded as new states entered the Union. Several years later, Meigs also gained responsibility for building the current Capitol dome. A talented administrator, an accomplished engineer, and an astute observer of his times, Meigs kept careful records including diaries, journals, notebooks, and drawings.

At the heart of this collection are Meigs' shorthand journals. Displaying an engineer's appreciation for structural order and efficiency, Meigs enthusiastically embraced Pitman's newly devised system of phonetic shorthand. Starting with his journal entry for May 17, 1853, and continuing through the nearly seven years he served as supervising engineer for the Capitol extension, Meigs relied on Pitman shorthand to record his daily musings.

Initially, Meigs used the journal to note decisions and activities related to his official duties. Early entries, for example, detailed the arrival of supplies, such as brick and stone, and the number of workmen employed on each aspect of the construction. At the end of each month, Meigs recorded payroll and contract costs. In later years, he expanded the entries to discuss his social and family life and political events in Washington, as well as to comment on such world events as the Crimean War. These entries thus provide a unique glimpse of life in mid-nineteenth-century Washington.

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