

PREFACE

In 1991 a committee of congressional historians and curators, with financial support from the Senate Bicentennial Commission, undertook a two-part project to make available rich new documentation on the mid-nineteenth-century construction of the Capitol's dome and its Senate and House wings. The first part of this project involved transcribing, in some 2,800 typewritten pages, the shorthand journals kept by Captain Montgomery C. Meigs during the nearly seven years he served as supervising engineer for construction of the Capitol extension. The second stage of the project involves publishing this edited and abridged version of Meigs' journals, to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary, on November 17, 2000, of the House and Senate's first occupation of the U.S. Capitol. Because of the length of the full transcript, the present volume contains principally the portions related to construction of the Capitol.

Copies of the full 2,800-page transcription are available to researchers at several locations: the office of the Curator of the Architect of the Capitol, the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, the Senate Historical Office, and the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The original shorthand journals and the microfilm copy are housed at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. The transcriber's paper copy of the microfilm is in the files of the Senate Historical Office.

Preparation of the journal has been a collaborative project among a number of congressional offices, including the Architect of the Capitol; the Legislative Resource Center, Office of the Clerk, House of Representatives; the Senate Curator; and the Senate Historical Office, with valued assistance from staff of the Library of Congress. Financial support for transcribing the journal for 1853-1859 was provided by the Senate Bicentennial Commission; and for 1861 by the U.S. Capitol Historical Society.

An advisory committee representing the Architect of the Capitol, the Clerk of the House of Representatives, the Senate Curator, and the Senate Historical Office has overseen the project, and its core members throughout the project have devoted considerable time to reviewing the text of the journal at several

stages, including countless hours of their own time. These advisory committee members are: William C. Allen, Architectural Historian, Architect of the Capitol; Richard A. Baker, Senate Historian; Diane Skvarla, Senate Curator; and Barbara A. Wolanin, Curator, Architect of the Capitol. These individuals also provided substantial assistance identifying artists, contractors, and others mentioned in the journal. Recent advisory committee members who also participated in portions of the review include Lea J. Uhre, Manager, Library Services, and Kenneth Kato, Historical Services Manager, both with the Legislative Resource Center, Office of the Clerk, House of Representatives.

Since the project has spanned nearly a decade, a number of previous Advisory Committee members also deserve mention: Robert Cuthriell, former chief, Legislative Resource Center, Office of the Clerk, House of Representatives; James Ketchum, former Senate Curator; and Raymond Smock, former House Historian.

Preparation of the journal text has involved a number of arduous tasks that required considerable tedious labor. William D. Mohr, an Official Reporter of Debates for the U.S. Senate for twenty-three years until his retirement in 1989, devoted more than four years to translating the journal from the obsolete version of Pitman shorthand in which Meigs wrote it and entering the majority of the text into a data base for publication. Elizabeth Strannigan organized the initial distribution of the text to the advisory committee and keyed in the early portions of the journal. Cynthia Pease Miller transcribed most of the lengthy newspaper articles and excerpts from congressional debates that Meigs pasted into the journal; Jason Barrett of the Legislative Resource Center completed the process by transcribing the remaining articles. Ellen T. McDougall conducted the initial extensive research needed to identify the many family members, workers, and government officials mentioned in the text and prepared a detailed index of all those mentioned in the complete version of the transcript. Copies of this index are available to assist researchers consulting the complete transcripts at the locations mentioned above.

The project could not have been undertaken without the extensive cooperation of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, which provided paper copies of the microfilm version of the journal for use in translating the shorthand. More recently, Marvin Kranz, Historical Specialist in the Manuscript Division, provided access to the original journals for purposes

of scanning illustrations. Jan Lancaster of the Library of Congress' National Digital Library scanned the many illustrations that are used here from the original journals, with the expert assistance of Domenico Sergi, Computer Specialist for the Library's Information Technology Services.

Many others have reviewed and corrected or commented on the transcribed journal at various times since the project's inception, among them: Jim Oliver, Deborah Turner, and Gerasimos Vans, of the Office of the Clerk, House of Representatives; Henry Hope Reed; Harry C. Ways, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Dean Herrin, Historian, HABS/HAER; and Carmen Brissette Grayson.

While this project owes its existence to many helpful individuals, it owes its success to just two. Drawing on his abundant fund of knowledge and patience, William Mohr faithfully transcribed the original 2,800 pages. Historical Editor Wendy Wolff then reduced and shaped that massive text to one that sparkles with colorful insights about construction of the Capitol and the politics and culture of pre-Civil War Washington, D.C. By removing passages that were repetitive, mundane, and overly technical, she has skillfully enhanced the appeal of this compelling story without sacrificing its complexity or richness. She also selected the illustrations and prepared the index. In its final shape, this is her volume.

Alan M. Hantman,
Architect of the Capitol

Gary Sisco,
Secretary of the Senate

Jeff Trandahl,
Clerk of the House of Representatives