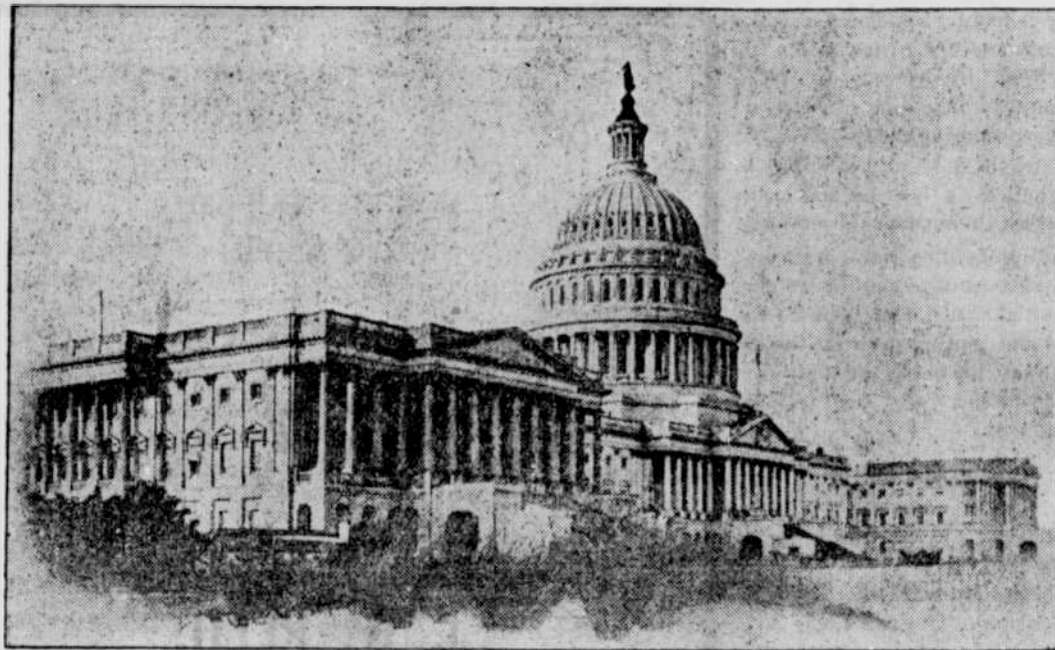


EVOLUTION OF THE CAPITOL AT WASHINGTON

After many Vicissitudes the Superb Structure is about to take Final Form



IN the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington stands a large model of the structure executed with a regard for minute detail and accuracy of scale which makes it a work of art in its way. An accompanying placard announces that it shows the suggested extensions and improvements in the Capitol, which will bring the building to its final form. Why does this shrine of the republic need alteration? Every American is familiar with the outlines of soaring dome and majestic facades. A glimpse of the building arouses dormant patriotism and affection in the heart of every American. The halls are rich with marbles, sculptures, paintings and mural decorations worthy of the finest Old World palace. Changes mean a destruction of many associations.

A critical study of the building, however, and a comparison with the model, leads to the conclusion that the alterations will greatly add to the beauty of the Capitol—already called a miracle of architecture. The building is far from finished. The dome lacks a needful support and the central building—the old Capitol—is subordinated to the new wings on either side. It is now proposed to correct these faults by erecting an extension to the central structure, so that the eastern front, with its portico and steps, will be on a line with those of the wings. As for sentimental objections to such a change, it need merely be stated that the adopted plan was made more than a quarter of a century ago, and completes the alterations of which the dome and legislative wings formed parts.

Occupied by Congress.

In 1800 the Federal government came to Washington. The old Senate wing was by that time finished, the foundations of the rotunda were laid and the basement of the House wing was in process of construction. On November 17 both Senate and House were called together in the new building—the former body in the original Senate chamber, the floor of which was that of the present basement beneath what is now the room of the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, the House, for lack of better quarters, met in a long apartment over the Senate committee

rooms, which is now cut up into offices for the Supreme Court. The arrangement, quite naturally, gave great dissatisfaction to the Representatives, for whose accommodation a temporary structure of brick, in the shape of an ellipse 70 by 90 feet, was erected before the next winter within the rising walls of the south wing. The hall of the House, when finally completed, was first occupied in October, 1807.

Benjamin H. Latrobe had become Director of Public Works in 1803. He likewise quarreled with Dr. Thornton, and President Jefferson afterward took an active part in the discussion. Most important among his modifications was an alteration of the shape of the chamber occupied by the House of Representatives from an elliptical room to one with two short sides and curved ends.

A Curiosity in Acoustics.

Thus began one of the most curious of the disputes regarding the Capitol. The acoustics of this old chamber have always been a puzzle. Now the Statuary Hall, visitors to the structure today find cause for wonder in the curious "whisperings" and the transmission of sound from point to point, audible on one stone in the pavement, unheard a few feet distant. Dr. Thornton finally suggested the placing of draperies between the row of marble pillars at the north end of the apartment. This served as a temporary remedy.

The echoes in the House of Representatives caused continued discussion between 1820 and 1836. Robert Mills, an architect under Latrobe, thought that the trouble arose from the fact that the walls in the rear of the columns, which partially surrounded the room, ran at different angles. He suggested a curved wall and a permanent screen parallel with the colonnade. Bulfinch attributed the faulty acoustics to the unfinished condition of the interior. Curtains were suspended between the pillars and a flat ceiling of cloth was hung under the domes in the ceiling. The latter seemed to absorb all the sound. Strickland suggested that numerous sunken panels be placed in the dome instead of the painted sections which were and are still there. Mills' plan of a circular wall and raised floor was finally adopted. This chamber has been altered decidedly since then, and it is, therefore, curious that the defects are still so apparent.

Burned by the British.

Evil days were to fall upon the Capitol. During the summer of 1814 the Atlantic seaboard was threatened by the Republic's enemy, the British.

About the middle of August some sixty English ships sailed up the Chesapeake, and General Ross landed 3,000 British soldiers, defeated the Americans at Bladensburg, a few miles from Washington, and on August 24 marched into the infant capital to destroy it.

Washington then had about 900 houses, scattered over three miles of open country, and bordering on avenues which were merely dirt roads. The invaders found that the Capitol consisted of two wings joined, where the central pavilion was afterward erected, by a wooden passageway, 145 feet long, which Congressmen called "The Oven," because it lacked ventilation and was very hot in the summer time.

A pitiful scene of destruction followed. Rockets were discharged into the roof of the Capitol, to set it on fire, but did not serve this purpose. The timbers of "The Oven" furnished fuel. Books, papers, hangings and furniture were piled in the center of each legislative chamber, and rockets placed beneath the material to spread the fire. A British officer's remark, that it was a "pity to burn anything so beautiful" as the Hall of Representatives, did not save it from destruction. The two wings of the unfinished Capitol, the "President's Palace," and the long bridge across the Potomac, formed parts of a conflagration that could be seen in Baltimore, forty miles distant.

Thus was realized the ruin outlined in the middle picture. The walls and many of the interior partitions were used in the new building, which now forms the central pavilion of the structure. The sculptures crumbled in the fire, and were replaced. The material was sandstone, and a coat of white paint concealed the smoke marks. In this manner the Capitol and Executive Mansion were changed from dull yellow to white buildings, and the latter earned the name of "White House."

During the next thirteen years the old Capitol was finished. President Madison was authorized by Congress in 1815 to borrow \$500,000 for the rebuilding. The legislative wings were reconstructed and occupied in 1819, and the central pavilion in 1827, the entire structure costing \$3,700,000.

Latrobe made minor modifications in the Thornton design. His are the famous "corn columns" beneath the old Senate chamber—a new American order. He increased the height of the dome, but the drawings were never executed. Latrobe also changed Dr. Thornton's semi-circular portico to the rectangular projection which now ornaments the central structure.

The floor of the Senate chamber was

elevated to the main floor, the Supreme Court moving into the basement beneath, and the hall of the House assumed a form which was meant to resemble that of an ancient Greek theater.

Beneath the center of the rotunda was built a subterranean chamber, called the crypt, in which it was understood that the remains of Washington were to lie, in a stone sarcophagus, exposed to the view of the multitude. His widow was not adverse to the plan, but his heirs objected to the removal of the coffin from Mount Vernon, and so that project was abandoned. Nevertheless, a watcher called the keeper of the crypt, was employed by Congress up to the Civil War and a light kept there was not extinguished, it is said, for fifty years.

Charles Bulfinch, of Boston, was architect of the Capitol from 1817 to 1829, and completed the building as shown in the picture of 1835. Under his direction, the dome rose higher than in any previous design, the cupolas were added at either end and the familiar western portico and terraces incorporated into the design. The acoustics of the Hall of Representatives still baffled the government, and William Strickland, of Philadelphia, was called into consultation with Bulfinch to supply a remedy.

The picture of 1835 marks the second stage in the evolution of the Capitol. The changes to come gave the structure substantially its present appearance. The Capitol of 1835 covered a little more than an acre and a half of ground, and was 351 feet 4 inches long.

In the course of years it became too small. The Congressional Committee on Public Buildings advertised, in December, 1850, for plans for an extension of the Capitol. From the numerous designs submitted four were selected, and the premium equally divided among the four architects. The committee then employed an architect named Mills to prepare a design for the extension of the Capitol, based on the principal feature of the four selected plans. President Fillmore adopted a different design, and the cornerstone was laid on July 4, 1851, an oration being delivered by Daniel Webster. Thomas U. Walter, of Philadelphia, was the successful architect. In 1855 the old dome, which was too "squat" to be beautiful on the extended facade, was removed and work on the present one begun.

During this operation a movement was started in a convention of American artists at Washington to supervise the decorations in the new wings and dome. The members of the convention recommended the appointment of a committee for the work. As named by President Buchanan, in 1858, this body comprised Henry K. Brown, a sculptor, of New York; James R. Lambdin, a portrait painter, of Philadelphia, and John F. Kennett, a landscape painter, of New York. Although these gentlemen took a hand in the work of supervision, they accomplished little, and finally abandoned their duties when Congress declined to pay their bills for expenses.

Thus the building was brought to the condition shown in the picture made in 1861. A comparison of this bird's-eye view with the Capitol of 1835 illustrates in a comprehensive way the proportions of the wings as compared with the size of the old building in the middle and the contracted dimensions of the roof upon which the present dome was placed.

The statue was raised to the apex of the dome in 1863.

The Capitol to-day contains 430 rooms. With the contemplated addition it will have 493 rooms—thirty-three more for the Senate and an equal number for the House of Representatives.

When the extension has been made, the edifice, including the works of art which it contains, will have cost nearly \$20,000,000—more money than Congress had ever imagined, in a lump sum, when in the early nineties of the century before last it offered \$500 and a building lot for the best design for a house for the National Legislature.—Philadelphia Ledger.