

# THE CAPITOL DOME



Washington's Tomb  
Texas Legation History  
Architect of the Capitol Reflections  
Trumbull and the Rotunda

Society News: 2017 Donors & Event Coverage





## *From the Editor's Desk*

The Capitol's history is steeped in stories about efforts to create and maintain a repository for national meaning. Those efforts are as distant in time as George Washington's burial and as current as the recent restoration of the Dome. **Matthew Costello's** article shows how George Washington's body became a commodity in protracted negotiations that, two hundred years later, still leave their mark as an empty tomb below the Capitol Crypt.

At the other extreme—in chronology as well as vertical distance—is the Capitol Dome. **Alan Hantman's** first-person narrative recounts the genesis of its most recent restoration, which was completed and celebrated in a formal ceremony on 2 December 2016. Hantman is uniquely positioned to tell this story: as the 10th Architect of the Capitol, he led a federal agency whose 2,200-person workforce is virtually invisible to the millions of Americans who see their handiwork—in person, in books and newspapers, or on TV—every day of the year. Between 1997 and 2007, he was responsible for the architecture, engineering, renovation, new construction, historic preservation, and facilities management for the U.S. Capitol, the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress, and all congressional office buildings. He oversaw the planning, design, and construction of the 580,000 square foot Capitol Visitors Center, which is the building's largest increment of growth since George Washington selected the Capitol design in 1793.

A local collector's chance purchase of a rare C.A. Busby print launched the Society's

sleuthing Resident Scholar on a journey back almost two hundred years to Charles Bulfinch's time, when the purpose and scope of the Capitol Rotunda was not yet settled, literally, in stone. **Pam Scott** brings her usual intrepidity and insight into retrieving Bulfinch's phantom designs for the most symbolic space in the Capitol.

Like the Busby print that inspired Scott's article, the re-discovery of the Texas Legation Papers after 150 years is the inspiration behind **Kenneth Stevens's** article on a relatively unknown episode of federal government history, when the future state of Texas was still a recently-proclaimed republic, and the "Texas Legation" was something between a foreign embassy and a congressional delegation.

Finally, we conclude with the return of a feature that we will continue to revive periodically in these pages. Book reviews offer readers a short-cut to the latest scholarship, which they can then choose to pursue at more length. Here, we consider the recent biography of former Representative Homer Thornberry (TX) and invite readers to recommend other books on congressional or Capitol history for future reviews. We are grateful to **Bell Clement** for her well-written and judicious review—as we are grateful to all our authors for this issue of *The Capitol Dome*.

*William diGiacomantonio*

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## *Contents*

American Sepulcher: George Washington's Tomb in the United States Capitol by Matthew Costello.....	2
Dome Reflections: An Architect of the Capitol's Inside View by Alan M. Hantman, FAIA.....	12
From "Hall of the People" to "Grand Vestibule for Great Public Occasions" by Pamela Scott.....	26
"Lone Star Diplomats: Representatives of the Republic of Texas in Washington" by Kenneth R. Stevens.....	36
Capitol Bookshelf.....	49
2016 Donor List.....	51
Society News.....	55
Marketplace.....	64

### **Cover:**

The restoration of the Capitol Dome was nearing completion in August 2016. This image shows one of the later painting phases, with some of the upper scaffolding surrounding the Dome already removed. Courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.



# American Sepulcher: George Washington's Tomb in the United States Capitol

by Matthew Costello, Ph.D.



*Fig. 1. Detail from The Apotheosis of Washington by Constantino Brumidi, 1865*



Visitors to the United States Capitol often spend a fair amount of time in the Rotunda, admiring the massive paintings, Doric pilasters, and life-sized statues of prominent Americans. As schoolchildren and tour groups gaze upwards into the Dome they see Constantino Brumidi's *Apotheosis of Washington* (1865) (fig. 1). Completed near the end of the American Civil War, this stunning fresco features a radiant George Washington rising into the heavens, accompanied by the female figures of Victory and Liberty. Surrounded by thirteen maidens and groups that represent the themes of commerce, agriculture, war, science, mechanics, and the sea, Washington is visually enshrined as America's greatest founder and hero. But what many fail to realize is that long before Brumidi's fresco, the Rotunda was designated to serve as a grandiose mausoleum for the remains of George Washington. Two stories beneath the Rotunda floor, the tomb would safeguard the republic's most revered citizen, resting at the center of the city that shared his name and symbolically lying at the legislative heart of the American nation.

The history of Washington's tomb in the Capitol illuminates how American hero worship evolved and transformed during the nineteenth century. Federalists attempted to fuse European hero worship traditions with American republicanism, using Washington's tomb to further their political agenda. Democratic-Republicans charged that this form of veneration smacked of regality and decadence. They branded it as antithetical to the ideals of the American Revolution, contending that the people, not an individual, secured independence for the nation. Washington's descendants ultimately ensured that his body would never lie beneath the Rotunda. Nonetheless political parties, factions, and organizations battled each other incessantly to claim George Washington for themselves. With so many different interpretations of Washington, these groups believed that possession of the body gave its owners the power to control the memory of Washington for political, social, economic, and cultural reasons. The tomb is a testament to George Washington's significance to a young nation, but its emptiness speaks volumes about our rejection of Old World traditions and

the political contentiousness of our national past (fig. 2).

A number of historians have explored the origins of the tomb, debating whether or not Washington encouraged the idea of a tomb for himself. C.M. Harris argued that Washington "recognized the political usefulness of his own, world famous image (and body) in fixing the location of the permanent capital and in establishing the 'national faith' of the new government." Rubil Morales-Vázquez contended that Washington supported Dr. William Thornton's idea and design for a tomb because "self-interest coincided with what he perceived to be the public good." Karal Ann Marling countered



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Fig. 2. Washington's tomb at the Capitol, c. 1916

that while Washington personally inspected all of the submitted plans for the new Capitol, there was no tomb specifically mentioned in Thornton's winning design. Architectural historian William C. Allen argued that while Thornton wished to place an equestrian statue of Washington in the "Grand Vestibule," only after Washington's death did he promote the idea of entombing him in the Capitol. The original Thornton plans are long lost, but all of these scholars drew vastly different conclusions from the same document: William Thornton's letter to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia in April 1793.<sup>1</sup>

Thornton's letter to the Commissioners describes the Capitol's prominent features in great detail. He men-

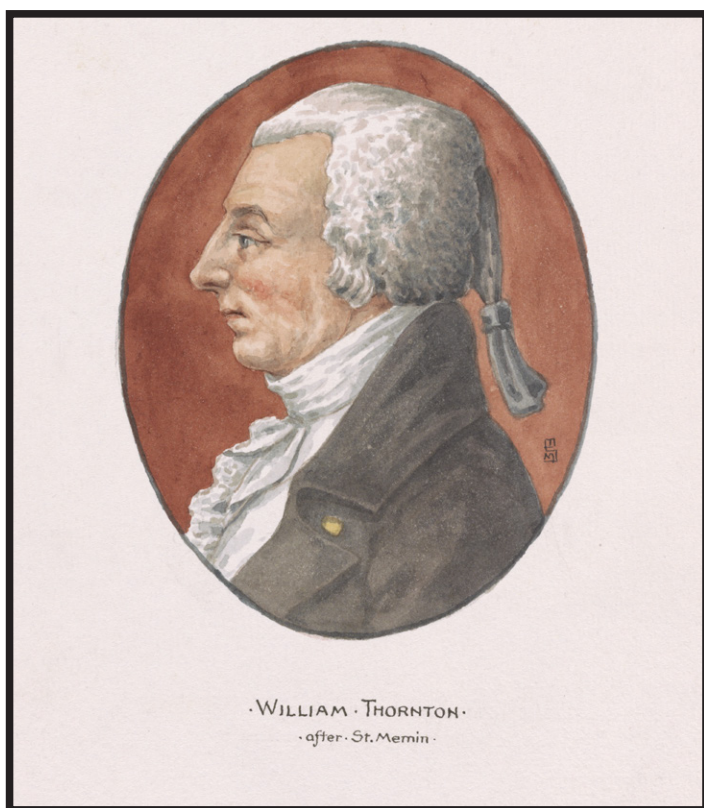


Fig. 3. Print after Charles Balthazar Julien Fevret de Saint-Mémin's portrait of William Thornton, c. 1800

tions his "Grand Vestibule" and beneath it a "great repository," but never specifies what exactly would fill this space. It seems plausible that Thornton's repository could have held future acts of Congress, treaties with foreign nations, formal proceedings of the national government, or even served as a possible destination for the first Library of Congress. Washington's correspondence with Thornton offers no clear answer either, as

Washington never discussed his future entombment nor alluded to a mausoleum in his honor. While the two men certainly shared a friendship, Federalist political beliefs, and a vision of prosperity for the nation's capital, there is no direct evidence that Washington desired a tomb beneath the Rotunda.<sup>2</sup>

Washington had "no hesitation in giving [Thornton's drawings] a decided preference" in the design competition, but Thornton's lack of architectural training created conflict between the English doctor and the new Capitol superintendent Étienne Sulpice Hallet. As a highly qualified French architect, Hallet had been recommended by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and selected by the commissioners to oversee the construction. However, losing the competition to an English amateur never sat very well with the Frenchman. He immediately scrutinized Thornton's designs and informed Jefferson of their deficiencies, impracticalities, and impossibilities. Washington called for a conference in Philadelphia to discuss the discrepancies, attended by Thornton, his secondary architect Thomas Carstairs, Hallet, Jefferson, and Thomas Hoban, architect of the President's House. Those present tended to agree with most of Hallet's objections, and in doing so provided him with greater autonomy to revamp Thornton's plans to his own liking. Knowing Washington's affinity for frugality, Hallet also secured the President's confidence by vowing to cut the cost of construction in half.<sup>3</sup>

After Washington caught wind of Hallet's deliberate attempt to alter Thornton's plans by eliminating the Grand Vestibule, the French architect was dismissed for insubordination. His successors, George Hadfield and James Hoban, also experienced rather short tenures.

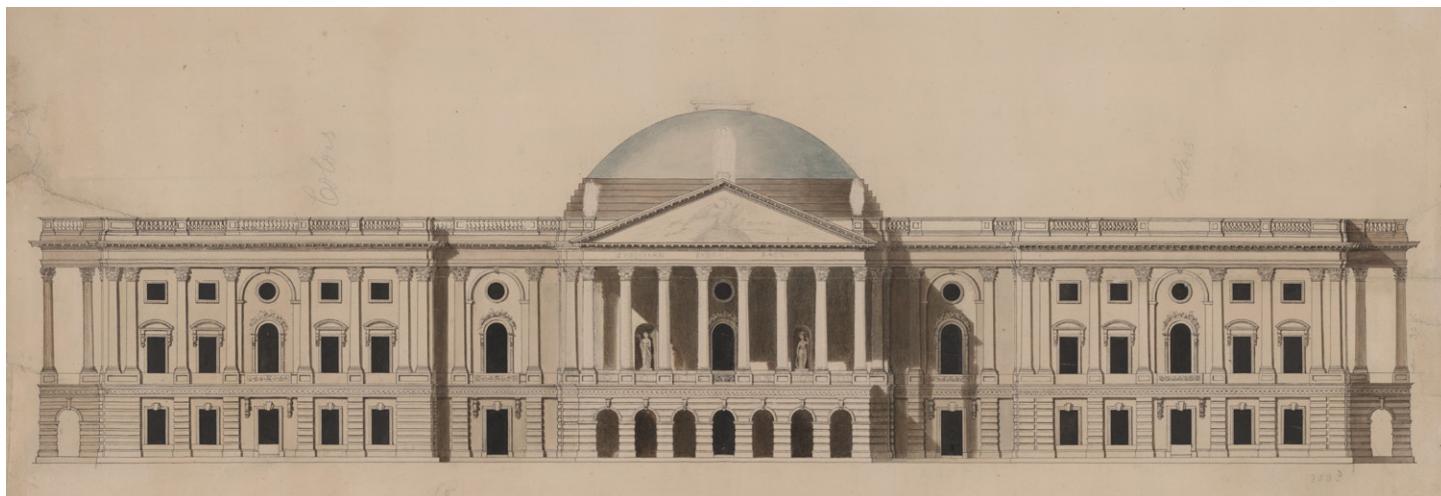
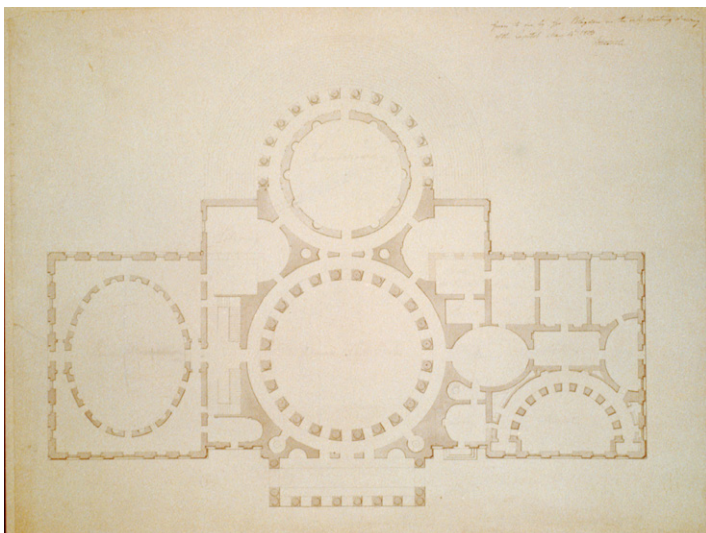


Fig. 4. Thornton drew this elevation of the east front after Hallet was dismissed (1793).





*Fig. 5. This 1793 Capitol floor plan by William Thornton shows the chambers of both houses of Congress.*

With expenses growing and Congress's move from Philadelphia approaching, these two architects focused on completing the Senate chamber housed in the North Wing, leaving work unfinished on the South Wing (House Chamber) and the Rotunda.

As the nation's representatives prepared to head south from the temporary capital, word reached Philadelphia that George Washington had passed away at Mount Vernon. His successor, President John Adams, shared the disheartening news with Congress and confirmed the rumors: "It has pleased Divine Providence to remove from this life, our excellent fellow-citizen George Washington. . . . [I]t remains for an affectionate and grateful people, in whose hearts he can never die, to pay suitable honor to his memory." Virginia Representative and future Supreme Court Justice John Marshall was tasked with leading a committee that would decide how best to commemorate Washington. Under Marshall's guidance, the committee proposed a monument inside the Capitol and requested Washington's family provide his remains "to be deposited under it." Once this measure passed Congress unanimously, Adams asked Martha Washington (fig. 6) to consider giving up her husband's body for the good of the country. After much deliberation Martha acquiesced, citing George's example of always forgoing "private wishes to the public will."<sup>24</sup>

Tobias Lear, Washington's longtime secretary and confidante, crafted Martha's response to the Congressional request. He also wrote a personal letter to Adams

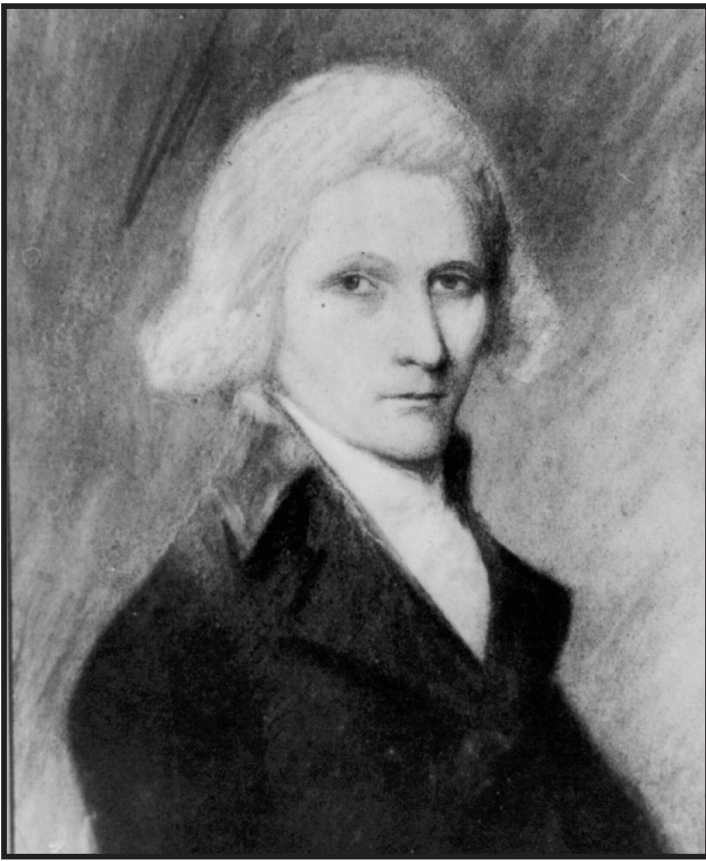
describing the anguish that came from such a public demand. He informed the president that he had promised Martha that "her remains would be deposited in the same Tomb" as her husband's. Around the same time William Thornton wrote to committee chairman John Marshall, telling him that he approved of the plan "to deposit [Washington's] body in the place that was long since contemplated for its reception," the "Center of that National Temple which he approved of for a Capitol." Thornton recommended that Marshall encourage a secret vote to oblige Martha's request in order to secure Washington's remains for future entombment. Only a month after Washington's burial at Mount Vernon, a Federalist-controlled Congress had secured the national government's right to possess George Washington's bodily remains.<sup>5</sup>

In the wake of Washington's death, Democratic-Republicans captured the House and the Senate in the election of 1800. As the political landscape shifted, the idea of hero worship became extremely contentious; Federalists clung to Washington's image while Republicans tried to subvert it. On days of remembrance, politicians of both parties praised Washington, but



*Fig. 6. Martha Washington (The Athenaeum Portrait), oil on canvas by Gilbert Stuart (1796)*





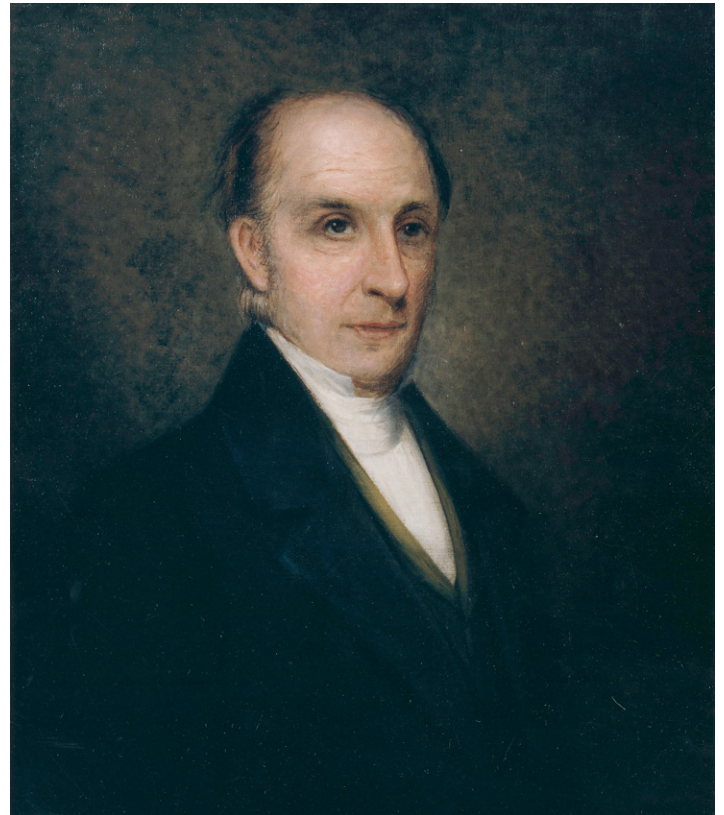
*Fig. 7. Photograph of James Sharples's portrait of Bushrod Washington*

Republicans gave more attention to the masses, the unknown peoples who fought and died for America's independence. These soldiers and sailors, many of whom were small landowners, apprentices, tradesmen, artisans, and laborers, welcomed the acclaim and gravitated towards Republican Party ideology and its more democratic means of commemoration. Even so, Republicans had to carefully undermine Federalist efforts to channel the memory of Washington without insulting the symbol or appearing ungrateful for his contributions to the American experiment.<sup>6</sup>

With their control of Congress due to expire in the spring of 1801, Federalists moved quickly to pass legislation that would create a more opulent tomb for Washington and emphasize their connection to the man. In December 1800 Virginia Representative Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee introduced a resolution that called for the "erection of a Mausoleum to George Washington." This colossal monument would be made of "American granite and marble, in pyramidal form one hundred feet square at the base, and of a proportionate height." Republicans immediately rejected the idea with an

array of arguments: the mausoleum was a waste of public funds; Washington was not a Pharaoh or all-knowing deity; a proper means to commemorate Washington would be by emulating his example, not amassing stones; and perhaps the most powerful argument, that such a tomb was monarchical and aristocratic in nature. While the Federalist House managed to pass the legislation, small changes made by the Senate sent it back for a confirmation vote. Public opinion now coalesced behind the Republicans, and Washington's mausoleum ultimately failed 34-49. With the influx of Republican representatives in both the House and the Senate in March 1801, any possibility that Washington might be entombed in an elaborate Federalist sepulcher disappeared.<sup>7</sup>

While there would be no Washington pyramid, Thornton's suggestion for a tomb was carried forward by the successive architects of the Capitol. Hired first by President Thomas Jefferson as surveyor of the Public Buildings, Benjamin Henry Latrobe altered Thornton's designs for the South Wing and oversaw construction until the War of 1812 interrupted the building's progress. After the British burned the Capitol, Latrobe



*Fig. 8. This portrait of Charles Bulfinch is by George B. Matthews, after an 1842 drawing by Alvan Clark.*





Fig. 9. Archibald Dick made this engraving from William Henry Brooke's image, c. 1830. It shows Washington's Tomb in the foreground and his home, Mount Vernon, in the background.

returned to restore the damaged North and South Wings and complete the center Rotunda. At the same time, the Virginia General Assembly passed a resolution to build a monument to George Washington in Richmond, asking his executor and nephew, Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington (fig. 7), if the Washington family would be willing to part with his uncle's remains so they could be entombed beneath the memorial. Citing Washington's will, Bushrod refused to surrender the body for reburial in the state capital. With this appeal defeated, Latrobe continued his work, but his personality and demands created more enemies than friends in Congress. By November 1817 Latrobe resigned his position, making way for Charles Bulfinch (fig. 8). A Harvard graduate known for his design of the Massa-

chusetts State House, Bulfinch was selected by President James Monroe to finish the Capitol's construction. Work on the Rotunda began in 1818, but Bulfinch made adjustments to accommodate Jonathan Trumbull's commissioned paintings and representatives' demands for more committee rooms. Bulfinch made the Rotunda his own, adding more rooms than Latrobe's design and the circular oculus in the Rotunda floor that allowed light into the crypt above Washington's destined tomb. But by 1828 Trumbull demanded that the oculus be closed, as warm air and moisture were beginning to damage his paintings. Two years later Bulfinch finished the Rotunda, completed the United States Capitol, and resigned from his position to return to his native Boston.<sup>8</sup>

Bulfinch's progress sparked excitement and celebra-



tion over the Capitol's completion. It also nicely coincided with the approaching centennial of George Washington's birthday in February 1832. Congress once again took up the issue of filling the empty tomb beneath the Rotunda, but sectionalism had drastically altered the political landscape. Washington's commemoration became intertwined with contemporary issues as representatives and senators vehemently argued over westward expansion, economic and taxation policies, internal improvement, and the constitutional authority of the federal government to enact and enforce such measures. Serving as co-chair of the joint committee on the centennial observance, Kentucky Senator Henry Clay accumulated Whig support for removal, maintaining that Washington belonged to the nation. Virginia congressmen countered that Washington was first and foremost a Virginian and that he should remain in his native soil. Democrats rallied to the cause, scorning the measure as yet another example of an overzealous national government infringing upon the sovereignty of

a state. Despite the partisan and regional resistance, the measure requesting Washington's body for entombment passed the Senate 29-15 and the House of Representatives 109-76.<sup>9</sup>

The new proprietor of Mount Vernon, John Augustine Washington Jr., had inherited the property from his uncle Bushrod and aunt Julia Blackburn Washington in 1829. Along with the mansion, outlying buildings, and a considerable amount of land, John became owner of the family tomb and the remains of his deceased family members (fig. 9). As a result, it was John Augustine's decision and his alone that truly mattered in securing the remains. At the same time, word reached Richmond that Congress intended to remove George Washington and entomb him in the United States Capitol. The Virginia General Assembly responded with a unanimous resolution denouncing the proposal, citing the connections between Washington, the state of Virginia, and their ancestors who fought alongside the general in the Revolutionary War. The Assembly's declaration concluded,



*Fig. 10. The Capitol Crypt as it appears today*



“In the name of the good people of this commonwealth, we solemnly protest against the contemplated removal of his remains from our territory.”<sup>10</sup>

Moving Washington’s bones to the tomb in the Capitol was meant to inspire patriotism and unity among citizens, but the issue was deeply intertwined with the polarizing sectionalism that had engulfed American politics and society. Representatives of the national government and the state of Virginia both claimed Washington for themselves, but only the Washington family could decide which political entity to side with in the matter. Even within the Washington family there was no clear consensus on the proper means of action. George Washington Parke Custis, Washington’s step-grandson and postmortem publicist, gave his “most hearty consent to the removal of the remains.” It was, however, John Augustine’s decision as owner of Mount Vernon. Responding on 15 February 1832, John Augustine thanked Congress for its desire to celebrate his ancestor but denied their request based on the wording of Washington’s will and the family’s recent construction of a new vault. “In respect to the disposition of his remains,” he wrote, they “now repose in perfect tranquility, surrounded by those of other endeared members of the family.” By denying the federal government’s application for Washington’s remains, John Augustine defused a politically volatile situation. He also ensured that the tomb in the Capitol would remain empty.<sup>11</sup>

With the Rotunda floor sealed and the Washingtons staying put at Mount Vernon, Americans quickly forgot about the 1799 pledge made by Congress. A star-shaped light was later added to the space to mark the burial spot, and a crypt-keeper continued to guard the vacant tomb. Over the next 30 years the country grew more litigious and divided; Congress kept the nation together with a variety of compromises and bargains, but eventually the cries for war grew louder. During the Civil War, supplies and provisions were stacked above the tomb and below Union troops, fresh off the Ohio and Baltimore Railroad and temporarily housed inside the Capitol. As these soldiers looked up at Brumidi’s unfinished fresco of Washington, they were reminded of what they were willing to die for: the defense of the Constitution and the preservation of the Union. While Washington’s body was 15 miles away in neutral territory, his spirit, captured in these iconic images, gave hope and courage to the men serving the Union.<sup>12</sup>

Although the Capitol’s tomb would never hold the

remains of George and Martha Washington, it did become a sacred depository of another relic. After the assassination and funeral of President Abraham Lincoln, the catafalque used to support Lincoln’s casket was moved down to the empty chamber at the request of the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Benjamin French (see Fig. 2). The bier was later used for the funeral ceremonies of presidents, generals and admirals, Supreme Court justices, unknown soldiers of the major wars, prominent public servants, and private citizens. Today the Lincoln catafalque continues to bear the bodily remains of our nation’s heroes in the Rotunda, but the story of Washington’s tomb and its lack of contents tell us how Americans struggled to determine whether hero worship should revolve around the body or the memory of the figure in question. While Federalists favored entombing Washington and venerating his remains in the Capitol or possibly a mausoleum, others rejected such regality and excess, arguing for a more democratic form of commemoration that celebrated the contributions of all Americans to independence. The empty sepulcher has and will always be emblematic of our revolutionary heritage and our rejection of Old World political traditions. But it also represents a longstanding struggle between Americans over our nation’s history, as we continue to battle over the possession and the power to interpret the past.<sup>13</sup>



**MATTHEW COSTELLO** currently serves as Senior Historian for the White House Historical Association. He received his Ph.D. in American history from Marquette University, specializing in the early Republic, memory studies, and nationalism.

# Notes

1. C.M. Harris, "Washington's Gamble, L'Enfant's Dream: Politics, Design, and the Founding of the National Capital," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (July 1999): 552-53, 559-60; Rubil Morales-Vázquez, "Redeeming a Sacred Pledge: The Plans to Bury George Washington in the Nation's Capital," in Kenneth R. Bowling and Donald R. Kennon, eds., *Establishing Congress: The Removal to Washington, D.C. and the Election of 1800* (Athens, OH, 2005), pp. 151-152; Karal Ann Marling, "The United States Capitol as Mausoleum: Or, Who's Buried in Washington's Tomb?" in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville, VA, 1999), pp. 448-449; William C. Allen, "Pantheon on the Potomac: The Architectural Evolution of the Capitol Rotunda," in Donald R. Kennon and Thomas P. Somma, eds., *American Pantheon: Sculptural and Artistic Decoration of the United States Capitol* (Athens, OH, 2004), pp. 5-6; Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), pp. 35-38. For a point-by-point refutation of C.M. Harris's claims, see William C. Allen, "Washington's Tomb in the Capitol's Original Plan: A Rebuttal," 4 Oct. 2005, Catafalque and Tomb Folder, Office of the Architect of the United States Capitol Archives (OAUSCA).

2. William Thornton to Commissioners of Washington, DC, ca. 10 April 1793, box 1, reel 1, Papers of William Thornton, Library of Congress; see also C.M. Harris, ed., *Papers of William Thornton* (Charlottesville, VA, 1995) 1:242. In his will, Washington was very clear that he wished to be buried in the family tomb at Mount Vernon; see George Washington's Last Will and Testament, 9 July 1799, in W.W. Abbot, ed., *Papers of George Washington: Retirement Series* (Charlottesville, VA, 1999) 4:491.

3. George Washington to David Stuart, 1 February 1793, Philander Chase et al., eds., *Papers of George Washington: Presidential Series* (Charlottesville, VA, 2005) 12:81, 249; George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, 30 June 1793 and Tobias Lear to William Thornton, 13 July 1793, box 1, reel 1, Papers of William Thornton, Library of Congress;

Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 17 July 1793 and George Washington to the Commissioners for the District of Columbia, 25 July 1793, Theodore Crackel et al., eds., *Papers of George Washington: Presidential Series* (Charlottesville, VA, 2007) 13:236-39, 276-78; Don Alexander Hawkins, *William Thornton's Lost Design of the United States Capitol: A Study and a Reconstruction*, OAUSCA; Dr. William Thornton's Capitol Plans, William Thornton, Plans and Drawings Folder, OAUSCA; Pamela Scott, *Temple of Liberty: Building the Capitol for a New Nation* (New York, 1995), pp. 37-43; Savage, *Monument Wars*, pp. 35-38.

4. William C. Allen, *The United States Capitol: A Brief Architectural History* (Washington, DC, 1990), pp. 3-12; *Philadelphia Gazette*, 19 Dec. 1799; [Georgetown, DC] *Centinel of Liberty*, 24 Dec. 1799; 19 Dec. 1799, *House Journal*, 6th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 540-42; 19 Dec. 1799, *Senate Journal*, 6th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 11-13; [New York] *Commercial Advertiser*, 26 Dec. 1799; [New York] *Weekly Museum*, 28 Dec. 1799; [Elizabethtown] *New-Jersey Journal*, 31 Dec. 1799; [Massachusetts] *Salem Gazette*, 3 Jan. 1800; [Portsmouth, NH] *Federal Observer*, 3 Jan. 1800; John Adams, Theodore Sedgwick, and Samuel Livermore to Martha Washington, box 1, 24 Dec. 1799, Peter Family Archives, Fred W. Smith Library; Martha Washington to John Adams, 31 Dec. 1799, Fred W. Smith National Library.

5. Tobias Lear to John Adams, 4 Jan. 1800, Fred W. Smith National Library; William Thornton to John Marshall M.H.R., 2 Jan. 1800, box 3, reel 2, Papers of William Thornton, Library of Congress; Diary of Mrs. Anna Thornton 1800-1863, 3 Jan. 1800, William Thornton, OAUSCA. Congress put Martha Washington in a difficult position asking for her husband's remains in a very public manner. The request was published in newspapers across the country, adding pressure to Martha's decision. While she agreed to the request, she also loathed the thought of Thomas Jefferson being involved in that process. John Cotton Smith wrote of one instance where Martha verbalized her dislike for Jefferson and his patronizing visit to Washington's tomb; see William Watson Andrews, ed., *Miscellanies and*



*Correspondence of the Honorable John Cotton Smith* (New York, 1847), pp. 224-225.

6. Sarah Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 133-70; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997), pp. 288-93.

7. [Washington, DC] *National Intelligencer*, 8 Dec. 1800; [Baltimore] *Federal Gazette*, 9 Dec. 1800; [Virginia] *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Register*, 11 Dec. 1800; 4 Feb. 1801, *Senate Journal*, 6th Cong., 1st sess., p. 120; Damie Stillman, "From the Ancient Roman Republic to the New American One: Architecture for a New Nation," in Kennon, *Republic for the Ages*, pp. 309-15; Savage, *Monument Wars*, pp. 39-43.

8. Allen, *Capitol*, pp. 5-10; Guy Gugliotta, *Freedom's Cap: The United States Capitol and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York, 2012), pp. 8-12; William C. Allen, "Pantheon on the Potomac: The Architectural Evolution of the Capitol Rotunda," in Kennon and Somma, *American Pantheon*, pp. 11-16; [Brattleboro, VT] *The Reporter*, 24 April 1816; Bushrod Washington to Wilson Cary Nicholas, 18 March 1816, H.W. Flournoy, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts* (Richmond, VA, 1968), pp. 436-437; [Virginia] *Alexandria Herald*, 18 March 1816. Latrobe had actually submitted a pyramid design for the mausoleum back in 1800, but the monument failed to materialize.

9. 13 Feb. 1832, *Register of Debates in the U.S. Senate*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., pp. 377-78; [Massachusetts] *Salem Gazette*, 21 February 1832; 13 Feb. 1832, *Senate Journal*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., pp. 21, 131; 13 Feb. 1832, *Register of Debates in the House of Representatives*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., pp. 1794-1809; 13 Feb. 1832, *House Journal*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., pp. 340-42.

10. 17 Feb. 1832, *Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia*, 1831-2 (Richmond, VA, 1831), p. 163; Marling, "The United States Capitol as Mausoleum," in Kennon, *Republic for the Ages*, pp. 456-457.

11. 16 Feb. 1832, *Register of Debates in the House of Representatives*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., pp. 1819-20; [Massachusetts] *Pittsfield Sun*, 23 Feb. 1832; [Providence] *Rhode Island American*, 24 Feb. 1832; [Rhode Island] *Newport Mercury*, 25 Feb. 1832; [Hartford] *Connecticut Courant*, 28 Feb.

1832; [Portsmouth] *New Hampshire Gazette*, 28 February 1832; [Keene] *New Hampshire Sentinel*, 2 March 1832; Marling, "The United States Capitol as Mausoleum," in Kennon, *Republic for the Ages*, pp. 456-57; Savage, *Monument Wars*, pp. 45-46.

12. Marling, "The United States Capitol as Mausoleum," in Kennon, *Republic for the Ages*, pp. 448-49, 461.

13. Benjamin B. French to Major General M.C. Meigs, 21 April 1865, Catafalque and Tomb Folder, OAUCA.

## IMAGE CREDITS:

Fig. 1. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 2. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-npcc-32682]

Fig. 3. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-ppmsca-39583]

Fig. 4. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-ppmsca-07219]

Fig. 5. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-USZC4-114]

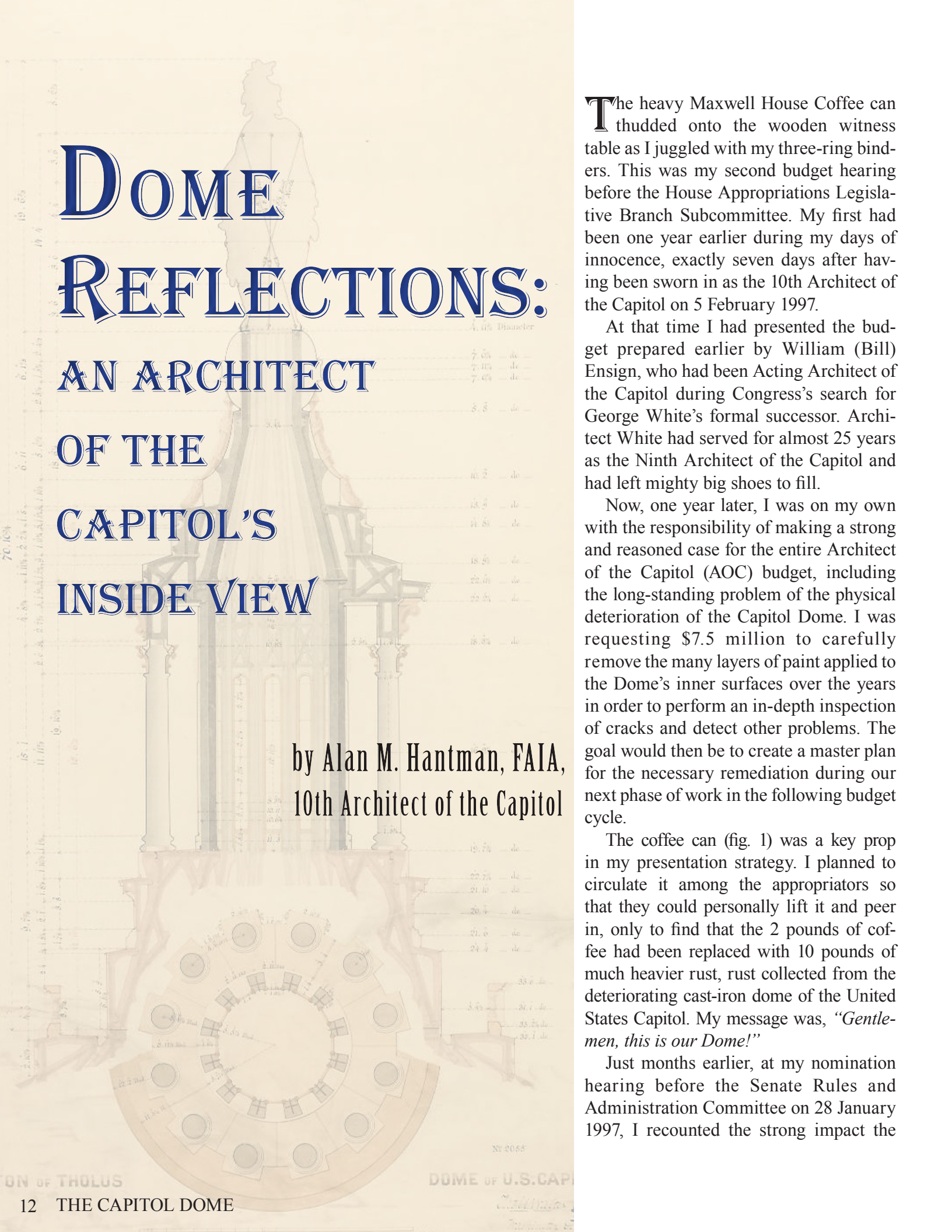
Fig. 6. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; owned jointly with Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Fig. 7. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-USZ6-159]

Fig. 8. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 9. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-ds-05566]

Fig. 10. Architect of the Capitol



# DOME REFLECTIONS: AN ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL'S INSIDE VIEW

by Alan M. Hantman, FAIA,  
10th Architect of the Capitol

The heavy Maxwell House Coffee can thudded onto the wooden witness table as I juggled with my three-ring binders. This was my second budget hearing before the House Appropriations Legislative Branch Subcommittee. My first had been one year earlier during my days of innocence, exactly seven days after having been sworn in as the 10th Architect of the Capitol on 5 February 1997.

At that time I had presented the budget prepared earlier by William (Bill) Ensign, who had been Acting Architect of the Capitol during Congress's search for George White's formal successor. Architect White had served for almost 25 years as the Ninth Architect of the Capitol and had left mighty big shoes to fill.

Now, one year later, I was on my own with the responsibility of making a strong and reasoned case for the entire Architect of the Capitol (AOC) budget, including the long-standing problem of the physical deterioration of the Capitol Dome. I was requesting \$7.5 million to carefully remove the many layers of paint applied to the Dome's inner surfaces over the years in order to perform an in-depth inspection of cracks and detect other problems. The goal would then be to create a master plan for the necessary remediation during our next phase of work in the following budget cycle.

The coffee can (fig. 1) was a key prop in my presentation strategy. I planned to circulate it among the appropriators so that they could personally lift it and peer in, only to find that the 2 pounds of coffee had been replaced with 10 pounds of much heavier rust, rust collected from the deteriorating cast-iron dome of the United States Capitol. My message was, "*Gentlemen, this is our Dome!*"

Just months earlier, at my nomination hearing before the Senate Rules and Administration Committee on 28 January 1997, I recounted the strong impact the



Dome had on me throughout the Architect of the Capitol vetting process:

In traveling from New York to these interviews, I rode Amtrak to Union Station, usually arriving in late evening. Each time I arrived and walked southward, out through the terminal's grand arcade, I caught my breath at the sight of the Capitol Dome glowing against the darkness.

The image of that dome is etched in my mind, and every time I see it my reaction is the same. I believe it is more than architectural form and proportion that evokes this reaction. The Capitol is so much more than an impressive, stately building. To me, it is the symbolic anchor of our democracy.

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 the threads that bind the Capitol's history together.<sup>1</sup>

Bill Allen's volume has been a welcomed resource to me as we mark the successful completion of a monumental undertaking by the office of the Architect of the Capitol: the total restoration of the Capitol Dome. This multi-decade project was conceived and executed over the course of a quarter of a century, through the terms of the Ninth, 10th, and 11th Architects of the Capitol. The project exemplifies this legislative branch agency's commitment to excellence in stewardship and preservation over time.

As the 10th Architect of the Capitol, I offer here a personalized overview of the design evolution and restoration of the Capitol Dome in its several incarnations over the course of two-and-one-quarter centuries of history, and the stewardship efforts undertaken by the Office of the Architect of the Capitol over time.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At noon on 2 December 1863, at the height of the Civil War that threatened to tear apart our 87-year-old nation, the fifth and final section of the magnificent 19'6" tall *Statue of Freedom* was raised to the top of the dome of the Capitol and bolted into place.

"A battery of artillery at the Capitol fire(d) a salute of thirty-five rounds (one for each state) as soon as the head was put into place. A response from the forts around Washington..." followed. Thomas Ustick Walter, the Fourth Architect of the Capitol, wrote to his wife: "There was an immense crowd to witness the operation, and everything was done with propriety and dignity. I have had thousands of congratulations on this great event."<sup>2</sup>

The casting of the bronze statue in the foundry of Clark Mills is itself historically important because of the significant contributions made by Philip Reid, an enslaved foundry laborer in June 1860 when the casting



Fig. 1. The Maxwell House Coffee can with 10 lbs. of rust was produced as evidence before the House Appropriations Legislative Branch Subcommittee (1998).

In the year 2000, the 106th Congress authorized the publication of *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics*. William C. Allen, the Architect of the Capitol's historian, exhaustively researched this volume over a number of years, completing it during my term as the 10th Architect of the Capitol. The foreword I wrote in Bill's book still rings true:

began, but a free man when the statue was unveiled. He is the best known of the many African Americans to have made important contributions to the construction of the Capitol itself.

On 2 December 2008, precisely 145 years after the Dome's dedication, the original plaster cast of *Freedom*, sculpted by Thomas Crawford, stood proudly as the focal point of Emancipation Hall, looking out over the formal dedication of the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC). The CVC represents the largest addition to the Capitol since 1793, when President George Washington selected the winning design proposal by Dr. William Thornton, the 1st Architect of the Capitol.

## PASSING THE BATON

Many important architectural changes were proposed and implemented at the Capitol between these two events, as they had been ever since Thornton's design was first submitted. With this constant flow of change, the baton has been passed from Architect to Architect, each a dedicated steward of the Capitol, each working to maintain its integrity, while from time to time weaving in his own aesthetic philosophy. These changes were necessitated by the physical needs of our aging

structures, as well as by the imperative for additional congressional space as our nation continued to grow, adding more senators, representatives, and their supporting staffs.

The most recent of these efforts has been the comprehensive, multi-phased Capitol Dome Restoration Project that was completed in 2016 and celebrated on 2 December of that year in the CVC's Congressional Auditorium. An earlier program of major Dome repairs dates back some 57 years to 1959-1960, under J. George Stewart, the Eighth Architect of the Capitol. Cracked cast iron was patched with metal straps that soon snapped with the pressure of the expanding plates. Joints were caulked, and a finish of "Dome White" paint was applied over a new coating of red lead-based primer, creating an environmental problem for future architects (fig. 3).

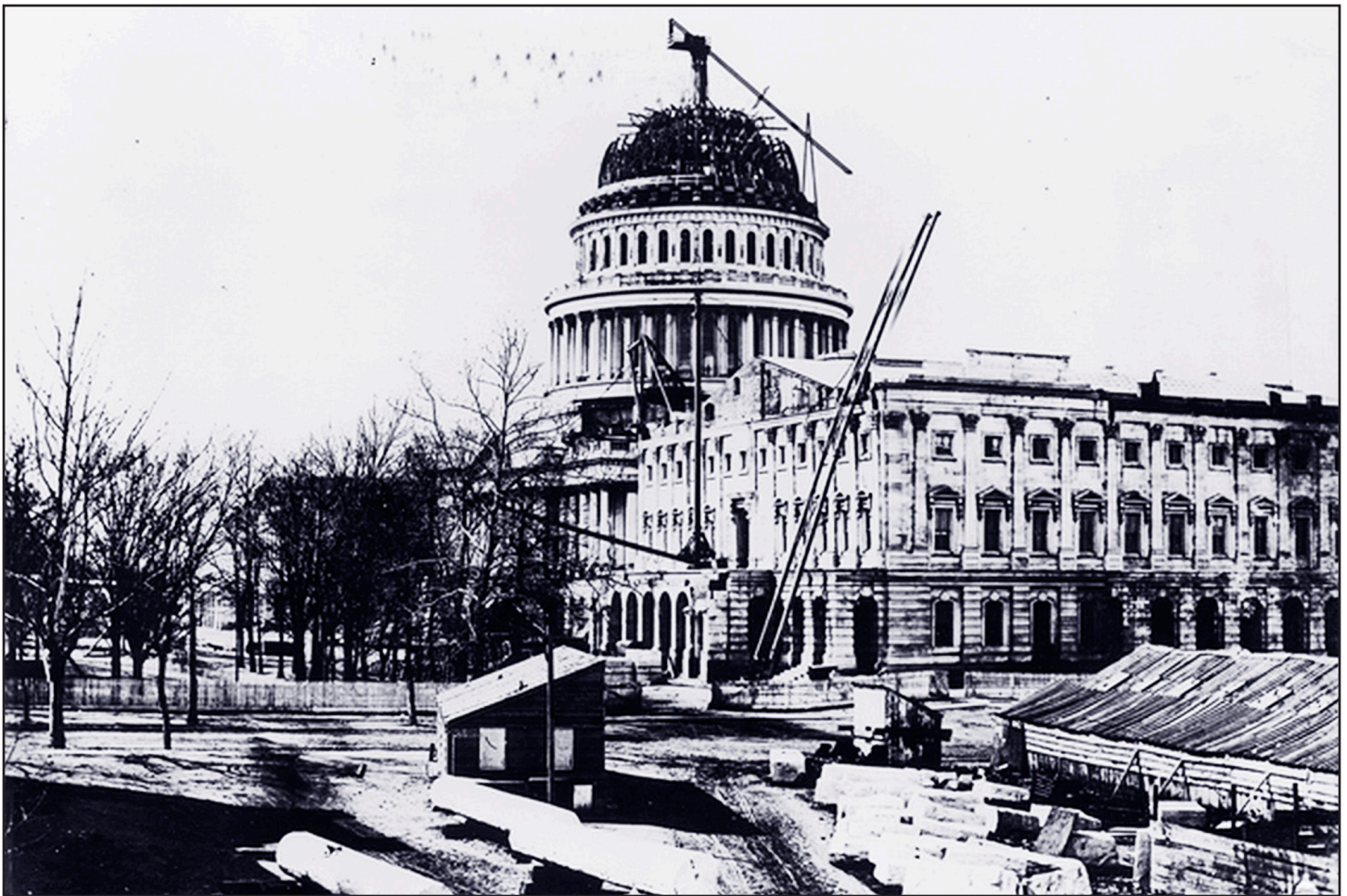
My direct predecessor, George White, had begun initial investigations of Dome deficiencies after a major 1990 storm caused multiple leaks that created puddles on the Rotunda floor and damaged Constantino Brumidi's frieze at the top of the Rotunda wall. The next year White commissioned a study of the problems and received a report from his consultants, Hoffman Architects of Connecticut, that the water drainage problems

## PRESIDENT LINCOLN

Like many Americans, I believed that President Lincoln had been determined to continue construction of the Capitol as a powerful symbol that the Union would be preserved despite the tremendous costs of the ongoing war. This was compatible with my sense of patriotism and image of Lincoln as a far-sighted and thoughtful leader. The reality is that, as Bill Allen discusses, at the start of the Civil War in 1861 the construction of the new cast-iron Dome had already reached the level above the 36-column colonnade, almost completing the drum that was to serve as the Dome's base (fig. 2).

When the New York foundry of Janes, Fowler, Kirtland and Co. was contacted by the secretary of war, "advising the firm not to expect payment for any further work on the Dome until the country's financial outlook improved . . . Charles Fowler and his partners determined that there was no choice but to continue to hoist and bolt ironwork on the Dome. They had 1.3 million pounds of iron stockpiled on the site, and walking away from such valuable material would be irresponsible and costly. Instead the firm decided to continue building the Dome, trusting the government to pay when times were better."<sup>3</sup> This therefore was a unilateral business decision by the foundry, rather than a far-sighted one by President Lincoln.





*Fig. 2. The Dome, looking southwest, nearing completion in 1862*

were due to cracked cast iron plates, joint leakage, and drains clogged by bird droppings. Taken together this would significantly increase the level of Dome corrosion over time.

During further investigations the AOC structural consultants, LZA Technology, performed a computerized structural analysis finding the original cast-iron truss structure to be in “exceptional” shape. Under George White’s direction, Hoffman designed a series of improvements to protect the gutters and maintain the Dome, including catwalks to make worker access safer and easier.

Since then, additional weather-related deterioration had occurred with more than 1,300 cracks, rusted connections, and other deficiencies discovered in a 1999-2000 comprehensive AOC investigation. I had requested and received an emergency appropriation of \$7.5 million to fund the first phase of this work, discussed in detail below. Since it was better funded, it was much more informative than the work undertaken ten years earlier. These significant findings resulted in

a comprehensive five-volume remediation master plan documenting all of the problem areas. This served as the blueprint for subsequent phases of the implementation work which has now been successfully concluded under the stewardship of Stephen Ayers, the 11th Architect of the Capitol.

This multi-phased, quarter-of-a-century-long project spanning the tenures of three Architects of the Capitol speaks to the importance of continuity, as each Architect conscientiously built on the efforts of his predecessor for the overall good of the Congress, the American people, and our nation’s historic structures on Capitol Hill.

It is extraordinary to me that, with nine major incremental phases of Capitol growth, and the many ongoing historic preservation efforts, we can still celebrate a unified Capitol at the crest of Jenkins Hill that projects the confident spirit of architectural harmony, nobility, and strength—the American icon most recognized and admired around the world.

Ongoing historic preservation efforts have also been





critical for the Dome's crowning glory. The tri-annual waxing of the Statue of Freedom is an important maintenance function intended to prevent ultra-violet rays from degrading the bronze statue. The erection of the scaffolding for this three-year maintenance cycle also provides an opportunity to inspect and replace the lightning rods that had been damaged in the intervening years. One of the joys during my tenure was the opportunity to climb a narrow scaffold to the top of the statue for these inspections (figs. 4 and 5). The juxtaposition of three very different Capitol Dome designs, one against another at the same scale (fig. 6), provides an excellent visual representation of our nation's growth as it inexorably expanded from the original, tenuously-bound 13 colony/states, to America's increasing prominence in the world community, growing over time to span the North American continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

*Fig. 3. (left) The Dome in 1960, with scaffolding and newly applied red lead primer*



*Fig. 4. The author inspecting the Statue of Freedom at approximately 288 feet above ground level.*



*Fig. 5. The author is accompanied by Dr. Barbara Wolanin, then Curator for the AOC (now Curator Emerita).*



## THE FIRST DOME: A CHANGE IN THORNTON'S ORIGINAL DESIGN

Dr. Thornton's winning Capitol design of 1793 was capped by a low and gracious neoclassical dome that echoed the lines of the historic Pantheon in Rome, dedicated almost 1,700 years earlier in 125 CE. It sat comfortably as a well-proportioned and integral part of the Capitol. Although Washington lauded this design for its "grandeur, simplicity and beauty," its construction had been deferred for a quarter of a century while funding was provided first for the design and construction of the north Senate wing and then the south wing for the House of Representatives.

During Thomas Jefferson's presidency, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the Second Architect of the Capitol, had already proposed the major design refinement of raising Thornton's graceful dome on an octagonal drum to avoid creating an incompatible intersection with the adjacent pediment. He also favored Greek neoclassical forms to the Roman models preferred by Thornton. They became vituperative enemies; their feud resulted in a libel case which Latrobe ultimately won.

In 1818 the noted architect Charles Bulfinch was brought from Boston as the Third Architect of the Capitol to replace Latrobe, who had recently resigned in frustration due to conflicts with the Commissioner of Public Buildings. Latrobe filed for bankruptcy and returned to Baltimore penniless. Bulfinch was appointed to complete construction of those first Capitol wings, and was then also asked to begin developing detailed plans for the Capitol's central section and dome. Thornton's Parthenon-like dome ultimately was never built, serving only as the conceptual starting point for Charles Bulfinch.

## THE SECOND DOME: A PRESIDENT'S TASTE

Bulfinch's initial Dome designs were based on Thornton's original approved design, with the addition of Latrobe's octagonal drum modification. Unfortunately he "found his professional judgment overruled by those in charge for reasons at odds with his taste and experience . . . [He] wrote philosophically: 'Architects expect criticism and must learn to bear it patiently.'"<sup>4</sup> Due to President James Monroe's insistence and the Congress's concurrence, he redesigned the Dome to be some 70 feet higher, in order to obtain the visibility desired for the Capitol on top of Jenkins Hill.

While yielding to the president's pressure for a much higher Dome, Bulfinch then created an inner dome preserving Thornton's vision of a 96' interior height to complement the 96' diameter wall of the Rotunda space, the same interior proportions achieved at the Pantheon. This grand rotunda concept was not universally supported. Some considered the space to be wasteful, with talk of eliminating the Rotunda in favor of creating additional committee rooms. Fortunately Bulfinch was able to solve the problem by creating a plan that took "advantage of the sloping hill on which it was to be built, rising four stories on the west while remaining three stories on the east. A new ground floor in the western projection could provide twelve committee rooms and



*Fig. 6. The three major stages of the Dome's evolution are on display in this unique montage of images, created by the U.S. Capitol Historical Society to commemorate the bicentennial of the laying of the Capitol's cornerstone in 1793.*

offices.”<sup>5</sup>

This need for additional meeting rooms and offices has been a recurring issue at the Capitol. It was in fact a major driving force behind Congress’s post-9/11 directive to add 85,000 square feet of underground space for the Senate and 85,000 square feet for the House into the plans for the already-designed Capitol Visitor Center.

There is a saying in the architectural profession: “A camel is a horse designed by a committee.” Bulfinch’s exterior dome was ungainly and referred to as an “upside-down kettle.” With the president as the chairman of that “committee” dictating basic design parameters, the unhappy results were perhaps pre-ordained. While each Architect of the Capitol needs “champions” in the Congress to help facilitate necessary support for important projects, there is often a delicate balance between “support” and the imposition of design preferences by members and their staffs. Latrobe had also experienced strong presidential input from Thomas Jefferson, but fortunately that was a more positive architectural patronage, based upon well-informed sensibilities.

Bulfinch’s Dome was roofed over with wood and copper, was difficult to maintain, and constantly leaked. Its wood construction was also a significant fire hazard, a liability that the Congress later came to recognize through its experience with the costly 1851 fire in the Bulfinch-designed Library of Congress, then also

housed in the Capitol. The fire destroyed the reading room and two-thirds of its books. The Bulfinch Dome only survived some 30 years.

### THE THIRD DOME: THE NATION EXPANDS

In 1851, as our nation continued to grow with the addition of new states, President Millard Fillmore selected the design of Thomas Ustick Walter of Philadelphia for the expansion of the Capitol. While Bulfinch’s Dome had clearly been too large and ungainly for the Capitol’s original base, a Dome of greater “presence” and proportionality was needed for this newly elongated base.

Walter clearly recognized this and in 1854, while the expansions were underway, he took the initiative to create a design for a much larger and more compatible Dome to replace Bulfinch’s “upside-down kettle.” He created a beautifully rendered seven-foot long elevation of the Capitol featuring an impressive fireproof cast-iron Dome and displayed it in his office. It was enthusiastically viewed by Members of Congress, some of whom immediately supported its funding. Based only on this drawing, Representative Richard Stanton (KY) proposed legislation to appropriate a \$100,000 budget, although Walter knew it would cost at least \$500,000. That initial appropriation passed, but the Dome ultimately cost over \$1,000,000 (fig. 7).

As noted by Bill Allen, Architect Walter had, in his



Fig. 7. Walter’s seven-foot long elevation drawing of a new Dome (photo from long-lost original 1854 drawing)



14 years at the Capitol, survived “five presidents, five secretaries of the interior, five secretaries of war, two supervising army engineers, and countless committee chairmen, senators, and representatives.” He resigned in 1865 when Secretary of the Interior James Harlan stripped him of all of his authority.

This concluded one of the most productive and thankless chapters in the life of a great American architect. During his 14 years in Washington, Walter transformed an idiosyncratic building into an inspiring monument, one ranking high on the world’s roster of architectural achievements.... For all his works of magnificence ... Walter left the city without so much as a handshake or a word of farewell at the train station.<sup>6</sup>

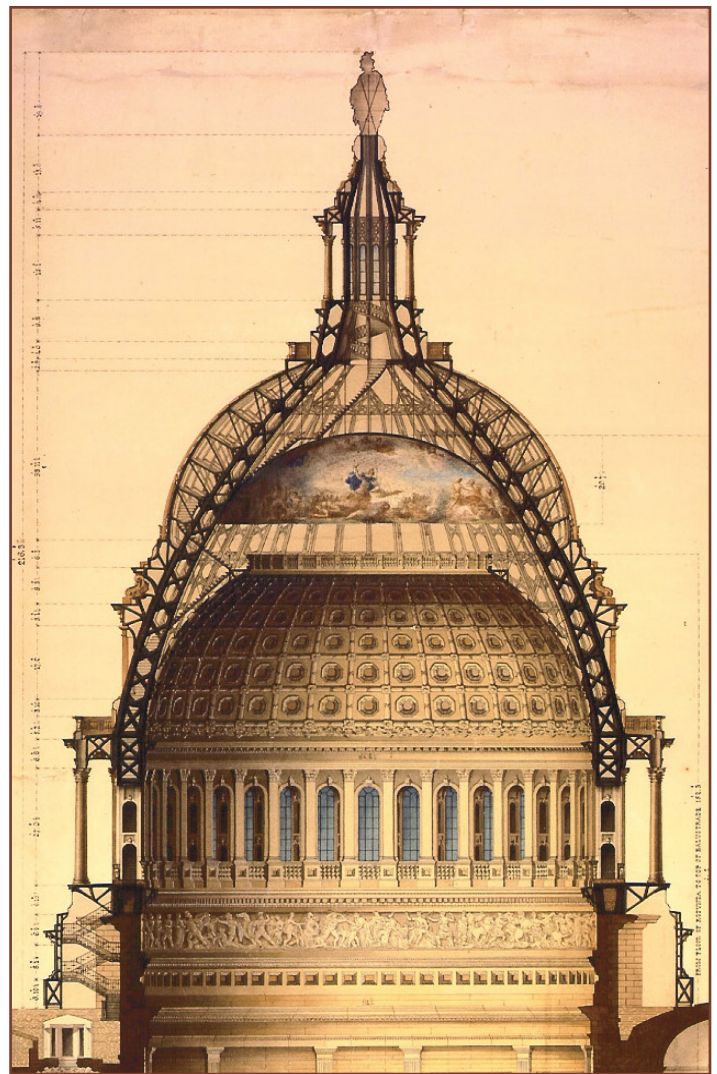
It is Thomas Ustick Walter’s Dome that graces the Capitol today, having stood for over 150 years as our greatest national icon. In 1997, my first year as Architect of the Capitol, I climbed into the interstitial space between the inner and outer domes, guided by AOC Capitol maintenance staff (fig. 8). Thus began my stewardship efforts of Walter’s creation, which was in great need of attention.

## AT THE WITNESS TABLE

In my 10 years as Architect of the Capitol, I testified at more than 50 hearings before a variety of House and Senate Committees as a member of the Capitol Police Board and the Capitol Guide Board, as well as on issues directly impacting the mission of the Architect of the Capitol agency. AOC budget hearings were certainly more involved and difficult to prepare for than the others, and I always invested long hours in detailed preparation.

Appearing as a witness at my first appropriations hearing presented a very steep learning curve. It was virtually impossible for me to feel comfortable sitting at the witness table facing photographers squatting on the floor at the base of the dais, while being cross-examined by committee members looking down at me from their elevated positions, with TV cameras grinding away from the sides of the hearing room.

As a visually-oriented person, I have always been more comfortable with some form of graphics to help



*Fig. 8. Walter’s 1859 drawing of a section through the Dome (detail), showing crawl spaces*

make points in my presentations more understandable. I prefer enhancing my testimony with charts, prioritized lists of important projects, and presentation renderings. At my first AOC budget hearing, on Wednesday, 12 February 1997—just 7 days after having been sworn in as Architect of the Capitol—I introduced the basic minimalist budget prepared by William Ensign, the Acting Architect of the Capitol, on a series of hastily-prepared presentation boards. I vowed that I would be thoroughly prepared at the budget presentations the following year.

## “LEAKS APLENTY”

In a *New York Times* article of 24 June 1997, entitled “Leaks Aplenty in Capitol Dome,” Eric Schmitt played

on the double meaning of “leaks” to place the Dome’s immediate threat in a political context: “Yikes! The dome of the United States Capitol has sprung a leak. Make that more than 200 leaks. And those are not the kind of leaks that Congress is famous for.” The author reported that I had requested an additional \$1.5 million “to study the problem and get cracking on the cracks. But he has run into a hitch that has nothing to do with bricks and mortar, and everything to do with politics.”<sup>77</sup> As it turned out, the fiscally conservative House Members who had wanted to freeze the budget couldn’t overcome the strong support of Republican House leaders such as James T. Walsh (NY), the chairman of the House Appropriations Legislative Branch Subcommittee, whom Schmitt quoted as saying, “The dome is a pretty important symbol to the country and the world, and we want to make sure we take care of it.” When we took Walsh on his own inspection tour of the Dome, he realized “There are literally cracks and water or rust spots along the walls.” In advance of his committee’s meeting to approve budget levels he affirmed, “We’ll resolve this issue. I don’t think we’ll have a big fight.”

Senator Bob Bennett (UT), the Senate’s Appropriations Legislative Branch Subcommittee chairman, also supported funding for the Dome’s Phase One lead paint removal, inspection, and remediation master plan, saying “I learned in business that one of the most expensive ways you can save money is to cut down on repairs in the short term.”<sup>78</sup> The \$1.5 million was approved for this preliminary work.

## THE DOME INSPECTION

Climbing inside the interstitial space between the inner and outer Capitol domes is a bit of a physical challenge. Many flights of stairs twist and turn, following the

curve of the exterior dome’s skin. Everyone climbing those stairs needs to duck between and beneath cast-iron trusses at points where the stairs narrow and continue rising sharply upwards, ever closer to their apex directly beneath the base of the *Statue of Freedom*. As I climbed higher on a Dome inspection tour led by AOC roofers, we passed windows of 1860s hammered glass that diffused the light and reduced heat gain. It was all too easy to verify what the crew had been telling me. The Dome was rusting; old cracks had reopened; cast-iron decorative pieces were falling off and becoming embedded in the roofs below; bolted connections between pieces of the cast iron railing had totally deteriorated to the point where it was only rust that held them together (fig. 9).

The sun was the major culprit, aided and abetted by Washington’s significant freeze-thaw cycles. As the sun rises each morning the eastern segment of the cast-iron Dome begins to heat up, causing the fish-lapped plates to expand as they warm. As the sun arcs southward, new sections of the Dome begin to expand, and the first sections, now out of the direct rays of the sun, begin to cool and shrink back to their original dimensions. This constant heating and cooling process causes the joints between adjacent cast-iron pieces to open and close, rubbing against each other to produce the creaking sound that metal-on-metal friction creates, and at the same time opening pathways for water penetration.

After several inspection tours in my first year of office, I needed no further convincing. This constant movement and water penetration was clearly taking its toll on the 150-year-old Dome. The problem was deciding how to best present these realities to the Congress as I sought the necessary funding to perform an in-depth survey of the problem areas so that we could begin to determine solutions. I called upon George White’s



*Fig. 9. Cast iron decorative pieces that have fallen off the Dome*



consultants, Hoffman Architects and LZA Technology, to update and expand their studies and prepare a comprehensive master plan for Dome remediation. As a result of concerns about recent earthquake activity in the U.S., I also commissioned LZA to perform a three-dimensional computer analysis of the Dome's earthquake resistance capabilities—four years before the earthquake that rocked Washington in 2011. The original cast iron trusses passed the computer analysis with flying colors. It was the cast iron “skin” of the Dome that was at issue rather than basic structural considerations (fig. 10).

#### FISCAL YEAR 1999 APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE HEARINGS

After one year as Architect of the Capitol, I came to my budget presentations well-armed with visuals. This time I had not only presentation renderings, charts, and

lists, but also a two-phase plan of action with “order-of-magnitude” estimates and some powerful “show and tell” items. I intended to make as strong a case as possible for my greatly-enhanced Dome appropriation request.

The can of rust from the Dome, masquerading as Maxwell House Coffee, was circulated among the members at the hearing room dais along with chunks of cracked cast iron. The interrogatory with one of the committee members, Representative Jose Serano (NY), went like this:

**Mr. Serrano.**

That is a piece of the dome, so to speak?

**Mr. Hantman.**

That is a piece of the railing at the dome. We have bags of bolts that have rusted right out and they were not holding anything in place.

**Mr. Serrano.**

This is rust?

**Mr. Hantman.**

It is rust.

**Mr. Serrano.**

Looks like good coffee to me.<sup>9</sup>

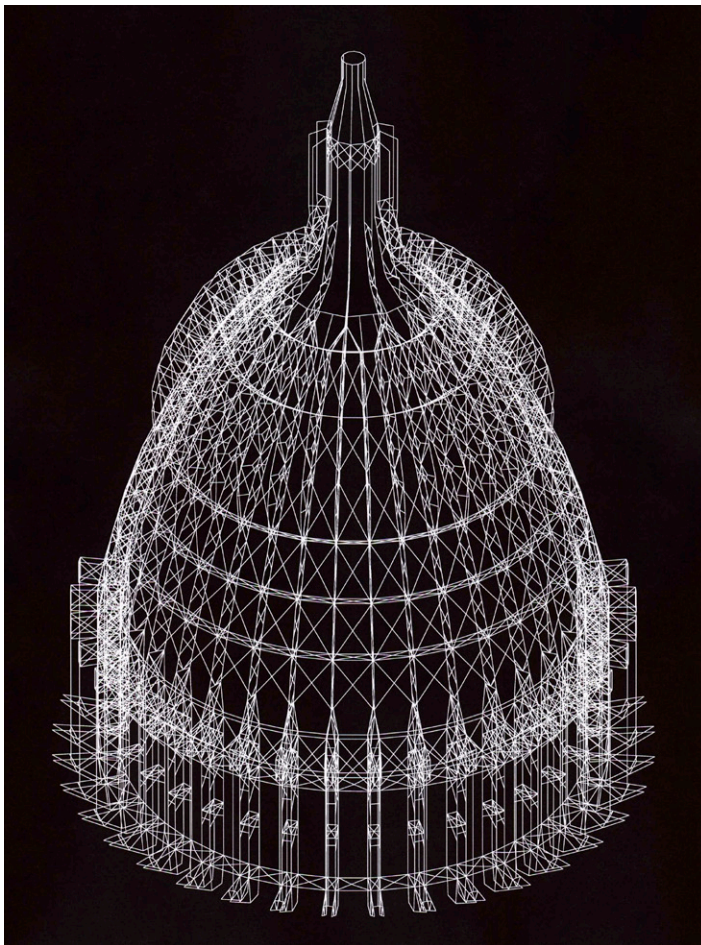
That can of rust, along with several chunks of cast iron that had fallen from the Dome, helped make the case for the Dome portion of my budget request, but it still wasn't a done deal.

At the 16 September 1998 Senate Rules and Administration hearing, Senator Wendell Ford (KY)

...specifically expressed concern over the Capitol dome repairs because the rotunda will remain open throughout the construction and the safety of the staff, members and visitors may be at risk.

Hantman assured the committee that an innovative netting structure would shield the inner dome from falling debris and allow for the most unobstructed view possible (of the Apotheosis of Washington).

The initial 18-month phase of the work, which will be bid on in October and commence in November, will solely concern the area between the interior and exterior domes. . . . All findings during phase one will be fixed during phase two of the project.<sup>10</sup>



*Fig. 10. Isometric view of LZA Technology's structural analysis model*

With the political pressure on the appropriators to avoid any increase in the total appropriations request, my \$7.5 million first phase budget was passed separately as an emergency appropriation for the 1999 fiscal year. This allowed us to competitively bid and award the paint removal contract by the end of 1998 to the Aulson Company and begin actual work in the spring.

## PHASE ONE BEGINS

By June of 1999, two shifts of nine safety-suited workers from our new contractor were working 20 hours each day to remove 88 tons of lead-based paint from the surfaces between the inner and outer domes. They accessed the Dome using scaffolding set up in their East Front staging area between the northern Senate and Rotunda monumental stairways. I authorized the shipment of all 88 tons of lead-based paint to Exide Battery Company in Indiana to be recycled for use in new car batteries. This was an environmentally sensitive way to avoid disposal problems and potential superfund issues.

The Aulson team used air-powered blasters and needle guns on the inner surface of the outer Dome. We used less invasive, vibration-free, citrus-based chemicals and hand scraping on the inner canopy in order to avoid negatively impacting Constantino Brumidi's masterful fresco, the *Apotheosis of Washington*, painted on the Rotunda side of that surface.

Some of the 21 layers of paint applied to the Dome since its initial construction included as much as 30% lead. We placed the area under a negative air pressure with strong filtration systems to assure that lead was not released into the air. Air monitors placed throughout the work area and the Rotunda below were checked daily by our industrial hygienist to assure worker and visitor safety. No elevated lead readings were detected during the course of the project, nor did we have any noise complaints since the most disruptive work was performed in off-hours when Congress was not in session.

This work allowed us to inspect the cast iron surfaces in order to identify and document all existing problems, some of which dated back to the original completion of the Dome. We blasted the paint off each area of cast iron with needle guns and absorbent sponge particles impregnated with aluminum oxide. The surfaces were then thoroughly inspected for cracks and deteriorated connections, and a new base primer coat was immedi-

ately applied to prevent the bare cast-iron from quickly beginning to rust. This was a lesson learned the morning after the first small areas had been cleared of old paint. Upon inspection, they had begun rusting, turning orange overnight.

We designed a donut-shaped multi-layered protective netting to hang beneath the inner dome to protect Congress, staff, and visitors in the Rotunda below from the ongoing work while retaining the view of the Apotheosis of Washington. Our team also gathered multi-layered paint samples of the coffered Dome to be analyzed for its future restoration and repainting (fig. 11).

Working with our consultants we produced a comprehensive five-volume report with drawings detailing the nature and location of the 1,300 cracks and problem areas, and recommended a series of methodologies to address those problems.

## PHASE TWO DELAYED

Upon completion and submission of the master plan to the Congress, I requested funding for phase two in the 2000 AOC budget. But by that time the CVC was under design and would soon be ready to go out for bids. The murders of Police Officer J.J. Chestnut and Detective John Gibson on 18 July 1998 had spurred funding for the CVC, with \$100 million appropriated four months later. My second phase of the Dome budget request was denied. Congressional leadership determined that two major concurrent Capitol projects would cause too much of a disruption to the day-to-day workings of the Congress. The second phase of the Dome project would therefore have to be deferred until after the completion of the CVC.

I spent sleepless nights with visions of chunks of cast iron cascading down the surface of the Dome. It was a true life-safety issue. The only thing holding the railing together at the crown of the Dome was the rust itself, and the rust could yield to the forces of gravity at any time.

A greater risk than gravity was the pressure placed on the Tholos-level railing by members and their visitors leaning on it as they enjoyed the 360-degree panoramic view of the city. Major sections of the railing<sup>11</sup> were slated to be repaired or recast during Phase Two work. Because I was not permitted to suspend the Members' tours of the Dome, we constructed a wooden railing inside the perimeter of the cast iron





Fig. 11. “Donut” netting over the Rotunda

railing—well before the hearings—to assure that no one would be able to displace any part of it by leaning on the fragile metal.

This temporary measure remained in place until funding was finally appropriated to implement the master plan we had prepared more than a decade earlier. But although the CVC had been completed and open to the public in 2008, those funds were not easily made available to Stephen Ayers, the 11th Architect of the Capitol. One New York Times article, like the newspaper’s report on the Dome’s leaks fifteen years earlier, blamed partisan politics.

To the myriad indignities suffered by Congress, including stagnant legislation, partisan warfare and popularity on a par with petty criminals, add this: the Capitol’s roof is leaking, and there is no money to fix it...

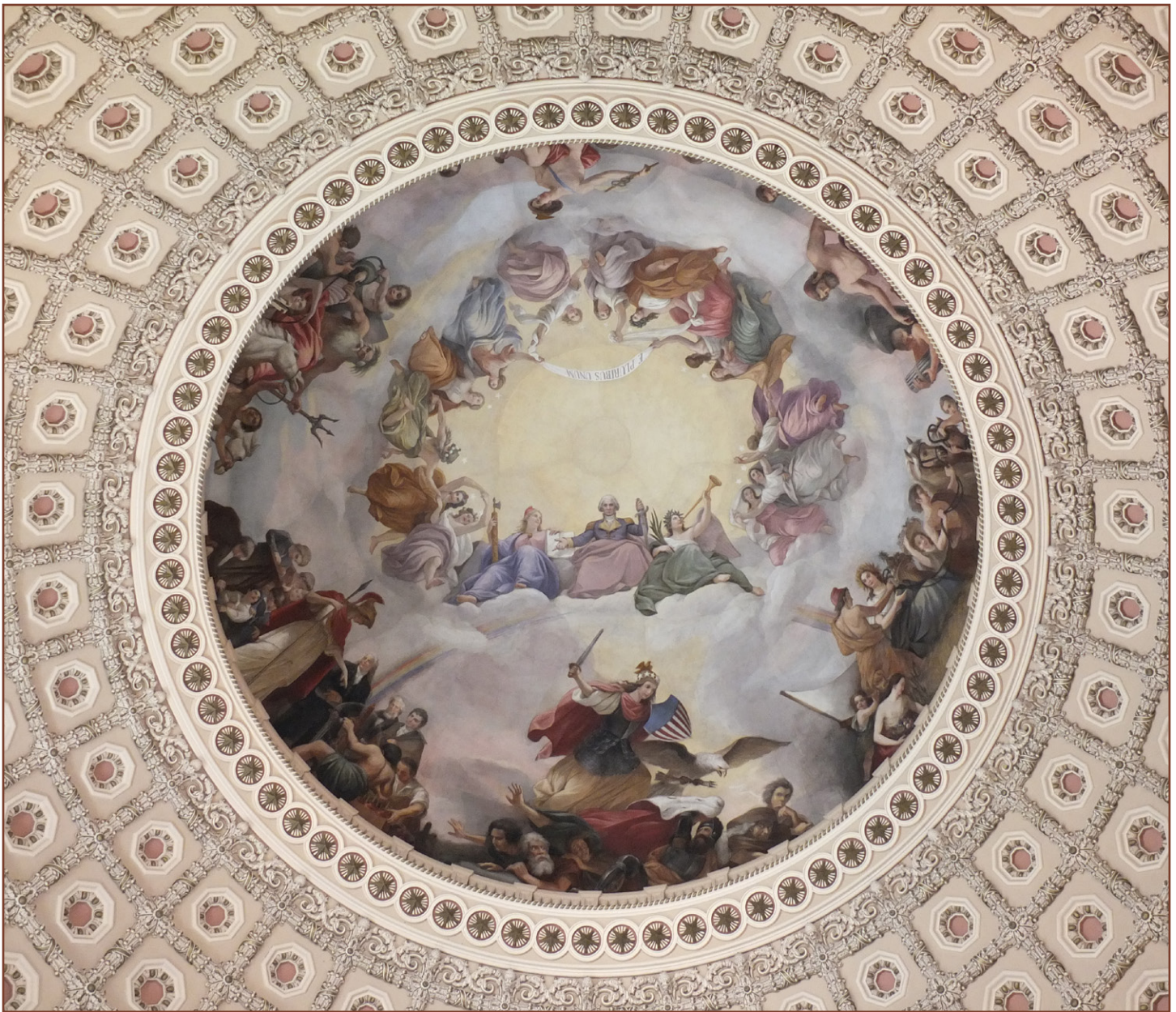
Like most of what the federal government

is on the hook to fix—highways, bridges and airports—the dome is imperiled both by tough economic times and by a politically polarized Congress. While Senate appropriators have voted to repair the dome, which has not undergone renovations for 50 years, their House counterparts say there is not money right now. In that way, the dome is a metaphor for the nation’s decaying infrastructure.

“The dome needs comprehensive rehabilitation,” said Stephen T. Ayers, the architect of the Capitol, whose office oversees the building’s physical state. “It’s a public safety issue.”

The skirt of the dome—the section around the base of the original sandstone foundation—was fixed up recently at a cost of about \$20 million, but an additional \$61 million is needed to repair and restore the rest of the structure’s exterior.<sup>12</sup>





*Fig. 12. Completed color scheme of the Dome's interior coffered surface*

The arguments remained the same, and Architect of the Capitol Ayers had to continue making the case to the Congress, although I am not sure if he had to retrieve the Maxwell House Coffee can from the archives for his presentation. When the funding was ultimately appropriated, the final phase began. Hoffman Architects was once again recalled to help implement the work.

The AOC used the same paint removal techniques on the exterior of the Dome, and successfully used the Lock and Stitch and stainless steel strapping techniques proposed in the master plan. The phase two public information brochure produced by the AOC,

*Capitol Dome Restoration Project*, describes these methodologies in some detail. The suspended donut netting first used in 1999 was successfully utilized again for Rotunda protection, while alternative color palettes were tested on the coffered Dome, with the color combination most compatible and appropriate selected (fig. 12).

We can finally celebrate this last phase of the quarter-century-long Dome restoration odyssey. It was initiated by the Ninth Architect of the Capitol, was advanced by the 10th Architect of the Capitol, and was concluded as promised by the 11th Architect of the Capitol, Stephen Ayers, in time for the Presidential Inauguration on 20



January 2017. AOC stewardship responsibilities for all segments of the Dome have now been successfully fulfilled. With proper ongoing maintenance, I trust that major work will not be necessary until at least the term of the 15th Architect of the Capitol.

I wish her a stout heart, much patience, and great success.



*A note on nomenclature: The editors capitalize Dome and Rotunda when the author references those actual structures as the singular artistic, cultural, and historical features they are. The words are left lower-case when either they appear so in their original, cited source or when the author uses them in their generic architectural*

*sense. Obviously, there is some scope for subjectivity in deciding which is which.*

**HON. ALAN M. HANTMAN**, FAIA, served as 10th Architect of the Capitol, 1997-2007. Before his appointment, he was vice president for Architecture, Planning, and Construction for the Rockefeller Center Management Corporation with oversight of all art, architecture, and preservation issues. A registered architect in the states of New York and New Jersey, he is also certified by the National Council of Architectural Review Boards and was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. In 2007, Hantman established the firm of A.M. Hantman Associates, LLC, providing consulting services in architecture, planning, and historic preservation.

## NOTES

1. William C. Allen, *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics* (Washington, DC, 2001), p. xiii.

2. Allen, *Capitol*, pp. 325, 327.

3. Allen, *Capitol*, p. 315.

4. Allen, *Capitol*, p. 146.

5. Allen, *Capitol*, p. 135.

6. Allen, *Capitol*, p. 335.

7. Eric Shmitt, "Leaks Aplenty in Capitol Dome; Repairs Fall Prey to Politics," *New York Times*, 24 June 1997.

8. Report by Jennifer Bradley, *Roll Call*, 17 July 1997.

9. House Hearing, 4 Feb. 1998, 105th Congress, "Part 2: Fiscal Year 1999 Legislative Branch Appropriation Requests—Hearing of Architect of the Capitol—Capitol Dome Project," U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.

10. Report by Stacey Zolt, *Roll Call*, 17 Sept. 1998.

11. The railing is around the viewing platform at the base of the Tholos, the tall circular structure comprised of twelve columns that caps the curved surface of the Dome and supports the *Statue of Free-*

*dom* above. It is also known as the lantern, for the light that signals when either or both chambers are in night session.

12. Jennifer Steinhauer, "Capitol Dome Is Imperiled by 1,300 Cracks and Partisan Rift," *New York Times*, 24 Aug. 2012.

## IMAGE CREDITS:

Fig. 1. Alan Hantman

Fig. 2. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 3. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 4. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 5. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 6. U.S. Capitol Historical Society

Fig. 7. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 8. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 9. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 10. ThorntonTomasetti

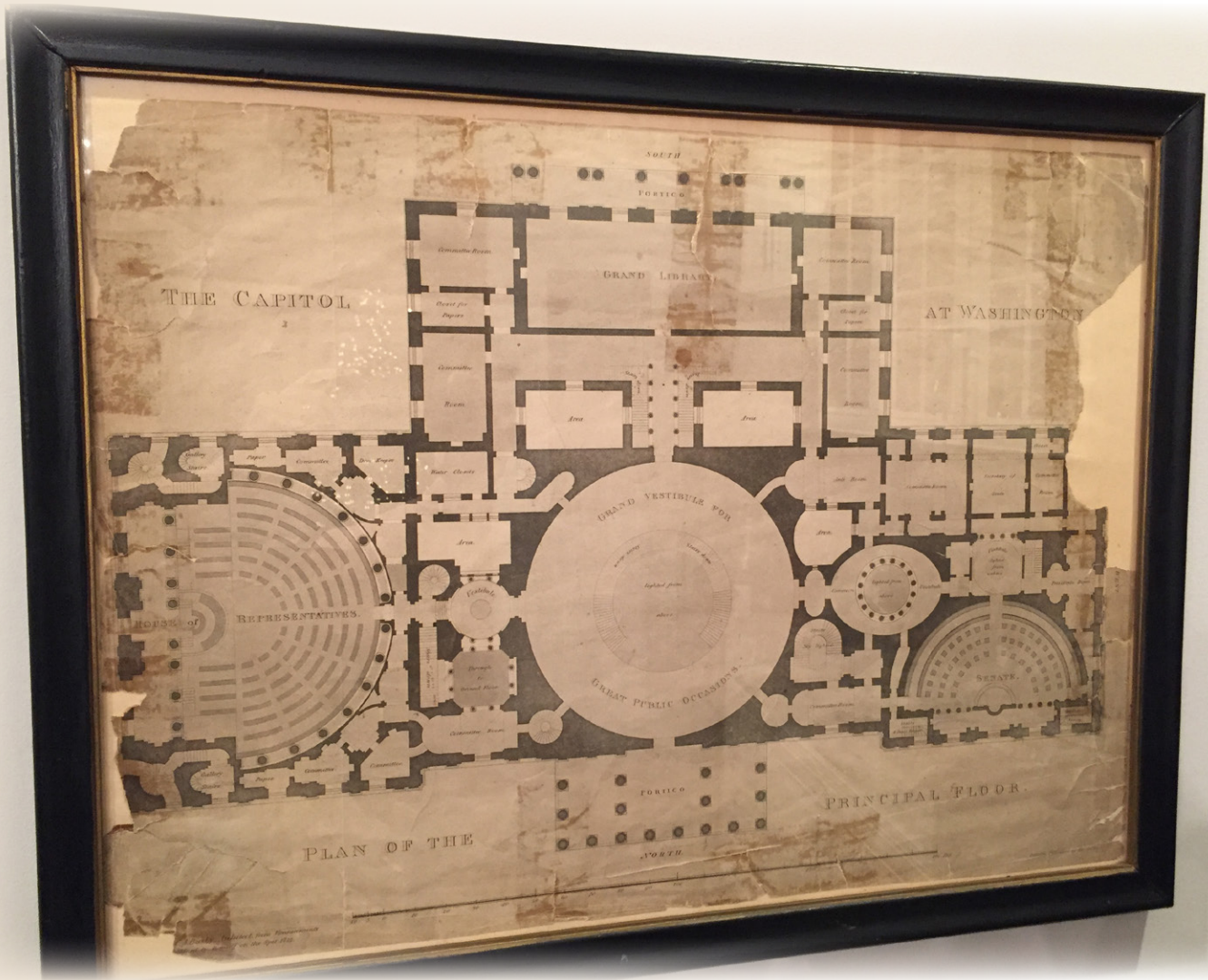
Fig. 11. Architect of the Capitol

Fig. 12. Bruce Guthrie

# *From "Hall of the People" to "Grand Vestibule for Great Public Occasions"*

**by Pamela Scott**

SEE NOTES FOR IMAGE CREDITS.



*Fig. 1. Prolonged contact with a wood backing and insects caused most of the damage to Shattuck's copy of Charles Busby's 1823 plan of the Capitol.*



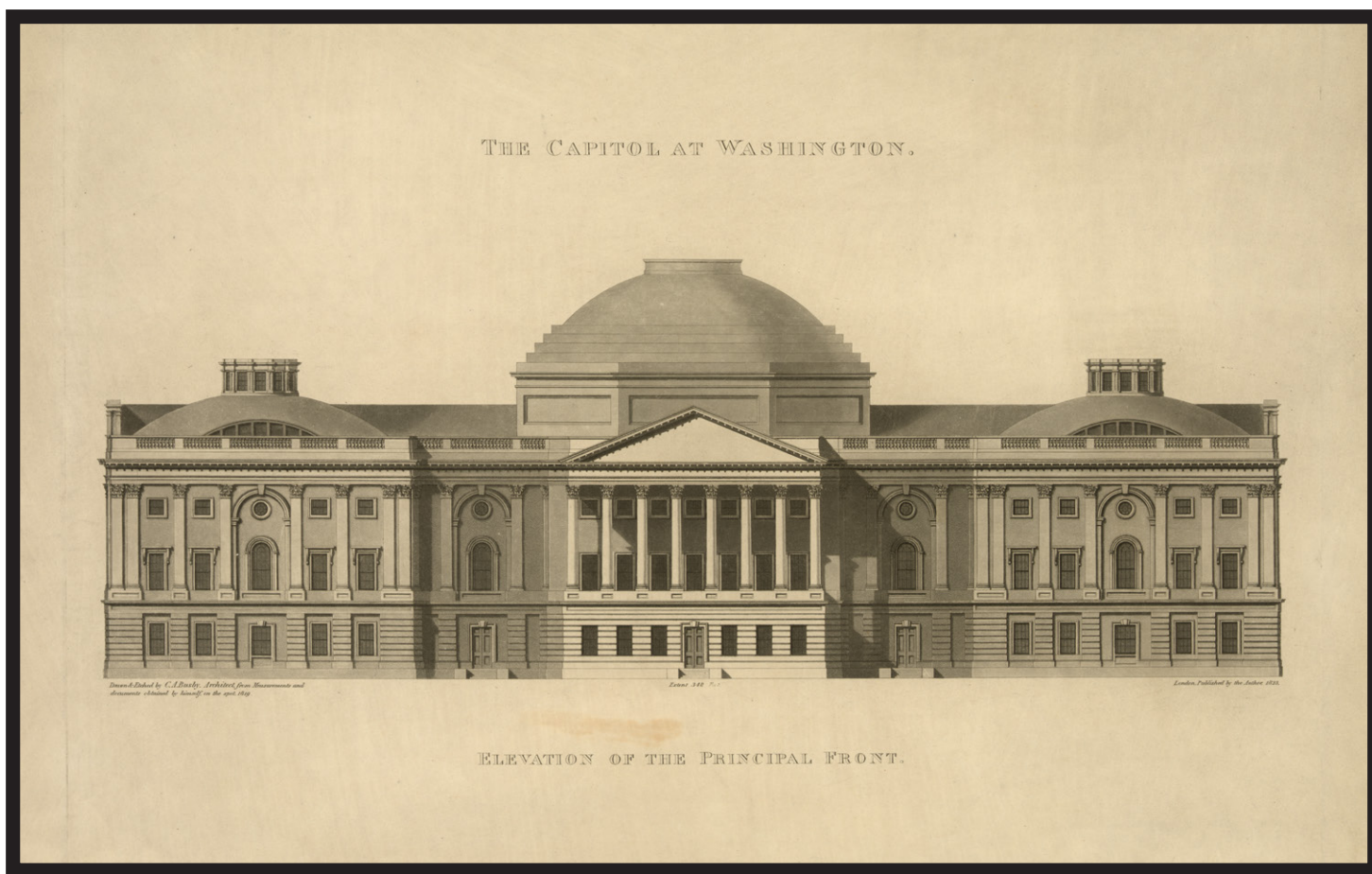


Fig. 2. Busby's 1823 east elevation of the Capitol shows John Trumbull's scheme to return to William Thornton's 1793 design.

This tale of discovery begins in a Fredericksburg, Virginia, antique shop. Bryan Shattuck visited on 4 December 2016, spied, and promptly bought a framed etching of a plan of the Capitol (fig. 1). He immediately contacted the U.S. Capitol Historical Society for information about his “find.” And a wonderful find it is, a very rare etching of the main floor of the Capitol that has a pendant, the Capitol’s East Front (fig. 2). Only one other copy of this plan is known to survive, valuable for the Capitol’s history because functions of various spaces were identified on it (fig. 3). The measured drawings were made in 1819 in Washington, but not published until 1823 in London, by the home-educated British architect and engineer Charles Augustin Busby (1786-1834). In the spring of 1817 the president of London’s Royal Academy, the Pennsylvania-born history painter Benjamin West, wrote Busby a letter of introduction to John Trumbull (1756-1843), West’s intermittent student between 1780 and 1815.<sup>1</sup>

Trumbull is considered America’s greatest painter of

the Revolutionary era because from his youth he directed his exceptional artistic talent towards visually recording via sketches and portraits its civil and military leaders and the places where its momentous events occurred. Due to partial blindness Trumbull’s participation in the war was limited to drawing maps of British fortifications in the Boston area and serving as the second of George Washington’s personal aides-de-camp. In 1780 Trumbull moved to London to study painting but was soon imprisoned by the British for spying. During several months of the winter of 1780-1781, Trumbull began his architectural studies via books visitors brought him in prison, the study of great works of architecture being the common way architects of his era were educated in their profession. (None of his constructed designs—all in Connecticut—has survived.) During 1786 Trumbull was invited by Thomas Jefferson, America’s minister to France, to stay with him in Paris. He subsequently travelled widely with another of Jefferson’s visitors, the young Boston architect Charles Bulfinch (1763-1844),

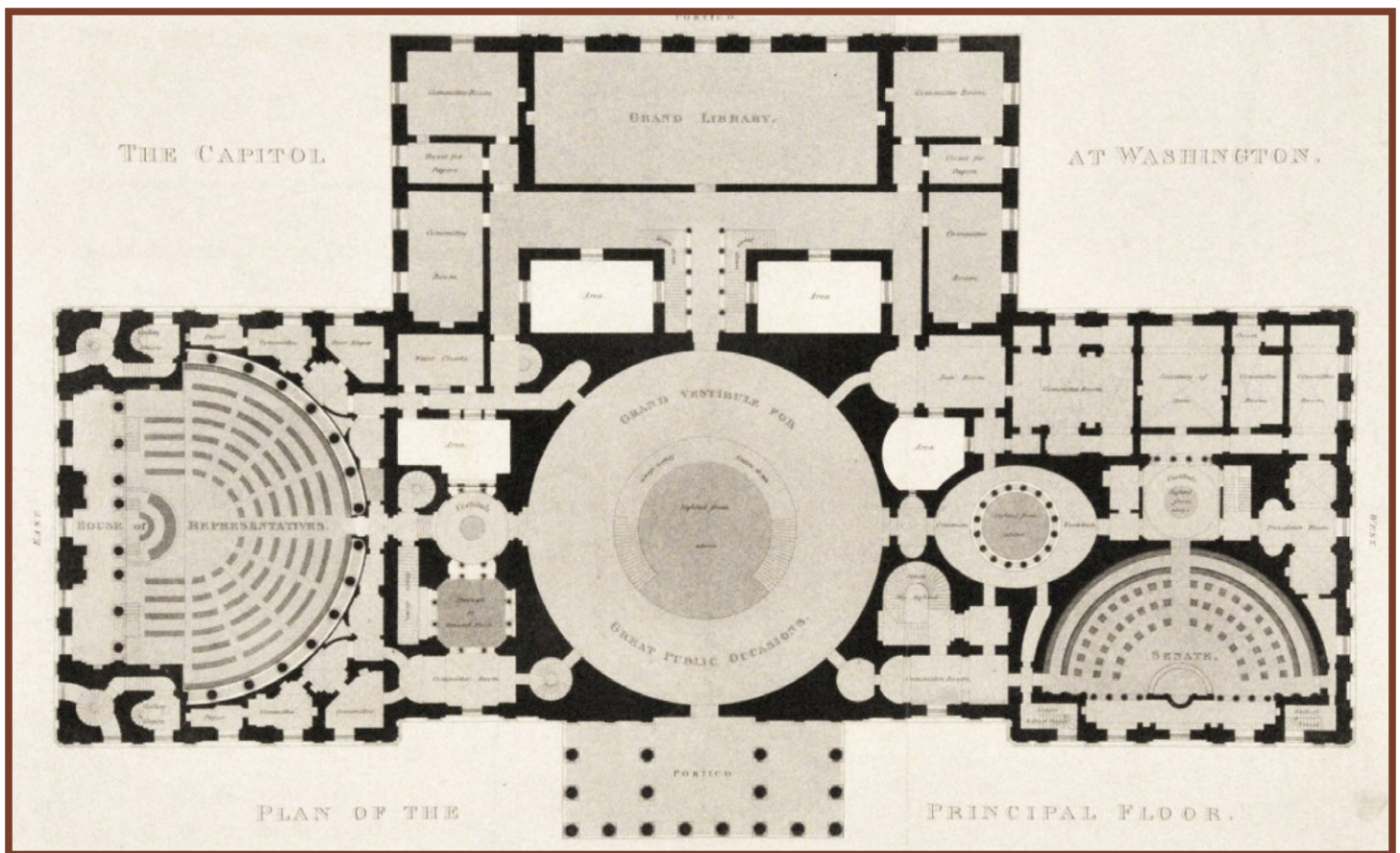


Fig. 3. Only one pristine copy of Busby's 1823 plan of the Capitol's main floor is known to exist; it is in private hands. This image, which was scanned from a plate produced from a negative published between 1900 and 1903, is of an original copy whose current location is unknown.

who was making a “grand tour” of European cities. They are known to have visited Versailles together but it is uncertain if Bulfinch accompanied Trumbull to Rome.<sup>2</sup>

Trumbull settled in New York in 1815 and the following year was elected president of the American Academy of Fine Arts, his goal to remake it on the model of the Royal Academy with regular exhibitions and a hierarchy of academicians. Busby arrived in New York in the early summer of 1817; between June and September—with Trumbull's support—Busby was accepted as a member of three prestigious New York intellectual and artistic societies. Busby's talents, gleaned from drawings of his English buildings and his designs for a Virginia church, led the academy to name him its architectural advisor at summer's end. In late 1816 Trumbull began lobbying members of Congress for his life's ultimate goal: to hang some of his Revolutionary War paintings in the Capitol. The first was his great painting “commemorative of the Declaration of Independence,” but three others were soon added, approved

by Congress on 6 February 1817. One depicted another civic event, set in the Maryland statehouse in Annapolis: Washington resigned his commission there as general of all the armies on 23 December 1783. The two great American military victories Trumbull painted were Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga (October 1777) and Cornwallis's at Yorktown (October 1781). Trumbull had formerly done easel paintings of them all; his contract was to enlarge them to a monumental size suitable for the Capitol's rotunda.<sup>3</sup>

Trumbull was in Washington on 22 January 1817, when he wrote the Capitol's architect B.H. Latrobe, who replied the same day that he was “honored in having my Walls destined to support your paintings.” By early autumn Trumbull and Latrobe were corresponding about how to fit the paintings—by contract to be twelve feet high by eighteen feet long—into Latrobe's plan for a rotunda ninety-plus feet in diameter. Latrobe planned eight great openings, massive entrances at the four cardinal directions and equally dimensioned niches between the doorways that contained wide staircases



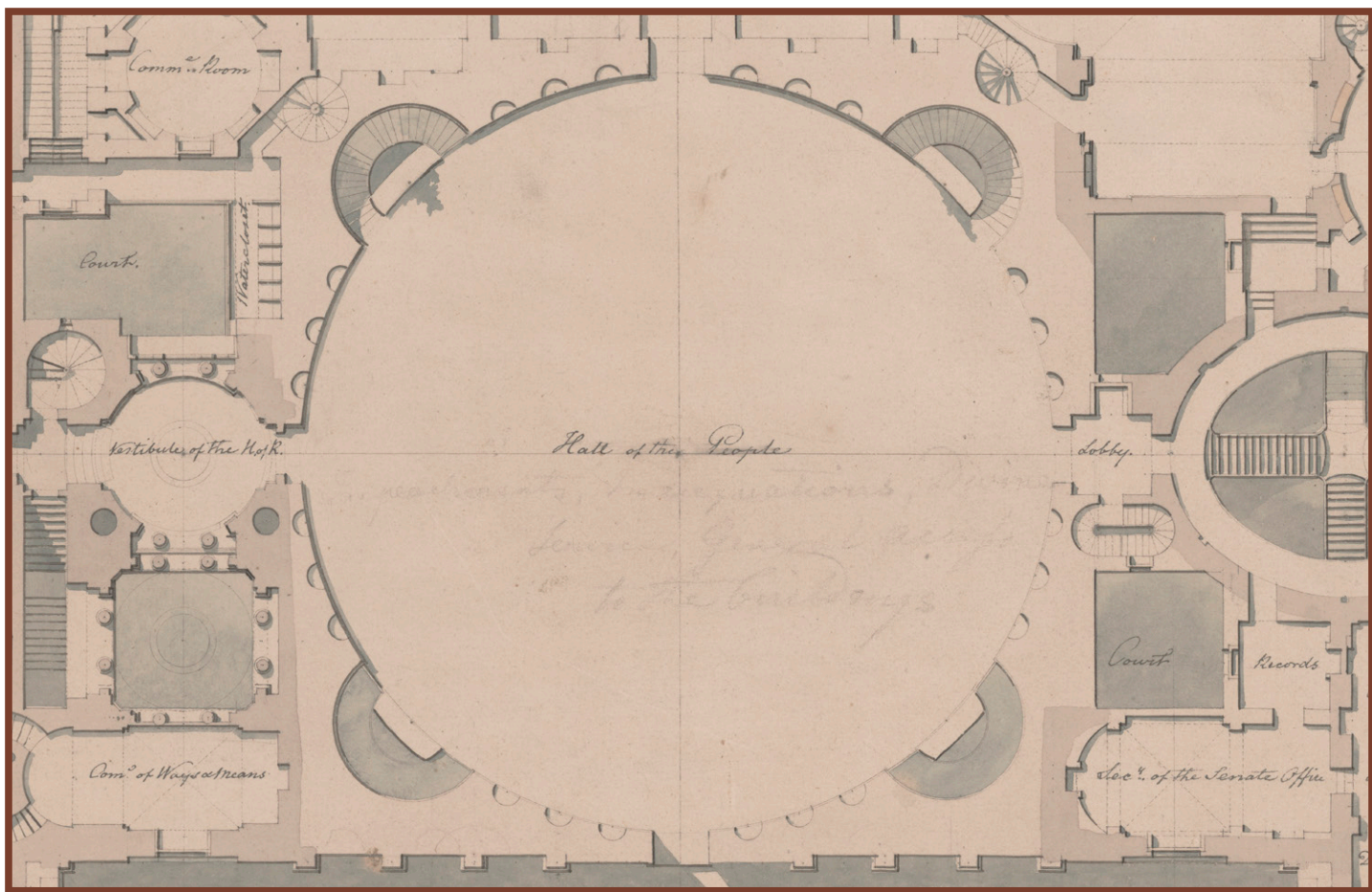


Fig. 4. Detail of B.H. Latrobe's planned rotunda in 1806 as the "Hall of the People."

descending to the crypt (fig. 4). The niches were present on Latrobe's 1806 plan—which identified the rotunda's function as the "Hall of the People"—and the ground floor plan he submitted to President James Monroe on 2 May 1817 (fig. 5). Trumbull suggested that the frames of his paintings rest on the cornices of the doors that carried across the springing of the niche's arches, which he assumed were intended for sculpture (fig. 6). Latrobe responded that the paintings would be too high for visitors to appreciate, suggesting instead that each frame be curved, its sides built out from the wall to accommodate the rotunda's curvature. Setting the frames into the wall (lined with cedar planks to reduce moisture) was also considered. Latrobe resigned on 20 November 1817, before architect and painter arrived at a viable solution.<sup>4</sup>

Bulfinch applied to Monroe to be appointed as Latrobe's successor on November 26 and took up his appointment at the beginning of December, although the formalities were not concluded until early January 1818. Bulfinch's relatively placid tenure as Architect of the Capitol was markedly different from Latrobe's tumultu-

ous one. His 22 years of experience on Boston's board of selectmen (the last 18 of which, as its chairman) prepared him for the highly charged political atmosphere of Congress, and he kept a low profile. Latrobe was an ardent Jeffersonian Republican; Bulfinch was a New England Federalist (as was Trumbull). Bulfinch's mild personality was the opposite of Latrobe's vibrant one. Latrobe's reports to Congress were replete with detailed explanations about his architectural decisions; Bulfinch recorded what had been accomplished and how much it cost. Latrobe resigned because malicious accusations spread among congressmen (and to Monroe) by Commissioner Samuel Lane were too difficult for him to refute or to bear while grieving over the recent death of his oldest son. Bulfinch, who could foresee the end of work in Boston, economically crippled by the Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812, was delighted to have a secure position in Washington for himself and possibly for his sons. When Bulfinch was summarily dismissed in 1829, he as well did not feel his work on the Capitol was complete.<sup>5</sup>

In 1900 Washington architect Glenn Brown published



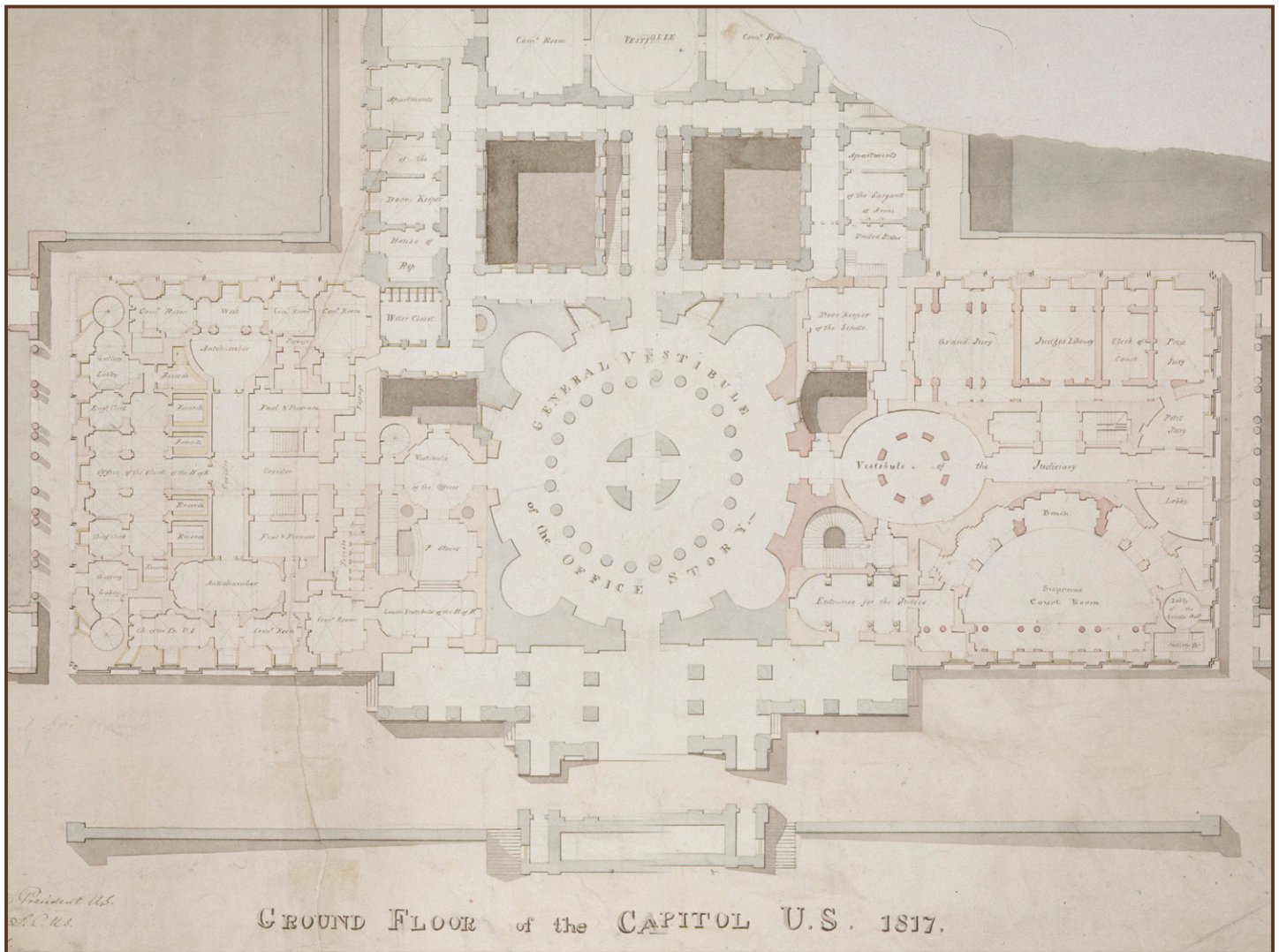


Fig. 5. Latrobe's rotunda in 1817

the first volume of his seminal *History of the United States Capitol*. Because Brown had found no Bulfinch drawings for the Capitol, but had copies (since unlocated) of Busby's etchings dated during Bulfinch's tenure, he made a bold supposition. "As this elevation and plan show a different treatment from those of Latrobe, we can assume they present one of the designs made by Bulfinch." Subsequent scholars may have relied on Bulfinch's remark that Monroe glanced at Trumbull's drawings among three alternates shown him to suppose that Bulfinch had adopted Trumbull's ideas as alternatives of his own. Because the poor quality of Brown's illustrations prevented reading the functions assigned to the spaces on Busby's plan, Shattuck's sharing of his discovery led to this re-evaluation of Busby's etchings within the Capitol's overall history.<sup>6</sup>

Bulfinch wrote his first letter to Trumbull on 19 January 1818. Lost in an 1836 fire at New York's Academy of Fine Arts, the main points of its content can be inferred from Trumbull's lengthy reply nine days later. He began by noting that Bulfinch was precisely in the situation the painter expected, "surrounded by every possible diversity of opinions, interest, and prejudices," but he was delighted that after "thirty years of acquaintance and esteem" Bulfinch turned to him for advice. Bulfinch's letter contained the shocking news that Congress was considering "abandoning the grand circular room and Dome," the spur that led Trumbull to make his own design for the Rotunda that meant redesigning the entire "center building" between the House and Senate wings. In his response, Trumbull reminded Bulfinch that if Congress



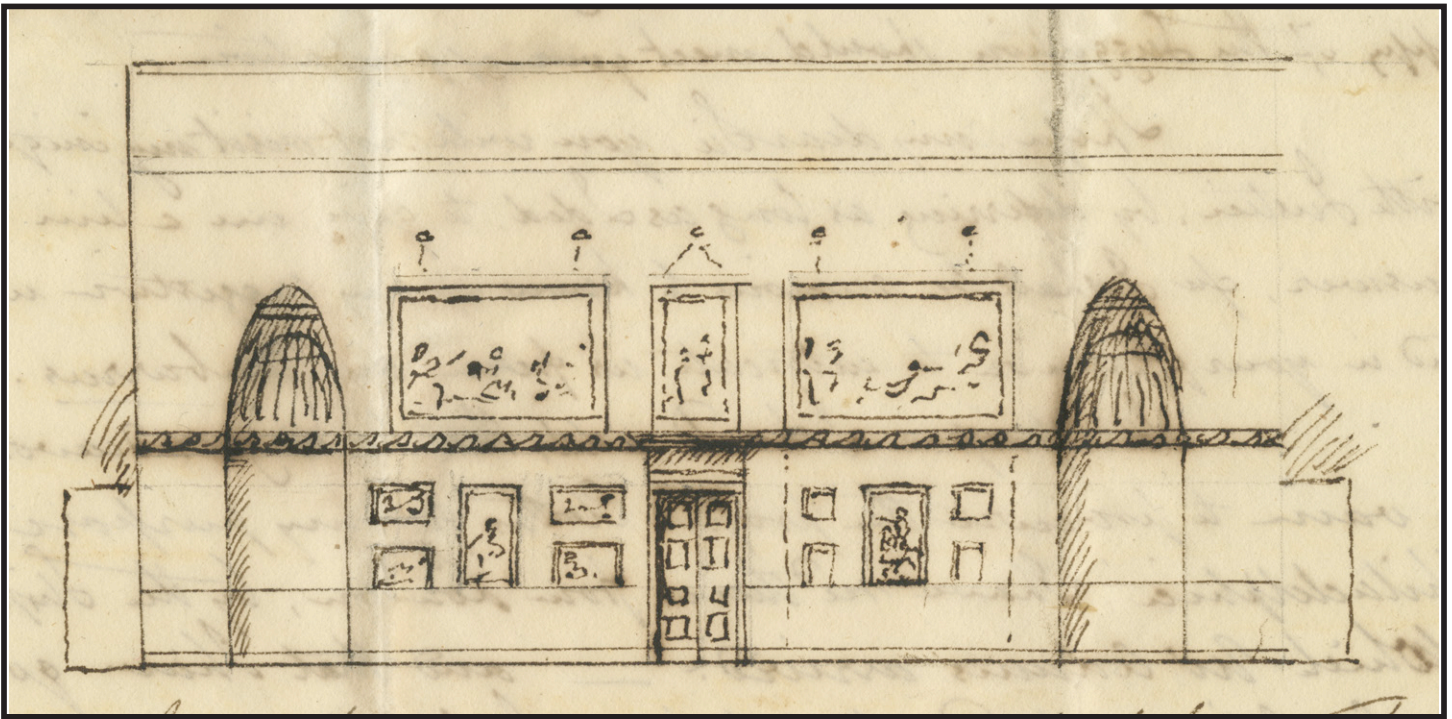


Fig. 6. Trumbull's suggestion for how to hang his four Revolutionary War paintings in the Rotunda appeared in a letter he wrote to Latrobe on 25 September 1817.

objected to Latrobe's Rotunda, they were ignorant of the "earliest idea of the Capitol as projected by Major [Peter Charles] L'Enfant, drawn by Dr. [William] Thornton, and adopted by General Washington."<sup>7</sup>

Mangin and McComb's much-admired two-story vestibule rotunda for the New York City Hall (1803-1812) was Trumbull's architectural starting point for his Capitol redesign (fig. 7). Much of his six-page letter to Bulfinch described how he fundamentally rethought Latrobe's rotunda and crypt in order to provide ideal conditions for the approach and display of his four Revolutionary War paintings. The letter is also key to understanding that Busby's etchings actually reflected Trumbull's thinking, not an alternative design by Bulfinch for completing the Capitol as Brown and subsequent scholars supposed.<sup>8</sup>

Trumbull's response to Bulfinch contained three explanatory drawings, each described in detail in his text. "Referring to plan No. 1, I propose then to enclose the basement story of the two porticos, in the same style of piers and arches, as in the wings, and to enter, under each portico." Trumbull eliminated Latrobe's staircase and his colonnades on either side of the Portico, that is, returned to Thornton's original design. Busby's version of the East Front etching visually depicted Trumbull's

written description. Deleting so many exterior columns and arches, not to mention the staircase raised on massive arches, would be a great saving in public money. Trumbull knew that Latrobe's grand but expensive architectural gestures were a critical issue with Monroe and several Members of Congress. Bulfinch intended to avoid undue expenses. Trumbull believed he was providing an economical solution to complete the center building, but it was also one that would leave his architectural mark on the Capitol. History has determined that Latrobe was a greater architect than Bulfinch; Trumbull may well have felt the same as he pushed the Bostonian to adopt a spatially exciting center building closer to Latrobe's aesthetic ethos than Bulfinch's attachment to elegantly decorated surfaces.<sup>9</sup>

Trumbull proposed entering the Rotunda at ground level via "a hall forty feet by twenty, with apartments for doorkeepers adjoining—to open a passage through the center of the building." (fig. 8) Committee rooms for both houses and a central furnace to heat all of the center building were also shown. Trumbull went on to describe the outer ring as the support for the "Vestibule's" (Rotunda's) wall, the double inner rings as the supports for the double circular staircases connecting the two floors. Busby's plan of the main floor





*Fig. 7. The two-story vestibule rotunda in New York's City Hall (1812) influenced Trumbull's plan for the Capitol's center building.*