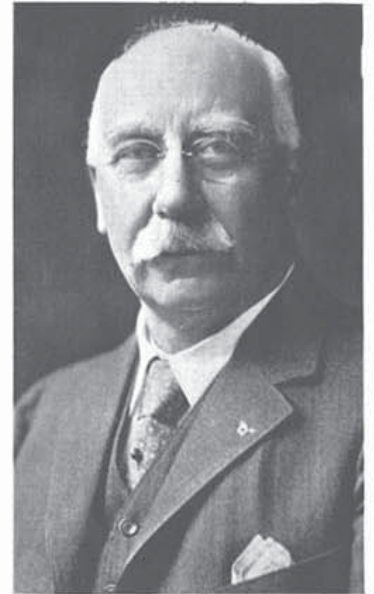


Architects Struggled With MATERIALIALISTS

TO Save Beauty of Design

By—
CHARLES H. BEBB, F.A.I.A.

Former Architectural Advisor to State Capitol Commission, and Associate Architect During Construction of Present Units of Group



WHILE the completion of the major part of Washington's governmental buildings constitutes a testimonial to unified effort, the history of the way in which plans were developed for the structures is a record of enormous battles over conflicting ideas.

For years there was a bitter controversy over the style and arrangement for the proposed buildings. Governor McGraw started a Capitol building in 1893 and spent \$200,000. Governor Rogers stopped work on the foundation and urged the purchase of the Thurston County courthouse.

Two nation-wide architectural contests were held before any designs were adopted. Probably 50 of the nation's greatest architects inspected the site upon which the Capitol now stands, both dreamed and planned buildings which they thought would meet the state's needs and put their dreams on paper. Even after decisions were made a half dozen governors still battled for individual interpretations of the designs chosen. Separate sets of dreamers planned to place the central building of the group in a half dozen different spots on Capitol Place, while some have argued that it should be faced south, east, west or north, as finally done.

Out of all this disagreement has come the first group Capitol in the United States, if not the world and what is declared to be the finest seat of state government to be found in the nation. The many plans it seems have led the way to the perfect plan.

First Competition in 1893

Though plans for the present buildings were prepared by the firm of Wilder & White, New York, the first architect designated for the Cap-

itol was Ernest Flagg, also of New York, who was named to that post shortly after the Legislative session of 1893.

The solons decided, in that year, that the time had come when something should be done about a permanent seat of government for the new state which was created in 1889. An appropriation of \$500,000 was provided, so that a start could be made upon the structure and a nationwide competition was inaugurated to select an architect to direct the work. Professor Ware of Columbia was appointed sole judge, and it was agreed that his decision should be final. Out of many entries submitted, the design offered by Mr. Flagg was considered the most suitable, and was given approval.

Winners of Nation-Wide Competition for Group Plan



MR. WALTER R. WILDER

MR. HARRY K. WHITE

The plans accepted at that time constituted the basis for most Capitol discussion from that time forward until 1911, when they were virtually discarded. They provided for a single building of very substantial construction which was to have been 250 feet long, 150 feet deep and three stories high with an attic in some portions. The exterior was to have been faced with Tenino stone. The dome proposed would have risen to a height of approximately 150 feet, or about half the height of the present dome.

According to the conception of the early nineties this one building was ample to care for the needs of all the state departments, the two houses of the Legislature and the Supreme Court, for all time. The rapidity with which development

has come in the state is aptly illustrated by the fact that the present Legislative Building, more than half as large again is no more than adequate for four executive offices and the house and senate chambers, while the court and state departments are housed in separate structures.

New Start is Made

Although the Flagg plans were accepted as the basis for official action through many years, they were never carried out beyond the point of putting in a foundation which was later utilized to a very small extent in the present Legislative Building.

By 1911 the Legislature grew weary of the various expedients employed in providing Washington with temporary governmental buildings and thoughts once more turned to the proposal for a permanent Capitol.

At the instance of the Washington Chap-
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Architects Struggled With Materialists

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ter of the American Institute of Architects, it was decided to hold another country-wide competition for the selection of an architect. There were two separate phases in the competition—one for a group building plan which would serve as a guide for future construction and the other to provide a design for a structure to house the Supreme Court, State Law Library and the Attorney General's office.

In carrying out this competition the State Capitol Commission, which consisted of Governor Hay, the State Auditor, State Land Commissioner, State Tax Commissioner and three citizens appointed by the Governor; the writer, of the Seattle firm of Bebb and Gould, was named as their advisor in drawing up a program. Kirkland K. Cutter, Spokane, and W. B. Farville, San Francisco, were later engaged to act with me in judging the designs submitted.

My own work in this advisory capacity entailed the expenditure of a considerable amount of time and study, and in March, 1912, I received the following communication in recognition of what part I had played in connection with the competition and in the final selection of plans.

March 23, 1912.

"Mr. Charles H. Bebb,

Seattle.

Dear Sir:

At a meeting of the Commission held upon the 27th ultimo the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

"WHEREAS MR. CHARLES H. BEBB, of Seattle, has been employed by the State Capitol Commission as Expert Architectural Adviser, and in that capacity has rendered to the Commission and to the State of Washington invaluable assistance in the selection of plans for the Capitol Building Group and in the preparation for the construction of the Temple of Justice;

BE IT RESOLVED that the sincere thanks of the Commission be extended to Mr. Bebb for the ability, care and industry with which he has discharged the duties of his said employment.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) E. W. ROSS,
Secretary."

Wildner & White Chosen

Out of thirty-seven sets of plans submitted, those entered by Wildner & White, New York, were chosen both for the general group scheme and the Temple of Justice design.

The group plan offered many difficulties to the architects, since they were venturing along altogether new and novel lines. There were no existing buildings or precedents to guide them.

The chief difficulty lay in splitting up what would ordinarily have been a single building into six or more parts without diminishing each part to the point of insignificance. Recognizing this problem, the Legislative building was placed in the center and the other structures were arranged around it in such a way that they will finally present, from nearly every angle, the general effect of a very broad base from which an adequate dome rises.

Greek Doric architecture, modified in some respects, gives the Capitol strength, simplicity and charm. Outside decorations, such as the skull-and-wreath frieze, the cheneau or cornice fringes, etc., are carved from sandstone. Big columns, more than four feet in diameter and twenty-five feet high, inclose the Capitol. The columns are called Doric, but they are really simplified Doric, minus the indented grooves. They are graceful shafts, smooth, with a slight inward-leaning toward the top to emphasize stability, and the colonnade gives the building an air of security. The colon-

nade of the main entrance consists of eight Corinthian columns, more than thirty feet high, which differ from the Doric in that they are "necked" with fragile embellishments, almost flowery, carefully carved from stone. A terrace 411 feet long fronts the Capitol, also extending on both sides, providing plenty of space for social events or any gathering of people.

Plans Often Revised

While the present buildings are in entire conformity with the plans of Wildner & White, as selected in competition, the Legislative building, as it stands, is the result of constant growth. The original competition program provided that this structure was to be erected on the old foundations designed by Mr. Flagg in 1894, although these covered an area of only about two-thirds the size of the present building. The original design showed a dome considerably higher than that contemplated by Mr. Flagg, for the extended base line resulting from the group program, made this desirable. A material increase in height was not possible, however, because of the comparatively small building on which it was to rest.

Gov. Lister and the State Capitol Commission, in 1917, purposed to erect an office type of building in the middle of the beautiful and dignified group called for in the previously accepted plans and aroused a storm of protest from the architects of the state. The architects' interest in the proposed Capitol building at Olympia was purely artistic. They wanted to see something in harmony with the high ideals and the dignity of this great state and had a professional horror of seeing something so durable as a State Capitol botched.

The Washington State Chapter of the American Institute of Architects took the lead in arousing a public protest against utilitarian and inartistic plans of the Capitol Commission, with the result that these plans were abandoned.

The charm and the dignity of the Wildner & White grouping and the treatment proposed for the unsightly waterfront at Olympia appealed to everybody with a love for the beautiful in architecture. It was to be expected that the architects would protest when proposals were made to throw the plans aside, abandon the waterfront approach and to have plain office buildings facing Capitol Way.

The office building proposed by the State Capitol Commission was to cost \$400,000. The plans for the building were drawn by Julius Zittel of Spokane, who had taken a prominent part in Democratic state politics.

The controversy over style and arrangement of buildings for state Capitols was no new thing in this country. Several states have gone through such controversies and some of them made serious errors which the people have since regretted. Only when a well-established plan has been followed has the result been satisfactory either from a utilitarian or an artistic point of view.

When the French engineer, Peter Charles L'Enfant, laid out the general plans for the national capital city of Washington, D. C., there were those who objected to following precisely his recommendations. However, those who wanted to see something dignified and beautiful as a capital city, prevailed, and the L'Enfant plans generally were followed. The changes made were few and the wisdom of those who stood for the original plans was abundantly proved. Washington today is known as "Washington the Beautiful." It would not have been so had the utilitarians prevailed.

In place of artistic groupings and classic

edifices, the result doubtless would have been canyons of office buildings, had the coldly commercial faction had their way.

The architects of the state of Washington, in their appeal to the people, called attention to the fact that the opportunity was presented for making a beautiful and impressive capitol city and that on the site then owned and with the treatment proposed in the accepted plans there would be erected buildings which would be a monument to the good sense and the taste of the people.

The design of the Legislative building was finally taken up in detail only after Governor Louis F. Hart took office in 1919. The difficulties involved were really faced in 1921, after the Capitol Commission had been replaced by a Capitol Committee, consisting of Governor Hart, State Auditor C. W. Clausen and State Land Commissioner Clark V. Savidge.

As the plans were being checked it was decided that the building, if limited to the size originally proposed, would provide very small rooms for the main executive offices and that a considerable loss of dignity would result.

It was obvious, however, that no enlargement would be possible without extending beyond the old foundations, so this extension was approved and the Legislative building was lengthened nearly eighty feet and about twenty feet were added to its width.

This revision of plans not only added to the size and cost of the building, but also made it infinitely finer. A major result of the change was that a considerable heightening of the dome was made possible.

Study Models Built

Before final plans for the Legislative building were accepted study models of both the structure itself and the group as a whole were prepared and the dome proposals were all tested out. At one time it was planned to make the dome 307 feet high, the same height as the National Capitol, which would have made Washington's dome the third highest in the world, rather than the fourth. The effect, when tested out on the scale models, was not considered desirable, however, so the height was reduced by twenty feet, to a total of 287 feet. Three domes in the world now tower higher than the one on Washington's Capitol: National Capitol at Washington, D. C., 307 feet; St. Paul's at London, 319 feet; and St. Peter's at Rome, 408 feet.

The work of the architects did not end with the task of putting the dream of a beautiful building on paper, suiting it to the environmental advantages offered or splitting one huge structure into a half dozen parts.

Changing views of the Capitol Commissions, Committees and Governors all had to be recognized and harmonized. Perspectives had to be readjusted to conform with altered base lines. Modification had to be carried out without altering general effects.

Furthermore, it was no simple task to put that dream on paper in the first instance; much less so to perfect it in conformity with the final needs.

Countless Details Studied

An appalling multiplicity of details demand attention when one puts the plans for a building weighing 149,000,000 or 74,500 tons on paper. Even the pictorial or designing part of the job is an undertaking of great magnitude when a dome weighing more than thirty million pounds is reared heavenward.

Planning has to be perfect, down to the finest point, when the job at hand requires the placing of eighteen million pounds of brick and concrete and more than twelve million pounds of stone in a dome; utilizing brick weighing thirty million pounds, fifty-one million pounds of concrete and almost forty million pounds of stone in a building—and utilizing it all to construct a masterpiece of dignity, art and beauty.

Credit the Bivalve . .

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ceived the highest vote before being placed upon the ballot.

The question was submitted on November 4, 1889, with the following result:

Olympia	25,490
North Yakima	14,711
Ellensburg	12,833
Centralia	607
Yakima	314
Pasco	130
Scattering	1,088

If opposition to Olympia had been concentrated, it will be noted, a change in location would have resulted.

Since there was no majority a second election became necessary. This was held exactly a year later.

Intense Campaign Waged

In the period that elapsed between the two elections an intense campaign was waged. A history of the period says: "In May occurred the disastrous conflagration in Seattle . . . and the city council appropriated \$500 to be forwarded to the sufferers. The secret of this remarkable liberality with the people's money lay in the coming Capital election. Seattle's influence for Olympia was desired."

Oysters alone, it appears, could not be made to exert state-wide influence and the city appropriated \$1,000 as a campaign fund.

The final election on the State Capital location issue resulted as follows:

Olympia	37,413
North Yakima	6,276
Ellensburg	7,722
Scattering	5

The battle for the retention of the Capitol virtually closed at this juncture, since the constitution provided that a change of location could be authorized only by a two-thirds vote of the people, a development which has never since seemed a probability. Nevertheless, the old threat was used annually or biennially at each session through to 1909, and to good purpose. Only completion of the legislative building proper has finally convinced the people of Olympia that their difficulties upon this score are finally at end.

During the period sketchily covered in this account Olympia has made countless concessions to the lawmakers, in order to retain their good graces; has sacrificed many important objectives in order to attain that major purpose—a "permanent" Capital; has paid, as has been said, a price in untiring effort that can never be calculated.

At last, however, the oyster rests easily in his bed near Olympia and the city now believes that both lawmakers and voters have thoroughly accepted the view advanced by Mr. Denny when he said: "I know of no other place combining anything like the claims, all things considered, to the Capital as does this immediate vicinity."

In conclusion it may be wise to point out that sources of information studied while preparing this review are in conflict upon certain of the dates used, with the result that several figures presented may be slightly inaccurate. Since variances between the histories consulted in no case amount to more than a year these discrepancies are probably not important. The writer is particularly indebted to Senator P. H. Carlyon for assistance in compiling data, and to Rathbun's "History of Thurston County" covering the period from 1845 to 1895.