
GLENN BROWN AND THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL

BY WILLIAM B. BUSHONG

THE most important legacy of Washington architect Glenn Brown's prolific writing career was his two-volume *History of the United States Capitol* (1900 and 1903). Brown's *History* created a remarkable graphic record and comprehensive account of the architecture and art of the nation's most revered public building. His research, in a period in which few architectural books provided substantive historical text, established Brown as a national authority on government architecture and elicited acclaim from European architectural societies. The *History* also played a significant role in shaping the monumental core of Washington, in effect serving as what Charles Moore called the "textbook" for the McMillan Commission of 1901–02.¹

Brown's family background supplied the blend of political awareness and professionalism that inspired the *History*. His great grandfather, Peter Lenox, supervised construction of the original Capitol Building from 1817 until its completion in 1829. His grandfather, Bedford Brown, served two terms in Washington, D.C., as a senator from North Carolina (1829–1842) and counted among his personal friends Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, Franklin Pierce, and James

¹ Charles Moore (1855–1942), chief aide to Senator James McMillan (R-MI) and secretary to the now famous Senate Park Commission of 1901–02, commonly referred to today as the McMillan Commission, made vital contributions to the administration and editing of the influential 1902 planning report that subsequently shaped the twentieth-century development of the civic core of Washington, D.C. Moore later became chairman of the United States Commission of Fine Arts from 1910 until his retirement in 1937. For Moore's discussion of the importance of Brown's *History* to Washington's planners, see Charles Moore, "Glenn Brown: A Memoir," *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal* 39 (October 15, 1932): 858.



Figure 1. Glenn Brown, secretary of the American Institute of Architects, at the Octagon in 1907. *Prints and Photographs Division, LC.*

Buchanan. Brown's most influential role model was his father, Bedford Brown II. An 1850 graduate of Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, Dr. Brown established his practice at Yanceyville in Caswell County, North Carolina, while living at his father's plantation, "Rose Hill." He later served as a Confederate brigade surgeon and hospital inspector during the Civil War. Due to the state's depressed postwar economy, he moved from North Carolina to Alexandria, Virginia, where he achieved prominence as a physician and as a leading proponent of the professional licensing of medical practitioners.²

Born in 1854 in Fauquier County, Virginia, where his father briefly practiced medicine, Glenn Brown was raised at "Rose Hill" in North Carolina. He completed two years of study at Washington and Lee University in 1873 and returned to Alexandria to serve as his father's apprentice. To supplement a small allowance, he studied mechanical drafting and began producing drawings for patent attorneys. Through this drafting experience Brown discovered his aptitude for architecture. In 1875 he attended the architecture school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, then located in Boston, where he studied under the department's founder, William R. Ware. Brown later recalled that his mentor had instilled in him "the highest ideals in the profession, striving, no matter against what odds, for the best."³

After completing his studies at MIT, Brown obtained employment on Henry Hobson Richardson's Cheney Building in Hartford, Connecticut, as a draftsman and paymaster for the Norcross Brothers. Soon after marrying Mary Ella Chapman of Staunton, Virginia, a grandniece

of President James Madison, Brown returned to Alexandria, Virginia, and obtained work as a draftsman for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1877. In 1880, he opened an independent office in Washington, D.C., and soon became a leading advocate of modern domestic architecture and sanitation, offering his clients workmanlike Richardsonian designs with advanced household plumbing systems.

Richardson's Romanesque Revival designs continued to influence Brown's practice into the 1890s as was evident in his commercial and residential design between 1884 and 1894. These structures strongly reflected the balance of picturesque composition and rational planning characteristic of Richardson's architecture. But just as Washington embraced Richardson's Romanesque as a new "American style" for its public buildings, Brown's design inspiration shifted to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Georgian and Federal architectural landmarks in Alexandria and Washington, such as Gadsby's Tavern, the Carlyle Mansion, and the Octagon.⁴ Brown's interest in early American architecture and its revival as a design source for public buildings began and deepened with his study of the United States Capitol between 1890 and 1900. He recognized the urban planning potential of neoclassical public architecture during his visit to the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Although Brown had expected to be disappointed by "sham classical structures," he left Chicago deeply impressed by the beauty and grandeur of "noble buildings, nobly and harmoniously grouped."⁵

² See William B. Bushong, "Glenn Brown, the American Institute of Architects, and the Development of the Civic Core of Washington, D.C." (Ph.D. Dissertation, George Washington University, 1988).

³ Glenn Brown, *Memories, 1860–1930: A Winning Crusade to Revive George Washington's Vision of a Capital City* (Washington: W. F. Roberts, 1931), 18–21.

⁴ For a discussion of the influence of Richardson's architecture on the design of both Washington's public and private buildings and the perception locally that it would be the "American style," see Appleton P. Clark, "History of Architecture in Washington," 500–502, in John C. Proctor, ed., *Washington Past and Present: A History*, vol. 2 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1930).

⁵ Brown, *Memories*, 345.



Figures 2 and 3. The T. P. Simpson residence at 1301 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W., completed in 1886, is a bold wedge-shaped Richardsonian Romanesque Revival house adapted to an unusual triangular lot facing Logan Circle.

Brown's personal conversion to neoclassicism became increasingly evident in his practice after 1893, and by 1900 he designed almost exclusively in this idiom. During the 1890s he became one of Washington's leading advocates of the Colonial Revival movement. Along with several other prominent local firms, notably Hornblower and Marshall and Harvey L. Page, he began drawing inspiration from historic buildings for the design of door and window surrounds, cornices, and mantels of new residences to "imbibe the spirit of the old work without literally copying it."⁶ Brown had extensively promoted the appreciation

⁶ For Brown's quotation and a discussion of the inception of the Colonial Revival movement in Washington, D.C., see Brown, "Domestic Architecture in Washington City," *Engineering Magazine* 7 (June 1896): 454-460.



Figure 4. The Romanesque Revival National Union Insurance Company Building at 918 F Street, N.W., completed in 1890, was the location of Brown's office between 1891 and 1905. *American Architect and Building News*, September 20, 1890.



Figure 5. The residence of Mrs. Joseph Beale at 2301 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., completed in 1907.

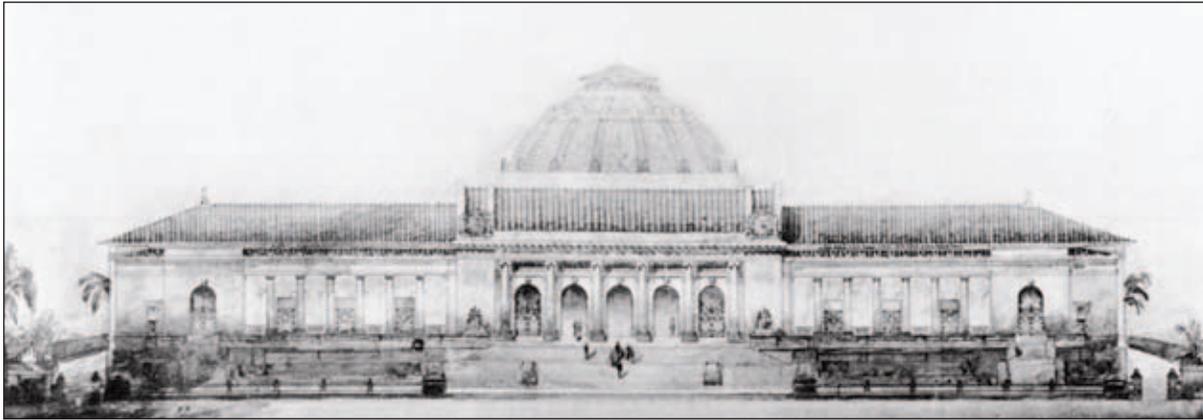
of the region's historic buildings in his publications in the 1880s and later directed a restoration of Christ Church in Alexandria (1891), which included a new Colonial Revival pulpit that would be featured in *The Georgian Period* (1898).⁷ The church's interior appearance today reflects both Brown's pioneering interest in historic preservation and his influential contribution to the Colonial Revival movement in the region. While working in 1901–1902 as historical adviser and construction superintendent for McKim, Mead, and White's renovation of the White House, Brown formed a warm friendship with Charles F. McKim and developed an admiration for the firm's eclectic neoclassicism. Brown's 1907 residence for Mrs. Joseph Beale on Sheridan Circle (now, the Embassy of Egypt) was a notable building erected at the peak of this influence. Two unexecuted projects, developed during his partnership with his son Bedford Brown IV, illustrate the firm's mastery of the then fashionable Beaux Arts style: a competition scheme for a capitol in Puerto Rico (1908) that was "conservative and dignified in treatment . . . and suitable to the tropical climate" and preliminary plans for the construction of a new AIA headquarters and library (1912). The AIA project was especially interesting in its development of a design

⁷ See Brown, "Old Colonial Work in Virginia and Maryland," *American Architect and Building News* 22 (October 22, 1887): 198–199; "Old Colonial Work in the South," 22 (November 19, 26, 1887): 242–243 and 253–254; and "The Tayloe Mansion, the Octagon House, Washington, D.C.," 23 (January 7, 1888): 6–7. Brown's drawings along with others in this series became part of an influential source book for the Colonial Revival movement. See William R. Ware, comp., *The Georgian Period* (Boston: American Architect and Building News, 1899–1902), subsequently enhanced and published as *The Georgian Period* [Student Edition] (Boston: American Architect, 1904) and *The Georgian Period* (New York: U.P.C. Book, Inc., 1923). For a discussion of the importance of these early measured drawings, see William B. Rhoads, *The Colonial Revival*, 2 vols. (New York and London: Garland Publishing Co., 1977), 77 and 608 n. 8. For information on Brown's interior restoration of Christ Church, see John Milner Associates, "The Historic Structure Report for Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia," unpublished manuscript submitted to the Vestry of Christ Church, copy on file at Lloyd House, Alexandria Public Library, Alexandria, Virginia.

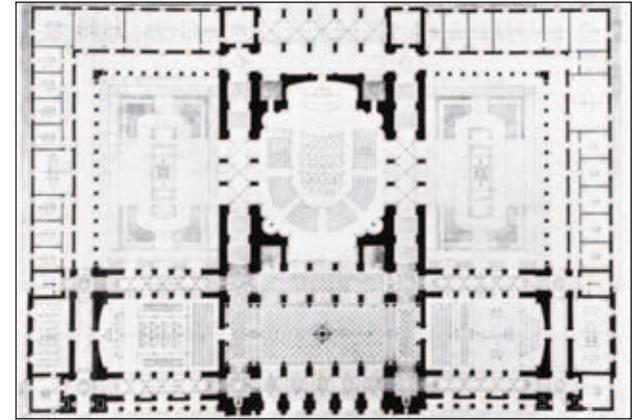
that complemented Thornton's Octagon. It appeared that Brown's interest in Thornton's lost competition design for the west front of the Capitol inspired his domical entrance for the new headquarters sited to the rear of the Octagon.⁸

By the time the first volume of the *History of the United States Capitol* was published in 1900, Brown had developed a clear vision for rebuilding and expanding the core of Washington based on the revival of the 1791 L'Enfant plan. Brown promoted his vision—which included the construction of a federal enclave that would echo the neo-classical architecture of Washington's early federal buildings—through his work as an organizer and lobbyist for the architectural profession. In his first national campaign as director of the Washington chapter of the American Institute of Architects, which he had founded in 1887, Brown supported an intensive AIA lobbying effort led by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, to implement key provisions of the 1893 Tarsney Act. This law eventually opened commissions for major federal buildings to private architects. In 1895 Brown both conceived and organized the Public Art League, a national fine arts lobby formed to advocate the establishment of an expert commission of architects and artists to advise the government on its patronage of architecture, art, and

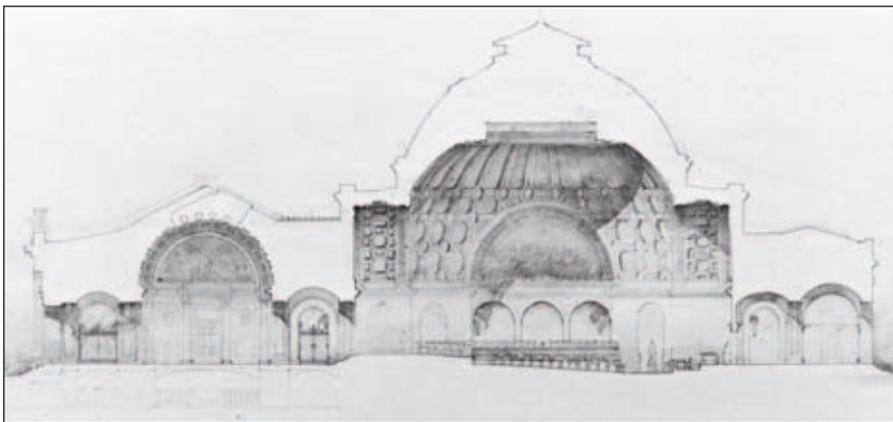
⁸ For the design competition program for the Puerto Rico Capitol, see Adin B. Lacey, comp., *American Competitions* (Philadelphia: T Square Club, 1908), vol. 2, xxiv. Compare Brown's drawing for the domical recess of the AIA headquarters to Plate 32 in *History of the United States Capitol*, vol. 1. In 1912 Brown and his son and then-partner Bedford Brown prepared preliminary designs for the headquarters "in order that the members of the Institute may offer suggestions for or approval of a general scheme, and that a systematic effort may be made to secure the money to make the improvement." The proposal was ambitious and would have required \$300,000 to build a Colonial Revival crescent-shaped structure. Bedford Brown directed the design project, but this alternative sketch indicated his father's strong influence. The AIA did not build an addition until 1939–1940. That Colonial Revival building, designed by Eggers and Higgins, was demolished to make way for the present headquarters in the 1970s.



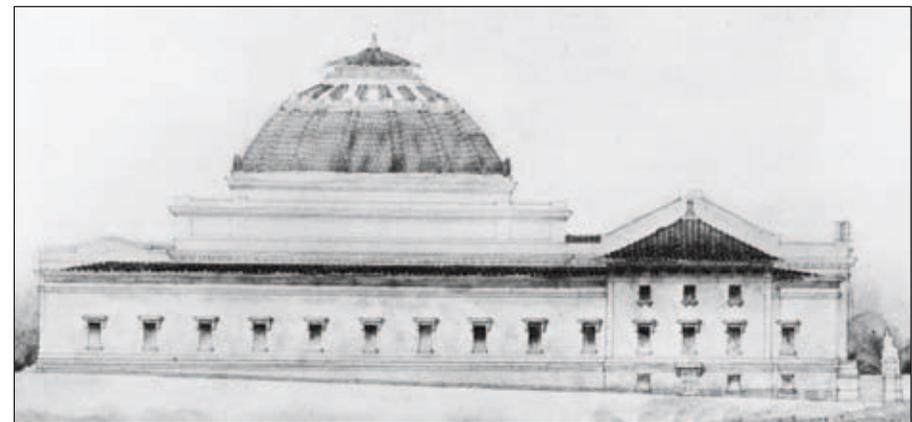
ELEVATION OF FRONT



PLAN OF FIRST FLOOR

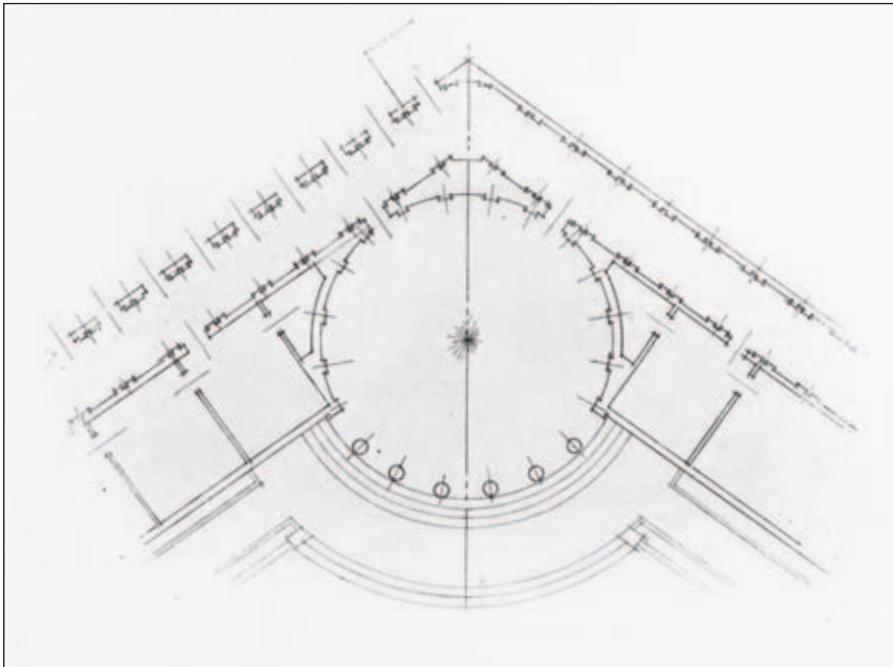
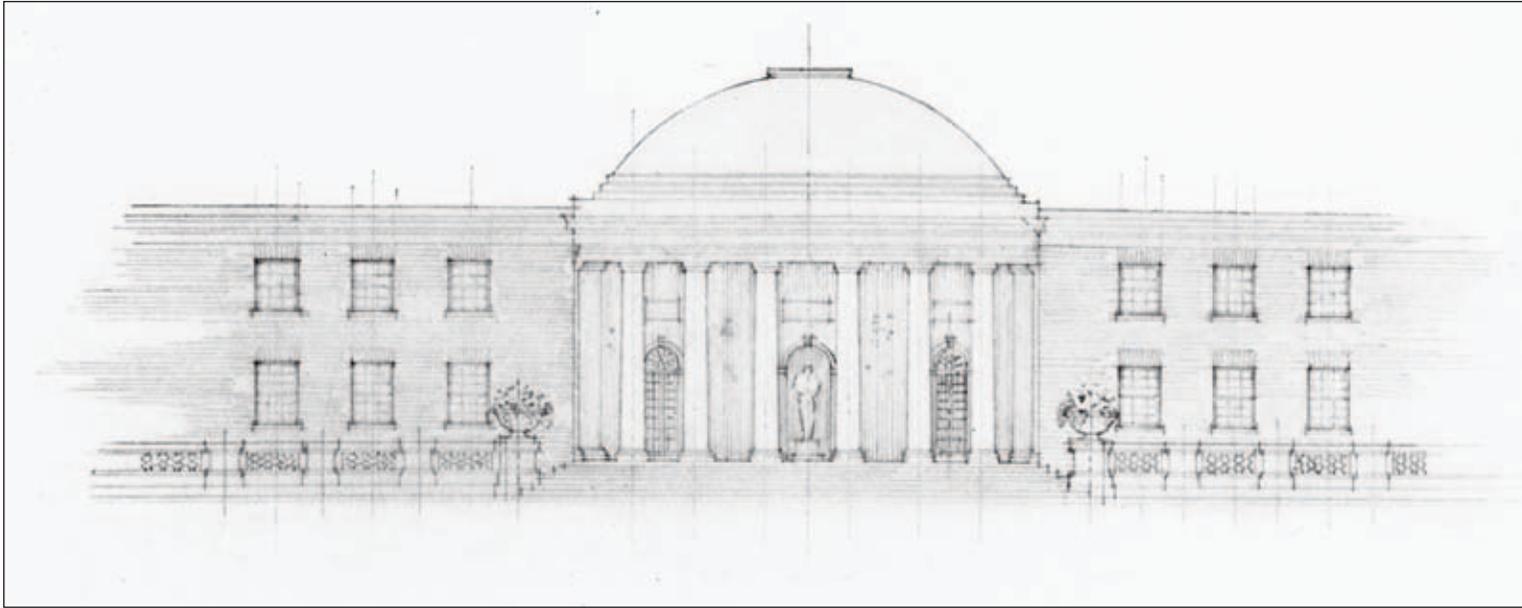


TRANSVERSE SECTION



ELEVATION OF SIDE

Figures 6 and 7. Four competition drawings for a capitol in Puerto Rico by Glenn and Bedford Brown. *American Competitions*, vol. II, 1908.



Figures 8a and 8b. These 1911 sketches of the elevation and plan for a domed recessed entrance to a planned AIA headquarters was largely based on Brown's interpretation of Thornton's design of the Capitol's west front (see Plate 32). *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, Vol. 1, January—December, 1913.

sculpture. Brown's efforts on behalf of legislation for such a commission, introduced in the Senate by Francis G. Newlands (D-NV) in 1897 but never put to a vote, established his national professional prominence and resulted in his election as AIA secretary in 1898.

Once installed as a national AIA officer, Brown implemented an ambitious program to relocate the Institute's headquarters from New York City to Washington, to establish an archives and library as well as a professional journal, and to increase the organization's membership and its political influence. During his tenure as secretary, Brown so widely and effectively promoted the AIA that by 1913 it had attained recognition in Congress on par with that of the American Bar and Medical Associations.⁹

⁹ Bushong, *A Centennial History of the American Institute of Architects* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Architectural Foundation Press, 1987), chapters 1 and 2.

States Capitol, and the Washington Monument. Further mistakes, he argued, could be avoided if a Bureau of Fine Arts, composed of “cultivated architects and landscape artists,” rendered decisions on the design and placement of public buildings and sculpture.¹¹

In 1896 Brown produced a monograph on physician William Thornton in which he argued that Thornton deserved major credit for the original design of the Old Capitol (completed with significant revisions by Benjamin Henry Latrobe and Charles Bulfinch in 1826). Published in the *Architectural Record*, Brown’s monograph contended that earlier historians underestimated Thornton’s contribution to the design of the Capitol as well as his importance to Washington’s early architectural development. Thornton’s work as an architect, Brown asserted, “compares favorably with the best of the period in design and construction.” He responded to Thornton’s numerous nineteenth-century critics, who had dismissed the doctor as an untrained amateur, by maintaining that anyone who could have accomplished so much with “so little study must have been a truly remarkable man.”¹²

¹¹ Brown, “The Selection of Sites for Federal Buildings,” *Architectural Review* 3 (August 1894): 28. Brown failed to explain that L’Enfant’s original intent for a memorial to Washington was an equestrian statue and that the Washington Monument as built was a far more dominant presence on the Mall.

¹² Brown, “Dr. William Thornton, Architect,” *Architectural Record* 6 (July 1896): 52–70. His interpretation specifically challenged works by historians George A. Townsend and James Q. Howard, who promoted French architect Etienne (Stephen) Hallet as the building’s principal designer. Late-nineteenth-century authorities on the architecture of the Capitol, such as Adolph Cluss and John H. B. Latrobe, also advanced this position. See also George A. Townsend, *Washington Outside and Inside* (Hartford: James Betts and Company, 1874); James Q. Howard, “The Architects of the American Capitol,” *International Review* 1 (November–December 1874): 736–753; Adolph Cluss, “Architects and Architecture of the United States,” *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention of the American Institute of Architects* (Boston: Franklin Press, 1876); and John H. B. Latrobe, “The Capitol and Washington at the Beginning of the Present Century” [An Address before the American Institute of Architects in Washington, D.C., November 16, 1881], (Baltimore: W. K. Boyle, 1881).

Brown’s case for Thornton became a cause in the “History of the United States Capitol,” a series that appeared in the *American Architect and Building News* in 1896 and 1897. The articles provided the first history of the design competition for the Capitol and chronicled the Old Capitol’s design and construction to 1829. These articles would be reprinted with minor revisions in volume one of the *History*. Brown established Thornton, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, and Charles Bulfinch as the architects of the Old Capitol. He depicted French architect Stephen Hallet and other early Thornton critics as jealous and petty rivals who attempted to destroy the integrity of the winning design. Brown even interpreted Benjamin Henry Latrobe’s influence on the Capitol’s development as detrimental to Thornton’s design intent, although he generally praised Latrobe’s work in rebuilding the Capitol after it had been burned by the British in 1814. The concluding articles described the completion of the building’s central section and development of Charles Bulfinch’s dome with a brief discussion of the landscape, paintings, and sculpture adorning the building before 1850. Brown’s overriding theme in these articles was the wisdom of early government officials in selecting designers like Thornton, Latrobe, and Bulfinch, which resulted in the high quality of the Capitol’s architecture.¹³

Brown’s first volume of the *History* reflects an unswerving bias toward Thornton in his interpretations of the numerous conflicts and controversies that surrounded the early design and building of the Capitol. Today Latrobe is considered the designer who improved Thornton’s exterior design and defined the overall interior architectural character of the Capitol before 1829. Brown’s *History* was considered

¹³ Brown, “History of the United States Capitol,” *American Architect and Building News*, 52–55 (May 9, 1896): 51–54; (May 23, 1896): 75–77; (June 13, 1896): 99–102; (July 4, 1896): 3–5; (July 25, 1896): 27–30; (September 5, 1896): 75–78; (October 3, 1896): 3–6; (October 24, 1896): 27–29; (December 5, 1896): 81–83; (January 2, 1897): 3–6; (February 20, 1897): 59–60.

the authoritative source on the building until his objectivity and accuracy were seriously challenged by Wells Bennett and Fiske Kimball in a series of articles published between 1916 and 1923. Today Brown's discussion of the first competition for the Capitol and the early history of the building is considered flawed not only by his strong bias toward Thornton but also by inconsistencies and errors, including the

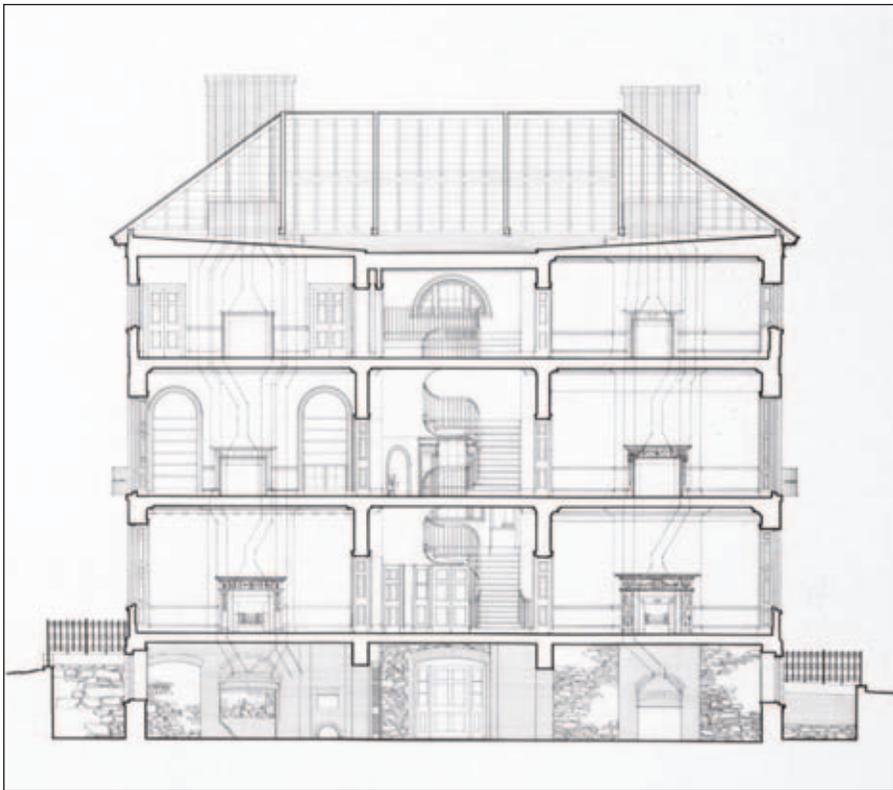


Figure 11. Commissioned by the AIA, this cross section was one of 30 measured drawings of the Octagon prepared under Brown's direction in 1913–1914. *Prints & Drawings Collection, The Octagon Museum, The American Architectural Foundation, Washington, D.C.*

misidentification of drawings, the omission of passages from key documents, and the hasty transcription of quotations.¹⁴

Brown's zealous promotion of Thornton as the "outstanding architect of his time" was related to his plan to have the AIA acquire and preserve Thornton's Octagon as its headquarters, an action which has since linked the public's recognition of the professional organization to this architectural landmark. If Thornton had been portrayed simply as an opportunistic gentleman architect with little practical knowledge of the field, Brown could hardly have convinced his colleagues to lease and later purchase the building. His promotion of Thornton's genius as a designer and the first Architect of the Capitol was motivated in part by a determination to preserve and adapt the Octagon as the AIA headquarters. Anticipating the reuse of the building for offices, a library, and a museum, Brown pressed for the building's purchase immediately after he became AIA secretary in 1899. The Institute purchased the Octagon in 1902 at a time when the preservation of historic buildings, except for houses associated with major historic figures, was a novel idea.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Wells Bennett, "Stephen Hallet and His Designs for the National Capitol, 1791–94," reprinted from the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* (July, August, September, October, 1916) [Harrisburg, Pa., 1916]. Fiske Kimball and Wells Bennett, "The Competition for the Federal Buildings," *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 7 (January, March, May, August, December, 1919): 8–12, 98–102, 202–210, 355–361, 521–528; and Kimball and Bennett, "William Thornton and the Design of the United States Capitol," *Art Studies* 1 (1923): 76–92. See also Bennett's critique of Brown's *History*, printed as a letter to the editor in *The Nation* 102 (January 13, 1916): 43–44.

¹⁵ In a gesture of gratitude for his loyal service to the organization, the AIA appointed Brown architect of the Octagon in 1914 to survey the building and administer repairs. Brown directed the preparation of a complete visual record of the building with photographs and measured drawings. Architectural photographer Frank Cousens, who published several books on Colonial Revival architecture, provided the illustrations. With the aid of his son and partner, Bedford Brown, and draftsmen Beverley Harris and William B. Cash, Brown produced thirty plates of elaborate measured drawings. The drawings and photographs were published in *The Octagon* (1915) and were his last tribute to Thornton.

Brown's intensive study of the Capitol's architecture made him the natural choice of Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark to assess damage to the building caused by a gas explosion in the basement in 1898. Brown produced a descriptive essay, six sheets of drawings, and numerous photographs illustrating the blast's impact on the lower levels of the building. The report also included plans of the existing condition of the sewer system and conduits for water, gas, steam, and other service needs. Brown offered several major recommendations: to reconstruct the central section of the Capitol roof with fireproof materials, to modernize the building's physical plant, and to erect a separate structure to house a power plant and store flammable materials such as wood, coal, documents, and books that had been stored in the Capitol basement. Brown suggested that a new building be erected to house power production and storage facilities. The proposed structure was to be connected to the Capitol by a subway to ferry coal, wood, and freight and to route all lines for gas, steam, and water, as well as electric, telephone, and telegraph wires.¹⁶

Impressed by the report, Clark asked Brown to prepare preliminary sketches in order to persuade members of Congress to appropriate funds for the project. Clark also promised to reward Brown with the commission for his preliminary design services. The sketches, titled "Building for Machinery, Storage, and Offices" and developed in 1900, illustrated Brown's solution to house the Capitol's power plant and presented a contextual design for a multipurpose structure that would provide the House of Representatives with additional space for offices and committee rooms. Brown developed a neoclassical exterior design that complemented the original building's historic architecture.

¹⁶ Brown, "Report on the Effects of an Explosion in the United States Capitol, November 6, 1898," in *Annual Report of the Architect of the Capitol* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899).

Meanwhile, Charles Moore convinced Senator James McMillan (R-MI), for whom Moore served as political aide, to sponsor publication of Brown's serial history of the U.S. Capitol as a Senate document. In December 1899, McMillan requested and obtained a Senate resolution to publish the history to commemorate the 1900 centennial of the removal of the seat of government to Washington. The Senate passed a motion to print 200 clothbound copies of the history for the use of the

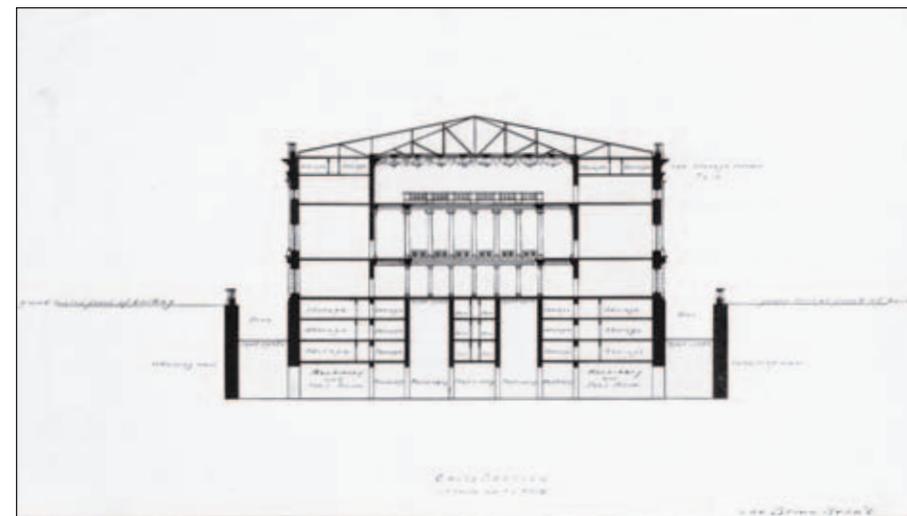
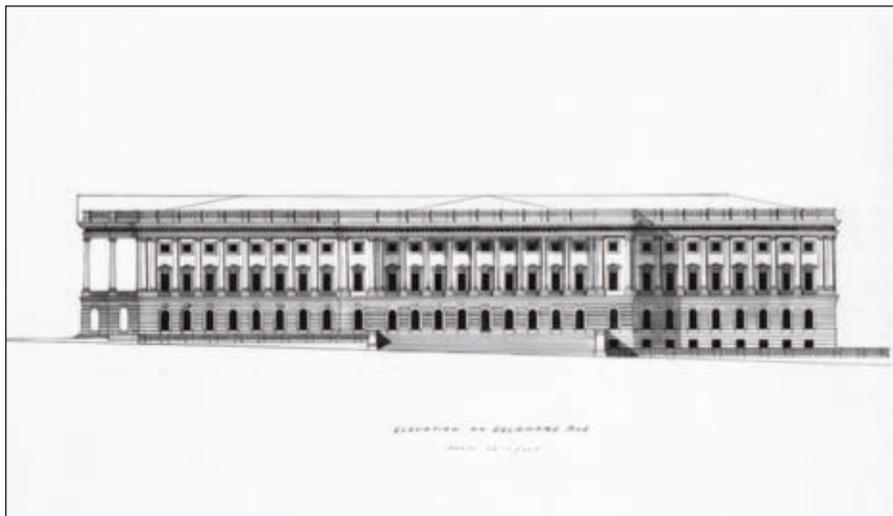
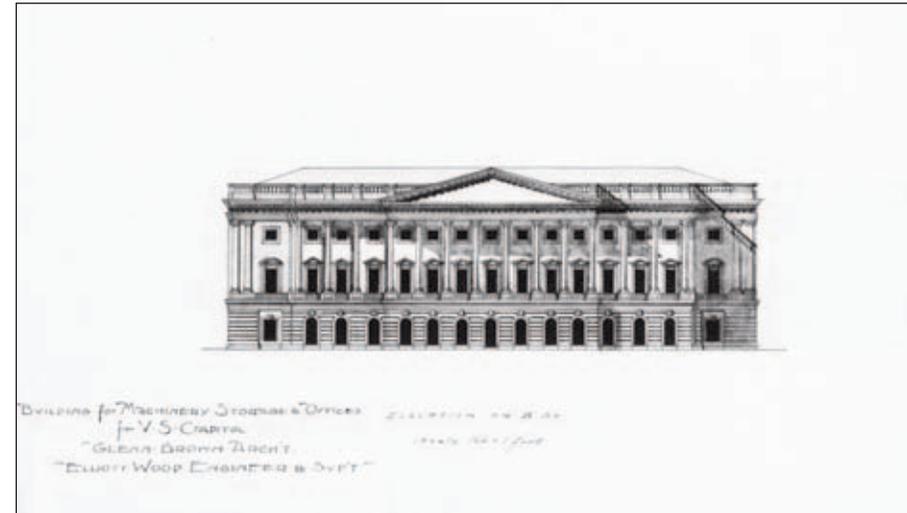


Figure 12. Brown inspecting damage to the Capitol's west wall after the 1898 gas explosion.

Committee on the District of Columbia.¹⁷ Brown accepted the offer under the condition that he be allowed to design the book and supervise its production by the Government Printing Office. Brown personally selected the paper and type and designed the cover using the frieze of a mantel in the robing room adjoining the Old Supreme Court as a decorative motif. Charles Moore agreed to write the introduction, and the first volume appeared in December 1900.¹⁸

¹⁷ "History of the Capitol," *Congressional Record* Senate, 56th Cong., 1st sess., vol. 33, December 15, 1899 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 439. The book was not referred to the Committee on Printing because McMillan assured his colleagues it would not exceed the \$500 cost limit on publications taken from the Senate contingency fund.

¹⁸ The mantel was destroyed by the gas explosion of November 6, 1898. See Brown, *Memories*, 43.



Figures 13, 14, and 15. Preliminary elevation and cross section drawings prepared by Brown in 1901 for a congressional office building designed, among other things, to facilitate removal of machinery and storage from the Capitol's basement.



Figure 16. Frances Benjamin Johnston in a portrait taken in 1903.
Prints and Photographs Division, LC.

A few months after its publication, the *New York Times* weekly book review supplement printed a letter charging that the book was a lavish waste of government money and that only the author would profit from its sale. The newspaper concurrently ran an article informing readers that Brown's *History* had a small and limited run and that most of the volumes had been given to Senators and Representatives or donated to major public libraries. The *Times* praised the book and could see "nothing but credit to everybody who had anything to do with it, and to the Government which has issued it."¹⁹

¹⁹ *New York Times* (Saturday Review of Books Supplement, April 27, 1901), 298.

As the *Times* suggested and as Moore noted in the introduction, the special value of Brown's work lay in its voluminous illustrations. An indication of the author's intent for a special visual quality was his creative collaboration with Frances Benjamin Johnston, recognized today as a master architectural photographer. Brown commissioned her to record the appearance of the building and to reproduce early maps of Washington and numerous paintings, prints, and drawings of the Capitol. The work was extensive and may have prompted a barter of services as Brown designed an addition for Johnston's V Street studio in 1902.²⁰

The *History* included 322 plates representing a vast collection of large-scale plates of drawings, maps, paintings, sculpture, architectural

²⁰ Johnston had provided photographs for Brown's serial history of the Capitol in 1896–1897 as well as illustrations for his 1896 articles on William Thornton and domestic architecture in Washington. After Brown became AIA secretary in 1898, Johnston became the organization's unofficial photographer. She photographed the Octagon when the AIA purchased the building, documented the appearance of the White House before and after the McKim, Mead, and White renovation that Brown superintended, and made portraits of the organization's presidents during the first decade of the twentieth century. For background on her career, see Pete Daniel and Raymond Smock, *A Talent for Detail: The Photographs of Miss Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1899–1910* (New York: Harmony Books, 1974), 3–34. There are a number of letters in Brown's papers that discuss Johnston's preparation of the illustrations for the author's articles and books. See Johnston to Glenn Brown, January 25 and February 14, 1898; William Rotch Ware to Brown, March 16, September 26, November 18, December 1, 14, 19, 22, 26, 1896, and January 26, February 4, 10, 1897. See also HelioType Printing Company (Boston) to Brown, June 19, 1900, forwarding proofs for the *History of the United States Capitol*, and Irving T. Guild to Brown, July 2, 1900. All of the above letters are located in the Brown Papers, RG 804, Ser. 5, AIA Archives. See also Herbert Wise to Frances B. Johnston, February 15, 1902, Johnston Papers, Manuscript Division, LC. The letters indicated that Brown usually obtained the negatives from Johnston, and then sent them to the publishers at their request. A survey of Johnston's negative proofs at the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress reveals that a number of negatives in that collection were produced for Brown's publications. However, the plates in the *History of the United States Capitol* do not match the proofs in Johnston's collection and may be extra project negatives.

photographs, and overall views of the grounds that with the text created a visual and descriptive catalog of the architectural evolution of the Capitol and its physical state at the turn of the century. Another impressive feature was the extensive original research, albeit without footnotes and flawed by Brown's bias in favor of Thornton. The second volume, based largely on the reports of the Architect of the Capitol, is more objective and included an annotated bibliography of the author's major sources.

Brown located and examined manuscripts, drawings, and maps deposited throughout the city at the State, Treasury, and Interior departments as well as public documents in the possession of the Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, the Office of the Chief of Engineers, and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol. He also traveled to Baltimore to examine the first competition drawings for the Capitol at the Maryland Historical Society and consulted collections of papers or drawings of Latrobe's superintendent John Lenthall, Thornton, and Thomas U. Walter (then privately owned respectively by their descendants, William S. Abert, J. Henley Smith, and Olivia and Ada Walter). In addition, Brown drew on an extensive collection of published pamphlets, articles, and books at the Library of Congress bearing on the history of the building. The Latrobe papers were not then available to researchers.²¹

Brown's research was no easy task given the unorganized nature of the collections and the resistance of government bureaucrats to providing access to official files. Brown recalled that he had particular

trouble seeing the early records of the District of Columbia, then located in the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. Captain John Stewart, custodian of the records, had spent more than twenty years organizing and indexing the collection, which had been transferred to the jurisdiction of the Chief Engineer of the U.S. Army after Congress mandated in 1867 that public works and improvements in the capital be superintended by the Army engineers. Brown described Stewart as an "old Scotchman . . . who looked upon the records as private property upon which no one should encroach." Stewart performed meritorious service in cataloging the records because the Army was able to ascertain and locate missing and stolen documents and maps that belonged in the collection. Ultimately, the collection contained many documents and maps that proved invaluable to Brown's study, especially the original 1791 L'Enfant map and a wealth of other manuscripts and maps related to the early history of the city.²²

Brown's *History* was calculated to instill pride in the origins of the national capital. George Washington emerged as a heroic figure whose vision of a new federal city and whose wisdom in selecting architects and engineers of talent and ability provided a model for contemporary political leaders. Brown relished Washington's comments on disputes surrounding the plans for the Capitol, quoting the first president: "I profess to have no knowledge of architecture, and think we should, to avoid criticism, be governed by the established rules which are laid

²¹ Brown discussed his research in *Memories*, 37–42. He indicated that he had copied four boxes of Thornton's papers, which he described as containing "little that did not concern the history of the District and Government Buildings." At that time the papers were in the possession of Mrs. Bayard Smith. J. Henley Smith, after his mother's death, burned many of the letters despite Brown's pleas to donate them to the Library of Congress. Brown's copies of Thornton's papers have not been located. Brown noted that Mrs. Smith was a neighbor of the Latrobes in Baltimore and apparently did not request access to Benjamin Henry Latrobe's papers even though many of the architect's journals, letterbooks, and sketchbooks were in the family's possession at this time.

²² See Brown, *Memories*, 40–42. For background on Stewart and the Army's care of the city's early records, see John M. Wilson to Brown, December 1, 1896, Brown Papers, RG 804, Ser. 5, AIA Archives; and Colonel Theodore Bingham, "Report on Senate 2725, 56/1, March 6, 1900," Correspondence 1899–1906, Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, Lot 441, RG 42, NARA. Senate 2725 was a bill introduced by Senator James McMillan that called for the transfer of these historical maps and documents from the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds to the city surveyor's office. Bingham's unfavorable report on the bill provides an extensive history of the agency's care and preservation of these materials since 1867.

down by the professors of the art.”²³ Brown thought that this statement provided historical justification for expert control over the selection of plans for government architecture and the acquisition of fine arts. He applauded Washington for “far-seeing vision” that produced a plan for a capital city of a million inhabitants at a time when the national population was approximately only three million.²⁴

Brown purposely opened the 1900 AIA convention on December 13, coinciding with the day President Washington transmitted the L’Enfant plan to Congress in 1791. With the development of the city’s monumental core as its theme, the convention proved a resounding success. Papers presented by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and other experts soon eclipsed other planning and public works proposals prepared for Washington’s centennial. The AIA convention papers, published as a Senate document in 1901, comprised an important body of professional thought concerning the future planning of Washington and provided the Senate Park Commission with a framework for developing their own plan.²⁵

²³ Brown, *History of the United States Capitol*, vol. 1, 54.

²⁴ Brown, *Memories*, 37–46.

²⁵ There is a large body of scholarly literature that discusses the origins of the McMillan commission’s 1902 plan. Major works include Frederick Gutheim, *Worthy of the Nation: The History of Planning for the National Capital* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977); Jon A. Peterson, “The Nation’s First Comprehensive Plan,” *American Planning Association Journal* (Spring 1985): 134–150; John Reps, *Monumental Washington: The Planning and Development of the Capital Center* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1967); and Reps, *Washington on View: The Nation’s Capital Since 1791* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). See also Richard Longstreth, ed., *The Mall in Washington, 1791–1991* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1991); Bushong, “Glenn Brown,” chapter 4; Brown, “A Suggestion for Grouping Government Buildings, Landscape, Monuments and Statuary,” *Architectural Review* (August 1900): 89–94; Brown, comp., *Papers Relating to the Improvement of Washington City, District of Columbia* (Washington: 56th Cong., 2nd sess., S. Doc. 94).

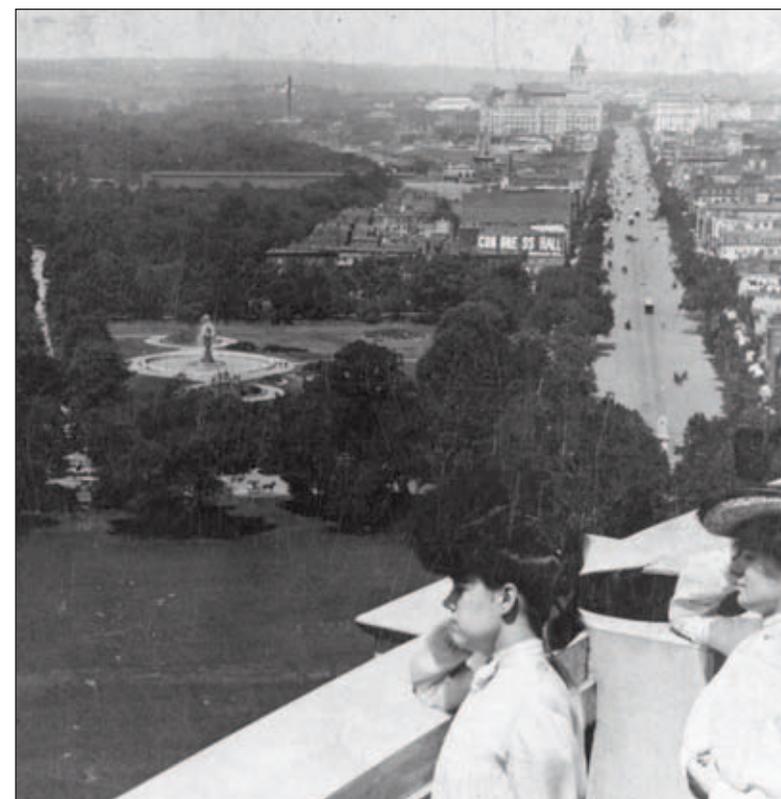


Figure 17. Vista overlooking the Mall and Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol’s dome (taken about 1900).

Brown’s *History* provided the Senate Park Commission with an understanding of the city’s historic design and influenced its decision to take the 1791 L’Enfant plan as a starting point for its own famous 1901–1902 comprehensive plan for the capital. Brown asserted that the city’s design, as depicted and described on L’Enfant’s 1791 manuscript map, had been retained in Andrew Ellicott’s 1792 printed map of

Washington and that the modifications suggested by President George Washington were important.²⁶ According to Brown, the sites of the Capitol, White House, and Washington Monument formed an integral triangular relationship with the Mall, with each site intended as a focal point of a series of vistas. Brown suggested that “haphazard” siting of government buildings had mutilated this design and unplanned development had destroyed the vista from the Capitol to the Washington Monument. The root of the evil, in Brown’s view, was that “no general system is being followed; no man or men seem to have studied the question as a whole. The development of the original and wise plan seems to have been forgotten.” Brown called for a concerted effort to revive the L’Enfant plan and vigorously promoted the design concept for an open Mall vista.²⁷

²⁶ Brown, *History of the United States Capitol*, vol. 1, 34. In 1913 Brown made an interesting statement about his interpretation of the two maps: “I would not for a moment detract from Captain Ellicott’s merit. Himself a surveyor, he modified or followed the suggestions of modifications desired in the plans after L’Enfant had proposed them; but the evidence goes to show that the great originality in the plan was L’Enfant’s, that where ideas in the design were original they were L’Enfant’s. It is those original ideas that the board of artists who have designed the future development of Washington have taken, and do not claim even to have improved upon.” See Brown to William Howard Taft, undated, Taft Papers, Reel 415, Case No. 1291, Manuscript Division, LC. The letter was probably written in relation to Taft’s research for his illustrated article, “Washington: Its Beginning, Its Growth, and Its Future,” *National Geographic* 27 (March 1915): 221–292.

²⁷ Charles Moore, who became the commission’s secretary and, later, biographer of commission members Daniel Burnham and Charles McKim, believed the fundamental importance of Brown’s book was that it gave planners a necessary grounding on the history of the Capitol and the Mall for their work in Washington. Moore, “Glenn Brown,” 832. William T. Partridge, the chief draftsman responsible for organizing the work of redesigning the Mall and public buildings connected with the monumental core under McKim’s direction, considered Brown’s *History* of “inestimable value” to the commission and that the author’s vision of the transformation of the plans into reality was vital to the City Beautiful movement in Washington. “Personal Recollection of the McMillan Commission,” by William T. Partridge. National Capital Planning Commission, Historical Data File, 1929–1949, RG 328, NARA.

Brown’s study, imbued with his own professional values and personal architectural and artistic biases, also singled out the men whom he believed had contributed most to its design and thus deserved the title of Architect of the Capitol. Brown considered Thornton, Latrobe, Bulfinch, Walter, and the incumbent Edward Clark as a successive line of Architects of the Capitol. This interpretation emerged as the official history for the origins and development of this office, created by Congress in 1867 to superintend the Capitol. Brown had dismissed as “superintendents” architects such as Stephen Hallet, George Hadfield, James Hoban, and Robert Mills, who contributed their share of design ideas, revisions, and working drawings. He largely ignored the Commissioners of Public Buildings and other federal officials who had administered the design, construction, and maintenance of the Capitol before 1867.²⁸

Brown’s choices revealed his underlying motive to develop a strong parallel between the evolution of the American architectural profession and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol. He considered Thornton a pioneer of the profession, while he saw Latrobe, the first true professional architect working in the United States, as embodying the architect as masterbuilder. He admired Bulfinch, the nation’s first native-born professional architect, for expressing an American variation of the neo-classical designs of British architects Robert Adam and William Chambers; Bulfinch exhibited a “refinement in his work and capacity to simplify” that often was lacking in the European architecture of the period. Finally, Brown saw Walter, a founder and second president of the AIA,

²⁸ See George M. White’s synopsis of the history of the Office of the Architect of the Capitol in the foreword to Jeanne F. Butler, “Competition 1792: Designing a Nation’s Capitol,” *Capitol Studies* 4 (Special Issue 1976): 11–13. The Architect of the U.S. Capitol is an agent of Congress, appointed by the President, and is responsible for all design, construction, and maintenance of the U.S. Capitol complex.

as the dean of the American architectural profession.²⁹ Only Frederick Law Olmsted shared equal status with these four architects. Brown praised Olmsted's plan for the grounds and his design of the west terraces, emphasizing the government's wisdom in selecting "the one capable man, probably, in the country at that date" as the Capitol's landscape designer.³⁰

Brown's *History*, despite its impression on official Washington, did not result in his appointment as Architect of the Capitol, a position he

²⁹ See Brown, *History of the United States Capitol*, vol. 2, chapter 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 466–467.



Figure 18. One of several House Office Building design proposals developed by Elliott Woods and rendered by Raymond Squier in 1902.

long coveted. The incumbent Edward Clark had held the post since 1865 and earned respect for his long and useful service. After Clark became gravely ill in 1898, Congress appointed as the acting Architect of the Capitol Elliott Woods, an employee of the office since 1885 who had risen through the ranks to become Clark's chief assistant. The choice was logical because of Woods's loyal service and experience as well as his cordial relations with many members of Congress.³¹

From Brown's perspective, Woods, a self-trained woodcarver, would be a disastrous choice for Architect of the Capitol. As a designer Brown considered him a rank amateur and totally unfit to be the custodian of a national monument. Brown's prejudice against Woods developed between 1898 and 1901, a period in which Brown was actively involved in preparing his *History* as well as working as a consultant on plans for a new House Office Building and the restoration of the Supreme Court Chamber. Woods emerged as the congressional choice for Architect in 1901 but felt threatened by Brown's proposed plans for the new multi-purpose power plant, storage, and office building. After his appointment as Architect, Woods set forth his own ideas for an office building. In his first annual report (1902), he presented striking renderings for a new House Office Building prepared by artist Raymond Squier.³² Angered by Woods's snub and motivated by his own ambition to design the House Office Building, Brown spearheaded an AIA lobbying campaign against Woods's design. Eventually Woods appeased his professional critics by arranging for the design of the new House Office Building to be prepared by the New York firm of Carrère and Hastings, both

³¹ For biographical data on Edward Clark and Elliott Woods and for background on the appointment controversy, see *Architect of the Capitol Scrapbook*, vol. 1, 1836–1909, 34–37, Curator's Office, AOC.

³² For an explanation of Woods's plans, see *Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Capitol* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 47–55.

prominent AIA members, and for the construction to be superintended by his office.

Brown also interfered with Woods's project to replace the roof structure of the Capitol's original north and south wings with fireproof materials after the 1898 gas explosion. Woods extensively photographed the old ceilings before demolition and then expected his contractors to replicate the historic ceilings from these images after installation of the new steel structural roof members.³³ Burgess and

³³ See Brown, *Memories*, 58.

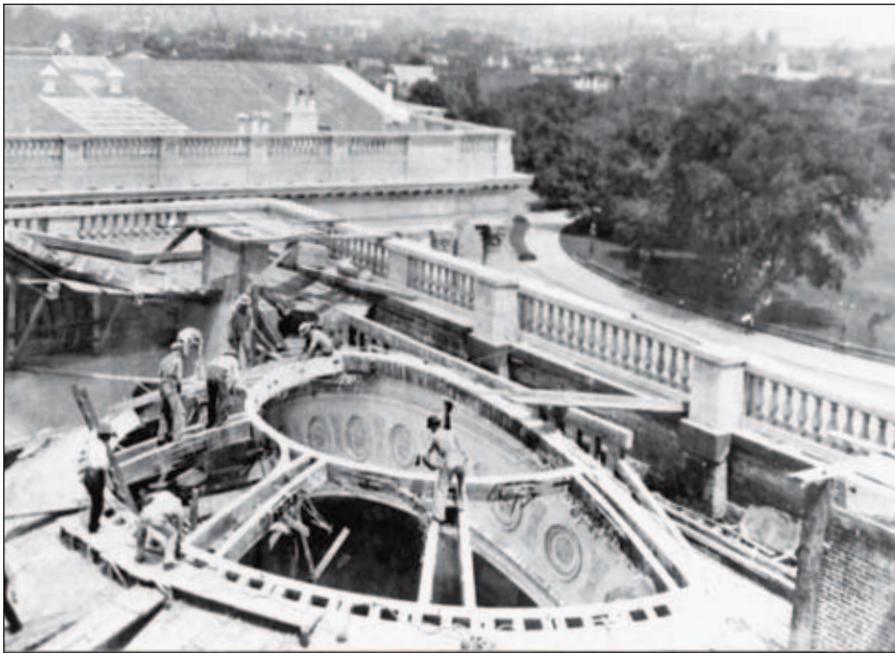


Figure 19. Workmen rebuilding the roof of the Supreme Court ceiling (Old Senate Chamber) in 1901.

Richardson, a Washington contracting firm employed by Woods to reproduce the plasterwork in the Supreme Court Chamber, became concerned about the feasibility of this plan. They realized that Latrobe's intricate coffered plaster ceiling in the Old Supreme Court (originally the Senate Chamber from 1810 to 1859) could not be replicated from photographs and that its suspension by steel rods from the roof frame, as Woods proposed, would not hold it in place. The contractors, who had built several of Brown's residential and commercial buildings, hired him as a consultant on a per diem basis. Brown immediately stopped the workmen and made measured drawings of the Supreme Court ceiling's extant ribs, coffers, and circular skylights and then made a complete set of working drawings, which had not been provided to the contractors by Woods.³⁴

Brown himself sought to be appointed Architect of the Capitol in 1902 and obtained the backing of the AIA and its president, Charles F. McKim. But his candidacy faced the opposition of Representative Joseph Cannon (R-IL), the powerful chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations. Cannon knew Brown as the leading crusader for the Senate Park Commission, which he vehemently opposed because it was

³⁴ Brown, *Memories*, 55–56. Brown's working drawings for this project have been lost, but one of the extant measured drawings is in the AIA's drawing collection. In 1919 the Mazer Acoustic Tile Company of Philadelphia installed a facsimile of the 1902 plaster ceiling built after Brown's drawings with an "acoustic membrane" made of "fireproofed unbleached cotton." See Florian H. Thayne, "Composite Report of the Research for the Proposed Restoration of the Old Senate Chamber and the Old Supreme Court Chamber," unpublished paper for a report of the Architect of the Capitol, Curator's Office, AOC. For information on the acoustic refitting, see Jacob Mazer to Elliott Woods, July 2, 1919, "Old Senate Chamber," RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC; *Report of the Superintendent of the United States Capitol Building and Grounds*, June 30, 1920 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 4. The present Old Senate Chamber was restored as a bicentennial project in 1976 under the direction of George M. White and the Senate Commission on Art and Antiquities.

formed without the consent of the House. After hearing of the AIA's promotion of Brown's candidacy, Cannon engineered a petition from House members and the Senate leadership calling for Woods's appointment, and several delegations of congressmen visited President Theodore Roosevelt to press their support of Woods.³⁵ Roosevelt, who had endorsed the 1902 McMillan plan and had cordial relations with the

³⁵ President Roosevelt had been advised of Brown's suitability for the position by the chairman of the Civil Service Commission, J. R. Proctor. A close friend of the president, Proctor greatly admired the first volume of the *History*. He was so confident of Brown's appointment that he had the papers prepared for the president's signature. For Brown's version of the controversy, see *Memories*, 56–57. For newspaper coverage of Cannon's actions and the text of the petition, see *Architect of the Capitol Scrapbook*, vol. 1, 1836–1909, 34–37, Office of the Curator, AOC.

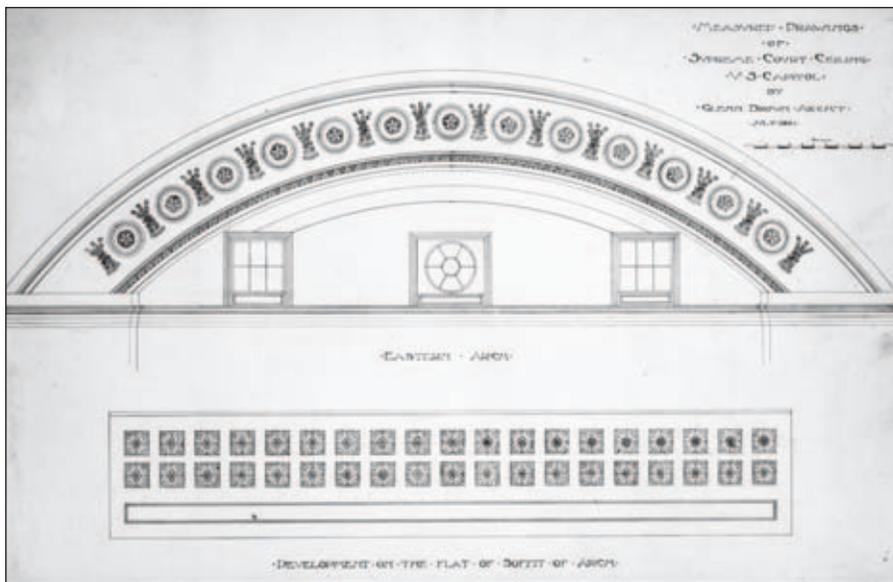


Figure 20. Brown's 1901 measured drawing of the Supreme Court Chamber ceiling (Old Senate Chamber). *Prints & Drawings Collection, The Octagon Museum, The American Architectural Foundation, Washington, DC.*

leaders of the architectural profession, chose to compromise. He appointed Woods on the condition that Congress change the title from "Architect" to "Superintendent" of the Capitol but let the duties and responsibilities of the office remain the same.³⁶

After his defeat, Brown remained a major figure in Washington and stayed at the forefront of public controversy over the implementation of the McMillan plan after 1903. For the next decade, he continued to rally the architectural profession and fine arts organizations throughout the country to defend the plan and to promote professional architects as arbiters of the federal government's fine arts patronage. Brown's agenda was dominated by his successful campaign to establish the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts in 1910. This body has advised the government on federal building projects in Washington for over seventy-five years and has had a profound influence on the aesthetic development of the city.³⁷

After 1910 Brown devoted his energy to a political struggle over the siting of the Lincoln Memorial, spearheading opposition to congressional proposals for a monument between Union Station and the Capitol or for a memorial highway from Washington to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Shortly after legislation enacted in December 1913 ensured that the Lincoln Memorial would be sited on the Mall, Brown was deposed as AIA secretary. Younger architects wanted to restructure the Institute's operations to reduce the decision making authority of its secretary and to disperse responsibilities within a new corporate organization.

³⁶ Resolution of the struggle came swiftly because Cannon added an amendment to the 1902 appropriations bill, which changed the title of the office and cleared the president's appointment of his candidate. See "The Appointment of the Architect of the Capitol," *Inland Architect and News Record* 37 (March 1902): 13; "Employment, Duties, and Compensation of Employees of the House," 58th Cong., 1st Sess., *Congressional Record*, vol. 35 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 7675–7676; and Brown to Robert S. Peabody, January 7, 1902, Secretary Outgoing Correspondence, RG 801, Ser. 1.1, AIA Archives.

³⁷ See Bushong, "Glenn Brown," chapters 3 and 4.

Although Brown made efforts to maintain his professional influence in Washington, the loss of his AIA post sharply reduced his effectiveness. In addition, the Progressive public spirit that had pervaded the city at the turn of the century was all but dead by the end of World War I. Temporary government buildings erected during the war clogged the Mall and the area from Union Station to the Senate Office Building. Even worse, the twin stacks of a power station now interrupted the planned Mall vista. Disconsolate, Brown retired from his involvement in political and public affairs in 1919 to concentrate on his writing and architectural practice.³⁸

Brown's later years were marked by a crusader's preoccupation with what he saw as the unfinished business of his career. He wrote many articles and editorials condemning the Institute's loss of influence with the federal government and its lackluster opposition to deviations from the McMillan plan. When Elliott Woods died in 1923, Brown, at age 69, again attempted to obtain appointment as Architect of the Capitol, seeing this as his last opportunity to influence federal design policy. He sought former President and then Chief Justice William Howard Taft's support. Taft informed Brown that although he was a deserving applicant, the appointment of Woods's chief engineer, David Lynn, was inevitable.³⁹

When Brown pressed the AIA to support his nomination, Milton Medary, an active member of AIA committees concerned with the planning of Washington, sought Charles Moore's advice on what to do about "dear old Glenn Brown." Moore, although supportive of Brown's appointment twenty years before, had in the interim developed cordial working relations with Woods and his heir apparent, Lynn. The

³⁸ For a discussion of changes in attitudes concerning civic causes in Washington after World War I, see Constance M. Green, *Washington: A History of the Capital, 1800–1950*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 257; 312–336.

³⁹ Brown to William Howard Taft, June 2, 1923, and Taft to Brown, June 4, 1923, Taft Papers, Reel 254, Ser. 3, Manuscript Division, LC.

old wound regarding the slighting of Woods's professional status also had been fully healed in 1921, when Congress reinstated his title as Architect of the Capitol. In his reply to Medary, Moore revealed impatience with Brown's persistent quest: "I have expressed the highest appreciation of Glenn Brown's long, intelligent, painstaking and effective work for the development of Washington . . . but his insistence on his appointment as Architect of the Capitol has been a constant embarrassment to the Commission in its relations with Congress." Moore advised Medary not to repeat the mistakes of 1902, but instead to leave the appointment as a "family matter" for Congress to decide. President Calvin Coolidge appointed Lynn in 1923.⁴⁰

Brown took up residence at Corcoran Courts in 1925 and began work on his autobiography. His health grew worse, prompting frequent automobile trips to the Virginia shore and to the mountains to restore his constitution. Brown continued to write when he felt well enough. Propped up in his bed, he maintained a lifelong habit of heavy cigarette smoking as he scribbled reflections of his career onto small yellow note pads.⁴¹ His son Bedford had this handwritten material typed, and the last

⁴⁰ Cass Gilbert was particularly supportive of Brown's nomination and wrote Charles Moore to use his influence with the president. The rift between the American Institute of Architects and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol had been healed by the efforts of Thomas Hastings and Henry Bacon, who successfully advocated Woods's honorary membership in the Institute. See Cass Gilbert to Charles Moore, May 29 and June 4, 1923; Milton A. Medary to Moore, June 11, 1923; Moore to Medary (telegram), June 18, 1923, and July 6, 1923. Also see copies of letters sent to Moore in reference to Brown's appointment: Brown to William Faville (AIA president), June 4, 1923; Medary to Faville, June 11, 1923; Brown to Harry Cunningham (Washington chapter president), June 21, 1923; E. C. Kemper to Faville, June 29, 1923. All of the letters cited above are located in General Records, Architect of the Capitol, Commission of Fine Arts, RG 66, NARA.

⁴¹ Interview with Elizabeth Downing, December 1, 1986. Ms. Downing is Brown's grandniece; her mother, Willis Williams Walker, was Brown's niece and adopted daughter. These recollections were drawn from many visits with her mother to see Brown in the last years of his life. Bushong, "Glenn Brown," chapter 7.

book of Brown's prolific writing career took shape. *Memories: A Winning Crusade to Revive George Washington's Vision of a Capital City* was released in a limited private printing of 300 copies in January 1931. Largely a reprint of Brown's many articles, his memoirs documented a life's work and contained many perceptive essays on the historical events that shaped the monumental core of Washington. It also contained valuable personal observations of colleagues and contemporary artists, architects, and public officials. The next year Brown died in Buxton Hospital in Newport News, Virginia, after a long battle with respiratory disease.

Charles Moore, at his retirement dinner in 1937, delivered a speech that recalled how the planning movement that shaped Washington began at the 1900 AIA convention and noted that in Brown "the

spirit of L'Enfant was incarnate."⁴² The observation underscored the passion with which Brown pursued his historical research and presented his findings. Brown's *History of the United States Capitol* was a call to the nation to revive an ignored architectural and planning heritage. The ideas and concepts presented in the book—including the revival of the L'Enfant plan, recognition of Thornton's role in the design of the Capitol, a simplified lineage of the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, and the formation of a commission of fine arts—reverberate to the present day. Brown's *History of the United States Capitol*, despite its pronounced bias, endures as a classic in American architectural history.

⁴² "Address by Honorable Charles Moore, Given at the Mayflower Hotel on February 18, 1937," Charles Moore Papers, Commission of Fine Arts, RG 66, NARA.