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## CHAPTER V

# THE WORK OF CHARLES BULFINCH, ARCHITECT

THE resignation of Latrobe placed the position of Architect of the Capitol at the disposal of the Commissioner of Public Buildings and Grounds.<sup>1</sup> President Monroe, who was now in the White House, became acquainted with Charles Bulfinch when on a visit to Boston, July, 1817. On this occasion Bulfinch was chairman of selectmen, as well as of the reception committee which received the President.

Miss Ellen S. Bulfinch, in the life of her grandfather, Charles Bulfinch, which was recently published, gives several letters and other data, from which I have taken extracts throwing light upon this period in the history of the Capitol.

Bulfinch, in his brief manuscript autobiography, says:

“About November, 1817, following the visit of the President, I received a letter from William Lee, esq., one of the auditors at Washington, and in the confidence of the President, stating the probability of the removal of Mr. Latrobe, the Architect of the Capitol, and proposing that I should apply for the place. I declined making any application that might lead to Mr. Latrobe’s removal, but before the end of the year disagreements between him and the commissioner became so serious that he determined to resign, and his resignation was immediately accepted. On receiving information of this in another letter from Mr. Lee I made regular application through J. Q. A. [John Quincy Adams], Secretary of State, and by return of post received notice from him of my

appointment, with a salary of \$2,500 and expenses paid of removal of family and furniture.”<sup>2</sup>

The letter of Mr. William Lee, referred to by Bulfinch, shows that the friction between Latrobe, the commissioner, and the President was at the point of rupture before September, 1817. He says: “I am sorry for Latrobe, who is an amiable man, possesses genius and a large family, but in addition to the President not being satisfied with him, there is an unaccountable and I think unjust prejudice against him by many members of the Government, Senate, and Congress.” Bulfinch says that although he would be pleased to have the situation, “I have always endeavored to avoid unpleasant competition with others, that by opposing their interests would excite enmity and ill will. I should much regret being the instrument of depriving a man of undoubted talents of employment which places him at the head of the profession.”<sup>3</sup> The President on his return appointed a commission, consisting of General Mason, Mr. Graham, and Colonel Bomford, to examine and report upon the state of the Capitol.

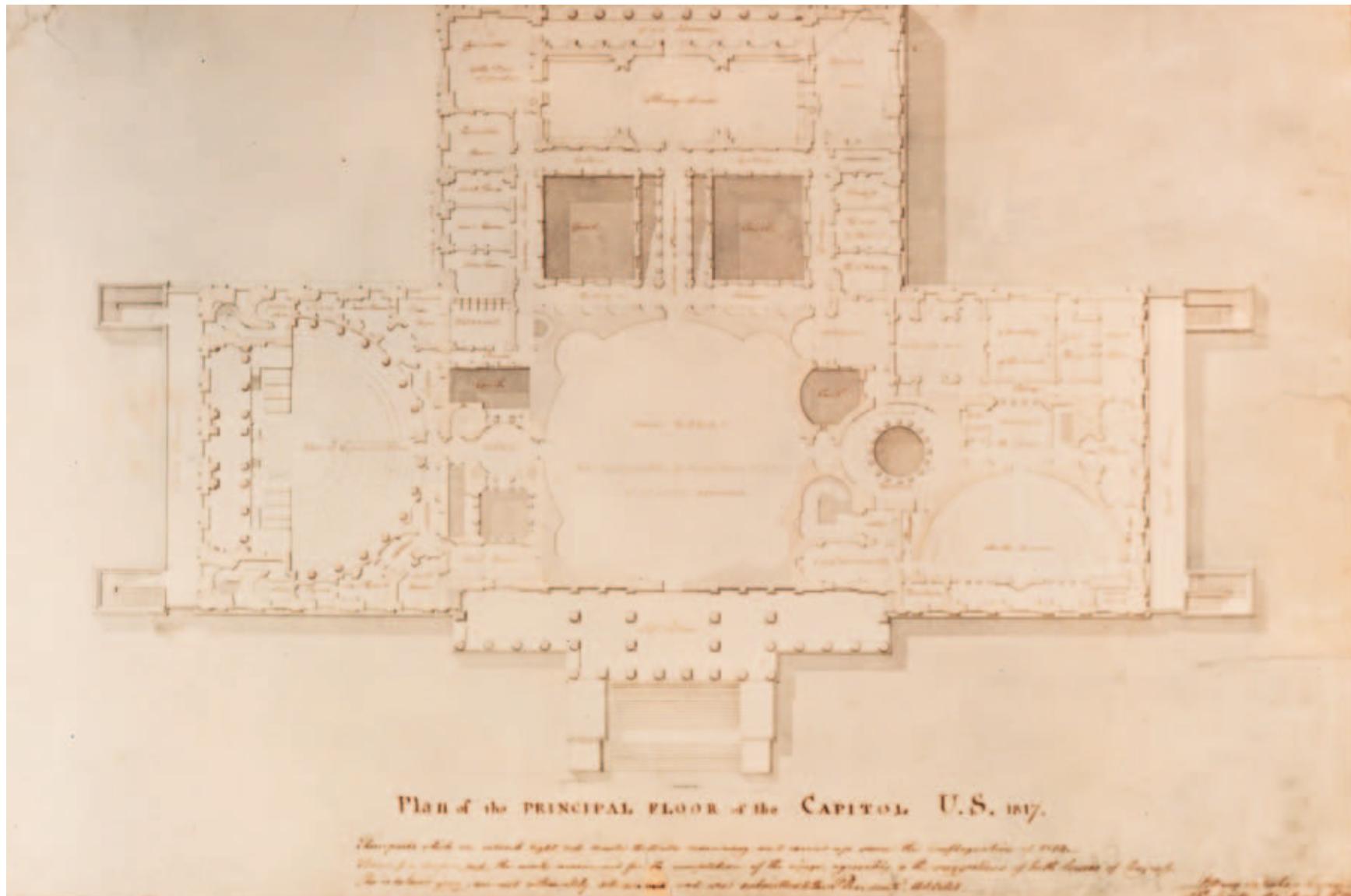
Mr. Lee wrote to Bulfinch that either Commissioner Lane or Latrobe must go out, and he thought the commissioner would be retained, as he had more friends than the architect. The three commissioners reported in favor of retaining Latrobe. William Lee still urged Bulfinch to apply for the place, telling him that with the assistance of his friends he would

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<sup>1</sup> For an earlier version of this chapter, see Glenn Brown, “History of the United States Capitol,” *American Architect and Building News* 54 (October 3, 1896): 3–6; (October 24, 1896): 27–29.

<sup>2</sup> See Ellen Susan Bulfinch, ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch, Architect, with Other Family Papers* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896), 199–200. The William Lee letter to which Bulfinch refers was dated September 14, 1817.

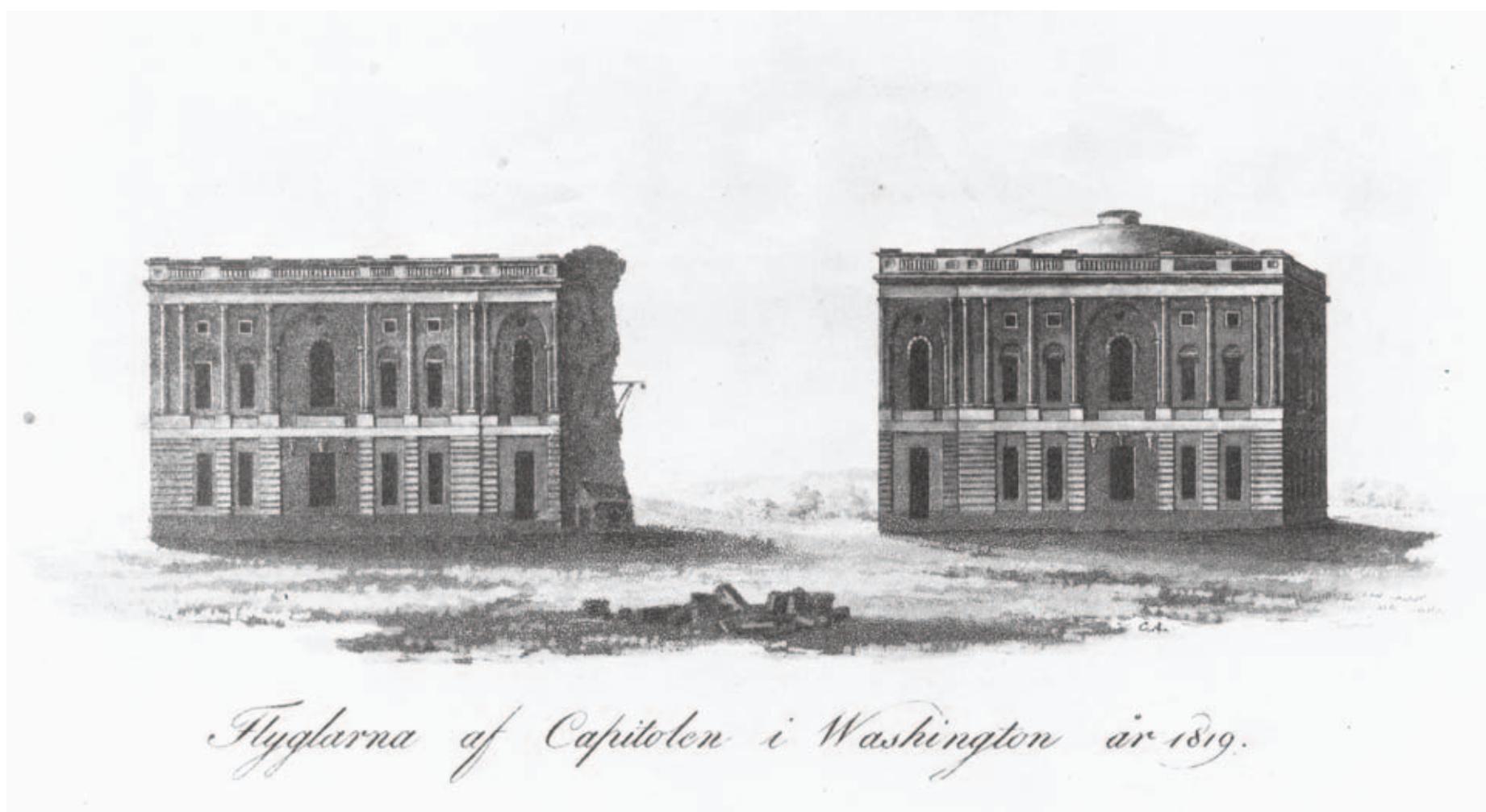
<sup>3</sup> Charles Bulfinch to William Lee, November 15, 1817, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 200–201.



PLAN of the PRINCIPAL FLOOR of the CAPITOL. U.S. 1817.

*This plan which we intend to print and send to the several members of Congress, and to the several members of the Senate, is the suggestion of both Houses of Congress. It is not intended to be a final plan, but a suggestion of the several members of Congress, and to the several members of the Senate.*

PLAN OF THE PRINCIPAL STORY 1817, LATROBE ARCHITECT.  
Proposed plan for the second floor of the Capitol showing Latrobe's design for the Central Building, 1817. Prints and Photographs Division, LC.



WEST VIEW OF BUILDING 1818.

Brown incorrectly identifies a view of the east front by Klinckowstrom, published in 1824. *Prints and Photographs Division, LC.*

undoubtedly be appointed. But after the report in favor of Latrobe, Bulfinch declined to make an effort, writing a letter to that effect November 15.<sup>4</sup> Latrobe's resignation, two days later, left the position open. Bulfinch's friends, William Lee, H. G. Otis, and J. Q. Adams, urged the appointment of Bulfinch. Monroe said to Mr. Otis, "Sir, we are looking to him [Bulfinch], but Mr. Latrobe is a great loss and it will require two persons to supply his place, and we think also of a Mr. Macomb [architect of the city hall, New York]." <sup>5</sup> Several letters passed between Bulfinch and his friends bearing upon the salary, expenses, and climate of Washington.

He was tendered the position at \$2,500 per annum, and in addition to his salary and traveling expenses he was allowed \$500 a year for a draftsman. Through John Quincy Adams Bulfinch informed the authorities that he would not be able to remove to Washington before January, 1818.

His official appointment was made out January, 1818:

TO CHARLES BULFINCH, Esq.

SIR: Having entire confidence in your professional talents and integrity, I have appointed you Architect of the Capitol of the United States, to discharge all the duties and to receive the emoluments attached to this appointment.

Your salary to commence the 11th day of December last past.

Given under my hand at the city of Washington, the 8th day of January, 1818.<sup>6</sup>

SAMUEL LANE,  
*Commissioner of Public Buildings.*

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 206–207.

<sup>5</sup> Harrison Gray Otis to Charles Bulfinch, December 2, 1817, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 207.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Lane to Charles Bulfinch, January 8, 1818, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 211.

A letter of Bulfinch's, in his granddaughter's book, gives an interesting description of his feelings and what he found upon taking possession of his office:

"I have received from Colonel Lane a great number of drawings, exhibiting the work already done and other parts proposed but not decided upon. At the first view of these drawings, my courage almost failed me—they are beautifully executed, and the design is in the boldest style. After long study I feel better satisfied and more confidence in meeting public expectation. There are certainly faults enough in Latrobe's designs to justify the opposition to him. His style is calculated for display in the greater parts, but I think his staircases in general are crowded and not easy of access, and the passages are intricate and dark. Indeed the whole interior, except the two great rooms, has a somber appearance. I feel the responsibility resting on me, and should have no resolution to proceed if the work was not so far commenced as to make it necessary to follow the plans already prepared for the wings; as to the center building, a general conformity to the other parts must be maintained. I shall not have credit for invention, but must be content to follow in the prescribed path; as my employers have experienced so much uneasiness of late, they are disposed to view me and my efforts with complacency."<sup>7</sup> The first report Bulfinch made gives a clear statement of the condition of the work when he took charge, as he had spent his time between arrival and writing his report in viewing the building and studying the original plans and designs for work.

"Great progress has been made toward rebuilding the north and south wings. It will be necessary to complete them according to the designs already adopted and on the foundations already made. I have

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Bulfinch to Hannah Bulfinch, January 7, 1818, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 212–216.

been engaged in preparing several designs for the central portion, from which the President may choose one.”<sup>8</sup>

It is strange that none of Bulfinch’s drawings of the Capitol have been preserved.

C. A. Busby, an English architect, made drawings in 1819 (a short time after Latrobe retired) and published them in 1822, from measurements and drawings obtained on the spot. As this elevation and plan show a different treatment from those of Latrobe, we can assume that they present one of the designs made by Bulfinch. The plan and elevation have been carefully executed, although the points of the compass have been transposed on the original engraving [Plates 71 and 72]. This plan shows a circular opening and stairway in the Rotunda from the principal story to the crypt or basement story below, in addition to the alteration in the designs of the east and west porticoes made by Bulfinch. The west portico was executed according to the plan of Bulfinch, while the design of Latrobe for the east portico was retained.<sup>9</sup>

To better explain his ideas to the President and Congress, Bulfinch had a model made of the Capitol: “I have been engaged the past week, and still continue so, in giving directions to a young man from Boston, Mr. Willard, who is making a model of our great building. He works in my room. I hope this will prove a satisfactory mode of conveying clear ideas of the several plans for finishing the center,

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<sup>8</sup> Architect of the United States Capitol to the Commissioners of the Public Buildings, November 21, 1818, in *Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting a Report of the Commissioner of the Public Buildings*, H. doc. 8 (15–2), Serial 17 (Washington: Printed by E. De Krafft, 1818), 8–13.

<sup>9</sup> Bulfinch’s drawings of the Capitol dome and stove designs for the Library of Congress were acquired by the Library of Congress.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Bulfinch to Hannah Bulfinch, March 16, 1818, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 225.

and enable the President and the committees of Congress to select the one that on all considerations shall promise best.”<sup>10</sup>

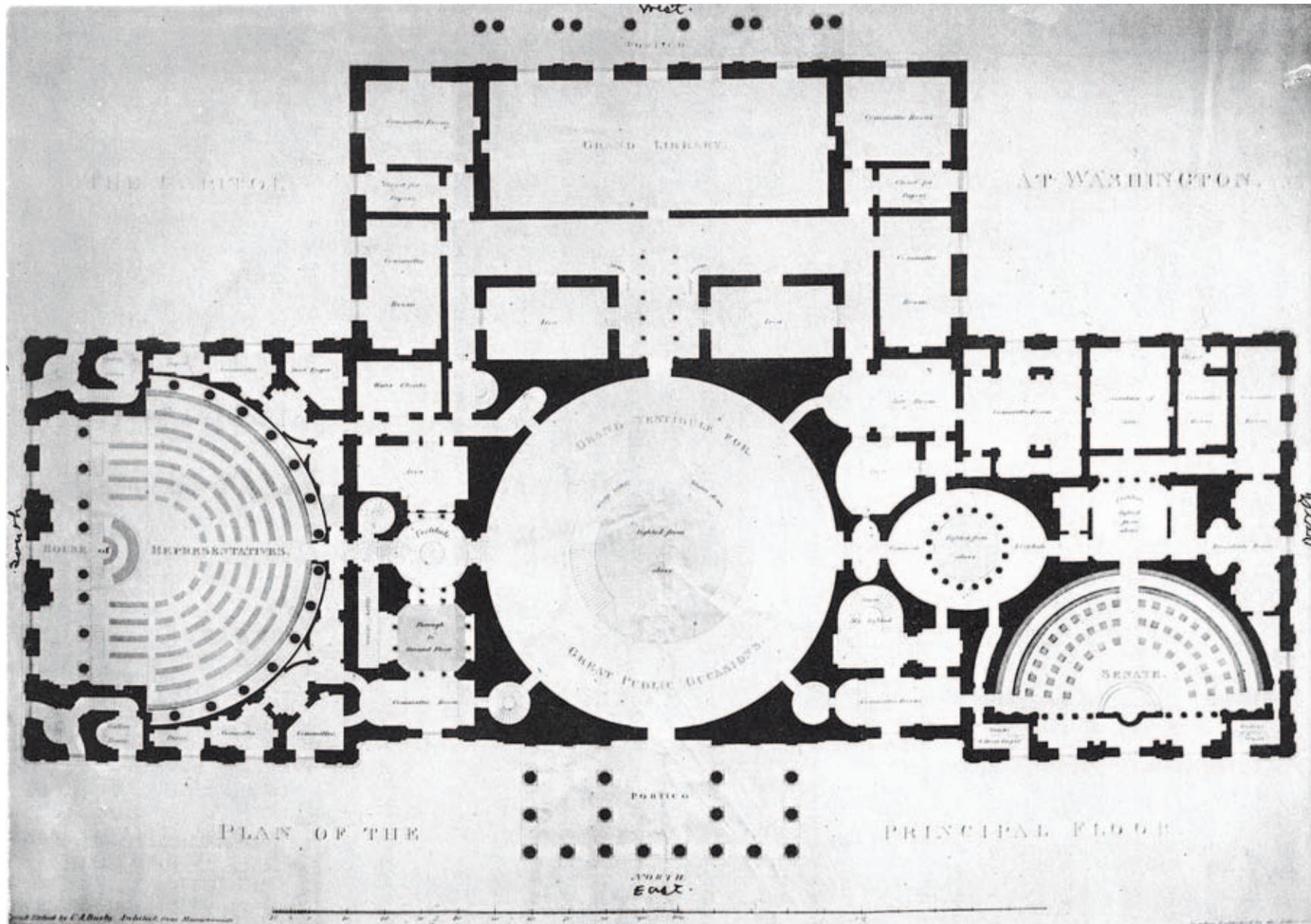
When Bulfinch took charge a large amount of stone had been accumulated for the Hall of Representatives and marble for the stairways of the north wing. Only three of the columns and two pilasters for the House of Representatives were complete, while the others were in various stages of progress. Fifty mantels [Plates 73 to 76], marble doorways for the Senate and House, all window frames, sashes, and parts of doors were completed. As the mantels were on hand when Bulfinch took charge the credit must be given to Latrobe for either designing or selecting them.<sup>11</sup>

Bulfinch in this report mentions a portico on the north and south ends which Latrobe had proposed. The elevations of Thornton [Plates 30 and 31] show porticoes on the north and south sides. Although these porticoes were not built on the old Capitol, it is interesting to note that they are similar to the ones afterwards erected on the north and south of the new wings under T. U. Walter.

One of the first problems Bulfinch had to solve was to discover the cause of the accident to the brick arch which was intended to carry the cupola over the flat dome on the Senate wing. May 1, 1818, he made a report on the accident, saying that, having confidence in his predecessor, he instructed the workmen to complete the arch as directed by Latrobe. On loosening the center “the arch moved 4 inches, the workmen left in alarm, and the clerk of works [Lenox] informed me of the fact, and I immediately went to the roof to view it, with the clerk, the principal of the stone department [Blagden], and the master mason.” The arch was 40 feet in span, running from north to south, and 30 feet in width. It was to support a stone cupola intended to light the space

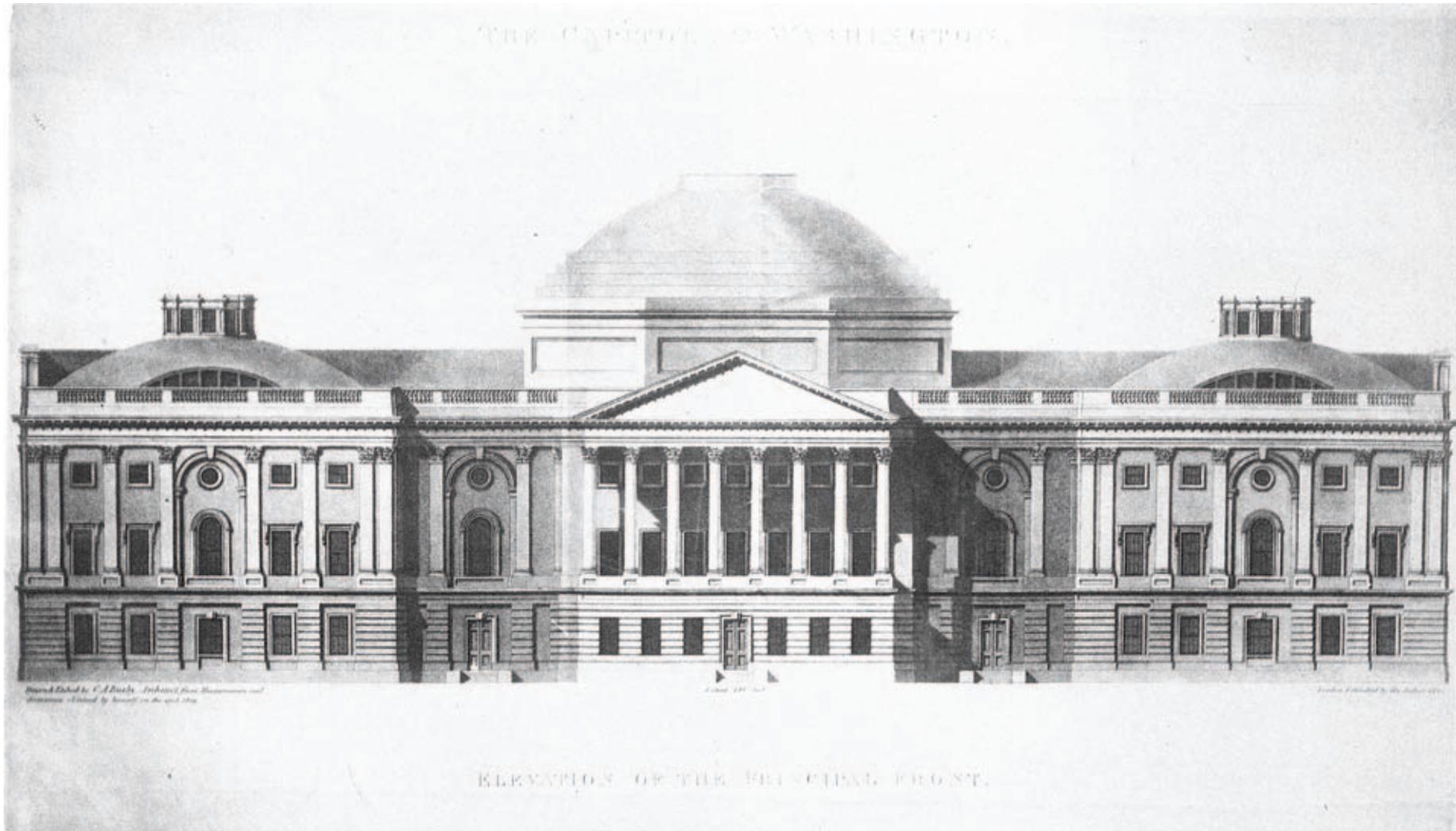
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<sup>11</sup> Architect of the United States Capitol to the Commissioners of the Public Buildings, November 21, 1818, in *Message from the President of the United States*.



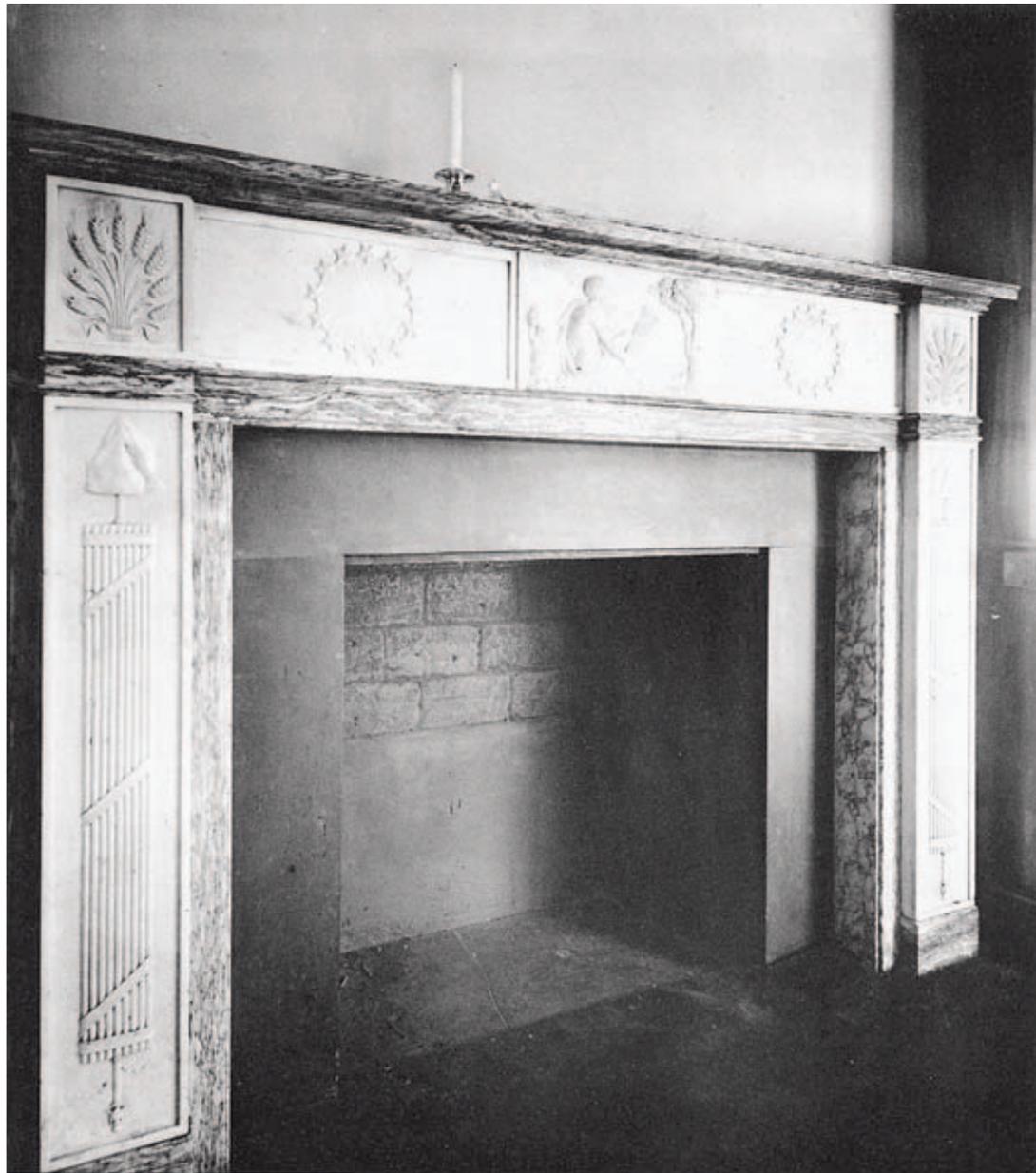
PLAN SHOWING CHANGES BY CHAS. BULFINCH.

Plan by C. A. Busby, showing Bulfinch's design for the central building, 1819. Location unknown.



EAST ELEVATION, SHOWING SUGGESTED CHANGES BY BULFINCH.

Elevation by C. A. Busby, 1819. *Geography and Map Division, LC.*



MANTEL IN OLD SENATE CHAMBER.

Mantel under the north end of the east gallery in the Old Senate Chamber, S-228.



MANTEL IN OLD SENATE CHAMBER.

Mantel under the south end of the east gallery in the Old Senate Chamber, S-228.



MANTEL, SERGEANT AT ARM'S OLD OFFICE.

Typical of marble mantels imported from Italy for the restoration of the Capitol after the fire of 1814.  
This mantel, located in S-229, was destroyed in the gas explosion of 1898.



MANTEL IN THE OLD ROOM OF THE VICE PRESIDENT.  
Mantel in S-231, a room currently occupied by the Republican Leader.

beneath. The piers between the windows were intended to contain eighteen flues, twelve of which were carried over the arch from the west, three from the south, and three from the north to this outlet. Plate 52 shows a drawing made by Latrobe before the British invasion for a similar treatment of the chimneys, although the spans were not as great and a smaller number of flues were conducted up through the cupola. Bulfinch attributed the failure of the arch, first, to the location of the 15-foot opening 10 feet nearer one side of the arch than it was to the other, also to the unequal distribution of loads produced by the chimneys. General Swift and Colonel Bomford, engineers, were called in consultation. They agreed with Bulfinch that the arch would not bear any additional weight, and approved of his method of using a brick cone as a foundation for a cupola. This report of Bulfinch's on the arch was not published until he sent in his report to Congress in the latter part of November, 1818.<sup>12</sup> Latrobe wrote an elaborate reply in December, 1818. He states that the arch was not begun when he resigned, but from his interest in the matter he examined the stone and directed the beginning of the work. The change from a vaulted ceiling to a wooden roof in the Senate Chamber made the arch necessary to support the cupola which was required to light the vestibule of the Senate and attic stairway, and to conceal the numerous chimneys which it was necessary to carry above the roof. Although Latrobe thought the changes in the Senate made this arch necessary, Bulfinch seems to have contrived a simpler method. Latrobe attributes the failure of the arch to improper haunches, or lack of any loading, and the error of the workmen in not putting any hoop around the circular opening, which he had uniformly undone in

<sup>12</sup> "Report of the State of the Arch in the Roof of the North Wing, May 1, 1818," in *DHC*, 209–210.

<sup>13</sup> "Memorial to Congress in Vindication of His Professional Skill," in Van Horne, *Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, vol. 3, 1010–1018.

similar cases. He justifies the use of iron by quoting its use in the domes of St. Paul's, Ste. Geneviève, and the Cathedral of Baltimore.<sup>13</sup>

The question of the location, he justly says, could have had nothing to do with the problem if, as he says, the weakest side was ample to support the cupola. The report of Bulfinch, November 21, 1818, gives an idea of the progress on the Capitol at that date. On the north wing the stone balustrade over the cornice, on the east and west sides, the attic on the north, and the stone cupola were complete. The roof was covered with copper. On the interior the marble staircase was laid to the principal floor. The colonnade to the vestibule or small rotunda [Plate 68] and part of the east gallery of the Senate Chamber were completed. The apartments of the attic story and the committee rooms and offices on the principal floor were plastered and paved, and the carpenter work finished. It was expected that the court room would be finished in December. The Senate room was delayed by the difficulty in getting the marble work. On the south wing the balustrade on the roof was nearly complete [Plate 70]. On the interior the columns of Brescia were completed and in place, and the entablature and stone inclosure for the gallery were built. The ribs of the domed ceiling were raised and secured and the exterior roof was completed. In the center, excavation had been completed for the "new work on the west of center" [Plate 71]. The foundations were laid and the cellar carried up to the level of the ground-floor arches. The external walls of the basement were commenced.<sup>14</sup> The report of Mr. Cobb, Member of Congress, February 16, 1820, states that everything in the north and south wings was completed with the exception of painting and a few changes desired by Congress.<sup>15</sup> The first appropriation for the purpose of commencing the

<sup>14</sup> Architect of the United States Capitol to the Commissioners of the Public Buildings, November 21, 1818, in *Message from the President of the United States*.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Willis Cobb, "Additional Report of the Committee on Public Buildings," in *DHC*, 225–227.

central portion was made April 20, 1818. "Upon the request of a former committee of the House, the plan of the central portion has been changed from the design of the late architect, Mr. Latrobe [Plate 70], so as to afford more convenience and a greater number of necessary rooms. This alteration has been approved by the President [Monroe], and it is believed that it will not affect either the beauty or increase the cost of the erection, inasmuch as its external is substantially preserved and its size diminished."<sup>16</sup>

Congress held its sessions in the new Hall of Representatives in December, 1819. At this period we find members complaining of the acoustic properties of the Hall. April 13, 1820, the House sent the following questions to Bulfinch in reference to preventing echo:

1. Whether it can be remedied without total alteration?

2. Whether anything can be added without destroying the beauty of the hall?

3. Would partial benefit justify the expense?

I have not been able to find the answer of Bulfinch to these questions, but the presumption is that no change was advocated unless it was a total change.

During the same year (1820) Dr. Thornton was called on for advice on the same subject. He a second time advised hangings, and took the opportunity to call the attention of Congress to the deviations from his original scheme and to state how they had affected both the utility and beauty of the building. Three old engravings give a good idea of the appearance of the Hall of Representatives at this period, showing the semicircular colonnade galleries and curtains hanging behind the columns [Plates 77, 78, and 79]. Plate 79 shows the space

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<sup>16</sup> "Act making appropriations for the public buildings, and for furnishing the Capitol and President's House." [Stats. at Large, vol. 3, 458] in *DHC*, 206.

under the gallery open, while Plates 77 and 78 show this space inclosed by a solid partition concentric with the columns, which was not put in until 1836, when Robert Mills was in charge.<sup>17</sup>

During the year 1821 the number of mechanics employed on the central portion of the building varied from 80 in December to 229 in July. About this period Samuel Lane was replaced by Joseph Elgar as Commissioner of Public Buildings, who, to effect an economy, proposed to reduce the salary of the Architect. Miss Bulfinch gives the correspondence between Bulfinch and his friends in reference to this proposed reduction:

OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS,  
Washington, D.C., September 30, 1822.

SIR: I have a painful duty to perform. It is that of announcing a general reduction of salaries, to take place at the end of the present year.

Subsequently to that period yours will be \$2,000 per annum.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

J. ELGAR,

*Commissioner of Public Buildings.*

TO CHARLES BULFINCH.<sup>18</sup>

Bulfinch protested through John Quincy Adams, making the claim that his salary was fixed by contract. President Monroe referred the question to Attorney-General Wirt, who decided in favor of Bulfinch:

[President Monroe to Attorney-General Wirt.]

JANUARY 31, 1823.

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<sup>17</sup> Brown has confused the room's original lower stone wall below the gallery, designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, with a wood and plaster wall built by Robert Mills behind the gallery. The space below the gallery was never open. See "House of Representatives," RG 40, Subject Files, Curator's Office, AOC.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Elgar to Charles Bulfinch, September 30, 1822, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 245.

DEAR SIR: I send you a paper, the claim of Mr. Bulfinch, which will not require five minutes' attention. The question involved in it is whether the invitation to him to come here at a given salary formed a contract not to be altered, supposing his conduct to be correct, until the Capitol should be finished?

I wish an immediate answer, as I promised one on my part this morning.

J. M.<sup>19</sup>

[Attorney-General Wirt to President Monroe.]

JANUARY 31, 1823.

SIR: I am of the opinion that Mr. Adams' letter of 4th December, 1817, and Mr. Bulfinch's answer thereto, make a contract between the Government and that individual which is unalterable by the mere will of either party, as if it had been, instead of a salary, a contract for a fixed sum to be paid for the whole work.

I have the honor to remain, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

WM. WIRT.<sup>20</sup>

The report of Bulfinch in 1823 gives a clear synopsis of the state of the building at this period:

WASHINGTON, D. C., *December 9, 1822.*

JOSEPH ELGAR, ESQ.,

*Commissioner of Public Buildings.*

SIR: The season for continuing the external work on the Capitol being near its close, I present a statement of the progress made thereon during the past year.

The exterior of the western projection [central portion] has been completed by finishing the copper covering, painting the walls, and

inserting the window frames and sashes; the scaffolding is removed, and this front of the building exhibits the appearance it is intended to retain, being deficient only in the iron railings between the columns of the loggia, which are in forwardness and will soon be executed. The two principal stories of committee rooms, with their extensive passage or corridors, are plastered, and a great portion of the carpenters' work is finished. The principal labor of the season has been devoted to raising the dome of the center. For this purpose the interior walls of the Rotunda were continued. As soon as appropriations were made in the spring they were raised to the full height and covered with entablature and blocking course. The exterior walls were carried up with stone, formed into large panels, and crowned with a cornice and four receding gradines. About two-thirds of the interior dome is built of stone and brick and the summit of wood. The whole is covered with a wooden dome of more lofty elevation, serving as a roof [Plate 80]. It is hoped that a few days of favorable weather will enable the workmen to sheath it securely, when it will be in readiness for the copper covering. It will be finally crowned with a balustrade, to surround a skylight of 24 feet diameter, intended to admit light into the great Rotunda. This work has required a great effort to complete it, from the mass of stone and other materials employed in it, and raised and secured at so great a height. I can not omit this occasion to mention the ingenuity and persevering diligence of the superintendents of each branch of the work and cheerful and unremitting exertions of the workmen in their endeavors to execute their orders and to bring this part of their labors to a close. I sincerely hope that the effects of our joint efforts will meet the approbation of the President of the United States and the Representatives of the nation.

Respectfully submitted.

CHARLES BULFINCH,<sup>21</sup>

*Architect of the Capitol of the United States.*

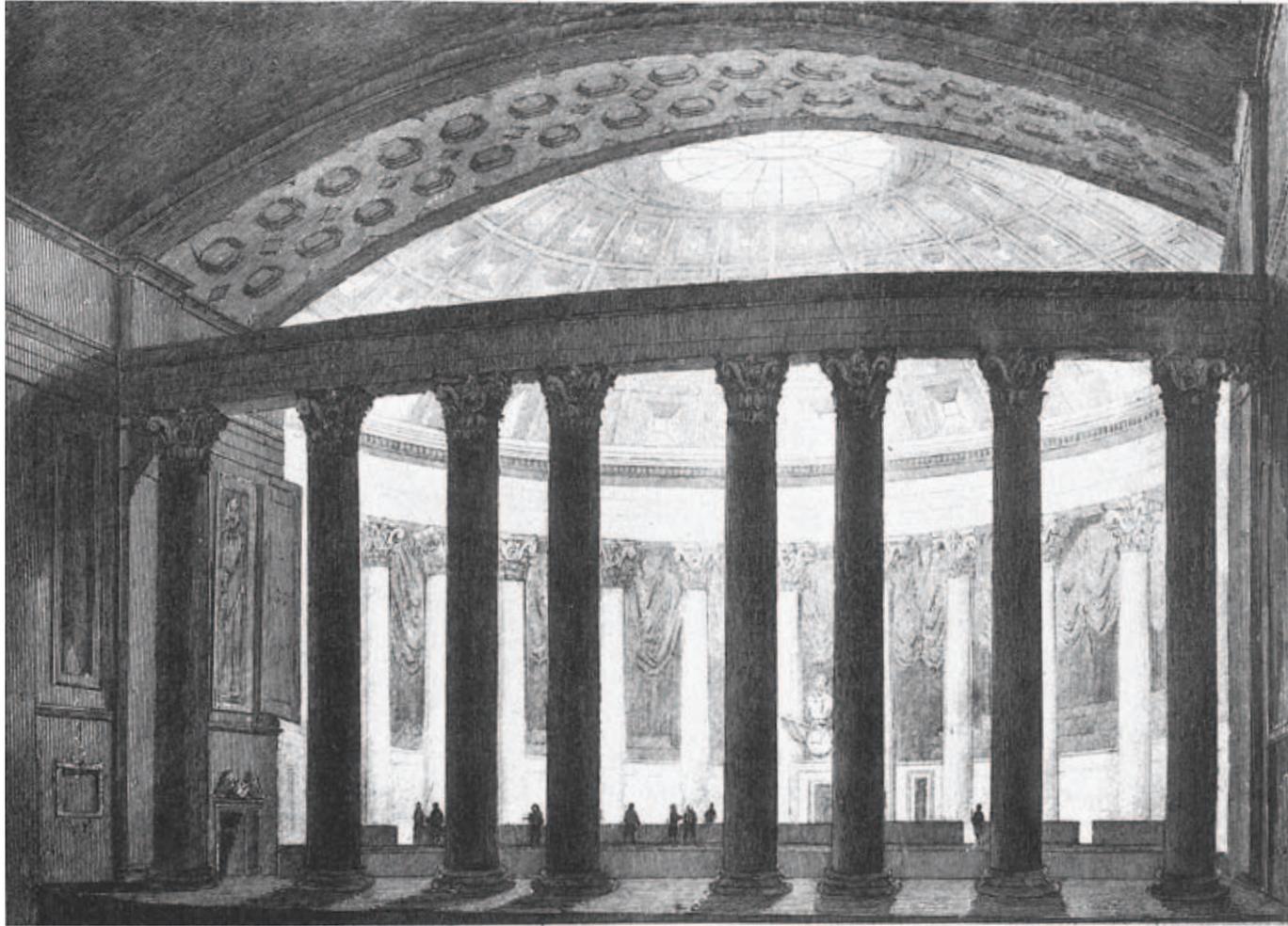
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<sup>19</sup> James Monroe to William Wirt, January 31, 1823, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 246–247.

<sup>20</sup> William Wirt to James Monroe, January 31, 1823, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 247.

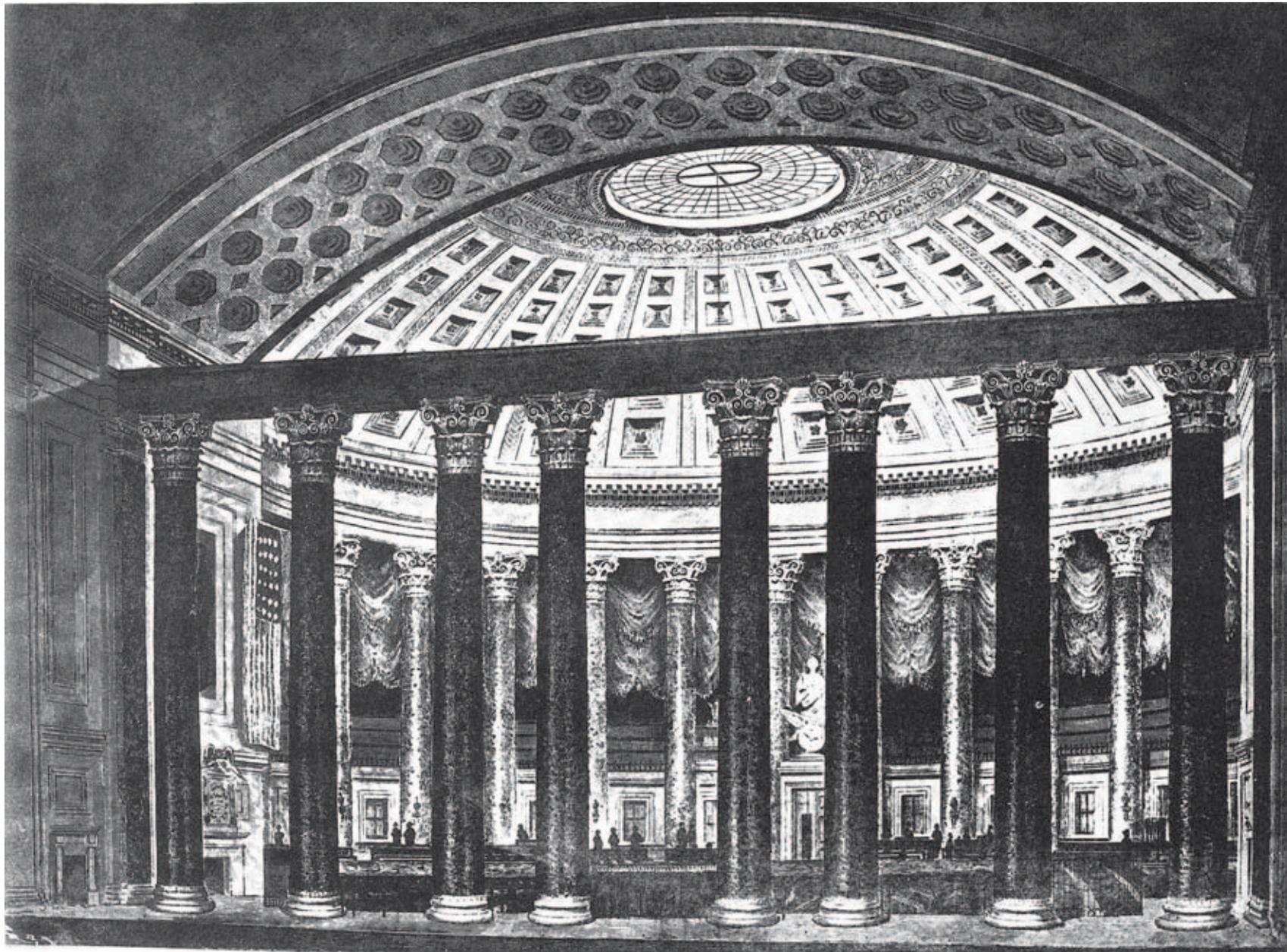
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<sup>21</sup> Bulfinch's report to Joseph Elgar on the progress of the Capitol, December 9, 1822, in *DHC*, 206.



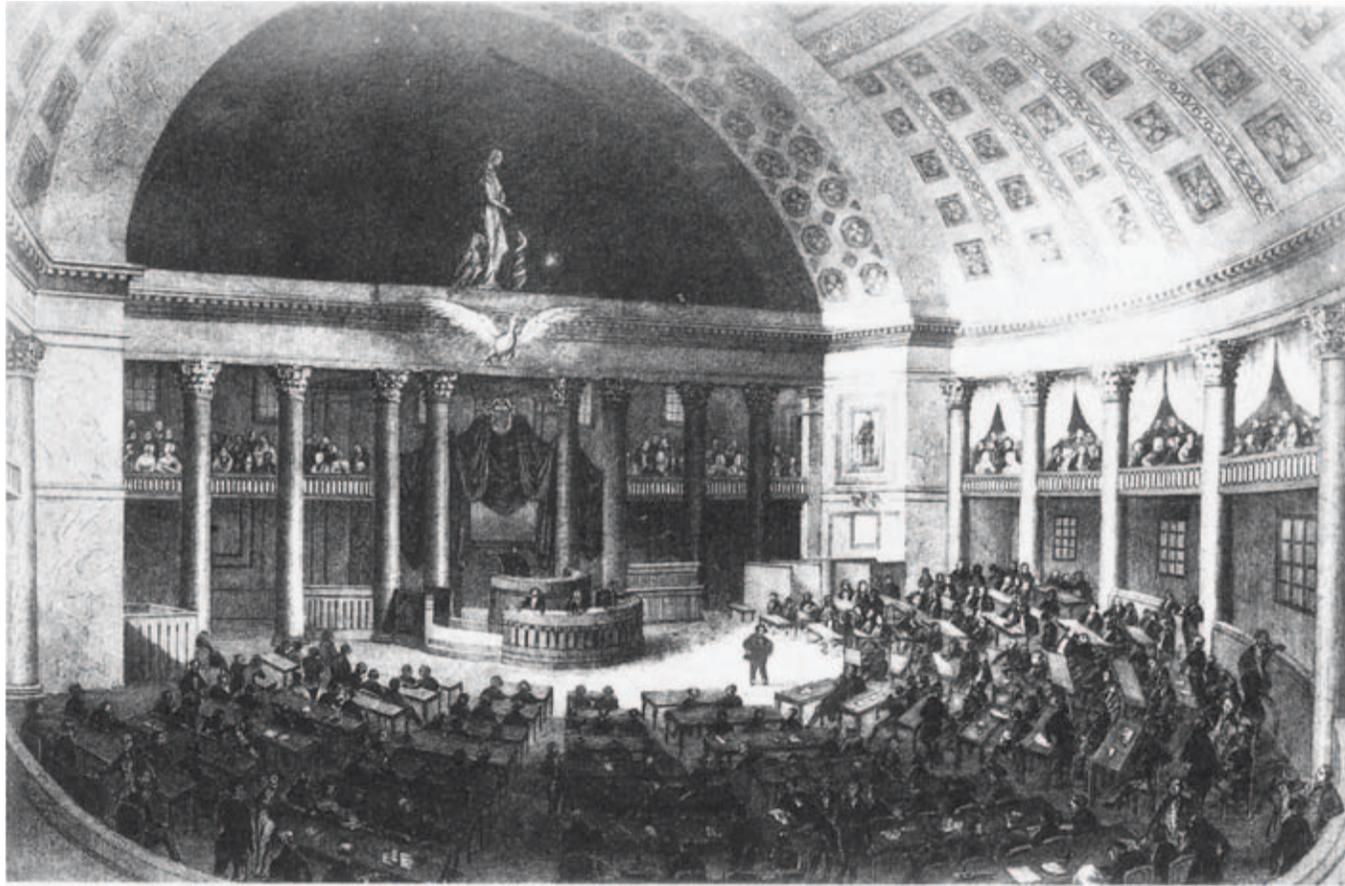
OLD HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FROM FRENCH PRINT.

*Historical Society of Washington, D.C.*



OLD HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, NORTH VIEW.

Engraving published in *Penny Magazine*, October 10, 1835. *Historical Society of Washington, D.C.*



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, SOUTHWEST VIEW.

Color lithograph published by Goupil, Vibert, & Co. Lithography by Deroy. *Prints and Photographs Division, LC.*



EXTERIOR OF BULFINCH DOME.

Photograph of a drawing by Thomas U. Walter, ca. 1854, reproduced in the Capitol Extension and New Dome Photographic Books, 1860. *Location unknown*

We find Bulfinch requesting a guard and guides as the Capitol approaches completion. On December 10, 1824, the fact is recorded that the interior of the Capitol is finished, with the exception of some painting on the stonework, “which is not sufficiently seasoned to receive it.” The colonnade of the east portico was incomplete.<sup>22</sup>

Bulfinch was employed during 1826 and 1827 in charge of what is called new work and in landscape work on the grounds. The latter had reference to designs for the steps and approaches made necessary by the hill on which the Capitol stands. Plates 81 and 82 show the gate lodge and a section of the fence, which were removed in 1873 and set up in the Monument lot. The sculptors were actively at work.

June 4, 1826, while Bulfinch was away from the city, the commissioner wrote to him, saying: “We have met with an irreparable loss—Mr. Blagden was killed last evening at the falling of the bank at the south angle of the Capitol.”<sup>23</sup>

We learn from Robert Mills that the original design for the Senate Chamber had an upper gallery on the east, supported by an attic colonnade. But because this obstructed the light, it was removed in 1828 and a light circular gallery on the west was erected [Plate 83].<sup>24</sup>

Although an act was passed May 2, 1828, abolishing the office of Architect of the Capitol, Bulfinch held his position until the end of June, 1829.<sup>25</sup>

[From Joseph Elgar to Charles Bulfinch.]

WASHINGTON, D.C., June 25, 1829.

SIR: I am directed by the President to inform you that the office of Architect of the Capitol will terminate with the present month.

<sup>22</sup> DHC, 265.

<sup>23</sup> For correspondence and information concerning the accident, see “George Blagden,” RG 40, Subject Files, Curator’s Office, AOC.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Mills, *Guide to the Capitol of the United States* (Washington: n.p., 1834), 44.

<sup>25</sup> Act of May 2, 1828, c. 45, 4 Stat. 265.

Respectfully, I remain your faithful and obedient servant,  
J. ELGAR.<sup>26</sup>

Bulfinch sent a memorial to President Jackson, saying that the building was not in a condition to leave it without the supervision of an architect. He inferred from the act of Congress (March, 1829) and the statement of the Congressional committee that he would be retained until the work was complete, which he thought would be sometime in September, 1829.

He ends his memorial as follows:

“I most respectfully suggest that if the President should think proper to recall his orders, and continue my employment for another quarter, it would insure the right execution of the work; it would gratify my feelings, in closing my labors, with satisfaction, and my time would be at the command of the Government to visit the navy hospital at Norfolk, if the public services should seem to require it, and to make inquiry into its actual situation, and report of the proceedings there as might lead to more correct prosecution of the distant works in future.

“The above is respectfully submitted to the consideration of the President of the United States by one who feels a pride in his profession and who would regret the appearance of censure more than the loss of the emoluments of office.

“With great respect,

CHARLES BULFINCH,  
“Architect of Capitol of the United States.

“JUNE 27, 1829.”<sup>27</sup>

President Jackson answered as follows:

“WASHINGTON, June 27, 1829.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Elgar to Charles Bulfinch, June 25, 1829, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 262.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Bulfinch to Andrew Jackson, June 27, 1829 [“Memorial to President Jackson, On Close of My Services”], in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 262–263.

“SIR: Your note of this morning has been received. As the law under which you have been employed makes the period of your services depend upon your necessity, it became the duty of the President, as soon as he was advised that the public buildings had so far advanced as no longer to require them, to notify you accordingly. But it was far from his intention in so doing to manifest the slightest disapprobation of the manner in which you have discharged your duties. The superintendent of the buildings had reported that they were so far advanced as not to require the employment of the Architect. Of course, the President, whose duty it is to guard against a wasteful expenditure of the public money, was bound to direct his discharge.

“Your suggestion in regard to the work at Norfolk will receive the most respectful consideration.

“Your obedient servant,

ANDREW JACKSON.”<sup>28</sup>

After his connection with the Capitol ceased Charles Bulfinch evidently remained in Washington about a year. Ashton R. Willard, in the *New England Magazine* (1890), quotes from a letter of Bulfinch in the possession of a member of his family, written June 3, 1830: “I date from this place [Washington] for the last time. We have taken places on the stage and leave for Baltimore at 2 o’clock. We have not time to regret at leaving friends . . . and a place which has given us a pleasant and respectable home for twelve years, and where we leave memorials of us which we trust will long endure.”<sup>29</sup>

Charles Bulfinch designed and planned the modified form of the western extension of the building as finished [Plate 71]; made slight

alterations in the interior arrangements of the wings, the galleries in the Senate Chamber being one of the changes. Otherwise he carried out Latrobe’s ideas according to the drawings. He altered the form of the Dome, making it much higher than it had been indicated on either Thornton’s or Latrobe’s drawings [Plate 80].<sup>30</sup>

An old water-color drawing, made about this period, shows the east front as completed [Plate 84]. George Strickland made a perspective drawing of the building as it was completed. This drawing is reproduced in Plate 85. Robert King made a drawing showing the exterior from the west. This drawing was evidently made before the terraces and entrance steps were put in place [Plate 86].

The three men who deserve credit for the rebuilding of the old Capitol, as assistants to the Architect, were Peter Lenox, clerk of works; George Blagden, superintendent of stonework and quarries, and Giovanni Andrei, in charge of the carvers and sculptors. In 1822 each received a salary of \$1,500 per annum. Blagden was killed in 1826. Andrei died in December, 1824, on which occasion Bulfinch paid a high tribute to his merit. Congress allowed \$400 to send Andrei’s family back to Italy, according to agreement. Francis Iardella, who came from Italy to work on the Capitol in 1816, succeeded Andrei April 25, 1825, at \$1,250 per annum.

It seems proper to give here a recapitulation of the facts in reference to the men in charge and result of their work in the building. That a structure as interesting and harmonious as the old Capitol proved to be should have been produced, when we consider the various hands through which it has passed, is remarkable. This was due both to the

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<sup>28</sup> Andrew Jackson to Charles Bulfinch, June 27, 1829, in Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 263–264.

<sup>29</sup> Ashton R. Willard, “Charles Bulfinch, The Architect,” *New England Magazine* 3 (November 1890): 284.

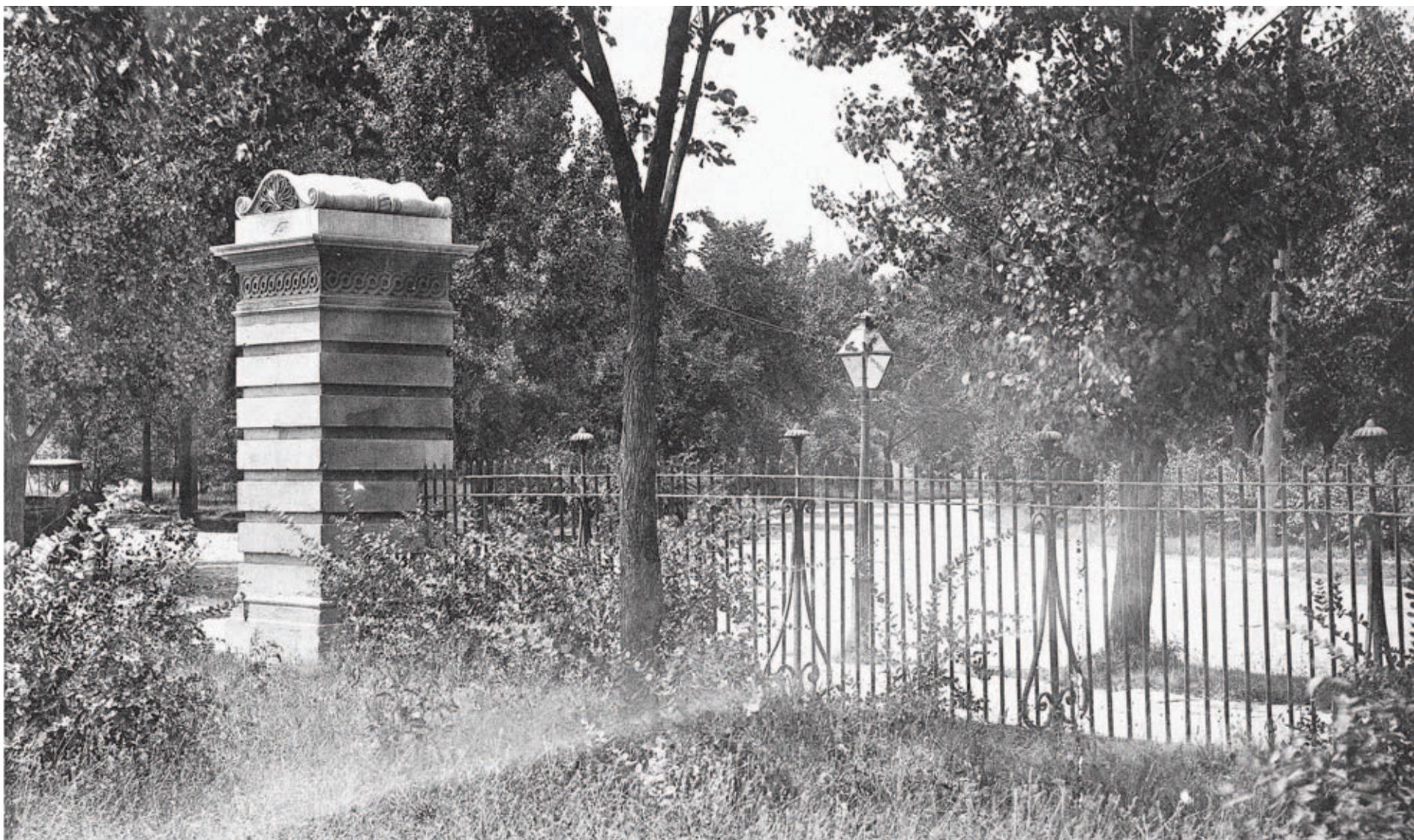
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<sup>30</sup> The height of the dome was determined by President Monroe and his cabinet. Bulfinch prepared alternative designs of different heights and preferred a scheme higher than Latrobe’s but lower than the one selected by the Monroe administration. For a history of the design and construction of the Capitol dome, see William Allen, *The Dome of the United States Capitol: An Architectural History* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992).



ENTRANCE OR GATE LODGE.

Bulfinch Gate Lodge from the west grounds, which was relocated to Constitution Avenue near 15th Street, N.W. in 1874.



GATE POST AND FENCE OF OLD CAPITOL GROUNDS.

Bulfinch gateposts, which were relocated to the corner of 17th Street and Constitution Avenue, N. W., and to the National Arboretum in northeast Washington.



SENATE CHAMBER, SHOWING WESTERN GALLERY.

Engraving by Thomas Doney, 1842.

skill of the architects employed and the determination of the many Presidents who took a personal interest in the work to see it executed, if not in strict conformity, at least in harmony, with the original design. Hallet and Hadfield were both discharged by order of General Washington because they persisted in attempting to introduce changes in Thornton's scheme. No changes were allowed until Latrobe's entrance into office, and the only material change he made in the plans or elevations was on the eastern and western central porticoes, Jefferson insisting that everything should agree with the original design. After the destruction of the building by the British, in 1814, Latrobe changed completely the interior of the south wing, or old Hall of Representatives, but over this Madison held a restraining hand. Bulfinch can only be credited with planning and designing the western central portico and the earth terraces and landscape work, as shown in the steps leading up the hill. The result produced is to be attributed to the employment of the most skillful architects that could be obtained in the country, combined with the good conservative judgment and personal interest of such cultivated men as Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Adams, and Monroe.

Thornton, Latrobe, and Bulfinch deserve the distinction of being the architects of the building. Each designed and planned. Of the three, Thornton deserves the greatest praise, as the originator; Latrobe next, doing much original work in detail as well as planning and general arrangement of the interior. Bulfinch executed Latrobe's drawing, with the exception of the western portico, as noted above. Hallet, Hadfield, and Hoban were simply employed as and were called "superintendents,"

and deserve probably less credit than Lenthall and Lenox, who were called in the documents of the day "clerks of work" or "principal surveyors." Thornton showed an appreciation of the needs of the American people and a confidence in the growth of the country which his contemporaries did not appreciate, and his original plan was materially curtailed in scale and material under his direction.

Latrobe, when he was employed, made changes which could not be considered as satisfactory as the original design. He left out the grand semicircular portico on the west, and changed the form of the Hall of Representatives from an ellipse to a room with semicircular ends with parallel connecting lines, and omitted the grand staircases which were in prominent view, relegating them to out-of-the-way corners, where only those familiar with the building could find them. His curtailment of the number and size of entrances to the Rotunda was also unfortunate. While he made the eastern portico more imposing, it is a question whether it is as thoroughly in harmony with the building as the original portico, shown on Thornton's elevation. This change made the eastern the principal front, whereas the most imposing design should have been toward the west, where it shows from the river and city, and overlooks the broad expanse of country toward the President's House and Potomac River. Bulfinch by his alteration gave a better plan for the central western part of the building, without improving on Latrobe's design. Bulfinch made the projection of the central portion less, decreased the size of the courts or light wells, and increased the size of the halls [Plates 70 and 71].



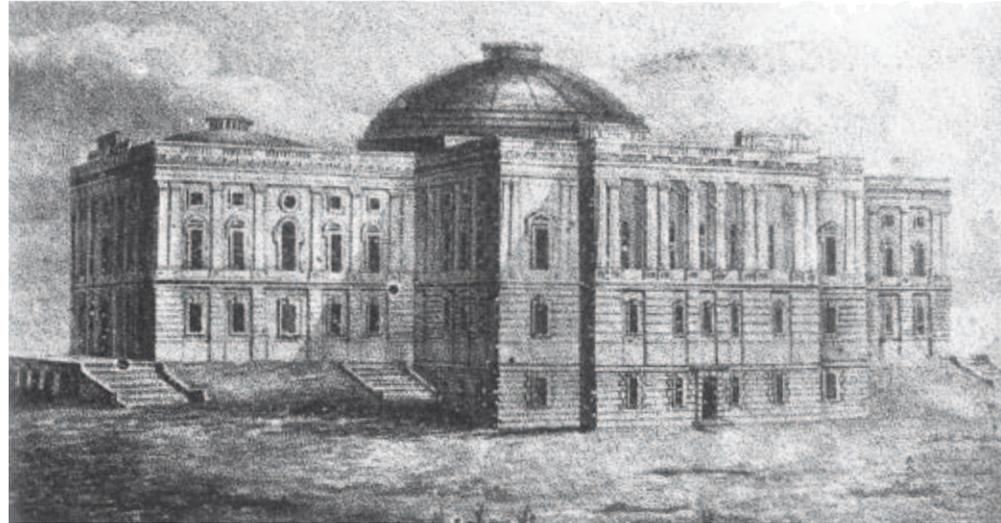
DRAWING OF LATROBE FOR EAST FRONT.

Watercolor now attributed to Alexander J. Davis, ca. 1832–34. *Prints and Photographs Division, LC.*



PERSPECTIVE VIEW DRAWN BY GEO. STRICKLAND.

Drawing attributed to George Strickland, 1830–40.



WEST VIEW OF CAPITOL. ABOUT 1830, DRAWING BY ROBERT KING.

Bermed terraces, begun in 1826, were not shown in this view. NARA.