
The Office of Architect of the Capitol

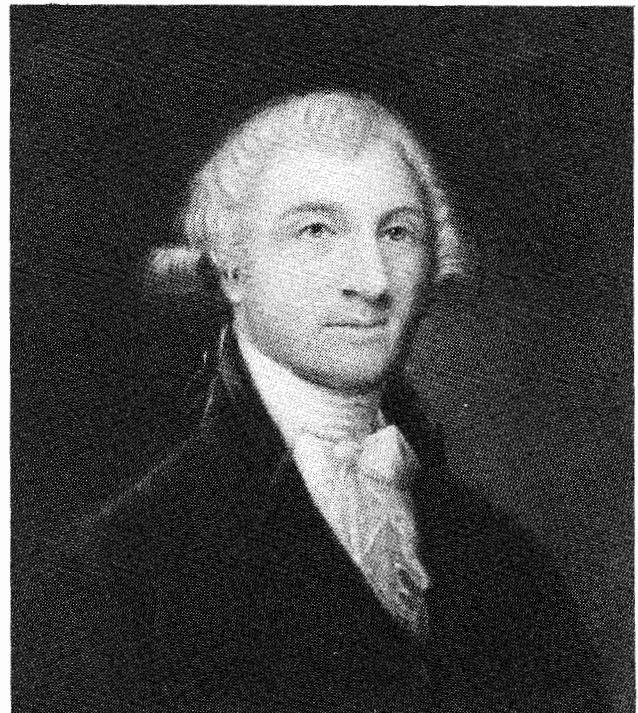
George M. White

A recent study proposing expansion of the parliamentary buildings in Ottawa raises the issue of jurisdiction over these precincts. The subject is also being discussed in some provincial legislatures (see Ruling by Speaker John Reynolds elsewhere in this issue). In this article Mr. White explains how the issues of co-ordination and planning for legislative buildings are handled by the United States Congress

The title "Architect of the Capitol" is somewhat of a misnomer, although architecture is the basis for the fundamental activity of the office. Over the years the office has evolved into a department which responds to congressional needs not only in architecture but also in administration, management, construction, art, institutional history, security, food service, botany, real estate, finances, development and telecommunications.

The physical jurisdiction of the Architect includes more than 200 acres of Capitol Grounds generally known as the Federal portion of Capitol Hill. It contains the Capitol Building, three Senate Office Buildings, three House Office Buildings, a number of annex buildings for both the House and Senate, the Supreme Court, the three buildings of the Library of Congress, the Capitol Power plant and the United States Botanic Garden Conservatory and park.

The Architect belongs to both Houses of Congress and yet to neither one exclusively. Many functions thus require that the office conduct affairs diplomatically as well as competently. There are approximately 2500 employees under the jurisdiction of the Architect whose annual budget averages approximately \$100 million not



William Thornton, first Architect of the Capitol, portrait by George B. Matthews after Gilbert Stewart. (Architect of the Capitol)

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including major capital improvements or major restoration projects are funded on a separate basis.

The Office is divided into basic functional areas, covering design, construction management property management and other areas. With respect to the design function, the office is responsible for all of the architectural and engineering design work for all new and existing buildings on the Hill. New buildings, of course, are not constructed very often but whenever they are, the design work, although generally accomplished by associate architects from the private sector, is under the jurisdiction of the Architect of the Capitol. The existing buildings are under continuous modification, improvement and restoration. In addition, interior design work for office modifications and changes in decor are all a part of this function.

Another functional area is construction management. The office is responsible for all of the construction that takes place within its jurisdiction. New construction as well as existing construction modifications are managed. Most of the new construction is done by private sector contractors directed by the Construction Management

Division. There are, of course, projects taking place continuously that require construction management on a daily basis. There are four to five hundred such projects at any one time varying in value from a few hundred to several million dollars. Cost control, scheduling, material procurement, work done by government forces and private sector contracting are all controlled by the Construction Management Division.

The third function area is property management. There are some 24,000 people working on the Hill every day. The office is responsible for providing adequate physical facilities in which their various prescribed duties can be carried on. Property management includes responding to various needs of the building occupants such as maintenance of the buildings, cleaning and other services.

The fourth functional area is termed "General", and includes such responsibilities as the operation of the Capitol Power Plant, which supplies the steam and chilled water for all of the buildings on the Hill, the care and maintenance of the Capitol Grounds which includes street repair, snow removal, the operation of the United



Aerial view of buildings under the jurisdiction of the Architect of the Capitol (Architect of the Capitol).

States Botanic Garden, including the Conservatory, located on Capitol Hill, and 25 acres located several miles away where nursery and greenhouses for all of the plant needs on the Hill are located.

As the Office evolved, a number of specific duties were assigned to the Architect by law. Permanent authority for the care and maintenance of the Capitol was provided by the Congress in August 1876. That authority has been expanded from time to time to provide for the care and maintenance of additional buildings and grounds.

The Architect is in charge of making arrangements with proper authorities for ceremonies held in and about the Capitol and grounds. He has responsibility for the structural and mechanical care of the Library of Congress Buildings and the Supreme Court Building.



The restored Bartholdi fountain (Architect of the Capitol)

Subject to the direction of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, the Architect is charged with the structural, mechanical, domestic care and maintenance of the Senate Office buildings including the Senate Subway. In addition, the Architect is responsible for the operation of the Senate Restaurants. Under the direction of the House Office Building Commission, the Architect is responsible for the structural, mechanical, domestic care and maintenance of the House Office Buildings.

Under direction of the Joint Committee of the Library, the Architect serves as Acting Director of the United States Botanic Garden. He also serves as a member of the

Capitol Police Board, the Capitol Guide Board, the House Page Board, the District of Columbia Zoning Commission, the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. In addition, he is a member of the Art Advisory Committee to the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority, the National Capital Memorial Commission which advises the Secretary of the Interior with regard to proposed memorials on Federal land in Washington, the National Institute for Conservation, and serves as coordinator of Civil Defense for the Capitol group of buildings.

Current preservation programs include the restoration of the structure and the original sandstone veneer of the West Front of the Capitol and the restoration of the Library of Congress Thomas Jefferson and John Adams Buildings. In the park of the Botanic Gardens the cast iron fountain designed by Auguste Bartholdi, who created the Statue of Liberty, was restored this year. In addition, an active art conservation program maintains the approximately 800 works of art of the Capitol collection. Recently, frescoes and wall paintings by Constantino Brumidi have been a priority. The fresco frieze painted by Brumidi in the Rotunda has just been cleaned and work on the canopy under the dome will start this year.

A recently established and important challenge for the Architect is the provision of modern telecommunications and television systems for the Congress. During 1986 the Office of the Architect provided logistical support for the implementation of live television coverage of Senate proceedings as had been accomplished in the House of Representatives chamber in 1979. A final major challenge facing the Architect's office concerns the provision of the physical security needs for Congress, its buildings and grounds in the face of the need to retain the openness necessary for citizen participation and access. To provide the most modern of security systems for the benefit of Congress while preserving the architectural heritage of the Capitol and grounds, is the major goal. The Security Enhancement Project, currently under study, is anticipated to be implemented in the near future.

The Architect has recently been directed to conduct a feasibility study regarding the development and construction, by means of a public-private partnership, of a building on Capitol Grounds for the Administrative Office of the United States Courts. If the Congress should decide to proceed with this project after reviewing the results of the study, a new concept in providing office space for federal use will have been launched.