

August 20, 2013

OAC Historical Decisions Document
West Wing Renovation

The Capitol Building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and designed by Alfred Henry Piquenard, is a blending of 18th century baroque and 19th century classical styles of architecture on the exterior and French Renaissance style on the interior. All three styles are well known for their high level of ornament and in public buildings especially, a sense of monumentality and permanence. The Illinois State Capitol is no exception. When originally constructed between 1868 and 1887, and standing 361 feet above the earth, clad in limestone, fit with marble decorative plaster and ornamental lighting, the Capitol was like no other building around it in terms of mass, style, grandeur and perpetuity. This is still true today.

The decision to renovate the west wing of the Capitol building presented a unique set of challenges and balances. The Office of the Architect of the Capitol (OAC) was mindful that this renovation was first and foremost a life safety, ADA and Infrastructure upgrade project to correct dire deficiencies in these areas. We were also aware that to accomplish these tasks, the wing would need to be vacated to facilitate the work efficiently and effectively. Vacating a wing of the Capitol building while performing upgrades to major systems is truly a once in a lifetime project. We did not want to undertake such a project without pursuing the renovation of the rest of the west wing that would bring that wing back to what is termed a “Period of Significance”. The period of significance for the building, which is the time frame of the original design and time frame when renovations to the design were still done with the original design intent, is between 1868 and 1908.

Below are some of the decisions OAC made to bring the building back to a period of significance:

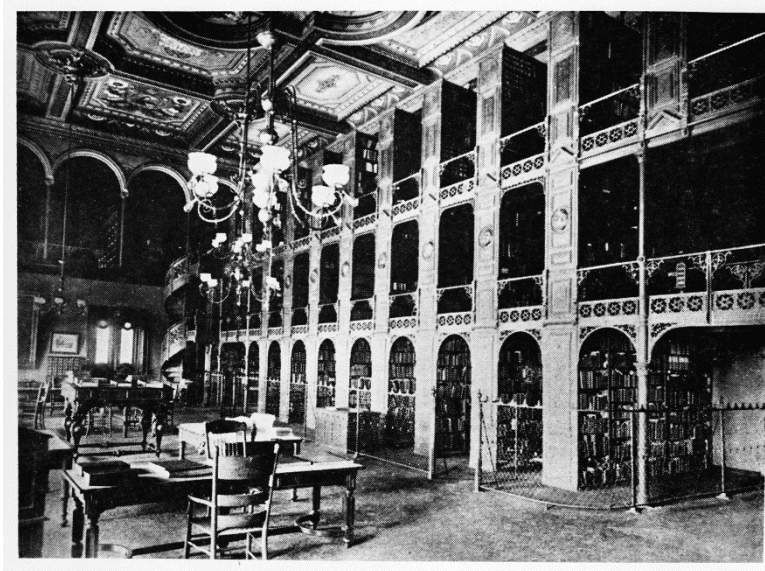
Exterior Doors:

When originally designed, the main entrance to the Capitol was from the east through a long set of 37 steps up to the second floor of the building. These were removed before the building was officially opened when Architect W.W. Boyington converted the Basement into the First Floor. While the first floor doors were oak on the outside and black walnut on the inside, they were heavily carved with bronze ornamentation. Bronze is a metal made primarily of copper. As the western exposure and elements took their toll on the doors, they simply became inoperable and were replaced with a much simpler, non-historic door. In this renovation, we took the cue from the bronze ornamentation from the original doors, and clad a new wood door in copper to give it protection for a time period that should well exceed a century. Aside from an historic standpoint, Copper was chosen for its longevity, natural beauty and because of its tendency to patina to a brown that is similar to a US10B finish, or oil rubbed bronze, the standard finish for the building.

Mezzanines:

Every wing of the Capitol had mezzanines constructed that were not part of the original design intent of the building’s architects and therefore outside of the period of significance. Mezzanines were added for the sole purpose of creating more space and to that end, they were not done very well and destroyed not only much of the highly ornate original woodwork around windows and doors but also the large volume of space now bifurcated by their addition. It was an OAC decision to remove the non-original mezzanine from the west wing as a way to bring the building back within the established timeframe and reestablishing the large open space that was lost for decades by the mezzanine. The large open spaces will have open office landscaping

(cubicles) which keep the high ceilings and allow more people to enjoy views out of the west facing (rooms 220, 309, Treasurer's Office) south facing (rooms 216, 220) and north facing (Treasurer's Office) windows. There was a balcony placed into 309 paying tribute to the book stacks of the State Library when it occupied that space. The balcony will house Senators offices and their Legislative Assistants.



Lighting:

The Capitol Building, having been constructed over a twenty year period, saw a change in the style of light fixtures from floor to floor. Through photographic evidence and catalogues from lighting suppliers of the mid to late 19th century, we recreated the light fixtures in most of the west wing offices. Rooms 216, 220 and the Treasurer's Office have more modern fixtures as a way to save money on this project. The installation of the correct fixtures is important however to the integrity of the space so we anticipate changing those out in the years ahead.



The maidens that were designed by A.H. Piquenard for the second floor grand staircase were brought to the Capitol building for installation and were thought too risqué to install. These original lighting pieces are in Iowa's Capitol (which was designed by the same Architect) in a very similar location at the base of their grand stairs. Since their placement in our building was the original intent of the architect, OAC chose to have them molded from the originals and placed in their intended location.



Woodwork:

While the building is constructed primarily of brick and stone, it was wood that gave it a human quality. The woodwork in the Capitol building is pervasive – from doors and windows, their frames, the wainscoting, and although lost to time, some of the floors, there is no doubt this was an important material to the architects and the craftsmen who installed it. Highly decorative carvings on doors, door frames and windows frames give the occupant of the Capitol a sense that this place is not just a structure, but a collaboration of craftsman creating a work of art to highlight the talents and skill of the citizens of this state. Where we could, we salvaged the original doors and refinished them. Where the mezzanine had destroyed the upper section of the second story doors and windows, we recreated them to their original splendor.

Decorative Painting:

One of the first interior indications of the specialness of the Illinois State Capitol is the decorative painting throughout the building. The walls and ceilings are literally teeming with high detailed stenciling, stylized patterns of plants and flowers infused with geometric shapes that add to the richness and complexity of the space yet seem appropriate to the nature of the building. The wall and ceiling colors and the decorative painting patterns in the west wing are for the most part replications of what was original to the building. They were uncovered by artisans and recreated on freshly painted plaster surfaces. Many of the decorative paintings are on canvas. This is a relatively inexpensive way to achieve the desired effect while increasing the accuracy of the patterns and minimizing the impact a potential threat such as a water leak would have by

making repairs much simpler. Images below show uncovering original colors and patterns and post renovated condition.



At the height of the west wing renovation, there were 170 people working onsite and many, many more worked offsite to make the parts and pieces being installed.

So while we have created a safer, more accessible, more comfortable and more user friendly building, we have also restored the west wing to a period of significance and in doing so a period where public architecture mattered. It mattered because it stood as a testament and a masterpiece of human ingenuity, talent, and commitment to something larger than us. It did so unapologetically, boldly and with an unerring quality that will stand for generations upon generations to come. When given the opportunity, like we had with the west wing renovation, we must dedicate our work to the ideals of those well before us so that the fruits of our labor may be enjoyed by those long after us.

J. Richard Alsop, III, AIA, LEED AP BD+C
Architect of the Capitol