

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

WISCONSIN STATE CAPITOL

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: WISCONSIN STATE CAPITOL

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Capitol Square (Carroll, Main, Pinckney & Mifflin Streets)

Not for publication: \_\_

City/Town: Madison

Vicinity: \_\_

State: WI

County: Dane

Code: 025

Zip Code: 53703

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: \_\_
Public-Local: \_\_
Public-State: x
Public-Federal: \_\_

Category of Property

Building(s): x
District: \_\_
Site: \_\_
Structure: \_\_
Object: \_\_

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1
\_\_
\_\_
\_\_
1

Noncontributing

\_\_ buildings
\_\_ sites
\_\_ structures
\_\_ objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ Entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Determined eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: Government                      Sub: State Capitol

Current: Government                      Sub: State Capitol

**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: American Beaux-Arts/Renaissance Revival

**MATERIALS:**

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Structural Steel/Granite/Brick/Clay tile

Roof: Copper, Rubber Membrane

Other:

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**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.****Location and Site**

Madison, the capital of Wisconsin, lies in the south-central portion of the state, nearly eighty miles west of Milwaukee and 125 miles north of Chicago. Home to nearly 200,000 people and diverse academic, political, business and social institutions, Madison possesses a vibrant cosmopolitan identity. Geographically, Madison is defined by the convergence of four lakes. The Wisconsin State Capitol, in downtown Madison, is situated on an isthmus formed by two of these, Lakes Monona and Mendota. From its position at the summit of an eighty-five-foot hill, the Capitol commands a panoramic view of downtown Madison, the surrounding city, lakes and adjoining rural landscape. Conversely, the building's visual dominance of the city has resulted in its long being considered a symbol for both the city of Madison and the aspirations of generations of Wisconsin citizens.

Surrounding the Beaux-Arts styled Capitol, 9.5 acres of landscaped grounds and walkways constitute the Capitol Park, locally referred to as the "Square." The Square remains at the center of the original historic plat for Madison, which was designed in 1836 by James Duane Doty and his surveyor, J.V. Suydam.<sup>1</sup> Doty, originally from New York State, settled in Michigan in 1818. He was first admitted to the bar and later appointed to act as circuit judge of the Western Michigan Territory in 1823 by President James Monroe. As a result of the travel demanded by this position, Doty developed a deep familiarity with the landscape that would become Wisconsin. Following election to a two-year term in the Michigan Territorial Legislature in 1834, Doty was instrumental in the creation of the Wisconsin Territory in 1836.<sup>2</sup> Shortly thereafter he established himself as a land agent for John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. On behalf of his employer, Doty laid out the town of Astor, now Green Bay, in the mid-1830s. Independently, he purchased thirty-five hundred acres at the south end of Lake Winnebago, where he established the city of Fond du Lac.<sup>3</sup> In the fall of 1836, when he traveled to the meetings of the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature in Belmont, Wisconsin, Doty had a speculative interest in seeing Madison become the territorial capital and he promoted the site as a paper-town. On the proposal drawings presented to the early territorial legislature, Doty labeled the acreage atop of the prominent hill between the two lakes as "Donated Land for Public Buildings."<sup>4</sup>

Doty prevailed in the sale of his paper-town to the territorial legislature of 1836 and Madison became the permanent territorial capitol of Wisconsin, later evolving into Wisconsin's state capital. The existing building is the third to occupy the site. The first territorial capitol constructed on Doty's donated land followed the use of a short-lived territorial Capitol in Belmont, Wisconsin, and another in Burlington, Iowa.<sup>5</sup> Construction of the building was begun

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<sup>1</sup> David Mollenhoff, *Madison: A History of the Formative Years* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1982), 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 24; Legislative Reference Bureau, *Wisconsin Blue Book 1997-1998* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1997), 658.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> Plat map, Wisconsin Map Collection, Whi (X32) 8775 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin). Also published in Mollenhoff, *Madison*, 23.

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in June of 1837 under the supervision of Capitol Commission member Augustus A. Bird, also the presumed designer. Because Madison had no residents at the time, workers traveled from Milwaukee and maintained rustic accommodations in the Madison wilderness.<sup>6</sup> Built of stone quarried across Lake Mendota, according to the historic specifications, the Capitol had a rectilinear floor plan 104 by 54 feet wide. The exterior was designed to be identical front and back, with an oak floored piazza at each entrance beneath a roof supported by an Ionic colonnade. Above the central porch rose the tin covered dome, twenty-six feet in diameter and with a clear skylight in its center.<sup>7</sup> The building was completed in 1848, the same year Wisconsin was admitted into the Union as a state.

Less than a decade after the completion of the building, the Capitol was determined too small for the growing needs of Wisconsin State government. By 1856, the building was falling into disrepair and concerns were mounting with regard to the structure's susceptibility to fire. Concepts for the expansion of the Capitol by adding wings to the east and west quickly evolved into a plan for a new building. Drawings for the addition were prepared by August Kutzbock and Samuel H. Donnel, prominent mid-nineteenth century Madison architects. By 1863, the demolition of "Doty's Washbowl" (so-called because of the tin dome) had taken place and the construction of the new building was underway. Construction was suspended and the rotunda capped in 1865, while debate ensued over the design of the dome. In 1868, construction was resumed, but Kutzbock's scheme had been set aside and a dome based on a design by Stephen Vaughan Shipman was executed. Shipman's cast iron dome satisfied state lawmakers who had rallied for a capitol dome based on the recently completed dome on the National Capitol in Washington.<sup>8</sup> In 1872, the Wisconsin Legislature established the Board of Park Commissioners, who retained landscape architect Horace Cleveland of Chicago to provide a comprehensive plan for the Capitol Park. Cleveland's plan provided a highly picturesque scheme calling for fountains, curvilinear paths and a music shell. The plan was never fully carried out with only one of the four fountains installed.<sup>9</sup>

### **Capitol Competition and Building Construction**

The second Madison Capitol served as the seat of state government until it was severely damaged by fire in 1904. Even before the fire, in 1903, Governor Robert M. La Follette had formed the Capitol Improvement Commission to oversee the enlargement of the existing building. Following the fire, the commission reconvened to establish a program for a new building that would use the still extant central portion of the earlier structure. The Commission held a competition and awarded the project to Cass Gilbert, who was just completing work on the Minnesota State

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<sup>5</sup> Stanley H. Cravens, "Capitals and Capitols in Early Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Blue Book 1983-1984* (Madison, Wisconsin: State of Wisconsin, 1983), 114-117. See also Jean Houston Daniel and Daniel Price, *Executive Mansions and Capitols of America* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 241.

<sup>6</sup> Mollenhoff, *Madison*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Cravens, "Capitals and Capitols," 122.

<sup>8</sup> Cravens, "Capitals and Capitols" 142-143; *Historic Structure Report Book V: Wisconsin State Capitol Central Portion-Dome and Rotunda* (Madison, Wisconsin: Department of Administration, 1997), 3-23.

<sup>9</sup> Arnold R. Alanen, "A Place on the Isthmus: Planning of Madison and Its Capitol Park during the Nineteenth Century," *Historic Madison-A Journal of the Four Lake Region* vol. XV (1998), 23-25.

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Capitol. As the result of prevalent criticism that Gilbert's design was too large and expensive,<sup>10</sup> the 1905 legislature voided the competition and established a new body, called the Capitol Commission, to establish a new program for the building. The Commission required the building be "arranged in the form of a St. Andrews cross," which required that the wings of the building radiate from the Central Portion to the corners of the square.<sup>11</sup> The search began anew for an architect to design the building; five nationally prominent architectural firms competed for the design work.<sup>12</sup>

Partly on the advice of Daniel Burnham, the well known Chicago planner and architect who acted as the Commission's hired consultant, George B. Post and Sons of New York City was hired to design the new building. Burnham and Post had worked together on the planning and design of the 1893 Colombian Exposition in Chicago, and Burnham strongly recommended Post over the other firms that had entered the competition. In a report prepared for the Commission, Burnham extolled the Post design with such remarks as "Post. . .shows something more than mere scholarship. . .The general mass is impressive and beautiful . . .The Post treatment is simple and direct and the arrangement of the parts of its design are those well known and long approved."<sup>13</sup>

Construction was carried out in five phases over eleven years. This phased approach was to accommodate the ongoing function of state government and allow for a gradual expenditure of funds. Ground was broken for the West Wing in fall of 1906, which was followed by the East Wing in 1908, and the Central Portion was started in spring of the following year. Construction of the South Wing began in winter of 1910 and the North Wing in 1915. The project was completed in 1917.<sup>14</sup> The grounds of the Square evolved during this period from Horace Cleveland's romantically conceived park to a formal setting that emphasized the linear and axial characteristics of the building and reinforced its dominant position within the city.<sup>15</sup> Respected Cambridge, Massachusetts landscape architect John Nolen was responsible for these changes following his hire in 1910 to plan the Capitol grounds.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Objections to the Selection of Gilbert Plans for New Capitol Building and of Mr. Gilbert as Architect, Presented before the Joint Committee on Capitol Grounds, February 23d, 1905* (Madison, Wisconsin: J.S. Bletcher & Company, 1905).

<sup>11</sup> *Program for Architects' Competition for Wisconsin State Capitol* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin State Capitol Commission, 1906), 14.

<sup>12</sup> The firms invited to compete in the second competition held in 1906 included: Cass Gilbert of New York; Ferry & Clas of Milwaukee; H.C. Koch & Co. of Milwaukee; McKim, Mead & White of New York and Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge of Boston. Because only three firms responded, an additional four were invited, of which two responded. Those invited included: Carrere & Hastings of New York; George B. Post and Sons of New York; Babb, Cook & Willard of New York and Peabody & Stearns of Boston. Minutes of the Capitol Commission, 20 February 1906 through 16 July 1906, ser. 346, vol. 1 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 1-16.

<sup>13</sup> D.H. Burnham to Wisconsin State Capitol Commission, 11 July 1906, Capitol Commission General Files, ser. 833 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 5-7.

<sup>14</sup> C.A. Holst, ed., *The Wisconsin Capitol, Official Guide and History*, Fourth ed. (Madison, Wisconsin: Lathrop and Cook, 1921), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Alanen, "A Place on the Isthmus," 26.

<sup>16</sup> For more information on Nolen's planning recommendations in Madison and Wisconsin, see: Barbara Jo Long, "John Nolen: the Wisconsin Activities of an American Landscape Architectural and Planning Pioneer, 1908-1937," thesis,

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**Exterior**

Situated imposingly on the highest point of the Madison isthmus, the massive Vermont White Bethel granite structure is a distinctive silhouette in the Madison skyline. The city's main thoroughfares, as originally described in the Doty plat, approach the building at its corners and center points. The streets are interrupted by Post's eight grand facades, which are of two types and represent either the classically rendered terminus of one of the four wings or a monumental stair sheltering a carriage drive (also called a porte-cochere) beneath. The four equally sized wings are oriented to the corners of the Capitol Square, which correspond to the cardinal points of the compass. The Corinthian colonnades positioned above the formal pedestrian entrances at the end of each wing carry a traditional classical entablature and pediment, which contain sculptural figures, also in classical arrangement, conveying themes particular to Wisconsin. Each wing consists of five levels and a basement and measures 125 feet in width, 187 feet in length and 85 feet in height. Steeply pitched skylights have been located on the roofs of the wings to effectively illuminate interior spaces.

Each of the four identically designed wings of the Wisconsin Capitol consists of five floors, the design of which corresponds to the traditional use of a base, middle section and attic. A belt course separates the rusticated foundation of each wing from the sections above.<sup>17</sup> At the ground floor, six individual six-over-six windows line either side; the windows are slightly curved on top to accommodate the slight curve of the surrounding arch. A carved, decorative keystone projects above each window. The first, second and third floors comprise the middle portion of the design. The seven first-floor windows on either side of each wing are also six-over-six panes, each capped by a triangular pediment. The taller, arched second-floor windows are eight-over-seven panes. An ornamental carved relief and protruding keystone are positioned above the rounded arch of each window. Smaller pairs of rectangular windows open to the third floor. Each pair is divided by a raised pier, which separates the windows vertically. The attic level, recessed twenty feet behind a granite balustrade, is one story high. The windows on this fourth floor are of a simple two-over-two design.

The four wings meet centrally at the rounded shallow domed pavilions beneath the base of the dome. Pedestrian entrances are located at the first level, accessed by broad granite stairs. Above the Ionic colonnade and entablature of each pavilion, a granite balustrade circles the domed pavilion roofs and extends around the attic story of the wings bringing cohesion to the design. Beneath the monumental stairs, formal vehicular approaches can be accessed by drives leading to the building from Madison's principal east-west corridor and a pair of streets that traverse the isthmus north and south. To accommodate the gentle slope of the site, Post placed the building on a formal terrace encircling the entire structure with a broad balustraded walkway.

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University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1978. See also John Nolen's writings: "City Making in Wisconsin, What Must be Done to Create Healthful, Convenient and Beautiful Cities," *La Follette's Magazine* 1 (November 1909); *Madison: A Model City* (Boston: Cantwell Printing Co., 1911); *New Ideals in the Planning of Cities, Towns and Villages* (New York: American City Bureau, 1919).

<sup>17</sup> *Historic Structures Report Book IV: Wisconsin State Capitol South Wing-Southeast and Southwest Pavilions* (Madison, Wisconsin: Department of Administration, 1995), 95.

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The massive granite dome of the Wisconsin State Capitol was completed in 1915. It remains the only granite capitol dome in the United States.<sup>18</sup> Two years following its completion, it was described in an article written for the September 1917 *Architectural Forum* by Michael A. Mikkelsen.

Over the crossing of the wings rises a great dome, the crowning feature of the building. A podium wall above the small flat domes of the pavilions forms a base on which the barrel of the great dome rests. The barrel is treated as a circular Corinthian arcade, through the arched windows of which the rotunda is lighted. The podium, ninety feet above the ground, is surrounded by a balustrade. At the height of 155 feet is a balustraded balcony resting on the colonnade of the barrel. Another balustraded balcony encircles the lantern at the height of 235 feet. On the lantern is mounted a gilded bronze statue symbolic of the State of Wisconsin. . .<sup>19</sup>

The dome was built using an internal steel superstructure, with a terra cotta clay tile system. The granite blocks rest on the upper chord of the arched trusses, which are spanned with steel T-shaped members, acting as purlins. The upper ends of the trusses are riveted to a compression ring beneath the lantern and held to the tension ring at its base with pins. The inner dome, positioned well beneath the outer dome, is composed of twenty-four radial lattice ribs riveted at an elevation of 146 feet to the faces of the steel columns that rise from the foundation. The upper ends are riveted to the web of a ring plate girder, twenty-six feet and six inches in diameter, at an elevation of 180 feet. The top cord of the inner arched trusses, as with the lower chord of the outer dome trusses, is fireproofed with terra cotta clay tiles and plastered.<sup>20</sup>

### Exterior Sculptural Program

Based on the competition rendering Post had provided to the Capitol Commission in 1906, the architect had envisioned a much grander sculptural program for the exterior of the Wisconsin Capitol than was actually put into place. Reclining figures at the base of the staircases leading to the first-level pavilions and lions positioned on the balustrade of the Observation deck were included in the proposed scheme. Post had called for small tower-like structures, tourelles, to be placed at the base of the dome, the position subsequently given Karl Bitter's figural groups. Consistent with the initial proposal, sculptural groups located in the pediments of the wings and a figure surmounting the dome were included in the completed design.

#### *Pediment Sculpture*

Identical, richly detailed, triangular pediments above the colonnades at each end of the wings contain groups executed by artists Karl Bitter, Adolph Weinman and Attilio Piccirilli. The carved granite figures, positioned in classical arrangement, reinforce the Beaux-Arts scheme established by Post. They celebrate the lofty ideals to which the building is dedicated.

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<sup>18</sup> Eldon Hauck, *American Capitols: An Encyclopedia of the State, National and Territorial Capital Edifices of the United States* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1991), 280.

<sup>19</sup> Michael A. Mikkelsen, "The Wisconsin State Capitol, Madison, Wisconsin," *The Architectural Record* 42 (September 1917), 196.

<sup>20</sup> "Dome of the Wisconsin State Capitol," *Engineering News* (28 August 1913), 393.

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The West pediment houses Karl Bitter's "The Unveiling of the Resources of the State," completed in 1909. Establishing a theme repeated in the interior, the central female figure, representing the State of Wisconsin, is shown throwing back her cloak and gesturing toward the clusters of domesticated animals positioned on either side. Further represented as Wisconsin's resources, wheat, corn and forest products are included in the composition. Hunting and fishing are embodied by figures positioned in the corners. The state animal, the badger, peers down from the left corner of the group. "Liberty Supported by the Law," the group positioned in the East Wing pediment, was completed by Bitter in 1910. It is thematically appropriate to the wing housing both the State Supreme Court and the Executive Office of the Governor. "Liberty" stands centrally, a female figure holding a torch and a shield. "Justice," seated to the right, is enlightened by the glow of the torch and "Truth" to the left, is protected by the shield. The subordinate groupings represent two figures protectively carrying the Magna Carta and a mother shown instructing her family, indicating the importance of both written law and the ideal of moral character.

Adolph Weinman, a well-known German-American sculptor residing in New York, completed the work in the south pediment in 1913. Titled "The Virtues and Traits of Character," the central figure, "Wisdom" is portrayed with the attributes of equity, righteousness, power, meditation and prudence. "Wisdom" is shown as a female figure positioned in front of a mass of foliage. She holds a winged skull and mirror. Standing with "Wisdom," one male figure holds an equilateral triangle and another bears a square representing equity and righteousness. Two groups of three seated figures each are positioned in the corners of the pediment; on the left, representations of diplomacy, eloquence, and the clear vision of progress, and on the right, power, meditation and prudence. Pediment sculpture by New York artist Attilio Piccirilli was set in place close to the completion of the North Wing in 1917. The group, "Learning of the World," represents human history from the earliest time to the present day and celebrates the collective knowledge of our culture. Enlightenment is portrayed by the central figure, shown holding a tablet with the inscription "Sapientia," which means wisdom. Agricultural activity and the family, representing the foundation of society, are shown in the secondary groups on either side of the central figure. The smaller figures in the corners are intended to personify the fine arts, philosophy, geometry, physics and the sciences.

### *The Dome Statuary Groups*

Karl Bitter enjoyed a long professional relationship with Post prior to Bitter's work with the architect on the Wisconsin State Capitol. In the spring of 1909, Bitter had extensively developed his concept for the sculptural groups enabling Post to include them in an architectural drawing of the dome. Each granite group is comprised of three figures; the central standing figure elevated on a base with two seated figures behind. The triangular composition is reinforced at the base by an eagle with out-spread wings connecting the arms of the seated figures' chairs. There are two feminine statuary groups; "Faith" on the dome's southeast side and "Abundance" at the northwest position. Male figures comprise the other two figural groups; "Strength," also referred to as "Force" by the artist, to the southeast and "Wisdom" to the northeast. These groups were installed between 1911 and 1915.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> James M. Dennis, *Karl Bitter: Architectural Sculptor 1867-1915* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 140.

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*“Wisconsin”*

Preeminent American sculptor, Daniel Chester French’s gilded bronze statue “Wisconsin” is positioned atop the lantern at the summit of the massive granite dome. The figure measures fifteen feet and five inches and weighs approximately three tons. She stands with her right arm outstretched, gesturing her open hand towards Lake Monona. In her left hand, she holds an orb upon which an eagle is perched. She wears a classical chiton, covered with a cape that is gathered over her shoulders and fastened in front with an ornamental breastplate that bears an elaborately embellished “W.” Her headdress incorporates iconography symbolic of the attributes of the State. Agriculture is represented by a pair of cornucopias, ears of corn and decorative flowers; a badger, the state animal, looks over her forehead from the crown of her headpiece. Cast in six sections, the hollow bronze statue is positioned on a convex base inscribed with the words “D.C. French. Sc. 1912” and “Cast by Roman Bronze Foundry, N.Y.”<sup>22</sup>

**Interior**

The clear demarcation between public and private spaces is central to the development of Post’s scheme for the Capitol interior. The public spaces, such as the rotunda, chambers and major corridors are monumental in scale and are characterized by ornate decoration, rich materials and lavish details. The private offices, designed with the goal of making them adaptable to changing need, are constructed at a smaller and more intimate scale. The spatial hierarchy Post established was reinforced by the decorative finishes installed throughout the building by the New York firm of Mack, Jenney and Tyler. The four wings were designed similarly, yet each is specifically laid out to accommodate its particular function. The East Wing houses the Executive offices of the Governor and the Supreme Court, while the Assembly Chambers of the Wisconsin Legislature are located in the West Wing. The North and South Wings house second- and fourth-floor hearing rooms and the Wisconsin Senate, respectively.

The ground floor of the Capitol provides a hub for the eight corridors, which are positioned along the building’s primary and secondary axes, to meet and open to the soaring dome above. With the Rotunda operating as a pedestrian turnabout, the corridors provide a network of thoroughfares that extend to the eight entrances of the ground floor and ultimately to the corners and the midpoints of the Capitol Square. The long corridors, extending the lengths of the wings, are aligned with the cardinal points of the compass. The shorter pavilion corridors allow ingress and egress to the Rotunda from the four rounded pavilions, passing beneath the granite stairs that ascend to formal entrances on the first floor. Entering the Rotunda from any of the eight corridors, egress is possible from any of these same corridors that radiate from the center of the Rotunda at increments of forty-five degrees. Although Post had determined the first floor to be the principal entrance and the location of formal gatherings, the entrances provided on the ground floor have always been more widely used.

*The Rotunda*

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<sup>22</sup> C.A. Holst, ed., *The Wisconsin Capitol, Official Guide and History*, Fourth ed. (Madison, Wisconsin: Lathrop and Cook, 1921), 23.

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More than any other space in the building, the Rotunda expresses the intended symbolism of the structure. With the Rotunda's verticality culminating at the Edwin Blashfield painting, "The Resources of Wisconsin," the space was intended to be morally uplifting and inspirational in a manner that references the dome's ecclesiastical origins. Traditionally a symbol of religious expression, late nineteenth century American architects transformed the dome and its interior into one of civic celebration. The soaring rotunda of the Wisconsin State Capitol is designed to induce its citizenry to be, as individuals, among the "resources of Wisconsin." Whereas some statehouses are maintained apart from the urban fabric, the Wisconsin Capitol Rotunda functions, both literally and symbolically, as a city center and is fully utilized as a public space to which all have claim.

The Rotunda opens to a lofty coffered ceiling. Sheathed in a variety of colorful, variegated marble and stone, it rises to an interior height of nearly 200 feet as measured from the ground floor to the oculus. The drum, expressed on the interior as a cylindrical shaft above the barrel vaults and pendentives, is encircled with bands of gilded ornamentation and a Corinthian colonnade. Natural light enters the Rotunda through triple sash, nineteen-foot tall cathedral windows, hung between the columns. In the dome, the decreasing size of the coffers rising toward the central oculus contributes to the illusion of soaring height. Michael Mikkelsen described the space for *The Architectural Record* in 1917:

The Rotunda is of noble proportions, seventy-six feet in diameter and reaching 200 feet from the ground floor pavement to the crown of the coffer dome. Four great arches opening into the vaulted stair halls of the wings are supported in the rotunda on Corinthian entablatures, the friezes of which are of dark rose Numidian marble; these rest on columns and pilasters of green Tinos marble imported from Greece. Many beautiful Wisconsin granites have been used in the rotunda and stair halls, the walls of which are finished with yellow Kasota limestone from nearby quarries in Minnesota. Over the piers and between the four arches in the rotunda are pendentive brackets, which make the transition from the octagonal form of the rotunda and the circular form of the dome. Above the pendentives is a circular entablature, the cornice of which supports a visitors' gallery. . .

The pendentives are decorated with four panels of glass mosaic by Kenyon Cox. These are twelve feet high and have an average length of twenty-four feet.

In the crown of the coffer dome is a great ceiling painting, thirty-four feet in diameter, by Edwin Howland Blashfield.<sup>23</sup>

Above the coffered ceiling, which is suspended by its own structural framework, is a vast open space. Enclosed at the top by the steel superstructure that carries the exterior granite of the dome, the space between the inner and outer domes is barren, without ornamental detailing and painted a shade of industrial gray. Directly beneath the Rotunda, the circular Rotunda Basement was designed by Post to function as a restaurant, with its kitchen extending into the east wing. Although the design was implemented at a scale that is much more intimate than that of the Rotunda, the decorative program is quite elaborate and reveals Post's conception of the dining

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<sup>23</sup> Mikkelsen, "The Wisconsin State Capitol," 200, 203.

area as a public space. The marble patterns in the floor correspond to the dropped soffits of the ceilings, which frame painted canvas panels, a unifying technique used throughout the public corridors encircling the Rotunda.

*The Rotunda: Kenyon Cox Mosaics*

The four mosaics placed in the pendentives of the rotunda were installed during the summer of 1914, after having been executed in the studios of the Decorative Stained Glass Co. of New York City and shipped to Madison glued on heavy canvas. Each panel is composed of over 100,000 glass pieces, or tesserae. The mosaics depict the branches of government located in the Capitol. "Legislation," "Government" and "Justice" are represented as monumental figures clad in the robes of the ancients, surrounded by attributes consistent with their identities. The figure "Liberty" is dressed in a robe, the colors of which symbolized "youth" and "hope" to the artist. In describing her countenance, Cox wrote, "With her left hand, she points upward, as if to say, 'Under a republican form of government, the voice of the people is as the voice of God.'"<sup>24</sup>

Cox was on hand for much of the installation, which was undertaken by artisans from the Decorative Stained Glass Co. amid concerns about the company's financial solvency.<sup>25</sup> Kenyon Cox, a theoretician as well as a practicing artist, had published books and articles upholding the use of Renaissance form in art and architecture. He described the thematic content of the mosaics.

The ornamental parts of the scheme are alike in all four pendentives. Each pendentive has a colossal seated figure on a gold background, surrounded by a circular border based on the fasces with its reeds and crossed ribbons. On either side of this central circle is a panel of oak foliage and the whole panel is surrounded with a simple guilloche border in gold and purple. . .

Legislation is represented by a powerful old man with a long beard, reminiscent of the accepted type of Moses, the first lawgiver. . .

Government, the executive power, is a man in the vigor of his age armed and holding a leading staff in his right hand. His left hand rests upon a great sword, sheathed and bound, only to be drawn in cases of necessity. . .

Justice is represented in the purely judicial function of weighing the one cause against the other, the sword of punishment being left to the executive arm of the government. Seated upon a lion throne, she looks forward in an abstracted mood, while with either hand she tests the weights in the scales of balance which is let down from heaven. . . While the attitude chosen for the figure is unusual, it is not

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<sup>24</sup> Kenyon Cox to Lew F. Porter, 12 February 1914, Capitol Commission General Files, ser. 833 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

<sup>25</sup> Kenyon Cox to Lew Porter, 8 May 1914, Capitol Commission General Files, ser. 833 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin); Lew Porter to Kenyon Cox, 24 October 1914, Capitol Commission General Files, ser. 833 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

without precedent, the hint for it having been taken from a fresco by Giotto in the Arena Chapel in Padua.<sup>26</sup>

*Rotunda Artwork: "The Resources of Wisconsin"*

Like sculptor Karl Bitter, New York muralist Edwin Blashfield had also enjoyed a long artistic association with George Post that extended back to Blashfield's work with the architect at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. Blashfield had completed murals for Post's Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building and for other buildings thereafter, including the Bank of Pittsburgh (1895) and the Great Hall of the City College of New York (1903-07). Blashfield had just finished a large mural for the Assembly Chamber of the Wisconsin State Capitol, "Wisconsin, Past, Present and Future," when the discussion concerning the commission for the mural in the "eye of the dome" was initiated by Post. Post contacted Lew Porter of the Capitol Commission on October 28, 1911 to indicate he felt all consideration should be given Blashfield.<sup>27</sup>

The circular painting, thirty-four feet and five inches in diameter, was executed in sections of irregularly sized canvas in the Vanderbilt Gallery of the Fine Arts Building on Fifty-Seventh Street in New York City.<sup>28</sup> A.E. Foringer and Vincent Anderente, whose names appear on the canvas, assisted Blashfield in his work. The composition depicts a sturdy looking female figure surrounded by other women positioned in various states of repose. "Wisconsin," centrally enthroned, is dressed in a white gown adorned with a metallic breastplate suspended from her red hood. In her left hand she holds an escutcheon depicting the state coat of arms, and in the other hand bears a sheaf of wheat. At her back, an adolescent girl huddles against her protective girth and, with a companion, drapes an American flag to partially cover the ten other figures. With outstretched hands, the secondary figures proudly offer up to "Wisconsin" the products of the state, described by Blashfield as including "lead, copper, tobacco, fruit, a fresh water pearl," etc.<sup>29</sup>

In keeping with the Renaissance-revival style of the building, Blashfield used a formula in designing his circular painting, or tondo, that was inspired by the High Renaissance muralists Botticelli and Raphael. In a 1914 book written by Kenyon Cox,<sup>30</sup> the artist and author asserted the device of using the dominant figure to mark the central axis of a room as being typical in the work of these Italian masters. Located in the Rotunda, a space where the central axis is fully ambiguous, the "Resources of Wisconsin" assumes an orientation that is not aligned with any of the cardinal points of the circular room, but instead establishes its axis with the southeast/northwest entrances. Consistent with the southeast orientation of Daniel Chester

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<sup>26</sup> Cox to Porter, 12 February 1914.

<sup>27</sup> George B. Post & Sons to Lew F. Porter, 28 October 1911, Capitol Commission General Files, ser. 833 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

<sup>28</sup> George B. Post & Sons to George H.D. Johnson, 22 August 1912, Capitol Commission General Files, ser. 833 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

<sup>29</sup> Edwin Howland Blashfield to Lew F. Porter, 12 February 1914, Capitol Commission General Files, ser. 833 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

<sup>30</sup> Kenyon Cox, *Artist and Public and Other Essays on Art Subjects* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1914), 112-13.

French's "Wisconsin" atop the dome, the painting signals Post's intention that the Monona Avenue (now Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.) façade be the building's primary entrance.<sup>31</sup>

## **The Design and Appointment of the Interior Spaces**

### *General Description*

From the central Rotunda, barrel vaults extend into the four wings. The corridors, meeting rooms and private offices are arranged implementing a hierarchy of space conveyed through proportional spatial arrangement, use of materials and level of decorative finish. The primary corridors are typically finished in marble with coved plaster ceilings. Even the smallest offices are finished with wood trim and ornamental stencil-work. Elegantly appointed public and semi-public spaces are located in the wings to house the various branches of state government. Second to the rotunda, the most opulently detailed spaces are the chambers and meeting rooms devoted to the Supreme Court, Executive offices, the Senate and the Assembly.

### *The West Wing*

Work on the West Wing, the first portion of the Capitol to be constructed, began in 1906 and was completed in 1909. The Assembly Chamber on the second floor is the most elaborately treated space in the wing. Covering nearly 5000 square feet, the room is enclosed by forty-one foot ceilings pierced by an immense leaded glass skylight. Flat elliptical arches ornament each of the four walls, which are lined with South Dover marble, separated from one another by pendentives with centrally positioned tondos. The Speaker's platform dominates the north end of the room, situated between elevated voting boards.<sup>32</sup> Legislative members' desks are arranged in rows facing the Speaker's platform. Behind the dais and desk, a monumental mural by Edwin Blashfield covers approximately 625 square feet of the north wall and is framed within the ellipse of the arch. Titled "Wisconsin, Past, Present and Future" the epic painting portrays the State's past, present and future using symbolic figures and depictions of significant events from Wisconsin history. "Wisconsin, Past Present and Future" is central to the larger decorative scheme that includes eighteen smaller murals by Blashfield.

Visitors' observation galleries are recessed under elliptical arches on the west, east and south walls. The east wall frames the principal entrance to the room, which opens to an entrance lobby sheathed in decorative stones including Royal Tennessee, Botticino and Sienna marbles. Adjacent to the Chamber, the Assembly Parlor is a long rectangular room appointed with Circassian walnut paneling. The interior scheme for the Assembly Chamber and Parlor, devised by Elmer Garnsey, includes fireplaces with elaborate mantles of Sienna marble located at each end of the Parlor.

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<sup>31</sup> James Otis Post to Lew F. Porter, 23 June 1914, Capitol Commission General Files, ser. 833 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

<sup>32</sup> What has been reported as the world's first electric voting machine was installed in the east gallery of the Assembly Chamber in 1917. Two voting boards positioned in the front of the room replaced the earlier system in 1939. These boards remain extant in the chamber, although their mechanical equipment over the years has been updated to accommodate computer technologies. For a more detailed description, see *Wisconsin State Capitol Guide and History*, (Madison, Wisconsin: Department of Administration, State of Wisconsin, 1991), 39.

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*The East Wing*

The principal spaces of the East Wing, constructed between 1908 and 1910, house the Supreme Court and the offices of the Governor. The Supreme Court Hearing Room, on the second floor, is close to square in plan, measuring forty-two by forty-three feet. A large skylight over the center of the room provides a source of natural sunlight. The walls are covered with Italian Botticino marble inset with sections of Formosa marble from Germany and pilasters of Italian Coraline marble. The carved columns on the wall behind the judges' mahogany dais are French Benou marble. The original mahogany and leather tables and chairs remain placed throughout the room in a manner consistent with Post's original interior design scheme.

Muralist Albert Herter painted the four murals located in the Supreme Court, the colors of which were carefully matched to the decorative stone in the room. The Supreme Court Justices, following lengthy debate, determined the thematic content of the paintings to represent law as practiced in different periods of western history. Prominently situated above the justices' bench on the west wall, "The Signing of the American Constitution" depicts the 1787 event with a small degree of artistic license. This mural includes Thomas Jefferson, who was residing in Paris at the time of the signing. "The Signing of the Magna Carta," on the north wall, portrays the revolt against the English monarchy that occurred in 1512. The painting on the east wall, "The Appeal of the Legionary to Caesar Augustus," takes its theme from ancient Roman law. Drawing on Wisconsin history, "The Trial of Chief Oshkosh by Judge Doty," portrays an episode that occurred in 1830 when Doty, one of the first prominent white residents of the territory,<sup>33</sup> sat as judge in the murder trial of an equally prominent native American resident, Chief Oshkosh. Thematically, the painting expresses the importance of the spirit of the law over the letter of the law in its depiction of the Chief who, by demonstrating that his behavior was consistent with tribal rules, was cleared of wrong doing. The justices' oak lined chambers and conference room are situated in close proximity, contiguous to the Court chamber. The State Law Library is directly above the Hearing Room and chambers on the third floor.

Within the Governor's suite of offices, the Governor's Reception Room is clearly one of the most elaborately conceived rooms in the Capitol. The walls are lined with cherry wood paneling, and the floors are constructed of teak parquet. The work of Elmer Garnsey, who also developed the decorative scheme for the Assembly Chamber and Parlor, the room was designed in the style of the Venetian Renaissance, inspired by the council chamber in the Doge's Palace in Venice. The fourteen recessed ceiling murals, framed in gilded plaster, show events from Wisconsin's past interspersed with progressively minded mottoes. Hugo Ballin was commissioned to provide the paintings for the ceiling and walls.

Ballin's most prominent work in the Executive Chamber, the round mural centered in the ceiling, represents "Wisconsin Surrounded by her Attributes, Beauty, Strength, Patriotism, Labor, Commerce, Agriculture and Horticulture." A handsome young woman enthroned with a halo symbolizes the beauty of the state. Surrounded by the symbols of Wisconsin's attributes, she commands the center of the mural. Two mottoes are inscribed on panels and positioned next to the circular painting; they proclaim "The Will of the People is the Law of the Land" and "The

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<sup>33</sup> The figure depicted in "The Trial of Chief Oshkosh by Judge Doty" is the same James Duane Doty who promoted Wisconsin for Statehood as a member of the Michigan Territorial Legislature and held a speculative interest in the designation of Madison as the capital of the Wisconsin Territory.

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Progress of a State is born in Temperance, Justice and Prudence.” A third panel depicts the Latin phrase “Tempus Edax Rerum,” which translates as “Time the devourer of all things.” Other smaller panels provide representations of Pioneering, Invention, Charity, Religious Tolerance, Art and Justice.

The wall murals illustrate significant figures and events from Wisconsin history. Representing Wisconsin’s involvement in the Civil War, four figures are shown with an allegorical representation of “Unity.” A representation of explorer Jean Nicolet as the first white person in Wisconsin is to the left of the entrance. The end of the Winnebago War is depicted and two portraits, located on the east wall, show U.S. Weather Bureau founder, Increase Allen Lapham, and Civil War hero, Colonel Joseph Bailey. The east wall also carries depictions of the Wisconsin territorial capitol at Belmont and the building that was the immediate precursor to the contemporary capitol that was also located on the Square.

### *The South Wing*

The third wing to be constructed, the South Wing of the Wisconsin State Capitol was completed between 1910 and 1913. This wing is dedicated to the Wisconsin State Senate, whose facilities include the second-floor Chamber and the adjoining Senate Parlor. The Chamber is an impressive circular room, measuring thirty-one feet in diameter by approximately thirty-one feet high. The three-story ceiling is dominated by an exquisite circular stained glass skylight that permits natural light to enter the room. The walls are sheathed with a creamy yellow Tavernelle Italian marble. The pilasters and columns that surround the circular space are made of French Escalette marble. The visitors’ gallery, located at the second level, surrounds three-quarters of the Senate Chamber.

Kenyon Cox, who created the mosaics for the Rotunda, also painted the three large murals in the Senate Chamber. Each painting is over eleven feet tall and more than seven feet wide. Entitled “The Marriage of the Atlantic and Pacific” the three murals form one unified composition, with each canvas separated from the next by marble columns. Taken as a whole, the murals symbolize the opening of the Panama Canal. The Senate President’s dais is placed at the base of these murals and is flanked by two doorways capped by triangular entablatures. The Senators’ desks are arranged in a horseshoe shape with its opening facing the President’s chair. Adjacent to the Senate Chamber is the Senate Parlor; a rectangular room renowned for its sumptuous mahogany wall paneling. Mantels and plinths adorning the room are carved of Greek marble.

### *The North Wing*

Built between 1914 and 1917, the North Wing was the final wing to be constructed and originally housed the offices of the State Library and Railroad Commission. The principal second-floor space, corresponding to the dominant chambers of the other wings, was designed as a large Hearing Room intended to accommodate the state Railroad Commission and to provide additional large meeting space.<sup>34</sup> The room was executed in a color scheme dominated by yellow Verona and Monte Rente Sienna marbles, which are positioned on the walls between pilasters that frame the panels. An Italian marble, colored black and flecked with gold, delineates the base

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<sup>34</sup> C.A. Holst, ed., *The Wisconsin Capitol, Official Guide and History*, Fourth ed. (Madison, Wisconsin: Lathrop and Cook, 1921), 45.

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of the wall and is also in place as a floor border. The deep coves at the edges of the ceiling hold paintings completed by Charles Turner of New York. The compositions, installed on the concave surfaces, depict the evolution of transportation in Wisconsin. The series of four works are entitled: "Indians Striking the Trail," "A Lake Trading Station," "The Stagecoach," and "A Modern Transportation System." The warm tones used in the paintings were intended to be harmonious with the colors of the stone used to sheath the room.

On the fourth floor of the North Wing, the Capitol was originally furnished with the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) Civil War Museum. Lew Porter designed an exhibit area for Civil War memorabilia, which had been housed in the previous Capitol, for this building. The room has a barrel-vaulted ceiling and is lit by natural light entering through a skylight. As originally designed, painted murals depicting Wisconsin's involvement in the Civil War and pictures of the branches of the military adorn the ceiling. With the establishment of the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum across the street from the Capitol, the collections were relocated and the space currently functions as a Hearing Room.

### **The Master Plan and the Restoration and Rehabilitation of the Capitol**

Since its completion in 1917, the Capitol has undergone an ongoing series of alterations. Fortunately, the constant evolution of a public building was something that the Capitol's forward-looking designer recognized and accommodated. In fact, flexibility in the face of changing future needs was a competition criterion for the original design. The Competition Program states in Section IX that:

The building as provided for in this program is of adequate size only for the present departments of the government and it should be so designed that additions, when necessary to supply future needs, may be made to it without destroying its usefulness or architectural appearance.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, the Wisconsin State Capitol has been unusually adaptive as government in Wisconsin has grown and changed. Several remodeling projects were undertaken to accommodate legislative and technological demands and the assertion of personal tastes has always been a factor. These projects were facilitated by the nonstructural clay tile system Post had used to establish the interior office spaces. This system allowed for convenient addition and removal of walls in response to the needs of building occupants.<sup>36</sup>

Due to modifications in legislative and administrative requirements, the Capitol underwent several distinct phases of remodeling and renovation. In the 1950s, many original departments had relocated off-site and state legislators moved into the building with their staffs. Remodeling followed. By 1964, a major remodeling project commenced in the South, East and West Wings.<sup>37</sup> The energy crisis of the 1970s spurred another round of renovations intended to

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<sup>35</sup> Capitol Commission Competition Program, 10 March 1906, ser. 833 (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

<sup>36</sup> *Historic Structure Report Book V: Wisconsin State Capitol Central Portion-Dome and Rotunda* (Madison, Wisconsin: Department of Administration, 1997), I-9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* The *Historic Structures Report* provides a detailed description of remodeling completed in the Capitol since

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increase energy efficiency. Although well meaning, these projects frequently compromised the historical integrity of the Capitol's original design. For instance, window air conditioners, dropped ceilings, fluorescent lighting and covered skylights concealed or replaced the decorative elements in many of the office spaces.<sup>38</sup> There was no over-arching plan to this constant adaptation. However, most of the changes were limited to the private spaces of the Capitol and the public and semi-public spaces were left intact, ensuring the general character of the Capitol. By the late 1970s, much of the Capitol's communications, electrical and heating/cooling systems were largely out-dated. Significant and organized change was required to ensure the Capitol's viability as a functional public building into the twenty-first century.

Planning began with an effort in the early 1980s to remove elements of previous renovations that were not compatible with the historic plan of the Capitol. As these efforts evolved, the Department of Administration formulated the *State Capitol Restoration Guidelines* in the late 1980s.<sup>39</sup> This document discussed potential space use, interior and exterior architectural considerations and made recommendations for further study of the mechanical/electrical systems. In addition, the *Guidelines* advocated the preservation of the public spaces as providing the scale, spatial sequence, architectural detailing and symbolism frequently associated with the Beaux-Arts style.<sup>40</sup> This document offered a general delineation between the public and private spaces, however the *State Capitol Restoration Guidelines* did not provide a detailed plan for comprehensive rehabilitation of the Capitol.

In 1987, the Joint Committee on Legislative Organization ratified the *Capitol Master Plan* as an intended blueprint for sympathetic restoration of the building. This working plan established objectives for the Capitol restoration that would ensure state government could "perform efficiently and effectively while preserving Wisconsin's premier architectural and historical structure."<sup>41</sup> It called for rehabilitation and restoration work to be completed in sequential phases that accommodated continued governmental functioning. This work was to include reallocating office space as required, restoring the public spaces, updating mechanical communications and electrical systems to modern standards, providing air-conditioning and preserving or restoring the artwork and decorative finishes throughout the Capitol. The ultimate goal of the *Master Plan* was to ensure that the Capitol remain a working public building, while maintaining its architectural integrity. The stated intent has been to balance the needs of a significant historic structure with those of a modern functioning seat of government.

The task of restoration and rehabilitation has been undertaken with energy and commitment. As prescribed in the *Capitol Master Plan*, the project was divided into phases, each phase focusing either on one of the Wings or the Central Portion. The process began in 1990 with the treatment of the North Wing (1990-92), followed by the West Wing (1993-95), the South Wing (1996-98), the Central Portion (1997-98) and, finally, the East Wing (1998-2001). A team approach was

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its construction.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., I-10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

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implemented that allowed participation by numerous firms, contractors and state employees, each committed to adhering to George Post's original design intent. The team believed each facet of the building required architectural and historic analysis so that the restoration and rehabilitation process could be undertaken accurately and efficiently. The team implemented a widely used preservation methodology incorporating comprehensive survey, documentation, research and analysis. Prior to each phase, systematic surveys were completed to record the building's existing conditions in detail. Historical research focused on gathering archival source material documenting the Capitol's original design and construction and subsequent alterations. The information gathered during survey and research then informed a Preservation Plan, which was prepared for each area of the building. The plan identified a hierarchy of recommended preservation treatment for the Capitol. Preserving the important artistic and architectural features to every degree possible has been an over-riding priority.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally:  x  Statewide:   Locally:  

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A  x  B   C  x  D  

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A   B   C   D   E   F   G  

NHL Criteria: 4

NHL Criteria Exclusions:

NHL Theme(s): III. Expressing Cultural Values  
5. architecture, landscape architecture and urban design.Areas of Significance: Architecture  
Politics/Government

Period(s) of Significance: 1906 –1917

Significant Dates: 1906, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1915, 1917

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder: Post, George Browne – architect  
Post, William Stone – architect  
Post, James Otis – architect  
Porter, Lew – Superintendent of Construction for the Capitol Commission  
Nolen, John – landscape architect  
Garnsey, Elmer – interior decorator  
Mack, Jenney, and Tyler Co. – decorative painters  
Blashfield, Edwin Howland – muralist  
Ballin, Hugo – muralist  
Cox, Kenyon – mosaic artist and muralist  
Herter, Albert – muralist  
Bitter, Karl – sculptor  
French, Daniel Chester – sculptor  
Mears, Helen Farnsworth – sculptor  
Piccirilli, Attilio – sculptor  
Weinman, Adolph – sculptor.

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Historic Contexts:

- XVI: Architecture
- M. Period Revivals
- 6. Beaux Arts

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**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.****Summary**

The Wisconsin State Capitol is nationally significant as an excellent example of Renaissance Revival architecture, as interpreted through American Beaux-Arts sensibilities. The building also has association with a political movement that had a profound impact on national politics in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Reflecting the aesthetic of an era spanning from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century, the building is a premier example of the American Beaux-Arts and also represents a national movement to construct monumental state capitols patterned after the National Capitol in Washington.<sup>42</sup> As with the finest examples of governmental buildings of this type, the vocabulary of form was derived from buildings of the Renaissance and Baroque periods of European architecture, yet the classically derived iconography of the Wisconsin State Capitol has been given regional theme. Classical wreaths and garlands of oak leaves provide a prominent motif in the corridors and a celebration of the bounty of mining, agriculture and Wisconsin's waterways is depicted in the murals and sculptural program. The Capitol is a seminal and highly intact example of the architectural values that underpin the American Beaux-Arts tradition. The high level of architectural integrity that has been both maintained in, and restored to, the Wisconsin State Capitol since its completion in 1917 makes it a particularly valuable resource. Symbolically, the Wisconsin State Capitol conveys a cultural exuberance and trust in government that has roots in the Progressive political movement that was spearheaded by the La Follettes at the time of the building's conception.

In 1906, Wisconsin Governor Robert M. La Follette, Sr. established the Capitol Commission, the body that oversaw the construction of the building. Although La Follette's six-year tenure as State Governor ended that same year, with his election to the United States Senate, his political influence and that of his sons was in ascendance in both national and state arenas. The Wisconsin State Capitol stands as part of the legacy of Robert M. La Follette, Sr. and gives articulation to the principles of the Progressive ideology he developed and which are expressed in the cultural history of the building.

**Architectural Significance***Introduction*

The Wisconsin State Capitol, designed by George B. Post and Sons, represents a showcase of the work of the era's most prominent sculptors, painters and decorative finish practitioners. Post assembled a group of mature and accomplished artists, many of whom he had worked with previously on similar civic-scaled Beaux-Arts projects. The level of integration Post achieved in this well conceived and handsomely executed design results in the Wisconsin State Capitol being a seminal example of the Beaux-Arts tradition in American public architecture. It also serves as a fitting capstone to the career of architect George Post, who did not live to see the building

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<sup>42</sup> *Historic Structures Report Book V: Wisconsin State Capitol, Central Portion- Dome and Rotunda* (Madison, Wisconsin: Department of Administration, State of Wisconsin, 1997), 3/24-32.

completed. Although the finishes were being installed in the Wisconsin State Capitol during the closing days of the popularity enjoyed by this style, the building emerged pre-eminent as an example of Renaissance Revival style, as adapted by American architects early in the twentieth century.

### *Historic Background*

American architecture of the mid-nineteenth century was wrought with eclectic experimentation.<sup>43</sup> Although the century began with an interest in the interpretation of Greek and Roman classicism, in which reticence and simplicity were dominant, the Victorian era gave way to a widespread use of picturesque styles that included Second Empire, Gothic and Romanesque. The resurgence of a Renaissance inspired classicism towards the end of the nineteenth century reflected part of a larger effort to bring order to both the design of the individual building and the larger urban environment. The academic classicism of the late nineteenth century was expressed in a variety of styles, ranging from various Colonial Revivals (based on an earlier, more restrained classicism), Renaissance Revival and an American adaptation of the French Neo-grec. Stylistic preferences were deeply influenced by the aesthetic and educational philosophy of France's national school for advanced training in the arts, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, located in Paris.

The Ecole was an influential training ground for many prominent American architects.<sup>44</sup> With formal academic training in architecture not available in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century, serious young Americans aspiring to the profession were required to study abroad.<sup>45</sup> Several notable American architects trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the first being Richard Morris Hunt, who was formally accepted on December 11, 1846.<sup>46</sup> An even more significant number of Americans went to France to work and study as apprentices in the ateliers, or studios, of French architects who were graduates of the Ecole. With the return to the United States of architects trained at the Ecole or in the French studios established using Beaux-Arts methods, architectural practices established in the United States reflected this training and the associate stylistic predilections of the French academy.

### *George Browne Post -- Architect*

George Browne Post (1837-1914) was among the first Americans to be influenced by Beaux-Arts method while remaining on native soil. Employed in the atelier-like setting of Hunt's New York City office, Post represents a member of the second generation of American designers to integrate the French manner of design, including the preference for axial planning and symmetry in their work. Post's period of development occurred during a time in which the picturesque

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<sup>43</sup> For an excellent recently published overview of American architectural history, see Mark Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University of New England Press, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> James Phillip Noffsinger, *The Influence of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts on the Architects of the United States* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Paul R. Baker, *Richard Morris Hunt* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 26-44.

qualities of Gothic and other styles were enjoying a renewed interest and application in Europe and the United States. The general academic attitude supported the use of ornament, often drawn from assorted stylistic periods, on buildings that were becoming increasingly standardized through industrialization. By the final quarter of the nineteenth century, engineers became more prominent in the design process as the structural requirements associated with steel construction determined certain rhythms and patterns in organizing a building's plan and facades. The accomplished architect of the late Victorian era was a master of stylistic effect and his role, as generally accepted, was to provide ornament within the accepted perimeters of "good taste."

In addition to having worked in Hunt's New York office from 1858 to 1860, Post was formally trained in civil engineering. Post established an independent practice in 1860, which was interrupted by military service for several months in 1867 and re-established in 1868.<sup>47</sup> Post stayed abreast of architectural trends and was consistent with his American peers in working within a variety of styles through the 1870s and 1880s. Until the mid-1880s, Post's work is characterized by an accomplished eclectic attitude, in which he displays similar ease working in a Romanesque, Second Empire or Gothic idiom. By the 1890s, Post's reputation was solidly intact and his practice firmly established. When tastes shifted towards the use of Renaissance Revival during the closing decade of the nineteenth century, he represented a major leader in the movement towards applying traditional proportional arrangement to a cityscape defined by an effervescent classicism.<sup>48</sup> Following the turn of the century, Post's contributions to the profession were acknowledged by the many appointments and awards he received both in the United States and Europe.<sup>49</sup> In 1904, Post changed the name of his firm from George B. Post to George B. Post and Sons, to acknowledge the inclusion of his sons in his practice.<sup>50</sup>

Post's contribution to the development of the tall office building, which many consider the crowning accomplishment of nineteenth century architecture, represents one of the more significant aspects of his career.<sup>51</sup> At two separate times, Post designed buildings that dominated

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<sup>47</sup> Sarah Bradford Landau, *George B. Post, Architect, Picturesque Designer and Determined Realist* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), 12.

<sup>48</sup> Landau re-evaluated Post's career in her 1998 publication, offering an analysis in which Post arrives as a designer nearly on par with his mentor, Richard Morris Hunt, and his contemporaries McKim, Mead and White. She contends that his contribution as a member of a group that shaped late nineteenth century taste (in establishing the architectural nomenclature adapted by East Coast tastemakers and the corporate and civic entities they supported) had been understated.

<sup>49</sup> Landau enumerates the honors bequeathed upon Post just following the turn of the century. See Landau, *George B. Post*, 163-165. Included in this impressive list: Post was awarded a silver medal at the Paris Exposition (1900), served as a Director of the Municipal Art Society of New York (1901-1909), was decorated a chevalier of the French Legion of Honor (1901), was named by the governor of New York state to the Board of Commissions for the St. Louis Exposition (1902), served as President of the New York Chapter of the AIA (1904), represented the United States at the World's Congress of Architects held in London (1906), was appointed to be an honorary corresponding member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1907), was elected to be an Associate of the National Academy of Design (1907), was named an Academician of the National Academy (1908), was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws by Columbia University (1908), was made a member of the permanent committee of the International Congress of Architects (1908), was appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt to the Bureau of Fine Arts (1909), was awarded the AIA's Gold Medal (1911).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>51</sup> W. Weisman, "Commercial Architecture of George B. Post," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 31 (October 1972), 176-203.

the New York City skyline. The twenty-story Pulitzer Building (1889-90), also known as the World Building, and the twenty-six-story St. Paul Building (1897-99) rose above all the other buildings of America's largest city, one at the close of each of two consecutive decades. Through Hunt, Post had cultivated an appreciation of classical planning and proportion that informed his work as a designer of all building types, including New York's early skyscrapers. Drawing on his engineering skills and his mastery with a variety of stylistic effects, Post attained prominence for the picturesque results he frequently attained externally and the order he applied internally. Following several decades, in which eclecticism and picturesque tastes dominated, by the 1890s, contemporaneous French taste took tight hold of American architectural sensibilities, and the prominent stylistic genre, especially for public buildings, was an exuberant form of Renaissance Revival. This attitude also influenced growing trends in urban planning. A studied use of the European Renaissance prototype, implemented within the strictures of a prescribed system of classical proportion, became the dominant method of designing and planning large governmental and other institutional buildings in America around the turn of the century.

### *The Columbian Exposition (1893)*

The Columbian Exposition, which took place in Chicago in 1893, was an important showcase for the late 19<sup>th</sup> century American Beaux-Arts aesthetic. The event had profound effect in disseminating Beaux-Arts ideals relative to architecture and city planning throughout the United States, having particular effect in the Midwest. Organized by nationally esteemed Chicago architect and planner, Daniel Burnham, and a committee that included Post and other prominent East Coast architects, the Exposition's "Great White City" profoundly influenced American architecture and urban planning well into the early twentieth century.<sup>52</sup> George Post's contribution to the Columbian Exposition, the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, the largest building at the fair and situated on the principal lagoon, positioned him as a leading practitioner of American Beaux-Arts design.<sup>53</sup> The Columbian Exposition fueled the vision and provided impetus to the progressive City Beautiful movement that swept the nation. As demonstrated at the Chicago Fair, the buildings of the Exposition drew from classical traditions and were conceived to form harmonized groups.<sup>54</sup> The desire to bring unity to an urban environment through the careful assimilation of architecture, within a space planned to include axial vistas and an underlying geometric order became widespread throughout the country following 1893.

### *The New York Stock Exchange (1899-1903) (NHL, 1978)*

Post's facility in working within the more classical Renaissance Revival style was demonstrated through his work in a number of buildings he designed following the Columbian Exposition. While the Wisconsin State Capitol epitomizes the culmination of his work in this stylistic mode, the New York Stock Exchange (constructed between 1901-1903) represents an important

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<sup>52</sup> Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 152.

<sup>53</sup> At the time, proclaimed as the "largest structure on earth," the building was reportedly 1,687 by 787 feet with an area of 30.5 acres. See "World's Columbian Exposition, Erection of the Manufactures Building," *Engineering News* (July 28, 1892).

<sup>54</sup> Leland M. Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc: 1980), 214.

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precursor and a building of comparable merit. The nine-story Broad Street façade is dominated by a Renaissance Revival fluted Corinthian colonnade beneath a pediment that has been completed with allegorical sculpture, “Integrity Protecting the Works of Man,” by Getulio Piccirilli. Contemporary critic Montgomery Schuyler lauded the Exchange for a “lay out’ which recognizes the requirements according to their relative importance.”<sup>55</sup> The Trading Floor represents the principal space in the building, being the largest and most decorously appointed. The ceiling is seventy-two feet above the floor and is completed with a vast skylight; the multiple story windows positioned between each of the columns of the exterior Broad Street colonnade further illuminate the room, which features observation galleries and decoratively gilded 115-foot long steel trusses. Rooms designed in support of this space include the seventh-floor Luncheon Club and the sixth-floor Bond Room, now “Board Room.” All of the detailing in the Bond Room, including the design of the leather-upholstered mahogany chairs, is attributed to Post.<sup>56</sup>

*“America’s Grandest Monument” (1899)*

Post’s rendering for an unrealized “museum of living history,” intended to be on the same scale as the Kensington Museum in England, represents another very important prototype to the Wisconsin State Capitol.<sup>57</sup> Announced publicly just weeks before the competition results for the New York Stock Exchange were presented, on November 12, 1899, the *New York Press* featured the news item, “Immense Museum Designed for New York.” The article was illustrated by a rendering that offered a design for the building by Post.<sup>58</sup> Post’s scheme was for an idealized Renaissance Revival domed structure to be built on the upper-west side of Manhattan, where it would overlook the Hudson River from a 9.5 acre site.<sup>59</sup> The scheme for the museum provides an uninhibited expression of the architect’s own version of civic monumentality and presents many ideas that will be later seen in the design for the Wisconsin State Capitol.<sup>60</sup> Cruciform in plan, the general layout is similar to the Wisconsin Capitol, with four equal wings projecting from the central rotunda. Externally, the wings are tied together by large quarter-circle colonnades that extend to nearly the porches of the porticoed fronts. The sculptural program Post advocated for the museum is reminiscent of buildings of the European High Baroque, completed 200 years earlier, but more specifically evokes the sculptural program for the Cathedral of St. Isaac’s (1842), completed just over a half century earlier and located in St. Petersburg, Russia. Designed by the French architect, August Ricard Montferrand, St. Isaac’s was known to American architects of the late nineteenth century through publications and is significant for the

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<sup>55</sup> Montgomery Schuyler, “The New York Stock Exchange,” *Architectural Record* 12 (September 1901): 413-14.

<sup>56</sup> Landau, *George B. Post*, 129.

<sup>57</sup> *Historic Structures Report Book V: Wisconsin State Capitol Central Portion-Dome and Rotunda* (Madison, Wisconsin: Department of Administration, 1997), III-30.

<sup>58</sup> “Immense Museum Designed for New York,” *New York Press*, November 12, 1899. See Landau, *George B. Post*, 116-117.

<sup>59</sup> Landau, *George B. Post*, 117.

<sup>60</sup> *Historic Structures Report Book V*, III-30. A photograph of the rendering held in the George B. Post Collection is in the Archives of the New York Historical Society. It has been annotated (presumably by Post), “America’s Greatest Monument, A Building designed to be a Living Encyclopedia of the World’s Progress, which its projector confidently believes will soon raise its wall above the banks of the Hudson.”

influence it had on Thomas U. Walter's design for the cast iron dome of the National Capitol in Washington D.C.<sup>61</sup>

*Wisconsin State Capitol (1906-1917)*

Post's Museum Project of 1899 provided a direct stylistic precursor to the Capitol. In this design Post created a vision, which was largely implemented in the design for Wisconsin. Post shifted the layout of the design for the Capitol by forty-five degrees to accommodate the Capitol Commission's call for a plan in the form of a St. Andrew's Cross<sup>62</sup> and significantly scaled back the large circular colonnade. He simplified the dome and eliminated the sculptural figures, to be positioned behind the roofline balustrade, that were so prominent in the Museum Project. As one of the final undertakings of the architect's career, the commission for the Wisconsin State Capitol provided Post with an opportunity to fully orchestrate and implement his own highly developed Beaux-Arts vision, in full blown Renaissance Revival form, and create for Wisconsin its own "temple of democracy."<sup>63</sup>

In Madison, Post was extended the opportunity of creating a monumental structure within a setting that already exhibited some of the City Planning ideals promulgated following the Columbian Exposition. Laid out in 1848 as a paper village, James Duane Doty's speculative scheme was constructed largely as it had been conceived. Designed to imitate the plan for Washington, D.C., as had been established by Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant in 1792, Post had the good fortune of starting with a site, the prominence of which had been firmly established within the city scheme. Conceived to reflect the Baroque principles employed by L'Enfant in his layout of Washington, D.C., all of the principle streets emanate from the corners and centers of the Capitol Square, with secondary streets encircling it. Doty's insight in the original plat of designating a hilltop between two lakes as the site for future public buildings, prominent within a daring radiating plan, was a masterful gesture for this frontier judge and land speculator.

The influence of the National Capitol in Washington played a significant role, which was clearly evident in all three of the buildings that have occupied this site.<sup>64</sup> The first, a Territorial Capitol (1837-1845), was patterned after the first portion of the National Capitol designed by Dr. William Thornton and completed in 1824 through the additional efforts of Benjamin Latrobe and Charles Bulfinch. The second building, designed as the Wisconsin State Capitol and reflecting the efforts of two local architects of some renown,<sup>65</sup> was a massive stone building with large rounded porticos and tall arched windows. Construction was halted when disagreement ensued over the design of the dome and it was redesigned in cast iron to replicate the dome then recently

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., III-18.

<sup>62</sup> St. Andrew's Cross plan refers to a Greek Cross plan, tilted to 45 degrees, so named because of the manner in which St. Andrew had been martyred. See Ibid., III- 31.

<sup>63</sup>The term "temple of democracy" was popularized by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale in their 1976 publication on the state capitols entitled *Temples of Democracy: the State Capitols of the U.S.A.*

<sup>64</sup> Stanley H. Cravens, "Capitals and Capitols in Early Wisconsin," *1983-1984 Bluebook* (Madison, Wisconsin: Legislative Reference Bureau, 1983).

<sup>65</sup> The local Madison firm of Kutzbock and Donnell was hired to design the Wisconsin Capitol in 1859. See Ibid., 137-41.

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completed at the National Capitol in Washington.<sup>66</sup> From the end of the Civil War, the dome of the National Capitol inspired the designers of America's state capitols from one end of the country to the other. Many of those designed and/or constructed prior to 1893, in such states as Michigan (1871-78), Illinois (1867-88), Kansas (1866-1903) and Iowa (1870-1887) demonstrate a picturesque quality and looseness of proportion that virtually disappears after the precedent established by the Columbian Exposition. Cass Gilbert's Capitol for Minnesota (1895-1906), McKim, Mead and White's Rhode Island State Capitol (1895-1905) and Theodore C. Link's design for Mississippi (1901-1903) all typify the design of state capitols following the Exposition for their much stricter adherence to historic prototype as expressed in both detail and massing. The Wisconsin State Capitol (1906-1917) fits comfortably with the later group and responds to the precedent of the National Capitol in such a way as to mark Post as an architect of his generation.

The time during which the Wisconsin State Capitol was built was one of waning Beaux-Arts influence. Following the proliferation of similar state capitols during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Beaux-Arts adaptation of form fell out of widespread use in this and other architectural applications. The year the Capitol was completed, 1917 marked the beginning of World War I. According to one interpretation, in that same momentous year the American Beaux-Arts tradition in public architecture was drawing to a close. With the placement of Daniel Chester French's "Wisconsin" atop the lantern, architectural historians Henry Russell Hitchcock and William Seale note the passing of an era:

[In 1917], Daniel Chester French's heroic statue "Forward" [sic.]<sup>67</sup> arrived at the Madison railroad station; it took eight mules to draw it up the street to the new Capitol. Around the square several hundred people stood transfixed as the steam mechanism with ropes and pulleys transported the golden figure up to the lantern. Many years later, after two world wars and a great depression, an old man in California remembered that day "Forward" [sic.] journeyed to the crown of the dome: My father sat in front of our store watching what was going on—and when the statue was in its proper place at [the] tip [of] the top—he hurriedly came in the store and went into our back room shop—got a big lead pencil and wrote on the wall above the shop door—the date and exact time [and] hour and minute when that statue rested in its place."<sup>68</sup>

An ordinary citizen has recorded the end of the American Renaissance.<sup>69</sup>

Twenty-five years after the Columbian Exposition and the construction of several state capitols designed with objectives similar to those expressed in Wisconsin, architectural discourse in the

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<sup>66</sup> Stephan Vaughn Shipman was later hired to redesign the dome in April of 1866. *Ibid.*, 142-43.

<sup>67</sup> The statue is actually entitled "Wisconsin." There is a prevalent misnomer, locally, concerning the correct name of the work and it is frequently referred to as "Forward." A statue entitled "Forward," is installed on the Capitol grounds. It is a second generation cast replica of a figure by Helen Farnsworth Mears that was completed for the Columbian Exposition of 1893.

<sup>68</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale, *Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the U.S.A.* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 264. This anecdote is based on a document in the collection of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (series number not cited) identified by Hitchcock and Seale as: William A. Van Deusen to Rufus F. Wells, Hollywood, California, July 24, 1968.

<sup>69</sup> Hitchcock and Seale, *Temples of Democracy*, 264.

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United States (and Europe) began to address the conflicts inherent to the use of historic form with the tenants of modern architecture. In the mid-west United States, critics of Beaux-Arts adaptation such as Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright contended that the expansion of the Beaux-Arts style stifled the opportunity for the development of an independent American architecture. Sullivan and Wright shared with the Beaux-Arts designers the desire to "create an environment harmonious in the interrelationship of all its elements."<sup>70</sup> However, Wright and Sullivan shunned the historicism of the Beaux-Arts because they felt it was unrelated to the American experience. Instead, they promoted the adaptability of a building to the specific environment and functional requirements. By the 1930s, an anti-Beaux-Arts sentiment had developed among young architects and architectural students who desired to implement new materials and a modernistic approach to architectural design.<sup>71</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The Wisconsin State Capitol superbly typifies the American Beaux-Arts tradition for its monumental scale, adaptation of Renaissance Revival form and sumptuous, yet tasteful, decorative program. Post's mastery of Beaux-Arts principles extended itself to all elements of the building's plan, form and original program conveying a carefully coordinated and fully integrated architectural statement. The massive granite structure was built with the benefit of steel and is at a scale that dramatically exceeds any European Renaissance prototype. Post's monumental building rises to nearly 270 feet from its base and is prominent from all vistas, both approaching Madison and from within the city. The tallest granite-clad dome of any capitol in the nation, Post demonstrated his acumen as an engineer and reinforced his reputation as a designer of tall buildings in this Beaux-Arts interpretation that varied markedly from the proto-skyscrapers he had designed for New York City. The detailing of the interior, the massing and organization of the exterior and the manner in which the building relates to its site and the surrounding city and lakes show Post to be in full command as a designer. Post seized the opportunity with the Wisconsin Capitol Commission to create a highly personal statement about that which he found to be appropriate and beautiful in architecture. The Capitol nearly perfectly combines the requirements of the 1905 Capitol Commission with Post's own notions of architectural perfection. In the Wisconsin State Capitol, Post, as a mature and highly accomplished architect enjoyed the opportunity to create an architectural statement that represents the capstone in his career as a designer.

In addition to the Capitol representing a seminal work of an important American architect, the building also stands as a superlative expression of the Progressive ideology that spawned the impetus for the construction of the building. The Wisconsin State Capitol celebrates the ideal of democratic government at its best – benevolent, responsive and supportive to the needs of its citizenry in such areas as education and labor. An important intention of the Capitol Commission was that the building be accessible to all and function as a collective expression of progressively minded government. Thus, the building was conceived with a didactic function, intended to educate the populace about the traditions associated with the state. Post reworked the ecclesiastic symbolism associated with this domed building type to elevate the themes of government in the neo-Byzantine mosaics undertaken by Kenyon Cox for the Rotunda

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<sup>70</sup> Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture*, 189.

<sup>71</sup> *Historic Structures Report Book V*, III - 46.

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pendentives. Edwin Howland Blashfield's "The Resources of Wisconsin," positioned within the central oculus commands visitors to gaze upwards and be inspired to be themselves among the resources of the state. The building was designed to excite respect for Wisconsin's governmental institutions and inspire pride in all the state has to offer. Post secured a sympathetic client in the Wisconsin Capitol Commission, one that fostered his vision and facilitated it becoming a reality. He enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with this group of high-minded men, one that encouraged and supported his sensibilities as a designer

### **Political/Governmental Significance**

#### *Introduction*

The Wisconsin State Capitol is also notable for its association with events that gave shape to America's Progressive movement in the early decades of the twentieth century. As Governor of Wisconsin, Robert M. La Follette, Sr. was behind the intended expansion of the previous capitol in 1902, forming the Capitol Improvement Commission. Cass Gilbert was hired as the architect to carry out the modifications. When fire destroyed the existing structure in February 1904, concern with the enlargement of the building transformed into a need to replace it altogether. In 1906, La Follette and the State Legislature modified the intent of the Commission and it re-emerged simply as the Capitol Commission, charged with developing a building program, hiring an architect, letting contracts and overseeing construction.<sup>72</sup> Having already served in the House of Representatives in the 1890s, La Follette was elected to the United States Senate in 1905 and left Wisconsin and his position as Governor in 1906.<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, the work of the Commission proceeded and the building was completed in 1917. As work of Robert M. La Follette, Sr. advanced nationally, his son Phillip F. La Follette was learning the political lessons that would facilitate his emergence as an important state political figure in the ensuing decades. The contributions to social reform by Wisconsin Governor Phillip La Follette during his three non-consecutive terms in the 1930s took place within the Wisconsin State Capitol. Governor Phillip F. La Follette was a moving force behind model legislation for unemployment compensation and an advocate for an increased governmental role in economic planning.<sup>74</sup>

#### *Historic Background*

Extensive industrialization following the Civil War led to what many considered unsavory economic and political conditions in this country. With the concentration of American factories being established in the cities, a shift in the country's labor force and general demographics occurred in response to the demand for unskilled, low-salaried workers. This trend resulted in far greater numbers of urban poor, while the self-proclaimed "Captains of Industry" profited

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<sup>72</sup> A second design competition was initiated after Cass Gilbert's design scheme for the building was determined to be too large and expensive. See *Objections to Selection of Gilbert Plans for the New Capitol Building and of Mr. Gilbert as Architect, Presented before the Joint Committee on Capitol Grounds, February 23d, 1905* (Madison, Wisconsin: J.S. Bletcher & Company, 1905).

<sup>73</sup> Robert S. Maxwell, *La Follette and the Rise of the Progressives in Wisconsin* (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1956), 12, 82-3.

<sup>74</sup> Legislative Reference Bureau, *Wisconsin Blue Book 1960* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1960) 177.

wildly.<sup>75</sup> The high rates of immigration during the last decades of the nineteenth century added to the number of disenfranchised and financially distressed city dwellers. These trends also affected the rural working class, who, in addition to losing family members to the draw of city life, found it difficult to survive in this era of increasing agricultural mechanization and lower prices.<sup>76</sup> Robert M. La Follette, Sr. sought to curb the socially harmful actions of unregulated and largely independent corporate entities. In so doing, he provided a unifying impetus that overcame traditional social divisions.<sup>77</sup>

Under the banner of "Progressivism," La Follette, Sr. fought the forces of privilege and attempted to eliminate inequities between the wealthy and the poor.<sup>78</sup> He sought to decrease the role of special interest groups in influencing the political process, to make government more responsive to citizen needs and to increase participation in the American democratic system. Progressive leaders like La Follette Sr. wanted to ensure social justice by making the governmental process more directly democratic and by reinforcing the notion of government operating for the collective good of all citizens. La Follette, Sr. was the first advocate of Progressive reform to attain the position of governor in state politics.<sup>79</sup> In his unsuccessful bids for the GOP presidential nomination, he campaigned on a platform calling for the elimination of corrupt politics and the abuses by big businesses such as the railroad industry. In 1911, he and others formed a branch of the GOP called the National Progressive Republican League. La Follette Sr. represented them as their presidential candidate in the 1912 Republican Presidential primaries.<sup>80</sup>

*The Progressive Era in Wisconsin: The La Follettes and the Wisconsin Idea*

The La Follette family dominated state politics for over fifty years, embodying Wisconsin Progressivism and building a movement that had widespread national impact. Within their local and regional sphere, the La Follettes operated in an environment that sustained their influence. The level of collaborative exchange established between the academicians of the University of Wisconsin (in such disciplines as economics, political science and agriculture) assisted state politicians in writing well-informed, carefully studied legislation. Termed the "Wisconsin Idea" by former State Legislative Reference Librarian Charles McCarthy,<sup>81</sup> the basic precept was that the information gathered by the research efforts of the university faculty should provide

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<sup>75</sup> John D. Buenker, *The History of Wisconsin, Volume IV: The Progressive Era 1893-1914* (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1998), 126.

<sup>76</sup> Herbert F. Margulies, *The Decline of the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin: 1890-1920* (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1968), 11.

<sup>77</sup> David P. Thelen, *The New Citizenship: Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin 1885-1900* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1972), 310.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>79</sup> John A. Krout and Arnold S. Rice, Ph.D., *United States History from 1865* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 115.

<sup>80</sup> Carl R. Burghardt, *Robert M. La Follette, Sr. The Voice of Conscience* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 79-82.

<sup>81</sup> Charles McCarthy, *The Wisconsin Idea* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912).

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improved conditions to all citizens in the state.<sup>82</sup> The use of early communication technology was key, particularly at University of Wisconsin where the first educational radio broadcasts in the nation were aired on WHA Radio to aid Extension programming. Charles Van Hise, La Follette, Sr.'s University of Wisconsin classmate and the university's president from 1903 to 1918, spearheaded the idea that an informed citizenry is crucial to the success of the democratic process. With open populist intent that fueled Progressive ideology, Van Hise proclaimed, "The boundaries of our campus are coextensive with the boundaries of our state."<sup>83</sup>

The collaboration wrought of the long-standing relationship between Van Hise and La Follette, Sr., and their shared hope for an educated and politically involved citizenry, was central to the development of the Progressive stance that dominated Wisconsin politics during the first four decades of the twentieth century. The establishment of the Legislative Reference Library represents a direct and immediate effect of the "Wisconsin Idea." Established in 1901, the library initiative first consisted of McCarthy single-handedly overseeing a small collection of documents in the previous Capitol building, which had suffered the fire.<sup>84</sup> The facility was eventually moved to the second floor of the present Capitol's North Wing following the wing's completion in 1917.<sup>85</sup> During the 1920s, Legislative Librarian Charles McCarthy expanded his operation from a small reference collection to a dynamic and innovative institution with a sizable staff and a substantial budget. McCarthy's department provided lawmakers with legislative research and also drafted innumerable legislative bills. This non-partisan service facilitated the application of scientific management, based on academic expertise, to forward more effective government. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, twenty-seven states had instituted Reference Libraries, based on the innovation in Wisconsin.<sup>86</sup> Wisconsin's Legislative Reference Library, which underwent dramatic evolution in the Wisconsin State Capitol, effected the process by which legislation was drafted throughout the nation.

Once elected to the Senate in 1905 and upon assuming his seat in 1906, La Follette, Sr. continued to implement his Progressive ideals as a United States Senator and enjoyed the ongoing support of his constituents, who re-elected him to four consecutive six-year terms. In addition, he

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<sup>82</sup> La Follette wrote in his autobiography that the principal service the university performed was outside the scope of teaching. He wrote, "In no state of the Union are the relationships between the University and the people of the state so intimate and mutually helpful as in Wisconsin. We believe that the purpose of the University is to serve the people and every effort is made through correspondence courses, special courses, housekeepers' conferences, farmers' institutes, experimental stations and the like to bring every resident of the state under the broadening and inspiring influence of a faculty of trained men. At the same time the highest standard of education in the arts and the professions are maintained in the University itself." Robert M. La Follette, Sr., *La Follette's Autobiography* (Madison, Wisconsin: 1913), 30.

<sup>83</sup> Arthur Hove (with the editorial assistance of Anne Biebel), *The University of Wisconsin: A Pictorial History* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 70.

<sup>84</sup> Howard F. Ohm, "The Wisconsin Legislative Reference Library: A Brief Story about Its Origin, Functions, and Facilities and Its Founder, Charles McCarthy," *The Wisconsin Public Employee*, December 1935, Charles McCarthy Name File (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Archives), 5; Rex Mitchell Baxter, "The Legislative Reference Library," *Arena*, June 1908, Charles McCarthy Name File (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Archives), 675-76.

<sup>85</sup> Post Drawing 518-3103, 13 March 1909, rev. 14 May 1909, Wisconsin State Capitol Drawings; C.A. Holst, ed., *The Wisconsin Capitol, Official Guide and History*, Fourth ed. (Madison, Wisconsin: Lathrop and Cook, 1921), 7.

<sup>86</sup> John D. Buekner and Edward R. Kantowicz, *Historical Dictionary of the Progressive Era 1890-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 253.

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founded *La Follette's Weekly Magazine* in 1909, established the National Progressive Republican League in 1911 and sought the GOP presidential nomination in 1908 and in 1912. In 1924, he mounted an independent campaign for president, securing 17% of the vote.<sup>87</sup> He died the year following this exhausting political campaign. Although often controversial, especially for his position surrounding the United States' involvement in World War I, La Follette, Sr.'s contributions were recognized by the United States Senate. In 1957, he was voted as one of the five outstanding senators of all time.

Following La Follette, Sr.'s death in 1925, the goals of the Progressive Movement endured, particularly in the State of Wisconsin. La Follette's son, Robert M. La Follette, Jr. was elected in a special election to fill his father's senate seat, a position he held without interruption from 1925 until 1947.<sup>88</sup> As further indication of the support the La Follettes enjoyed in Wisconsin, five years after the elder La Follette's death, Phillip F. La Follette was elected to serve as the Governor of Wisconsin, a position that he held from 1930 until 1933 and again, from 1935 until 1939.<sup>89</sup> During these periods of public service, both Robert and Phillip La Follette remained loyal to the Progressive ideology developed by their father. Included in the progressive efforts were the establishment of statewide primary elections, railroad reform, work reform for women and children, an expanded University Extension and state income tax. Several pieces of this progressive legislation had national impact, such as the efforts begun in 1909 and culminating in 1911 with the Workman's Compensation Act. Under Phillip F. La Follette, the 1932 Unemployment Compensation legislation was passed. The period of time between these two legislative acts has been considered "the golden era in Wisconsin during which the state pioneered in the enactment of a variety of laws which [sic] now have wide-spread national acceptance."<sup>90</sup>

Considered one of Phillip F. La Follette's most notable achievements, the unemployment compensation legislation enacted in Wisconsin represented the culmination of five decades of progressive efforts to protect workers who were sometimes left without employment due to circumstances outside of their control.<sup>91</sup> Inspired depression era reformers realized that private

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<sup>87</sup> Dwight C. Agnew, ed., *Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography* (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1960), 217-19.

<sup>88</sup> Dwight C. Agnew, ed., *Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography* (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1960), 219; As the eldest son of Robert M. La Follette Sr., Robert Jr. was thrown into the political ring early, elected at age thirty to the United States Senate to fill the empty seat of his deceased father. In addition to a four term career in the Senate, Robert helped found the Progressive Party of Wisconsin. Although illness prevented him from completing a university degree, Robert Jr. eventually was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1938.

<sup>89</sup> Legislative Reference Bureau, *Wisconsin Blue Book 1960* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1960), 177-78. Born on May 8, 1897 while his father, Robert, was a state congressman, Phillip spent his childhood in the shadow of his father's political successes, living first in the Governor's Mansion in Madison and then in Washington D.C. He eventually moved back to Madison for school and earned both his undergraduate and law degree at the University of Wisconsin. Phillip served three terms as Governor of Wisconsin, considered to be periods of aggressive executive action. After leaving office, Phillip turned to private law practice.

<sup>90</sup> Legislative Reference Library, *Wisconsin Blue Book 1962* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1962), 267.

<sup>91</sup> The workman's compensation legislation promoted safer working environments by solidifying the employer's obligation to pay benefits. This victory provided a national impetus for progressive workman's compensation reform and by 1920, all of the states in the union, save six, had adopted workman's compensation legislation.

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charity organizations and churches no longer adequately met the needs of the growing numbers of unemployed.<sup>92</sup> In response, Wisconsin lawmakers saw the government as playing a vital role as they "sought a constructive program which would benefit workers, farmers, business, and the whole economy."<sup>93</sup> It was not until 1932, following intense debate in both the senate and the assembly, that substantial practical unemployment reform became reality. Governor Phillip F. La Follette signed Wisconsin's unprecedented Unemployment Compensation Act, the first in American history, on January 28, 1932.<sup>94</sup> The bill based compensation on a worker's weekly wages and the employer's requirement from the company's unemployment compensation experience record.<sup>95</sup> The concepts included in Wisconsin's legislation "helped to shape the whole unemployment compensation program" in the United States and "were recognized by Congress in 1935, and by most of the state U.C. [unemployment compensation] laws passed from then on."<sup>96</sup> The unemployment compensation legislation of 1932 solidified the buying power of workers and encouraged employers to maintain steady employment records.<sup>97</sup> This piece of legislation was a crowning achievement of Wisconsin's progressive tradition on the national level.

The Wisconsin State Capitol, since the time the West Wing was occupied in 1909, has been the scene of ongoing significance at the state level for the legislation enacted there. It is the building's tie with two generations and nearly a half-century of state leadership imparted by the La Follette family that elevates the building's significance to a national level. The Capitol, as specified in the original building program, is in the form of a St. Andrew's Cross, providing a double axial configuration that welcomes state citizens to walk beneath the four classical porticoes and enter the halls of government. This expression of accessibility to all, combined with high-minded sculpture, mosaics and paintings that celebrate the inherent good of fair government and its significance to the commonwealth, give architectural form to the Progressive ideals of Robert M. La Follette, Sr. The building remains an expression of values that were intrinsic to both Wisconsin and United States history, values that continue to be held by subsequent generations of Wisconsin citizens.

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<sup>92</sup> John D. Buenker and Edward R. Kantowicz, 483.

<sup>93</sup> Paul A. Raushenbush, "Another Wisconsin First-A Systematic Procedure for Payments to Workers During Periods of Unemployment," Wisconsin Legislative Reference Library, *Wisconsin Blue Book 1956* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1956) 118.

<sup>94</sup> Paul W. Glad, *The History of Wisconsin Volume I: War, a New Era, and Depression, 1914-1940* (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), 395; Legislative Reference Library, *Wisconsin Blue Book 1956* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1956), 118; Legislative Reference Library, *Wisconsin Blue Book 1962* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1962), 269.

<sup>95</sup> Legislative Reference Library, *Wisconsin Blue Book 1962* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1962), 269.

<sup>96</sup> Raushenbush, 118.

<sup>97</sup> National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form for the Wisconsin State Capitol, 30 June 1970, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Division of Historic Preservation, Madison, Wisconsin, 4.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: 13.4

UTM References:

	<u>ZONE</u>	<u>EASTING</u>	<u>NORTHING</u>
A	16	305880	4771820
B	16	306100	4771660
C	16	305880	4771480
D	16	305720	4771660

Verbal Boundary Description:

The property includes the entire Capitol Square, which is bounded by Main St. to the southeast, Carroll St. to the southwest, Pinckney St. to the northeast and Mifflin St. to the northwest.

Boundary Justification:

The determined boundary maintains the integrity of the site and includes the area that has been historically associated with the Wisconsin State Capitol.

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