

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Texas State Capitol

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Congress Avenue and 11th Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Austin

N/A vicinity of

state Texas

code 048

county Travis

code 453

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name State of Texas

street & number

city, town Austin

N/A vicinity of

state Texas

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Travis County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Austin

state Texas

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Texas Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1964 federal state county local

depository for survey records Texas Historical Commission

city, town Austin

state Texas

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>N/A</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Texas State Capitol building is a three-story structure, with a four-story central block, with exterior masonry-bearing walls faced in Texas red granite. Modeled on the design of the national capitol in Washington, D.C., the building features a dome at the crossing of its major axes. The dome rests upon a masonry drum, with the upper sections of the dome proper fabricated in metal, the exterior surface painted to simulate the granite of the exterior walls. The interior of the structure features monumental and elaborately detailed doorframes, with cast-iron staircases placed alongside the rotunda. The two legislative chambers occupy the second floor of the structure, with the basement, first, third, and fourth floors being devoted to office space.

The Texas State Capitol building is located at the crest of a hill overlooking downtown Austin and the distant Colorado River. The setting for the building was an integral part of the 1839 plan of the city of Austin prepared by Edwin Waller. The principal elevation of the capitol faces south, with the central block measuring 289 feet from north to south, and the east-west measurement of the building at its greatest length reaching 566 feet, 6 inches.

The overall conception of the design is clearly based upon that of the national capitol in Washington, although there are substantial differences in terms of architectural detailing and finishes. The north and south elevations are five-part compositions, the central bays of which serve as the principal entrances to the structure. The south entry is framed by a colossal three-story archway, while the north entrance is set within a three-story columnar portico. The east and west elevations were originally planned to feature similar porticoes, but these were eliminated from construction plans due to the increased cost of such elements. The central pavilions on the north and south elevations rise four stories, and are five bays in width. The projecting wings which house the two legislative chambers are recessed back from the central block, and contain five facade bays arranged in an AABAA pattern. The flanking pavilions, which also form the east and west elevations of the structure, are each three bays in width on the north and south elevations, and nine bays in width on the east and west elevations.

The dome which surmounts the intersection of the east-west and north-south interior axes of the building is a more vertically proportioned version of the dome of the national capitol. In height, it measures 250 feet from the floor of the basement to the base of the lantern. The Renaissance-inspired detailing of the exterior of the dome, including the columned drum, is executed in galvanized iron painted to match the color of the red granite which faces the masonry walls of the building. The lantern of the dome is topped by a cast zinc statue representing the Goddess of Liberty, in whose raised left hand is held a five-pointed star, an iconographic symbol borrowed from the state flag.

The exterior walls of the capitol are faced with red granite quarried near Burnet, Texas. The great majority of the stone is quarry faced, with the only dressed ashlar work being confined to the shafts of the columns and pilasters which articulate the bays of the facades. The most monumental blocks of granite are set in the first floor walls, with blocks of lesser scale and texture of finish being used on the upper floors. The stonework is carried up to the parapets on the north and south elevations of the central block.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1882-1888 **Builder/Architect** Elijah E. Myers, Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Texas State Capitol represents the high-water mark in the career of its architect, Elijah E. Myers, described by the architectural historians Henry Russell Hitchcock and William Seale as "the greatest capitol-builder of the Gilded Age". The building reflects the popularity of the national capitol in Washington, D.C. as the prototype for state capitol buildings in the post-Civil War era. The product of an architectural competition judged by a prominent architect, the Texas State Capitol building is the largest such structure in the United States.

The foundation for construction of the Texas State Capitol, which began in 1882, was actually laid in 1875 with the passage of the state constitution. Included in that document was a resolution to appropriate and set apart three million acres of public lands for the purpose of providing the funds needed to construct a state capitol and other public buildings. Supplementary acts passed in 1879 authorized this land either to be sold to pay for such construction, or to be used as the means of payment itself for such work. These supplementary acts also established the Capitol Building Commission, which was appointed on November 16, 1880. On November 20, 1880, the Commission called for the submission of designs for a new state capitol to cost one million five hundred thousand dollars. The deadline for the submission of these designs was February 1, 1881. Eleven designs were received by the deadline, which were studied by the three members of the Commission, as well as Governor O. M. Roberts. The Governor requested that an impartial architect be consulted to advise the Commission on the adoption of plans for the building, and on April 24, 1881, Napoleon LeBrun of New York arrived in Austin to serve in that capacity. On May 6, 1881, it was announced that the plans submitted under the "nom de plume" of Tuebor had been chosen as the winner of the competition.

These plans were the work of the Detroit architect Elijah E. Myers, the individual most responsible for the architectural character of post-Civil War state capitols, having designed four such structures and competed, without success, for the chance to design two others. At the time he entered the Texas competition, Myers had already gained fame from the completion of the Michigan State Capitol in Lansing, completed in 1878, and would shortly enter and win the competition for the Colorado State Capitol in 1883. Myers also designed the first Idaho State Capitol, built in 1885, a commission evidently not awarded on the basis of a competition. Myers entered the competitions for the Indiana and Wyoming state capitols in 1877 and 1885, respectively, but won neither. Myers was also noted for his designs for county courthouse and municipal buildings, the most noted being the City Hall of Richmond, Virginia, completed in 1894.

From the outset of his career as a designer of state capitol buildings, Myers was clearly influenced by the model of Thomas U. Walter's work on the national capitol at Washington, D.C., which had been completed in 1863. Of course, the concept of a tripartite design

9. Major Bibliographical References

Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the U.S.A., Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale. 1976. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York and London.

The Preservation of the Texas State Capitol. Diane Susan Jones. Unpublished Masters Thesis, School of Architecture, University of Texas at Austin, 1980. (continued)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 27 acres

Quadrangle name Austin East, Tex

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	4
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6	2	1	0	5	0
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3	3	4	9	8	0	0
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B

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6	2	1	4	0	0
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3	3	4	9	7	0	0
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C

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6	2	0	9	0	0
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3	3	4	9	5	4	0
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D

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6	2	1	2	6	0
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3	3	4	9	4	4	0
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E

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Verbal boundary description and justification The twenty-seven acre site is bounded on all sides by the cast- and wrought-iron fence which defines the perimeter, generally bounded by 11th Street on the south, 14th Street on the north, Colorado to the west and Brazos to the east.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John C. Ferguson, Architectural Historian

organization Texas Historical Commission date December, 1985

street & number P.O. Box 12276 telephone (512) 475-3094

city or town Austin state Texas 78711

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Curtis J. J. J. J.

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 13 Jan. 1986

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 1

The interior of the capitol is dominated, on the first floor, by the broad east-west hallway, which is flanked by suites of legislators' offices, and the vast space of the rotunda. The lobby spaces to the north and south of the rotunda serve mainly as pre- ludes to the rotunda space. The second floor houses the chambers for the Senate and House of Representatives, with offices in the east and west ends for Speaker of the House and President of the Senate. The third and fourth floors contain more legisla- tors' offices. The detailing of the interior reflects the classical character of the exterior. The monumental cast-iron columns of the interior feature Corinthian capitals, a device also found on the more elaborately detailed doorframes, most of which are of carved oak. The rotunda features galleries on the second, third, and fourth floors, supported on massive console brackets of cast iron. The Senate and House chambers are set to either side of the rotunda space. These primary public spaces were both original- ly lit by large skylights, the interior glazing of which consisted of large rectangular panes of inch-thick glass sandblasted with the state seal at their center. The opaque character of these panels diffused the light into the chambers. While several of these glass panels survive, many have been removed over the years. Spectators' space galleries ring the legislative chambers on three sides.

The only significant interior space to have been seriously altered from its original design is the legislative library, which is located in the north section of the central block. Originally built as a two-story space illuminated by a skylight and glass blocks in the floor, the space has had its skylight filled in and the glass block flooring removed. Some of the book stack shelving still remains in use today.

Shortly after its completion in 1888, the state capitol site was further improved by the erection of a composition cast- and wrought-iron fence surrounding the twenty-seven- acre capitol grounds. Executed by the Springfield, Ohio, firm of Mast, Foos and Company, the fence features five-pointed stars as caps for each of its pickets.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
Date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1

for such a monumental structure had originated with Charles Bulfinch's plans for the nation's capitol, which were expanded upon by Walter. By the time the competition for the design of the Michigan state capitol was announced in June of 1871, several states had already begun to erect new seats of state government based upon Walter's work, the earliest of which was the California state capitol in Sacramento, completed in 1874, although begun over a decade earlier. It is significant to note that while the California state capitol precedes Myers' Texas design by more than a decade, the earlier structure has seen many changes to its original form. On the exterior, construction of a massive addition in 1949-1952 resulted in the concealment of the original east elevation. The remodeling of 1906-1908 significantly impacted the scale of the legislative chambers, with the ceiling height dropping eight feet to accommodate an additional fourth level of office space. The structural work undertaken on the California state capitol between 1975 and 1982 resulted in the restoration of many lost features, but did not restore the original ceiling heights of the legislative chambers.

Myers' entry in the Michigan competition, which he won, was a variant on the national model with respect to the character of the detailing of the exterior. While Myers chose to repeat the image of the domed central block flanked by wings containing the legislative chambers, as established by the new national capitol, he did not adorn the elevations with giant-order colonnades supporting sculpture-filled pediments. In terms of proportions, the Michigan capitol was more vertical than its prototype, with the central block being a full four stories above a full basement. The dome which Myers placed atop the design appears too small for the mass of the structure, and the colonnade around the drum of the dome projects out of its circular form to address the four projecting masses of the building below. Each of the floor levels was defined by stringcourses, and pediments adorned all the windows of the upper two floors.

The design Myers submitted in 1881 for the Texas state capitol represented a substantial change from his Michigan project, both in terms of scale and character. Perhaps by virtue of the large site available in Austin, Myers' design was a more elongated composition, more closely reflective of the national model. The dome, although still narrower than that designed by Walter for Washington, had attained a prominence far greater than that of the Michigan design. In detailing the exterior walls of the Texas capitol, Myers may also have responded to the national model in his choice of giant-order pilasters to frame the second and third floors of the building, dispensing with the multiple stringcourses used for the Michigan design.

These design tendencies should not, however, be taken to suggest that Myers was merely copying Walter's work in Washington, even though the building was first called to be faced in limestone, so as to present a more serene appearance. The substitution of red granite for limestone in 1885 surely adds to the original character of Myer's work, especially given the quarry-faced finish used on the majority of the exterior stonework. Perhaps the most dramatic and original element introduced by Myers was the colossal archway which framed the main entry to the south elevation of the building, an element

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
Date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

which has no counterpart in the design of any other state capitol building, although Myers would use the motif on smaller county courthouse designs.

The success with which Myers generated an original solution to the design of the Texas state capitol becomes more apparent when one looks at his last state capitol project, that for Colorado. Not completed until 1908, the Colorado capitol reads as a somewhat abbreviated version of the Michigan and Texas designs, with little of the vitality of either of those earlier projects.

The successful career which Myers had built as the architect of public buildings was, ironically, in a large part responsible for his dismissal from the position of designing architect by the Capitol Commission in April 1886. The inability of the Capitol Commissioners to obtain responses from Myers on questions concerning the various contract specifications for the building was the result of his work on the Colorado state capitol and other public buildings. It is significant to note, however, that the design of the Texas state capitol was executed according to Myer's drawings, which the Commissioners considered to be of sufficient elaboration and detail to allow for the construction of the building without Myers' direct assistance. Therefore, in spite of the deteriorating relationship between the architect and his clients, the Texas state capitol building can still be said to represent the best efforts of Elijah Myers in a field of endeavor in which he had established a significant and well-deserved reputation across the United States.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

Date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 1

The Politics of Architecture in the Gilded Age: The Practice of Elijah E. Myers.
Marlene Elizabeth Heck. Unpublished Masters thesis, The University of Virginia,
Charlottesville. 1977.

Biennial Reports of the Capitol Building Commission, 1883-1888. Triplett &
Hutchings, State Printers, Austin. On file at the Texas State Archives, Austin.