

THE FIRST CAPITOL BUILDINGS
HARRISBURG, PA.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. PA-3

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Julian Millard, District Officer
2250 No. Third St., Harrisburg, Pa.

THE FIRST CAPITOL BUILDINGS

AT HARRISBURG

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

OWNER: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

DATE OF ERECTION: Two fireproof Office Buildings built 1812; demolished about 1901. Main Building built 1822, burned 1897.

ARCHITECT: Stephen Hills. He was born in 1771 at Ashford, Kent County, England, and was apprenticed for seven years to a local "house-wright", living in his master's family until he was 21 years of age (1792.) He arrived at Boston in 1796 or 1797 and was in business there for several years. It is not known when he left Boston, but he arrived at Harrisburg some time previous to 1810. He was engaged to design and build the two fireproof office buildings, which were occupied in 1812. He was also engaged to design and build the main building, which was started in 1816 and finished in 1822.

In 1825 he sold his property and went back to England, where he remained for eleven years, returning to America in the Winter of 1836-7. In 1837 his plan for the Missouri State Capitol was adopted and he built it, an almost exact duplicate of the Pennsylvania Capitol. He then built the University Buildings at Columbia, Missouri. Completing them in 1843, he retired to his farm in Illinois, 12 miles from St. Louis and died in 1844. (From the Biographical Encyclopedia of Dauphin County, Penna.)

BUILDER: Stephen Hills.

PRESENT CONDITION: Destroyed.

NUMBER OF STORIES: Two stories.

MATERIALS OF CONSTRUCTION: Materials, handmade red brick with brown sandstone trimming, base and columns. Stone was painted white. Cornices, metal. The drum of the dome and the square base are of frame construction. The circular wall of the main floor plan carries up to the base of the hemispherical dome. The two office buildings were of fireproof construction.

OTHER EXISTING RECORDS: The accompanying drawings have been developed with great care from an engraved main floor plan which was printed in the State Handbook of 1866, and several years preceding, and from a number of photographs. Nothing is known of the second story plan nor of the plans of the office buildings. The photographs are copies of old photographs. Also see engraving in Egle, W.H.: History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon, p. 1).

ADDITIONAL DATA: The Seat of Government was removed from Lancaster to Harrisburg by authority of an Act approved February 1810 and the entire Government was removed there in 1812.

The Act authorizes the acceptance of ten acres of land in Harrisburg from William Maclay, adjoining the four-acre tract formerly given for the use of the State by John Harris.

It authorizes the construction of two office buildings for the Land Office, The Treasury, The Surveyor-General, The Auditor-General and another unassigned office, all to be of fire-proof construction.

The Commissioners appointed by the Governor invited architects to present plans and elevations. A premium of four hundred dollars was offered for the plan adopted and two hundred dollars for that adjudged the next best.

Stephen Hills was retained as architect and builder.

The two office buildings were finished in time for the removal of the Government from Lancaster in 1812 and the main building, which was evidently designed as the central element of a group of three, was started about 1816 and finished in 1822. The cornerstone was laid in 1819 by Governor Findlay, assisted by Stephen Hills, Architect and Builder, William Smith, Stonecutter, and Valentine Gergan and Samuel White, Masons.

The cost of the two office buildings was \$73,000.00 and of the Main Building \$148,000.00, without furnishings.

On Tuesday, February 2nd, 1897, the central building was destroyed by fire, after serving the Commonwealth for seventy-five eventful years. The Legislative Halls were the scene of many thrilling events during the Mexican and Civil Wars, the battleground for the most notable conflicts in the History of the Commonwealth. Here the giants of our political history fought for their principles or their purposes and here notable debates took place on the issues of a time when such men as Thaddeus Stevens, Simon and Donald Cameron, Wm. A. Wallace, Matthew S. Quay, and Andrew Curtin were in the public eye. Many notable historical characters visited the building. Among them are mentioned General Lafayette in 1825, Charles Dickens in 1843, and the Prince of Wales in 1860. In 1898, the present building was started and during its construction the old office buildings were removed, to be replaced by new construction. The new Capitol was completed and dedicated October 4, 1906.

REFERENCES: Official Records and Egle's History of Dauphin County.

Julian Millard
District Officer

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.