The traditional American state capitol, classic in form and with high symbol in mural and statuary, has something impersonal about it, typifying the enduring majesty of law and government. But, if stones could speak, these imposing edifices would tell a warm and moving story of the individual men whose brain and brawn went into the actual construction. What follows is an intimate narrative, written by a Harrisburg citizen of long standing—author, professor, artist—of the erecting, not of the present Capitol, but of its predecessor, which served Pennsylvania for seventy-five years, from 1822 to 1897.

STEPHEN HILLS AND THE BUILDING OF PENNSYLVANIA'S FIRST CAPITOL

By HUBERTIS CUMMINGS

The walls of Pennsylvania’s first Capitol rose during the summer and autumn of 1819. Residents of the borough founded on the Susquehanna by the ferryman John Harris, as much as legislators and State officials, beheld the spectacle of building with an ever growing interest. The likelihood of Harrisburg’s remaining the Commonwealth’s capital city grew more and more into certitude. In December James Peacock was serene enough about the early completion of the structure to prepare—it must have been
by use of one of the architect's draughts of its front elevation—a wood cut of the three "State Buildings." On the last day of the month he inserted it at the head of the editorial page of the Harrisburg Republican, and week after week he kept it there.

It pictured the Capitol set in the midst of a trio of edifices, its portico and dome rising lofty. In front an esplanade sloped down to a retaining wall at the foot of a hill, four arches within that apparent barrier of stonework adding a happy touch to the general design. Long walks passing to right and left before the two wing buildings and then down to the fictitious wall brought everything into symmetry. A proud cut, indeed, to shine above the motto of The Republican: "To speak his thoughts is every freeman's right." But it anticipated completion of the structure by almost two whole years, and was at the moment confirmatory only of a small-town printer's enthusiasm and a contractor-builder's confidence.

Haste, in fact, had been making slowly ever since the Legislature of Pennsylvania had determined in February, 1810, during the governorship of Simon Snyder, to remove the seat of government of the Commonwealth from Lancaster to Harrisburg in October, 1812. Ready for the offices of the government when it came were two Fire-Proof Buildings built on the hill northeast of the town on directions from the Assembly and under the superintendence of Commissioners John Jacob Bucher, Edward Crouch, and John Dorsey. Formal and proud they had risen; and in commodious rooms to the rear of their high, dignified classical porticoes, shelves and cabinets had since 1812 accommodated the Laws of the Commonwealth, unprinted and printed, the records of the Secretary,
the Treasurer, the Auditor General, and the Surveyor General of the State. But legislation was still constrained to function in the halls of the Dauphin County Court House on Market Street. In cramped quarters, in a structure which had been erected for other purposes in 1792-1799, which in the practice of Harrisburg folk was dubbed the “State-House,” and which had been remodeled somewhat for their use in 1812, legislators had perforce to work out their own and the people’s will.

Little wonder that they grew restive there, felt the crowding of themselves as they conferred, debated, fought bills through to amendment and final vote and sent them on to the Governor. Little wonder that, as they remembered the fine site but empty space on the hill between the executive offices, they brought to ultimate form on March 11, 1816, an act which promised eventually to provide the Assembly with more adequate legislative halls. Indeed, although it is dumbfounding today, it was hardly surprising to citizens of the time that their Legislature should have determined by that act to sell Independence Hall to “the Mayor, aldermen and citizens of Philadelphia,” for $70,000,¹ a price which, they hoped, would go far towards enabling the Commonwealth to erect a new capitol in the borough of Harrisburg.

The subsequent sale to the city of the old State House which had been built by Edmund Woolley for the Province of Pennsylvania at the behest of the sons of William Penn, and which later had had honor for being the meeting place of Continental Congress and the scene of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, was only a means to a newer and more appropriate governmental end. It was, as it were, as much an act of necessity as it had been necessary for George Heckert, Clerk of the House of Representatives, in the autumn and winter of 1812-1813, to sell the furniture used by the House when its abode was in Lancaster, to help meet the expenses of repairing the Dauphin County Court House for new legislative residence. Mr. Heckert had sold and bought. When he paid, he paid the State’s two-thirds of a bill, leaving it to the County of Dauphin to meet the other third of the account.²

It was thus whether he was paying, at the hand of Carpenter

¹ Penna. Laws, 1815-1816, 110-111.
Stephen Hills, sums to this purveyor or that, or settling with Mr. Hills directly for his supply to the State of nails, screws, hinges, sash-weights, locks and escutcheons, rolls of green tape, plated doorknobs, door pulleys, brass nails, 15,000 feet of clear boards, 1,900 feet of yellow pine scantling. All was measured to him in firm, hard detail. All was requited in as hard and unromantic a fashion. For a deft job the House Clerk was used to paying a clean wage—as, in respect of commodities and workmanship, were Pennsylvanians generally four years later.

Such advertisements of proposals for a capitol as had been authorized to Governor Snyder by another act, of March 18, 1816, brought in no results which officialdom could promptly accept as practicable. Eminent William Strickland, architect, himself trained by the yet more famous Benjamin Henry Latrobe, designer of the National Capitol at Washington, forwarded from Philadelphia on October 1 drawings and description for an ambitious edifice. It should be 120 feet front, 135 feet deep, have a semi-circular portico of 60 feet in diameter, with a flight of steps 13 feet high leading up to six Ionic pillars of 4-feet diameter. Interior halls and vestibules, chambers for the two Houses, colonnades right and left connecting with the already built State Offices, statuary in abundance—all were elaborated on to stir excitement in the civic mind. But the cost would be $300,000, building would require four or five years, and Pennsylvania to date had only $70,000 towards the project. Strickland’s plans were not met with response. And as little encouraged was the proposal made in December to Governor Snyder by James C. Lavelier, less elaborate in detail but calling for $330,000. Architects’ figures were something of a deterrent.

Yet the will to build had been in legislators and citizens. As they saw it, before and immediately after the act of last March 11, what was needed to insure Harrisburg’s having an eventual objective and physical seat of government in its midst was a concrete accumulation of workmen’s tools and material building supplies. Amass a stock pile near the two Fire-Proof Buildings on the Public Grounds, and some noble and dignified structure was certain some day to rise between them. Gather together the crude products of industry, the implements of labor, and the fundamental skills. Let

*State Capitol Papers, 1816, Public Records Office.
the work of smith, quarryman, sawyer, brick-maker, ferryman, wagoner, laborer be the prelude to construction. From energy and a store of goods would spring form and beauty, and the master builder would appear in due season. Almost as sentimental as that was the impulse of the year.

For on March 18, 1816, with no architect chosen, the Assembly authorized an appropriation of $50,000 for the acquisition of construction materials; and by May 2 Stephen Hills was recording his first payment of $670.44 for white pine boards bought of David Whitaker. At the touch, as it were, of the master-carpenter who had erected the State’s Office Buildings in 1810-1812 and refurnished in 1812-1813 for State purposes the Dauphin County Court House, new activity sprang into being.

For over a decade now leading citizens of Harrisburg and workmen alike had known the big Englishman. Stephen Hills, they said, weighed 250 pounds. Born at Ashford, in Kent, England, in 1771, he had emigrated in the late 1790’s to Boston, Massachusetts, then come on to Harrisburg in the early 1800’s to build houses. Front Street residents regularly employed him. He was eminently in favor when Messrs. Bucher and Crouch retained him in 1810 as superintending carpenter for the State Building. Acceptance of him by those two gentlemen in no way decreased his repute. Legislators had seen him at work on the stairs, the cabinets, the desks at the Court House which he was readying for their use both before and after the beginning of their session of 1812-1813. His competence was familiar to all.

Men intuitively expected expert performance of him, although none knew in 1816 that he would build two state capitols before he died in 1844; that for twenty-eight more years his career would be in the making; that he would be honored in Missouri as the man who in “the golden age” of that State’s architecture built its handsome State House at Jefferson City overlooking a glorious view of the Missouri River; that his name would cling for a hundred years to the ivy-mantled columns of the first University Building at Columbia, Missouri, and remain beloved in the affectionate traditions of a great seat of learning. What men knew

4 State Capitol Papers, Hills’ voucher list, May, 1816-May, 1817.
of Stephen Hills in 1816-1817 was that he was busily gathering materials for the construction of a Pennsylvania Capitol.

The stock pile which he ordered and directed grew prosperously until upon it, on May 23, 1817, half of the Legislature's $50,000 appropriation had been spent. For, in an era when the "assembly line" was a wholly unknown term, skilled workmen and dealers responded to the man Hills with alacrity. Blacksmith John Geiger forged for him picks, crowbars, wedges, chisels, scrapers, sledges;
made for him the blades of grubbing hoes, axes, and stone augers; and delivered them to the State's Public Grounds.7 James Sweeney, skilled quarryer, gathered together a crew of English-named, Scottish-named, Irish-named workmen with blacksmiths William Nelson and Peter Updegraff to keep the tools of these in repair;8 and, from June to November, Sweeney culled sandstone from one quarry or another for the ever increasing stock pile of Stephen Hills. Thomas Osburn, Samuel Lynd, William Forbes, Charles Brady, Patrick Flenigan, Arthur McQuade, and a score of other laborers signed their receipts to Foreman Sweeney for wages paid, and perchance wondered when the fruit of their toil would have visible embodiment in sandstone architecturally placed.

Accounts of other dealers in stone and of their wagoners indicated the scope of Stephen Hills' purchases. From the Susquehanna opposite Harrisburg Adam Orris and his men arduously dragged river stones and hauled 79½ perches of them to the public hill for use in the foundations of the future building. Other hundreds of perches of cellar stone were hauled by Daniel Murphy, George Hoyer, Isaiah Meehaffa, Samuel Garman, Philip Conrad, John Danse, and James White. From York County and lower Cumberland County, to rival the numerous loads of sandstone which had come out of Hummelstown and Derry Township quarries when Messrs. Bucher and Crouch were supervising the construction of the State's two great Office Buildings, there came now to the public hill almost countless wagon loads of similar choice quality. Across the river by Chambers' and Simpson's were ferried the wagons. Dealers and haulers Robert Allison and John Smith paid $2.00 a wagon to Ferryman Charles Oglesby for getting their burdens over the Susquehanna. Busy men at the ferries were Henry Whitezel and Jacob Gher, and accounts for their services ran upward of $300.00. Moreover, the indefatigable Irishman Daniel Murphy added to his score of cellar stone not only 668 perches of limestone at $1.50 a perch but 50 perches of mountain stone at the slightly lower figure of $1.40.

But the bowels of the earth, valley, river, and mountain, were ransacked not merely for ancient glacial deposits and strata of

---

6 State Capitol Papers, Hills' voucher list, May, 1816-May, 1817.
7 Ibid., Hills' accounts, Geiger's bill, 1816.
8 Ibid., 1816, Sweeny's Time-Roll and Receipts.
usable rock. In architecture roofing is as essential as crypt and foundation. Mr. Hills, mindful of where Messrs. Crouch and Bucher had procured their roofing materials, called upon Jeremiah Brown of Little Britain for slate to be supplied from his Peach Bottom quarries in the southwestern tip of Lancaster County. In August, 1816, wagoners began transportation of it, and loadings of 1½ to 2 tons each were borne onwards to Harrisburg until November 25 by the good Quaker’s men. Samuel Moore and Stephen Bachelor were the first two carriers in 8th month, Moore making his wagon trips again twice in 9th month, once in 10th month, or October, and twice in November. Bachelor was on the roads between Peach Bottom and Harrisburg almost as often. Other carters, John Evans, Frank and Barney Branen, tallied a lower score. For the labor of all his wagoners Jeremiah Brown billed Mr. Hills $500, and for his 51 ton and 13 hundredweight of slate, at $38 a ton, $1,462.70.

The gamble in futurities continued from May, 1816, on into the late spring of 1817. Not until August of the former year did Mr. Hills begin stocking in brick; but Peter Stoll’s account of $559.46 for 66,667 common brick was only an index to other bills which followed in September and October. Load after load came on from other dealers like Cline and Robarts, John Henry, Jacob Shott, George Silzel, Peter Shutt, John Peter Fredericks; wagoners bringing them greatly outnumbered the carters of stone. On hand by the end of November were 1,655,299 common and stock brick. Costing 70 cents to one dollar a thousand, these had demanded an expenditure of more than $7,500; and hauling them had seen a multiple activity for men and wagons.

Moreover, as Stephen Hills perforce gambled in supplies from central Pennsylvania brickyards—all of them apparently on the eastern side of the Susquehanna, as no accounts for ferriage were involved—so he gambled in stocks of lumber. Rafting days in the spring brought the products of the forests and the sawmills down the river. The agent of purchase on the public hill began receiving consignments in May, 1816. White pine boards came in abundance. There were bills for over 350,000 feet of them at 75 cents a thou-

9 Ibid., account of Brown and voucher of Stephen Hills.
10 Ibid., total computed from accounts of dealers in brick.
11 Ibid., amount computed from Hills’ voucher list.
sand in the first month. In June came the more precious yellow pine boards, scantling, and plank at far higher prices, boards at $12.00, plank at $20.00, scantling at $15.00 and $16.00. After June, consignments ceased for the year. Erasmus Lindy, that good handyman who had worked at one stern task or another while the Fire-Proof Buildings were going up, digging excavations for wells “and necessary houses,” hauling stone, brick, and timber, watching stores against prowlers at night, had many a job now cut out for him. There were stone and brick to remove, or to pile; there were shelters to be set up to protect one sort of stock or another. As Hills bought, Lindy labored to keep out weather and wet. The year 1816 passed into 1817, and winter once more into spring. Raftsmen and arkwrights busied themselves on the Susquehanna in the season of “freshets.” Down from Owego, New York, by North Branch and River descended the 50,000 feet of “clear white pine boards and plank,” which Mr. Hills had contracted for in the previous autumn with the lumber merchant Charles Pompilly. Choice stock this which came by long delivery, acquired at a price of $20.00 a thousand feet and costing in all, as Mr. Hills’ voucher list would later indicate, $1,181.25. Six days after the arrival of the last load of it on May 17, 1817, Lindy submitted a new bill of $16.90 for piling.

Assembled, in fact, in that month were the crude elements for a more mammoth edifice than ever central Pennsylvania had up till then seen. All that lacked to raise it into shape were a magic wand, the consent in further appropriations of a Legislature, and an architect’s plan. None of those needful incentives was now in evidence. As much as Stephen Hills could do was to write Secretary of the Commonwealth Nathaniel B. Boileau and Auditor General George Bryan of how he had carried out duties laid upon him in April, 1816, and collected materials to the cost of $25,641.41; and of how he deemed it unwise to buy in any further substantial supply on the mere “expectation [he spelled the word expation] of the Building being determined on next winter.” Well that the

32 Fire-Proof Buildings Papers, receipts of Lindy.
33 Stephen Hills to Nathaniel B. Boileau, December 7, 1816; State Capitol Papers.
34 Delivery was noted in Hills’ voucher as by May 17, 1817; State Capitol Papers.
35 State Capitol Papers, Stephen Hills to George Bryan and N. B. Boileau, May 26, 1817.
carpenter-architect-buyer had in 1816 completed construction of a fence around the public grounds, and had had his fees for materials and work honored to the amount of $1,491.93. Like the people of Harrisburg and of the Commonwealth, he could continue waiting for a Capitol.

He had to wait for nearly two more years. Not until January 27, 1819, did the Assembly supplement its acts of March, 1816, for the erection of a State Capitol with an act calling for new proposals. Printer James Peacock of Harrisburg was engaged to put these into the form of circulars. Two months and a half elapsed for the latter to appear in Washington, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Harrisburg newspapers. Then at last, on April 19, the Commissioners to erect a Capitol, Governor William Findlay, Auditor General George Bryan, State Treasurer Richard M. Crain, Associate Justice John Bannister Gibson of the Supreme Court, and Attorney and Book-Seller William Graydon of Harrisburg, met to give final consideration to previously sifted ones of the seventeen proposals submitted. Of the five, Nos. 2, 8, 9, 11, and 17, they made choice of two for awards. To Robert Mills, proponent of No. 17, went the second premium of $200. To the proponent of No. 8 went the first prize of $400. Mr. Stephen Hills, the winner of that distinction, had only one day earlier sent in a design for the Capitol of Pennsylvania which as contractor and architect he offered to build "as near as possible to the sum of 120,000," outside sum sanctioned by the Assembly's act of January 27. The man who had directed the assembling and the sheltering of the great stock pile on the hill northeast of Harrisburg had, in fact, been chosen to be the builder.

Today only the letter which accompanied his drawings of the proposed structure and of its position on the public grounds survives. But that letter is so precisely detailed as to remain an almost perfect word-picture of the building which eventually would grace Capitol Hill from 1821 to 1897. In brief, it designated an edifice

---

10 Ibid., Hills' Account for making the fence.
11 Ibid., receipt of Peacock.
12 Findlay must have rejoiced to be *ex officio* on this Commission; as early as 1799, when he was a member of the Assembly, he had advocated bringing the seat of government to Harrisburg.
13 State Capitol Papers, Richard M. Crain to George Bryan, April 19, 1819.
14 Senate Journal, 1819-1820, 43-47.
180 feet front and 80 feet deep, so placed that the two Fire-Proof Office Buildings became wings to it and that a clear range of view was allowed between the column of their porticoes through the six columns of its own high circular portico. Sensitive to mass, proportion, and perspective, Stephen Hills saw all as an harmonious unit externally; and he planned the interior of his Capitol as gracefully, with rotunda tapering upwards to the fluted ceiling of the dome 100 feet above its floor and a double flight of stairs leading to House and to Senate Chamber halls, both of them 21 feet high, accommodated with concentrically placed members’ seats, galleries, and speakers’ desks. Passages to offices and committee rooms were easily open and free. All parts tended “as rays to the centre”; the spaciousness of design permitted a full dispensing of light—as might be expected of a Capitol whose portico columns were to rise to a height of 36 feet and whose rotunda measured to a diameter of 34 feet and led to a space of 40 feet between the door of the House and that of the Senate.

Indeed nothing seemed wanting to present perfection of structure but the blunt necessity of staying within $120,000 cost, and planning that the columns of the new portico should be built of brick, not stone, and covered with plaster. So, contract being awarded to him in April, 1819, as well as surety for his performance of it by December, 1821, being furnished by Messrs. Obed Fahnstock, Joseph A. McJimsey, and James S. Espy, of Harrisburg, Stephen Hills set to work with spirit, and did not need to wait long for praise.

On May 7 James Peacock was ready with comment. Not only did that editor of the Republican rejoice that Mr. Hills’ plan combined “external elegance” with convenient interior arrangement. Not only did he predict that “the execution of the work would in every particular equal the design.” Not only did he award encomiums to the Legislature of the late session which set plans in motion for the building, and especially to the members from Dauphin County who had furthered the project. He observed that the cellar was already “partly excavated,” and he had discovered that “machinery” was “constructing on an improved plan” for “sawing stone by horse power.” Moreover, he could promise his readers a corner-stone laying within a week or two.

21 Ibid., 45.
That happy event took place on the last day of May, 1819. At high noon on Monday, the 31st, the Harrisburg Band of Music played, Governor Findlay, and his fellow Commissioners Bryan, Crain, Gibson, and Graydon came officially. A concourse of citizens gathered to look on. The Chief Executive divided the honors of the occasion with stone-cutter William Smith and masons Valentine Kirgan and Samuel White. Everybody present delighted to have the ceremony further bruited by three discharges from public cannon, brought from the nearby State Arsenal. Then a more restricted company of officials, workmen, and burghers partook of a cold collation served to them by public house keeper Melchior Rahm, whose own pleasure in the function was by no means reduced by the fact that, as the State Senator from Berks and Dauphin Counties, in 1806-1810, he had worked to have the Seat of Government brought to Harrisburg, and that he had subsequently to that delivered some 50,000 brick from his kilns for erection of the Fire-Proof Buildings. The still unbuilt Capitol was a matter of great popular interest. None probably enjoyed the day more than Stephen Hills. It was something for him to see William Findlay and his aides depositing in the corner-stone their great treasure of copies of Pennsylvania State and national documents: from King Charles II's Charter to William Penn to the Declaration of Independence; to the State Constitution of 1776; to the Articles of Confederation of the United States; to the Constitution of the United States; to the 1790 Constitution of Pennsylvania; to all those Acts of Assembly by which the seat of government was removed from Philadelphia to Lancaster, and from Lancaster to Harrisburg, and by which the edifice now building was authorized to be erected. The work of the carpenter, agent of purchases, and architect was under way. He could look north and south and see the graceful porticoes of his earlier achievements in architecture; in his mind's eye he could see the plans which he had set down in his drawings growing into clear shape there on the hill.

In 1820 his Capitol grew into full external shape, and by the close of that year The Pennsylvania Intelligencer, founded by

22 Republican, June 4, 1819.
23 State Journal, especially for 1809-1810, where, on p. 189, Rahm’s vote for the affirmative is recorded.
24 Fire-Proof Buildings Papers, Receipts of Melchior Rahm and Samuel Comstock.
Charles Mowry, had taken over the enthusiastic Peacock's rights in *The Republican*, including his wood cut, and was ready to go on in the same spirit of pride. On December 5 Mowry published a description of the Capitol, now unfortunately lost; and a week later on December 12 he was pleased to cite a reference to the progress of the building made by Governor Findlay in his message to the newly convening Assembly. By that time, happily, the Chief Executive and the editor were on safe ground. In the preceding March, Findlay had signed an act authorizing the Commissioners to contract with Stephen Hills for constructing the columns and their capitals of hewn stone and for covering the roof of the dome "with some incombustible material." Three-and-a-half weeks later that architect, on April 21, had volunteered to build columns and capitals as newly specified—he needed not to hesitate, for he had already built the porticoes of the Fire-Proof Buildings of cut stone—and to cover with copper the dome and the four square corners of roof from which it rose, these services to be performed for $15,000 additional to the $120,000 cost of the main construction. On April 22 he had been contracted with to such purposes.

In the interim between then and December his work had been making considerable advance. Findlay now could expect the Capitol to be ready for the use of the Assembly of 1821-1822, and predict that appropriations would presently have to be made to provide it with furniture.

Moreover, on the 12th of the month the publisher of the *Intelligencer* could expand editorially on the elegant sample chairs which Mr. Lichtzanthaler was displaying on the floor of the House of Representatives in hope to catch a contract. Mr. Mowry noted that they were durably constructed, comfortable, and elegant—although they differed somewhat from "the three-legged stool on which 'immortal Alfred sat and sway'd the sceptre of his infant realms.'" On January 6, 1821, he could go even further in his delight in the new chief point of attraction in the Capital City of Harrisburg.

On that day, beneath a somewhat truncated and motto-less form...
of James Peacock's cut, he printed an ebullient and glowing description of "The Public Buildings"—one that drew into its lines every conceivable mark of dignity to make illustrious a seat of government. The author of this wrote romantically of the eminence on which the new Capitol stood. It was 100 feet higher than the Susquehanna, and overlooked town and country for some distance north and south. But especially was the prospect glorious from "the circular department of the Dome." From there "taste was literally cloyed with the beauties of the scenery": of rolling landscape "enlivened by numerous heights and highly cultivated farms"; of glittering reflections of the river, seen for 20 miles of its course; of the borough of Harrisburg, numbering about 1,000 houses, and only 300 paces away; of its "noble bridge, or rather two bridges, each 1,500 feet long, exclusive of an island in the middle of the river, and the causeway which connects them"; of those "more sublime features," the "gap about 7 miles distant where the Susquehanna breaks through that famous range of mountains called the Blue Ridge, which, emblematic of the indissolubility of the Union, runs from Maine to Georgia."

Just who set down all this verbal glow for Charles Mowry is not known today; but, if the writer's comment had small relation to the progress of Stephen Hills' work, it has at least the value of indicating that he had his construction under roof by December, 1820, and the copper-roofed dome of the Capitol in position. For it was from there that the spectator had had his grand view.

Indeed, it would seem safe to believe that the experienced builder Stephen Hills pressed procedure pretty much as do modern contractors. He got the walls of his structure up and its roof on as one main endeavor. He got the interior of his structure and all the intricacies of its details done as a second, and an even more gradual, time-taking task. At any rate the carpenter-architect advanced his work steadily in 1821. His original contract called for completion on or before the first Tuesday of December in that year. He asked for no extension of time when in April, 1820, he contracted to build the columns of the portico in hewn stone rather than brick. On August 17, 1821, Charles Mowry of The Pennsylvania Intelligencer hesitated not at all to remark editorially: "there is not much doubt but the Halls will be ready for the reception

"Penna. Intelligencer, Jan. 6, 1821."
of the next Legislature” (which obviously meant to him, Tuesday, December 4, first Tuesday of the month and proper date for reconvening).

In fact by August the plaster work indoors had been completed; the “inclined planes” for members’ desks had begun making, furniture was already arriving. To those signs of advancement in the interior could be added the cheerful news that a street 60 feet wide had been cut through the hill from the corner of Walnut and Third Streets on a range with the front of the three buildings, and that the earth removed by this cut had been deposited in the low ground in front of the Capitol and was now making a hard dry road to the Susquehanna. To cap all those evidences of a proud and succeeding enterprise, Mr. Mowry added the statement that “Mr. Hills, whose indefatigable exertion and care to complete the buildings was entitled to commendation,” had in his employ on the buildings 86 men, besides 24 engaged in the street digging, a total roll of 110.

The year moved on into early November, the restive editor of the Franklin Gazette advised his readers that he “understood from Harrisburg that the New Capitol will probably not be prepared for the reception and accommodation of the Legislature at any time during the approaching winter”;

The year moved on into early November, the restive editor of the Franklin Gazette advised his readers that he “understood from Harrisburg that the New Capitol will probably not be prepared for the reception and accommodation of the Legislature at any time during the approaching winter”; and Charles Mowry was stirred

\[Penna. Intelligencer, Nov. 9, 1821.\]
to a rejoinder. Indignantly he responded that the remark came
from misinformation. After having read it, he went directly on
the subject to Stephen Hills; and that gentleman assured him
"that the Capitol will be completed sufficiently for the reception
of the Legislature at their first meeting." He would be sorry, how-
ever, if they should proceed to occupy it immediately; because of
"the greenness of the painting" he wished that the legislators would
not think of using it before Christmas.

The Legislature went there first on a day of fete on January 2,
1822. Weather conditions were "unusually favorable" for celebra-
tion. Officialdom, legislative and administrative, with architect,
masons, and workmen generally, found it easy to meet and form
procession opposite the old "State-House." Ladies of Harrisburg
and the adjacent countryside found it just right for taking ad-
vantage of the announcement that they would be admitted to the
House of Representatives prior to the arrival of the official mem-
bers, and filled the gallery there before ever the formation of the
parade in Market Street at 10 o'clock.

Indifferent to the old Dauphin County Court House, undis-
rupted by the charred remains of negro John Brown's barber shop,
perilously next door to this and burned just three nights before,
the men fell into line. Stephen Hills with eighty of his workmen led
the way, their group walking two and two. After them came in the
march clergymen of the borough headed by President John M.
Mason of Dickinson College, Carlisle, and the Rev. Dr. George
Lochman of the Lutheran Church, Harrisburg. Then came Gov-
ernor Hiester and the Heads of his Departments of State followed
by the Officers, the Speaker, and the Members of the Senate, and
the Officers, the Speaker, and the Members of the House. The
Judges succeeded these, and were followed by the Mayor and
Council of Harrisburg. Last came citizens.

To Third Street marched all, up Third Street to Walnut Street,
into the public grounds at the corner of those two thoroughfares.
Past the State Arsenal they came, and past the South Fire-Proof
Building. Presently the leaders of the procession were in front of
the portico, and Mr. Hills signaled his men to separate into two
lines and let the official part of the procession pass between these

---


PENNSYLVANIA STATE CAPITOL

From J. I. Williams' "View of Harrisburg, 1855."

Courtesy Dauphin Deposit Trust Company
into the Capitol. In orderly form officialdom made its entrance into
the great rotunda, with the architect's men prompt to follow. After
that there was a rush.

More citizens tried crowding in than could be accommodated;
the punctual ladies had already appropriated every possible seat
in the House of Representatives which could be seized. In that Hall
had to be spoken the prayer and the address of the day to a surging
throng of Members, Senators, State Officers, citizens, and pre-
empting females. How well the Rev. Messrs. Lochman and Mason
were heard, unfortunately, cannot today be declared. But, happily,
the complete text of each of the two speakers has been preserved;
and in prayer and address can be read much of the spirit of that
age when the buyer-carpenter-architect-superintendent Stephen
Hills built diligently and without affectation a Capitol for Penn-
sylvania.

Dr. Lochman was aware of the past of the Commonwealth, of
the part which it had played in the struggle for independence, of
the prosperity which it enjoyed under its freedom and by the grace
of God, of the duties of honor and wisdom incumbent upon it and
its Legislature. He was as confident "that except the Lord build
the house, they labor in vain that build it." He rejoiced that no
lives had been lost in the building of the new Capitol; "no tears of
widows or orphans were caused by its erection." God had "pre-
served and protected its workmen." The good Lutheran prayed
that the eyes of the Lord might then "be open into this house night
and day" and "watch over it and preserve it from fire and
lightning." Emphatically he felt that "except the Lord keep the
city, the watchmen wake, but in vain."

The prudent historian may appraise the comments of the clerics
Lochman and Mason on January 2, 1822, more as supplication than
as prophecy. Rational opinion properly hesitates to declare the
exact measure of the fulfillment of any prayer. Wish does not too
often constitute future accomplished fact. Admittedly, at the least,
the Lord did not always "keep" the Capitol which Stephen Hills
built; and the "waking" of the watchmen on February 2, 1897,
was certainly considerably "in vain."

On that date the "last edition" of the Harrisburg Telegraph
headlined the sad news that Pennsylvania's Capitol was in ruins.

*34 Penna. Intelligencer, Jan. 11, 1822.
It had "Burned to the Ground This Afternoon." Slowly and step by step were recounted the beginning and the progress of the destruction. First discovery of signs of smoke occurred slightly before one o'clock. One hour later the dome collapsed and crashed earthwards. At three o'clock all was a burning heap of debris except the massive two-feet thick walls of the building and the six gaunt stone columns of its great portico.

The Telegraph report of the fire offered no encomiums on the vigilance of either executive officers or legislators. It noted that both Houses were in session as the catastrophe struck; it told of the actions of simple men in the sudden moments of stress; it offered brief figures of loss in insurance and monetary terms. It mentioned Governor William Findlay's laying of the corner-stone in May, 1819. It pronounced "valuable documents of the Legislature for years back... undoubtedly lost"; and it observed that everything within the old structure, "good and bad, was gone, a sacrifice to the greed of King Fire." It made no reference to the builder; and it reflected no townsman's memory now that the designer and architect of it seventy-five years before had been one Stephen Hills.

Columns of the majestic portico, their white paint scorched and their capitals smoke-stained, stood firm and austere as early dusk fell on Tuesday, February 2, 1897. Their story seemed told. They had reached the end of their cycle. New faces, new times were at hand with the approaching turn of a century. Few men thought now of the scenes which had attended the emergence of the old Capitol.

Particularly none remembered the clink of hammer and chisel as stone cutters on the Public Grounds dressed rude blocks of sandstone into plinth, section of column, section of circular architrave, during the busy months of 1820 in order that Stephen Hills' six-columned portico might presently culminate into splendor. None remembered those later days when tier by tier each column rose into its own noble thirty-six feet of height, while masons Valentine Kirgan and Nicholas Hitzelburger directed the work of their assistants and the architect looked on. There were no steam-powered derricks with wire ropes and block-and-tackle and pulley to aid them. Rather at their advantage were only two boles of trees—they were probably hickories—cut out of Maclay's Woods, crossed near their tops, lashed together into a tall crude 'X,'
BEFORE THE FIRE

The clock hands shown here are now in the museum of the Historical Society of Dauphin County.

AFTER THE FIRE

Courtesy the Historical Society of Dauphin County
which men of the time called shears, their sloping power to lift and to lower regulated by winch and ropes, the point of crossing and winding or unwinding at the will of man-manipulated handle and ratchet. By such a pioneer contrivance, and by the rope and tongs suspended from the point of crossing, each cylinder of sandstone was raised from the position on the ground nearby to which wooden rollers and crowbars had brought it, then steadily guided into exact place above the plinth or the cylinder beneath it by the strong, deft hands of workmen poised on a scaffold encircling each column and rising from day to day with it as it climaxed to full altitude. All the strain, the skill, the wonder of the task had been forgotten, although the very ruin of the work in February, 1897, was even then a stark testimony of its greatness as an achievement rendered, under the authority of a Governor and a Commission, with the enthusiasm of Pennsylvania workingmen and small-town merchants in 1819-1821, and the capable surveillance of a master-carpenter who had grown into the brilliant, however modest, architect Stephen Hills.