South Carolina Historical Magazine

Volume 100 Number 2
April 1999

Publication of this issue is made possible
in part by the Frederick Horner Bunting
Publication Fund and

WACHOVIA

(ISSN 0038-3082)
(USPS 502360)
PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE
SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
FIREPROOF BUILDING
100 MEETING STREET
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA 29401-2299
PHONE (843) 723-3225 • FAX (843) 723-8584

South Carolina Historical Magazine

April 1999 • Volume 100, Number 2

CONTENTS:

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES

The *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (ISSN 0038-3082) is published quarterly (January, April, July, and October) by the South Carolina Historical Society, Fireproof Building, 100 Meeting Street, Charleston, S.C. 29401-2299.

Second-class postage paid at Charleston, South Carolina.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to South Carolina Historical Society, Fireproof Building, 100 Meeting Street, Charleston, S.C. 29401-2299.

SOUTH CAROLINA'S ARCHITECTURAL AMBITION: THE EFFORT TO ERECT THE NEW STATE CAPITOL, 1851-1855

DANIEL J. VIVIAN*

IN *THE GEOGRAPHY OF SOUTH CAROLINA*, PUBLISHED IN 1843, William Gilmore Simms described the South Carolina State House in Columbia as "an inferior building, of wood, humble in its architecture, and only tolerably commodious."[1] Many governmental officials of the period undoubtedly agreed with Simms' unflattering assessment. Built in the early 1790s, the State House a half century later had become a source of constant concern for the General Assembly. Spatially, it no longer met the expanding needs of the state government; in an 1850 legislative report, for instance, the Special Joint Committee upon the State House and Grounds lamented that all Senate committees and half those of the House of Representatives were forced to meet elsewhere in Columbia because no rooms were available for their use.[2] The building was also deteriorating and required frequent, often costly repairs. By the late 1840s, many legislators had begun to question the wisdom of making almost annual appropriations to maintain a decaying structure that was increasingly

*Daniel J. Vivian is survey coordinator for the State Historic Preservation Office, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

[1]William Gilmore Simms, *The Geography of South Carolina* (Charleston: Babcock & Co., 1843), 125.

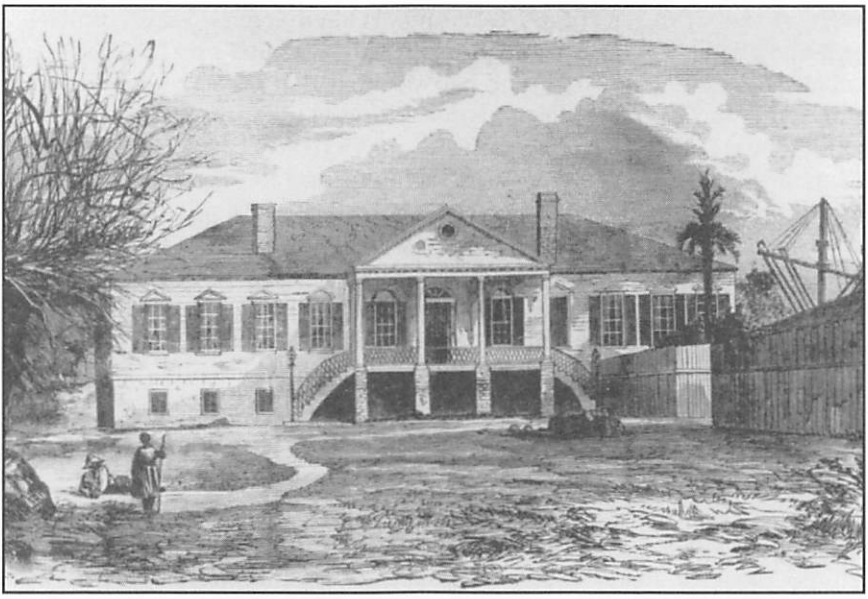
This article is a product of the South Carolina State House Documentation Project, an interdisciplinary undertaking funded by the General Assembly under the oversight of the State House Joint Committee to document the history of the current state capitol building and its two predecessors. Institutions involved include the University of South Carolina, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, and the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology. Research findings from the project have served as the basis for *Creating the South Carolina State House* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999) by USC professor of art history Dr. John M. Bryan and "The South Carolina State House: Buildings for the State and its People," a historical exhibit displayed at the State Museum from June 1998 to February 1999. This article has benefited from the collective insights of the project's research team, which includes Dan Bilderback, Roger Christman, Dr. John M. Bryan, and the author. The author also wishes to extend special thanks Roger Christman, Jean B. Lee, Robert Weyeneth, and the editorial board of the *South Carolina Historical Magazine* for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

[2]Report of the Special Joint Committee upon the State House and Grounds, *Reports and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina* (hereafter *Reports and Resolutions*), 1850, 158.

Sponsors

Edward M. Armfield, Jr.
Mr. & Mrs. Robert M. Baldwin
Mr. & Mrs. Rufus Barkley
Mrs. Lloyd A. Beattie
Dr. Barbara Bellows
BellSouth
Mrs. J. A. Blanton
Spotswood Walker Box
F. Kinloch Bull, Jr.
Mr. & Mrs. Mark W. Buyck, Jr.
Hilary Cadwallader
Wayland H. Cato, Jr.
Dr. & Mrs. Malcolm C. Clark
Rev. & Mrs. Philip G. Clarke, Jr.
College of Charleston
Department of History
COPAC
Mr. & Mrs. James S. Cordovano
The Charleston Corporation
Mr. & Mrs. John H. Daniels
Mr. & Mrs. Hugh G. Dargan, Jr.
Fabtech, Inc.
Mr. & Mrs. L.G. Fishburne
Mr. & Mrs. Caleb C. Fort
Mr. & Mrs. Steve C. Griffith, Jr.
Maj. Gen. & Mrs. James A. Grimsley, Jr.
Mr. & Mrs. C. Michael Harrington
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hazlehurst
Mr. & Mrs. Lawson Hayes
Mr. & Mrs. Robert H. Hood
Leonard Hultquist
Mr. & Mrs. Richard W. Hutson, Jr.
Dr. & Mrs. S. Edward Izard
Jeffries Travis Realty Corp.
Hugh C. Lane, Sr.
Dr. Frank B. Lee, Sr.
Mr. & Mrs. David B. McCormack
John B. McLeod
Magnolia Place & Its Gardens
Mr. & Mrs. David Maybank, Jr.
Mr. & Mrs. Henry B. Middleton
Mr. & Mrs. B. Alston Moore, Jr.
Mr. & Mrs. Stephen G. Morrison
North American Underwriters
Dr. & Mrs. William W. Old III
Lucille V. Pate
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas H. Pope III
Frances H. Porcher
Mr. & Mrs. John M. Rivers, Jr.
Mr. & Mrs. Robert N. Rosen
Jane Clark Scott
Mr. & Mrs. Albert R. Simonds
Mr. & Mrs. Park B. Smith
Mr. and Mrs. Roy McBee Smith
Dr. & Mrs. E. Lee Spence
Mr. & Mrs. Roland A. Stebbins
Mr. & Mrs. H. Simmons Tate, Jr.
Dr. J. Ives Townsend
Mary Elizabeth Van Every
Vendue Inn Association, LLC
Mr. & Mrs. Charles E. Volpe
Mr. & Mrs. Mark L. Wheless
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph H. Williams
John Winthrop
Robert Winthrop

South Carolina Historical Society Membership Categories
Proprietors' Council: Benefactor: $2,000 and above; Patron: $1,000-1,999; Sponsor: $500-999
Regular Membership: Sustainer: $100-499; Contributor: $60; Libraries: $50; Regular: $50; Student: $25.



The grounds of the first State House in Columbia between 1854 and 1865 during the construction of the New State House. Note the construction fence and derrick to the right of the first State House. Illustration courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library.

unsuited to the needs of the state government.[3]

At the same time, concern for the official records of the state developed into one of the primary factors that compelled the legislature to consider construction of a new capitol building. Space was so limited in the State House that, in 1848, the west portico was removed and a room for the storage of legislative records was built in its place.[4] This makeshift measure, however, failed to alleviate the problem. Legislators were also alarmed by the conditions under which documents were kept. In 1850, when officials found the "sills, joists and flooring" of offices on the first floor "completely decayed," they recognized that the large volume of state papers stored there

[3]The worsening physical condition of the State House was noted in numerous legislative documents during the period. See especially Report of the Committee on Repairs, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1842, 103-104; Report of the Special Joint Committee upon the State House and Grounds, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1850, 157-158; Report of the Special Joint Committee on the State House and Grounds, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1851, 272-274.

[4]Report of the Committee on Public Buildings, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1848, 199-202.

were at risk of destruction.[5] Governor Whitemarsh B. Seabrook took a personal interest in the preservation of South Carolina's early records and official documents; by 1849, he had decided that they were sufficiently numerous and valuable "to justify the adoption of prompt measures by an enlightened Legislature, to rescue from oblivion these precious relics."[6] The General Assembly agreed and, in 1850, decided to construct a fireproof building directly adjacent to the State House that would serve as an archival repository.[7] Moreover, the structure was designed with the provision that, if the legislature so desired, it could later serve as the basement story for one wing of a new capitol.[8] To oversee construction, the General Assembly required the appointment of eight of its members to a board of commissioners.[9] After the cornerstone was laid in December 1851, it was not long before the possibility of relocating meeting rooms and state offices to a spacious, solid building proved irresistible to the legislators. The following year the General Assembly voted to press ahead with construction

[5]Report of the Special Joint Committee upon the State House and Grounds, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1850, 157-158.

[6]Message No. 1 of Governor Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of South Carolina* (hereafter *House Journal*), 1849, 27. On concern for the state records, see also Report of the Committee on Education, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1849, 321-322; Correspondence, &c. concerning the Historical Records of the State of South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1849, 454-469; Message No. 3 of Governor Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1850, 239-141; and Report of the Special Joint Committee on State House and Grounds, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1851, 272-274.

[7]Report of the Special Joint Committee upon the State House and Grounds, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1850, 157-158.

[8]Report of the Special Joint Committee on the State House and Grounds, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1851, 273.

[9]*Reports and Resolutions*, 1851, 284-285. The board of commissioners was to consist of three members of the senate and five members of the house, appointed by the president of the senate and the speaker of the house, respectively. Only the senate, however, took immediate action on the matter, appointing James Gregg, William Izard Bull, and Richard S. Bedon; the latter two had served on the 1850 Special Joint Committee upon the State House and Grounds. The house never made any formal appointments to the board, but it appears that its members then serving on the same joint committee—Thomas M. Wagner, Laurence M. Keitt, and Benjamin F. Hunt—began serving as commissioners. The continuity between the joint committee and the board of commissioners is not surprising since the former was given authority to contract for construction of the fireproof building and control of the funds appropriated for the undertaking. Although the legislative record is unclear on the issue, it seems that the board never had eight members. See *House Journal*, 1850, 56, 58; *Journal of the Senate of the State of South Carolina* (hereafter *Senate Journal*), 1851, 171; Report of the Special Joint Committee upon the State House and Grounds, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1850, 158.

During the critical period between spring 1854 and the 1855 legislative session

of the New State Capitol.[10]

The decision to erect the New State Capitol rapidly came to embody far more ambitious intentions than to simply build a sturdy replacement for the deteriorating wood and brick State House. The lofty nature of the state's goals became unmistakably clear when the commissioners presented plans for the building to the General Assembly in 1853. "The Capitol will contain every convenience of a State House," they declared. Only iron and granite was to be used in its construction, to make it "effectually fire proof, so that nothing but the waste of the ages can destroy it." Once completed, the commissioners assured the legislature, "South Carolina will be able to boast of a State Capitol . . . comparing in convenience and magnificence to any in the Union."[11] The legislature endorsed the plan and thus committed the state to raising a work of public architecture that would stand on a par with any building in the nation. At the time, neither the commissioners nor the General Assembly could foresee the effort and expense that would be required to achieve such a grandiose aim. The undertaking was to prove far more costly than anticipated, daunting in its magnitude, prone to conflict, and, at times, beyond the administrative capacities of the commissioners. More than once, it would seem certain that the effort to erect the New State Capitol was destined to end in failure rather than success.

Peter H. Hammarskold, a South Carolina architect of rising popularity, was selected to design and supervise construction of the fireproof archives and, subsequently, the New State Capitol. Born in Sweden, Hammarskold arrived in Charleston during the 1840s and began working as an architect,

discussed in this article, it is certain that the board had a stable membership of six legislators: William Izard Bull, John L. Manning, Charles F. McCay, Thomas J. Goodwyn, Richard S. Bedon, and Thomas M. Wagner. See Report of the Commissioners of the New State House, n.d. [ca. Dec. 1855], Miscellaneous Communication 344, 16, General Assembly Papers (hereafter GA Papers), South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C. (hereafter SCDAH).

[10]Report of the Committee on the State House and Grounds, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1852, 217.

The term "New State Capitol" is used throughout this article for two principal reasons. First, it appeared in virtually all of the legislative documents of the era, from the commissioners' notes to the General Assembly journals, and thus evokes a clear sense of the importance ascribed to the undertaking by those responsible for it. Second, it serves here to identify a specific structure—the grandly monumental building begun in the 1850s that was never realized—and to distinguish it from its predecessor, the first state house in Columbia, and the substantially different building into which it evolved after the Civil War.

[11]Report of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1853, 133-134.

civil engineer, and draftsman.[12] In 1850, under the direction of Edward B. White, Charleston's most prominent and prolific architect of the period, Hammarskold worked on the city high school and additions to the College of Charleston. An impressive draftsman, his architectural drawings were often praised for their artistic merits.[13] In terms of practical experience, however, Hammarskold's architectural credentials were limited. He had never supervised a building project of comparable scale before his design for the New State Capitol was selected. Other qualifications may have convinced the commissioners that Hammarskold was capable of the task. In particular, experience gained as a director of Spartanburg's Nesbit Iron Works allowed him to claim familiarity with construction techniques that relied upon iron for structural purposes, as was specified for the new building.[14]

Once Hammarskold began work in Columbia, demand for his services increased markedly. As construction began on the New State Capitol he undertook other projects in the capitol city—most notably a professor's residence at the South Carolina College—and also continued to design buildings in Charleston.[15] With his time divided among his many professional obligations, Hammarskold failed to devote adequate attention to construction of the New State Capitol and allowed the contractors for the masonry and brickwork to perform shoddy work. His neglect was to cost him his job and to bring construction to a standstill.

In early May 1854, the commissioners noticed small cracks in the interior plaster of the basement of the New State Capitol. Further inspection revealed evidence of structural failure in the work performed under Hammarskold's direction. Indeed, the cracking plaster was symptomatic of larger fissures in the masonry throughout the partially completed foundations. Construction was most advanced in the north wing of the building—the portion designed to serve as a fireproof archival repository—and with the walls rising about twelve feet above the foundations, the damage was readily apparent. At the northwest corner, cracks twenty to twenty-five feet in length and more than a quarter-inch thick in places were visible in the stonework above the basement story windows. The huge groined arches, designed to distribute the forces placed on the load-bearing walls, were also failing; some arch stones had fallen out of position and

[12]Peter Hjalmar Hammarskold, Petition for Citizenship, 5 Nov. 1849, Journal of the U.S. District Court at Charleston, Book 6 (1849-1860), 7, SCDAH.

[13]Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston* (1945; reprint, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 241; Kenneth Severens, *Charleston Antebellum Architecture and Civic Destiny* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 170.

[14]Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, 241-243.

[15]Ibid., 242-243.

numerous cracks of varying dimensions were visible. To a lesser degree, the northeast corner of the foundation was similarly defective, and further scrutiny revealed the presence of smaller cracks in some interior walls and at the southeast corner.[16]

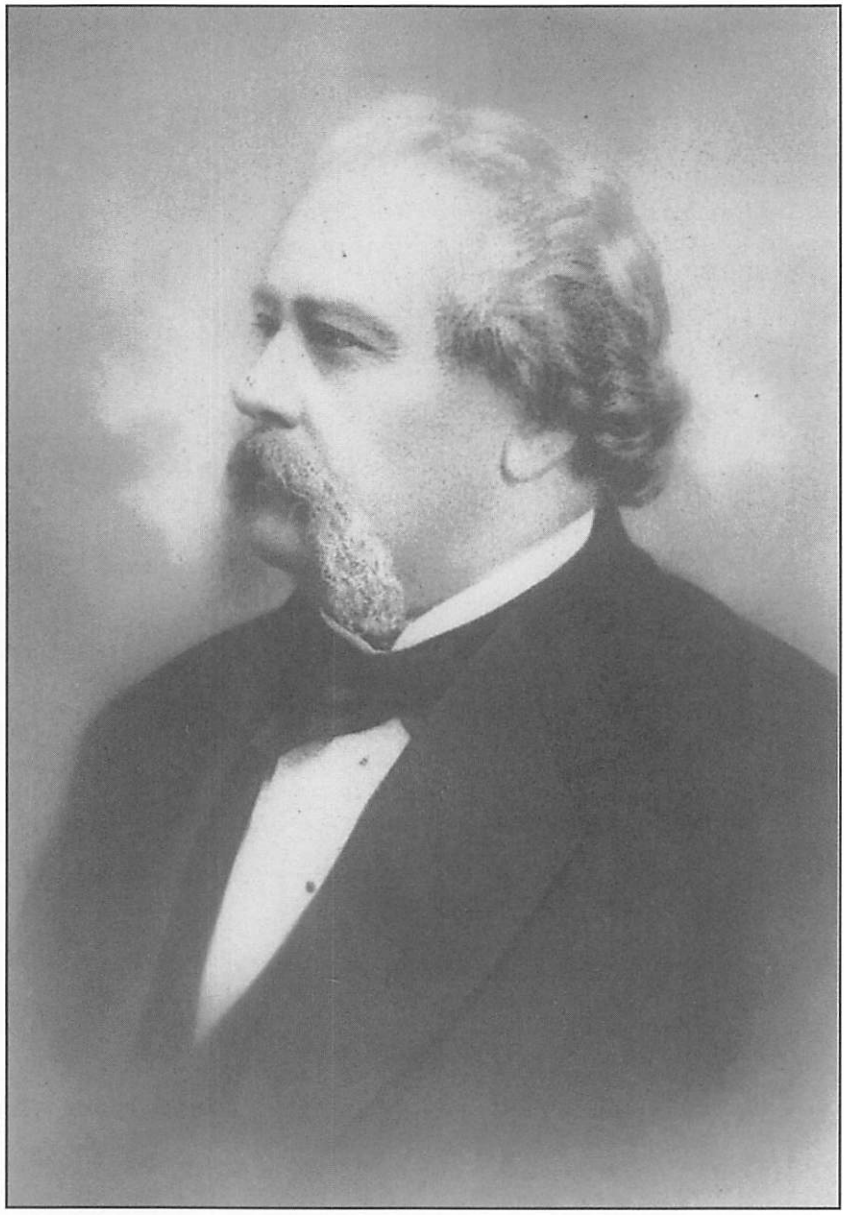
Alarmed by their discoveries, the commissioners dismissed Hammarskold and immediately sought the "advice of an architect possessed of undoubted skill and competency." Upon the recommendation of Governor John L. Manning, they summoned John R. Niernsee of Baltimore to inspect the flawed building.[17] By virtue of his extensive engineering and architectural expertise, the Vienna-trained Niernsee was well qualified to serve as a consulting architect. After emigrating to the United States in 1838, he was hired by Benjamin H. Latrobe, Jr., as a draftsman and engineer with the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. The position introduced him to James Crawford Neilson, another B&O engineer; in 1848, the pair entered into a partnership and during the decade that followed, the architectural firm of Niernsee & Neilson rapidly grew to become the largest and most successful in Baltimore. Their work included numerous dwelling houses, commercial buildings, and churches, but their most important structures of the early 1850s were several depots for the B&O.[18] The commissioners thus had good reason to believe that Niernsee would provide them with sound advice on Hammarskold's collapsing foundations.

As the commissioners awaited Niernsee's arrival in Columbia, Assistant Architect John A. Kay provided them with the first authoritative condemnation of the work performed under Hammarskold's supervision. In Kay's judgment, poor workmanship, inferior materials, and flawed design were responsible for the failure of the foundations. The walls built by Hammarskold had two "separate and distinct parts," an exterior

[16]Report of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1854, 130-133; Report of the Superintending Architect of the New State Capitol, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1854, 133-137; Report of John A. Kay to the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, n.d. [ca. late May or early June 1854], John L. Manning Papers, in the Chestnut-Miller-Manning Family Papers (hereafter Manning Papers), microfiche, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, S.C. (hereafter SCHS).

[17]Report of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1854, 130-131; Copy from Minutes of Commissioners, entry of May 27, 1854, George Edward Walker Papers (hereafter Walker Papers), microfilm, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, S.C. (hereafter SCL). Hammarskold received notice of his removal from office on June 1, 1854; see Memorial and Protest of P.H. Hammarskold, Dec. 5, 1854, Petition 71, GA Papers, SCDAH.

[18]James D. Dilts, *The Great Road: The Building of the Baltimore and Ohio, The Nation's First Railroad, 1828-1853* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 267, 375-376, 435 n. 7; John Dorsey and James D. Dilts, *A Guide to Baltimore Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Centreville, Md.: Tidewater Publishers, 1981), 282-283.



A Bachrach portrait of John R. Niernsee (1813-1885). Niernsee's extensive engineering and architectural expertise made him a logical candidate to serve as consulting engineer for the New State Capitol after the dismissal of Peter H. Hammarskold. Courtesy of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

"veneering" of masonry and an interior wall of brick. What little bond existed between them was woefully insufficient; the mass of the building was far too great for either the stonework or the brickwork to support independently and thus, both were ruined because of their disunion. Not only had the stonework been poorly laid, Kay stated, but many of the cut granite blocks were smaller than desirable. Door and window frames built in a "highly objectionable" manner further undermined the structural integrity of the walls. In addition, Hammarskold's design for the building placed "two powerful steam boilers under its very center," a flaw which Kay believed to be a "most serious evil." The danger of an explosion, he warned, "menaces the entire Building" and "puts the lives of all who may be inside in jeopardy."[19] In all, it was little surprise that Hammarskold's foundations began crumbling well before their completion.

Niernsee first met with the commissioners on June 15, 1854. Four days later, after thoroughly inspecting the foundations, he and Kay submitted a report that condemned Hammarskold's work, explicitly identified the structural flaws present in the building, and made recommendations for their repair and further construction. Niernsee proposed to remove the entire foundations of the south wing, much of those in the building's central sections, and all of the defective groined arches. In the north wing, only its crumbling corners would be reconstructed; at the time, Niernsee believed that further construction of the best quality could "counteract any bad effects" stemming from the faulty walls. Though he admitted that it would have been preferable "to commence the whole building anew in a proper and perfect way," in the interest of time and economy, Niernsee believed it could be made structurally sound while retaining a considerable portion of Hammarskold's poorly fabricated foundations. He claimed a "more perfect & difficult superstructure" would "remedy or counteract defects" in the existing foundations and "insure [*sic*] permanence to the work."[20] The commissioners placed their trust in Niernsee and immediately ordered the contractors to begin dismantling portions of the foundations according to his instructions.

With a competent consultant at their disposal, the commissioners next began the search for a new resident and superintending architect. Advertisements placed in newspapers in Columbia, Charleston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore during July 1854 yielded twenty-nine

[19]Report of John A. Kay to the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, n.d. [ca. late May or early June 1854], Manning Papers, SCHS.

[20]John R. Niernsee to George E. Walker, August 24, 1854, Walker Papers, SCL (all quotations); Report of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1854, 131-132.

applications for the position. On August 3, 1854, the commissioners elected George E. Walker to the office of resident and superintending architect.[21]

Though hired amid troubled circumstances that jeopardized the outcome of the New State Capitol in its embryonic stages, Walker's appointment was indeed an auspicious career development that appeared to confirm an emerging architectural talent. He brought a level of experience to the project that surpassed that of Hammarskold and gave the commissioners reason to believe that he was capable of supervising an undertaking of such magnitude. Like many of his contemporaries, surveying and civil engineering projects constituted much of Walker's early professional experience and facilitated his entry into the field of building design. A native of Charleston, he spent three years surveying and supervising the construction of the Greenville and Columbia Railroad beginning in 1847.[22] His first major architectural commission was Free School No. 6 in Charleston, a building for which he garnered considerable acclaim upon its completion in 1852. Walker also remodeled the courthouse at Georgetown and designed the library building at the College of Charleston in the early 1850s. Most importantly, he served as assistant constructing architect under the direction of Edward B. White on the new Custom House in Charleston, itself a building of monumental stature. In support of Walker's application for the position of superintending architect of the New State Capitol, the commissioners received letters of recommendation from A.H. Bowman, superintending architect of the Treasury Department, and W.L. Colcock, commissioner of the new Custom House.[23] Convinced that it was within Walker's capacity to salvage the New State Capitol, the commissioners proclaimed him a "gentleman of merit and great promise in his profession."[24]

Walker was not merely expected to be the building's savior, but, in addition, the appointment promised that he would oversee construction through to completion, thereby forever placing his name on a building that was intended to be "grandly monumental" from the outset.[25] He harbored

[21]Report of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1854, 130-132; Copy from Minutes of Commissioners, entries of June 17 and August 3, 1854, Walker Papers, SCL; *Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, S.C.), August 5, 1854.

[22]Capt. George E. Walker, n.d., typescript, p. 1, Walker Papers, SCL.

[23]A.H. Bowman to the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, May 20, 1854; W.L. Colcock to the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, June 9, 1854, both in Walker Papers, SCL. On Walker and his early work in Charleston, see Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, 244-248; on Walker's design for the library building at the College of Charleston, see Severens, *Charleston Antebellum Architecture*, 140.

[24]Report of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1854, 132.

[25]Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale, *Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the USA* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 133.

no illusions about the scale of the project and knew that it was certain to test his abilities, but he eagerly accepted the challenge. The enduring benefits to be gained from such a prominent, lucrative commission doubtless provided ample motivation. The chance to design and supervise construction of the New State Capitol represented an opportunity for Walker to ensure himself of lifelong success in the architectural profession. Yet soon after arriving in Columbia, he would find himself beset with problems far greater than those that typically burdened the supervisor of a major mid-nineteenth century building project. Confronted by as many political as architectural problems and unable to deal with any of them effectively, Walker was to become the pivotal figure in the state's effort to erect the New State Capitol. His tenure in the office of superintending architect would prove tumultuous and decidedly brief.

Walker met with the commissioners on August 4. After receiving formal notice of his appointment he set to work at once. His initial survey of the building site found the contractors well underway with the disassembly of the foundations. As per Niernsee's orders, they had removed the entire northwest corner of the building. From the materials they had uncovered, it was clear to Walker that Hammarskold's work, particularly in the north wing, was even worse than Niernsee and Kay had suspected. "The mortar is scarcely worth the name," stated Walker, describing it as "a mass of wet sand, destitute of lime" that could be "easily removed from the walls in large lumps with the fingers, without the aid of tools."[26] The bricks too were of poor quality, "soft as clay" and "easily cut with a pen knife."[27] In his judgment, the foundations had been constructed in a "very imperfect manner.[28] On the basis of his inspection, Walker concluded that Niernsee's plans for further construction of the building demanded serious revision.

Walker wrote to Niernsee at once to inform him of his findings. Almost immediately, the two architects became engaged in a dispute over how the problems with Hammarskold's foundations could best be rectified and construction resumed. Despite the miserable condition of the north wing, Walker believed that it could be salvaged and, therefore, Niernsee's condemnation of the south wing made little sense. Judging the foundations of the south wing "quite equal to, if not superior in quality to those of the North wing," he told Niernsee that "if a superstructure can with safety be placed upon the walls of [the] North wing . . . a similar superstructure can with much more safety, be constructed immediately upon the foundations

[26]Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings of Commissioners of the New State Capitol, Columbia, South Carolina* (n.p.: R.M. Stokes, n.d.), 12.

[27]George E. Walker, Architect's Diary, New State Capitol, entry of August 23, 1854, Walker Papers, SCL.

[28]Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 12.

of the South portion of [the] Building, they not being encumbered with twelve feet of defective wall." To Walker, who was absolutely convinced that the worst mortar and softest bricks had been used in the walls of the north wing, Niernsee's orders to remove the foundations of the south wing "simply because the mortar is not as good [as that in the north wing]" seemed ridiculous. If the work proceeded according to his plans, Walker asserted, the commissioners would surely ask why "the south wing[,] which is the best, rejected, and the North Wing[,] which is the worst, accepted?" Walker therefore concluded that nearly all of the foundations were salvageable and that the contractors should press on with the work.[29] Niernsee, however, adhered to his original judgment. By the end of August, he sensed that a compromise was unlikely and suggested to Walker that it might be necessary "to call in an umpire for the final decision."[30] In response, Walker confidently stated that the commissioners were undoubtedly capable of rendering a judgment on the issue themselves.[31]

While the plan to erect a building of such size and stature upon faulty foundations involved obvious risks, political as well as pragmatic reasons compelled the commissioners to hasten construction. In particular, they were eager to see substantial progress made before the General Assembly convened for its annual session in November. Chairman of the commissioners William Izard Bull, a St. Andrew Parish planter with nearly two decades' experience as a legislator, feared that if the foundations were entirely removed and the building was begun anew, the entire scheme to erect a new capitol might be jeopardized. "Do push on with the reconstruction with all energy and let us have it," he urged Walker. "I am of the opinion," Bull stated flatly, that "if we can get it well up and in an advanced state before the Legislature meets all will go well." Otherwise, he had "the most gloomy forebodings" and feared that "all sorts of wrangling" would arise, resulting in "the loss of an appropriation to carry on the work which will forever seal [the building's] fate."[32] The entire project clearly rested upon

[29]Walker to Niernsee, August 31, 1854, Walker Papers, SCL; Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 12.

[30]Niernsee to Walker, August 24, 1854, Walker Papers, SCL.

[31]Walker to Niernsee, August 31, 1854, both in Walker Papers, SCL. The only issue of significance that Walker and Niernsee agreed on was the inadequacy of Hammarskold's work. His plans for the New State Capitol, they told the commissioners, were as inferior as his foundations. They consisted of only a base elevation and some general structural outlines; entirely lacking were any finishing or construction details. See Report of John R. Niernsee and G.E. Walker, December 13, 1854, Misc. Communication 61, GA Papers, SCDAH.

[32]William Izard Bull to [Walker], fragment of undated letter [ca. early Sept. 1854], Walker Papers, SCL. On Bull, see N. Louise Bailey, Mary L. Morgan, and Carolyn R. Taylor, eds., *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate, 1776-1985* (3 vols.; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), Vol. I, 231-233.

tenuous ground in the aftermath of Hammarskold's flawed work. Certainly, the legislature could be expected to scrutinize every detail of the undertaking and to deliberate at length over its expected cost, then estimated at close to a million dollars.

Yet as work on the building continued during the month of September, it became apparent that all of the foundations were "very much inferior to what was at first supposed." The dispute between Niernsee and Walker was effectively resolved when they both reached the unavoidable conclusion that it was "unsafe and imprudent to attempt to raise the remainder of the structure upon such a miserable base." Walker told the commissioners of the unfortunate news on September 27, 1854; he later said that they received his report as if it were "the sentence of death." Reluctantly and with the realization that there could be no "speedy and immediate rescue from the snare into which they had fallen," they accepted their architects' shared opinion and ordered that the entire foundation be razed. The start of the annual session of the General Assembly loomed two months ahead and the commissioners were well aware that they would be held accountable for the disastrous events of the preceding months. In Walker's view, the bleak situation left them with "nothing to which to cling but the future hope of Legislative clemency."[33]

The commissioners thus entered the 1854 General Assembly session fearful that charges of improper conduct and mismanagement would be levied against them. As a member of the board, Governor John L. Manning held a vested interest in their fate. In his annual message to the legislature, he summarized the problems that they had encountered during the preceding year. Though aware that "great dissatisfaction" understandably existed with the commissioners, Manning emphasized the difficulty of their assigned task and urged the legislature to "judge them with calmness and equity." He further recommended that a Special Joint Committee be formed to review the commissioners' reports, statements, and accounts, to which the legislature agreed.[34] The ensuing investigation took less than a month to complete and, on December 18, the committee presented its findings to both houses of the legislature. But before either the house or senate could consider the committee's report, the commissioners tendered their resignation.[35] Their reasons for doing so remain unclear: they either

[33]Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 16-17; Walker, Architect's Diary, New State Capitol, entry of September 27, 1854, Walker Papers, SCL.

[34]Message No. 1 of Governor John L. Manning, *House Journal*, 1854, 18-20; *Senate Journal*, 1854, 37, 40; *House Journal*, 1854, 41. On Manning, see Robert Sobel and John Raimo, eds., *Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States, 1789-1978* (Westport, Conn.: Meckler Books, 1978); *Biographical Directory of the S.C. Senate*, Vol. II, 1041-1044.

[35]*House Journal*, 1854, 124-125.

thought that such a gesture would aid their cause or, more likely, feared the worst and had concluded that, whether by their own volition or by decree, they would inevitably be relieved of their duties. Whatever their reasoning, the Special Joint Committee's report treated the commissioners with mercy, absolving them of any dereliction of duty and placing the primary blame for the faulty foundations on the contractors' poor workmanship and Hammarskold, who "permitted, approved, and in many cases directed" their labor.[36]

Contrary to the fears of Chairman Bull, the report left no question as to the need for a new capitol building. Instead, it emphasized the miserable condition of the existing State House, describing it as "a crumbling shell—out of position, wanting in all proper accommodation" and unsuited to the conduct of "business in a manner essential to good legislation." A new capitol was thus deemed an "absolute necessity." Furthermore, the committee, reiterating a plea made by Manning earlier in the legislative session, recommended that construction proceed with as much speed "as the nature of such an undertaking, and the finances of the State will allow."[37] Both houses of the legislature accepted the report. Neither took any action on the commissioners' resignation, thereby reaffirming—if only by implication—their authority to oversee construction of the New State Capitol. The legislature did, however, attempt to increase administrative efficiency by adopting a resolution requiring the appointment of three commissioners to take charge of the disbursement of funds and construction contracts.[38] But since it made no appointments before adjourning, management of the project remained unchanged.

Vindicated by the legislature, the commissioners convened on December 22 for what would prove to be a pivotal meeting. Foremost among their needs was a complete set of detailed plans and drawings for the New State Capitol. Their attempts to acquire them, however, gave rise to unanticipated conflicts that would prove debilitating to the project. At issue were the specific rights and responsibilities of each architect's appointment. Walker adamantly asserted that as resident and superintending architect, he should be allowed to draft the plans; the role of the consulting architect was merely to be one of review. Several commissioners, however, thought otherwise and insisted that the duty rested with Niernsee. Walker, they maintained, was expected only to supervise construction. Yet not all of the commissioners disagreed with Walker; Richard S. Bedon and Thomas J. Goodwyn apparently questioned the wisdom of allowing Niernsee to be the sole designer of the building. Divided and unable to reach a final decision on the matter, the

[36]Special Joint Committee Report, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1854, 279-287.
[37]Ibid.
[38]*Reports and Resolutions*, 1854, 305.

commissioners ordered each architect to produce drawings, plans, and estimates of the expenses that would be incurred in the construction of the building, which they were to present at the commissioners' next meeting on February 7, 1855. The arrangement implied that Niernsee and Walker were to compete for the commissioners' approval and therefore, at least insofar as Walker was concerned, it promised "to increase the discord" between them.[39]

The commissioners, believing that the issue had been decided the preceding summer, were stunned by Walker's insistence on his right to prepare plans for the New State Capitol. On August 4, 1854, the day after they elected Walker superintending architect, the commissioners had adopted a resolution specifying the duties of the consulting architect, among which was explicitly listed the preparation of all plans and specifications. Walker was never directly informed of the decision and only learned of it months later, while reviewing the commissioners' records as he prepared his annual report to the legislature. He further discovered that the same resolution raised Niernsee's annual salary to $6000 in compensation for his increased responsibilities, $2000 more than the amount allotted the superintending architect per annum. Although angered, Walker chose to remain silent. With the General Assembly session approaching and the commissioners concerned that the legislature would abandon efforts to build a new capitol, it was an inopportune time for Walker to demand an explanation. He did, however, resolve to fight for the right to prepare plans at a later, more auspicious date. Unaware of Walker's willful intentions, the commissioners entered the December 22 meeting believing they had long since decided that Niernsee would design the New State Capitol.[40]

Walker's steadfast insistence that he be allowed to prepare the plans stemmed from his erroneous interpretation of the duties assigned to him as superintending architect. The responsibilities of the office, as far as he was concerned, were precisely defined by the original newspaper advertisement for the position published in July 1854, shortly after Hammarskold's dismissal. It stated that the commissioners desired "a competent Architect, for the purpose of carrying out and perfecting the plans, &c., of the new State Capitol," who would also "superintend the work during its construction." Walker mistakenly equated the advertisement with an employment contract and thus stood convinced that it guaranteed him the privilege of preparing the plans. His unwavering opinion on this issue largely sparked the conflicts that erupted at the commissioners' December 22 meeting.[41] But the

[39]Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 20-25.

[40]Ibid., 17-18; Copy from Minutes of Commissioners, entry of August 4, 1854, Walker Papers, SCL.

[41]*Charleston Daily Courier*, June 22, 1854; Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 7-10.

problem extended beyond the plans. Walker further believed that the superintending architect should receive assistance from the consulting architect only when absolutely necessary. Most of the commissioners disagreed, favoring a more active role for Niernsee, and the problem soon became a persistent source of friction between them and Walker.

The dispute over the manner in which plans were to be prepared for the New State Capitol revealed that while some divisions did exist among the commissioners, Walker's supporters were fewer and less powerful than Niernsee's. The predicament angered and frustrated Walker throughout his tenure as superintending architect. John L. Manning, a member of the commissioners whose term as governor ended only days prior to the December 22 meeting, was deeply interested in the progress of the New State Capitol and exerted a tremendous influence on the other members of the board. Manning ardently favored Niernsee and firmly believed that he should prepare the plans without assistance from Walker. Chairman Bull, Manning's long-standing political ally, agreed, and their combined influence dictated the opinions held by most of the other commissioners. Walker's politically tactless decision to oppose "the will and dictates of so elevated a personage" as Manning "rent asunder all the chords of kindly feeling" remaining between him and those commissioners who favored Niernsee. As Walker pleaded his case at the December 22 meeting, Niernsee observed the feverish debate quietly, certain that Manning and Bull would ensure that, at the very least, he was given considerable influence in the preparation of the plans.[42]

The December 22 meeting also saw the commissioners take an important step toward improving their administrative efficiency. Since the legislature had decided to create a board of three commissioners but failed to make any appointments while in session, the commissioners took it upon themselves to do so. The resulting subcommittee was chaired by South Carolina College Professor Charles F. McCay and also included Colonel Richard S. Bedon and Thomas J. Goodwyn. Their duties were to disburse the commissioners' funds, "to give a daily supervision to the work, & to attend to all the minute details requiring prompt decision and immediate action."[43]

[42]Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 21-22.

[43]See Report of the Commissioners of the New State House, n.d. [ca. Dec. 1855], Misc. Communication 344, 3, GA Papers, SCDAH; Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 23. In addition to being smaller than the full board of commissioners and, therefore, presumably more efficient, the committee's primary advantage was that each of its members resided in Columbia. The other commissioners all lived a considerable distance from the capital city and found it difficult to meet there as frequently as necessary. Having established McCay's committee, the full "Board resolved to meet every two months & oftener when circumstances should require." On McCay, see

Although the commissioners created McCay's committee with the intention that it would only handle mundane matters that did not require the board's consideration, in short order, circumstances would force its members to make decisions of critical importance to the outcome of the project.

When the meeting adjourned, the future of the New State Capitol was no more certain than it had been when the commissioners convened. Although the problems that crippled construction during 1854 had largely been resolved, the new year would begin without plans for the building and relations between Niernsee and Walker deteriorating. Walker was largely at fault due to his inability to work amicably with Niernsee and the antagonistic stance he assumed on the issue of the plans. But the commissioners were hardly blameless—after all, they could have made a firm decision as to which architect would draft the plans. Because they did not, the matter would remain unresolved for months, further delaying the progress of the New State Capitol when the project could least afford it.

On February 7, 1855, the day the commissioners were to meet in Columbia for the purpose of examining Walker's and Niernsee's plans, a quorum failed to assemble and the matter therefore fell under the authority of McCay's committee. After examining the architects' proposals for two days, the committee met with them on February 10. Walker, a man of little restraint, was unable to resist an opportunity to deride the consulting architect's work and "unhesitatingly pronounced the plans of Mr. Niernsee to be in no degree superior to those of Mr. Hammarskold, and in some points inferior." Then, he resorted to a personal attack, angrily calling the Austrian-born architect "a humbug." While the committee concurred to the degree that they did not find Niernsee's plans entirely satisfactory, they did not believe Walker's work to be significantly better. Seeking to improve relations between the two men, the committee resolved that Walker, working "in consultation with the Consulting Architect," should produce a revised set of plans and drawings, which were to accommodate eight design details specified by the committee. In the days that followed, Niernsee and Walker argued about how they could best work cooperatively and, unable to reach any agreement, the former returned to Baltimore.[44]

As a result, each architect individually prepared plans for the New State Capitol, again on a basis that was essentially, if not explicitly, competitive.

William Porter Kellam, *Episodes in the Life of Charles Francis McCay: Academic, Actuary, Author, and Businessman* (Athens, Ga.: n.p., 1983), 24, 32. On Goodwyn, see *Biographical Directory of the S.C. Senate*, Vol. I, 586-587. On Bedon, see *Biographical Directory of the S.C. Senate*, Vol. I, 118-119.

[44]Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 28-35; Preamble and Resolutions of the Committee of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, February 10, 1855, Walker Papers, SCL.

The design details required by the committee dictated the depth of the building's wings, the arrangement and placement of specific rooms, and exterior decorative features. Niernsee and Walker independently concluded, however, that it was impossible to design a well-proportioned building with sufficient interior space that did not exceed the specified exterior dimensions. Walker, in fact, produced an awkward plan that managed to accommodate all eight details but, frustrated and fully aware of its obvious flaws, brought the problem to the attention of the committee chairman. McCay assessed the plan honestly, pronouncing it "a failure," but he was also sympathetic to Walker's plight and acknowledged the impracticality of designing a building that accommodated all the committee's specifications. Yet because McCay did not "extend any order which could have been construed as authority for deviating from the express terms of the resolutions," Walker neither enlarged the dimensions of the building nor otherwise altered his plan.[45]

McCay's committee, with only the chairman and Goodwyn present, next met in mid-March. Bedon, Walker's most consistent and outspoken supporter among the commissioners, was unable to attend. Since Walker had not received explicit instructions to deviate from the committee's design details, he brought only the inadequate plan previously shown to McCay to the meeting, having made no other efforts to design an acceptable New State Capitol. To Walker's dismay, Niernsee submitted "four or five sets of plans," all of which "were totally at variance with the dimensions" specified by the committee's resolutions of February 10. When McCay and Goodwyn asked Walker what he thought of the consulting architect's work, he was too enraged to offer any substantive opinion. Because the exterior dimensions of the building proposed by Niernsee exceeded the specified measurements by thirty-three feet in length and three feet in width, Walker believed that Niernsee had unfairly disregarded the requirements of the committee. In fact, he had done nothing of the sort. Although the resolutions specified eight design details, they also allowed the architects to make "such modifications as architectural principals may require, and with such an arrangement to other things, not specified in the resolutions" as necessary.[46] Niernsee took the liberty of doing so in order to produce an acceptable plan for the building whereas Walker, lacking the experience and initiative of the consulting architect, did not.

The committee adjourned without reaching any decision on the matter, thereby allowing Walker an opportunity to prepare—albeit in haste—plans

[45]Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 33-36; Preamble and Resolutions of the Committee of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, February 10, 1855, Walker Papers, SCL.

[46]Ibid., 36-38.

for a building with overall measurements similar to those proposed by Niernsee. After so doing, Walker showed his new design to the committee, boasting of its excellence. Niernsee's designs, he scornfully asserted, contained numerous flaws, the most significant of which was their failure to allow for adequate interior lighting in the building. Confident of the superiority of his work, Walker boldly suggested that the committee submit both his and Niernsee's designs to "any Board of competent Architects" so that they could "select the plan which possessed the most merit." McCay's committee disregarded this suggestion and instead decided to give further consideration to each architect's plans.[47]

With the end of March approaching, practical considerations dictated the committee's decision. No further time could be spent preparing plans for the building; construction had to begin as soon as possible so that the building season was not wasted. On March 19, the committee accepted one of Niernsee's plans, with the provision that he make several minor modifications, and instructed him to produce working sketches for the stone cutters and masons so they could begin construction at once. As for Walker, because he had not "complied with the instructions of the Commissioners" and failed to fulfill their "just expectations," the committee adopted resolutions censuring his behavior.[48] He had made no earnest effort to produce plans in conjunction with Niernsee, as directed by the committee, nor had he even attempted to draft an alternate plan of his own design. In large measure, Walker was solely responsible for his fate.

Walker immediately sought assistance from Bedon, complaining that the committee's decision "directly violated all understandings" and thus left him with no other recourse than to publish "a full and detailed account of all that has passed since I first entered the office" of superintending architect. To do otherwise, Walker stated, would be "to abandon myself to the power of Mr. Niernsee and his friends. Come up to Columbia immediately if you can," he begged, "for some hard things will have to be said."[49] Of all the commissioners, only Bedon had offered him much support in the past; Walker believed that had he been present at the committee meetings that led to the adoption of the resolutions of March 19, Bedon certainly would have defended his interests. In fact, the delays and incessant squabbling of the preceding months had disgusted Bedon as much as the other members of McCay's committee. His response to Walker offered no hope for a reversal of the committee's decision. "We need harmony & consort of action, particularly now," Bedon wrote, advising Walker against "all hasty action" and suggesting that the matter be referred "to a 'higher tribunal'." Contrary

[47]Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 37-38.
[48]Ibid., 38-42; Resolutions of March 19th 1855, Walker Papers, SCL.
[49]Walker to R.S. Bedon, March 19, 1855, Walker Papers, SCL.

to Walker's sanguine expectations, Bedon had given McCay and Goodwyn full authority to make whatever decisions they believed necessary in his absence since "prompt and efficient action was called for." The entire committee clearly believed that they had treated Walker fairly; their selection of Niernsee's plan was made solely in the interest of the New State Capitol.[50]

Walker also solicited support from his mentor, E.B. White, and the account he provided of the situation in Columbia left no uncertainty about his contempt of Niernsee. The Baltimore architect's plans, he claimed, were "a disgrace to any man who calls himself an architect," and "all parties in the Town who know any thing of the plans have condemned them." Walker alleged that McCay's committee sought "to choke me off and place Mr. Niernsee at the head of affairs," but he promised that "they will have a hard fight before they can succeed." "Come up as soon as you can," he begged White, "and we will kill Mr. Niernsee as dead as possible." If successful, literally or figuratively, Walker expected the victory to be a popular one, for he claimed the support of Columbia's populace: "I have the whole Town with me." Aid from White, he believed, would "confer & seal that of the peoples."[51] No evidence exists to suggest that White attempted to intervene in the dispute on Walker's behalf.

With Manning, Chairman Bull, and all three members of McCay's committee present, the commissioners met on April 11 to ensure that conflicts like those that had hindered the progress of the New State Capitol during the first months of the year did not recur. Their review of events concluded that, having initially decided in early August 1854 that the consulting architect should prepare plans for the building, it was generous of the commissioners to give Walker several opportunities to show "his skill as a divising [*sic*] architect" by working cooperatively with Niernsee. Because Walker repeatedly refused to do so, consistently objected to the commissioners' decisions, and was uncooperative with McCay's committee, the commissioners adopted resolutions thoroughly condemning his behavior.[52] They expected him to resign immediately but instead, he obtusely asked for Niernsee's plans so he could begin construction.[53] Realizing that Walker would not leave voluntarily, McCay's committee reconvened on April 14 and decided to dismiss him on the grounds that he was clearly unable to work "in harmony with the Consulting Architect, and

[50]Bedon to Walker, March 24, 1855, Walker Papers, SCL; Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 44-46.

[51]Walker to E.B. White, March 20, 1855, Walker Papers, SCL. Walker left the letter unsigned, suggesting that it may never have been sent. Regardless, it offers a revealing view of his sentiments toward Niernsee and the commissioners.

[52]Resolutions Passed April 11th 1855, Walker Papers, SCL.

[53]Walker to the Committee on the New State Capitol, April 12, 1855, Walker Papers, SCL.

cordially and fully carry out the views of the Commissioners." After he had served only eight months and done little more than supervise the removal of Hammarskold's flawed foundations, Walker's tenure came to a sudden and dishonorable end.[54]

In an effort to preserve his professional reputation, Walker mounted a campaign to disseminate his interpretation of the commissioners' actions, convinced that popular support would be forthcoming if the full extent of their injustices were known. A series of reports attributed to a correspondent identified only as "ESWAPUDENAH" but almost surely written by Walker appeared in the *Daily South Carolinian* beginning on April 27 and continued throughout the month of May. So viciously did they attack the commissioners and Niernsee that a May 18 editorial distanced the newspaper from the correspondent's opinions, declaring them "unbecoming, uncalled for, and unjust."[55] Despite this disclaimer, the correspondent's writings continued to appear in the newspaper. By early fall 1855, Walker had produced a manuscript titled "Exposition of the Proceedings of Commissioners of the New State Capitol," which the newspaper published in serial form during November; subsequently, it was issued as a pamphlet. Although the latter articles were explicitly attributed to Walker and appeared just before the annual session of the General Assembly opened on November 26, they failed to arouse public interest or incite the ire of legislators. Walker's accounts, laden with convoluted logic to explain the misunderstandings and conflicts that had arisen during his service as superintending architect, were the work of a bitter, vindictive man unwilling to admit that he bore the burden of responsibility for his failure.[56] Of far greater interest to most South Carolinians and other observers, who knew the building was "designed to be the finest State house in the South," was the rapid progress of construction following Walker's dismissal. His angry calls for justice seemed insignificant, passé, and in opposition to the interests of the state, much as the commissioners had concluded months earlier.[57]

[54]Resolutions Passed April 14th 1855, Walker Papers, SCL. See also Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, 48-57.

[55]The evidence that Eswapudenah's writings were those of Walker is not limited to the congruency of the former's opinions with those in Walker's personal papers and published work. Included in his papers is a draft of an article that appeared in the May 2, 1855, *Daily South Carolinian*; portions of the document were printed verbatim in the article. See "Messrs. Editors . . . ," n.d., Walker Papers, SCL.

[56]*Daily South Carolinian* (Columbia, S.C.), April 27, 1855; April 30, 1855; May 2, 1855; May 17, 1855; May 18, 1855; September 10, 1855; November 13, 1855; November 15, 1855; November 16, 1855; November 20, 1855; November 21, 1855; November 22, 1855; Walker, *Exposition of the Proceedings*, passim.

[57]Anne King Gregorie, ed., "Micajah Adolphus Clark's Visit to South Carolina in 1857," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 54 (January 1953), 17.

Although the problems that surrounded Walker's service as superintending architect could easily have dealt a final blow to the New State Capitol, the episode ultimately demonstrated the strength of the legislature's resolve to erect the building even after a series of costly setbacks. In the wake of Walker's departure, the 1855 General Assembly session established a more effective system of legislative oversight for the project. As they had done a year earlier, the commissioners presented their resignation; this time, they pleaded that the legislature accept it. The responsibility of supervising the entire undertaking had clearly proven burdensome. "Those of us who have labored at this work from the beginning have undergone much trouble & expense on account of the duties imposed on us," the commissioners wrote in their report to the General Assembly. "We have been troubled with our quarries, our plans, our Architects, our Contractors, & our workmen." Yet since they could present the legislature with "a foundation for their new Capitol, & an organized set of officers & workmen which will enable our successors to erect a structure worthy of our State, and of the age in which we live," they felt that their labors had achieved a certain measure of success.[58] The legislature agreed and accepted the resignation with thanks for the commissioners' devotion of "time and attention to the public service, without pecuniary reward for two years or upwards," and for the "faithful, fearless, and laborious discharge of the public trusts confided to their hands."[59] To replace them, it was decided that "a paid agent be elected by the General Assembly, who shall have entire charge of the work, and on whom shall rest the responsibility for its due execution."[60] James Jones, a former adjutant and inspector general of South Carolina, was elected to the position.[61] Allotted an annual salary of $3,500, Jones had sufficient incentive to contend with the problems sure to confront him as commissioner of the New State Capitol. By creating a single authority to supervise all work on the project, the legislature instituted a more efficient system of administration, a measure much needed for its success.

In retrospect, it is clear that the commissioners' experience was something of an educational process, both for them and the General Assembly. There was much to be learned in order to attain the goal set forth at the beginning of the undertaking—to give South Carolina a state capitol comparable "in

[58]Report of the Commissioners of the New State House, n.d. [ca. December 1855], Misc. Communication 344, 13-15, GA Papers, SCDAH.

[59]*Reports and Resolutions*, 1855, 357.

[60]Ibid., 358-359.

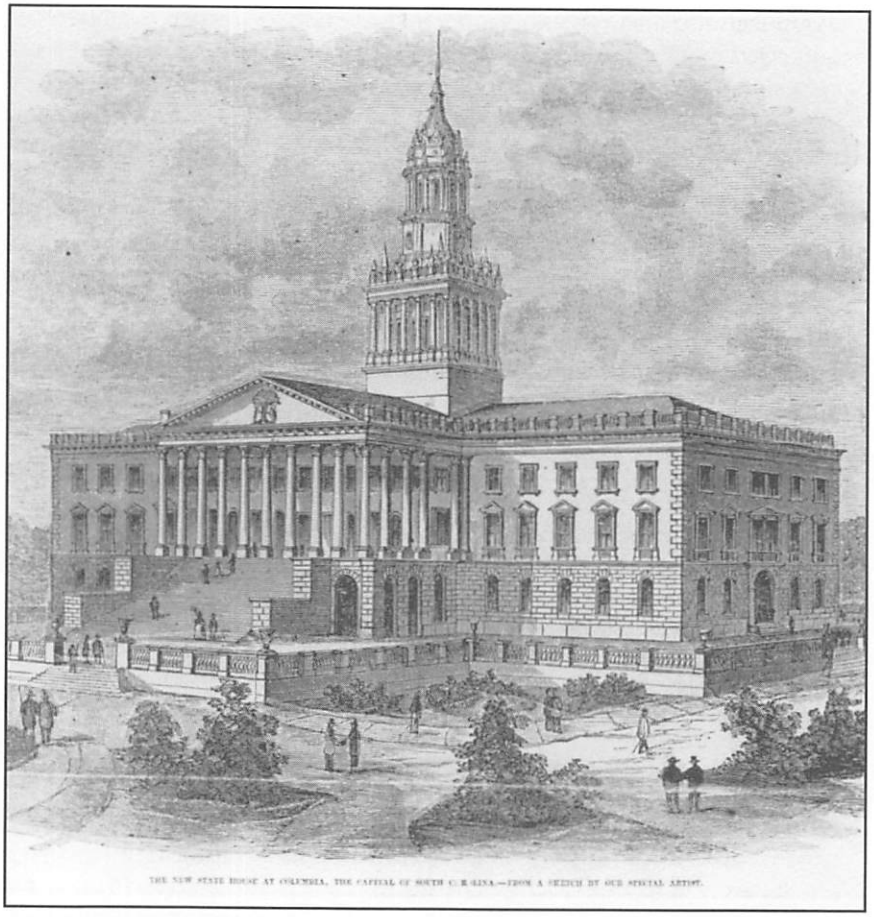
[61]*Senate Journal*, 1855, 153; *House Journal*, 1855, 255. On James Jones, see *A Columbia Reader, 1786-1986* (Columbia: R.L. Bryan Co., 1986), 45.

convenience and magnificence to any in the Union."[62] Only when Niernsee began serving as superintending architect did the state finally obtain the services of a true professional who was thoroughly capable of the task.[63] That the commissioners first selected Hammarskold and subsequently Walker reflected a naivete born of the baseless assumption that any man who called himself an architect was capable of erecting a building of monumental scale. In reality, huge variations in skill and competency existed among the men who comprised the ranks of the architectural profession in the 1850s. As Hammarskold demonstrated with disastrous results, talented draftsmanship did not necessarily reflect practical architectural ability. Moreover, in an era well before the establishment of professional standards, high potential existed for issues of personality to dominate the relationship between architect and client, as clearly occurred in Walker's case. Finally, a skilled architect alone could not assure success for a building project of monumental scale; equally critical was effective administrative supervision of the labor, contractors, and funding. Only when they dismissed Walker in April 1855 did the commissioners demonstrate that they were beginning to grasp how they could best accomplish their assigned duties. Within the following year, particularly with the decisions made at the 1855 General Assembly session, the legislature in turn demonstrated its recognition of the measures necessary to ensure success. The learning process was a long and costly one. In the aftermath of the delays sustained at the hands of Hammarskold and Walker, Niernsee's appointment to the office of superintending architect came a full five years after the legislature decided to build the fireproof archives and four years after it agreed to proceed with construction of the New State Capitol.

For Walker, his brief stay in the office of superintending architect of the New State Capitol proved to be a turning point in his career. Prior to his appointment, he was clearly an architect on the rise, applying his talents to projects of increasing size and importance. His work under E.B. White on the new Custom House in Charleston qualified him to preside over the construction of a building of similar scale. By appointing Walker superintending architect of the New State Capitol, the commissioners

[62]Report of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1853, 134.

[63]Though the commissioners approved Niernsee's design for the New State Capitol on March 19, 1855, and construction subsequently began in late April and continued throughout the remainder of the year, it was not until January 1, 1856, that Jones officially hired Niernsee as superintending architect. See James Jones to Niernsee, February 6, 1856, Letter Book of James Jones, SCL; Report of the Commissioners of the New State Capitol, n.d. [ca. December 1855], Misc. Communication 344, 9-10, GA Papers, SCDAH.



This sketch appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* on August 17, 1861, and shows the New State Capitol as envisioned by architect John R. Niernsee. Courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

confirmed his ascension to the top rank of southern architects. Following his dismissal from office in April 1855, Walker found himself relegated to projects of lesser significance, although he did not encounter difficulty in obtaining commissions. By January 1856 he was supervising construction of the new water works in Columbia, a project that made full use of both his civil engineering and architectural experience. Walker continued to design churches throughout the 1850s, most notably Trinity Episcopal Church in Abbeville and Christ Church in Columbia; he also designed buildings for Columbia Female College and Newberry College. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he was serving as president of the Columbia Gas Company but

left the position in April 1861 to enlist in the Confederate army. During his military service, Walker quickly rose to the rank of Captain of Engineers and designed and supervised construction of several military fortifications, including Thunderbolt Battery near Savannah and Battery Bee on Sullivan's Island in Charleston harbor. While working in Columbus, Georgia, on an inspection of the Confederacy's railroads, Walker was stricken by an illness— "a violent form of sore throat," according to one account—and died on September 16, 1863, at the age of thirty-six.[64] By then, it had become clear that his brief tenure in the office of superintending architect was destined to stand as the peak of his career. None of the projects Walker worked on after 1855 approached the scale and significance of the New State Capitol.

Rather than a lack of architectural expertise, Walker's failure as superintending architect of the New State Capitol was primarily due to personal character flaws—his willfulness, obstinacy, and inability to compromise—that ultimately left the commissioners little choice but to dismiss him. In addition to the frequent misunderstandings that marred his working relationship with the commissioners, Walker's political ineptitude complicated his position by creating conflict with former Governor Manning, who held Niernsee in high regard. When Walker fell into Manning's disfavor, it was of little surprise that the other commissioners followed suit. Equally troublesome was Walker's unyielding insistence—from a position that afforded almost no bargaining power—that he should prepare plans for the building. Prone to unrestrained displays of anger, his often tactless and abrasive demeanor did little to win him the commissioners' favor, and his stubborn refusal to cooperate or compromise with Niernsee impeded construction of the New State Capitol during a critical period.

Whereas Walker's influence was ultimately negligible, Niernsee became the principal architect of the New State Capitol, designing it and supervising most of its construction. From his initial consultation with the commissioners in June 1854, Niernsee was clearly willing to serve in whatever capacity they desired. Certainly by the early months of 1855, by which time it had become clear that Walker's dismissal would in no way hinder construction, the ingratiating Austrian-born architect stood as an attractive alternative. With good reason, the commissioners placed their trust in Niernsee. His understanding of building design was particularly advanced for the day, and, as was essential for the project's success, Niernsee had extensive experience with the structural use of iron. While employed by the B&O

[64]Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, 244-248; "Capt. George E. Walker," Walker Papers, SCL; *Charleston Mercury*, September 22, 1863; *Charleston Daily Courier*, September 19, 1863; Columbia *Tri-Weekly Carolinian*, September 18, 1863.

Railroad in the 1840s, he designed the earliest known examples of composite iron roofs used in the United States, thereby making him one of the few architects in the country with such specialized knowledge.[65] Moreover, by virtue of his training at the Polytechnic Institute of Vienna, he was well-grounded in traditional architectural practices.[66] In effect, Niernsee held a potent combination of credentials that was yet to become common among architects. Like the gentlemen architects of the early nineteenth century, he had a strong sense of style, form, and aesthetic detail. But more importantly, Niernsee was of a rising generation of professionals that benefited from their involvement with the nation's early canal and railroad projects. His engineering expertise and cutting-edge knowledge of emerging building technologies were assets that he used to his advantage. In fact, few architects in the country were better qualified to preside over construction of the New State Capitol. And as the commissioners knew all too well, his personal demeanor was far more affable and endearing than that of the volatile Walker.

Under Niernsee's direction, construction progressed swiftly and the New State Capitol emerged as a building of national significance, rivaled by only a handful of contemporary projects. In stature and design, its closest parallels were the Tennessee State Capitol in Nashville and the new Custom House in Charleston. Also influential were the Alabama State House in Montgomery and the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.[67] When Union troops entered Columbia in February 1865, they were struck with awe by the New State Capitol. Though roofless and far from completion, its sheer size alone was impressive. The sight of the massive quantities of finely figured marble, granite, and other materials lying upon the grounds, waiting to be used in the construction, only hinted at the lavish manner in which Niernsee planned to finish the building. "The imposing walls of the new capitol, yet unfinished, rose in massive beauty" recounted one Union soldier, who also found it easy to identify why the state had been compelled to build it: "Near this magnificent edifice, stood its less conspicuous

[65]Dilts, *The Great Road*, 435n7.
[66]Dorsey and Dilts, *A Guide to Baltimore Architecture*, 282-283.
[67]Hitchcock and Seale, *Temples of Democracy*, 133.

A Richard Wearn photograph of the unifinished New State Capitol as viewed from Main Street shortly after the Civil War. The New State Capitol remained unfinished until early in the twentieth century. Courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

neighbor, the old capitol, dingy and forbidding."[68] Although the destruction of Columbia left the building itself essentially unscathed, fire ravaged the capitol grounds, destroying the old State House and much of the construction materials. The devastation of the war left the state without the resources to complete Niernsee's New State Capitol and, although used by the legislature from the late 1860s on, it remained unfinished until early in the twentieth century.

[68]Fenwick Y. Hedley, *Marching Through Georgia* (Chicago: Donahue, Henneberry & Co., 1890), 365-366.

"THE PUBLIC BUSINESS IS OURS": EDWARD MCCRADY, JR. AND CONSERVATIVE THOUGHT IN POST-CIVIL WAR SOUTH CAROLINA, 1865-1900

CHARLES J. HOLDEN*

ON NOVEMBER 2, 1903, THE *CHARLESTON NEWS AND COURIER* paid tribute to "One of Carolina's Greatest Sons," General Edward McCrady, Jr., who had passed away the previous day. The obituary featured reviews of McCrady's active career in the Confederate army, his leadership in post-war Confederate veteran activities, as well as his political work helping to reestablish "home rule" in South Carolina in 1876 and representing Charleston in the state House of Representatives through the 1880s.[1] From 1865 until his death, McCrady relished and prospered from his reputation as an old soldier, but also as a staunch conservative. Postwar conservatives like Edward McCrady, Jr. have not received the scholarly attention given their antebellum predecessors.[2] That South Carolina remained a conservative state following the war will startle very few. But while it is widely understood that the state's leaders were still conservative following the war, theirs remains a conservatism assumed more than explained.

Scholars often overlook the philosophical underpinnings of South Carolina's return to conservative rule. State political studies view the "restoration" of 1876 to 1890 in terms of the traditional elite's effective use of *noblesse oblige* as a bare-knuckled strategy to divide and conquer the expanded, biracial democracy created by the 1868 constitution.[3] Don H. Doyle sees the continued economic prominence of the traditional elite in the Lowcountry as a result of a consciously isolating outlook that emphasized "genealogy, manners, cultural refinement, old homes, and a shared, precious

*Charles J. Holden is a visiting assistant professor of history at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

[1]Charleston *News and Courier*, November 2, 1903.

[2]Clinton Rossiter in *Conservatism in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, second edition, 1982) and Russell Kirk in *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., seventh revised edition, 1994), as leading scholars of conservative thought in the United States, both leave Southern conservatism dead on the fields of 1865, reemerging with the Agrarians in the 1930s. Richard Weaver's, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, George Core and M. E. Bradford, eds. (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1968) is a notable exception.

[3]See William J. Cooper, Jr., *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1968); George B. Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900* (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, 1952).