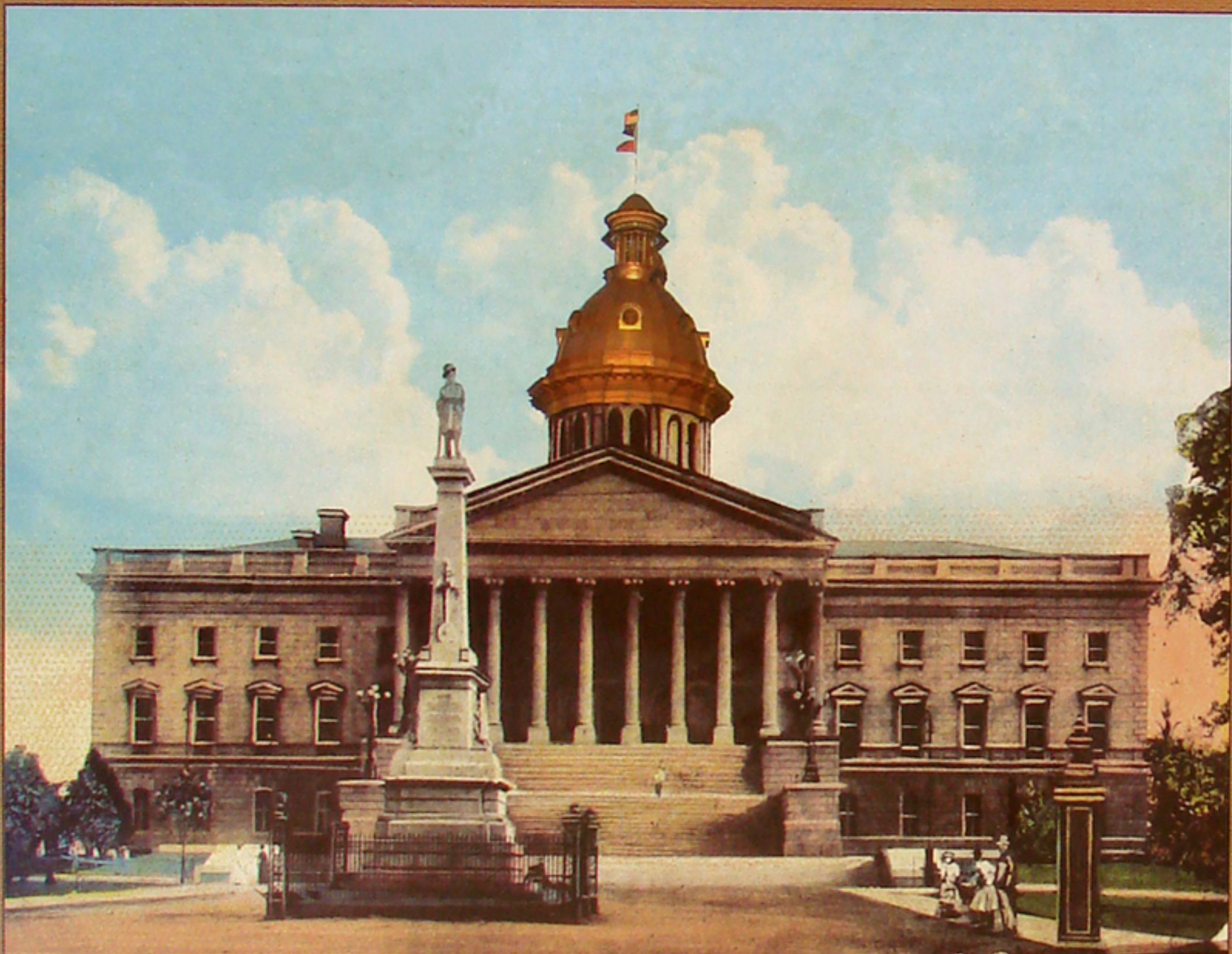


The South Carolina State House

*Buildings for the State
and Its People*



**An Exhibit of
History & Archaeology**

**June 1998 to February 1999
South Carolina State Museum**

Presented to the South Carolina General Assembly and the People of South Carolina
by
the University of South Carolina Art and History Departments, the South Carolina Institute
of Archaeology and Anthropology, and the South Carolina State Museum

The South Carolina State House: Buildings for the State and its People

June 1998 to February 1999

*How many South Carolina State houses were there?
South Carolina lays claim to three State houses.*

The Architects of a Capitol

The First State House

The first was built during the colonial era and stood in Charleston. Although established as an English colony in 1670, South Carolina was without a state house for more than eighty years. The Commons House of Assembly passed an act in 1712 and again in 1719 for "building a convenient State House for holding of General Assemblies, Courts of Justice, and other public uses," but failed to appropriate funding in both instances. The Assembly finally provided funds to begin construction in 1751 and, on June 22, 1753, Royal Governor James Glen laid the cornerstone at a public ceremony. By 1756, work was sufficiently advanced to allow the governor and legislature to occupy the State House. Artisans and carpenters continued to add finishing details until 1760.

Although few descriptions of the first State House exist, it is known to have been a two-story Georgian building built of brick and covered with stucco. According to a 1770 account, its main facade had four columns with "highly finished" capitals that supported "a large angular pediment and cornice." A visitor described the interior in the following manner:

"The Council Chamber is about 40 feet square, decorated with many heavy pillars and much carving, rather superb than elegant. The assembly room is of the same dimensions, but much plainer work. This convenient enough. There are sundry public offices kept in small apartments below, there are two flights of stairs, one leading to the Council Chamber, the other to the assembly room. Below stairs is a court house where the courts of common pleas and the pleas of the crown are kept."

On February 5, 1788, a fire started in the senate chamber and spread rapidly, destroying the State House. According to the Charleston Gazette, flames "formed a crown of ruin of the whole building" as they consumed the upper story.

The Charleston Courthouse was constructed on the site of the burned out State House and incorporated substantial portions of the structure, including the foundations. Thus the Courthouse was the same size of the first State House and bore more than a passing resemblance to its predecessor.

The Second State House

The General Assembly decided, in 1786, to relocate the capitol to Columbia and construct a new State House in that city. The cornerstone was laid in 1788 and construction began in earnest the following year. The General Assembly first met in the partially-finished building in 1790. Carpenters continued to add finishing touches to the interior for several years.

The State House was a modest Georgian building with a wooden superstructure set upon a raised brick basement. Offices occupied the first floor. The senate and house chambers were on the main floor, as were committee meeting rooms and the legislative library. The State House seems never to have been completely finished. As early as 1799, officials found the wooden floorboards in the basement rotting and ordered them replaced with brick pavers. Other repairs became increasingly common during the next five decades.

By the 1840s, space for the storage of public records in the decaying building had become limited. In 1848, the west portico was removed and replaced with a room for legislative records, but it did little to solve the problem. As concern for the state's official documents mounted, a committee report delivered to the legislature at the 1849 session advocated construction of a fireproof building for public records storage on the State House grounds. It would prove to be the seed of a new state capitol.

In 1853, the State House was moved to the southwest corner of the square to make way for construction of the new building. It continued to serve as the seat of government until it burned along with the rest of Columbia on the night of February 17, 1865.

The Third State House

In 1850, the General Assembly decided to construct a fireproof building adjacent to the State House to serve as an archives. Many legislators were already discussing the prospect of replacing the old State House and thus, the archives was designed so that it could ultimately serve as a basement wing of a new capitol. Indeed, at the 1851 session, the legislature decided to proceed with construction of a New State Capitol. The cornerstone was laid in December 1851 and a commission of several legislators was charged with oversight of the project. Construction appeared to proceed smoothly for the next two years under the direction of Charleston architect Peter H. Hammarskold.

Once the General Assembly decided to build a new state house in the early 1850s, the undertaking quickly developed into one of the most ambitious building projects in the antebellum South. An initial setback occurred in 1854 when the commissioners discovered large cracks and other structural flaws in the partially completed foundations. Construction began on April 21, 1855, and progressed rapidly in stark contrast to the delays and setbacks of the preceding years. With John R. Niersee in charge the New State Capitol quickly began to take shape. Niersee used his considerable engineering experience to make operations more efficient and also demonstrated masterful administrative skills. At its peak in 1858, the labor force under his direction totaled almost 400 men.

By 1860, although it remained far from complete, the New State Capitol had begun to take shape. In his annual report to the legislature that year, Niersee reported that the exterior walls would soon be finished and ready for roofing. The stonecarvers intended to use for decorating the interior, was expected to arrive in Columbia in the coming months.

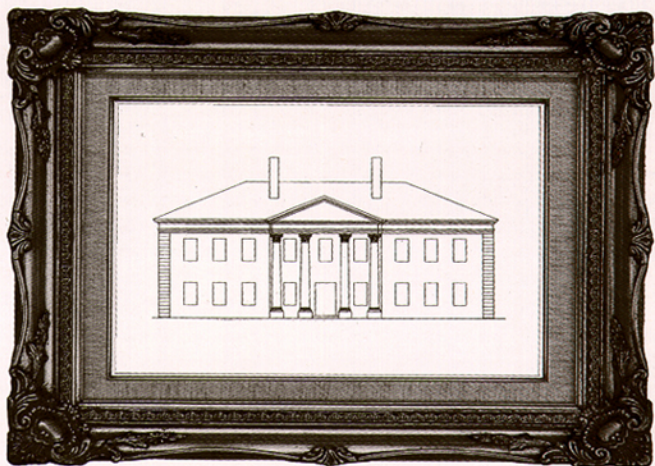
As planned by John R. Niersee, the New State Capitol was to have been grandly monumental. The basic shell of the building was, in fact, built according to his design. Constructed primarily of granite, it features a rusticated basement that raises the central structure a full story above ground. Its facades are distinguished by pedimented windows and other Italianate motifs. The broad stair and Corinthian columns of each pedimented portico added to the building's stature. Niersee planned to erect a massive tower above the roof. Although it was never built, he designed it to have a colonnaded square base, an octagonal central section, and a slender, bell-shaped cap set upon a ring of Corinthian columns.

The coming of the Civil War drew South Carolina's attention from construction of the New State Capitol, all work being halted just weeks before the attack on Ft. Sumter. Workers at the granite quarry and the highly skilled stonecutters, however, continued their labor, having agreed to accept state bonds instead of cash as payment. By October 1861, the building's exterior walls were almost complete but preparations needed to be made for the roof, construction of the porticos had not started, and the interior remained unfinished. Much of the cut and polished marble for the central lobby and legislative halls was stored in sheds at the construction site. From its peak of almost 400 men several years earlier, the labor force had dropped to less than 200.

On February 16, 1865, Union forces began shelling Columbia, using the Capitol as one of their principal targets. Several shells hit the unfinished building but caused minimal damage. The fire that destroyed Columbia on the night of February 17, however, caused extensive destruction. In its aftermath, nothing "but the blackened ruins of the brick walls of the basement" remained of the old State House. Construction sheds on the grounds burned, destroying the cut stone, building materials, and equipment stored in them. So too did Niersee's office, which housed his plans and a mass of other documents concerning the New State Capitol. The Confederacy's defeat thwarted plans for a speedy completion of the New State Capitol and left its unfinished shell standing as a grim reminder of unrealized expectations amid the rubble of Columbia.

In the years immediately following the Civil War, the General Assembly focused its attention on the state's economic rehabilitation and other matters of more immediate importance than the completion of the New State Capitol. Since the old State House had burned and the New State Capitol was far from finished, the legislature met in buildings on the South Carolina College campus in 1865 and 1866. In spite of the installation of a temporary tin roof over the building and landscaping the grounds, no significant work was performed on the State House until after Niersee's death in 1885. James Crawford Neilson completed the walls to their full height and installed a slate roof, along with a galvanized iron ceiling and steam heat. Under Frank Niersee, during 1888 and 1889, the interior was completed, bathrooms added to the basement, and the building wired for electricity, replacing the expensive thirty-year-old gas lighting system. The building was finally completed during the first few years of the twentieth century, under Frank P. Milburn. However, mounting pressure for office space, first voiced as early as 1885, plagued the Capitol. To meet this concern, the Calhoun Building was erected and dedicated on January 5, 1927 and over the next half-century, it was joined by five more office buildings. Thus, the twentieth century has witnessed a change in the functional use of the State House. Today, it serves principally as the ceremonial seat of state government, while the various public agencies conduct their operations in other facilities.

A survey of the State House, in 1995, demonstrated the necessity for repairing the structure, notably the badly leaking dome, and bringing the plumbing and electrical wiring up to modern standards. In addition, the survey recommended renovations to meet standards for fire safety, handicapped accessibility, and seismic (earthquake) protection. Between 1995 and 1998 work commenced to renovate the interior and exterior of the State House building to these standards.



Modern Era

1998	Ground Opening
1995	Work Commences on Latest Renovation
1946	Renovations to Capitol Proposed and Rejected
1940	State House Complex Established (Between 1940 and 1970 five more legislative buildings added)
1929	Calhoun Building Constructed
1903	
1900	
1888-1889	Interior Completed, Bathrooms Installed, Electricity Replaces Gas

James C. Neilson	1887	Capitol Walls Erected to their Full Height; Slate Roof Completed; Steam Heat Installed
John R. Niersee	1886	
	1885	
Edward O. Schwagerl	1879	Grounds Landscaped
	1878	
	1877	

Reconstruction

		Legislature First Meets in State House
	1868	Capitol Made Usable with the Installation of temporary Wood Floors and Walls
	1867	Temporary Roof Installed on Capitol
	1865-1866	Legislature Meets on South Carolina College Campus

Civil War

	1865	February 17th: Old State House and New State Capitol Shelled; Construction Sheds, Building Materials, and Plans Destroyed
	1865	February 16th: Columbia Attacked by Union Army Under General Sherman
	1861	Construction on Capitol Discontinued

John R. Niersee (Commissioner)	1859-1860	Sculptures for New State Capitol Completed by Henry Brown
James Jones (Assistant Architect)		
John Kay (Assistant Architect)		
Gustav Theodore Berg (draftsperson)		
	1858	Labor Force of as many as 400 Men Work on Capitol Building

Antebellum

George Walker	1855	Construction on New State Capitol Commences
Peter H. Hammarskold	1854	
	1851	Cornerstone Laid for New State Capitol
	1850	Legislature Commissions the Construction of a Fireproof Building for Archives

Colonial

	1792	Charleston Courthouse Built on State House Remains
	1791	George Washington Visits
	1790	First General Assembly Meeting in Columbia State House
	1788	Cornerstone Laid for First State House in Columbia
	1756	Governor and Legislature Occupy the State House
	1751	First State House Cornerstone Laid

Web Sites

More information on the South Carolina State House can be found at the web site SOUTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY, TOURING THE CAPITAL COMPLEX, THE STATE HOUSE and can be accessed through <http://www.lpr.state.sc.us/shouse.htm>. Information on the State House grounds and monuments can be accessed through <http://www.lpr.state.sc.us/grounds.htm>. For information and images of the seismic renovation undertaken during the 1995-98 renovation project go to the web site Structural Affiliates International, South Carolina State House Seismic Renovation at <http://www.sai.com/projects/SCSH.htm>.

Peter H. Hammarskold A native of Sweden, Hammarskold emigrated to Charleston in the late 1840s and began working as an architect, civil engineer, and draftsman. In 1850, when the General Assembly decided to erect a fireproof building in Columbia for the storage of public records, the commissioners in charge of its construction chose Hammarskold as architect. The following year, he assumed the role of architect for the New State Capitol. The prestigious appointment was a huge boost to Hammarskold's career. However, after the commissioners found his unfinished foundations crumbling, they relieved him of his duties on June 1, 1854.



George E. Walker Charlestonian George E. Walker replaced Peter H. Hammarskold as superintending architect of the New State Capitol in August 1854. He was far more experienced than his predecessor, having served as assistant constructing architect under the direction of Edward B. White on the Charleston Custom House. Unfortunately, personality conflicts undermined Walker's work on the New State Capitol. A professional rivalry with Consulting Architect John R. Niersee prevented them from agreeing on even the simplest of issues. Ultimately, the commissioners approved Niersee's plans and dismissed Walker on April 14, 1855. During his eight-month service as superintending architect, he had done little more than oversee the removal of Hammarskold's flawed foundations.



Henry K. Brown While many skilled artisans and craftsmen worked on the New State Capitol, Henry K. Brown was one of the few that enjoyed a national reputation. Born in Leyden, Massachusetts, in 1814, he studied in Florence and Rome in the early 1840s. Upon his return in 1846, he established a studio in New York and emerged as one of the leading American sculptors of the day. His masterpiece is considered to be an equestrian statue of George Washington in New York City's Union Square that he created in the mid-1850s. Brown arrived in Columbia in 1859 or 1860. Within a year he completed the most detailed carving for the New State Capitol and returned to the North.

John R. Niersee John R. Niersee was first summoned to Columbia in the spring of 1854 to inspect Hammarskold's crumbling foundations. After the commission dismissed George Walker, they turned to Niersee as a natural choice for the position of Superintending Architect. Niersee had ample experience for a building project of such scale. Born in Vienna, Austria, and trained at the University of Prague, Niersee emigrated to the United States in 1838 and worked as an engineer with the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad during the 1840s. After forming a partnership with another B&O engineer, James C. Neilson, in 1848, their architectural firm quickly became the largest and most successful in Baltimore. In 1865, Niersee returned to Baltimore to go into practice with his son, Frank. However, twenty years later, the commission hired him back to finish the State House. In his early sixties and in poor health, Niersee barely had the opportunity to begin when he died suddenly on June 7, 1885, taking his yet to be drafted plans for finishing the State House with him.

James C. Neilson Neilson ran one of the most successful architectural firm in Baltimore until his partner, John Niersee, dissolved the partnership in 1873. After Niersee's death the commission quickly replaced him with Neilson. However, instead of moving to Columbia, he preferred to supervise the project from his office in Baltimore, leaving the day-to-day management to an assistant, T. J. Schmidt. Under the combined direction of Neilson and Schmidt, the exterior walls reached their full height by the fall of 1886, a permanent slate roof was installed. Inside, prefabricated galvanized iron ceilings were added in each legislative hall, and the building was fitted for steam heat. However, a legislative stipulation that the superintending architect reside in the city of Columbia during the progress of the work effectively ended Neilson's involvement in the project.

Frank M. Niersee Frank M. Niersee was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1849. He spent much of his youth in Columbia while his father supervised construction of the New State Capitol in the 1850s. Frank followed his family back to Baltimore after the war. He studied engineering at the University of Virginia and, in 1873, began working with his father under the name Niersee & Son. The most important of his early projects was an opera house in Lynchburg, Virginia. By 1882, Frank had returned to Columbia. Six years later, the South Carolina General Assembly hired him to replace his father's former partner, James Crawford Neilson, and to complete the interior of the State House. He finished the job late in 1890. By then, Frank had emerged as one of the leading architects in the state.

Frank P. Milburn Milburn was selected to complete the State House. He was among the most prolific and successful architects of the turn-of-the-century South. Born in Bowling Green, Kentucky, on December 12, 1868, Milburn studied at Arkansas Industrial University in Fayetteville. He designed a series of county courthouse buildings across the South, including the Mecklenburg County Courthouse in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the Bourbon County Courthouse in Paris, Kentucky, and renovated the Florida State House. Buildings that he designed in Columbia included the City Hall and Opera House, which stood on the corner of Main and Gervais Streets, and Union Station. After completing the State House in 1903, Milburn established a partnership with Michael Heister in Washington, D.C. while continuing to work extensively in the Southeast.



Monuments

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the *Lost Cause* became the principal means by which Southerners memorialized the Old South and the Confederacy. As a set of ritualized and institutionalized beliefs, the *Lost Cause* provided a means of coping with crushing defeat and, in a sense, played the role of a civic religion. Mourning was the predominant theme in the years immediately after the war; thereafter, the focus shifted to monuments and memorials that gave permanence to the *Lost Cause*. Several groups led the crusade, most notably the Southern Historical Society, the United Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Sons of the Confederacy. During an era in which monuments to the Confederacy were erected in public spaces across the South, South Carolina placed three on the State House grounds.



The first was the Monument to the Confederacy, which was dedicated on May 13, 1879. Its purpose was to create a monument to the South Carolinians that had died in the Civil War. In their view, such a monument would serve as "a constant testimony to the costly sacrifices which true men must be ever ready to make in asserting and defending their principles." On May 13, 1879, ten thousand citizens gathered to hear General John S. Preston deliver the dedication address at the Monument's unveiling.

The Monument to the Confederacy was followed by the equestrian statue of General Wade Hampton III, which was erected in 1906, four years after General Hampton's death. The Monument to the Women of the Confederacy was, in a sense, the end of an era. It was the last memorial of the *Lost Cause* to be erected on the State House grounds. Both monuments were created by leading American sculptor Frederick W. Ruckstull. At the dedication ceremony for the Monument to the Women of the Confederacy in April 1912, Ruckstull described its symbolism in the following manner: "The figure at the rear and the two smaller figures at the sides stand for the State of South Carolina coming joyfully to crown the noble womanhood of the Confederacy. The winged figure predominating is a Victory, the idea being that in her deeds the woman of the Confederacy was victor of every situation, whatever may have been the outcome to the armies. The figure of the Confederate matron is seated in a throne of State with the Bible, the main comfort and strength of the women of the Confederacy, in her lap. Her dress is

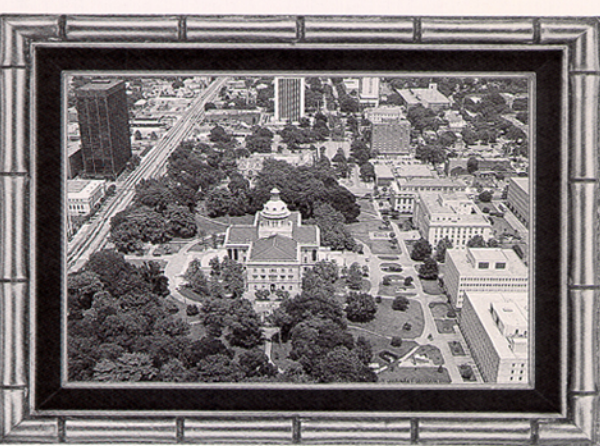
of homespun, of the plain character worn by the women during the war. She is looking out into space with a firm, serene and courageous look, meditating over the past and the future."

The earliest monument erected on the State House grounds is the Palmetto Monument. Dedicated in 1858 to commemorate a regiment of 974 South Carolina volunteers who, in 1846, fought in the Mexican War, the monument initially stood in front of the second State House. Later, it was moved to its current location on the northeast side of the State House. Crafted by German-born ironworker Christopher Werner, the monument is a rare example of a cast iron outdoor sculpture.



Monuments, Iconography, and Symbolism at the State House

Public buildings are by nature symbolic and embody the values of the society that creates them. Throughout its history, the State House has mirrored South Carolina culture. The State House was originally designed to reflect the values of the planter class that held political power in the antebellum period. A group of twelve figures carved into the pediment over the main entrance were to honor a society based on the peculiar union of democratic ideology and slave labor, as described by a stonemason in an 1861 letter: "The three central figures represent Hope, Justice and Liberty with their usual emblems and the statues on either side are of Negroes, represented in the cotton and rice fields."



The State's political radicalism was clearly reflected in the decision to carve likenesses of Robert Y. Hayne and George McDuffie, two leading secessionists, into the door surround of the North portico. The social upheaval that followed the Civil War prevented completion of the State House according to its original design. In fact, standing unfinished amid the muddy, rubble-strewn grounds, it served as a vivid reminder of secession's failure. But although funding shortages precluded work on the building itself, white South Carolinians pressed for erection of several monuments that memorialized the Confederacy's defeat.

In the twentieth century, the State House has remained the ceremonial seat of state government and thus South Carolina's foremost political symbol. Symbols associated with it, most notably the Confederate battle flag, continue to draw public attention.

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