FOREWORD

With the publication of the first volume of the six-volume Wisconsin State Capitol Historic Structure Report, the Division of State Facilities concludes its documentation of the restoration and rehabilitation of the Capitol that occurred between the late 1980s and the fall of 2001. While this portion of the report represents the first volume in the series, it fittingly was prepared last. This approach fostered a “comprehensive” treatment that utilized the advantages of hindsight in documenting and analyzing the completed restoration in light of the knowledge yielded by extensive research into the Capitol’s complicated past.

The restoration of the Wisconsin Capitol and historical research undertaken as part of the effort generated a new appreciation for those who designed and supervised the construction of the building. New York architect George B. Post and Madison architect Lew F. Porter, the secretary of the Capitol Commission, emerge as the principal players in the eleven-year drama that resulted in a structure that proclaims the riches of a fresh and optimistic democracy. Appropriately, it was through the toil of hundreds of laborers, tradesmen, skilled craftsmen, artisans and artists that the building was completed and left as a remarkable and beloved legacy for generations of Wisconsin citizens. Expressing a renewed appreciation for the artistic and cultural significance of the Capitol, a similar team of architects, engineers, contractors and workers was responsible for restoring the structure and its myriad elements. Not since 1917 has the building gleamed as brightly or functioned as effectively as it does now.

The Wisconsin State Capitol is significant as one of the last great Beaux-Arts inspired buildings erected in the United States, and this volume provides an account of the Capitol’s history, with focus given to artwork, decorative finishes, site, structural and mechanical systems, and the Capitol Heat and Power Plant. An increasingly sophisticated methodology was cultivated during the restoration process. This evolving approach to the work is described, with special attention extended to how the building was updated to meet the needs of its twenty-first century occupants without compromising its historic integrity. Further, this volume documents how the dedication to quality in the original construction of the Capitol was manifested fully during its restoration. It is my hope that this first volume of the Historic Structure Report on our Capitol will promote a greater understanding of the building for Wisconsin’s citizens and that it will make a lasting and meaningful contribution to the work of its current and future caretakers.

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