Chapter Nine
DECORATIVE FINISHES

Architect George B. Post wrote to Capitol Commissioner George H. D. Johnson in April 1909 after questions arose concerning plans for the installation of decorative finishes in the building. The architect offered his assessment: "After the appointment of proper artists for mural paintings there remains the question of painting the walls and ceilings to harmonize with both the architectural design and the decorative materials [such as marble and stone] which are an essential part of it." Post continued, "This painting should serve to unite the work in one harmonious whole. To secure a perfect result requires not only mechanical skill and thorough appreciation of color but great experience." He believed that decorative finishes in the public areas of the building—the ornamental painting, stencils, gold leaf, color choices and even flat wall painting—were essential to achieve a capitol "which would be a model for buildings of its class, and which would as such exert a great educational influence throughout the land." A year earlier in a letter to another commissioner, William F. Vilas, Post indicated his view that large public buildings, particularly in the West, were often "over-decorated." He indicated his preference for "well conceived and executed and properly restrained decorative painting" and added, "I lay considerable emphasis intentionally upon the words 'properly restrained.'" Post's sentiments were echoed six years later by Kenyon Cox, the artist responsible for the Rotunda mosaics and the murals for the Senate Chamber. In a 1915 interview, he remarked on ornamentation in state capitols throughout the nation and Wisconsin in particular:

Wisconsin, and in fact all of the other western states now building capitols, are particularly fortunate.

... They are constructing their buildings at a time when American art and American decoration has reached an artistic height never before attained. Many of the western statehouses are hideous conglomerations of musky color schemes and haphazard architecture. Wisconsin, I think, is building a capitol which would have pleased the old masters.3

Post's intentions for the highest quality of decorative finishes in the Capitol were largely achieved, despite his death in November 1913, a year before the majority of the decorating began. The comprehensive decorative finish program for the building was not, in fact, developed until September 1914. When completed three years later, the installation included about 250 oil-on-canvas decorative paintings that were attached to walls, pendentives and ceilings, and many hundreds more decorative panels, patterns and stencils that were painted directly on plaster.4 The ubiquitous coal and tobacco smoke of the era, however, soon discolored the work, and moisture, plaster failure, vibrations and general wear also affected it. Deteriorating appearance led to several attempts at cleaning and retouching some of the more elaborate surfaces, while less highly finished walls and ceilings were overpainted with new colors and stencils. Modification to the interior spatial configuration of the Capitol and the "modernization" of the building also had deleterious effects. Alterations that affected the historic paint scheme began in the 1920s and continued into the 1980s. The major restoration project that began in 1988 attempted to restore the decorative finish program as conceived in 1914 and largely reversed the negative impact of these earlier modifications. In preparation for each phase of the Capitol restoration,
decorative finish elements were surveyed to assess condition and analyzed to discover original appearance. Probe work determined wall and ceiling colors; the types of paints, glazes and gold leaf used; methods of application and the stencil and pounce patterns installed when the Capitol was constructed. Following technical analysis and in accordance with accepted preservation standards, the conservation of many surfaces that had survived intact (particularly in the public spaces) was undertaken, replication of many more occurred, and adapted historical designs were installed in the rehabilitated parts of the building.

**Decorative Finishes, 1908-13**

As determined by progress on Capitol construction and the necessity of applying finishes to walls and ceilings so that occupants could move into their quarters, the Capitol Commission contracted with three firms to create and install decorative finishes in the building. The first was Elmer E. Garnsey of White Plains, New York, who decorated the Assembly Chamber and its support areas in 1908-09 and the Executive Chamber, now the Governor’s Conference Room, in 1911, with some follow-up work in 1912 or 1913. Garnsey’s work became a permanent part of the Capitol’s decor. The second was the Conrad Schmitt Co. of Milwaukee that mostly applied flat paint to the walls and ceilings of the West and East Wings between late 1909 and early 1911. In some rooms, Schmitt had applied decorative stenciling, but his work was intended to be temporary, subject to overpainting when the entire Capitol would be decorated in an integrated manner near the completion of construction. The third was Mack, Jenney and Tyler of New York, the firm that designed and executed the vast majority of decorative finish painting in the Capitol, completing the comprehensive decorative finish scheme that George Post envisioned. The work began in 1914 and concluded with the completion of the North Wing in 1917. Probably because of the wishes of the secretary of state, Mack, Jenney and Tyler did not redecorate his private office and its reception area and left the Conrad Schmitt work intact—the only such instance in the Capitol.

**Elmer E. Garnsey**

George Post was successful in directing the Capitol Commission toward a network of artists and designers with whom he was familiar through both professional and social ties. Many of those he had recommended to the commission, including designer Elmer Garnsey, had worked with the architect at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and shared membership with Post and other important artists in the Century Association, a prestigious New York men’s club. Additionally, Garnsey had completed decorative finish work in Post’s New York Stock Exchange (1901-03) and even more recently in Cass Gilbert’s Minnesota State Capitol (1895-1905). In 1908, the Capitol Commission pressed for the completion of the West Wing so that it would be ready for the legislative session of January 1909. The urgency surrounding this matter may have led to the commission’s not seeking bids for decorating the assembly’s quarters, and instead merely authorizing, on 10 June 1908, that “Mr. Post... arrange with Geo W [sic] Garnsey for the Decoration of the Assembly Chamber[,] Loggia, Parlors and Lobby at such a reduction from the price proposed as he might be able to secure.”

George Post immediately began consulting with Garnsey about his fees and the intended scope of the work, and reported on 7 July that he had secured a quote of $15,670 from him that excluded painting the Assembly Lobby “until the decorative work in the Staircase Hall is done.” Later in the month, Garnsey reduced his fee to $15,500 as negotiated with William Vilas in his role as the chair of the commission’s executive committee. According to the agreement, Garnsey was to provide “all the decorations in Assembly Chamber, Loggia and adjoining rooms and corridors, Parlors, Speakers Room and Corridor, Chief Clerks Room, Document Room, and Sergeant at Arms Room” with a completion deadline of 13 December. Although he had no contract, Garnsey designed the decorations at his studio in New York and sent a team to begin installation on 28 September 1908, the same day the commission executed its contract with...
him. Garnsey attached to the agreement a specific description of the finishes to be applied, although it noted that the “final decision” would be “determined by the painter with the approval of the Architects.”

According to Garnsey’s proposal, walls and ceilings were to receive four coats of paint made from white lead and oil; the gold leaf was to be “first quality.” In the chamber, loggia and corridors, the plaster areas of the ceilings and walls were to be painted “in shades of stone color, enriched with dull blue, gray green, old red and other colors, in the ceiling coffers, soft panels, pendentives and elsewhere.” Plaster moldings, flowers and modillions were intended to be “dull gold or in color tending to bring them into proper relation with the general color scheme.” The colors and ornamental details were to “co-relate . . . with the Edwin Howland Blissfield mural” above the speaker’s desk and were to be painted “either directly on the plaster, or painted on canvas and mounted on the wall with white-lead.” For the loggia Garnsey suggested an overall buff stone color, “the ceiling coffers . . . violet blue, with borders of gray yellow. The general color of the cornice to be buff stone,” with the capitals of the columns in “dull gold” and the frieze in violet gray. In the parlor, the plaster ceiling was specified as gray blue “with painted borders and gold lines. The cornice in gray buff, with its decorated members rendered in dull gold.” The plaster walls were to be painted an “old crimson color, with an all-over damask pattern in dull gold.” The two small offices at the north and south ends of the loggia and a small office opposite the north loggia office were to have ivory gray ceilings “bordered with frets or similar patterns in gold,” and the walls were to be gray green “with panel lines around each wall panel.”

North of the Assembly Chamber, the ceiling of the Speaker’s Corridor was to be ivory gray, with “a border of laurel and lines of gold” and the walls gray green with panel lines. The decorative schemes for the four offices along the north corridor also were indicated. The speaker’s office in the northwest corner would have a buff-colored ceiling with “borders in blue and gold,” and walls painted “red” with “an all-over pattern in buff, each wall to be paneled with a border of interlacing lines in buff and gold.” A buff ceiling bordered with a gold fret and walls of gray green with buff and gold panel lines was planned for the next office to the east, the chief clerk’s room. The next room east, the document room, was to have a buff-colored ceiling with an “interlaced border in gold” and walls of a “tan leather color.” At the east end of the corridor, the sergeant-at-arms’ room would have a buff ceiling with a gold border and terra-cotta red walls with buff panel lines.

In December 1908, the Capitol Commission’s Executive Committee accepted Garnsey’s proposal to decorate the Assembly Lobby for an additional $800. Garnsey proposed “creamy grays” for the ceiling and cornice, “harmonizing with the . . . marble walls.” A gold-leaf “band of double Greek fret” about fifteen inches wide was planned for the ceiling panels, and gold leaf was to be used on the columns. Gilding was “to be lacquered to an old gold tone.”

Paint probes made by conservators in early 1988 of the Assembly Chamber and Loggia indicate that the initial scheme was followed in general terms, although the painters substituted a gray-green shade in the loggia vaulting for “buff stone,” and in the frieze the background color became a muted gold instead of violet gray. Similar probes were made in 1993 in the Assembly Parlor, Lobby and offices along the north wall. These probes also indicated that Garnsey’s contractual plan was followed closely, although no probes of ceiling finishes were made in the north corridor. A deviation from the contract occurred in the office of the sergeant-at-arms, which received a border of stars as part of the original work as well as the proposed panel lines. The contract provisions for the basic color schemes and locations for using gold leaf do not fully describe the decorative borders and frets. For the Assembly Chamber ceiling, Garnsey filled the twenty-four rectangular plaster panels between the ornamental grilles below the glass ceiling with a repeated design consisting of wreaths, branches and ribbons. The east and west gallery walls had simple borders, but the south gallery wall had an elaborate scrollwork and a fleur-de-lis pattern as a border.
In addition to the finishes applied directly to plaster, Garnsey created eighteen oil-on-canvas murals for the chamber and loggia. Each pendantive in the chamber received four canvases. The tondo at the center of each featured an eagle with outspread wings, and the remainder of each pendantive was filled with three triangular canvases that encircled the tondo with patterns of leaves and ribbons. Indicating the work was completed by a team of artists, the southwest tondo appears to have been painted by a different artist than painted the other three. Additionally, there were canvases in the lunettes at the ends of the loggia’s barrel-vaulted ceiling; the north lunette bore a quotation from Abraham Lincoln (“Let us have faith that right makes might and in that faith let us dare to do our duty as we understand it”), and the south, a quotation from historical writer Josiah Gilbert Holland (“Laws are the very bulwark of liberty. They define every man’s rights and defend the individual liberties of all men”). The inscriptions were depicted as though in plaques, and the background consisted of patterns of leaves.18

The work received mixed reactions, although generally favorable. The Wisconsin State Journal published an unusually large front-page photograph of the corridor between the chamber and loggia. George Johnson of the Capitol Commission expressed “appreciation of the excellence of [the work],” and George Post himself wrote to Johnson that “a result has been achieved which in its simplicity and grandeur combined with dignity and harmony of proportion and color may safely challenge comparison with anything of character in the country.” Criticism involved perceived overuse of gold leaf, especially on the capitals of columns. Post addressed this issue in his letter to Johnson: “[I]f the caps of the marble columns in your Assembly Chamber had been in marble in lieu of mat gold[,] . . . the columns as seen in connection with the work surrounding them would not only have been marred in form but the beautiful Breche Violette of which they are constructed would have seemed relatively colorless.” While the balance of Garnsey’s work was appreciated, the finishes applied in the Assembly Parlor met with some disapproval. Post brought this up in his letter to Johnson:

I understand that the Assembly Parlor is severely criticized. It is certainly the least satisfactory part of Garnsey’s work. I do not believe that he himself likes it and I am inclined to think that if he has an opportunity when again working in the Capitol he will of his own volition make some serious modifications. Nevertheless as it stands it is I think a monument to his skill for it was painted in parts while the untrimmed room was full of workmen of different trades, without the possibility of making any trial of the relative value of different colors or of testing the effect of the final lighting; and that the result is not far worse than it is I consider almost an artistic miracle.

Some technical problems about paint adherence occurred in the offices, and Garnsey recommended “putting a small quantity of Venice turpentine on the loosened paint and the plaster, laying a blower over the paint and holding a warm iron against it.”

Elmer Garnsey’s last work in the Capitol was the decorating of the Executive Chamber (now called the Governor’s Conference Room) and its lobby in the East Wing under a $5,000 contract. The room received architect George Post’s very careful attention and he made provisions for twenty-nine oil-on-canvas murals on the walls and ceiling, elaborate plaster work, carved and ornamented cherrywood walls and trim, a parquet floor, a gilded marble fireplace with an inlaid hearth and custom fixtures. Additionally, Post specified custom-designed mahogany furniture, light fixtures and draperies and the purchase of Oriental rugs selected for their size and colors. Post desired a room that was finished and furnished opulently, but one in which no single element dominated; accordingly, the colors of the walls and ceiling played a critical role in tying all the elements together. Garnsey determined the colors and types of finishes for the walls and ceiling that would achieve Post’s goal. He chose varnish, not paint, for the walls, using an opaque red-brown satin
varnish that has been called red-brown, maroon or the color of porphyry, a stone that was used in the hearth. For the interstitial portions of the plaster ceiling that required paint, he selected a color that matched the walls. The gold leaf on the ceiling, capitals and ornaments was dulled to give it an antique character. The decorating took place in the fall of 1911 and was supervised by Max Philipp, Garnsey’s foreman. Because of delays in mural installation, the work did not conclude until 1912 or 1913, having required additional attention to gilding and some painting once the murals were in place. In the lobby, the woodwork was painted a cream-white color with gilded highlights, the wall panels were tan with a gold-leaf border, and the ceiling was a cream-gold color with a fretwork and floral border in gold leaf.  

Conrad Schmitt Company

With the East and West Wings of the building completed significantly earlier than the rest of the Capitol, the commission needed to finish those spaces, at least minimally, for occupancy. While Garnsey had been hired to decorate the public spaces dedicated to the governor and assembly, provisions had not been made for the general painting of the wing or the installation of decorative finishes in offices that were to be occupied by the governor, attorney general, secretary of state or state treasurer. The contract to complete this work went to the Conrad Schmitt Co. of Milwaukee. Schmitt’s

9.5 Elmer Garnsey, Executive Chamber
Lobby decorations, 1917
Garnsey used ivory and gold in this space, similar to the colors in the antechamber of the council room of the Doge’s Palace in Venice, the precedent used in designing this area of the Capitol. The palette contrasted with the dark red and gold colors in the Executive Chamber (now the Governor’s Conference Room), which were derived from the council room in the palace.

9.6 Elmer Garnsey, Executive Chamber decorations, 1917
Deeply colored red walls, the color of porphyry, were created by using a dark varnish over the cherusses paneling; portions of the plaster ceiling were painted a similar color. Gold leaf was used heavily on frames around the twenty-nine paintings on the ceiling and walls and, also, to highlight elements of the woodwork and the composition ornaments.
agreement with the commission stipulated that his firm paint portions of the East and West Wing, essentially those spaces not decorated by Garnsey, between December 1909 and January 1911. Schmitt may have been promoted for the work by Commissioner George Johnson of Milwaukee. He actively advocated firms from his city as contractors and suppliers, and he particularly tried to advance Milwaukee artists; this advocacy prompted George Post to write Johnson a lengthy letter on 21 April 1909 explaining the necessity of engaging only highly experienced artists and decorators for a project like the Capitol. Post did not name the Schmitt firm specifically and merely addressed the issue of experience, but the timing of the letter is suspicious because Schmitt had begun pursuing a Capitol contract four months earlier.

In December 1908, Schmitt wrote to the commission and proposed painting the first floor of the West Wing for $3,750. As the commission had not solicited bids for this work, it did not respond, but a year later on 10 December, acting unilaterally and without a bidding process, Johnson and Lew Porter engaged Schmitt’s company to paint the committee rooms on the third floor of the West Wing for $1,225. Johnson and Porter reasoned that haste “was necessary in order to have rooms ready for the approaching session of the Legislature and there not being time to lay the subject before the members of the Executive Committee.” Schmitt began at once. Judging from room assignments indicated on a 1909 floor plan, Schmitt painted all the rooms along the north and south outer walls of the third floor that were designated as large and small committee rooms. A report on paint probes conducted in fourteen third floor offices in 1993-94 states that they all “had the same color scheme,” a “standard” dark brown dado, a light cream color on the walls and an off-white ceiling and cove. The report, however, is inconclusive in attributing this color scheme to Conrad Schmitt since this treatment is consistent with the later work of Mack, Jenney and Tyler.13

Half a year later, on 1 June 1910, Lew Porter wrote to Schmitt soliciting a proposal for the “simple decoration” of rooms in the East Wing, and Schmitt responded on 3 June with a rapidity that suggests Porter and Schmitt had discussed this work earlier. Schmitt offered to decorate the first floor rooms of the East Wing, excluding the Executive Chamber, its lobby and various vaults on the floor for $2,650, with completion by 20 June. The commission accepted this offer, and Schmitt completed the work by about 1 July. Porter described it as “most satisfactory.”14 Schmitt does not seem to have decorated East Wing corridors, but only offices, judging from paint probes made of the corridors in March 1999. In the governor’s and attorney general’s office suites, Schmitt created heavily stenciled borders with some gold leaf accents on both ceilings and walls. His choice of colors varied. He preferred gray, green and blue tones and refrained from the design of special ornamental treatment for pillars and pilasters in both the business offices for the governor and attorney general.15

On the basis of having completed this contract successfully, Schmitt submitted a sketch on 23 July 1910 for decorating the second floor Supreme Court Hearing Room and its lobby, a more ambitious project that he bid at $3,000. He wrote that he would make all necessary plaster repairs and apply four coats of oil paint, the “last coat to be genuine imported French zinc, ground in poppy-seed oil, and to be stipple faced. The ceiling panels are to be laid in solid XX gold leaf and then to be lacquered.” The “staff work,” or ornamental plastering, was to be “toned down in glazing colors to a dull ivory tone.” All painted and gold-leaved surfaces were to be “over lacquered to assure a permanent and artistic effect.” He proposed handling the vestibule or lobby in the same way. The commission met on 26 and 27 July, with James Otis Post in attendance. On 27 July, it accepted the proposal with the proviso that the architect supervise the work. Schmitt and James Otis Post evidently discussed the proposal immediately, because two days later Schmitt referred to a conversation with him in a letter to Porter.16 Paint probes undertaken in 1998, 1999 and 2001 demonstrated that a different scheme than Schmitt had proposed initially was undertaken. In the chamber, the first layer of paint appears to have been a casein-bound paint in “an off-white base color.” Over it there was a “rust-colored or reddish
brown oil wash" that served to "emphasize and/or pick out certain elements," thereby increasing "the illusion of relief (shade, contrast)." Elements that received this oil wash included long linear beads of plaster and the higher relief areas of the scroll brackets. The reddish-brown color looked "sketch-like," as if it had been "quickly applied," which was "entirely consistent with the notion that a temporary or quick decorative treatment was installed in this space in 1910." From the floor of the hearing room, the effect would have been "one of high (and dramatic) contrast between certain elements picked out with the reddish brown wash, alongside those areas that carried the more off-whitish base paint only." Little oxidation or soiling of this painted surface occurred before the second decorative scheme was applied. The probes indicated a similar initial treatment by Schmitt in the lobby.17

Since it was expected that these areas of the building would be repainted as a part of a comprehensive finish scheme to be installed when the building was completed, much of Schmitt's work involved the simple application of flat paint throughout the East and West Wings. In October 1910, he submitted a proposal to paint the ceilings and walls of the third and fourth ("attic") floors of the East Wing for $1,550, "excepting main corridors, light shaft over court room, and electric fan room." Again, he would repair plaster and the walls would receive "three coats of oil colors in the matt finish, and walls are to be slipper faced." The commission accepted Schmitt's proposal, and the parties agreed that Schmitt would finish the work by 25 November, less than a month after the contract was signed on 31 October.18 The nature of Schmitt's work in these spaces is ill-documented. Stratigraphic probes conducted on the walls of the central room of the third floor law library in 1998-99 indicate that he first applied a light gray undercoat and then covered the undercoats with a salmon-colored paint. On the ceiling, he used the light gray undercoat and a shade of tan over that.

In a library cove, he sized the plaster with glue and then painted two coats of "an off-white or light tan paint," which he likely glazed reddish-brown. On the fourth floor, only one such probe was done—again along the east wall of the library. There was an initial coat of light gray paint, followed this time by an application of light tan.19

At the same time Schmitt received the contract for the third and fourth floors of the East Wing, the commission awarded him a $3,025 contract for painting the walls and ceilings of the first floor of the West Wing. The first floor rooms included the suites of offices of the secretary of state and the state treasurer, with access from the octagonal lobby area in the center of the wing. James Gormley, Post & Sons' on-site representative, also asked Schmitt to paint the ceiling of the toilet room adjacent to the Assembly Chamber on the second floor. By December, the work was behind schedule and the secretary of state made "much and serious complaint" to Lew Porter about Schmitt's "lack of rapidity." Porter asked Schmitt to visit the Capitol personally to discuss the problem, indicating that Schmitt was rarely in the building but instead spent most of his time in Milwaukee. Schmitt completed the work in January 1911; this represented the last of his contracts in the Capitol.20 In the business office of the secretary of state on the north side of the wing, Schmitt appears to have used simple striped borders on the walls, a more elaborate border at the ceiling cove and relatively light colors. Paint probes completed in 1993 indicated a gray border above the oak wainscot, with a tan cotta stripe above the border, on walls that were tan. The piers had both horizontal and vertical gray borders on their edges with a terra cotta stripe on tan walls. A more elaborate border in grey, blue and gold leaf was used for the cornice, with shades of yellow and tan for the cove and ceiling. Comparable studies of the original paint layers in the treasurer's business office on the south side of the wing were not prepared, but analysis shows that the initial paint colors on the piers was red or deep ochre; the walls were tan or buff. In addition to his business office at the west end of the wing, the secretary of state had a private office and an adjoining reception area, both of which Schmitt decorated. The walls were painted light green with darker-green and gold-leaf borders above the wainscot and just below the cornice. On the cornice, Schmitt used a scroll and mosaic design, also with gold leaf. The borders consisted of a running Greek-key design with gold-leaf highlights. The mosaic motif was derived from work already completed in the offices of the attorney general in the East Wing.
In contrast to the relatively highly decorated office of the secretary of state, the private office of the treasurer was painted without stencils or pounce patterns. It had a gold-tan ceiling, tan walls below the cove, a terra cotta stripe above a light-brown border over the chair rail, and dark brown paint below the chair rail. Schmitt seems to have repeated these color choices in most of the offices along the south and north walls of the wing’s second floor in both the treasurer’s and secretary of state’s areas. The finishes in the secretary’s private and business offices were overpainted several times, but at dates later than the implementation of a comprehensive scheme for the building. Since the Schmitt work had been retained in this area historically, it was replicated in these spaces in 1993-95.²¹

Mack, Jenney and Tyler, 1914-17

As completion of the Central Portion and South Wing neared, the Capitol Commission again took up the issue of hiring a decorative finish contractor to implement the comprehensive scheme architect George Post envisioned for the building. In December 1913, the commission instructed Post & Sons to obtain bids from Elmer Garnsey “and other decorators” for all four wings and the Rotunda. Garnsey replied in January 1914, saying that he had not sought the contracts for important commissions like the Capitol, “nor have I competed against others, my only care having been to do the best I could when the opportunity came to me.” He offered to finish the building for $203,000. The commission did not accept Garnsey’s offer and requested that Post & Sons recommend other decorators.²² On 20 May 1914 representatives from the New York decorating firm of Mack, Jenney and Tyler appeared before the commission and showed sketches of “interior decorations of public buildings” it had implemented elsewhere. (Mack, Jenney and Tyler was a New York City firm that formed in 1906 as a partnership of Charles E. Mack, Edgar Whitfield Jenney and Ernest F. Tyler. It closed in 1941.) The commission thereupon asked the company to submit a proposal at the next meeting, which did not occur until September 29. By 8 June, Charles Mack sent a bid of $172,300 to Post & Sons, along with a detailed list of what kinds of decorations the firm proposed for “certain rooms” which would be painted “in color . . . [with] restrained use of dull gold, so as to conform with the architectural treatment and the purpose for which such rooms are designed.” To complement the architectural hierarchy of the spaces, Mack, Jenney and Tyler proposed five classes of decoration:

CLASS I
Decoration of class I is work of the highest type and is to be the equivalent of the decoration already finished in the Assembly Chamber and adjacent rooms. This class provides for as much variety of color and such use of gold leaf as may be found desirable. . . .

CLASS II
Decoration of class II is of a somewhat simpler type, although still permitting of great variety and the use of gold leaf in ornamental borders and diaper patterns. It is work of this class which we propose to use in the Executive Suite and rooms of similar importance. . . .

CLASS III
Decoration of class III is still simpler and would consist of the use of not more than four colors in one room and borders of simple painted ornament with comparatively [sic] little gold leaf. This class is designed for Secondary offices, Minor Corridors and Minor Committee Rooms. . . .

CLASS IV
Decoration of class IV is simplest. It consists of stripes and borders of not more than three colors in one room
and the use of simple stencils where desirable. It is specified for all work where something a little better than plain work is necessary. . .

CLASS V
Class V is plain paint, to be finished in four coats of lead and oil paint, the last coat to be stippled. It is understood that the use of one color for ceiling and another for walls in each room of this class is provided for in this estimate.

The proposal broke down the spaces into ten groups, and in a twenty-six-page addendum specified proposed treatment room-by-room and by group. The schedule excluded specifics about the North Wing, with the exception of the basement, since it remained under construction and issues concerning occupancy had not been resolved fully. The Class I finishes were to be applied in public areas, including the Rotunda, the main corridors on the ground floor, main stair galleries from the ground through the third floors, main stair softs, the Supreme Court Hearing Room and Lobby, the Senate Chamber, Parlor, Lobby and galleries as well as the senate president's office suite. Class II through Class IV treatments were assigned according to the prominence of the individual associated with the space or the extent to which the space was publicly accessible. Class V finishes, the least elaborate, predominated and were to be applied throughout approximately 40 percent of the building. The proposal does not mention special raised plaster work, pastiglia, that Mack, Jenny and Tyler evidently planned to include in the decorations. In that era, pastiglia was a fairly common adjunct to fine interior design, and the firm specialized in it.31

On 29 September, the commission entered into “considerable discussion” and decided to engage Mack, Jenny and Tyler to decorate “the upper portion of the Dome” for $10,000, work that was to be completed by mid-December of 1914. The issue required speedy resolution because of the construction scaffolding that made the upper reaches of the Rotunda accessible, but only temporarily. Due to constraints imposed by the lack of legislative appropriations until May 1915, the commission did not enter into a formal contract with Mack, Jenny and Tyler for the balance of the work until 2 October 1915, by which time the firm's price had risen to $174,642; $39,362 for the East Wing, $42,015 for the South Wing, $34,163 for the North Wing, $29,116 for West Wing, and $29,986 for Central Portion. Contract negotiations began in August and took two months because of concerns over deadlines. In the end, the decorators were given ninety days to complete their work throughout the entire building, those parts that had been constructed and those that had not. This deadline proved to be overly optimistic since the decorating work was not completed until 1917. The lack of a formal contract for work beyond the $10,000 for the Rotunda decoration did not prevent Mack, Jenny and Tyler from staying involved, nor had it precluded payment. By July 1915, Mack, Jenny and Tyler had received nearly $25,000 for work that included the Rotunda Basement and the Supreme Court Hearing Room. Lew Porter wrote on 11 March that he had found Mack, Jenny and Tyler’s work “absolutely correct” and authorized decoration of the Rotunda Basement, saying, “I . . . appreciate the way you are carrying out your contract,” though none had been signed.32

The schedule that Mack, Jenny and Tyler submitted as a part of their proposal was, at best, an outline of intentions based upon space assignments as they existed in the spring of 1913. As the work unfolded, exceptions occurred, and recent probe work has identified at least four deviations; there were likely more. The South Wing senate offices adjacent to those of the lieutenant governor (also the senate president) received only Class III finishes without gold leaf, not Class II finishes as scheduled. The State Law Library on the third and fourth floors of the East Wing was scheduled to receive stencils as a Class III space, but it did not. The offices of the justices and their clerks on the second floor of the East Wing were to have received Class II and Class III finishes respectively, but they all received Class III finishes. And the south offices on the ground floor of the East Wing, which initially were to have been occupied by the Civil

9.10 Mack, Jenny and Tyler project list, circa 1925
In 1914 the Capitol Commission engaged the New York decorating firm Mack, Jenny and Tyler to apply decorative finishes throughout the Capitol except for those spaces already decorated by Elmer Garvey. Charles Mack, Edgar Jenny, and Ernest Tyler established the firm in 1906; by the middle 1920s, it had achieved a distinguished record.

9.11 Charles E. Mack, circa 1910
Charles Mack (1876-1945) was both a decorator and architect, and the Capitol Commission sometimes relied upon him for technical as well as artistic advice. After the firm disbanded in 1941, Mack enlisted to serve in World War II. He was a harbormaster in the South Pacific well into his late sixties.
Service Commission but were not, received only two or three colors of paint and no stencils, finishes which were one or two classes lower than those scheduled. These exceptions indicate that representatives of the contractor, architect, Capitol Commission and occupants made unrecorded decisions as the decorating progressed, most of them apparently favoring more modest finishes than those proposed. The schedule, therefore, can be seen more as an initial set of guidelines, not as a description of the actual finishes applied throughout the Capitol.25

Following its work in the Capitol, Mack, Jenney and Tyler received a similar contract in 1919 for decorative finish work in the Houses of Parliament in Ottawa, Canada, where it decorated the principal chambers for the House of Commons and the Canadian Senate. The firm also decorated numerous important buildings in the United States, including the National Academy of Sciences (1921) in Washington, D.C.; the Palmer House (1924) in Chicago, the Morgan Library Annex (1928) in New York City and the Tennessee War Memorial (1925) in Nashville. The firm’s work in Wisconsin occurred relatively early in its existence and remained one of its largest commissions.26

Methods of Work

Once the contract was approved, painters employed by Mack, Jenney and Tyler began their work in the portions of the building that had not been painted already. An October 1915 article in the Wisconsin State Journal stated that the Senate Chamber, third floor barrel vaults, the column capitals in the wings, first floor ceilings, the Supreme Court Conference Room and the Rotunda Basement were all in progress. The article noted that gilders and painters in the Senate Chamber were using more gold leaf and brilliant colors in areas closer to the Kenyon Cox murals, “thus giving a restful and truly beautiful effect of the whole.” Throughout the building, “more than $15,000 worth of gold . . . leaf has already been applied . . . and nearly twice that much will have been used before the work is completed.” The article stated that the leaf “is guaranteed to last 50 years without peeling.” In the Central Portion, “[the beautiful gold, which has taken the place of the ghostly white plaster, sets off the beauties of the Blashfield center picture [in the oculus]] and the Cox glass mosaics in the dome, and the various colored marbles in the gallery cornices so advantageously that any previous feeling of inexpressible dissatisfaction is instantly dispelled. There is no hint of gauntness or suspicion of a desire to spend money for something that costs a great deal. It is rich and wonderful: that is all.”

The article also described the decorators’ methods for applying canvases to ceilings and for painting directly on the walls and ceilings. Mack, Jenney and Tyler’s artists in New York worked from architectural plans and elevations, painting the decorative oil-on-canvas panels in their studios, beginning with a watercolor sketch. When completed, the panels were sent to Madison for installation. Either pounce patterns or stencils for both oil paintings and wall and ceiling finishes also were developed in New York. Canvases in the third floor groin vaults show evidence of pounce patterns, indicating that many painters, not just one, created them. According to the Wisconsin State Journal, “The workman puts this stencil on the ceiling and goes over it with chalk or charcoal, which leaves an impression. He then fills in this impression with the colors selected. And the colors are selected to harmonize with the marbles, floor coloring and the lighting at that particular point. Many of these panels are allegorical representations of Plenty, Commerce, Labor, and other subjects. This work is especially beautiful in the Supreme Court council room and the restaurant down stairs.”27

Six months later in March 1916, the Wisconsin State Journal gave further insight into the work processes. It reported that Edgar W. Jenney was in Madison, “armed with all sorts of designs which are being ‘tried out’ on the balmy walls of the capitol. These designs are created in the New York office of the decorators . . . on huge canvasses, and are then sent here, fastened on the wall or ceiling . . . and the effect noted. They may not be used at all, they may be changed to suit the architectural surroundings, or they may be transferred at once to the panel.” Jenney said, “We have to per-
form a sort of marriage ceremony between the parts of the capitol and the decoration.” He explained that the public had become accustomed to the white plaster walls, “and when we started the decorating some of them said, ‘oh this is good enough of use.’ . . . It was the changing of a woman’s dress from skirts to hoops. The decoration is a sort of dress to the capitol. . . . We have to conform to the color scheme and lines of the building. In a certain sense, our work is laid out for us.”

Accessibility of the Capitol’s spaces contributed to the approach taken by Mack, Jenney and Tyler in decorating areas throughout all parts of the building simultaneously. The firm could advance in its work, in both public and private spaces, only as Lew Porter or James Gormley approved. For example, in May 1916, Gormley made thirty-three rooms available in the South, West and North Wings, a burden of work that led Charles Mack to suggest increasing the size of the work force. Change orders, too, affected Mack, Jenney and Tyler’s progress, as when marble was added to the walls of the Rotunda, about a year after the space had been decorated. New capitols had to be gold-leafed and the adjacent walls and decorative plaster had to be repainted. Shifting occupancy throughout the building also influenced the decorating schedule. Only when occupants vacated a previously decorated office could Mack, Jenney and Tyler fulfill its contract to decorate it. In at least one instance, the reception area and private office of the secretary of state were not redecorated.

Work Force
As part of Mack, Jenney and Tyler’s work force, the firm brought at least six experienced decorative finish painters to Madison. They included Mark C. Kinney, supervisor; John F. Byrne, a Pittsburgh native with a degree in art from Georgetown University; and John’s brother Thomas Byrne, who was a gold-leaf specialist; this was in addition to three finish specialists whose homes were in Germany (Munich, Hamburg and Baden Baden), one of whom worked as a foreman. Mack, Jenney and Tyler also engaged painters from Milwaukee and Madison, including the Socialist assembly representative from Milwaukee’s fourth district, German-born Carl Minkeley and his son Eric. Like the three German painters, Carl Minkeley had received technical training in Germany, in his case at a Berlin trade school; he had joined a trade union in Germany in his early twenties, and after settling in Milwaukee in 1893 he was active in the Brotherhood of Decorators and Painters of America. A newspaper account also mentions five men from Madison: Harry (Henry) Caesar, Alexander B. Ennis (whose surname is spelled “Elmier” in the newspaper story), Gustave M. Johnson, Arthur Larson and Norman Moll. Caesar and Larson were family men with young adults in their households; it seems that Ennis, Johnson and Moll were younger men. All were listed in Madison city directories as painters who maintained this type of employment over the years and all were members of Madison Local 802 of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America. The evidence of union membership seems to indicate that Mack, Jenney and Tyler hired unionized workers for this project; however, the firm was not always union-minded. In September 1920 it was among thirty-five signers of a letter protesting a strike by the Brotherhood of Painters in New York, suggesting that the firm accepted contracts for both union and non-union jobs. In addition to these men, a German-born painter, Franz Rohbeck of Milwaukee (1852-1919), is said to have been among the decorators in the Capitol, although he is better known for his independent work as a muralist and fine artist. He may have been engaged by either Mack, Jenney and Tyler or Elmer Garnshe. These findings suggest that Mack, Jenney and Tyler hired experienced painters and decorators to work on the Capitol.

John F. Byrne and at least one other painter and their girlfriends inscribed their names on the easternmost ceiling panel on the north side of the second floor principal corridor of the West Wing. The inscriptions read: “[J ohn]. F. Byrne,” “Stella Callahan” (also “Estella C.”), “Willie [Wilbur B.] Callahan,” “Jennie Spencer” and a mostly indecipherable signature that reads something like “1916 JAYMMK.” Estella Callahan signed twice and included “Easter 1916” with
her “Estella” signature. Byrne included “1916” after his signature, then later added a dash and “1936,” indicating that he had participated in another project to clean or restore the work twenty years later. In 1916, John F. Byrne had not been in Madison long. He and his brother Thomas arrived in Madison that year. After leaving Madison they both worked on the Canadian Parliament building in Ottawa. When in Madison, John Byrne met Estella Callahan, the sister of Madison painter, Wilbert Callahan. John and Estella eventually married and lived out their lives in Madison. Wilbert Callahan became a sign painter in Madison and married Jennie Spencer. John Byrne became a sign writer and painter for the University of Wisconsin and also painted portraits and landscapes. Neither woman was a painter, although the existence of their signatures on the ceiling has misled conservators into believing they were. The signatures are noteworthy because during the various surveys and analyses of decorative finishes throughout the Capitol from the late 1980s until 2001, no other signatures were found from the period of initial decoration.21

In addition to the “1936” annotation Byrne made near his earlier signature, the inscription “F. Armstrong” appears on the ceiling of the Senate Parlor in the South Wing. “F. Armstrong” was doubtless Frank C. Armstrong of Madison, a painter who later worked for the Bureau of Engineering, which was the agency that administered and maintained the Capitol. The type of specialty painting done by Byrne and Armstrong evidently was not part of the wider WPA projects done in the late 1930s and early 1940s but was merely associated with it, since their names do not appear in the time book for the projects in the building that began in October 1935. The appearance of the inscriptions in two distinct areas of the building indicate that cleanings or modifications to the decorative finishes were made throughout the Capitol that year.22

Class I and II Decorations in Public and Private Spaces

Mack, Jenney and Tyler’s most important work in the Capitol were the complex finishes the firm applied in the most highly decorated spaces, those described as Class I and Class II. The majority of these finishes had survived relatively intact when restoration efforts began in the late 1980s. Those which had been overpainted in the seventy years between 1917 and the 1980s became the subject of intense investigation during restoration and were analyzed in numerous reports. Accordingly, it is possible to describe the historic appearance and colors of these finishes with relative accuracy. Mack, Jenney and Tyler chose motifs and colors that were compatible with the Beaux-Arts tradition of the Capitol. Many of the designs emanated from nature—flowers (rosettes and three-part bell flowers were particularly common), fruits, leaves (especially maple and oak leaves), grains (notably wheat), animals and sea creatures. Other designs derived from classical mythology, especially the Greek and Roman gods, and from standard motifs from the Greek and Roman periods, especially the signs of the zodiac, the caduceus, fasces, classical masks, various Greek letters and Latin phrases, and designs of borders. The numerous figures in paintings were often garbed in classical robes and assumed poses drawn from classical art. Wisconsin itself provided motifs: various state seals; the letter “W” in many configurations; the date 1836 that marked territorial beginnings; the names of the counties and county seats; agricultural and industrial products for which the state was known; the badger, and more. Backgrounds, on both canvases and plaster, were often painted in damask or checkerboard patterns. Ribbons, swags, vases, standards, decorative rods, shields and plaques literally tied together various elements of the designs.

Rotunda and Central Portion

The most approachable and compelling public space in the Capitol is the Rotunda, where Mack, Jenney and Tyler began painting for the practical reason that construction scaffolding remained in place. At the very top, the decorators applied gold leaf to the elaborate plaster border that frames the oculus. A patterned border of bell-flowers and leaves intersected by eight rondels that contained gold-leaved “W”s encircled the gold frame on a blue-green background. The ceiling of the dome featured twenty-four rows of coffers, with five coffers in each row for a total of 120. The five
9.15 Probe report on Rotunda ceiling, 1997
Paint probes revealed the colors of paint and the shades of gold leaf used by Mack, Jenney and Tyler in the coffered ceiling of the Rotunda. In the original work, completed by late 1914, gold leaf was applied on the inner faces of the coffers; by reflecting light, this technique contributed to the impression of the coffers’ depth.

9.16 Sketch of poounce pattern at sixth level walkway, Central Portion, 1997
The wall at the sixth level walkway within the Rotunda, known also as the trumpeters’ course, was decorated with an elaborate swag pattern that was created using poounce patterns. The palette harmonized with the buff colored stones. The pattern was overpainted in 1968, and the configuration shown here was discovered through paint probes.
coffers increased in size as they descended from the top of the inner dome to its base at the top of the drum. Each coffer consisted of four fields; the innermost was painted blue-green, a color that harmonized with tones in the glass mosaics of the pendentives. The faces of the returns in each coffer and the ceiling separating the coffers were painted a light tan that harmonized with the Kasota stone walls in the Capitol. The top horizontal and vertical sides of the returns were gold-leafed; the flat surfaces of the returns were painted bronze. The effect of the gold leaf and bronze increased a sense of depth in the coffers and cast reflected light on the innermost panel. The light tan of the ceiling was carried downward and used in the sash, frames and surrounds of the twenty cathedral windows and other elements of the drum. Some courses and panels received darker tan shades. Between each of the windows and the four stairwell bays was a large, engaged column (twenty-four in all), each the height of the windows and made of scagliola, a gypsum product that took a highly polished finish. They were made in 1914 by the Rotunda’s plaster contractor and had intrinsic coloration and veining in shades of tan and beige, intended to evoke the coloration of the Siena marble used on the Rotunda floors. Mack, Jenney and Tyler drew upon the colors of the scagliola columns, as well. At the trumpet course, a pattern of swags, ribbons and rosettes was painted in six shades of tan, brown and gray on the gray ground of the walls. The
narrow walkway at this level was visually supported by an elaborate gold-leaved cornice made of Kree’s cement and plaster, ornamented with twenty-four lions’ heads and ninety-six anthemias, surmounting a course of dentils. Beneath a flat plaster course painted in a darker tan contrasted with the predominating pale tan of the Kasota stone.

At the third and fourth floor levels, gold leaf highlighted the plaster frames around the pendentive mosaics and the arches of the barrel vaults, painted in a color scheme consistent with the ceiling of the Rotunda. Between the gold leaf and the mosaics a gray border repeated the ground color of the trumpet course. The entablature between the pendentives and the two-story engaged columns and pilasters in the Rotunda were decorated intricately. The cornice was painted in two shades of tan, with gold-leaved elements. The frieze was red marble and the architrave was painted tan with gold-leaved plaster ornamentation. The Corinthian capitals surrounding the green Tuscan marble engaged columns and pilasters were heavily gold-leaved. Four monumental vaults created the transition from the central Rotunda into each wing. In each, the interior of the arch was designed with two different ceiling treatments. In the first narrow band, contiguous with the Rotunda, thirteen shallow coffers were painted with two shades of tan; one was a shade of dark tan similar in color to the band of plaster below the trumpet course, and the other was a lighter tan that suggests the color of the Kasota stone. The inner vault consisted of forty-five coffers arranged in fifteen rows of three. Each coffer contained a gold-leaved, three-dimensional rosette and the innermost field was painted the same blue-green that was used in painting the coffers in the Dome.34

Highly ornamented ceilings were provided in the corridors surrounding the Rotunda on the second, first and ground floors and in the Rotunda Basement. In total there were about 150 individually painted ceiling and wall panels installed in the Central Portion. Generally the panels were recessed inside plaster soffits or stone frames. Mack, Jenney and Tyler typically painted the plaster soffits or frames, often using gold leaf on frames, while soffits were painted in colors that harmonized with both the stone walls and floors. Many of the ceiling panels had light fixtures, which were incorporated into the painted decorative finish scheme.

On the second floor of the Central Portion, three ceiling panels were installed in the corridors adjacent to each of the four pavilions. The palette in the panels was tan, brown, gold, gray and red. The outer two panels in each of the four sets were rectangles, and they were painted similarly in each quadrant, a standard compositional arrangement throughout the Central Portion corridors. At the corners of the rectangles, pastiglia rosettes or paterae were painted in the ground color. The motifs were scrolls, shields (reminiscent of the state’s coat of arms) and flower-like anthemias. The center light fixture in each panel was surrounded by an octagonal pattern. Stone soffits separated the two rectangular panels from the central eight-sided panel that followed the angles of the corridor. The relatively long center panel, directly outside of the pavilion contained three light fixtures, each surrounded by a wreath of maple leaves entwined with wheat. The border consisted of a Greek-key fret, and there were shields as accents at the termini of the design. The corridors adjacent to the pavilions are linked to the gallery bridges that span second floor open spaces at the juncture of the wings and Rotunda and are directly beneath the barrel vaults on the primary axes.

In each of the four quadrants on the first floor, the corridors connecting the Rotunda to the circular pavilions, which at this level are intended to provide formal access to the building, feature oil-on-canvas ceiling paintings depicting the “Arms of the State of Wisconsin.” The emblems nearly fill the panels and the corners contain an ornament of leaves. The arms were painted in the colors called for by the heraldic description in the statutes and the depiction resembled that used in the 1880s version of the coat of arms created by the secretary of state.35 A series of three ceiling panels were painted adjacent to each of the four pavilion entrances—a central rectangular panel flanked by two six-sided panels at the angles of the corridors. These panels were painted using darker shades of red, brown, green and gold than those

9.19 (above) Restored ceiling panel, second floor northeast corridor, 2003
An autumnal palette and leaf motifs were included in the decorative scheme for the second floor corridor ceilings. In the panel shown, the Greek-key fret was gold-leaved; the shields and scrolls were reminiscent of the heraldic symbols used in the state’s coat of arms.

9.20 (above right) Restored ceiling panel, second floor corridor, East Wing, 2003
The integration of decorative brass light fixtures within the ceiling panels and walls was critical to the finishing of the interior spaces as with the repeated leaf pattern in the fixture and panel. Throughout the building, Mack, Jenney and Tyler were sensitive to the architectural and other finish treatments planned or already installed.

9.21 (right) Restored Wisconsin coat of arms, oil on canvas, first floor southeast corridor, 2003
Besides hundreds of panels painted directly on plaster throughout the Capitol, Mack, Jenney and Tyler created about 250 oil-on-canvas murals that were applied to plaster surfaces with white lead. The Wisconsin coat of arms appeared on the first floor ceilings in each of the four identical corridors between the pavilions and the Rotunda.
Central Portion Reflected Ceiling Plan, First Floor

Central Portion Reflected Ceiling Plan, Second Floor
on the second floor. The six-sided panels featured oak leaves, paterae in the corners, and a background consisting of a checkerboard pattern of terra cotta and gray squares. The rectangle was ornamented with two hieroglyphic "W"s for Wisconsin, borders with stars, and the dates 1836, for the year Wisconsin achieved territorial status and erected its first capitol, and 1915, the year the new Capitol was intended to be completed.

A series of five ceiling panels (four rectangles and one square) spanned the corridors between the pavilions; passing the Grand Stairs in each wing. The designs of the central square panel at the base of the stairs and the two identical rectangular panels in the corridor were repeated in each wing; but the two rectangular panels adjacent to the stairs varied from wing to wing; each pair of rectangles was painted similarly but featured a different theme. In the North Wing "Thrift" was expressed with motifs including a distaff with flax and fruits. In the East Wing, "Labor" featured two axes, a pickax and pine cones and needles (a reference to the state's white pine lumber industry). The South Wing theme was "Industry" and included a beehive and roses. In the North Wing, "Peace" featured sheaves of wheat with oxbows and hames (equipment associated with draft animals in a reference to agricultural production in Wisconsin during the Civil War era). The panels were painted in tones of gray and tan. The square panel between the two rectangular thematically varied panels had a border of oak leaf branches springing from vases, all painted in green and gray green. Paterae decorated the corners. An octagonal design surrounded the light fixture; the outer border repeated the egg-and-dart pattern of the adjoining plaster elements and the inner border consisted of anthemia and a complex bell-flower pattern. The ground pattern repeated the checkerboard pattern of the panels adjacent to the pavilions. The two outer, rectangular panels for the wings were identical and featured oak leaf borders like those of the central panel with elaborate cornucopia spilling fruits and flowers. Light green and gray, in addition to darker terra cotta tones, were used.

9.23 Restored Rotunda Basement mural, 2003
For the groin-like Rotunda Basement, which was designed as a restaurant dining area, Mack, Jenney and Tyler created a circular oil-on-canvas mural that included food-related themes. It was composed of five sections of canvas, and the palette was selected to complement the light-colored stone walls. The mural was restored in 1998.

9.24 Restored Rotunda Basement mural (detail), 2003
The Roman mythological god of the sea, Neptune, painted with a dolphin at his feet, represented "fish." Allegorical representations of grain, fruit and game also were included in the mural. Grapevines, grotesque masks and the Greek letters for the signs of the zodiac further embellished the composition.
On the ground floor, the ceiling panels in the corridors surrounding the Rotunda were in dark tones of green, gold, brown and red. Although enriched with gold leaf, they were the most muted colors in the Central Portion and provided a dramatic contrast when approaching the brightly illuminated Rotunda. There were three groups of panels—the inner ring on the ceiling below the first floor Rotunda platform, the middle ring between the massive piers supporting the Dome, and the outer ring in the corridor belting the Rotunda. There were sixteen panels in the inner group and they were in three shapes: a four-sided polygon or trapezoid, a five-sided polygon and a long trapezoid with steps on its wider end. The two styles of trapezoidal panels were on the ceilings of the corridors leading from the wings and pavilions. The trapezoids had the more elaborate designs, featuring eagles, borders of wheat, urns overflowing with grains and fruits, and paterae and anthemion. Octagonal designs surrounded the light fixtures. The five-sided panels had borders of laurel and ribbon, with a gold fret and terra cotta band; paterae were at the corners and in the centers of the long sides and gold-leaved oak leaves surrounded the light fixture. The sixteen panels in the middle ring came in three different sizes, each with its own design. Long, rectangular panels with a dark green ground led from the pavilion entrances toward the Rotunda. Their borders consisted of a guilloche pattern, whose links formed hearts at the corners with a gold stripe separating the border from the ground. The light fixture at the center was positioned within gold-leaved oak leaves. A series of three panels were located between the piers, in a transition space between the long axial corridors and the Rotunda. In the central rectangular panel, gold-leaved wheat and ribbon border surround the light fixture. The two side panels in the niches where telephones and sales stands existed were octagonal and had a guilloche border with designs of oak leaves and acorns. The center of the panel consisted of two oval tablets. The thirty-two panels in the outer ring were divided into two groups—one associated with the pavilions, the other with the wings. The palette was consistent with that used elsewhere on the ground floor. The pavilion group had three panels—one rectangular and two six-sided. The rectangle was at the center and had a geometric guilloche border and an inner pattern of wheat and ribbons. The six-sided panels flanking the center rectangle were more ornate and featured the letter W with laurel leaves in the corners and a guilloche border. The center light fixture was placed in a six-sided polygon decorated with a pattern of oak leaves and acorns. The ceiling panels associated with the wings were composed of five panels—two large rectangles at either end, contiguous with the pavilion panels, two smaller rectangles in the area of the Grand Stairs, and a central notched rectangle. The outer rectangles and the center rectangle repeated the patterns and colors found in the five-sided panels in the inner ring of panels adjacent to the Rotunda. The rectangles opposite the Grand Stairs repeated the pattern used in the rectangular panel in the middle course of panels between the wing ends and the inner course.

Studies made in the 1980s and 90s concluded that the Rotunda Basement had one of the most ambitious and elaborate decorative programs in the Capitol with thirty-seven oil-on-canvas paintings on the ceiling, plus four oil-on-plaster panels. The room had been designed as a restaurant dining room, and the iconography implemented in the decorative finishes celebrated food and conviviality. The central circular painting consisted of five butt-joined sections. The color scheme was influenced by the light gray-tan Eschallion marble from France that sheaths the room’s walls and pillars. The pink and gray of the Tennessee Grey marble floor also were echoed in the colors used in the room. A conservation report prepared in 1998 describes the effect as “perhaps the most classical, yet also the most playful, space in the Wisconsin State Capitol.” The description states:

It is really designed in the mode of a classical grotto, in which the fresco-like murals appear to be painted within carved stone niches. The murals manifest an iconography appropriate to the original use of the room as a restaurant and common space. The central dome presents figures that represent the classical gods associated with specific foods, such as Neptune, god of the sea, with fish. They are flanked by garlands, flowers and grotesques. The [other] panels . . . repeat the theme of garlands and grotesques . . .
The mural paints share an identical palette, a golden-beige base tone and subtly painted designs. This palette almost certainly is intended to imitate a fresco or fresco-like painting on aged plaster. The trompe l'oeil coordination of the murals with the original [incandescent] lighting is subtle but well planned.

The 1998 report notes that Mack, Jenney and Tyler painted the murals on linen canvas with a fine to medium weave. The canvas was sized with glue, and painted with a “light-gray or white priming layer composed primarily of lead white in an oil medium.” The oil paintings were then completed, and they were not varnished. The decorators adhered them to the ceiling with “lead-white adhesive.” Besides fish, the other figures in the central circular painting represented game, fruit and grain. Female figures were used to evoke game and fruit, male for grain and fish. Greek letters for the signs of the zodiac appeared in shields associated with the figures. Each was flanked by vases of grapevines, and grotesque faces were painted below the vases. The central light fixture was surrounded by bell flowers, fantastic fish, laurels and berries.

Sixteen trapezoidal panels constituted the inner ring of paintings, alternating between simple and more elaborate panels. The more highly decorated panels featured laurels, ribbons and theatrical masks that resembled the jack of cards—a motif suitable for a common room. The less elaborate panels had shields, laurels and ribbons with a center of plain paint. The sixteen trapezoidal panels in the outer ring were identical to one another, having borders of ivy, oak leaves and acorns. A pattern that resembled twisted wire with suspended pendants surrounded the light fixtures, and a checkerboard pattern of beige and gray squares served as the ground. Ceiling paintings appeared in four niches at the outermost edge of the room, spaces that corresponded to the pavilions in the upper levels. In these paintings, the oil paint was applied directly to the plaster and imagery featured Ws in shields, each with a ram’s heads at its base. Other motifs included oak leaves and cornucopia with leaves. Mack, Jenney and Tyler also decorated the capitals of the inner piers, which feature plaster swans in very high relief and swags of garlands.

Ground Floor Corridors and Pavilions

The decorative painting on the ceilings of the ground floor main corridors and pavilions honored the seventy-one counties and county seats existing in Wisconsin at the time of the Capitol’s construction. The names of eighteen counties
appeared on the ceilings of each of the North, East and West Wings’ principal corridors; the South Wing ceiling featured seventeen counties’ names plus Madison (the Dane County seat). The names of sixty-four county seats appeared on the ceilings of the pavilions, with sixteen cited in each pavilion. Five county seats, Milwaukee, Ashland, Barron, Florence, Green Lake, likely were not given mention in the pavilions since the counties’ names and those of the county seats are identical. A sixth, Black River Falls in Jackson County, may have been excluded since it had a long name that would not have fit the allotted space. In fourteen other instances, identical names of counties and county seats were repeated, including Eau Claire, Fond du Lac, Jefferson, Kenosha, Kewaunee, La Crosse, Manitowoc, Marinette, Oconto, Racine, Shawano, Sheboygan, Waukesha and Waupaca. The county seat of Wood County, now Wisconsin Rapids, was represented by the city’s name at the time, Grand Rapids. Menominee County, established in 1961 (Keshena, county seat), was not represented.27

The ground floor corridors were painted in a light-colored palette with extensive gold-leaf stenciling. The county names, in gold leaf, were arranged linearly along either side of the corridor, each positioned within a reddish-brown tablet, with stars in squares on a pale blue ground. Bs in the corners, gold fretwork between the stars and tablets, and an inner gold-leaf border of floral motifs completed the design. The cream-colored palette of the principal corridors was used, as well, in the ceilings of the transverse corridor just inside the entrance to each wing. These areas were treated as a single panel, each with three light fixtures surrounded by gold-leafed borders. The center fixture had the larger, more elaborate design that included scrollwork and vases with flowers springing from them. The two outer fixtures were surrounded by borders consisting of a Greek-key fret, paterae, a twelve-pointed star and floral motifs. The cornice was painted reddish tan, a shade drawn from the darker tones in the Kasota stone walls. In contrast to the single ceiling panels of the transverse and main corridors, the ceilings of the cross corridors, which extend to the elevators just before the grand stairs, were divided into three panels separated by soffits. The center panels were painted in two colors, cream in the center and tan on the sides. Gold leaf designs included vase forms, laurel leaves and swans around the center light fixture, four corner ornaments in the shapes of a dolphin, a sea horse, a swan and a lobster, and a scrollwork border drawn from a bell-flower motif. The panels opposite the elevators and those at the end of the corridors containing the secondary stairs were identical and included gold-leafed stencils of eagles with “W”s, bell flowers and stars. The center panels of the three in the stair corridors were decorated with gold-leafed eight-pointed stars, cornucopia, and caducei. The soffits of the stairs leading to the basement in the North and South Wings, directly beneath the grand stairs, were painted in a tapestry pattern surrounded by a gray border with a gold-leaf fret. The pattern utilized a gold ground with terra cotta-colored crosses; in an illusionary effect, the crosses, which are repetitive of the Capitol’s footprint, became the ground.

The circular ceilings of the pavilions were remarkable for the quantity of pastiglia or raised plaster elements used by Mack, Jenney and Tyler. Virtually all discrete elements of the ceilings were either outlined or formed in pastiglia, including the sixteen stars around the central light fixture, the fifty-six stars in the outer border, eagles, scrolls, badgers and shields, and fasces (bundles of rods with axes that were carried by Roman magistrates). The palette consisted of a dark green ground, elements in red and blue, plus liberal use of gold leaf.

Grand Stair Soffits and First Floor Corridors and Pavilions

The sloping soffits of the paired grand stairs between the ground and first floors, on the principal axis of each wing, were decorated as a single panel that measured approximately 30’ long by 5’ wide. Each had nine oil-on-canvas paintings that were surrounded by decorative elements painted directly on the plaster. The compositional treatment was the same for each of the eight panels. Beginning at the foot of the stairs, the oil-on-canvas paintings included a dolphin, a male figure in classical dress, a theatrical mask, a classically robed female figure, another mask, a second female figure, a
third mask, a second male figure and a griffin. The animals were painted in tan and yellow against a terra cotta ground, the figures were tan and brown against a green background, and the masks dark green with black shading against terra cotta. At the edge of the soffits, light tan stripes were followed by darker stripes of the same color, then a dark gray-green ground with laurel branches and leaves in light and dark tan. The plaster frame for the panels consisted of three fields—tan, then light gray-green followed by a deeper gray-green. Although the iconography remained consistent in each of the eight applications, Mack, Jenney and Tyler presented the motifs with variation although repeated some of the standing figures and masks. Several figures appeared posed in different attitudes but similar dress, and the masks, too, were reused with somewhat different expressions. At least six of the East Wing figures were painted in reverse in the North Wing grand stair. Several West Wing figures were repeated in reverse in the South Wing.

The first floor corridor ceilings were painted identically in each wing. The ceilings at the head of the grand stairs were divided into three panels: a long rectangle in the center and two square panels at the elevators. The motifs were similar in all three: gold-leaf fretwork borders with scrolls and floral patterns inside. The background color was cream, and teal blue highlights and borders were used inside the panels. Between the ceiling panels adjacent to the elevators and along the corridor between the grand and secondary stairs were two additional panels. These two panels had a grid of glass blocks through which light was borrowed from the second floor. The plaster elements of the grid were decorated with gold-leaf patina and fretwork. The ground color was cream. One large rectangular panel filled the ceiling of the four principal corridors that led into the office areas of each wing, and a single ceiling panel was implemented in the octagonal termination of the corridor. These areas were decorated with the same patterns and colors employed in the panels at the top of the grand stairs.

The first floor pavilions were considered the principal entrances to the building and were located atop a formal exterior granite stair that sheltered a porte-cochère. The four circular vestibules each received elaborate pastiglia and painted decorations. Figural representations of the signs of the zodiac (a theme that appeared in the Rotunda Basement and the Governor’s Executive Chamber, as well) provided the principal subject matter for the ceilings in these spaces. The zodiacal signs (twelve in each pavilion) were painted in oil on canvas and installed in the centers of alternating, gold-leaved pastiglia-framed hexagons and circles along the outer edges of the circular ceilings. The painters used a dark palette of green, black and gold, and inscribed the symbols for the signs behind the figures. Moving toward the center, a second band of decoration consisted of six ovals and six interstitial triangular shapes. Flying swans and swimming dolphins were alternated in the ovals and, in the triangular spaces, the masks of three smiling women were paired with three frowning, bearded men. Pastiglia frames surrounded these elements. The central light fixture was positioned within a star-shaped pattern with twelve rays, alternated with ribbons, paterae and leaves. The palette included dark green, tan and terra cotta with gold-leaf highlights.

**First Floor Business Offices and Reception Areas**

Mack, Jenney and Tyler applied the original decorative finishes in all the first floor reception areas and business offices of the East Wing, with the exception of the Governor’s Conference Room and Lobby. According to plan, Garsey’s work was left intact, but the governor’s private office, his secretary’s office and the business office, which had been decorated by Conrad Schmitt, were repainted. In the governor’s private office, Schmitt had used a palette of ivory, shades of gray-green and gold with a wide band of stenciling above the chair rail in brown, gray and green. Mack, Jenney and Tyler simplified the stencil and applied a gold-leaf pattern of geometric flowers and leaves, using a shade of gray-green on the walls that was reserved exclusively for the governor’s office and was not used elsewhere in the building. Below the picture rail, the decorators included a yellow-tan Greek-key fret with gold-leaf paterae interspersed. In the governor’s outer business office, Mack, Jenney and Tyler applied elaborate decoration to the pilasters.

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9.11 Restored Southwest Pavilion ceiling, first floor, 2003

The signs of the zodiac, painted in oil-on-canvas, were the principal motif in the ceilings of the first floor pavilions. Flying swans, swimming dolphins and masks of three women and three men also were included in the designs, which were surrounded by gold-leaved pastiglia.
with motifs including oak and laurel leaves, fasces with single axes, a shield with the letter W, ribbons, flowers and a classical female head. The palette consisted of gold leaf, gray, green and brown. Other stencils were implemented in green, gray and ivory and some gold leaf; patterns featured Greek keys, paterae, and geometric flowers. The pattern above the chair rail resembled that in the governor’s office. The walls were painted light gray-green and the ceiling, a color termed “chamois.” Schmitt had decorated ancillary offices in the governor’s area with decorative bands at the chair and picture rails, using tan and gray with gold-leaf highlights. Mack, Jenney and Tyler provided stenciling with similar placement, but used light brown or tan on the walls, “thyme green” in the dado and “waxen yellow” on the ceiling and molding. In the attorney general’s offices, on the north side of the East Wing, Mack, Jenney and Tyler replaced the Schmitt finishes, using a scheme similar to the governor’s suite, although with a warmer palette of tan and brown, warm colors that were suitable for the north side of the wing. In the business office, the firm decorated the pilasters with motifs that included the scales of justice, laurel leaves, panels, scrolls and paterae. The painters stenciled floral motifs as surrounds to the plaster panels in the principal offices.  

In the South Wing, the Board of Control and the Insurance Department business offices were on the west and east sides of the first floor, respectively, with access from the central octagonal lobby. Limited paint probes made in 1994 and more extensive probes completed in 1996 document the historic appearance of these spaces. The Insurance Department business office walls were painted yellow-tan and the panels were outlined in a modified bell-flower and Greek-key pattern in gray and tan. The pilasters received a flower-and-leaf stencil in the same colors. The reception area at the south end of the corridor was painted a similar color and stencils were applied above the chair rail and below the picture rail. Although the business office of the Board of Control was painted in colors that were similar to the business office.

9.32 Board of Control board room decorations, first floor, South Wing, 1917

The first floor housed the state’s principal bureaus, boards and commissions. Their business offices, meeting rooms and directors’ suites were decorated as public and semi-public spaces. The Board of Control oversaw state institutions, and its meeting room received multicolor wall panels and rich stencils.

9.33 Mack, Jenney and Tyler, Insurance Department business office decorations, first floor, South Wing, circa 1919

Business offices were decorated less elaborately than board rooms. Modest stencils surrounded single-color wall panels. Ceilings typically were painted a lighter color than walls and sometimes had stencil borders.
of the Insurance Department, stencil patterns varied considerably. The wall panels featured leaves and berries with a geometric guilloche as the outer border; pilasters were decorated with a scrollwork pattern.\(^{46}\)

In the West Wing, the secretary of state’s business office and reception area, plus the business office of the state treasurer are all accessible from the principal corridor. The pilasters in the business offices were painted with imagery suitable to the work conducted in these spaces. In the treasurer’s office on the south side of the wing, a shield with a large dollar sign was installed on the pilasters in shades of tan and gray with green laurel leaves, within a stenciled border of flowers and leaves. The panels in the room were painted tan with a green border and a gold Greek key in the corners. A pattern of rosettes and anthemions ornamented the cornice. The pilasters in the secretary of state’s business office were decorated with a quilt-and-scroll design surrounded by a wreath of laurel over a tapestry pattern in shades of tan and gray. The wall panels were painted gray-tan with a darker border. In contrast to placement of stencils as a border as was typical throughout the building, in this office stencils were applied over the ground color inside the panel using a floral motif. The reception area for the secretary’s private office was not repainted, although it had been scheduled to be.\(^{46}\) Consistent with placement in the other wings, the principal first floor corridor in the North Wing led to three departmental business offices—the bank examiner’s on the west, the superintendent of public instruction’s office at the end of the wing, and the engineering department’s on the east. Historic photographs of these spaces have not been located, nor have paint probes been completed. Because the North Wing interior spaces were not completely assigned when Mack, Jenney and Tyler prepared its schedule of finishes, these rooms were not included. It is likely that they received Class II finishes like the other business offices on the first floor that included stencils and gold leaf.

Second Floor Corridors, Chambers, Parlors and Lodges

The grand public areas on the second floor demonstrate an elegance and complexity of finish that vied with the Rotunda and the Governor’s Conference Room. The corridor walls were sheathed with stone, leaving the ceilings for decoration in a palette of tan, yellow and gray in which a variety of motifs were implemented. The ceiling panels adjacent to the elevators and the pavilions featured maple leaves and ribbons. At the head of the secondary stairs on the second floor of each wing, a single painted panel on each side wall and two similar panels on each end wall were provided with decorative motifs that included swags of maple leaves, columns of leaves with berries, winged dogs and columns surmounted by eagles with spread wings. Three ceiling panels existed between each elevator and the corridor belting the Central Portion. These had maple leaves, shields, ribbons and the letter W.

Mack, Jenney and Tyler bore responsibility for decorating the large chambers on the second floors of the North, East and South Wings, while the Assembly Chamber and adjoining areas in the West Wing retained the finishes applied by Elmer Garness. The Supreme Court Hearing Room and its lobby in the East Wing relied for effect on richly figured marbles, murals whose palettes were coordinated with the coloration of the stone and a color-matched glass ceiling. Only the plaster elements of the ceiling and cornices required paint. Mack, Jenney and Tyler replaced Conrad Schmidt’s earlier paint scheme in the hearing room with what was described in a 2001 report as “a tan base paint... bound in a casein/resin binder, and a ‘salmon’ or reddish-orange glaze (oil/shellac) ... applied to its surface in certain areas ... to emphasize or pick them out. There seems to be some intrinsic variation to the base color in terms of light to dark ... from element to element. ... The ‘salmon’ glaze appears very consistent in color and application ... [and] appears to be applied to highlight or emphasize edges, or the relief to certain elements, and follows closely on to the ‘model’ laid down in the first generation of decoration....” The report also noted that bronze powder paints were applied to the tan base paint in some areas, and that much of this paint still survived in 2001. “The visual effect from the floor ... would be to perceive a high and reflective contrast between gold [bronze] painted elements and surrounding paint and glazed/painted areas, and a very subtle or soft transition between ‘salmon’ glazed areas and non-glazed areas of the

9.34 (left) Replicated secondary stair landing decorations, second floor, East Wing, 2003
Since the second floor housed the principal chambers in the Capitol, the secondary stair landings received more elaborate decorations than the landings of any other floor. Motifs included winged dogs, eagles, paterae, vases and columns of leaves with berries. Since the panels had been overpainted and given different stencil borders, the original patterns and colors were replicated during the restoration.

9.35 (below) Mack, Jenney and Tyler, Supreme Court Hearing Room decorations, 1917
The frames around the murals in the Supreme Court Hearing Room were gold leafed, and the cornice and the ceiling were elaborately painted with some areas glazed. This treatment enhanced the sense of depth and relief in the coffers, recessed panels and plaster ornaments.

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exposed base paint.” The central square recess, which housed the room’s glass ceiling, was painted a medium gray. In the lobby, the cornice was painted in similar colors and featured a single ceiling panel using the same tan, brown and gray tones with a border of ivy and berries. The centrally positioned light fixture was surrounded by laurel branches and berries, eagles with ribbons, vases, flowers and entwined branches. Four oil-on-canvas panels were worked into the larger composition; two eagles in small horizontal panels were positioned on either side of the fixture, and two nearly square panels at either end of the rectangular space contained pairs of tablets that were left blank, suggesting that they may have been prepared for lettering or scenes but were never completed. The use of oil-on-canvas panels included in the ceiling indicates the high level of importance attached to this supreme court space.

The rectangular ceiling of the justices’ conference room, the walls of which were lined with bookcases, was painted with symbols appropriate to both Wisconsin and legal history. The wide outer border of the ceiling featured eight circular paintings in oil on canvas, and its four corners contained iconographic elements drawn from Wisconsin’s territorial and state seals (an anchor, a plow, the joined spade and pick, and an upraised arm with a hammer in its fist). Other imagery in the outer border included the seal of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, the shield of the United States, the nation’s Latin motto, e pluribus unum (from many, one), and “1917” in Roman numerals for the year the Capitol was to have been completed. A broad, gold-leaved frame separated the border from the inner panel where the Latin words lex, pax, veritas et justitia (law, peace, truth and justice) appeared in painted plaques, one on each side of the room. The center of the rectangle was dominated by a circular pattern surrounding a light fixture based upon motifs that included fruits, flowers and leaves in vases and a gold-leaved Greek key design. Gold leaf enriched an elaborate plaster cornice. The conference room’s color scheme included shades of tan, yellow, green, gray and terra cotta.

The Senate Chamber, Parlor and Lobby in the South Wing were the subject of extensive probes and stratigraphic analyses in 1995 that revealed the complexity of the finishes applied in these rooms. Layers of colors and glazes had been used to achieve visual unification with other elements in the room. Thematically, the decorative work in the senate’s rooms and chamber encapsulated many of the classical themes and devices typical of the Beaux-Arts finishes applied throughout the Capitol. In the circular Senate Chamber, raised ceiling panels with suspended rosettes at their centers were gilded and glazed to achieve a varied effect from plain gold leaf; the lower fields were painted with an acanthus design. The background color of the walls and ceilings consisted of a composite finish, “a layer of golden ochre, followed by a thin application of a grayish ochre, a scumble [an opaque or semi-opaque, thinly applied layer of paint] of warm gray-white and a tinted glaze.” The finish was “probably intended to resemble a fine-grained stone.” Panels between the suspended rosettes had a border of the golden ochre and an inner panel of “a scumbled tone of golden ochre and gray ochre, followed by a glaze.” Three bays existed in the chamber beneath an upper level gallery; the ceilings in these bays were decorated to simulate a stone-like surface. Using a ground color of warm beige, the surfaces were glazed, two warm beige scumbles were then applied, and finally a tinted glaze. Inside the panels diamond-shaped designs accented the light fixtures. The motifs used included rosettes, bell flowers, leaves and scrolls in gold leaf, with a terra cotta ground. Gold leaf was also applied to the plaster moldings.

The ceiling and walls of the visitors’ gallery were equally complex. On the ceiling, composites of “multiple scumbles and glazes” were overlaid “three alternating ochers.” The lower wall consisted of “a gilded and glazed floral stencils on a colored field” that was a composite of “orange-ocher, intense burgundy glaze, a red-orange paint, and an apparent warm light-gray scumble.” The gilding was not glazed. Even the gallery vestibule and corridor were painted complexly. In the vestibule, below the chair rail there were five scumbles that created a dark warm tone, and above the chair rail there were four scumbles in light gray and gray-ocher. In the corridor, the ceiling was covered with “alternating scumbles of light warm grays and light ochre.” The wall had five scumbles “of different but similar light ochers,” creating “a
warmer and darker tonality when compared to the . . . ceiling." The wainscot had "a darker and warmer field" color that consisted of five scumbles in ocher, warm-gray, and warm light gray.48

Second to the Executive Chamber, the Senate Parlor was the most lavish parlor or reception area in the Capitol. Mack, Jenney and Tyler prepared three oil-on-canvas paintings for the room, one for each of the three ceiling bays; these constituted the largest and most elaborate canvases the firm created for the building. The ceiling's center rectangle was composed of at least a dozen smaller canvases pieced together. Two squares featuring women within circles dominated the composition. The paintings were of Sapientia (Latin for wisdom) on the east and Diligentia (Latin for diligence) on the west. Sapientia was surrounded by elements identified with wisdom—a lamp, an owl, and a son, denoting women's wisdom as mothers. Diligentia was surrounded by the symbols of labor, a distaff for spinning, a bee hive, the fruits of gardening and a boy representing a son. Blue, gray, gold and flesh tones comprised the palette, which was lighter in color than the deep red-brown of the mahogany-paneled walls. The borders consisted of gold frets with dolphins and dark green masks in the corners. Three pairs of rectangular panels separated the central squares and the borders of the painting. They featured three men and three women in classical poses that presumably expressed various attributes appropriate for a governmental body. Interstitial canvases that repeated the scroll and floral motifs of the rectangles provided the balance of the painting's border. In the two rectangular canvases at the east and west ends of the parlor, naked children seated on upturned urns used ribbons to bind swags of branches with fruits and leaves. Each panel also contained masks, scrollwork, acanthus leaves, guilloches and composites of fruits. The palette was similar to that used in the central panel and a gilded plaster frame unified the three paintings. Between the ornament and the outer edge of the ceiling was a border painted on the plaster. It had balance scales in its corners, winged and interlocking brackets with scrolls, composes with fruits and hanging clusters of fruits. The colors were green, gray, ocher and terra cotta.

The plaster cornice was painted shades of gray with a light gray scumble over darker gray. A denticul course was prepared for gilding, but was painted instead. Twenty elaborate, high relief plaster panels in seven different classical designs composed a frieze around the parlor. On a background of blue green each frieze included motifs, such as griffins, acanthus and rosettes (two panels); a northwind mask, cornucopia and birds (two panels); cherubs, acanthus, rosettes and vases (two panels); storks, a mythical beast and plant forms (six panels); dolphins and acanthus (four panels); winged beasts and acanthus (two panels); and eagles and cornucopia (two panels). The wall panels between the relief panels were painted in alternating shades of gray and gray-green.49

The ceiling of the Senate Lobby was also quite elaborate. It contained two oil paintings and significant areas of pastiglia. The oil paintings were executed in a black-gray palette and were likely the work of Ernest Tyler who was remembered by his family for his Wedgwood-like figural painting. The ceiling also had significant designs in gilded and glazed pastiglia and non-figurative oil paintings applied directly on the plaster. The ceiling consisted of five panels between two recessed bays at the east and west ends of the lobby; the oil-on-canvas paintings were installed in the soffits of the bays. Identical panels at the east and west ends of the lobby contained pastiglia eagles, griffins and Ws. All the panels were painted in shades of deep red and gold. Panels decorated with fasces and guilloches separated the five recessed panels of the main ceiling. The soffits contained gilded pastiglia rosettes. The center panel of the five had pastiglia eagles with arrows in their talons, and pastiglia Ws and banners. Flanking the center panel were two long rectangles, each with two lunette paintings of wings and a hourglass and pastiglia Ws. The only remaining public spaces in the suite of senate meeting areas decorated by Mack, Jenney and Tyler were the round vestibules at each corner of the Senate Chamber. Their ceilings received a tapestry pattern of gold-colored diamonds whose size increased from small at the center to larger at the border. The ground color was dark red. Panels over doors were, according to probes, a composite of a light beige paint, a glaze and a warmer tone, then a glaze, probably giving the effect of stone.44
The offices of the president of the senate (also the lieutenant governor) and other senate officers along the west corridor of the South Wing’s second floor received fine finishes comparable to Elmer Garmes’s designs for the assembly’s officers. In the president’s office, Mack, Jenney and Tyler created an elaborate design of fasces, ribbons and leaves for the sconce panels, using shades of red-brown and brown with gold leaf against a medium green-gray wall color. The wall panels had a three-color stencil border in a pattern of branches of leaves, berries and rosettes. The leaves and branches were darker green-gray and gray; the centers of the rosettes and the berries were terra cotta. The room’s ceiling was ornate, outlined with a gold-leafed plaster frame. The outer border consisted of a terra cotta and gold damask pattern; the ground color of the ceiling was light gray with a gold-leaf border of bell flowers and rods, with entwined chains at the corners. The adjacent secretary’s room was painted with similar colors and stencils on the walls and ceiling, but did not include the sconce panels on the walls and damask pattern on the ceiling. Four additional rooms lined the corridors; two were occupied by the chief clerk and sergeant-at-arms, a third was the document room, and the fourth was a coat room. These rooms received similar wall and ceiling colors as those in the president’s office, much the same stencil for wall panels, a floral pattern for the ceiling stencil, but no gold leaf.47

The North Hearing Room and its lobby were the last major public spaces completed on the second floor. The walls of the hearing room were sheathed with yellow Verona marble with inset, bookmatched panels of mottled gray-black Monte Rente Siena marble, both from Italy. Paintings by Charles Yardley Turner filled most of the coves between the walls and ceiling. Mack, Jenney and Tyler decorated only the ceiling and the remaining areas of the coves, using a familiar palette of tan, gray-green, ocher and gold leaf, which harmonized with the walls and with the yellow, gray and blue tones of the glass in the ceiling. The firm also decorated the lobby ceiling, which consisted of a single panel. The ground color was cream over which a relatively modest gold-leafed pounce design was applied. The most significant design motifs appeared in the center of the panel. At its corners were a globe, a ship’s wheel, balance scales and a caduceus, all of them emblematic of the wing’s use by various regulatory and licensing commission of state government.

Upper Floors

The third floor corridors between the secondary stairs and the Grand Stairs received elaborate decorative treatment. Post & Sons had designed these corridors as a gallery that overlooked, through arched openings, a three-story open space beneath the skylights of the barrel vaults. These spaces were given additional prominence through the elaborate groin-vaulted ceilings and decorative iron railings. Mack, Jenney and Tyler supplied each of the three vaults within a corridor with two octagonal oil-on-canvases paintings and gold-leafed pastiglia; the thematic subjects for the paintings varied from wing to wing, and their titles appeared in plaques. Both the paintings and the plaques were surrounded by gold-leafed pastiglia. The paintings were mounted along the principal longitudinal axis of each wing, with the labels placed horizontally. The North Wing paintings were devoted to the months of the year (beginning in the southwest with January and concluding in the northeast with December). The East Wing paintings depicted personality traits presumably ascribed to Wisconsin citizens (tenacity, courage, fortitude, endurance, vigor, cunning, agility, daring, stealth, adventure, skill and strength). The South Wing paintings were devoted to the arts, humanities and sciences (poetry, art, oratory, philosophy, religion, singing, dancing, instrumental music, science, mathematics, tragedy and comedy). And the West Wing paintings were given over to industries, crafts and professions appropriate to Wisconsin (carpentry, masonry, mining, commerce, navigation, teaching, weaving, forging, brewing, forestry, stock raising and farming).

The ground color of the paintings was dark terra cotta, and the figures were painted in yellow-gray tones; almost all figures were seated or kneeling because of the constraints of the octagons, and they were divided equally between the sexes—half men, half women. A gold-leafed pastiglia frame surrounded each painting, and a gold-leafed pastiglia border outlined each groined. The background color of the vaults was a matte dark green. These colors harmonized with
the paint and gold leaf used throughout the barrel vaults, including the prominent treatment given to the walls above the entrances to the major second floor rooms, which featured large, three-dimensional plaster badgers seated atop the pediments. Behind each of the badgers, the walls were decorated with a semicircular panel of oak leaves. Above that panel were seven trapezoidal panels which contained ovals, three of which had paintings of Ws and four, paintings of leaves. At the side of each barrel vault, three panels featured large, three-dimensional eagles. The background color used in the groin vaults and as the background on the eagle panels was matte green, which echoed the green Tinos marble of the two-story pilasters and engaged columns in the Rotunda.

Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall

The fourth floor of the Capitol had only one public space that received a high level of decorative finish—the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall in the North Wing, which was designed as both a meeting room and exhibition space. The walls were left free of significant decoration because they were to be hung with paintings and artifacts, but the ceiling of the main room was richly decorated. The ceiling had six oil-on-canvas tondos, four of them portraits of servicemen illustrating the branches of service involved in the Civil War and two paintings representing "liberty" and "humanity" as seated female figures. Besides the tondos, the numerous ceiling panels utilized military motifs such as stacked cannon balls and cannon, along with images characteristic of Mack, Jenney and Tyler's work elsewhere in the building including masks, swags of leaves and Greek-key frets. Names of prominent battles in which Wisconsin regiments participated were included, as were insignia of units to which Wisconsin regiments were attached. The ceiling murals had a light-colored background, and the military motifs were rendered in colors appropriate to the natural objects. "Liberty" and "humanity" were painted in a style similar to that used for the paintings in the Senate Lobby and the third floor groin vaults. A small platform was erected on the north wall of the room, and its back wall was decorated with a panel identifying the room as "Memorial Hall of the Grand Army of the Republic." On the south wall, a mural was painted in the arch featuring a coat of arms, a sword, a rifle, a drum, and branches and leaves.48

Class III, IV and V Decorations in Private Spaces

Private offices, work spaces, meeting rooms and secondary corridors predominated in the wings and in the upper floors of the pavilions.44 Although the pavilions were scheduled to receive mostly Class II finishes, they received Classes III and IV finishes. The finishes in these areas were documented selectively by conservators in the 1980s and 1990s through numerous paint probes and stratigraphic analyses. The probes were made mostly on ceilings and exterior walls that had not been disturbed by alterations. The conservators' reports concentrated on the more highly decorated private spaces (generally Class III) and devoted fewer pages to those areas that were less highly finished. The decorations in offices, secondary corridors, vaults, coat rooms and toilet rooms varied widely. The more detailed decoration occurred, for example, in the East Wing offices of the supreme court justices; they had three colors of paint (one for the dadoes below the chair rail, one for the walls and one for the ceiling) and three types of stencils (one above the chair rail, one at the picture rail and one surrounding the ceiling panel). Throughout the building, the use of three ground colors for the walls and ceiling was fairly typical, but the use of stencils to this degree was not. In making determinations about the level of finish, the decorating contractor worked with the architects and the commission. They employed two standards. One was determined by the level of detail given to the architectural elements already in place and the other was imposed by the status of occupants, who occasionally made their personal wishes known. Another factor affecting color choice was natural light. The private spaces, many of which were positioned on the exterior wall, frequently included one or more windows as a natural light source. Conservators' reports indicate that Mack, Jenney and Tyler developed a widely applied scheme in which cooler colors were used in areas with more light, warm colors for those areas that had less. This is particularly apparent in the instance of the supreme court justices' offices, which had exposures to the north, east and south. Mack, Jenney and Tyler chose warmer tans and browns on the north and east, cooler browns and
gray-greens on the south. Distinctions were sometimes subtle; red tones in the prevailing tags, browns and creams contributed to a warmer palette, while green and gray tones helped establish the cooler palette.

**Departmental Areas and Offices**

Throughout the ground floor, brown, tan and cream predominated. In the West Wing, the reception area for the Commission of Fisheries, which had little natural light, was painted with a dark brown dado, light cream walls and an off-white ceiling. On the north side, the Industrial Insurance Department business office, with light from the west and north, was painted with a dark brown dado, dark cream walls and a light cream cove and ceiling, a scheme that was repeated in other rooms on the north side. Numerous probes made in the East Wing revealed the same three-color pattern, although the wall colors varied from tan on the north to gray-green on the south. Some offices were finished with only two colors of paint. The north side of the wing was to have been occupied by the Civil Service Commission and was scheduled for Class III decorations that included four colors, stencils and possibly gilding. The Department of Agriculture and State Land Office occupied the space instead, and the rooms were decorated more simply than Class III with three- and two-color finishes. The adjudicant general’s office on the south side of the wing and the adjoining minor corridors had dark dodos, gray-green walls and light tan ceilings. Striping existed in the corridors and lobby areas. In the South Wing, only two colors appeared in the office of the commissioner for the State Board of Health—a tan dado that might have been glazed with amber to darken it, and a light tan on the walls and ceilings. This shade was used extensively and has been identified as comparable to “Peanut Shell” by the current manufacturer, Pratt and Lambert. The more typical dark brown dado with the same light tan walls and ceiling was installed elsewhere on the floor. No stencils or striping were recorded. For the probes completed on the ground floor of the North Wing, the results were not documented.

On the first floor of the West Wing, private offices were provided for the staffs of the treasurer and secretary of state. The treasurer’s private corner office on the south side of the wing had been decorated with stencils and gold leaf, although the wall and ceiling color scheme was similar to the standard for the building established on the ground floor. Some rooms had striping above the chair rails, in either terra cotta or slate. In the East Wing, the first floor offices occupied by the governor’s and attorney general’s support staff had color schemes similar to those used in the more public business offices, but with much less elaborate stencils. Green and gray prevailed in the governor’s suite on the south side of the wing; tan and browns on the north. In the South Wing, the brown-tan-cream palette was used extensively, along with stencils in some of the offices for the Board of Control and the Insurance Department. Reports for the North Wing did not include private office spaces.

On the second floor of the West Wing, Mack, Jenney and Tyler installed finishes only in rooms on the southeast side. At this time, these spaces were considered largely utilitarian, used by the press and to house the telephone system. Probes revealed a color scheme that included a dark brown dado, cream walls and a lighter cream ceiling. The second floor of the East Wing was occupied by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, the justices’ offices being among the most highly decorated private offices in the Capitol. The justices’ offices were scheduled for Class II finishes (including gold leaf), while those of the justices’ secretaries were indicated for Class III; as realized the justices’ offices did not receive gold leaf, and the secretaries’ smaller offices typically received a similar decorative scheme. A Greek-key motif in gold paint delineated walls, and stencils, repeating the Greek key and including a floral pattern, were implemented at the coves and as surrounds on the ceiling panels, which featured rosettes, leaves and scrolls. Dark dodos, a mid-range tone on the walls and light coves and ceilings predominated, with warmer tans and browns on the north and east, cooler browns and gray-greens on the south. The second floor of the South Wing was occupied by the senate; paint probes conducted in three rooms on the east side of the South Wing revealed dark brown dodos, either tan or gray-green walls and light colored ceilings to match the wall palette. Wall panels were outlined with three-color stencils. In the North Wing, the Free Library Commission occupied the west side of the wing, and the Railroad Commission the east and north sides. The color schemes appear to have been typical, and the business office of the Railroad Commission received stripes above the chair rail and stencil in the ceiling cove. In the Northeast Pavilion, the room was divided into two spaces for the court reporter. Only the larger room was probed; it had no stencils; the dado was dark brown, the walls were tan and the cove and ceiling were a lighter tan. The Legislature’s post office was in the Southwest Pavilion and the Southeast and Northwest Pavilions were occupied by legislative committees. The second floor committee rooms had a dark brown dado, gray-green walls with two different gold-colored stencil borders, one above the chair rail and the other below the picture rail; the ceiling was painted light cream. The stencils and three-color scheme indicates these rooms were home to important committees and were probably used for hearings as well. 59

In the East Wing, the third floor committee rooms on both sides of the wing were painted by Conrad Schmitt, and then a short time later by Mack, Jenney and Tyler. The schemes were found to be essentially identical. The probes indicated a first scheme with a dark brown dado and yellow walls, and a second scheme of a dark green dado and light green walls. In the East Wing, the third floor offices were painted in somewhat lighter tones of brown, tans and creams on the dodos, walls and ceilings respectively. The library walls were painted in a single color without ornament. Offices of librarians received three colors, of their assistants, two. Probes of the Northeast and Northwest Pavilions indicate that round rooms on the third floor were painted differently according to the status of the occupants. The revisor of statutes occupied the Northeast Pavilion; the room had no stenciling, and the color scheme resembled that of the court reporter’s office on the floor below with a dark brown dado, tan walls, and a lighter tan cove and ceiling. There was no stenciling. In the Northwest Pavilion, a committee room, the dado was dark red-brown, the walls light tan; the cove and ceiling, yellow-tan. Although probes were made in the Southeast and Southwest Pavilions, which were committee rooms, reports about them were not prepared.

Reports on paint probes made of fourth floor private spaces suggest that they generally received simple paint schemes of two or three colors, even when Mack, Jenney and Tyler’s original schedule awarded stencils to at least one space—the hearing or meeting room at the south end of the South Wing. The number of reports on probes, however, is fewer than the number of probes made throughout the fourth floor, which suggests that modest two-color and three-color schemes were standard throughout. Occupancy of the pavilion rooms was not reported, but they were likely offices for state employees. In the North Wing, one office space was probed, but no report was made. The Northeast Pavilion room was painted in two colors: tan walls and ceiling and a darker tan dado. The fourth floor of the East Wing was a library space, painted like the third floor library space. The Southeast Pavilion room was probed, but no report was made. The South Wing meeting room was discovered not to have stenciling, despite the schedule. Although probes were made in two or three other private spaces, no report was prepared about them. The Southeast Pavilion also was probed, but no report was written. The West Wing had no fourth floor offices, only storage space, which was painted with a single color. The Northwest Pavilion room received three colors of paint, indicating a higher-status use: dark brown dado, light brown walls, and cream-colored cove and ceiling. The schemes resembled those of most offices throughout the Capitol: dark dodos, lighter walls, and still lighter coves and ceilings, or a relatively light colorado dado and wall, reflecting the general rule that decorations became simpler the higher the floor.

**Other Spaces**

Minor corridors, toilet rooms and vaults appear throughout the building, and they were decorated similarly. The interior corridors leading to private spaces typically shared a common color scheme: a dark brown dado, red-brown or tan walls and cream ceilings. This scheme was repeated in public coat rooms and toilet rooms, whereas private toilet rooms
had only two colors. Exceptions were noted in corridors without much or any borrowed light. On the south side of the first floor of the West Wing, the dado was dark as customary, but the walls were light green and the ceiling ochre. On the second floor of the North Wing, the east minor corridor had a light-green dado initially, then was changed to a dark brown; how long the green dado persisted was not known, but both could have been applied by Mack, Jenney and Tyler. On the third floor of the West Wing, the interior corridor dados were dark green, the walls a lighter green, and the ceiling an ivory color; the transverse corridor under the Assembly Gallery was painted in lighter tones of gray and white, replacing the yellow walls and ceiling initially painted by Conrad Schmutz. Throughout the building, storage vaults typically were painted light green, which would have harmonized with the dark green metal shelving and filing systems and also would have provided a reflective surface in the vaults that had no windows or skylights. Cream colors were used on the walls and ceilings of the janitors’ closets, the walls of which were wainscoted with gray marble. Shades of creams were used, too, on the ceilings in the utilitarian areas of the basement.

Restoration and Rehabilitation, 1988-2001

As it did in many aspects of the Capitol restoration and rehabilitation, the 1980 State Capitol Restoration Guidelines suggested an approach to the treatment of decorative finishes that was expanded and adapted throughout the course of the project. Although the Guidelines made only a brief mention of painting and decorative work, they recommended “match[ing] the original decor as closely as possible.” The 1980 publication was a precursor to two studies that initiated the systematic documentation of the historic decorative finishes. In 1982 the state arranged for an inventory of pounce patterns and stencils that had been stored in the South Wing basement. Rita Zachman, a University of Wisconsin-Madison art student, completed the study, but it was not comprehensive since more patterns and stencils existed than had been inventoried. Further, it was discovered later that some stencils and patterns dated to the period of initial decoration of the building, but others were made later for various overpainting projects. These distinctions became more apparent as additional research and paint probes were completed. A second study was undertaken late in the summer of 1986 by Lorette Russenberger of Milwaukee Art Conservators. In a thirty-eight-page report, Russenberger located both fine and decorative works in the building, assessed their condition and identified specific problems areas. The report suggested procedures for maintenance and recommended treatments “for areas with specific problems.” “In most cases,” she wrote, “the condition of the stencils, paint and gilding is generally good.” She continued:

Because of the high quality of the original materials and the skill of their application, they have survived well. Problems which have arisen are usually related to specific damage, such as leaks, vandalism or general wear and tear. In the last category it must be noted the abrasion of gold leafed surfaces which is caused by something as innocuous as wind, which blows through the hallways, gradually rubbing surfaces away. . . .

The ground floor decorative treatments are the most problematic, not only for their different materials, but because they have suffered more damage than others in the building, and have been repaired and retouched on numerous occasions, making identification of what is really original difficult. . . . Other damage . . . is largely the result of deterioration of the underlying plaster, through age or outside forces like moisture. . . . Some such areas have been repaired, often ineptly.

She found similar specific problems throughout the building related to moisture and age, but concluded that “the condition of art works and decorative treatments in the Capitol Building is good.” Russenberger noted that treatments of the works of fine and decorative art would vary “from minor and remedial work to extensive restorations,” and she
As work progressed, various individuals and firms completed decorative finish surveys using methodologies that met contemporary standards in the field of conservation but at different levels of detail. As with other aspects of the project, knowledge built upon knowledge, and the later projects were more informed than earlier phases of the work. In project sequence, paint probes and analyses were conducted in the Assembly Chamber by Al Isenbarger, an engineer from Portage, Wisconsin and Anton Rajer, a conservator from Sheboygan; in the North Wing, by Rajer and Garland Guild, Inc., a conservation firm from Indianapolis that expanded upon Rajer’s work during restoration; in the remainder of the West Wing by Rajer, Garland Guild, EverGreene Painting Studios of New York, Preservar, Inc., of New York, and Jean Easter of Indianapolis, an expert on plaster; in the South Wing, by Rajer, Garland Guild, Preservar, Richard Wolbers of the Winterthur Museum in Delaware, an expert in paint stratigraphy; in the Central Portion, by Garland Guild, Wolbers, Preservar; and in the East Wing by Garland Guild, Preservar and with Wolbers as a subcontractor.

The conservators, consultants and state bureaus created more than sixty survey documents, which range in length from one or two pages to over 300 pages; the Central Portion alone was documented in twelve scrapbook-like albums, with a few pages in a half dozen of them dedicated to the ongoing survey of decorative finishes undertaken in the Rotunda. Examples of reports concerning finishes in the Capitol have been found for every year between 1982 and 2001 except for 1983-84, 1989-90 and 2000, and they cover most phases of decorative finish work. The paints, varnishes, glazes and other finishing materials used in both restoration and replication varied. For the first test project in 1987-88, the restoration of the Assembly Chamber, oil paints, like those implemented historically, were used. For all other sections of the building, the conservators used oil-based primers, latex paints on walls and for minor decorations like stencils, and artists’ acrylic paints on the more art-like panels and decorations. Actual gold leaf was used for some repairs and restorations; gilt paint was also used to repair gold-leafed surfaces. For paints, Glidden products were used in the North Wing and Pratt and Lambert products were used in the rest of the Capitol.

Assembly Chamber and General Surveys, 1987-88

In January 1988, the Division of State Facilities Management (DSFM) contracted with Al Isenbarger of Portage to evaluate the plaster and paint in the Assembly Chamber. The work in the Assembly Chamber was intended as a pilot project for preservation techniques to be used in the larger Capitol restoration and rehabilitation. Consistent with the directive for public spaces in the Master Plan, it was intended that the decorative finishes in this room be restored. In his report, Isenbarger noted that lights had been installed in the decorative panels painted by Elmer Garney that encircle the glass ceiling. In these areas “paint cracking, curling and spalling” was evident, although “no significant water damage” had occurred in the upper layers of plaster. Isenbarger indicated that, in general, the painted surfaces had performed remarkably well,” but recommended immediate attention to the areas that had cracked or spilled. He suggested that when repair and repainting were to occur that a “breathing” paint, not latex, be used for the benefit of both the plaster and historic finishes. At nearly the same time, DSFM staff conducted paint probes, created drawings of stencil patterns and recorded color findings for several areas in the chamber. In March 1988, Anton Rajer completed paint probes of the Assembly Lobby ceiling and cornice to determine original colors, stencils and patterns of gilding, which were found to be consistent with the scheme implemented in the chamber. That October, Rajer examined the painted finish on the metal railings in the chamber’s galleries to determine original colors, which he reported were steel gray paint covered by a layer of dark brown. The restoration of Garmsey-era paint and repainting of overpainted surfaces in the chamber and galleries were executed by Conrad Schmitt Studios of New Berlin, Wisconsin under contract with DSFM. The contract included an adaptation that involved the removal of the centers of the wreaths in the ring of ceiling panels for the installation of television lighting.

In 1988, DSFM employed Anton Rajer to undertake technical examinations in seven areas of the Capitol in addition to the Assembly Chamber spaces, where he was under contract already to analyze finishes and restore Edwin Howland Blissfield’s mural, Wisconsin, Past, Present and Future. The seven areas were locations where historic finishes were known to have been in place and included the Governor’s Conference Room, the Rotunda Basement, the Senate and Supreme Court Louphies, and the ceilings of the Rotunda ground floor and West Wing ground floor principal corridor and the first floor of the Northeast Pavilion. The study was implemented to aid planning subsequent decorative finish restoration in areas throughout the building. In the conference room, Rajer reported that the walls had been varnished originally; then, in 1968, they and parts of the ceiling had been painted off-white. He recommended stripping the paint and revamping it. Rajer described the ceiling of the Supreme Court Lobby, also in the East Wing, as in the worst condition of any of the seven areas examined. It suffered from plaster failure, and portions of the center panel threatened to collapse; one of the four oil-on-canvas murals on the ceiling already had been torn. The report cited vibrations from fans and other sources as a principal cause of the plaster failure. Concerning the Senate Lobby in the South Wing, he stated that nearly a third of the ceiling had been overpainted and that many surfaces were flaking. He offered two options—one for repair and one for conservation of existing original surfaces with replication of those surfaces that could not be conserved. The West Wing ground floor corridor ceiling was found to have been repainted “a number of times . . . as tastes changed,” as were elements of the cornice and frieze. The workmanship evident in the later paintings, done in the 1970s, was “some of the poorest in the building.” Finally the report addressed a single panel on the ceiling of the ground floor near the information desk in the Rotunda. It had suffered flaking for years for a variety of reasons related to plaster, moisture and exposure from the Northeast Pavilion entrance, the principal delivery entrance to the building.

North Wing and General Surveys, 1990-92

With the onset of the comprehensive Capitol restoration and rehabilitation project, DSFM had completed sufficient preliminary analysis in the assembly spaces and elsewhere to recognize the necessity of probe work prior to architectural intervention, be it either restoration or replication. Between 1990 and 1992 two separate decorative finish surveys were completed in the North Wing; the first was undertaken in 1990-91 by Anton Rajer, and in 1992 Garland Guild examined several of the same surfaces but frequently arrived at different conclusions. Rajer made seventy-seven wall probes and prepared forty-five “color reconstruction drawings” for areas located in the basement through fourth floor. He found hundreds of colors, which he matched to the Munsell system, and identified thirty stencil patterns. On the ground and first floors, he discovered damaged plaster that he attributed to recent construction vibrations, and identified overpainting on the corridor ceilings. Most typically, the background colors were affected, although sometimes the stencils and gold-leaf ornament had been overpainted as well. On the second floor, Rajer identified the ceiling background color of the North Hearing Room lobby as having been overpainted, but found the gold-leaf stencil to be remarkably well."
be original. On the third floor, he described the groin vaults as “some of the most complex decorative surfaces in the building,” but appears not to have probed the walls beneath the vault as he was contracted to do. He recommended re-creating, as necessary, the decorations in the GAR Memorial Hall of the fourth floor and reattaching canvas panels loosened by flaking and delamination. In most situations, he advised cleaning.27

While making plans for the application of finishes in the North Wing, DSFM and the State Capitol and Executive Residence Board (SCERB) were called upon to respond to some building occupants and members of SCERB who felt the colors identified in Rajor’s probes were too dark in value to be suitable for the walls. They requested a lighter color scheme be considered. A room on the fourth floor was dedicated to testing paint colors, and eventually SCERB selected colors that were half the value of those established as original. As for stencils, assembly representatives decided that none of the offices would have replicated stencils, even though some of the corresponding historic spaces had been stenciled.28

During the summer of 1991, DSFM prepared specifications for restoring or replicating decorative finishes in the North Wing using Rajor’s data and the decisions made by SCERB. The specifications called for “only the best materials and workmanship” because the “Capitol ... is the single most important building in the state architecturally and histori- cally.” The specifications stated that “average materials and workmanship are not acceptable.” In a document that established the standard for decorative finish work for the balance of the restoration and rehabilitation project, the specifications indicated that the consultant:

[S]hall provide all decorating work, including submittal (sic) of materials and samples, making stencil and pounce patterns, scraping loose paint, cleaning and repairing existing finishes, preparing surfaces for finishes, painting plaster surfaces, executing free hand art work, providing gold leaf work, cleaning and grouting marble, cleaning decorative metal railings and gates, all as outlined below.

The intent of this work is to faithfully restore the public spaces to their 1917 appearance. Little creativ- ity is required since only original patterns and decorative schemes will be recreated or restored. Wherever possible original finishes shall be saved, cleaned and repaired. Other areas will require recreation of original finishes. All work shall be approved and coordinated with the project manager.

The document described in detail, floor-by-floor, the expectations the state placed on the contractor. In the basement corridors, the marble walls were to be cleaned and grouted, and the ceilings were to be painted “to match original.” The stair ceiling between the basement and the first floor was to be repaired and “[d]ecorative stencils and painting ... will be recreated in the west stair,” while in the east stair the “ceiling will be saved, cleaned and then touched up. Sample panel required.” Similar instructions were given for every floor, identifying what was to be re-created or replicated and what to be cleaned, repaired or touched up.29

Between May and November of 1992, Garland Guild restored and replicated the finishes of the North Wing; as necessary, the team made stencils and patterns and undertook additional probes to identify colors more accurately. As the project unfolded, the additional probe work led to a number of unexpected discoveries. The most notable was the identification of a finish scheme that had not been identified in Rajor’s earlier work. Garland Guild recorded notes concerning their exploratory work on the secondary stair landings of the second floor in their work log on June 25:

Probes above stencil band on 2nd Floor West Secondary Stair Landing revealed significant art work: griffin or Pegasus-like figures with vase and column surmounted by eagle located on both sides of east
door connected above door by rod with swag of leaves attached by ribbons. Same pattern detected on West Land and subsequently on 2nd Floor Secondary Stair Landings of other wings of Capitol.  

Other issues that arose as work was underway in the North Wing included a concern expressed by Garland Guild about the flat painting of walls, which had been subcontracted, especially with respect to visible roller marks. Also, the conservation effort required particular attention in the GAR Memorial Hall, where the finishes were replicated in some areas and restored where original work survived. To complete the fairly complex restoration of the third floor corridors, numerous consultations with DSFM staff occurred; field notes indicate almost daily informal meetings, and regular formal meetings were conducted and meeting notes prepared throughout the work on the North Wing. Six years later, in 1998, in conjunction with Central Portion work, Garland Guild returned to complete additional work on the vaults and the wing’s grand stairs. In the groin vaults, the firm inpainted the fields with a shade of brown used elsewhere in the Capitol, topping it with a glaze; on the soffits of the grand stairs, twelve panels needed attention because of previous overpainting that had not been executed to the current standard.

During 1991-92, Anton Rajer conducted additional probe work and analysis beyond the North Wing, examining the grand stair soffits between the ground and first floors in the East and West Wings, the South Wing ground floor main corridor, and the ground floor of the Northwest Pavilion. The condition of the grand stair oil-on-canvas ceiling murals had deteriorated since Rajer’s earlier examination in 1988. “At that time,” he wrote, “one panel was loose, [and] now [in January 1991] almost half of them show some signs of delamination and flaking. The detachment may have been caused by vibration from the North Wing renovation project. Witness the numerous red clay ceiling tiles that have fallen in the North Wing.” However, Rajer also noted, that no ceiling panels in the North Wing had detached, only those in the East and West Wings where tiles had not fallen. He recommended immediate repair of the delaminating panels. He noted similar problems with paint on plaster in the main corridors of the ground floor of the South Wing and in the barrel vaults of the West Wing. In January 1992, a steam leak occurred on the ground floor of the Northwest Pavilion, saturating the ceiling. “Upon drying many areas began to flake,” Rajer wrote. He applied BEVA 371 adhesive “as a consolidant to stabilize the flaking” until permanent repairs could be made. (BEVA is a non-aqueous adhesive formulated by Gustav A. Berger for fine art conservation. BEVA adhesives were used routinely throughout the building as a restoration material.)

West Wing, Northwest Pavilion and Probes in the South Wing, 1993-95
By April 1993, DSFM had been renamed the Division of Facilities Development (DFD) and it began developing plans for restoring finishes in the West Wing and Northwest Pavilion, this time in conjunction with Kahler Slater Architects, Inc. of Milwaukee and Madison. Beginning in January 1993, Anton Rajer continued as a conservator and analyzed finishes throughout the West Wing and pavilion; in September he issued a “preliminary final report” concerning the forty-seven areas and sixty-five rooms he had probed to determine the stratigraphy of the paint layers on walls, ceilings and coves. His report stated “On average in the offices about 8 layers of paint were found covering the walls.” In corridors, color schemes “closely follow the general color scheme of the marble walls and floors.” He submitted a four-page description of work he believed was needed. He also summarized the colors of paints used historically, using the Munsell system of color notation. When the document was reviewed critically by Mike Bath, a Department of Administration staff painter who had conducted additional probes, some inaccuracies were cited. For example, Rajer had stated that the main corridor’s “stencil ceiling is original and in good condition,” but it was found later that “[a] probe in this area indicates the color and stencil are the same as the North Wing” and “[the] center panel background will require repainting and the decorative gold leaf will have to be restencilled.” Four pages of similar comment followed. Rajer also attributed all the West Wing decorative work to Elmer Garney, but he had been responsible only
for the Assembly suite, not the entire wing. Rajer did not submit his final report on the wing and pavilion until April 1994; it ran 368 pages with only a brief text, but with scores of photographs, drawings of stencils, hand-colored renditions of chronologies of paint layers and colors.63

In the period between November 1993 and April 1994, DFD turned again to Garland Guild of Indianapolis to analyze finishes in both the wing and pavilion. Garland Guild conducted its work in February and reported findings in March, including photographs, a field log and paint samples that matched the colors revealed by the probes. Where possible, it matched original paints to latex paints made by Pratt and Lambert. Garland Guild’s probes included two spaces in the secretary of state’s suite, where Conrad Schmitt’s decorations had not been overpainted by Mack, Jennie and Tyler.64

The contract for restoration and replication of West Wing and Northwest Pavilion finishes, with the exception of the third floor groin vaults and the ground and first floors of the pavilion, was awarded to EverGreene Painting Studios. EverGreene’s crew began work on 1 July 1994 and concluded on 28 April 1995. EverGreene found previously undocumented patterns and stencils in many locations throughout the wing, most typically above chair rails, on wall panels, in coves and on ceilings. The technicians paid particular attention to details like glazes used to shade, for example, a ribbon, leaves and leaf veins in a ceiling panel in the Assembly Parlor. As Garland Guild had done in the North Wing, EverGreene cut replications of many stencils and patterns that would be used in recreating decorative paint schemes in the private spaces. A great measure of collaboration occurred between EverGreene and DFD in determining color schemes for the offices and the locations where stencils would be replicated. The overpainted ceiling of the Assembly Lobby prompted investigation about how to remove the new paint layers without damaging the original. Conservators tested several types of tape to pull off the non-original layers and found that making tape worked well. They applied the tape to the surface and brayed it with a plastic putty knife; then in pulling off the tape, overpainted paint layers were removed, leaving the varnished or glazed original ceiling mostly undamaged. Cracks and surfaces damaged by probes and cleanings needed to be repaired, touched up or replicated. EverGreene also investigated the Assembly Chamber ceiling and pendentives and was given an additional contract to clean and repair the ceiling. Recommended restoration work on the pendentives was undertaken by Garland Guild, as was additional work on the Blashfield mural in the chamber.65

In March and April of 1995, Garland Guild was hired to make additional studies of the finishes on the ground and first floors of the Northwest Pavilion and to restore those rooms and the third floor groin vaults of the West Wing; in these spaces the pastiglia required special consideration. Garland Guild retained Constance S. Silver of Preservar in New York City for technical studies of the pavilion rooms and Jean Easter, the frame conservator at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, “to consult on methodologies to consolidate and replicate pastiglia.” Garland Guild reported that, “It appears that the pastiglia in the 3rd Floor Groin Vaults was formed with a finish plaster, whereas the pastiglia in the Round Room Entry Vestibule was formed with a ‘compo’ material (as used on picture frames).” These findings prompted testing of three resins with adhesive properties “to reattach and consolidate delaminating pastiglia.” Hide glue was found to be too weak; an acryloid B-72 solution in acetone worked best on the most heavily damaged areas, while diluted BEVA GeI was effective in less serious situations. Joint compound was found to be useful in replicating pastiglia. In its examination of the first floor of the Northwest Pavilion, Preservar discovered the entire ceiling to be unstable, with adhesion to plaster “severely compromised” and “fragile to the touch,” with “widespread, very fine crazing with some blistering and buckling.” This condition was attributed to environmental circumstances, particularly the temperature and humidity swings characteristic of an entry area, especially one with a northwest exposure. In April the conservators, in consultation with Richard Wolbers of the Winterthur Museum in Delaware, tested several resins that could be used
in repairing the ceiling. They settled on Aquazol (a water-soluble resin with very low toxicological characteristics) “mixed in a volume ration of 15 parts distilled water to 1 part ethanol to 3 parts Aquazol.” The mixture was applied to the surface with a soft brush, covered with silicone-coated mylar to isolate, and then pressed with a bone folder. The mylar was removed and area washed with distilled water/surfactant (Triton X-100) using cotton, then dried with cotton cloth. The area was then heat-set utilizing silicone-coated mylar backed with brown paper to isolate. After the entire painted ceiling was consolidated, the paint was gently cleaned with distilled water and Triton X-100.

After the consolidation process was completed, the ceiling was sealed with a 10% solution of Acryloid B-72, brush applied. . . . Impainting was done with artist acrylic over the B-72. After experimentation with matte Soluvair, it was determined that Pratt and Lambert acrylic varnish resulted in a sheen more closely approximating the original and could be brushed evenly. Tests for solubility in toluene were positive.

Wolbers also examined the painted surfaces stratigraphically, discovering that most of the surviving paints were original, but consisted of more layers than had been thought. The plaster cornice and the outer ring of the murals had been painted to resemble the decorative stone in the room. Two other areas of overpainting were identified: a red band had been repainted the wrong color, and the green field of the cornice was originally slate blue. This highly detailed work on the third floor vaults and the two pavilion rooms took from early March through 3 May 1995.46

South Wing, Southeast and Southwest Pavilions, 1993-99

While West Wing and Northwest Pavilion restoration was underway, preparation for South Wing restoration began with the historic and forensic research on the wing and pavilions required for the compilation of a historic structure report (HSR). In the fall of 1993, Kahler Slater Architects conducted a preliminary survey of the decorative finishes in the wing and pavilion as part of preparing the Historic Structure Report, Book IV: Wisconsin State Capitol, South Wing, Southeast and Southwest Pavilions. The team compared original plans with those showing existing conditions to determine the location of intact historic interior walls, and it turned to archival records to determine the levels of finish that might be expected on walls in different spaces throughout the wing. Thirty-one probe locations were established and prioritized, and the architects prepared recommendations indicating where walls should be probed for original stenciling, floor by floor.47 Between 27 and 29 December 1993, a team of eight persons from DFD and Kahler Slater conducted reconnaissance probes from the ground through the fourth floors and issued a report in January 1994. The document indicated that research uncovered little photographic documentation showing individual offices within the wing, so probe work was undertaken to uncover “document original decorative finishes.” Colors were given a Pratt and Lambert color number, and paint chips were saved for future cross-section analysis. On the ground, third and fourth floors, the team found no stencils. Stencils were found in most rooms on the first and second floors, and drawings were prepared for some of these.48 These findings were incorporated into the South Wing HSR that appeared in 1995. The team recommended further probes in both public and private areas after occupants vacated the wing. Further, the HSR recommended preserving or re-creating finishes in public spaces replicating finishes on the newly constructed walls in the private spaces that would be compatible with the uses assigned those rooms.49

In keeping with the established recommendations, Garland Guild conducted comprehensive probes in the South Wing, Southeast and Southwest Pavilions between 7 August 1995 and 5 February 1996. This work expanded significantly upon the 1993 reconnaissance survey. As the probes were underway, regular reports were transmitted to the architect

9.47 Replication painting on Assembly Parlor ceiling, 1994
The decorative finish contractor conducted probes of the Assembly Parlor ceiling to determine colors and motifs as installed originally by Elmer Garner. The historic scheme was then replicated.

9.48 Decorative finishes analyses, ground floor ceiling, Northwest Pavilion, 1995
Plaster and paint on the ground and first floor pavilion ceilings were discovered to have suffered damage associated with widely varying temperatures, drafts and dampness, as well as from inappropriate attempts at repair. The Northwest Pavilion ceiling was particularly fragile prior to restoration.

12. Exposures of the Original Finishes.
and to a representative of the senate, which occupied much of the wing. In 1995, as consultants to Garland Guild, Constance Silver and Richard Wolbers analyzed the more complex Mack, Jenney and Tyler oil-on-canvas paintings and architectural finishes in the wing and pavilions. Their findings were summarized in a three-volume report. The first volume, submitted on 20 February, established two goals: “to determine the condition of the mural paintings and to make recommendations for their conservation treatment” and “to identify and determine the original appearance of the decorative finishes.” Garland Guild made the initial surface exposures and then Silver collected ninety-eight samples from which to make cross-section studies. Silver and Wolbers analyzed the cross sections, which were magnified 125 times, and Silver examined the mural paintings. Silver and Wolbers found that most of the original finishes “have been overpainted at least once and in some cases three times.” When examined only on the basis of the probe work, not including stratigraphic analysis, the original finishes appeared to be “straight painting in a rather ‘hot’ and dark palette,” but the cross sections confirmed the use of composite finishes made from base tones, scumbles, and glazes to create faux stone finishes or simply fanciful finishes. Moreover, the palette tends to be quite subtle, with a use of grays and toned glazes. … [W]hile there is some straight painting in the South Wing, most of the finishes are composites, apparently attempting to imitate stone.

Silver and Wolbers recommended replication, not conservation, of the painted finishes because of the costs associated with conservation, especially given the heavy use of the areas by occupants and visitors. The consultants recommended a pilot project, beginning with model boards on which original finishes would be reconstructed, then review of the boards, and finally replication of the finishes. Mack, Jenney and Tyler’s oil-on-canvas panels in the Senate Parlor exhibited numerous structural problems and Silver and Wolbers advocated that they be repaired, but did not recommend “comprehensive conservation treatment,” only the treatment of structural and aesthetic problems.

In its report concerning its work in the wing and pavilions, Garland Guild stated, “The rich but muted colors of the original finishes found under layers of overpaint, together with [both] the simple and elaborate stencil designs revealed, will complement and enhance the interior spaces when restored or replicated.” Garland Guild also prepared a supplemental volume in which it made room-by-room recommendations for restoration and rehabilitation of the finishes in the wing and pavilions. With the results of Garland Guild’s findings and the research for the HSR largely in hand, Kahler Slater, Affiliated Engineers Inc. (AEI), DFD, representatives of the Capitol staff, and Garland Guild collectively prepared a preservation plan and recommendations for the wing and pavilions. The recommendations were issued in February 1996, at the same time the Garland Guild reports were submitted. The document indicated:

In general, the recommendations propose conservation or restoration of all decorative finishes within the public spaces of the South Wing. Original decorative treatments are anticipated to be replicated in many of the first and second floor offices. Although not original, ground floor, third floor and fourth floor legislative offices are proposed to have decorative treatments sympathetic to the period and to the hierarchy within the South Wing.

The recommendations included proposed treatments, a schedule, floor plans and mock-up panels for review. Two contracts were to be issued—one for flat painting “rooms without decorative finish treatments . . . [meaning] very simple single or multiple color schemes,” and one for decorative finish and conservation painting. These recommendations were included in specifications prepared for the wing and pavilions.
9.50 Paint investigation data sheet, South Wing, 1995-96
Original paint and gold leaf were found on the ceiling of the side corridors on the first floor surrounding the glass-block inserts that transmit light from the second floor.

9.53 Trumpeters' course documentation, 1988
Previously completed surveys and studies became an important part of the historic record and frequently provided valuable documentation. Pages from a 1968 specification for repainting the Rotunda demonstrated that the decorative pattern in the trumpeters' course had been scheduled for restoration but was overpainted instead.
Garland Guild received the contract to complete the restoration and replication of decorative finishes in the wing and pavilions, although the oil-on-canvas panels and gilded elements of the Senate Parlor, the ceiling of the Senate Lobby, and the four round vestibules to the Senate Chamber were conserved by Preservar. During their work, the conservators discovered additional structural damage. Cracks in the canvases had worsened and more detachment from the ceiling had occurred to the Senate Parlor murals during construction. Also, under improved lighting, the team discovered a "very uneven quality of the varnish" on the murals. Conservators removed grime from the ceiling, reattached loose canvas, filled cracks, reintegrated discolored overpaints, inpainted cracks, and sprayed diluted varnish on the murals, "resulting in an evening of the overall surface and thus a great improvement in the appearance of the ceiling." Heavy accumulations of grime on gilded elements in the room were removed, the surfaces were washed and rinsed, and the gold leaf repaired. The Senate Lobby ceiling displayed significant overpainting, regilding, and loss of glazes on the painted surfaces. Delamination of paint had occurred in some areas, and plaster had failed. The ceiling of the west bay exhibited the worst problems because it had been "inaccurately overpainted" and had "extensive damage to the plaster and paint in the area." It required complete reconstruction. Treatment consisted of cleaning the entire ceiling, removing a water-soluble coating from the gilding, reattaching flaking paint with BEVA 28, and applying gloss varnish to secondary planes because "the paint has lost some of its transparency in relationship to the adjacent panels." The central panel of the west bay had to be repainted in large part, and the panel's southwest corner "proved to be one of the most vexing areas" because "severe and repeated water damage had caused almost total loss of original paint, followed by very poor and inaccurate reconstruction." After unstable paint and plaster were repaired, the inaccurate repait was covered and sealed with an isolating varnish. A stencil was cut from surviving areas elsewhere on the ceiling, and the decorations were duplicated with artists' acrylics.76

Garland Guild began work in the wing and pavilions in September 1997 and finished in December 1998, juggling South Wing restoration and replication with work in the Central Portion, which took priority. The Senate Parlor received immediate attention, as did the preparation of a sample room for presenting finishes. In April 1998, a little more than halfway through the two contracts, the conservators noted an anomaly in the paint on the south wall of the barrel vault: "The oak leaves and branches on the left side were outlined intermittently in a dark greenish-brown, interspersed with fairly transparent ochre. The right side was outlined entirely in the ochre, with the lower right extremity of the branches ... solidly gilt in outline." Examination revealed the inconsistencies to be original. Sizing for gilding had been applied on the left side, but the gold leaf was not. The solution was to "inpaint (an) emulsion of the dark greenish-brown on the right side (so as to match the left)." While this was an unusual occurrence, the daily logs demonstrate steady progress throughout the wing, beginning with the cleaning of surfaces, preparation for painting and repairs, then execution of the restoration or replication work, item by item.77 Besides the work specified in the South Wing schedule, Garland Guild conducted similar work in other areas of the South Wing and the pavilions including the principal stair ceilings between the basement and first floors; the ceiling panels in public spaces on the ground through third floors; the ground floor and first floor ceilings of the pavilions, and the third floor groin vaults. This work appears to have been conducted in connection with restoration of the Central Portion.78

Central Portion, 1996-98

Surveys and research for Historic Structure Report, Book V: Wisconsin State Capitol, Central Portion—Dome and Rotunda began in 1996. The scope of work for the interior encompassed the Rotunda, its belting corridors and the axial and diagonal corridors to the transitional space often referred to as the elevator corridor. Corridors encircle the central Rotunda on the ground through fourth floors and feature decoratively painted ceiling panels on the ground, first and second floors. The Rotunda Basement, originally an elaborately finished public dining room, was also included in the scope of the project, although some earlier analysis by Lorette Russenberger and Anton Rajer had occurred in the
1980s. In the Rotunda, the condition of finishes in the upper areas was difficult to assess in a preliminary way because lack of access hampered the work. However, historical research revealed the likely presence of a concealed decorative pattern on the wall at the sixth level and a color scheme for the ceiling coffering different than that in place at the time. More accessible, the 140 ceiling panels in the corridors of the lower levels and basement of the Central Portion were inspected visually and a wide range of conditions found, from pristine on the ground floor to very problematic in the Rotunda Basement. The HSR, issued in 1997, recommended that conservators address each decorative ceiling panel individually and treat it appropriately, an approach reflected in the specifications.

In 1996-97, the ceiling murals in the Basement Rotunda came under initial scrutiny as surveys were conducted for the Central Portion HSR; in 1998, much more in-depth analysis was undertaken by Preservar that included the analysis of the paint used on plaster surfaces. Preservar concluded that Mack, Jenney and Tyler’s color scheme had been over-painted once, using darker tones than had been applied originally, presumably in an attempt to match original paint that had darkened over time. In its analysis of the oil-on-canvas ceiling panels, Preservar found that one panel in the outer ring “was removed and subsequently lost” and that the central circular mural had been compromised when in 1971-72 some of its five sections were removed for plaster repair and reinstalled badly. The canvas became largely detached after the adhesive and much of the skim coat of plaster had crumbled. As for the other thirty-six murals, twenty in the outer ring and sixteen in the inner ring, the outer ring murals were found to be in “far better condition than those of the inner ring, although all had been covered with at least one coat of a natural resin which had discolored and become rather tenacious.” The color fields of the inner-ring paintings were in “extremely poor condition” because of previous cleanings and “a remarkably thick tinted varnish that had been applied apparently to mask surface defects.” Many of the murals were stained and had been abraded in attempts to clean them. Several had been “almost totally destroyed and thus required almost total reconstruction.” Complex individual treatments were applied to all but two panels and involved regluing, cleaning, inpainting, then varnishing with a conservation varnish. Two complete murals and part of a third had to be removed and treated because the supporting plaster had failed. One panel had been conserved by Anton Rajer and was not treated again; the missing panel was replicated in acrylic paints by Price Thomas Studios of New York, which used “shades that were somewhat lighter than the aged original paintings.” After installation, varnishes were applied to the new canvas to match the hues of the adjacent murals as closely as possible.

In the fall of 1997, Garland Guild was employed as the contractor for the repair and replication of decorative finishes throughout the balance of the Central Portion. Contracts for most of the flat painting were let in February 1998; Klein-Dickert Co., Inc., of Madison was selected to paint the portions of the Rotunda above the trumpeters’ course at the sixth level, and Thomas Mason of Milwaukee was contracted to paint all the flat surfaces below the sixth level. Garland Guild was responsible for probes, gold-leaf cleaning and repair, replicating or restoring complex plaster surfaces, and restoring the ceiling panels, most of them on the ground floor.88 Probe work was completed between August 1997 and March 1998, and was undertaken as the scaffolding made the upper level surfaces of the Rotunda accessible. Richard Wolbers of the Winterthur Museum completed stratigraphic analysis of paint samples and also assisted in making paint color matches based upon field work. The findings enabled the innermost panels of the coffer in the Rotunda to be painted their original teal color, replacing the robin’s egg blue installed in 1968. The probes and analysis also contributed to the return of the Rotunda walls to their original palette that included shades of brown, tan and ivory. Consistent with photographs from the 1960s, collected as part of the historical research effort, paint probes revealed a pattern of swags and panels in the trumpeters’ course. Also, the painted surfaces of the lions’ heads below were original, but the background color had been altered.89 In early January 1998, Garland Guild began restoration work, undertaking additional probes as necessary. Garland Guild’s technicians began at the top of Rotunda, starting with the gold leaf around the oculus and the # stencil pattern; they retouched the gold leaf after it was cleaned, but...
did not replace gold leaf in making repairs. Garland Guild also cleaned the coffer in preparation for flat painting by Klein-Dickert. Replicating the decorative pattern in the trumpeters' course took place from late April into mid-May and inpainting the background of the lions' heads was completed in late April. The upper levels of scaffolding were removed by mid-June, and Klein-Dickert finished painting the Rotunda down to the sixth level by late July. Thomas Mason's crew began flat painting the lower levels in early June, while the scaffold was still in place below the height of eighty-five feet. An addition to Garland Guild's Central Portion contract was made in early February 1998 for cleaning, repairing and, where necessary, inpainting the twenty-four engaged columns made of scagliola at the seventh level. Garland Guild subcontracted the work to Seebomh, Ltd., of Petoskey, Michigan, a firm with extensive experience in scagliola restoration. The process involved cleaning, filling cracks, stabilizing loose areas with injected adhesives, filling the injection holes, replacing some loose or spalled areas of scagliola, inpainting them with watercolor and then washing and gently buffing the columns when the restoration was completed. The work began about 10 February and concluded on 31 March, with the exception of some minor details. While Klein-Dickert painted the upper Rotunda, Garland Guild turned its attention to the Mack, Jenney and Tyler ceiling panels on the ground and first floors and to its responsibilities for the repair of ornamental plaster and gilding at the lower levels. Garland Guild found the ceiling panels on the ground floor to have some loose plaster and paint delamination. It was reported that "some of the panels had previous overpaint (incorrect colors and poor execution) which had to be redone." Aqualox was used to reattach delaminated paint, affected areas were inpainted with artists' acrylics, and matte Solvvar was used to seal the paintings. Garland Guild consolidated plaster where necessary by drilling small holes, injecting an acrylic adhesive (Rhoplex LC67 and MC76) and repairing the holes with 'vinyl sparkle, acrylic primer and paint.' The Central Portion project was characterized by overlapping schedules with numerous decorative painters, conservators and other craftspeople working on different parts of the project simultaneously. At one point in summer of 1998, two crews of flat painters, one crew of restoration painters and another crew of conservators were at work in the Central Portion. Although Garland Guild continued to work on specific small-scale projects through December, work was substantially completed in time for a gala rededication of the Rotunda on 19 October 1998, a celebration heralded in the press around Wisconsin as a successful conclusion to the year of "Restoring the Glory.

East Wing and Northeast Pavilion, 1998-2001
The restoration and rehabilitation of the East Wing and Northeast Pavilion were the final portions of the Capitol project. By the time this work was underway the client, members of the architectural and engineering team, and most of the contractors had worked together on the project for many years; for instance, Garland Guild had been involved in the work for over a decade. The experience of the team led to significant efficiencies in both preparing and executing the work. Paint probes for the East Wing began in September 1998, while the restoration of the South Wing and Central Portion were still underway. The major analysis of East Wing finishes occurred in November and December 1998, and Garland Guild's report appeared in March 1999. While still being compiled, the report was used by the architect to prepare specifications for decorative finishes in the East Wing and Northeast Pavilion. The thoroughness of the decorative finish specifications had evolved substantially from earlier project phases and was considerably more technical. In describing the scope of work, the specifications called for production of working stencils and pounce patterns, development of field logs, and "restoration, cleaning, conservation and/or replication of decorative painted and gilded surfaces in locations as designated on the Drawings." Additionally, the preparation and priming of surfaces was to include filling, patching and sanding; flat painting and conservation of artwork were also included. The contractor was expected to document the work as completed, describing existing conditions and prior treatments, with reports on

9.54 Rotunda Basement artwork report, 1988
Various conservators performed several surveys of the murals on the ceiling of the Rotunda Basement between 1985 and 1998. A 1988 report described the damaging effects of 1972 plaster repairs when sections of the central mural were removed and reattached.
9.55 Repainting the Rotunda, 1998
The original buff color of the Rotunda ceiling was reinstated during Central Portion restoration, as was the shade of teal in the innermost panel of the coffers. In 1968, the ceiling was repainted ivory, and robin's egg blue was applied in the coffers.

9.56 Restoring gilding in the Rotunda, 1998
Due to inaccessibility, the gold-leafed surfaces in the Rotunda had not been overpainted as often as other areas throughout the Capitol. Eighty years after original application, most of the gold leaf in the Rotunda required only cleaning.
methods and materials, and to provide drawings, sketches and photographs. Before starting work in a given area, the contractor was required to make mock-ups for review by the architect and the client. The mock-ups for the Governor's Conference Room and the Supreme Court Hearing Room had to cover a 50-square-foot area of the wall or the ceiling be restored within that space.\textsuperscript{82}

Elmer Garnsey's decorative treatment of the governor's reception room (currently referred to as the Governor's Conference Room) included a fairly opaque dark varnish on the cherrywood walls. The color that resulted, described as porphyry or a purplish red, was applied as paint on portions of the plaster ceiling. Both the varnished and painted surfaces throughout the room were highlighted with gilding that was glazed to give it an antique patina. In executing the murals for the room, Hugo Ballin coordinated his palette with the colors of the walls, ceiling, and the decorative stone used in the fireplace. In 1968, the room was painted ivory and much of the gilding was brightened by cleaning. After numerous discussions and reports from 1988 to 2001, SCERB and the Division of Facilities Development decided to have the walls stripped, stained a deep red color, and then given a satin varnish to provide a uniform finish and opacity similar to the original finish that had concealed the grain of the wood. Because SCERB had wanted the cherry grain to be visible, a compromise was reached by artificially "graining" the wood. The color of the historic ceiling was reinstalled and the worn gilding on the stone of the fireplace was refurbished. The lobby outside the conference room had also been finished by Garnsey in a palette of ivory and gold, a color scheme that survived largely intact, although it had been overpainted. As a part of the restoration of this space, the original colors were identified and replicated.\textsuperscript{83}

The ornate ceiling of the Supreme Court Conference Room had been overpainted much more extensively and with less regard to maintaining the original scheme. A great deal of probe work and analyses were required to reconstruct the rich variety of imagery and color presented in the original work of Mack, Jenney and Tyler. With the exception of the outer border, which was comprised of oil-on-canvas panels, the central area of the ceiling had been obscured, having been repainted with off-white with more modest and lighter-colored stencils and patterns. Twenty-four historic paint colors were discovered through the probes, as well as gold leaf. Garland Guild's report on East Wing decorative finishes devotes many pages to this room than to any other in the wing. The original ceiling finishes in the conference room were painstakingly replicated and the oil paintings restored or conserved, as determined appropriate while the work was underway.\textsuperscript{84}

The ceiling of the Supreme Court Hearing Room was also subject to intensive analyses that included twenty-eight microscopic examinations by Richard Wolbers. The first application of paint had been Conrad Schmitt's work, which was overpainted by Mack, Jenney and Tyler. That firm's decorations subsequently had been overpainted and retouched several times, largely in attempts to preserve the historical scheme, but the cumulative effect had been deleterious. Through Wolbers's analyses, he concluded that the Mack, Jenney and Tyler finishes consisted of a tan base paint with a salmon glaze in some areas "to emphasize or pick them out," and medium gray was painted in the central square recesses of the coffers. These colors and the nuances achieved through glazes were replicated in the painstaking restoration of the hearing room.\textsuperscript{85}

As elsewhere in the building, the private spaces in the East Wing were rehabilitated, and many of the interior walls removed and replaced. Subsequently, the ground floor spaces of the wing were transformed from bureau offices and vaults, as they had been historically, into offices used for supreme court activities, a formal office for the lieutenant governor and offices providing support space for the governor. Adapted finishes were applied in all these areas, since they had received little or no stenciling as painted by Mack, Jenney and Tyler. The offices were stenciled, with the lieutenant governor's office receiving a higher level of finish than the other rooms on the floor. On the first floor, both
the governor’s offices and those of the attorney general received replicated stencils and patterns consistent with the original finishes that had been installed in these spaces by Mack, Jenney and Tyler. The justice’s chambers on the second floor received replicated finishes, since they, too, had been reconfigured. Although historically the spaces were both finished as Class III, as reconstructed the replicated stencils in the clerks’ spaces were executed more simply than those installed in the justices’ chambers. The third and fourth floors had been library spaces; they were completely rehabilitated and rebuilt as offices with adapted decorations. Fabric walls were installed in a new hearing room on the fourth floor for acoustical purposes.

The ground floor of the Northeast Pavilion was in very poor condition at the point of restoration since it had been a service entrance to the Capitol for many years. Its ceiling and the ceiling of the first floor pavilion were restored to an appearance comparable to the other three pavilions, where careful analyses had directed the restoration of the pastiglia and decorative paint scheme. The upper floors of the Northeast Pavilion were treated consistently with the pavilions throughout. The second floor round room, rehabilitated as a justice’s chamber, received a tan dado, gray-green walls with leaf stencils above the chair rail and below the picture rail, and “peanut shell” in the cove and on the ceiling, replicating the scheme Mack, Jenney and Tyler had applied in at least two of the rooms. The third floor room had light brown dado, yellow-tan walls, and a cream-colored cove and ceiling; leaf pattern stencils were painted above the chair rail and below the picture rail, a departure from the simpler Mack, Jenney and Tyler scheme. The fourth floor round room was given oak wainscot, tan walls and a cream ceiling, a distinct departure from the 1917 appearance of this space.

9.58 Governor’s office, 1982
A 1982 remodeling project in the governor’s office resulted in a much simpler decorative scheme than had been installed historically by Mack, Jenney and Tyler. The cornice and the ceiling exhibited some variety, but stencils were not applied to the walls.

9.59 Governor’s office, 2001
The original decorative finishes on the walls and ceiling in the governor’s office were replicated during the East Wing Restoration and Rehabilitation. The room was photographed just before reoccupancy by the governor.
In all cases, the general appearance of a dark dado, light walls and lighter-still coves and ceilings was retained. The ground floor of the Northeast Pavilion was the last space restored, and although the ceiling needed considerable attention, the groundwork for its restoration had been laid. For this ceiling, extensive analyses were not required, nor were determinations about processes and materials. Those decisions had been made cumulatively in the previous projects. Accordingly, the conservation, restoration, replication or adaptation of decorative finishes of this ceiling as well as the entire East Wing and Northeast Pavilion project benefited from this accumulated knowledge and experience.

Continuity among contractors throughout most of the Capitol project enabled rapid progress and results commensurate with the excellence of design, materials and execution sought by the Capitol Commission in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Similar intentions were expressed on the part of the legislative and executive branches of government when they approved the restoration of the Capitol in the 1980s. The care lavished on decorative finishes from the late 1980s through 2001 produced a standard for future endeavors when changes inevitably will occur. George Post’s admonition that decorative finishes “should serve to unite the work in one harmonious whole” remained a beacon nearly a century later.
Endnotes
1 George B. Post (hereinafter Post) to George H. D. Johnson (hereinafter Johnson), 21 April 1909, folder 5, box 21, Capitol Commission records, ser. 833, Archives Division, Wisconsin Historical Society, hereinafter cited only as Capitol Commission records, ser. 833.

2 Post to Wm. F. Vilas (hereinafter Vilas), 7 July 1908, folder 6, box 42, Capitol Commission records, ser. 833.


4 The oil-on-canvas paintings include 18 in the Assembly Chamber and Loggia painted by Elmer Garsney. The others were painted by Mack, Jenney and Tyler: 37 in the Basement Rotunda; 72 (9 each) in the eight grand stair shafts between the ground and first floors; 48 in the first floor pavilions; 48 in the third floor groin vaults; 8 in the Supreme Court Conference Room; 4 in the Supreme Court Lobby; 4 in the first floor corridors in the Central Portion between the pavilions and the Dome; 3 in the Senate Parlor; 2 in the Senate Lobby; and 6 in the GAR Memorial Hall. Oils-on-canvas decorations have higher status as decorative elements than oil paintings on plaster, requiring a greater amount of time and including more detail.


6 Capitol Commission minutes for 10 June 1908, vol. 1, p. 140; Post to Vilas, 7 July (folder 6, box 42) and 16 July (folder 17, box 21) 1908; Lew F. Porter (hereinafter Porter) to Post & Sons, 13 July 1908, box 21; Post & Sons to Porter, 27 July and 23 September 1908, both folder 4, box 21; and "Elmer E. Garsney Articles of Agreement," 28 September 1908, folder 6, box 42, all in Capitol Commission records, ser. 833.

7 "General Description of Work Included in This Contract," folder 6, box 42, ibid.

8 Elmer E. Garsney (hereinafter Garsney) to Post & Sons, 27 November 1908, Post & Sons to Magnus Swenson, 28 November 1908, and Garsney to Porter, 8 December 1908, all in folder 5, box 10; Porter to Garsney, 30 November 1908, folder 4, box 21, all ibid.


11 "Beautiful Corridor in New Capitol West Wing," Wisconsin State Journal, 6 October 1909, 1. Johnson to Porter, 24 February 1909, folder 4, box 12; Post to Johnson, 21 April 1909, folder 5, box 21; and Post & Sons to J. H. Gormley, 10 November 1909, folder 8, box 31, all in Capitol Commission records, ser. 833.


13 Note dated 10 December 1910 (sic; should be 1909) in Capitol Commission minutes, vol. 1, 245, Capitol Commission records, ser. 833; Anton Rajejer, "Analysis of Interior Decorative Finishes in the Wisconsin State Capitol West Wing" (1994), 21, 300-24, B.11.11; no relevant third floor probes appear in EverGreene Painting Studios' report on West Wing finishes, B.20.05, both reports in Capitol Archives.

14 C. Schmitt (hereinafter Schmitt) to "the honorable commission of the State Capitol," 21 December, 1908, folder 17, box 23; Post to Johnson, 21 April 1909, folder 5, box 21; Porter to Schmitt, 1 June 1910, box 24; Capitol Commission minutes for 26 and 27 June 1910, vol. 1, 276-78; Conrad Schmitt contract and bond [incompletely signed and dated], July 1910, folder 1, box 44; Porter memorandum or report for 1 July 1910, box 1a, all Capitol Commission records, ser. 833.


16 Schmitt to Porter, 23 and 29 July 1910, folder 17, box 23; Capitol Commission minutes for 26 and 27 July 1910, vol. 1, 286-87, all Capitol Commission records, ser. 833.


18 Capitol Commission minutes for 17 October 1910, vol. 1, 307; Conrad Schmitt Co. contract and bond, 31 October 1910, folder 1, box 44, both in Capitol Commission records, ser. 833.


23 Capitol Commission minutes for 20 May and 29 September 1914, vol. 2, 20, 27; Charles E. Mack (hereinafter Mack) to Post & Sons, 8 June 1914, and twenty-six page detailed list, in both folder 1, box 43 and folder 15, box 16, all ibid.

24 Mack to George [Post?], 2 March 1915, and Mack to Porter, 17 September 1915, both in folder 5, box 16; Porter to Mack, Jenney and Tyler, 11 March, 14 May, and 7 and 20 September 1915, all in folder 1, box 17; Capitol Commission minutes for 24 August 1915, vol. 2, p. 42; Mack, Jenney & Tyler contract and bond, folder 1, box 43; Edgar Jenney to Porter, 18 January 1916, folder 6, box 16, all in Capitol Commission records, ser. 833.

25 These findings are based on the decorating schedule and the paint probes made in the 1990s.

26 Mack, Jenney & Tyler, Decorators, "Partial List of Buildings We Are Now Working On or Have Completed," private collection.
27 "New Cox Murals," 1, 5.
28 "Thousands Who Walk Thru Capitol Daily Think but Little of Care Artists Take in Decoration Work," Wisconsin State Journal, 10 March 1916, no page number.
29 Porter to Mack, Jenney and Tyler, 7 September 1915, folder 1, box 17, and Mack to Porter, 17 September 1915 and 10 May 1916, both in folder 5, box 16, Capitol Commission records, ser. 833.
30 "New Cox Murals," 1, 5; Wisconsin Blue Book 1913, 671; Wisconsin Blue Book 1915, 521; "The Painters’ Strike," New York Times, 10 September 1920, 12; Madison City Directories, 1911, 1914, 1916, for Caesar, Emmis, Johnson, Larson and Moll entries; financial ledger for 1911-12-13, and day book for 1914-15-16-17, records of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America, Local 801, M85-226, Archives Division, Wisconsin Historical Society; conversation with Pat (Mrs. William) Byrne, 30 April 2003; biographical information about Rohrbeck from www.wabmuseum.com/artists/rohrbeck.htm. Between July 1915 and June 1916, Minkley received a separate $10 stipend for “painting, senate chamber,” as detailed in Wisconsin, Secretary of State, Biennial Report, 1915 and 1916, 410. The union’s records report monthly dues payments and show an increase in the number of members during the period the Capitol was being painted, suggesting that more painters than those named in the newspaper article worked on the Capitol.
31 Photographs in EverGreene Painting Studios, "Wisconsin State Capitol—West Wing," B.20.05, Capitol Archives; Madison City Directories, 1911, 1914, 1916, 1919, 1923, 1933, 1935; "Byrne, Judge William D.,” Capitol Times, 3 October 1997, 6C (an obituary of the son of John F. Byrne); day book, 1914-15-16-17, records of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America, Local 891; conversation with Pat Byrne, 30 April 2003, including supply information from John P. Byrne, her brother-in-law. Ms. Byrne knew Wilbert and Jenny Callahan as well as her parents-in-law, and does not recall any family story about the Easter 1916 visit. She supplied the details about her father-in-law’s career and the career of his brother Tom, who did not remain in Madison but continued to work for Mack, Jenney and Tyler.
32 Photographs in EverGreene Painting Studios, "Wisconsin State Capitol—West Wing," B.20.05, Capitol Archives; EverGreene Painting Studios, daily log for West Wing Renovation and Restoration, entry for 19 September 1994 and Constance S. Silver and Richard Wolbers for Garland Guild, Inc., "Wisconsin State Capitol: Analysis of Mural Paintings and Architectural Finished [sic] of the South Wing and Southeast and Southwest Pavilions, Volume I" (20 February 1996), 14, both in Capitol Management office files; Madison City Directories, 1935, 1941, 1943; Time Book, 1935-37, file drawer four, Capitol Archives. The compilers of the EverGreene daily log assumed all the signers were painters; however, only the men’s names appear in the brotherhood’s records, and only one woman’s name appears in them—not Jennie Spencer or Estella Callahan. Painters for WPA Project 833 from October 1935 through December 1937 included Walter J. Blankenheim, Ludwig Buchholz, Addison Briggs, Dan Sullivan and Byron Coleman.
34 Wisconsin, Department of Administration, "Restoring the Glory: Paint Probe Survey Documentation, Wisconsin State Capitol, Central Portion—Restoration and Rehabilitation, Project No. 97646," comp. Rita Jeanne Serpe [and Mike Bath], E.15.20, Capitol Archives.
35 John O. Holzhueter, "Wisconsin’s Flag," Wisconsin Magazine of History 63 (Winter 1979-80), 91-121. The faces of the yeoman (realized as a miner) and sailor in the coat of arms doubltess were painted from photographs of individuals or from models. The yeoman’s face somewhat resembles Lew F. Porter’s, leading to a speculation that the artists drew upon Porter and James Gormley, the supervisor for Post and Sons, for the depictions.
37 It is not known who made the decisions about what names to exclude from among the county seats.
39 Ibid., 1-6, leaves for rooms 128/130 and 136/137.
40 Ibid., 1-6, leaves for rooms 105-15.
49 This discussion derives from the schedule submitted by Mack, Jenney and Tyler; the Post & Sons floor plan assignment drawings, 518-3100 through 3105, and the reports on decorative finish surveys and probes cited above.
51 Wisconsin, Department of Administration, Division of State Facilities Management in consultation with Shinji Yamamoto, State Capitol Restoration Guidelines (Madison, 1980), 15.
52 Stanley H. Cravens to Neal Steinhoff et al., 28 January 1982, and Rita Zachman, State Capitol Building, "Inventory of Patterns and Stencils" (Madison, 1982), B.11.13; conversations with Mike Bath.

DSFM and Yamamoto, Restoration Guidelines, 1, 15; Wisconsin, Legislature, Joint Committee on Legislative Organization, Capitol Master Plan (Madison, 1987), 1, 24-25.

See the contents of “Survey Decorative Finish, 1987” folder, box 1, Assembly Chamber Papers, Capitol Archives; Wisconsin, Division of Facilities Development, Historic Structure Report, Book III . West Wing and Northwest Pavilion, 6-16.

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Conversation with Charles Quagliana, 15 November 2001.

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Most of the relevant appearances in box B.11.10, ibid. See especially Charlie Quagliana to Dan Stephens and Art Chadek, 4 May 1993, Anton Rajer, Analyses of Architectural Decorative Finishes... West Wing, September 1993, and Mike Bath to Charles Quagliana, 23 November 1993. An illustrated copy of Rajer’s “Analyses” appears in B.11.09. Anton Rajer, Analysis of Interior Decorative Finishes in the Wisconsin State Capitol West Wing (Madison, 1994), B.11.11. While Rajer was conducting the investigations and writing the reports he simultaneously was involved in a whistle-blowing attempt to curtail extensive renovation of the private spaces in the wing, as opposed to the restorations of the public areas. See “Capitol restoration called a ‘plunder,’” Racine Journal Times, 10 September 1993, in B.11.09. Also see a correspondence file with Rajer from June 1992 through January 1994 in Capitol Maintenance and Restoration Papers, box 6, Capitol Archives. The conservators’ report is EverGreene Painting Studies “Addendum to Analysis of Interior Decorative Finishes,” 25 June 1995, in B.11.10a, ibid.


See reports by Constance S. Silver and Rebecca Garland, plus a daily log by Garland, in B.11.12, ibid.


Wisconsin, Department of Administration, Division of Facilities Development, “South Wing Reconnaissance Survey Probes” (Madison, 1994), E.1.15, ibid.

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See Wisconsin, Department of Administration, “South Wing, Southeast & Southwest Pavilions Probe Survey Project, Project No. 91926.8, Summer/Fall 1995” and numerous memoranda in E.1.14, Capitol Archives.


The reports appear in Department of Administration files with partial copies in the HSR files, ibid. The two have identical titles that do not completely reflect their content: Wisconsin State Capitol—South Wing Project: Report of Examination and Conservation Treatment of Decorative Ceilings.


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Charles Quagliana to file, 1 November 1997; McChesney, daily log entries for 12 and 20 November 1997; McChesney, correspondence memorandum, 19 November 1997, all album 3, ibid.
McChesney, daily log entry for 19 December 1997, album 3; McChesney, daily log entries for 5 and 27 January 1998, and Charles Quagliana to SCERB, 28 January 1998, all album 4; McChesney, daily log entries for 17 and 29 February 1998, both album 5; McChesney, daily log entry for 3 March 1998, album 6; McChesney, daily log entry for 24 April 1998, album 7; McChesney, daily log entry for 11 May 1998, album 8; McChesney, daily log entry for 11 June 1998, album 9, all ibid.

Documentation for the scagliola repairs can be found in the Central Portion albums (Capitol Archives) 5, 6 and 7, especially: project meeting minutes for 8 and 25 February, 17 March and 1 April 1998; Carol McChesney daily log entries for 10 and 20 February, and 12, 17, 23, 25 and 31 March 1998; Maura Donnelly to Gretchen Pfafchert, memorandum, 2 February 1998; J.P. Cullen & Sons, Inc. pre-installation meeting minutes, 9 February 1998; and Pfafchert to Design team, 24 and 31 March 1998.


Wisconsin, Department of Administration, Historic Structure Report, Book VI, 7-22 and 23.

Ibid., 7-23.