

## THE OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

SUMMER

1993

### DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

Summer is our busiest season, full of intellectual ferment. This summer, our interns are burrowing into a stack of projects which needs to be done for the Smithsonian's two oldest buildings--the "Castle" and the Arts and Industries Building. Two of the projects grew out of our need to provide a visual handbook on these two buildings. By indicating through a series of floor plans the changes over time revealed through research, we hope to develop a document which will show architects and space and program planners which parts of the buildings are historically significant.

The vital aspect of the historic plans project closest to our mission as the Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation is the emphasis on providing sources. Each plan is keyed to a source list which leads the inquirer to the document that refers to the architectural change. In other words, the drawing has footnotes assuring that future users will readily utilize the visual infor-

mation without the ongoing guidance of this office. As many times as we have studied the architectural history of the Arts and Industries building, many unresolved questions remain. For the third intern project, we chose to examine the unanswered questions about Adolf Cluss, the architect of the building. As a result, long standing riddles were untangled: What truth is there in the rumor that Cluss was a communist? (a lot); where did he receive his architectural training (Berlin); what design philosophy influenced his approach (the German masters who followed Schinkel and Semper). We have also identified certain drawings by relating their subject matter to references in a Cluss letter describing a project that would have turned the structure into an enclosed quadrangle.

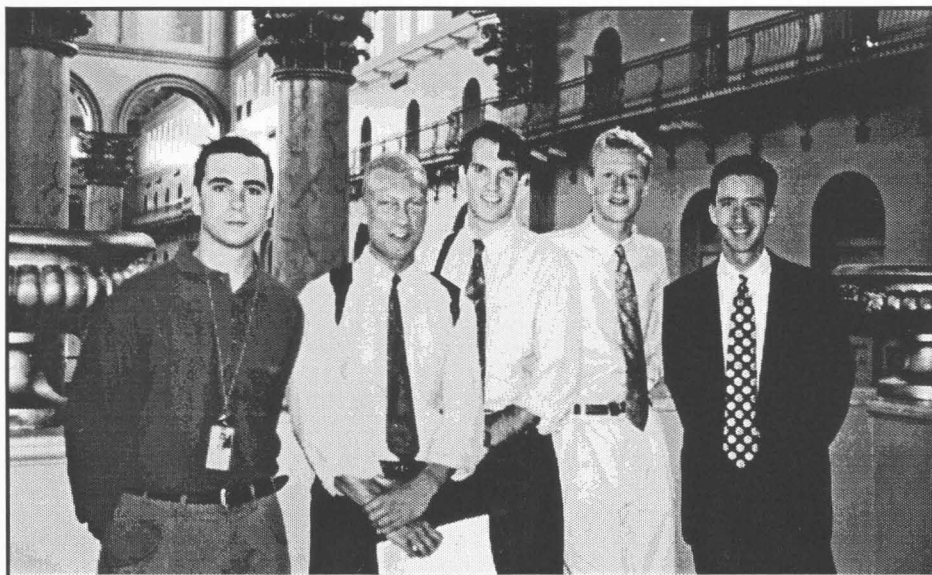
Our fourth intern has undertaken a most unorthodox summer project: recording the capitals of the columns of the Smithsonian Building. To inventory the intricate carving of certain capitals we, have chosen a traditional method used by archaeologists and medical illustrators: the soft pencil drawing. Such renderings, in a form highly developed in the 18th

and 19th centuries, enable us to distinguish detail and perspective lost in a photograph. These drawings, with an artistic quality of their own, can be used by craftsmen to transfer the designs to other media, such as metal, plaster or paper. The product of this project, therefore, serves a threefold function: as a catalogue of architectural detail, as the work of a creative artist, and as a model for product development.

The products of our "busiest season" will be, we hope, of lasting value to the Smithsonian as steward of these landmark buildings.

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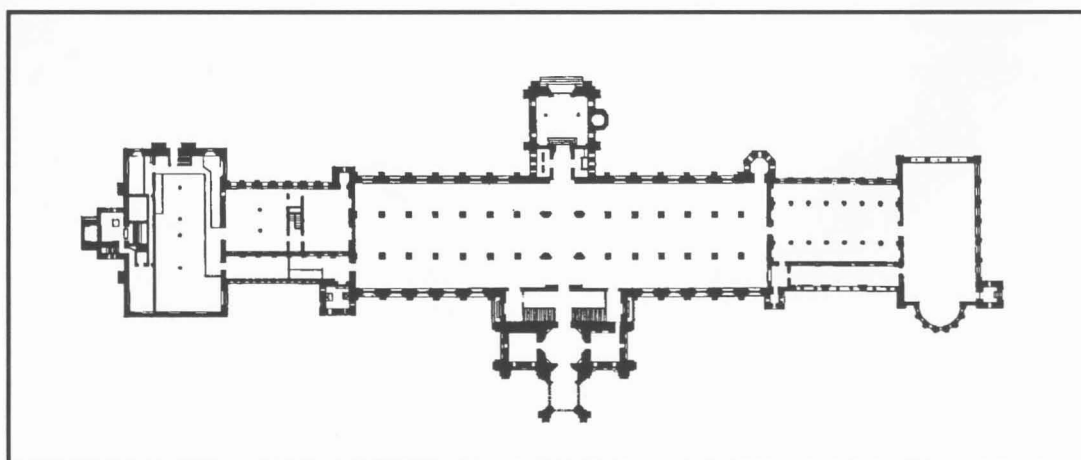
## PHOTO - OP

- » WHO: (l.-r.) David Ferraro, Robert J. Orr, Tim Gordon, Matthew Cloud, Denis McManara.
- » WHAT: OAHP summer interns with OAHP intern co-ordinator, Robert J. Orr.
- » WHERE: The National Building Museum.
- » WHEN: August 13, 1993.
- » WHY: This issue of Smithsonian Preservation Quarterly was written by the OAHP summer interns.

## DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Despite the numerous articles and publications explicating the rich history of the Castle, the precise evolution of its structure and usage is little known. This summer, OAHP has mounted a project to recreate a coherent pictorial version of the building's history in a set of detailed plans depicting the evolution of the structure, from its conception in the 1840s to its present state. The plans also include color

overlays, revealing the related usage changes, many previously known only through obscure written accounts.



First Floor Plan, SI Bldg. ca.1855, drawn by Tim Gordon.

The Castle has been remodeled so many times that a clear picture of its evolution no longer exists. Often walls were constructed or torn down without good documentation. The destruction of the original Renwick plans and drawings in the great fire of 1865 (caused when workmen in the art gallery attached a stove pipe to the wrong wall opening, sending sparks and ash up into the attic) has further exacerbated the confusion of the visual record.

The process of rediscovery began with the search for a useable base plan in the Smithsonian Archives, but, because of the fire, the earliest plan dated only to the 1860's. An original plan "as-built" had to be reconstructed through the correlation of the existing plans and the early documentation in the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Disagreements in the philosophical foundation of the institution seem largely responsible for the early structural changes. Many leaders of the institution held opposing views, exemplified by Robert Dale Owen, a regent who wanted to mold the Smithsonian into a teaching center, and Joseph

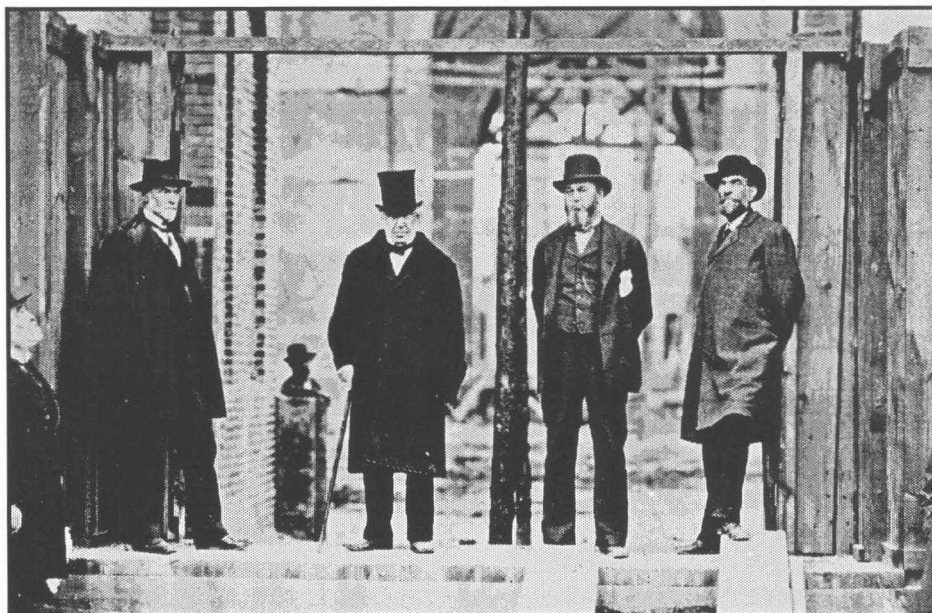
Henry, the first Secretary of the Smithsonian, who wanted to form an institution focused on research. Their personal agendas caused a "tug-of-war" in the construction and renovation of the building. Prior to the completion of the building, the East Wing first housed the entire workings of the institution, then supported a variety of uses including a lecture hall, laboratories, office of the Exchanges, living space and administrative facilities. Large sections of the interior of the building were completely gutted and rebuilt, adding new walls and inserting extra floors. The most sweeping of these changes occurred during the fire-proofing renovation done by Adolph Cluss, designer of the Arts and Industries building.

The difficulty in correlating plans and documents has prohibited a complete attribution of the function of every space. These historical grey areas, for now, must remain blank spaces in the project's displayed evolution -- mysteries some future researcher may solve. In the meantime, completion of the project will greatly facilitate future preservation work in the Castle, providing a user friendly visual source of structural background.

TG

## ARTS & MARX

As both the architect of the Arts and Industries Building and a close acquaintance of Karl Marx, Adolf Cluss has provided historians of both architecture and communism fruitful study. Yet since



Adolf Cluss (right) in portal of A&I during construction.

Cluss had all but given up political activism by the time his architectural career prospered, and had produced little architecture while actively working for Marx, the scholarship in each field rarely overlapped - until now.

The interest surrounding the Art and Industries Building's potential future conversion to the National African-American Museum has lead to an intense study of Adolf Cluss' life and career. After a 1984 "New York Times" article suggested a link between Cluss and Marx, the resulting research revealed Cluss' role as one of Marx's most valued comrades in the United States. As Friedrich Engels wrote to Marx in 1853, Cluss was "by far the most useful of them all."

Having met Karl Marx in Brussels, Cluss became active in the communist league. After participating in the democratic revolutions in Germany in 1848, he came to the United States, settling in Washington in March of 1849.

While working for the federal government as a surveyor and architect, Cluss published Marx's writings, wrote for German-American communist newspapers and provided Marx with crucial information about the communist movement in the United States.

By the mid-1850s, however, Cluss' revolutionary fervor began to dwindle, and his architectural career soared. He soon received commissions for schools, churches and municipal buildings throughout the city, and by 1881 could claim the Arts and Industries Building on his architectural resume. In an era known for its political corruption, Arts and Industries was completed on schedule and within its allocated budget, strengthening Cluss' reputation for integrity and efficiency.

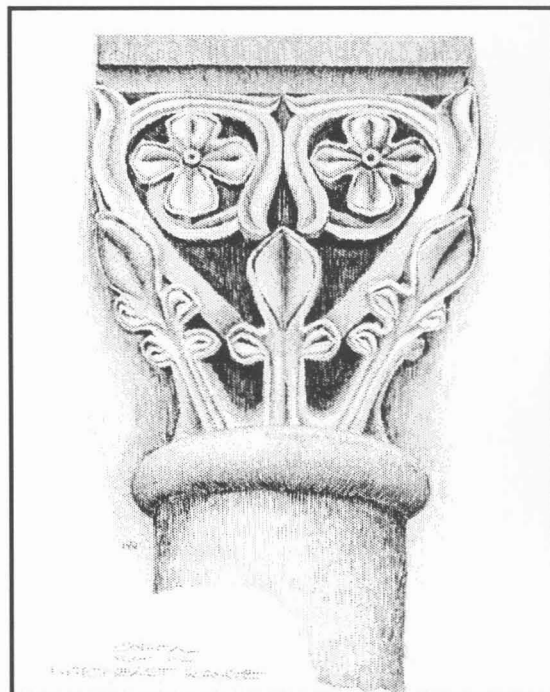
In one sense, Cluss' political activism seems appropriate to the Arts and Industries Building's future use: almost all of the communist organizations of Cluss' day professed abolition of slavery.



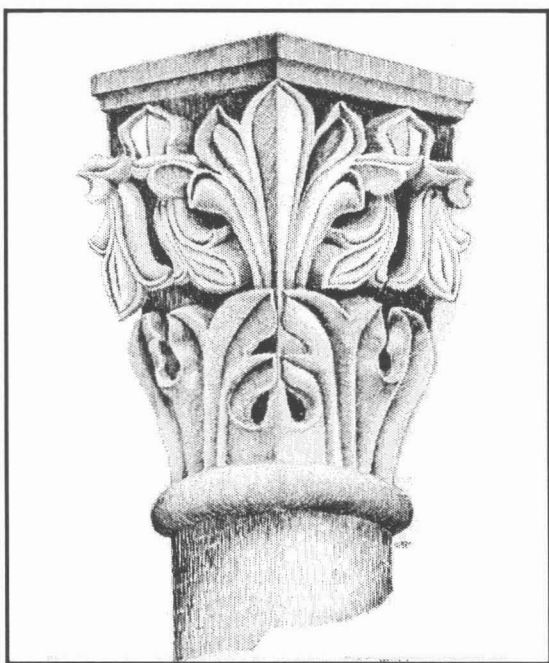
Since Cluss' Old Masonic Temple eventually housed African-American Freemasons, his Sumner school provided for African-American schoolchildren, and his St. Paul's Church (now St. Augustine's) houses one of Washington's African-American congregations, it seems only fitting that the museum designed by Adolf Cluss should safeguard the records and artifacts of African-Americans for future generations.

DM

tle, an image of the building leapt into my mind: but, the stone capitals? Throughout the project I found that I wasn't alone in my uncertainty about the "stone capitals." It seems that while the colorful history and peculiar aesthetics of the building are topics of much discussion, the capitals are easily, and quite often, overlooked. The capitals are found on the exterior of the building, ranging from intricate sculpture to simple, sensitive carving. Some of the capitals (particularly on the northeast range) seem to be obliquely derived from the Gothic ornamentation of Pugin, an early 19th century architectural theorist; never directly imitating his designs, but more often combining or elaborating on particular motifs. These capitals are extensively carved, appear more frequently on the building and seem to be the work of an experienced hand. Other capitals (specifically on the southwest range) appear to be products of an individual



Stone capital, NE Range, SI Bldg., drawn by David Ferraro.



Stone capital, NE Range, SI Bldg., drawn by David Ferraro.

## THE CASTLE'S CAPITALS

Of the infinite number of things to see at the Smithsonian Institution, The Castle is undoubtedly one of the most memorable. I say this from experience: when OAHP presented me with the opportunity to document the stone capitals on the exterior of The Cas-

craftsman's vision, as opposed to a widely followed design scheme. These capitals seldom recur, and generally have a more "naive" quality. The execution of the capitals has remained somewhat of a mystery. After considerable research, we still are questioning who did the carving, under what guidelines and, most puzzling of all, by what plan, if any, were they positioned on the building? During the past few weeks, I have researched, made drawings and photographed virtually all of the capi-

A small exhibition of engravings of Gothic details by Augustus Charles Pugin (1768-1832) together with examples of Gothic design furniture can be seen in the third floor hall of the East Range of the Castle. "Specimens of Gothic Architecture," published between the years 1821-1823, was Pugin's first book on the subject and established his reputation as a specialist in Gothic architecture. As a remarkable artist of architectural subjects, Pugin greatly influenced the adoption of the Gothic style by other architects of the nineteenth century, both in England and the United States. The Smithsonian Building, while predominately Romanesque in design, has many Gothic details incorporated into its design. The exhibit, titled "Gothic Influences on American Furniture of the Nineteenth Century," attempts to illustrate Pugin's influence, not only on architecture of the nineteenth century, but on furniture design as well.

tals. They are truly extraordinary; on your next visit to The Castle, I invite you to stroll around the building and seek out the capitals.

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## PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

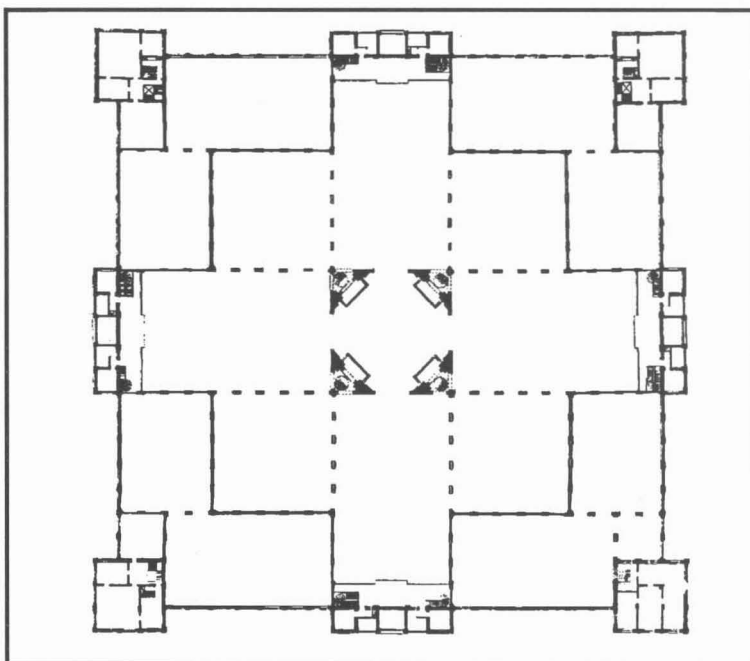
The Arts & Industries Building, as we know it today, is a strange mixture of public and private space. The halls running north-south and east-west, which house the building's collections, are the only remaining public areas of a building intended to be almost entirely devoted to public exhibition. Few people today realize that what now consists of two story office space was, when built in 1881, open courts and ranges, designed for exhibition use and lit by direct sunlight from the clerestory windows above. Like nearly all buildings, however, time and evolving needs brought great change to the A&I. No longer can the museum's visitors walk from hall to range to court. Today, their path is restricted to the main halls, as the ranges and courts have been filled in with hundreds of offices. Most of the clerestory windows, which provided the light that filled the enormous courts and ranges, have been rendered all but useless as they are now blocked off for office space.

The construction and renovation of the A&I falls into three basic time periods, each represented by one set of floorplans. The first set presents the original layout of the building as it was

completed in 1881. At this time, second and third floors only existed in the pavilions, located in the corners, and in the towers at each of the four entrances.

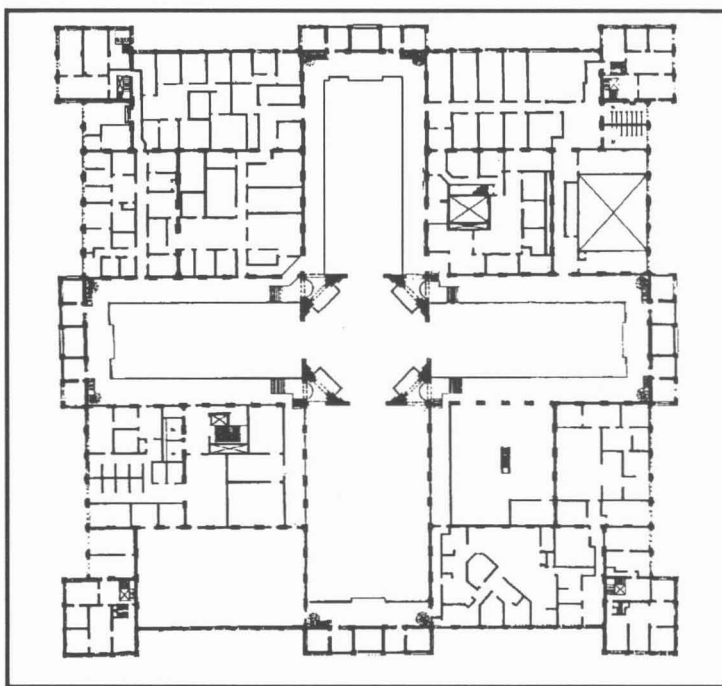
The second time period significant to the history of the building occurred around the turn of the century. At that time, the Washington architectural firm of Hornblower & Marshall installed second story galleries around the main halls

(still in place today), and around most of the courts and ranges throughout the rest of the building. In addition, Hornblower & Marshall made numerous other alterations, including the renovations of the entrances. In fact, the south and east entrances were blocked off and converted



Second Floor Plan, A&I, ca. 1881, drawn by Matt Cloud

into offices. The third major period of change was 1976, the bicentennial of the United States. By this time, various offices had been installed throughout the building as the needs of the Smithsonian grew.



Second Floor Plan A&I, ca. 1977, drawn by Matt Cloud.

With the opening of the Air & Space Museum, the role of the A&I was changing. The building was partially restored to provide an exhibit based on the museum as it would have appeared in the late 19th century. In addition, the offices which filled the first and second floors were constructed to accommodate the growing Institution's needs.

Since the last major renovation, when the halls were restored to nearly their original state, the fountain repaired, the 1876 exhibit

installed, the offices built, the A&I has seen nearly two more decades pass. With the future plans of the building still up in the air, the need for an understanding of the original fabric becomes essential. If this understanding is achieved, then perhaps the historic fabric of this impressive building can be restored, before any future renovations change the interior so drastically that it becomes unrecognizable.

MC

OAHP wishes to thank Rebecca Higbee of the Office of Public Affairs and Stuart Furman of the Office of the Director, Facilities Services, for serving as copy editors for this issue of the Smithsonian Preservation Quarterly.

**Notice**

Movement or breakage of any "Castle" collection objects should be reported at the earliest convenience to the OAHP Preservation Studio. E-Mail may be addressed to AHHPEM01, or phone messages may be left at 357-1409.

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