

THE OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

FALL

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DIRECTOR'S COLUMN: A NEW BEGINNING

OAHP looks forward to a new beginning with our imminent move into newly renovated office space in the southeast pavilion of the Arts and Industries Building, formerly the Credit Union area. For us this is a chance to order our procedures and initiate new projects. For you it means better access to data on the architectural history of the buildings, a comfortable place to meet with us to solve problems, and a location for regular meetings with representatives of the preservation review bodies. It seems that everyone will gain from this move.

Congratulations are extended to members of the staff who have spent the last year in extraordinarily cramped circumstances. Some of our staff members had to sit out on the balcony of the Arts and Industries Building in a cubicle laughingly known as "The

Annex." Laughing was an important survival skill under the circumstances. We developed other important skills such as blocking out the conversations of others in close proximity and holding very small meetings because we had room for only two chairs. Patience and a spirit of cooperation, developed out of a sort of "bunker mentality," became part of our office decorum.

We have a lot of thank you's to deliver. We are especially grateful to the Development Office who allowed us the indefinite use of their modular furniture to create The Annex. Thank you also to the Communications Management Office of OIRM who set up our telephone system and loaned us their conference space for countless meetings. We appreciated the patience of architects and engineers from the Office of Design and Construction who met with us standing up or perched on a step stool. Thanks also to all the members of the Office of Facilities

Services who ran down to our space with messages, faxes, and information. Building Management (South Group) moved us in and improved the quality of life despite the cramped space by keeping after the insect population and sweeping the carpets. The Office of Design and Construction staff members supervising our new space have been both super efficient as well as patient with our need for information.

We invite you to visit our new offices to use our facilities and research materials and to work with us with renewed spirit.

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SI PRESERVATION NEWS TO CHANGE NAME

- Commencing with the winter issue, the title of this publication will be changed to *Smithsonian Preservation Quarterly*.

FIRST BUILDING AT THE ZOO

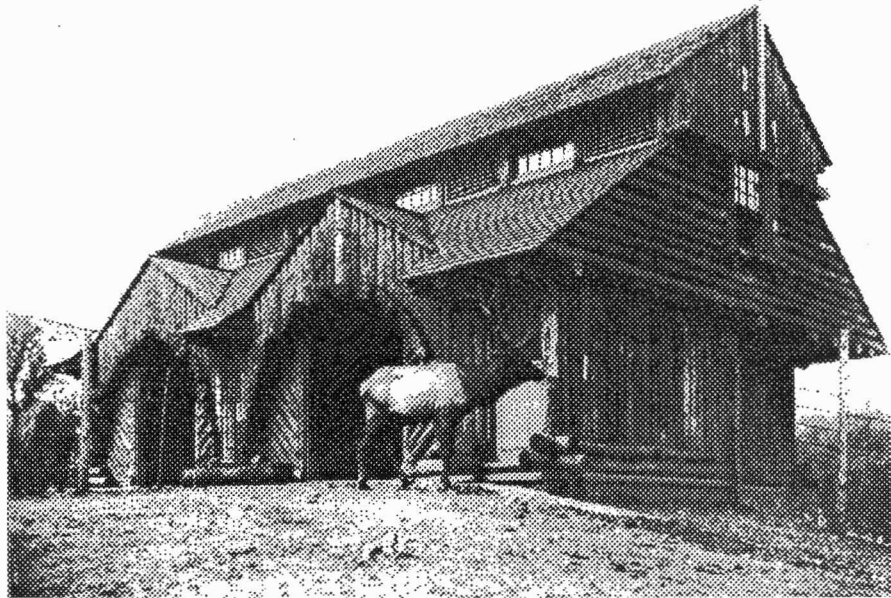
The Buffalo Barn

The Buffalo Barn, constructed in early autumn of 1890, housed both bison and elk, some of the earliest occupants of the National Zoological Park.

The barn was built by William Ralph Emerson, a popular residential architect in Boston at the turn of the century who was renowned for his innovative use of local materials. By creating a facade of logs with their bark left on, Emerson provided in the Buffalo Barn an architectural interpretation of the natural environment of the mid-Atlantic forest region.

The building was appropriate to the rustic and picturesque development of Rock Creek Park that the Smithsonian was effecting in the early years of the Zoo. The Institution hoped to create a "city of refuge" primarily for North American animals, which were threatened with extinction as westward expansion destroyed their native habitats. The National Zoological Park was originally intended to be an enormous 166-acre open reservation where animals like the buffalo could "breed and replenish their dying race" in their natural setting.

The building also served to inform the visitor about the



The Buffalo Barn at the National Zoo, ca.1895.

animals in other ways. Much of the architecture built in European and American zoological gardens during the late nineteenth century was designed in a style known as "Associationism." It was believed that one could further enhance a person's visit to the zoo by associating the animal with preconceived notions of the animal's country of origin. Exotic architectural styles and sculptural ornamentation were seen as contributing to the visitor's understanding of the animal. For example, housing a llama in a shed shaped like a pagoda encouraged the viewer to envision the exotic lands from which the animal had been brought. The Buffalo Barn, housing only North American animals, evoked the human habitations of the Wild West; it was a glorified log cabin, a quintessentially American symbol.

Emerson's first building

for the zoo, this buffalo barn, was then both a reflection of the natural environment, with its rustic appearance and its use of logs with the bark still on, and a symbolic home for these North American animals, conjuring up for the visitor images of the frontier and the home of the buffalo.

HE

IN MEMORIAM

This issue of the newsletter
is dedicated to the memory of

Robert B. Burke, Jr.

MASTER STONE CARVER CONSTANTINE SEFERLIS

For the past year parts of the Smithsonian Institution Building have been swathed in a dual-purpose scaffolding. Originally erected for the window repair and restoration project, it is also being used as a platform for workmen repointing the Seneca sandstone facade.



Constantine Seferlis at work.

The repointing of the facade is being supervised by a long-time friend of the Smithsonian, master stonecarver Constantine Seferlis. Mr. Seferlis first came to the Institution in 1980 when he was asked to repair and restore the statue of St. Dunstan, a gift from Westminster Abbey (see *TORCH*, September 1991). Since then, Mr. Seferlis has repaired and replaced broken finials of the Smithsonian

Building, carved the Renwick Gates at the entrance to the Enid A. Haupt Garden, and created the fanlight window above the south tower door of the Smithsonian Building. Over the years he has also stockpiled Seneca sandstone and compatible stone for future repairs from the original Seneca quarry in Poolesville, Maryland, and from the demolished District of Columbia Jail.

As a small boy in Sparta, Greece, Mr. Seferlis copied drawings from his books and kept a pocketknife handy for carving. Small wood pipes led to a 32-piece chess set carved by Mr. Seferlis at age twelve. Mr. Seferlis realized that he wanted to be an artist when he turned sixteen. "I carved a whole violin. Seeing this boosted my spirits that I could be an artist. This violin encouraged me to follow art," said Mr. Seferlis.

Shortly after carving the violin, Mr. Seferlis entered the Academy of Fine Arts in Athens to master the technique of stonecarving. Upon graduation from the Academy, Mr. Seferlis worked with the sculptor of the Royal Palace in Athens to design and erect war memorials around Greece. In 1957, he decided to continue his studies of stone in the United States and applied for a student visa to study at New York's Art Student League.

In New York, Mr. Seferlis met the President of the National Sculpture Society who

mentioned that construction was underway at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Realizing that there would be a need for stonecarvers for this project, Mr. Seferlis moved to Washington in 1958 and completed his work on the Shrine in 1959.

During 1959-60, Mr. Seferlis furthered his studies at the Corcoran School of Art at night. During the day, he worked on the restoration of the east front of the U.S. Capitol, carving detailed Corinthian column capitals.

In the spring of 1960 Mr. Seferlis was hired by the Washington Cathedral as a member of the stonecarving team. He worked at the Cathedral for over 18 years where he carved many of the decorative gargoyles and column capitals. Along with his Cathedral colleagues, Mr. Seferlis is prominently featured in the Academy Award-winning documentary film *THE STONECARVERS*.

In 1978, Mr. Seferlis went free-lance. His projects included the restoration of the commemorative stones at the Washington Monument and the Dupont Circle Fountain. Frederick Hart, sculptor of *THE CREATION* tympanum on the west facade of the Cathedral, introduced him to James Goode, then Keeper of the Smithsonian Building. Mr. Goode was looking for a stonecarver to restore the statue of St. Dunstan which had arrived in pieces from

Westminster Abbey. After inspecting the crumbling statue, Mr. Seferlis accepted the restoration challenge. The St. Dunstan project marked the beginning of a relationship with the Smithsonian which continues to this day as Mr. Seferlis accepts new challenges as sculptural consultant to the Office of Design and Construction.

AB

SECRÉTAIRE À ABATTANT

(Secretary Desk)

- SI.71.8
- BOSTON ca. 1820
- STRUCTURE: Flame grain mahogany over pine and yellow poplar secondary woods.
- HARDWARE: Brass, mercury gilded Doric capitals and column bases.
- DIMENSIONS: H.56 1/2" X W.38 1/4" X D.19".

The "secrétaire à abat-tant," a tall narrow fall front writing cabinet with bureau drawers, was introduced in the seventeenth century. This form of desk was adapted often from French designs by American cabinet makers during the Late Classical period, 1820-1850. Although considered part of the Empire Style 1815-1840, Late Classical style furniture is more restrained and somewhat severe in design, having very little of the exuberant carving present on the earlier designs of the period.

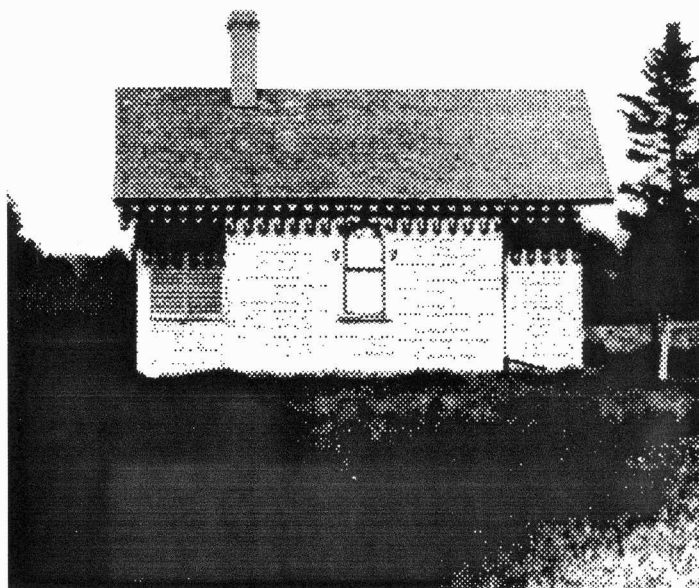


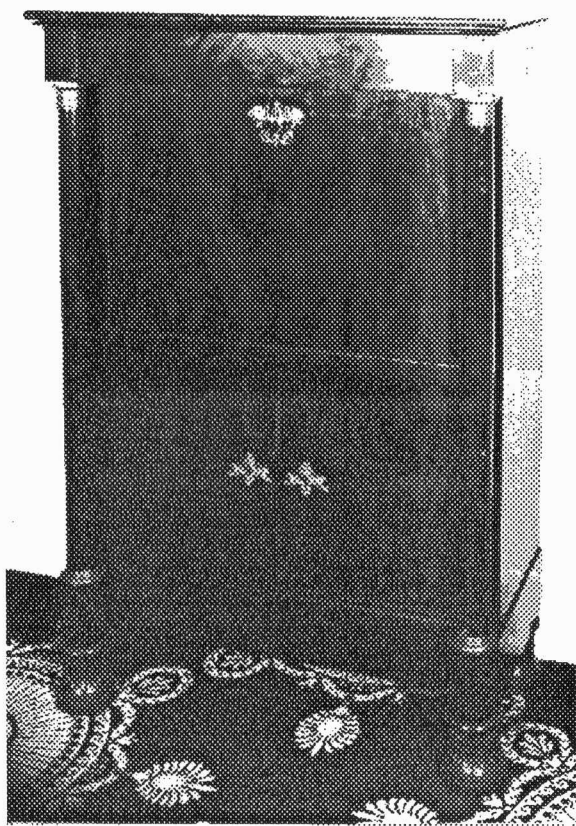
PHOTO - OP

OPPS NEGATIVE # 72-8167

- WHAT: Magnetic Observatory
- WHERE: The South Yard of the Smithsonian Building, where the Arts and Industries Building is today.
- WHEN: Ca. early 1863, during the completion of the dome of the Capitol building.
- WHY: The Magnetic Observatory was built in 1853 to provide the Smithsonian with a place to measure the variations and intensity of the earth's magnetic force. The picturesque woodframe building was "so finished as to correspond to some extent with the architecture of the Smithsonian building..." (Annual Report of 1853, p. 69). In particular the shed's two windows are reminiscent of the Renwick windows in the "Castle," with their round arches, foliated corbels, and double hung diamond pane glass. The Observatory, jointly established by the Smithsonian and the U.S. Coast Survey, remained in operation until 1860, when the instruments were transferred to a Coast Survey station at Fort Taylor on Key West, Florida.

The "Castle" Collection's secrétaire à abattant, in use in the Secretary's Meeting

Room on the second floor of the Smithsonian Building, was made by Isaac Vose and Son, ca. 1819-1825. Bearing a sten-



Secretary Desk made by Isaac Vose & Son, ca. 1819-1825.

ciled label of the firm, this desk is one of very few examples known today of labeled Boston furniture from the period. Isaac Vose belonged to a family of premiere Boston area cabinet makers who produced fine furniture to suit the tastes of the city's wealthy merchant families. The design of this piece was influenced by the French Restauration Style, adaptations of which were very popular in the United States during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

The massing, or over-all shape, is architectural, with two full round Doric columns supporting a cornice. The piece is restrained, relying on

this architectural massing and the artful use of book-matched veneers to provide detail and style. The severity of this form is relieved by the use of brass mounts thought to have come from France, source of the best castings at that time. The only carved details on this piece can be found on the four simple drum-shaped feet which are encircled with wreaths of carved leaves. These few carved and cast details contrast with the relatively unadorned flat surfaces, lending it a reserved, dig-

nified appearance. This desk is a testimony to the high quality of design and craftsmanship which has always been associated with the furniture of Isaac Vose and Son. RS

RESTORATION OF JAMES RENWICK'S REGENTS' CHAIRS

Over the next few weeks, the Regents' Room will undergo the removal of paint from the interior stone columns of the oriel window on the South side of the room and newly fabri-

cated shutters will be added. During this time OAHP Restoration Specialist Peter Muldoon will take the opportunity to begin the restoration and repair of James Renwick's Regents' Chairs. As in any conservation project, the focus of OAHP is two-fold, seeking to strike a balance between an artifact in use and an artifact as a cultural document. The Renwick Chairs are some of the most important pieces in the OAHP "Castle" Collection, as they were designed by James Renwick, the architect of the building for the very room which they now occupy. The "Castle" Collection consists of about 3,000 furnishings, many of which are in active use throughout the Smithsonian Institution Building. Begun in 1964, the collection serves to create the ambience of distinct periods of the nineteenth century. OAHP believes that enhancing the interior of the Smithsonian Building with appropriate furnishings is a means of imparting knowledge about the Institution's nineteenth century origins.

PLM

- » OAHP thanks Stuart Furman of the Office of the Director, Facilities Services for serving as grammarian and final proof-reader for the S.I. Preservation News.

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