

The Computer Graphic Capitol

www.cgcapitol.org

RECREATIONS OF LOST MASTERPIECES BY BENJAMIN LATROBE IN THE CAPITOL: THE HALL OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROJECT PRÉCIS

By 1800, the United States Capitol was the largest and most ambitious building program on the continent. Begun in 1793 with the laying of the cornerstone by George Washington, the Capitol was a vessel for many ideas and ideals in the minds of its creators.

It would be a new building form, containing a bicameral legislature that would test a new form of constitutional government. It also would be a modern, world class building and a didactic architectural model for the young nation.

As James Sterling Young wrote in "The Washington Community," the United States holds a unique place in history in that the idea of its political system and the representation of its political system, its architecture, emerged simultaneously.



Jefferson inspects the roof, c.1806

My investigation of the Capitol began in 2001, when I was in Paris for the Gabriel Prize. There I examined and drew buildings that Thomas Jefferson admired during his tenure as Minister to France, as well as other examples of 18th c. architecture. Following these threads, I discovered the story of Jefferson and his Architect of the Capitol, Benjamin Henry Latrobe during the first building campaign, 1803-1814. On its surface, the Capitol was a monumental, neoclassical building evoking ancient Greece and Rome, but to its creators it also represented the leading edge of European design and technology.

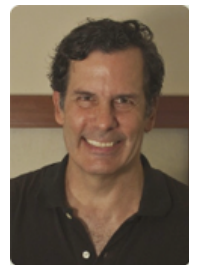
My first subject for forensic recreation was the Hall of Representatives, a Latrobe masterpiece and a chamber that Jefferson suggested might be one of the hand-somest rooms in the world. Was it? No topographical image exists; and no single document can synthesize the known facts about the room. I was drawn to this enigma. The fact that the Capitol's early masterpieces were lost to the fog of time was too much of a mystery to be left unexamined. I recreated the chamber as a digital experience based on the handful of design drawings at the Library of Congress, some existing building fabric and hundreds of letters between principals. My architectural history of the Capitol is a synthesis of hundreds of pieces of information into a coherent, determinate, and visual whole.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Richard Chenoweth is an award-winning architect, designer, classical artist, and digital artist. His initial research on the capitol was funded by two fellowships from the U.S. Capitol Historical Society.

Richard has designed his own public works project in Washington, the Metro Canopy Program for WMATA. He and his partner in the project built twenty-eight of the steel and glass canopies throughout the DC region between 2002 and 2007.

He studied art and engineering at Vanderbilt University and architecture at the University of Virginia.



Richard continues to study art and always is incorporating new techniques into his independent scholarship and professional work, learning and teaching digital painting, sculpture, stone carving, digital techniques, photography, and video production.

contact: rc@cgcapitol.org