

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE OLD SENATE CHAMBER



A Front View of the State-House &c. at ANNAPOLIS the Capital of MARYLAND.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
PREPARED FOR THE
MARYLAND STATE HOUSE TRUST
BY
THE OLD SENATE CHAMBER ARCHITECTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
January 14, 2010

**REPORT TO THE MARYLAND STATE HOUSE TRUST
on the
OLD SENATE CHAMBER**

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Submitted by the

OLD SENATE CHAMBER ARCHITECTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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RECOMMENDATION

The Old Senate Chamber Architectural Advisory Committee believes that a credible replication of the 18th-century appearance of the chamber is achievable. The Advisory Committee thus recommends that the Maryland State House Trust give positive consideration to pursuing a state-of-the-art restoration of this historic space.

The background and justification for this recommendation are stated below.

THE ISSUE

The Old Senate Chamber in the Maryland State House ranks among our nation's most hallowed and historic spaces. Its walls have witnessed events that have shaped America. The State of Maryland has assumed a special stewardship responsibility for preserving this room and ensuring that the meaning of what took place here is understood and appreciated by the hundreds of thousands of visitors to this National Historic Landmark. The essentials of its role in history are stated here in order to justify informed treatment and exhibition of the chamber.

National Significance of the Old Senate Chamber

The Old Senate Chamber achieved its primary significance in the first decades of its use, both by the Maryland upper house and the Congress of the United States. The room is thus a space critical to the comprehension of American democracy and the evolution of the institutions associated with it. The Maryland Senate, created by the State Constitution of 1776, was the inspiration and model for the United States Senate that emerged from the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

Here in this room, following Congress's move of the capital of the Confederation to Annapolis in 1783, Thomas Jefferson oversaw the ratification of the Treaty of Paris which officially recognized the United States of America as a nation among the nations of the world. The proclamation of peace, which he drafted on January 14, 1784, brought the American Revolution to an end.

The most important event to occur in the chamber was the resignation of George Washington as Commander-in-chief, on December 23, 1783. Washington believed that governance belonged to the elected representatives of the people. Washington thus bowed to Congress, entrusting its members with the care and instruction of his soldiers, and then retired until called again to serve. No single

action in American history was as important as the establishment of civil authority over the affairs of the nation. The resignation ceremony here was so moving that Washington was forced to steady his hand as he read from his carefully composed draft. That draft, one of the very few of Washington's public documents wholly in his hand, is now owned by the State of Maryland, awaiting permanent exhibition in a restored Old Senate Chamber.



Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe returned to this chamber on several occasions. Here Washington successfully lobbied in the 1780s for his vision of making the Potomac River the commercial highway to the Ohio country. Jefferson and Madison visited the Senate Chamber in September 1791 and climbed to the dome where they discussed their plans for the future of the nation. Washington made his last visit to the chamber in March of that same year, inspiring Governor John Eager Howard and the General Assembly, to undertake significant improvements to this space.

It is the mission of the Maryland State House Trust to make certain that the Old Senate Chamber presents a credible image of its original and indeed beautiful historic character. The chamber thus must be a space where visitors can feel the events that took place here and picture the presence of the individuals associated with those events.

The city of Annapolis is famed for the outstanding quality of its 18th-century architecture and craftsmanship. Archival records and historic images clearly demonstrate that such quality was present in the chamber's embellishment. Regrettably, well-intended alterations and restorations of limited knowledge have resulted in a space that offers an imprecise picture of the chamber's initial elegance and dignity.

Before us now is the challenging question: Can we do better?

SUMMARY OF THE OLD SENATE CHAMBER'S EVOLUTION TO THE PRESENT

All buildings change, some much more than others. Although the Maryland State House is America's oldest functioning state capitol building, it is very different, especially on its interior, from the building that was first occupied in 1779. From the start, it was subjected to alterations and repairs that affected its appearance inside and out.

A positive change to the original plan of the Senate Chamber occurred during the course of construction, in 1777, when it was decided to add a rear gallery. The gallery, described as "more elegant than required," was a tour-de-force of Annapolis-style design and craftsmanship. Its rich classical details closely followed illustrations published in Abraham Swan's 1758 pattern book *The British Architect*, a work owned by Annapolis architect William Buckland and which influenced architectural features in many of the finer 18th-century Annapolis houses. The next change came in 1792 when risers and seating were installed in the space under the gallery. At the same time a solid railing was constructed between the gallery columns to separate the public seating from the senators' desks. Additional changes included a small vestibule and an extra pair of doors under the gallery to provide added separation from the building's main hall.



On-site sketch by John Trumbull, 1822
 Courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery



General George Washington Resigning His Commission,
 John Trumbull, 1824

The general character of the Senate Chamber is depicted in John Trumbull's famous 1824 painting of Washington's resignation as commander in chief, one of the large historic scenes displayed in the Rotunda of the United States Capitol. The on-site sketches that Trumbull made in preparation for the painting provide more valuable clues to the early appearance of the chamber. Fortunately, the appearance of the center portion of the gallery is known through a rare 1868 stereoview photograph. Further evidence of the room's early appearance appears in an 1856 sketch by Frank. B. Mayer.

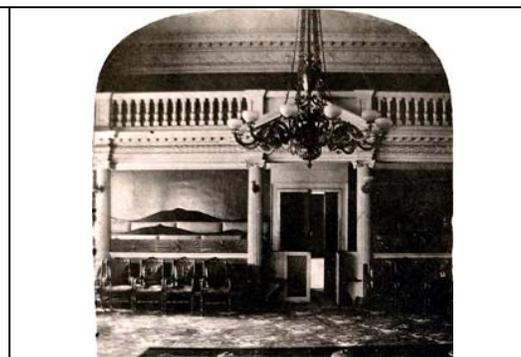
The architectural focal point of the Senate Chamber was the niche and dais opposite the entrance, where the President of the Senate's chair and desk were placed. Like the gallery, the niche was treated with rich architectural embellishment. It was framed by pilasters and set off by a classical pediment supported on Ionic columns. The original appearance of this feature is also recorded in an 1868 stereoview photograph, as well as in the Trumbull painting and other historic images. By the time the photograph was taken, however, the windows on either side of the dais had been covered over for the display of large portraits.



1858 Sketch by Frank B. Mayer
 Courtesy of Baltimore Museum of Art



1868 Stereoview of Niche

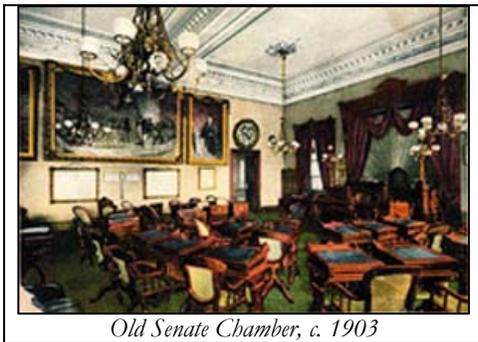


1868 Stereoview of Gallery

In 1797, structural weakness was observed in the Senate Chamber ceiling necessitating extensive repairs and replastering. As part of the repair, an ornament, for which there is no surviving image, was applied to the ceiling. The ceiling repairs may well have affected the main entablature although to what degree its design was changed, if at all, is uncertain.

1877-1878 Remodeling

By the late 1870s the State House was showing signs of wear and structural weakness. George A. Frederick, a prominent Baltimore architect, was hired to supervise renovations throughout the building. Regrettably, the Senate Chamber's repairs resulted in a complete remodeling. Except for the niche, all of the 18th-century fabric was removed, including the gallery, window and door frames, as well as the pediment and columns framing the niche. The chimney breast and mantel had already been removed, in 1858, for the installation of a new heating system. Frederick stated that the gallery was in "ruinous condition" and could not be repaired. He recommended its replication in more substantial materials but this was not done. Fortunately, two of the gallery column shafts were saved as relics by a local citizen.



Old Senate Chamber, c. 1903

In his detailed account of the restoration, published in the *Baltimore Sun* on December 26, 1903, Frederick stated that his examination of the flooring showed that it consisted of three layers, "which at intervals, as the worn condition of the floors demanded, had recklessly been nailed, one floor upon the other." Further examination by Frederick revealed that the floor joists were badly decayed. This necessitated installation of a new floor support system and new floorboards. Frederick unfortunately did not record the structural system before its removal. An 1886 photograph shows that the new flooring was covered with fitted floral carpeting.

The plaster entablature skirting the ceiling was a copy of the earlier entablature but with modifications to the spacing of the frieze ornaments. The new entablature was continued on either side of a large new beam installed in the center of the ceiling for extra stability. The niche, flanking pilasters and some of the moldings were spared, however, they were hidden behind an elaborate Victorian arrangement of draperies setting off the president's desk and chair. The resulting new look of the chamber is recorded in several historic photographs. It had little resemblance to an 18th-century space.

1905 Restoration

It is ironic that just one year after the nation's Centennial, a space so closely identified with the country's formation should be stripped of its original character. The 1877-78 remodeling was not without criticism. The project was so disturbing to some officials that just sixteen years later the Maryland Legislature appointed J. Appleton Wilson and Frank Blackwell Mayer to investigate the feasibility of restoring the chamber to its 18th-century appearance. Wilson was a Baltimore architect who specialized in Colonial Revival work. Mayer was an Annapolis artist with a detailed knowledge of Maryland history.

Wilson undertook a careful examination of the room and interviewed individuals who remembered it before the alterations. The legislators, however, took no action on Wilson's findings. Finally, in 1904, the newly elected Governor Edwin Warfield appointed a committee to administer a restoration of the Senate Chamber under Wilson's direction. Governor Warfield's action followed on the heels of the completion of a new annex for the State House. Designed by the Baltimore firm of Baldwin & Pennington, the annex contained sumptuous new legislative chambers. Since the Senate would no longer meet in its original chamber, it was deemed appropriate to restore the Old Senate Chamber to its historic appearance and maintain it as a ceremonial space and historic shrine.

Wilson carried out the restoration to high standards for the time. His gallery and dais reconstructions were based on the 1868 stereoviews as well as other early images, including the Trumbull painting. The dais restoration included revealing the covered-over niche and the repair of its detailing, the room's only 18th-century fabric to have survived *in situ*. His design for the two doorways on either side of the chimneybreast followed local precedent as well as the Trumbull painting. His mantel design was based on local precedent and its installation required the reconstruction of the brick chimneybreast. No reliable image of the original window frames was available nor was there more than minimal physical evidence, so Wilson resorted to standard architraves for window trim.



The entablature skirting the chamber ceiling was basically a copy by Wilson of the entablature installed by George Frederick. As noted above, Frederick's entablature differed from the entablature shown in the 1868 stereoviews in the spacing of its ornaments. Wilson also removed Frederick's carpeted flooring and installed new, tongue-and-groove floor boards, which were left exposed.

Wilson reused the salvaged column shafts in his gallery reconstruction. Although George Frederick had earlier noted that the gallery ends were curved, the 1868 stereoview of the gallery did not show the gallery ends. Wilson's convex curved ends thus are conjectural. This has raised the question as to whether the curved ends were concave or convex.

For its time, Wilson's restoration was a commendable work. Despite the limited knowledge and investigative methods of the time, the project returned a reasonably appropriate historic ambience to the space. However, it must be remembered that this was a *Colonial Revival* recreation, one involving more intuition than fact, and that it did not have the benefit of modern scientific examination procedures, research techniques, or the documentation that has since surfaced.

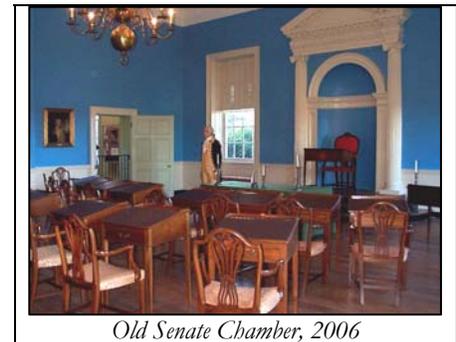
1940 Refurbishment

The 1905 restoration addressed the architectural aspect of the room, but did not include furnishing the chamber to its late 18th century appearance. In 1930, the Maryland Historical Society launched an effort to correct this deficiency, an effort that took ten years to accomplish and eventually expanded to include plaster repairs, reconsideration of some architectural details, and a new paint scheme. The architectural changes were initiated under the direction of Lawrence Hall Fowler, a Baltimore architect noted for his knowledge of historic American architecture. The firm of George W. Tovell, Inc. was engaged to carry out their several recommended changes, under the direction of the firm's vice-president, C. Eugene Tovell. The changes included removal of the cornices, friezes, and consoles from the door frames and installing plinth blocks under the door casings. The shelf and pulvinated frieze were removed from the mantel, leaving only a molded bolection frame around the fireplace opening. Plinth blocks were added to the mantel frame. A ceiling ornament installed by Wilson was removed. Finally, the narrow floorboards of 1905 were replaced with random-width yellow pine floorboards salvaged from another building. Although early records show that the floor had a fitted carpet in 1792, and possibly originally, the 1940 floorboards were left exposed.



2006-2009 Investigations

The Old Senate Chamber remained essentially as refurbished in 1940 until 2006. In November of 2006, the Annapolis restoration firm of John Greenwalt Lee, Co. undertook a detailed evaluation of the chamber wall plaster as part of an effort to solve long-standing moisture problems and resulting plaster deterioration. Assisting John Lee and his staff, and serving as the lead investigator, was Charles A. Phillips, a foremost expert in historic building analysis. Lee and Phillips determined that the moisture was the result of condensation caused by the application of incompatible modern paint coatings on the 1905 wall plaster, which in turn was applied on two sides of the room directly to the exterior masonry walls. Fortuitously, removal of test sections of deteriorated plaster exposed remnants of original plaster and revealed previously inaccessible and unrecorded evidence of the 18th-century details. Subsequent removal of the failing plaster and investigation of architectural clues, combined with intensive documentary research and analysis of historic photographs and newly discovered drawings have made it possible to develop new insights regarding the appearance of the Old Senate Chamber in George Washington's time. Moreover, these findings demonstrate that while the 1905 restoration was commendable for its time, many of its details were based on limited evidence and do not conform with either the evidence now in hand or our understanding of contemporary architectural practice in late Colonial Annapolis and the Tidewater Chesapeake.



The latest architectural findings and documentary research have been assembled in a state-of-the-art, passcode-protected website designed and maintained by the Maryland State Archives. The investigations and analysis by John Greenwalt Lee's team are presented in a detailed report, a 258-page document dated September 17, 2008 and updated on November 24, 2008. Following a presentation of these findings to the State House Trust in January 2009, the research effort was broadened to seek additional physical and documentary evidence in a coordinated effort that included the John Greenwalt Lee team, historians and archivists from the Maryland State Archives, and architectural historians from the Maryland Historical Trust. Their activities have extended into the new year and promising leads continue to appear, demonstrating that this concerted effort is yielding valuable results.

OLD SENATE CHAMBER ARCHITECTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Following up on the January 2009 meeting of the State House Trust, the Maryland Historical Trust, in consultation with the Maryland State Archives and the Department of General Services, formed the **Old Senate Chamber Architectural Advisory Committee**, a panel of experts in the fields of historic preservation, architectural history, and restoration.

The members of the Architectural Advisory Committee are as follows:

Richard Moe, President, National Trust for Historic Preservation (Chairman)

Edward A. Chappell, Roberts Director of Architectural and Archaeological Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

John C. Larson, Vice President for Restoration, Old Salem, Inc.

Calder Loth, Senior Architectural Historian, Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Hugh C. Miller, FAIA, former Chief Architect, National Park Service and former director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources

W. Peter Pearre, Trostel & Pearre Architects, Baltimore

Martin E. Sullivan, Ph.D., Director, National Portrait Gallery

Mission of the Architectural Advisory Committee

The primary charge to the Architectural Advisory Committee was to advise the Maryland State House Trust on whether sufficient physical and documentary evidence existed to warrant undertaking a *new* restoration of the Old Senate Chamber. The basic question before it was: Could such a restoration realistically present a more credible image of the 18th-century appearance of the chamber than the 1905 restoration and later refurbishment? The Advisory Committee was initially directed to provide peer review of the consultants' interpretation of evidence already revealed and to offer recommendations for further research.

The Advisory Committee's first meeting, on May 12, 2009, was devoted to a review of archival and physical evidence known about the room up to that time, with emphasis on the above-ground archaeological work conducted by the John Greenwalt Lee Co. Also at this meeting, Chairman Moe and the Committee members determined that depending upon the evidence, the interpretation of the Old Senate Chamber should focus on the decade of the 1780s. As noted above, it was in this period that the primary historical events associated with the room occurred, most notably George Washington's resignation in 1783 and the meetings and acts of the Confederation Congress.

The Committee's September 29 meeting largely consisted of visits to 18th-century Annapolis houses as well as to Whitehall, where the Committee examined architectural fabric contemporary with the Senate Chamber's original fabric. The Committee also reviewed an interim report featuring new archival and photographic evidence. At its third meeting, on December 1-2, the Committee spent considerable time inspecting and discussing the chamber's physical evidence. It also had a lengthy session interpreting the various historic images. The December meeting concluded with Chairman Richard Moe directing the Advisory Committee to make a recommendation for what it considered to be the most appropriate treatment of the Senate Chamber. The recommendation, based on the research and investigations conducted thus far, was to be prepared for presentation to the Maryland State House Trust on January 14, 2010.

FINDINGS OF THE ARCHITECTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE IN CONSULTATION WITH THE CONSULTANTS

The Advisory Committee commends John Lee, Charles Phillips and their colleagues for their highly professional examination and analysis of the physical evidence in the chamber, as well as for correlating this evidence with the extensive documentation supplied by the Maryland State Archives and the Maryland Historical Trust. Below are highlights of their findings. Although subject to further verification through additional research and investigation, these findings have the endorsement of the Architectural Advisory Committee.

- **Gallery:** Investigation of the 1905 fabric and comparison with the 1868 stereoview have revealed that the columns are not accurately spaced, the pilasters should have entasis, the present balusters do not match the historic photograph, the spacing of the modillions is not correct, the gallery lacks the soffit shown in the photograph, and the number and spacing of the frieze oak leaves are not consistent with the historic photograph. It is probable that gallery ends were treated with concave rather than convex curves, but this matter requires further study. A concave curve would avoid the awkward junction with the window.
- **Niche and Dais:** The niche itself along with its architrave moldings and flanking pilasters are original, indeed it is the chamber's only original trim. Investigations and the 1868 stereoview indicate that the pediment entablature did not break above the columns as was done with the 1905 entablature. Evidence was found showing that the original columns were almost free-standing rather than half-round as are the 1905 columns. Historic images show that the original pediment had a paneled soffit. The dais probably had only two risers rather than the existing three and was wider than the existing dais.
- **Room Entablature.** The general form of the entablature is consistent with the 1868 photographs but the placement of the frieze ornaments does not precisely match the photographs. Additional research and forensic examination will be required to determine the appropriate design of this feature.
- **Flooring:** The 1940 floorboards are reused from another building. However, the quality of the wood itself is a lower grade than would be normal for an important building such as the State House, and the floor details do not conform with 18th-century practice. Additional research will be required to determine whether the floor was originally carpeted.
- **Chimney Breast and Mantel:** As previously noted, the original chimney breast had been removed in 1858 for the installation of a new heating system. Physical evidence demonstrates that the original chimney breast was two feet broader than the existing 1905 projection. Moreover, historic images strongly suggest that the original mantel was typical of fine Annapolis mantels of the period with architrave surround, ornamented pulvinated frieze, and cornice shelf. There is no basis for the plain bolection surround of 1905, which was further simplified in 1940. More research is required to determine what might be reasonable dimensions for the mantel and fireplace opening.
- **Doorways:** Like the mantel, the two 1905 doorways were simplified in 1940. No documentation has surfaced to offer the rationale for the change. The Trumbull sketch, made on site, strongly indicates that the doors were topped with a frieze and cornice. Examination of the plaster suggests that the vertical frames may have been 14" wide. Additional research is needed to determine if the doors were framed with pilasters or with architraves and backboards topped with consoles. No physical or pictorial evidence has

been found for the design of the door leaves. Replicas will likely have to be based on local examples and pattern book precedents.

- **Windows:** Little pictorial or documentary evidence has yet been found that would indicate the window frame treatment. The Trumbull sketch of the 1820s indicates, but only indicates, that the window to the right of the dais was topped by a cornice. A sketch by Frank. B. Mayer from 1856, on the other hand, shows what appear to be curtains in the front windows but it is difficult to determine whether the sketch indicates cornices. It may be safe to assume that all the windows were treated the same. However, unless more specific evidence surfaces, the design of the window frames will have to be conjectural based on local examples and pattern book precedent. In any case, the present architrave frames are not representative of the 1770s and do not conform to comparable examples from the best Annapolis houses of the period.
- **Window Reveals:** Physical evidence suggests that the window reveals extended to the floor, but documentary evidence indicates that the window reveals were fitted with seating at one time. Additional study is required for determining the design of folding pocket shutters.
- **Window Sash:** Consideration will have to be given to the practicality of amending the sash to make it more consistent with 18th-century Annapolis sash types.
- **Wainscot:** A 1792 John Shaw work order confirms that the wainscot had a plain wood dado. Additional examination will be needed to determine the dimensions and profile of the baseboard cap and chair rail. Close examination of the historic photographs could provide the answers.

CONCLUSION

As stated above, the Old Senate Chamber is one of Maryland's and the nation's most historic spaces, a space that is a focal point of America's oldest functioning state capitol. The chamber is used for ceremonial meetings by state government and other organizations, and serves as a key educational facility for the many school children who visit it annually. It is also a premier heritage tourism site, accommodating thousands of visitors who come to learn more about seminal events of American history. It is thus essential that every effort be made to have this patriotic shrine evoke the ambience of its historic moments as accurately as possible.

It might be argued that the 1905 restoration and its modifications have integrity in their own right as valid Colonial Revival interpretations, and thus merit preservation. Admittedly, removal of century-old architectural fabric conflicts with modern preservation philosophy. However, as this report has emphasized, the Old Senate Chamber is a hallowed historic space because of the events that took place here in the 18th-century. Moreover, a primary objective of the Maryland State House Trust is to present the Old Senate Chamber as it appeared in its principal period of significance for the edification of its visitors and users, not to preserve fabric that does not accurately represent that period.

A parallel exists with the Independence Hall Assembly Room where the Declaration of Independence was signed and the Constitution was drafted. The room received new woodwork in the 19th century to replace the original destroyed by the British. Although the replacement woodwork had been in place for more than a century, it did not resemble the original woodwork. The appearance of the original was determined after painstaking research undertaken in the 1960s. These discoveries made it possible for the National Park Service to conclude that replicating the

original appearance of a room of such profound historic significance outweighed the value of preserving old but inaccurate fabric.

Removal of the 1905 architectural trim from the Old Senate Chamber has not been lightly considered. In its deliberations, the Advisory Committee has taken official preservation standards into consideration but believes that the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for *restoration* and *reconstruction* apply here more appropriately than the Standards for *preservation* and *rehabilitation*. Moreover, it is the Advisory Committee's opinion that the advantages of a more accurate reconstruction of the chamber's missing original architectural features overshadow those of maintaining the status quo. The results will provide a more convincing image of the room's true historic character and be a more engaging educational resource. Likewise, a restoration, in and of itself, can be made an edifying didactic process.

The Advisory Committee acknowledges that the latest investigations and research have not provided all the answers to the original appearance of every feature, but, as with other recent high-profile restorations, most notably James Madison's Montpelier, it is inevitable that many additional clues to the appearance of many details will be revealed in the course of more in-depth research of documents, exploration of existing fabric, and hi-tech scientific analysis of architectural artifacts.

Thus, following detailed review of the investigations and research, coupled with collegial deliberation, the Architectural Advisory Committee has concluded that sufficient evidence exists to justify a new, state-of-the-art restoration of the Old Senate Chamber to a more convincing and accurate representation of its 18th-century appearance. The Advisory Committee is firm in its opinion that the 1905 restoration and its 1940 modifications are fraught with inaccuracies and do not warrant reinstallation. The Advisory Committee therefore has made the decision to recommend undertaking a new restoration of the chamber, which recommendation to the Maryland State House Trust is stated above.

The ancient Romans spoke of the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place—the effect a place has on one's psyche. The Old Senate Chamber has sheltered events that affected the course of history. The *genius loci* of this room must be felt by all who enter it.

SIGNED

Richard Moe, Chairman

Edward A. Chappell

John C. Larson

Calder Loth

Hugh C. Miller

W. Peter Pearre

Martin E. Sullivan

January 14, 2010