

Introduction

The Maryland State House in Annapolis is the third such structure on a site originally surveyed in 1694. The State House is the oldest capitol in continual use in the United States and the circle upon which it is erected is arguably the oldest lot of ground devoted to such a use in the country as well.

A landscaping plan for the grounds needs to be sensitive not only to the antiquity of capitol but to the development of the site over time. The presentation of the structure to those who approach it as well as the views afforded of Annapolis from the grounds have been developed over time. This program is an effort to explore the history of the site and a vision of the State House achieved over time.

The issues at hand relate to the development of the present landscape, access to the site, archeological issues that must be addressed, and the future of the grounds.

Initial Development

Construction of the present state house was initiated in 1772. The structure is crowded into the southwest quadrant of the circle and the earliest surviving elevation of the capitol, the print published in the Columbian Magazine in 1789 (figure 1) shows the center of the site occupied by a structure known as the "Council Chambers". The condition of the grounds in 1789 can only be described as rudimentary. The print depicts a site which has some grass, no trees or shrubs, and a great deal of erosion. The evidence suggests grading of the site was not completed until 1804, some ten years after the completion of the structure.

Disturbance or excavation for construction of the state house must have been minimal. Work undertaken in 1876 to install central heating, among other improvements and repairs, required the excavation of a cellar. According to the architect for the work, George A. Frederick, "we discovered that the building was erected on the slope of the hill". Since Mr. Frederick had assumed in his initial investigations that uniform footings would have been placed before construction, this discovery caused considerable additional expense as the foundation for the entire structure had to be underpinned. The question of the site elevation at the perimeter of the structure as well as the balance of the site needs to be addressed in detail but for the purposes of this exercise it is sufficient to assume that the present grade at the original building is much as it was prior to its construction.

Improvements 1794-1837

The well known Annapolis cabinetmaker, John Shaw, became responsible for the maintenance of the State House and for

supervision of improvements in 1794. His accounts have been preserved and there is an estimate of the cost to erect a brick wall about the grounds surmounted with an iron fence and gates. Shaw indicates that 525' of stone coping would be required. This would only complete a bit less than half of the circumference of the circle as it exists today, approximately 1,267'. It does not appear that Shaw was authorized to undertake this work.

Funds were appropriated by the General Assembly in 1818 to enclose the grounds and improve the circle. A committee appointed to examine the condition of the "public buildings" reported to the House of Delegates. "Although not instructed, they would draw attention of the House to the grounds around the State House, which are in an uneven and irregular situation...". Henry Maynadier, Jeremiah Hughes, and F. Hollingsworth were commissioned to oversee the work. Bids for materials and laborers were solicited in May and work must have commenced shortly thereafter. In December of 1818, Governor Charles Ridgely of Hampton was able to report to the General Assembly that "The public circle has been enclosed with a wall of masonry: which is an effective and lasting enclosure, while it serves the very important purpose of preventing the abrasion and washing away of the hill on which the State House is placed". The erosion of the site so clearly shown in figure 1 must have been a seasonal constant. Notwithstanding the Governor's message an additional order on the treasury was approved for payment in April, 1819 to H. H. Chapman "for the preservation of the wall enclosing the public circle".

Maynadier, Hughes, and Hollingsworth received fairly explicit instructions from the Governor and Council. At minimum they were expected to erect a retaining wall about the circle two and one half feet in height executed in either brick or stone with a wood railing on top. Preferably the appropriation would be sufficient to construct a stone wall four feet high backfilled to the top on the interior of the circle. In addition, "knowing the interest in which you respectively feel in everything relating to the improvement of Annapolis", they were advised that an additional \$1,000 would be provided for "leveling, sodding, graveling, and planting trees, laying off walks and so forth". The instructions conclude with suggestions "to show what would be most agreeable to the Governor and Council ... The Parade in front to be graveled, and supported by a low wall, not to show above the ground on the inside, from the Brick wall the slope to be smoothed gently to the enclosing wall". There is not sufficient evidence to indicate if the desired complexity of arrangements was achieved. The hint that there was an existing brick wall on the site is a matter which requires investigation.

There are two illustrations of the State House and its grounds which appear to have been made after the improvements authorized in 1818. Each shows the site enclosed by a wall but the perspective differs as does the artists attention to details other than the State House itself. The illustration deposited

with the Archives by Albert Small (figure 2) depicts the wall around the grounds of granite at least four feet tall. This print is remarkable in that it shows the path from Chancery Lane to the front of the State House as well as the path from Francis Street. The other illustration, a copper plate engraving (figure 3), shows what appears to be a lower wall made of brick with a stone coping. The only possible explanation for the difference other than artistic license is that the Small print was executed in the midst of work undertaken in 1835 prior to the erection of the iron fence about the ground. The entry detail at Francis Street on the Small print is confirmed in the first photographs available for the grounds. That the grounds are completely enclosed by this time is about the only point of agreement between the two works. There is no evidence of vegetation although the treasurer regularly paid for the pruning of Lombardy poplars from 1822 on.

It was not until 1835 that funds were expended to enclose the grounds with an iron fence although resolutions authorizing the work were passed by the General Assembly in 1833 and again in 1834. Jeremiah Hughes, Dennis Claude, and George Wells were commissioned to oversee the work. The work may well have encompassed completing the wall at this time as well. Governor Veazey's message of December 20, 1836 refers to the completion of the new stone wall and iron railing. Grading had not completed and Veazey suggested there was a need for an additional appropriation to complete the work. Gates at three entrances were provided in 1837. One of the entrances was at Francis Street. The others most likely were at Chancery Lane to the southwest and at the head of East Street.

The final improvement appears to have been the installation of flagging from the entrance at Francis Street to the portico. This contract was let in July of 1837 and may have replaced a gravel path referred to in the work done in 1818.

John Shaw's estimate for work to enclose the grounds with a retaining wall and fence was made in 1794. Although the scope of the work does not appear to have been ambitious it was not until 1837 that this project was completed. That the will to undertake the work and the funds required were in short supply seems obvious. In contrast, two city residents installed a brick wall almost seven foot high, 2' wide, and several hundred feet long between King George and Prince George streets to separate their properties after the revolution offers clear evidence that the State's efforts on behalf of the State House grounds were half-hearted at best. The host of internal improvements authorized by the state in the intervening period encompassed several canals and a railroad. Funds were committed to major civil engineering projects yet the condition of the public buildings and grounds in Annapolis remained precarious.

Interlude 1837-1882

With the completion of work on the grounds in 1837 very little appears to have been done to alter the appearance of the site. The donation of a cannon in 1841 and the dedication of the Taney statue in 1872 are the only notable additions to the grounds. Among the Sharf papers is a bill for various trees planted on the site in 1846. Species include silver poplars, lindens, aspens, black walnut, butter nut, and pecan. At some point a fountain was installed at the site of the DeKalb statue. Otherwise there appear to have been no concerted efforts to further improve the grounds beyond the work completed in 1837.

The two photographs taken before 1872 (figures 4 and 5) of the entry at Francis Street show a granite wall somewhat less than four feet in height with the iron railing. There is a flight of seven granite steps from the circle to the gates to the grounds. Given a rise of eight inches per step it seems likely that the threshold at the gates was 4' 8" above the circle. The flagging from the entry appears to be steep and is provided with a step at regular intervals of approximately 10 to 15 feet, four steps in all. The porch at the entry to the state house appears to have a flight of five steps from the flagging to landing at the door. At a point thirty feet inside the gates there appear to be paths that follow the perimeter of the circle, one towards the entry at chancery lane and the the other to the Treasury building. Benches are provided on the paths about twenty feet from the junction with the main approach. Likewise benches are placed at either side of the southeast elevation at the corners of the building. From this photographic evidence it is likely that the entry from Chancery lane crosses the front of the structure and proceeds by the Treasury building towards East Street. The path on the right from the entry at Francis Street must have intersected with the approach to the Treasury from East Street. Hopkins atlas of 1878 confirms only the existence of paths from Chancery Lane, Francis Street, and East Street.

The installation of the Taney statue in 1872 was made directly on the flagging. No arrangements to set the monument apart from the entry were made. The statue appears to be off center as well.

The only other site improvement is the installation of a pair gas lamps at the entry to the grounds and again at the porch to the State House. Since the Annapolis Gas Company was not chartered until 1856, the lamps and consequently the photographs that survive must be dated subsequent to that date.

Two photographs taken of the entry to the grounds between 1872 and 1882 (figures 6 and 7) give ample evidence of the landscape plan of the period. Trees were planted along the sides of the main entry in a columnar row towards the porch and the paths which are discernible appear to have been bordered with trees as well. There is an appearance of order and a desire for symmetry in the arrangement of the plantings.

A Public Commons

The grounds received no major attention until 1882 when the General Assembly authorized the appropriation of \$15,000 to improve the landscaping and pave State Circle.

The Board of Public Works advertised for proposals and received two plans, one submitted by George Gray, which survives, and another which is supposed to be the work of Frank B. Mayer, which has not been found. The evidence that Mayer submitted a plan which was adopted is fragmentary. Although efforts to locate a submission among Mayer's papers have not yet been successful, a close reading of the documents relating to the work undertaken, indicate the design proposed by Mayer was in fact executed. The successful bidder, Joseph M. Marshall, offers to construct either of the two plans in his bid of June 29, 1882. Marshall's contract refers to plans adopted by the Board of Public Works for the grounds and for the porch. The design for the porch was executed by Mayer. A bid for the construction of the porch submitted by C. C. Woolley refers Mayer's plan for the work. Marshall's bid for the porch is not extant but since he underbid Woolley by a substantial amount, almost \$2,500, he was awarded the contract for porch as well as the grounds on July 20, 1882.

The other evidence to suppose that the plans adopted were Mayer's rather than those of George Gray may be deduced from his correspondence with the Board of Public Works. Gray ran into difficulties with the Board, as potential vendors sometimes do, by indicating his bid was not sufficient to accomplish the work required. Gray's proposal of June 28, 1882 offers to execute the work for \$14,900, fractionally less than Marshall's bid of \$14,978. A close reading of his proposal reveals his bid was not responsive to the scope of the work required. The Board may have well thought so too. Gray wrote the Board on July 17, to convey "a few remarks...that I fear I omitted to make clear when I had the honor of seeing you on Thursday last". Perhaps his appearance before the Board was requested to clarify his proposal. The upshot of Gray's letter is that he cannot undertake the the work proposed for \$15,000. He goes on to suggest that his plan, while more expensive, was superior. He closes by asking for the Board's "kind consideration". However the Board apparently reviewed all the bids and concluded without difficulty to award the work to Marshall.

It is not difficult to understand why the Board of Public Works was not interested in in a contract which would exceed the available appropriation in light of the recent past. In 1876 the Board initiated repairs to the State House which surpassed the appropriation of \$32,000 to the tune of almost \$80,000. A committee appointed by the General Assembly conducted a lengthy investigation of the matter and was able to conclude that most of the work performed was unavoidable. exceeded the