

State House: New Toy for the Lawmakers?

By DAVID COOPER.

It's been sort of like new fathers' day at the maternity ward so far in the 1963 General Assembly.

In the week and a half they've been in session, legislators have acted like 170 proud new papas.

The baby they've been cooing over is their new home—the \$6.2 million State House.

And, in case you haven't noticed, most of what the honorables have done to date has revolved around the handsome new structure, its private offices, pyramided roof, plush red carpets, and indoor courtyards.

Beaufort County Rep. Wayland Sermons probably expressed better than anyone else the legislators' thrills when he told his House colleagues last week:

"We're standing around playing with it like a new toy at Christmas."

It's All Theirs.

Sermons also had an explanation for all the attention legislators have given the State House.

"It's the first thing that belonged to us," he told the House with a plaintive note in his voice.

The General Assembly, in the only bill it has passed or even debated this session, has made it abundantly clear that the State House belongs to the Legislature.

Under the new law, in fact, the State House is the only State-owned building in North Carolina which is not under the control and supervision of the executive branch of the government.

Some legislators, of course, have disagreed with Sermons' view that the shiny new building "belonged to us."

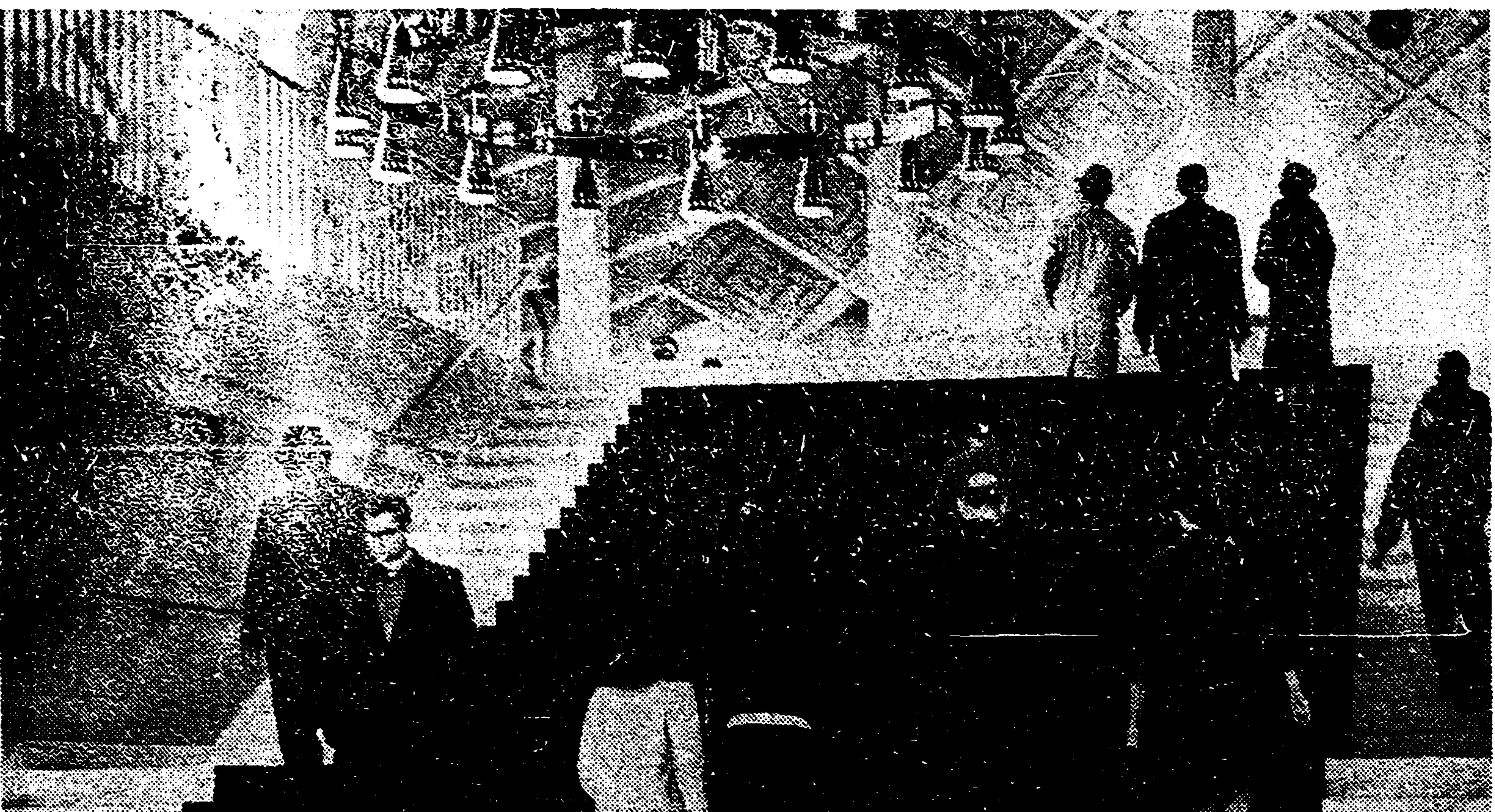
Another Voice.

"This State House does not belong to us," asserted Cumberland County Rep. Sneed High, in objecting to the new law. "It belongs to the people."

High's voice, however, was drowned out in a sea of other voices approving the law.

The Legislature got off to a fast start talking and acting about its new home on the very first day of the session, Feb. 6.

Sen. Thomas J. White of Lenoir, the proudest papa of them all, introduced the first bill of the session. White was chairman



Many North Carolinians saw the new State House for the first time when it opened to the public this weekend.

of the commission that planned and supervised construction of the State House and his first bill would give the structure the official title "State Legislative Building."

The next bill of the session was introduced by White also and called for a legislative commission to run the building, set all policy for its use, and exempt it from other laws putting State-owned buildings under the Department of Administration.

The commission bill whisked through the Senate under suspension of the rules, was rushed to the House for fast passage. . . but there was sent off to a committee for further study.

As the study was going on in the days that followed, every action of the Legislature seemed either geared to the bill or to the State House.

House Speaker Clifton Blue and Senate President Clarence Stone began assigning committees but most of them didn't meet because committee rooms hadn't been assigned. The commission proposed

in White's bill was supposed to allocate space in the State House, but the bill was still in committee.

In the meantime, legislators were beginning to find their way around the big building. They obviously liked what they found.

The structure has private offices for each Assemblyman and the honorables were eager to take up permanent residence in the rooms. Some took "squatter's rights" on temporary offices.

During the time it took for the House Rules Committee to study White's bill, someone came up with the bright idea that it would be wise to go ahead and assign the offices and committee rooms.

So, a resolution was introduced in the House, and quickly passed, to have the Senate and House Rules Committees take on this chore.

Legislators went home for their first weekend still agog over their new home and undoubtedly spent much time proudly inviting constituents to "come up to Raleigh and see our new building sometime."

Over the same weekend, Wake County Rep. Archie McMillan found that his constituents had tried to do just that, but couldn't.

After McMillan complained about the State House being locked on Sunday to visitors, another resolution was put in, asking that it be kept open on Sundays.

White's bill, in the meantime, was rewritten, passed by the House, sent back to the Senate, amended there and went back to the House where it was finally approved and became law.

House Rules members then started worrying over how phones in each of the 170 little offices would be used and settled down to ironing out other such knotty problems about the building.

The six-member commission

should result in more efficient lawmaking.

Uzzell, long an advocate of better tools for the legislative branch of government, foresaw the eventual possible need for a legislative counsel to do research and gather data for Assemblymen between sessions, and some form of continuous legislative committee that could handle some chores when the rest of the boys were not in town.

Just before the legislators headed for home again Friday, balky House members put a temporary halt to a request by Tar Heel Jaycees that they be allowed to use the State House next month on a Saturday when the Legislature holds only brief sessions.

As one of the objectors, Rep. Clyde Harris of Rowan, put it: "It was built for the General Assembly."

And, whether it was because he was beginning to feel at home in the \$6.2 million building or not, another member of the commission running the State House, Rep. I. C. Crawford of Buncombe, was advocating annual sessions of the General Assembly as he headed off for a weekend in the mountains.

The pride of the 170 papas and their concern for rearing their new domed bambino appeared likely to cause more talk and action in the weeks ahead.