

The State of North Carolina

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The Reports

of the 1957-1959

**Commission on Reorganization
of State Government**

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Fifth Report
State Legislative Building

September 24, 1958

His Excellency

THE GOVERNOR OF NORTH CAROLINA
Raleigh, North Carolina

Your Excellency:

The Commission on Reorganization of State Government herewith transmits to Your Excellency its fifth report, recommending the construction of a new building to house the General Assembly of North Carolina.

We are firmly convinced that such a building is needed, that it is needed now, and that the benefits to be gained from it will be shared not only by the members of future General Assemblies who will use it, but by all the people of the State. For these reasons we strongly urge its adoption by the General Assembly of 1959.

Respectfully,

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Report of the Commission on Reorganization of State Government

STATE LEGISLATIVE BUILDING

Explanation of Findings and Recommendations

Introduction

The first study undertaken by this Commission concerned the need for a new building in which to transact the legislative business of North Carolina. Having all served in the General Assembly for a collective total of thirty-three terms, we have some personal knowledge of the need for such a building. This knowledge has been reinforced by the information which we have gathered in the course of our study. Neither in the public hearing which we held on this subject, nor in newspaper comments which have been made since it was announced that this subject was under consideration, nor elsewhere, have we heard or seen any disagreement with the proposition that North Carolina needs a new legislative building and needs it now.

The present Capitol

The City of Raleigh was laid out in 1792 as the capital of North Carolina. That same year, construction was begun on the small and unpretentious State House which for several years housed all of state government. Enlarged and renovated in the early 1820's to provide improved accommodations for the General Assembly and the state officers, the State House was burned in 1831.

The following year a small appropriation was made to begin construction of a new Capitol. As in 1792, the supervision of the work was entrusted to a commission created and appointed by the General Assembly. While some of the legislators of the time would doubtless have been content to see the new Capitol built as cheaply and simply as the old State House had been, the building commission had a larger conception of its task.

To design the Capitol the commission engaged the best architectural firm in the country, and to execute it they brought in skilled workmen and artisans from outside the State. Conscious that they were not putting up an ordinary building to last but a few years, they approved a design in the finest and most

“modern” style of their day, and they spared no expense in assuring that the people of the State got a Capitol which would, in the words of the commissioners, “remain for Centuries, an object of just and becoming pride, as a noble monument to the taste and liberality of the present generation.”

The Capitol with its furnishings ultimately cost over \$530,000—nearly three times the ordinary state expenditures for the fiscal year 1840-41, the year of its completion. Of course there was grumbling during construction about the alleged extravagance of the commissioners, but as one native historian has observed, “no public building, in any way a credit to the State, has ever been erected in North Carolina without bringing down denunciations upon those responsible for it.” Yet by the time it was dedicated, the grumbling had ceased and the Capitol had come to be generally recognized as a credit to the State and her people, and as the finest state capitol of the time.

Through more than a century of use, the Capitol, in its solid integrity, has come to be the symbol of our state government itself. We share with critics more learned than ourselves the opinion that our Capitol is a splendid specimen of the architectural taste and building art of its time.

Let it be clearly understood that we are convinced that the Capitol and Union Square should be left intact and unaltered, no matter what provision may be made elsewhere for improved legislative quarters. At a time when over three million dollars in private and public funds are being spent to rebuild the palace of a royal governor, it would be unthinkable to permit the desecration of a building which has for over a century sheltered the elected representatives of a free people.

Furthermore, we think that even after new legislative chambers are built, all future sessions of the General Assembly should convene and adjourn their sessions in its historic home, and so fulfill in spiritual continuity the hope voiced by Governor John Motley Morehead in addressing the first General Assembly to convene in the Capitol: “may a thousand years find these Halls still occupied by Freemen, legislating for a free and happy people.”

The changing times

With due reverence for the Capitol as a shrine of democracy, we believe that it has outlived its adequacy as the working center

of state government. When the Capitol was dedicated in 1840, North Carolina had a population of about 750,000; today she has nearly 4,500,000 residents. The annual state expenditures for all purposes were then \$214,000 a year; today we spend almost \$600,000,000 each year. When the Capitol was opened for use, it easily housed all of the state officers and employees in the capital city, for exclusive of the General Assembly and its staff they did not exceed a total of 15 people. Today it is estimated that there are working in the Raleigh agencies alone (excluding the state institutions located in the city) more than 3,700 people.

The General Assembly is the only agency of state government which is the same size today as in 1840—50 Senators and 120 Representatives. Yet the General Assembly has grown too, in its own way. The session of 1840-41 employed 11 clerks and doorkeepers, stayed in session eight weeks, passed 121 acts, and cost the State \$37,000. The 1957 session employed about 200 people, stayed in session 18 weeks, passed 1455 acts, and cost \$850,000. The number of standing legislative committees has grown in that period from a mere handful to 77. The number of citizens visiting the General Assembly from all over the State has multiplied with improved transportation and more widespread public interest in the work of government. The lone reporter with a pencil has given way to a host of newspaper, radio, and television representatives with increasingly elaborate equipment.

In short, North Carolina, her people, her wealth, her government, and the business of her legislature have all grown enormously in 118 years, but the facilities provided for the exclusive use of her legislative representatives are almost exactly the same as they were in 1840. As the other agencies and departments of state government have grown, additional buildings have been provided to house them until today we have in Raleigh, in addition to the Capitol, 19 office buildings and related structures, valued at over \$21,000,000 (without furnishings), and containing well over a million square feet of floor space. Now there are left in the Capitol (in addition to the General Assembly) only the Governor and his staff, the Secretary of State and part of his staff, and the State Treasurer and part of his staff—a total of about 30 full-time employees.

Deficiencies of the Capitol

The 170 members, 77 committees, and nearly 200 employees of the General Assembly need and deserve adequate working space and facilities. They do not have them.

The two legislative chambers themselves are crowded and cramped, and do not afford sufficient space for legislators, clerks, reporters, pages, and others who have to work there.

With the exception of the presiding officers and the chairmen of four or five of the busiest legislative committees, there are no office facilities at all for legislators. If a member has occasion to confer with a colleague or constituent, to write a letter, or to carry on any other official business, he must do it at his desk amid the bustle of the legislative chambers or in crowded lobbies or corridors.

The presiding officers of the two houses do not even have private offices. Each must share his small office (about 140 square feet each) with a secretary, and he has no place to hold necessary conferences with groups of legislators and other officials. Each of the principal clerks of the two houses must carry on much of his or her work in an office of about 140 square feet which is shared with three or four other clerks, and where he or she is subject to constant interruption and distraction.

The total office space available to the 60 clerical employees of the House of Representatives is about 900 square feet, or 15 square feet per person. There is available to the 42 Senate clerical employees a total of about 1200 square feet of office space, or about 29 square feet per person.

Nearly 30 House committee clerks must work in a room 21 by 33 feet, while the 15 Senate committee clerks occupy a room of similar size. (Both of these rooms also serve as permanent repositories for some of the State's most valuable public records, the original enrolled acts and journals of the legislature for the last 200 years, and for records of the Secretary of State's office.) The House engrossing office and stenographic pool, where some 15 people worked, were until recently quartered in a room containing about 160 square feet; now that room houses only air conditioning equipment.

The four House disbursing clerks and index clerks must work in a corner of the House lobby. Neither sergeant at arms has a desk at which to work. The printed bills office is kept in a small third floor room which is also a passageway to the

Senate galleries. The enrolling office is housed in the State Library Building.

There is no place for the pages, doorkeepers, and porters (numbering 40 or more in the House and about 33 in the Senate) to stay except in the chambers of the two houses, whether before, during, or after the daily sessions.

No cloak-room facilities are or can be provided for the employees of the two houses, and those for members are make-shift affairs situated in a lobby and a hallway. Existing restroom facilities for members and employees would be entirely insufficient even if they did not also have to serve the many hundreds of visitors who come to the Capitol daily during the sessions. Small closets offer the only storage space for stationery and supplies for the two houses.

Press facilities on the floor of the two chambers are cramped and very inadequate. The only place in the Capitol for newsmen to work and keep their equipment—typewriters, teletype machines, and the like—is an office containing about 100 square feet and about the same amount of space at the end of an open public corridor.

It would be impractical to house any significant number of legislative employees in office space removed from the Capitol, even if such space were available for them, for the obvious reason that their usefulness depends on their ready availability to the legislators and to the principal clerks.

It is highly unlikely that much better use could be made of the working space available to the General Assembly within the Capitol. The only answer lies in the complete removal of the legislative apparatus to new quarters, designed and built with a view to the needs of the General Assembly of today and the future.

Much of the efficiency of operation of the General Assembly depends in turn on the efficient operation of the legislative committee system. In 1957, there were 48 committees of the House and 29 committees of the Senate. They range in size up to 60 members each, and individual legislators often serve on as many as ten to fifteen committees. The busier committees must meet two or three times a week.

There are no committee rooms set aside for the sole use of the General Assembly. Efforts have been made from time to

time, as new state office buildings have been built, to reserve space therein for the exclusive use of the legislative committees. The needs of the administrative agencies inevitably have taken priority, however, and the reserved space has been given over to offices.

During legislative sessions, about ten rooms of various sizes are diverted from their regular uses and made available as meeting rooms for committees of the General Assembly. These rooms are scattered among the several state buildings. It requires much juggling of committee schedules to get maximum use out of available meeting rooms. Valuable time is lost by legislators who must walk considerable distances, in all kinds of weather, to get to several committee meetings in the course of a single morning. As has already been noted, only four or five of the committee chairmen have any office space in which to work, and this they must share with their committee clerks. The rest of the chairmen have no office facilities at all, and their clerks must share a single office with 15 to 30 other clerks.

As many as 2,000 school children visit the Capitol each day during the legislative sessions, in addition to many other citizens who come to see their representatives at work. Yet these visitors cannot be accommodated in anything like the manner they deserve. The public galleries are small and cramped, and the almost constant entry and exit of large numbers of spectators, however welcome they may be, is distracting to the legislators who are trying to give serious attention to the state's legislative business.

The 1957 session of the General Assembly lasted for 109 days and cost the State about \$850,000—an average cost of \$7,800 per legislative day. Since legislative members and employees are paid by the day, any reduction in the length of sessions would result in a direct saving to the State. To what extent recent sessions might have been shortened through the greater efficiency which adequate working facilities would have made possible is a speculative matter. Yet it is obvious to us that some time could have been saved, and at \$7,800 per day, the shortening of sessions by even a few days would produce substantial savings to the State. If the experience of the past few years is a reliable guide, it is probable that regular legislative sessions will continue to lengthen because of the increasing number and com-

plexity of problems which must be dealt with by the General Assembly. Any means which can have the result of limiting this gradual increase in the length of legislative sessions by getting the legislative work done in less time deserves serious consideration. We would not suggest that a new legislative building is justified solely on the ground of economies which might result from it; however, we believe that this is one factor which should not be overlooked in evaluating the benefits to be derived from a new building.

The needs of today

We are firmly convinced that North Carolina needs and should erect a new building to house the General Assembly and all of its activities. While exact specifications of what such a building should contain must await more detailed and expert study than this Commission can give the subject, we would offer these thoughts on that point, based on our own experience and observations as legislators.

The first requirement is adequate and comfortable chambers for the Senate and House of Representatives. They should be large enough to accommodate the members, clerks, employees, representatives of the press and other news media, and others who must in the ordinary course of business occupy the chambers. The chambers should be air conditioned, and should be equipped with public address systems, electric roll call devices, and such other equipment as will expedite legislative proceedings. There should be commodious public galleries, so designed that the public can gain access, view the legislative proceedings, and leave, all with a minimum of disturbance to legislators and employees at work in the chambers or elsewhere in the building.

Sufficient office space should be provided for the presiding officers of the two houses and their secretaries, the principal clerks, and the chairmen and clerks of at least the busier standing committees. Typing pools should be included for clerical personnel of the two Houses. Some provisions should be made for office space for legislators—perhaps not an individual office for each member, but at least such arrangement as will enable a legislator to have a little privacy when he needs to confer with visiting constituents, to dictate letters, and to handle other official business.

Within the legislative building itself there should be committee rooms of various sizes and sufficient in number to permit maximum working efficiency on the part of the legislative committees.

There should be appropriate facilities for the press and other news media and their equipment. As to offices of non-legislative agencies which might be located in the building, consideration should be given first to those agencies and services (such as the enrolling office of the Secretary of State and the legislative drafting division of the Department of Justice) which there is some special reason for having near the center of legislative activity.

The legislative building should be so designed as to permit its enlargement or the construction of additional closely related buildings, in order to permit expansion to accommodate future growth.

While the legislative building and facilities which we are proposing are intended primarily for use during the four to five month biennial legislative sessions, this does not mean that they will remain idle during the remainder of the time. The meeting rooms and other facilities would be available for use by the various interim study commissions of the General Assembly and by other agencies and groups which have occasion to meet in the capital city.

These are some of the particular needs which a state legislative building must meet. Moreover, we would not overlook the rare opportunity which the erection of this building offers to serve a larger purpose than the mere sheltering of governmental activities. This building will represent North Carolina, not only to our own people but to visitors who come to this State. In its design, its materials, its furnishings, and its decorations, the state legislative building should bespeak the character, the genius, the history, and the resources of our State and her people.

Recommendation No. 1:

We recommend that the General Assembly of 1959 authorize the immediate construction of a state legislative building to house the General Assembly, its officers, members, committees, employees, and related services and activities.

The cost

We believe in economy in state government. We are convinced, however, that this is one instance when true economy calls for large vision and for the willing expenditure of whatever sum it requires to give North Carolina a legislative building which will be in every way suitable to the needs and worthy of the pride of our State and her people. In erecting a building of this kind, it must be remembered that it is to endure and serve for generations, and that future generations will be benefitted or handicapped, according to the wisdom or the short-sightedness which guides the builders. It is due to the foresightedness and courage of the men who planned and built the present Capitol, and it is no less due to what their contemporaries decried as their "extravagance", that the Capitol which they erected has served the State for well over a century.

Based upon the evidence at hand and general information, but without having had the benefit of technical advice from architects, it is our present view that a legislative building approaching the kind and character which we have described can be built for \$7,000,000. It is our view also that at least \$7,000,000 should be provided for this undertaking in the first instance. We feel that the best talent and skill available should be used in the planning and execution of the building, and that there should be no sacrifice of quality in either design or construction. The financial authorities of the State have indicated to us that bonds in excess of \$7,000,000 may be issued during the next biennium on authority of the General Assembly and without a vote of the people. Because of the nature of the investment, we think it proper that the cost of a new legislative building and its site be provided by the sale of state bonds in the necessary amount. To provide the amount mentioned would not mean that the whole of such amount would have to be spent, if, upon closer examination, it should appear to those responsible for planning and erecting the building that a structure of acceptable character could be built for a smaller sum.

Recommendation No. 2:

We recommend that the General Assembly of 1959 authorize the issuance of state bonds in at least the sum of \$7,000,000, the proceeds to be used to acquire a suitable site and to erect thereon a state legislative building.

The site

We believe that the selection of a site for the legislative building should be left to the judgment of a Legislative Building Commission, the creation of which is hereinafter recommended. In this connection, however, we respectfully submit that, in our opinion, the building should be located with due consideration to the location of the present Capitol and the state buildings in its vicinity, and with a view to the construction of other state buildings in the future. Consideration should, in our opinion, be given to the acquisition of ample land on which to construct possible additions to the new legislative building or other buildings which in the future would be necessary to complement it, the site for all of which should be such as to lend itself to stately beautification and spaciousness consonant with the character, integrity, and generosity of the people of North Carolina.

Supervision

Because of the special nature of the building which is being proposed, we think a special Legislative Building Commission should be created and given responsibility for the selection and acquisition of a site, the employment of architects, the development and approval of plans for the building, the letting of contracts, and the general supervision of the execution of the work. This Commission would have available to it the personnel of the Department of Administration for assistance in the technical phases of its duties, in addition to such outside assistance as the Commission might see fit to employ.

The principal, if not the sole, purpose of this building will be to serve the General Assembly. For that reason, we think it desirable that a majority of the members of the Commission be persons with legislative experience, who know the special needs of the General Assembly, and who can bring that knowledge to bear in the selection of a site and the development and approval of building plans. There should also be on the Commission representatives from the public at large.

Recommendation No. 3:

We recommend that the selection of a site, the development and approval of building plans, the letting of contracts, and the overall supervision of construction of

the state legislative building be entrusted to a special Legislative Building Commission. We further recommend that this Commission consist of two persons who have served in the Senate, appointed by the President of the Senate; two persons who have served in the House of Representatives, appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; and three persons appointed by the Governor; and that all members serve for the duration of the undertaking.

The objective

It is our hope that those who are charged with the duty of planning and constructing the legislative building will keep constantly in mind the true nature of their task. This will not be just another office building, to be put up as cheaply and as quickly as possible, and then forgotten. It will, for a long time to come, be the center of state government and the focus of popular interest in that government, and therefore it should be a building which will do honor to the State both today and in the future.

We cannot know what progress in architectural design or changes in legislative needs time may bring; nothing can be built today with the assurance that it will be adequate to the needs of another century or even of another generation. The least and the most we can do is to adopt today the same high standards which guided the commissioners of 1833-40 in building the present Capitol, and strive to create a building which will long be recognized as an "object of just and becoming pride, as a noble monument to the taste and liberality of the present generation."