

“Capitols as National Historic Landmarks”
A National Historic Landmark Special Study
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Capitols are among the most prominent building types found across the United States. The architectural succession of a state's capitols can be a telling narrative of its settlement, wealth, geographic location, aspirations, and regional or national standing. The great majority of current state capitols were either constructed or were subject to major additions or renovations during the period between the Civil War and World War I. Rising industrial and agricultural wealth, large increases in population, well-honed feelings of civic pride and competition, new building technologies and transportation systems allowing for the movement of structural and finish materials, and professionalization in the field of architecture all converged in these decades, resulting in some of the nation's finest public buildings. The cultural contexts embodied by the architecture and building type are deepened by the activities that go on in a capitol. Most of these activities are unremarkable, and concern only essential business; however, at times decisions made by a legislative body are of exceptional historical significance to the nation.

Since 1960, thirty-five capitol buildings in the United States have been designated as National Historic Landmarks. This figure includes twenty current state capitols and fifteen "former" capitols—a descriptor that takes in older state capitols as well as colonial, tribal, and territorial capitols. Of these thirty-five, seventeen have been designated for architecture alone, eleven for history, and seven for both history and architecture. A number have been designated for reasons related to the country's political history. For example, the Maryland State House (NHL, 1960) is significant for its role in key events of the Revolution and the formation of the nation, and the Wyoming State Capitol (NHL, 1987) marks the first major jurisdiction in the United States where women attained full suffrage. While political history has been a profitable approach for arguing national significance, it should be stressed that no capitol has been designated based specifically on its function as a statehouse or as a symbolic representation of the federal system of government.

Beginning in 1960, the Secretary of the Interior designated eleven capitols as NHLs in the first years of the active program. Of these, ten were designated for history or a combination of history and architecture. In contrast, during the second decade (1970-79) only four of the fifteen designated capitols were found to possess national significance based on non-architectural historical contexts. The earliest nominations generally required a less rigorous process of documentation and the period seems to have been characterized by a tendency to cite the historical significance of a current or former capitol. The history represented by these NHLs overwhelmingly tended to be related to the Revolution and the Early National Period, and the Civil War, contexts that echoed the consensus narratives driving much of the nation's political and military history. Over the past generation, the comparatively few nominations for capitols based on history reflected the broadening of the history field to include such areas as women's history, African American history, and public health history. Looking to the future, it is doubtful that national significance can be effectively argued for every capitol in the United States

based on historical contexts, and determining the NHL eligibility of a capitol for history will have to be made on a case-by-case basis.

Because they are generally among the highest profile buildings in a capital city or, at times, an entire state, and often designed by noted architects or firms, arguing the national significance of capitols based on architecture has at times been relatively straightforward. Still, the practical and symbolic functions of these buildings, and the long and occasionally labyrinthine construction histories, make demonstrating national significance and accurately documenting physical integrity a daunting process.

Of the thirty-five capitol NHLs, twenty-four have been identified as having some degree of architectural importance to the nation. Most of the high-style trends impacting architecture in America during the past three centuries are represented by those designated, such as:

- Georgian**—Old Colony (State) House, Newport, RI, 1739-41 (NHL, 1960)
- Neoclassical**—Virginia State Capitol, Richmond, VA, 1785-1790 (NHL, 1960)
- Federal**—Massachusetts State House, Boston, MA, 1795-98 (NHL, 1960)
- Greek Revival**—Tennessee State Capitol, Nashville, TN, 1845-59 (NHL, 1971)
- Gothic Revival**—Old Louisiana State Capitol, Baton Rouge, LA, 1849 (NHL, 1974)
- Romanesque and French Renaissance revivals**—New York State Capitol, Albany, NY, 1867-69 (NHL, 1979)
- High Victorian Gothic**—Connecticut State Capitol, Hartford, CT, 1872-80 (NHL, 1970)
- Beaux-Arts/American Renaissance**—Wisconsin State Capitol, Madison, WI, 1906-17 (NHL, 1992)
- Skyscraper, modern**—Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln, NE, 1922-32 (NHL, 1976)

Despite this varied sampling, most of the architecturally significant capitol NHLs emerged out of two specific traditions: the Greek Revival and the Beaux-Arts or American Renaissance. Both of these classically based traditions readily convey strength and confidence through architectural form, even on a modest scale. The simple and staid character of the Greek Revival presents a solid and sober public face, appropriate for a state's primary governmental building. It was also an extremely flexible design mode that could increase a building's presence through the simple introduction of a columned portico. Eight of the capitol NHLs have been identified as nationally significant examples of Greek Revival architecture (an additional three Greek Revival capitols have also been designated for historical reasons).

Important public buildings topped, first, with cupolas and then small domes began appearing late in the colonial period; however, the difficulty and expense of raising even a modest dome kept most of them small in scale and visually subservient to the rest of the building. The mid-nineteenth century expansion of the US Capitol in Washington, DC, firmly established a new standard for domes on public buildings where the dome became a dominant feature of the design. The increase of dome size was made possible by structural iron and steel, which, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, could

be delivered to any capital city via the transcontinental railroad network. Gilded Age technology, wealth, and civic competition unleashed a period of capitol construction that will likely never be experienced again in the United States.

Between the Civil War and World War I, more than a score of new capitols having prominent domes were completed, and many existing capitols were significantly modified with new wings, larger domes, and extensive remodeling. Without exception, these capitols embody Beaux-Arts planning principles and nearly all are representative of a strain of monumental classicism known most inclusively as American Renaissance. The superficial similarity between this generation of capitols is striking, and underscores both the obvious influence of the US Capitol Building, as well as the speed with which the form of a dominant dome became strongly symbolic of democracy in the United States. The likeness of architectural form and details is easily comprehended, yet the scale of these buildings, and a period aesthetic sensibility that did not always value restraint, translated into designs with variable degrees of individual success. Four domed, Beaux-Arts capitols of the American Renaissance have been designated as NHLs. Two of the four, the Texas State Capitol (NHL, 1986) and the Michigan State Capitol (NHL, 1992), were designed by Elijah E. Myers, who was both an early advocate of the US Capitol as a model and, arguably, the most skilled in applying it to state capitol commissions. In addition to these works by Meyers, the Wisconsin State Capitol by George B. Post & Sons (NHL, 2001), and the Pennsylvania State Capitol, an especially sophisticated integration of art and architecture (NHL, 2006), were designated as superb examples of the type.

All of the state capitols that are commonly included in surveys of American architecture are already NHLs. These are: Old Colony (State) House, Newport, RI (Georgian, 1739-41, Richard Munday; NHL, 1960); Virginia State Capitol, Richmond, VA (Neoclassical, 1785-90, Thomas Jefferson; NHL, 1960); Massachusetts State House, Boston, MA (Federal, 1795-98, Charles Bulfinch; NHL, 1960); Ohio Statehouse, Columbus, OH (Greek Revival, 1838-61, various architects; NHL, 1977); Tennessee State Capitol, Nashville, TN (Greek Revival, 1845-59, William Strickland; NHL, 1971); Old Louisiana State Capitol, Baton Rouge, LA (Gothic Revival, 1849, James Dakin; NHL, 1974); and Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln, NE (skyscraper, 1922-32, Bertram Grovenor Goodhue; NHL, 1976)). Intriguingly, except for the US Capitol itself, the domed, Beaux-Arts state capitols have been largely ignored in most general architectural histories of the United States, undoubtedly in part because of their physical similarity. The omission likely also stems from established academic narratives for the architecture of the period, which tend to focus on the impact of new technologies, for example in the realization of skyscrapers and exposition buildings, or on different types, such as houses. By the end of the nineteenth century the visual importance of government buildings, which, along with churches, had traditionally been by far the most prominent edifices in a city or town, also began to be challenged by such new types as railroad stations and institutional buildings like schools and libraries.

A cursory look at the current state capitols not already designated as NHLs shows that there are a handful of other capitols that might be nationally significant based on

architecture alone. Among the domed, Beaux-Arts capitols, Minnesota (1893-1905, Cass Gilbert), Rhode Island (1894-1905, McKim, Mead & White), and West Virginia (1924-1932, Cass Gilbert) superficially stand out as having potential based on the renown and prominence of the architect or firm involved; however, a capitol commission's importance within the body of work of a nationally significant architect or firm would have to be unambiguously substantiated in a nomination. As the only Colonial Revival capitol, Delaware (Legislative Hall, 1931-33 with later wings) might eventually be worthy of NHL consideration. Among the few more modern examples, the asymmetrical massing of the tower and the base, and stripped-down decoration of the North Dakota State Capitol (1931-34) by the well-known Chicago firm of Holabird & Root is an intriguing possibility. The Oregon State Capitol (1935-38) appears to be an excellent updated take on the domed capitols of the American Renaissance. Designed by New York's Trowbridge & Livingston, the stripped classical building with Art Deco detailing has a dome over the central rotunda not visible on the exterior as it is entirely contained within an austere drum, an element that has precedent in the Greek Revival Ohio Statehouse. For capitols by architects or firms having more of a regional importance, a thorough preliminary evaluation of their work, influence, and the overall character of a capitol's design will be necessary before a study for an NHL nomination should be recommended.

CAPITOL NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS—Inventory

This list includes current and former state capitols, colonial capitols, and tribal and territorial capitols—organized by year of designation. Pennsylvania’s extant colonial statehouse, Independence Hall in Philadelphia, is not included in this list because it is not a National Historic Landmark, but rather the centerpiece of Independence National Historical Park.

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| First Confederate Capitol , Montgomery, Alabama
(NHL, 1960; 1849-51, Barachias Holt, Greek Revival;
Civil War) | (History) |
| Maryland State House , Annapolis, Maryland
(NHL, 1960; 1772-79, dome 1789; Revolution—
Treaty of Paris, national capitol 1783-84) | (History) |
| Massachusetts State House , Boston, Massachusetts
(NHL, 1960; 1795-98, Charles Bulfinch, Federal) | (Architecture) |
| Old Colony (State) House , Newport, Rhode Island
(NHL, 1960; 1739-41, Richard Munday, Early Georgian;
Revolution) | (Architecture & History) |
| Old State House , Boston, Massachusetts
(NHL, 1960; 1712-13, 1748, Late Georgian; Revolution) | (History & Architecture) |
| Old Statehouse , Hartford, Connecticut
(NHL, 1960; 1792-96, Charles Bulfinch, Federal;
Hartford Convention of 1814, state vs. federal sovereignty) | (Architecture & History) |
| Virginia State Capitol , Richmond, Virginia
(NHL, 1960; 1785-90, Thomas Jefferson, neoclassical;
Civil War) | (History & Architecture) |
| Cherokee National Capitol , Tahlequah, Oklahoma
(NHL, 1961; 1867-69, C. W. Goodlander, Italianate;
Tribal capitol until statehood; symbol of cultural
adjustment and compromise) | (History) |
| Creek National Capitol , Okmulgee, Oklahoma
(NHL, 1961; 1878, Italianate; Tribal capitol until statehood;
symbol of cultural adjustment and compromise) | (History) |

<p>Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois (NHL, 1961; 1837-40, Town & Davis, with John Rague [Springfield] superintending, Greek Revival; Lincoln, “House Divided”)</p>	(History & Architecture)
<p>Iolani Palace, Honolulu, Hawaii (NHL, 1962; 1879-82, Thomas J. Baker with others, Eclectic, Exotic; politics, became the territorial capitol)</p>	(History)
<p>Connecticut State Capitol, Hartford, Connecticut (NHL, 1970; 1872-80, Richard Upjohn, High Victorian Gothic)</p>	(Architecture)
<p>Old State House (Colony House), Providence, Rhode Island (contributing resource to the College Hill District NHL, 1970; 1760-62; tower mid-nineteenth century)</p>	(Architecture)
<p>Vermont Statehouse, Montpelier, Vermont (NHL, 1970; 1833-38, Ammi B. Young [1857-59, Thomas Silloway], Greek Revival)</p>	(Architecture)
<p>Old State House, Frankfort, Kentucky (NHL, 1971; 1829, Gideon Shryock [Lexington], Greek Revival)</p>	(Architecture)
<p>Tennessee State Capitol, Nashville, Tennessee (NHL, 1971; 1845-59, William Strickland, Greek Revival)</p>	(Architecture)
<p>New Castle Court House, New Castle, Delaware (NHL, 1972; 1730-31, 1765-1802, 1845, Georgian; Colonial, Early Federal politics, Underground Railroad)</p>	(History)
<p>State Capitol, Raleigh, North Carolina (NHL, 1973; 1833-40, Town & Davis with David Paton [also William Nichols], Greek Revival)</p>	(Architecture)
<p>State Capitol Building, Atlanta, Georgia (NHL, 1973; 1884-89, Edbrooke & Burnham [Chicago], neoclassical, American Renaissance; “New South”)</p>	(Architecture & History)
<p>Old Louisiana State Capitol, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (NHL, 1974; 1849, James Dakin, Gothic Revival)</p>	(Architecture)
<p>Old City Hall, Salt Lake City, Utah (NHL, 1975; 1864-66, William H. Folsom, Greek/Italianate; Utah Territorial Capitol, Feds v. Mormons)</p>	(History)

Nebraska State Capitol , Lincoln, Nebraska (NHL, 1976; 1922-32, Bertram Grovenor Goodhue, skyscraper)	(Architecture)
Old Capitol , Iowa City, Iowa (NHL, 1976; 1840-46, John Rague [Springfield], Greek Revival)	(Architecture)
South Carolina State House , Columbia, South Carolina (NHL, 1976; 1851-1907, John Niernsee, Charles Wilson, neoclassical; Reconstruction)	(History)
Ohio Statehouse , Columbus, Ohio (NHL, 1977; 1838-61, Greek Revival)	(Architecture)
New York State Capitol , Albany, New York (NHL, 1979; 1867-99, French [American] Renaissance Revival one of two of the most monumental load-bearing, masonry buildings constructed in the US)	(Architecture)
Louisiana State Capitol , Baton Rouge, Louisiana (NHL, 1982; 1930-32, Weiss, Dreyfous & Seiferth [New Orleans], 34-story skyscraper; Huey Long)	(History)
Texas State Capitol , Austin, Texas (NHL, 1986; 1882-88, Elijah E. Meyers, neoclassical, American Renaissance)	(Architecture)
Wyoming State Capitol , Cheyenne, Wyoming (NHL, 1987; 1886-90, David W. Gibbs & Co., American Renaissance; Women's suffrage)	(History)
Old Mississippi State Capitol , Jackson, Mississippi (NHL, 1990; 1836-40, William Nichols , Greek Revival, dome nodding to US Capitol as completed in 1828; black disenfranchisement, women's rights)	(Architecture & History)
Michigan State Capitol , Lansing, Michigan (NHL, 1992; 1872-78, Elijah E. Myers [Detroit], American Renaissance, early capitol modeled on US Capitol)	(Architecture)
Old State House , Little Rock, Arkansas (NHL, 1997; 1833-42, Gideon Shryock [Lexington], Greek Revival; public health)	(History)

Wisconsin State Capitol, Madison, Wisconsin (Architecture)
(NHL, 2001; 1906-17, George B. Post & Sons,
American Renaissance)

Pennsylvania State Capitol Building, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (Architecture)
(NHL, 2006; 1902-06, Joseph Huston [Philadelphia] with
various noted artists, American Renaissance)

Mississippi State Capitol, Jackson, Mississippi (Architecture)
(NHL, 2016; 1900-1903, Theodore Link, American Renaissance)

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