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COMMITTEES  
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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

October 25, 1979

Mr. Thomas V. Haas  
124 Locust Street  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17101

Dear Mr. Haas:

Thank you for your letter of October 19, in regards to the State Capitol building. I certainly enjoyed reading the interesting information enclosed within your letter.

I am hoping that since you are so closely located to the Capitol building that you might join us when we begin our more detailed survey of the Capitol. It would be both interesting and helpful to have someone like you along.

Again my thanks to you for contacting me and I shall be in touch with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Kenneth E. Brandt

KEB:jg

October 19 1979

Representative Kenneth E. Brandt  
House of Representatives  
State Capitol  
Harrisburg, Penna. 17101

Dear Mr. Brandt:

I recently read with interest that you are compiling a history of the State Capitol building. You wondered if there was a secret door to the dome of the building.

There is indeed, a door to the dome. Many years ago when I was about 16 and a student at St. Patrick's Cathedral on State St., a boyhood friend and I used to often explore the old building and the companion State Museum south of it.

A friendly old guide one day told us there was a way to the top of the dome and that we could explore it if we were careful, which we did. One took the elevator to the top floor to the center of the Capitol, and there was a stairway to the roof. On the roof is a walkway that goes the entire front of the building. Directly in front of the base of the dome was another stairway that lead to the walkway at the base under the double sets of pillars circling the dome. Presently one comes on a small iron door that was at that time, kept open. Immediately inside the door rose an iron ladder directly upwards into the darkness; the ladder running about the height of a 3 or 4 story building. Near the top were lights and also light from the round windows of the dome itself. On reaching that level, as I recall, a change is made to a narrow iron stairway situated between the outer and inner layer of the dome; here one could see the marvelous brick construction that made up the fabric. After a few climbs one then reached the lantern where one could look thru the small windows down to the brick tiled floor of the rotunda. Then one went thru a small door out onto the walkway of the lantern just beneath the curving tiles surmounted by the immense figure of Liberty. The walkway is about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide and circles the lantern. Of course there is a spectacular view from this level. As for the entrance to the gallery circling the lower part of the dome on the inside, there is no open door due to the possibility of tourists falling or jumping. It is for this reason that the way to the top of the dome is now closed. Being a Representative I am sure you would be permitted to make the climb.

There are a few things that present day guides to the building never mention or even know the facts. This particular old guide who permitted us to ascend the dome, also took us into the House and showed us on the beautifully colored marble walls, a Halloween witch complete with peaked hat, and on another panel a black cat! Then he took us to a small stairway leading from the floor at that level and which lead up to the next floor. On the marble floor of this tiny entry lay a gold frame enclosing a pane of glass. One day a charwoman discovered an intriguing freak of nature. The black and white variegated marble flooring under this frame, showed very clearly the face of Christ complete even to the crown of thorns! That frame lay on the floor of the entry for years but later disappeared. I have not visited that stairway since and wonder if I could again find the face on the floor as it was a real tourist attraction.

I think you are aware of course that the grand stairway is copied from the lavish grand stairway of the Opera in Paris. Another interesting item neever mentioned by present day guides is that those imposing female figures posing at the foot of the grand stairway, holding up a globe, are actually made of plaster with the globe of ordinary glass beads whereas the original contract was shown as a marble figure with the globe of cut crystal beads, this being part of the graft that took place when the State House was built. If you will look up at the golden female nudes directly above the entrances to the House and Senate, they look like gilt bronze but are in reality plaster covered with gold leaf. These too, were contracted and paid for, to be gilt bronze!

Before closing I do want to bring your attention and hope you too will be concerned about the rapid deterioration of the famous marble sculptures adorning the main entrance of the capitol. These figures are of Carrara marble, a stone that does not stand up well during our intensely cold winters. George Gray Bernard was one of the world's finest sculptors and his works are known all over Europe. You no doubt are aware of the ridiculous upwear that was made by the Harrisburg Ministerial Assoc. of that time over the nudity of the figures. In making some research, since I am a long time scholar of fine arts, I learned that as a result of the complaints the State government asked Bernard to put "fig leaves" on the figures. Being a true artist this was a gross insult and he rightfully refused to do so. Ironically the state has never given him nor his estate the full value of the contract. As a result of his refusal, the state asked another sculptor to do the job but for ethical reasons also would not undertake the vandalism. As a last resort, an ordinary stone mason was hired to make some marble cement and just put a large dab which immediately makes the once beautiful figures, downright obscene!

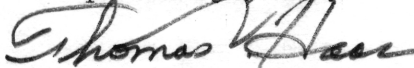
I have in my possession a book on the history of sculptor and its creators. George Gray Bernard is included and there are several photographs of the figures (which were created separately) as they looked on completion in his studio near Paris.

Last week I walked up to the main entrance of the capitol to check the figures and found them in quite bad shape with many cracks due to frost getting into the marble crevices and water freezing causing many cracks and fissures which if not halted will completely destroy what is now a priceless example of sculpture in America. Some years ago there was an outcry over this deterioration and at that time a box was made to enclose the figures thru winter; however that was only done once. Then the figures were cleaned and repairs made but nothing done to protect them from winter weather since. It would cost so little to cover the groups in those large heavy plastic sheets somewhat like the ones painters use, They could be so wrapped and secured that they would still be visible to visitors yet be protected from the elements each winter. I do hope you will give some encouragement to have this accomplished.

If might amuse you to know that for years before you began your term of office, there was a rather prudish senator who each session introduced a bill to remove these sculptures and hide them away in the building to protect the morals of little children touring the building!!!!

I am the retired Cashier of the Penna. Employment Security Bureau as I worked for the state  $35\frac{1}{2}$  years. I always loved our very beautiful Capitol and after seeing many others in the United States feel ours is the finest.

Respectfully yours,



Thomas V Haas  
124 Locust Street  
Harrisburg, Penna. 17101