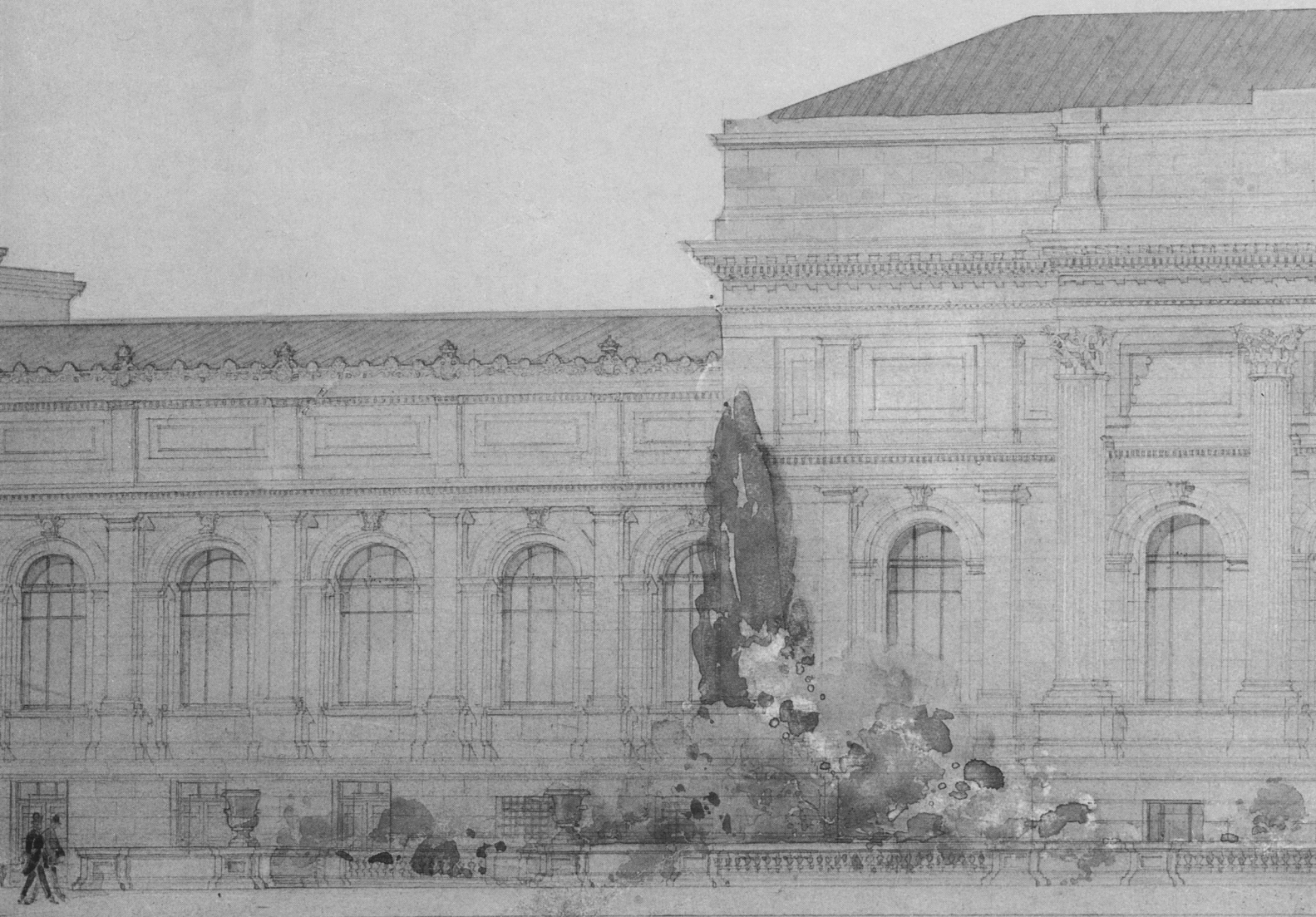


# The Metropolitan Museum of Art An Architectural History

Morrison H. Heckscher

The Metropolitan Museum of Art



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On the covers: *Detail of McKim, Mead and White's east (Fifth  
Avenue) elevation of the reduced master plan, 1908 (see fig. 62)*

## Director's Note

"It is a palace of art, truly, that sits there on the edge of the Park," wrote Henry James in 1904. He was responding to Richard Morris Hunt's recently completed Fifth Avenue addition to the Metropolitan Museum, but his description even more aptly fits the building now, on the Metropolitan's 125th Anniversary. Not only have we completed the major part of the 1970 master plan—adding more than one million square feet in a quarter of a century—but also we are now about to embark on a project that will take us well into the next decade and involve the reconstruction and expansion of 60,000 square feet: the total reinstallation of the Greek and Roman collections. Henry James's "palace" in the park has undergone many changes, from Vaux and Mould's original Victorian Gothic building to Richard Morris Hunt's and McKim, Mead and White's elegant Beaux-Arts classicism to the cool understatement of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates' modernist glass wings. With each architectural program the Metropolitan has recognized the need to adapt to a changing world—one in which serving the public remains paramount. The Museum is truly now a palace, but a welcoming, accessible one.

In this issue of the *Bulletin* and in an accompanying exhibition in the American Wing (April 7, 1995–January 7, 1996), Morrison H. Heckscher, curator, American Decorative Arts, has detailed the architectural history of the many structures that presently make up the Metropolitan. It is a saga of epic proportions, tracing the roles played by Museum trustees and directors, by architects, and by public officials. The development of the Metropolitan is a story of constant growth and change, a story accurately mirrored in its building. Through this text and the exhibition we will gain a new awareness of our complicated and fascinating architectural history, and we will be better able, in the ongoing process of change and renewal, to respect that history. As one example, the McKim, Mead and White galleries in the south wing along Fifth Avenue are being completely restored to their pristine condition during the renovation of spaces for the Greek and Roman collections.

Philippe de Montebello  
Director



# The Metropolitan Museum of Art

## An Architectural History

The Fifth Avenue facade of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 1) is one of the architectural glories of New York. Yet this majestic and apparently seamless classical composition is in fact a melding together, over seventy-five years, of the designs of Richard Morris Hunt, Charles Follen McKim, and Kevin Roche, the three architects principally responsible for the look of the Museum today. Extending 1,000 feet from Eightieth to Eighty-fourth Streets, the facade masks a structure of vast scale and startling complexity.

Since 1874, when ground was first broken for the Metropolitan's permanent home in Central Park, construction, expansion, and remodeling of the building have been more or less continuous. Over a dozen architectural firms have worked on designs for the Museum, and five different master plans have been approved. The resulting structure thus represents in microcosm more than a century of American architectural history. The richly textured story of how the Museum came to be situated in the park and why it looks the way it does today is recounted in the following pages.

### Temporary Quarters

The Metropolitan Museum was incorporated on April 13, 1870, in what Dickens might have called the best of times and the worst of times. In the aftermath of the Civil War, New York and the rest of the nation were expanding rapidly in an economic boom that lasted until the Panic of 1873. It was an era notable for grand and creative projects, such as the Atlantic Cable (1866) and the Brooklyn Bridge (begun 1869), and for the founding of many of the nation's great cultural institutions. It was also a time of blatant corruption. The administration of Ulysses S. Grant, elected president in 1868, was marked by

scandal; the stock-manipulating schemes by financiers Jay Gould and James Fisk made headlines in 1869; and in 1870 the depredations of the New York City treasury by state senator William Marcy ("Boss") Tweed and the Tweed Ring were at last exposed.

For years New York City's liberal-minded reform leaders had talked about founding an art museum, but there was no call for action until October 1869, when, in an address at the Union League Club, George P. Putnam, the publisher, extolled New York's "noble" Central Park, the city's "worthy and creditable" academy of art, and "the treasures" of its historical society. And he asked, "Is it not time to begin something in the shape of a permanent gallery and museum of Art, which . . . shall be worthy of the great city of a great nation. . . ?" What was needed to attract gifts of works of art, he asserted, was a national institution "in a building spacious in its dimensions, and thoroughly fireproof." These first specifications for the new building—that it be big and indestructible—have been honored over the intervening years.

During November distinguished representatives from New York's leading cultural and educational institutions met to pursue Putnam's suggestion. William Cullen Bryant, poet and coeditor of the *New York Evening Post*, presided. Andrew Haswell Green, treasurer and comptroller of the board of commissioners of "The Central Park"; Richard Morris Hunt, president of the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects; and William J. Hoppin, president of the Union League Club, were elected vice presidents of a citywide committee. They resolved to take immediate measures to establish a suitably grand museum of art.

In January 1870 an executive committee was formed with a mandate to prepare a charter. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was incorporated by

*1. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, from Fifth Avenue, 1995*

2. 681 Fifth Avenue,  
the Museum's home in  
1872-73, ca. 1900



the New York State Legislature on April 13, and its constitution was adopted on May 24. John Taylor Johnston, railway magnate and art collector, was the first president; Bryant and Green were among the nine vice presidents.

An immediate issue was whether to borrow works of art for a temporary exhibition. The executive committee, which included architects Hunt and Russell Sturgis, concluded that it would be impossible to find an existing building suitable for housing works of art. A committee was duly established to determine the location, schedule, and cost of a new structure; but two years passed before the Central Park site was definitively selected, and it would be another eight years before the first permanent Museum building opened.

Meanwhile, the fledgling institution began to form a collection. William T. Blodgett, one of the founding trustees, had purchased in Europe nearly two hundred Old Master paintings. In November 1870 he offered to sell them to the Metropolitan, but there were misgivings about spending money for works of art before the Museum was on a firmer

3. Opening reception,  
February 20, 1872, in  
the picture gallery at  
681 Fifth Avenue.  
Wood engraving from  
"Frank Leslie's Illustrated  
Newspaper," March 9,  
1872







freestanding structure (fig. 4) on the south side of the street, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues. Of brownstone with a mansard roof and broad curved stairs leading up to a recessed portico and entrance, it had been built in 1853–54 by James Renwick (1818–1895), a New York architect then making a name for himself with his design for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The house had been erected by Mrs. Nicholas Cruger (née Harriet Douglas) as a setting for her art collections, and there she held court until her death in May 1872. The diarist George Templeton Strong characterized the mansion in 1855 as “a most stately house, the finest I’ve ever seen, with its grand hall and staircase and ample suite of rooms.” Except for a structure built for the purpose, nothing could have better served the Museum’s immediate needs (see fig. 5).

4. 128 West Fourteenth Street, the Museum’s home from 1873 to 1879, ca. 1900

financial footing, or, for that matter, had a home for them. It was not until the following March that the trustees finally made the commitment.

Because the building of a permanent home was clearly some years off, a place for the pictures had to be found immediately. A trustee committee composed of Blodgett, Sturgis, and engineer Theodore Weston selected a row house at 681 Fifth Avenue (fig. 2). It had been erected about 1855 on the east side of Fifth Avenue between Fifty-third and Fifty-fourth Streets and was typical of the large brownstones in the area. The interiors had been converted by Allen Dodworth for his fashionable dancing academy. What appealed to the trustees was the large skylighted upstairs hall, “which it was evident could be made into a picture-gallery without great expense or delay. . . . It is,” they opined, “as good a building as could be hired without a very heavy annual charge.” A lease for \$9,000 a year was signed on December 1, 1871, and three months later the Museum opened its temporary gallery with an exhibition of Blodgett’s paintings (fig. 3).

Late in 1872 the Museum had the opportunity to purchase a remarkable collection of Cypriot antiquities, assembled by Louis Palma di Cesnola, United States consul at Cyprus (later the Metropolitan’s first director). Cesnola offered to deposit the collection in the Museum with the understanding that it would be “properly installed and shown to the public.” However, the 6,000 objects could not be stored, much less displayed, in the Dodworth building. The trustees had no choice but to look for new quarters.

As luck would have it, one of the grandest of New York’s private houses, 128 West Fourteenth Street, had just become available. This was a commodious

The Cruger mansion, conveniently located not far from the fading elegance of Washington Square, offered five times the space of 681 Fifth Avenue and at only \$8,000 a year. In May 1873 a five-year lease

5. Frank Waller. Second-floor paintings galleries at 128 West Fourteenth Street, 1879. Oil on canvas, 1881. Purchase, 1895 (95.29)



6. *The Metropolitan Museum (far left) in Central Park. Northwest view from Park Avenue at Seventy-ninth Street, 1880. Collection of Janet Lehr*

was signed for the house and the adjacent undeveloped lots, “upon which grounds,” explained the Museum’s 1873 *Annual Report*, “new galleries may be built should they be required before the final settlement of the Museum in Central Park.” The collections were installed in time for a public opening on October 1.

## The Central Park Site

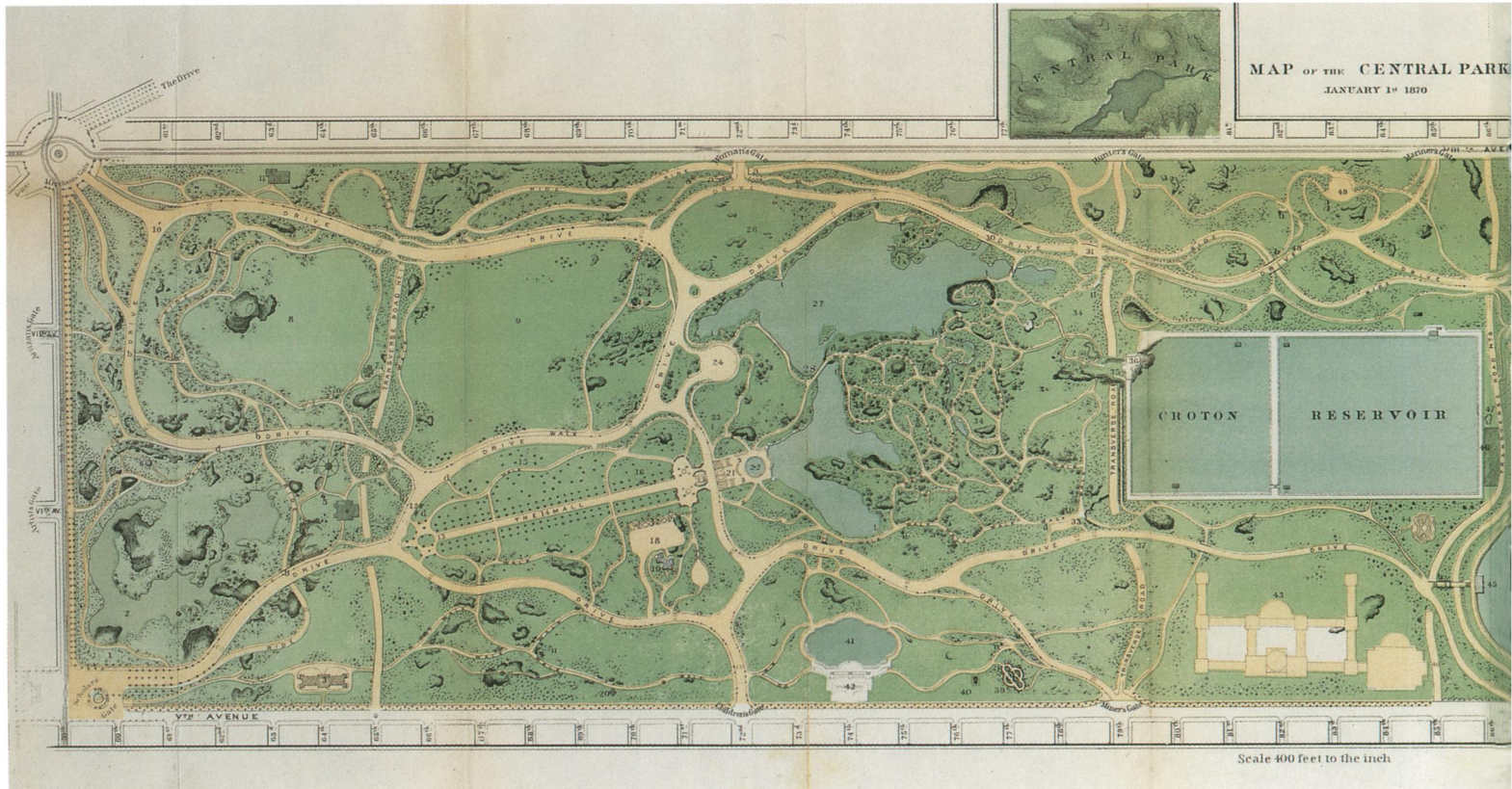
Today we take for granted the Museum’s location on Fifth Avenue at Eighty-second Street—on the edge of a fashionable residential and retail area and easy to reach on foot, or by public or private transportation. But in the 1870s the Upper East Side was still only sparsely settled (fig. 6). The streets had been superimposed on abandoned farmland but were not yet fully paved. Among decaying rural structures, clusters of brownstone town houses had begun to sprout like weeds. The fashionable part of the city was to the south on Fifth Avenue, where an unbroken line of handsome mansions (including that in fig. 2) marched from the Fifties below Central Park to Washington Square. It is no wonder that most of the Museum’s trustees thought the Museum should be



located in the center of this desirable area. To understand why the decision was made to place the Museum in Central Park, more than twenty blocks beyond the northernmost boundaries of “polite society,” we must consider the political history of the park.

In 1853 the state legislature, realizing that the land set aside for the public in the undeveloped areas of

7. *Vaux and Mould’s first Museum plan (center), in map of Central Park, January 1, 1870. From “Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park” for year ending December 31, 1869 (New York, 1870). Colored lithograph*



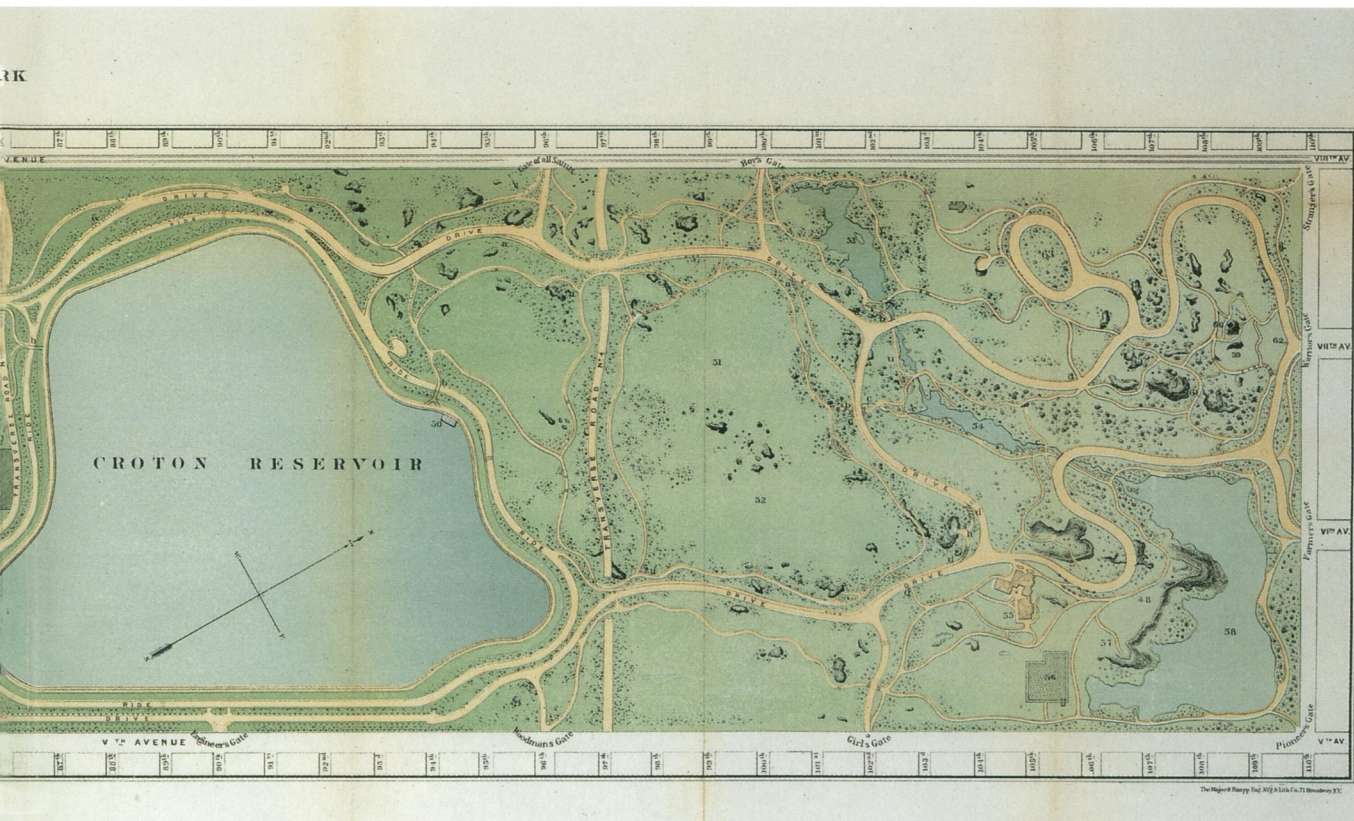
the city was inadequate, added the tract between Fifth and Eighth Avenues and Fifty-ninth and One-hundred-sixth Streets to the city's parks. By 1856 this land had been officially designated "The Central Park." It was one of only three tracts of public land suitable for the site of a large museum building; the other two were Reservoir Square and Manhattan Square.

A majority of the Museum's trustees favored the Reservoir Square location. Comprising the two blocks between Fortieth and Forty-second Streets and Fifth and Sixth Avenues (renamed Bryant Park in 1884), it was in the heart of the most sought-after residential district. The western portion, the site of the popular New York Crystal Palace in 1853, stood vacant. The Croton Distributing Reservoir, occupying the eastern portion, was scheduled to close now that the Croton Reservoir in Central Park had been completed. Such a plot near the developed part of the city seemed ideal. Manhattan Square, from Seventy-seventh to Eighty-first Streets between Eighth and Ninth Avenues (in 1864 made officially part of Central Park), was considered too far uptown and too far west.

But the ultimate decision about the Museum's location was to be made by the eleven commissioners

of "The Central Park," who in 1857 had been given full power over all aspects of its management and design. That year, after Andrew Green was elected treasurer and the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) was named superintendent, a competition for the redesign of the park was announced. First prize was awarded in 1858 to Olmsted and the British-born architect Calvert Vaux (1824-1895) for their plan, which they called "Greensward." That same year Olmsted was appointed architect in chief of Central Park; Vaux, architect; and Jacob Wrey Mould (1825-1886), another English designer, assistant architect. Green was made controller in 1859 and thereafter played the dominant role in park policy and finance. He was committed to the idea of the park as an educational center, and in April 1859, through his influence, park regulations were amended to allow "for the establishment or maintenance, within the limits of said Central Park, of museums . . . collections of natural history, observatories or works of art."

From the beginning, however, there were misgivings about large buildings in the park. No such structures were envisaged in the 1853 layout; nor did Olmsted and Vaux favor them in their Greensward



plan. According to that scheme, the only museum would be housed in a preexisting structure, the New York State Arsenal, at Sixty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue.

Years later, in 1872, in response to the relentless pressure to allow additional public structures in the park, Olmsted and Vaux carefully spelled out their opposition to extraneous buildings on this land. They allowed one exception, where the boundaries of the park followed preexisting street lines, which did “not precisely coincide with the desirable limits of the Park as a work of art.”

The Eighty-second Street and Fifth Avenue site was the principal example of a boundary area that could not readily be incorporated into the park landscape. As Olmsted and Vaux noted: “A large range of buildings at this point would be seen from no other point of the Park, the locality being bounded on two sides by the reservoir walls, on a third by a rocky ridge, and on the fourth by exterior buildings, while the whole of the territory thus enclosed was too small for the formation of spacious pastoral grounds.” Here was justification, in the words of the chief designers themselves, for this specific location.

In 1869 Green engineered legislation “to erect, establish, conduct, and maintain on the Central Park a Meteorological and Astronomical Observatory, and a Museum of Natural History and a Gallery of Art.” The park map published in January 1870 showed an art museum at the Eighty-second Street site (fig. 7).

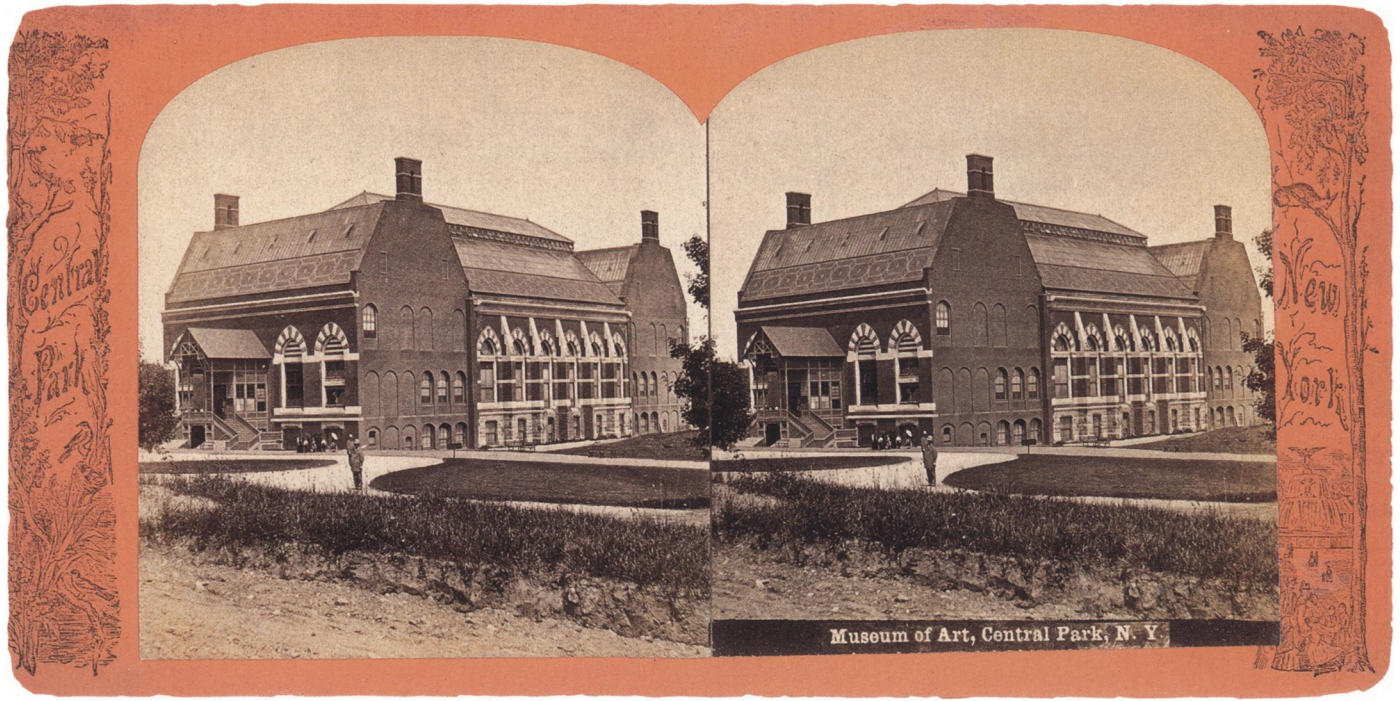
Green’s ambitious plans for a museum at this location were brought to a halt in the spring of 1870—just a few days before the Museum was formally chartered—when the city government was reorganized to suit Boss Tweed. On May 1, by order of A. Oakley Hall, Tweed’s hand-picked mayor, Green’s park commission was replaced: the independent Central Park commission was now officially the New York City Department of Public Parks. The new commissioners, unsympathetic to Olmsted’s conception of a landscape park, began a systematic desecration of the Greensward plan. In November they fired both Olmsted and Vaux, appointing Mould chief architect. The great irony is that, amid all their infelicitous proposals, there was also the recommendation to place the art and natural-history museums together in Manhattan Square because a museum on the Eighty-second Street site would, in the commissioners’ words, “obstruct too much of the Park surface with buildings.”

In April 1871 the state legislature authorized \$1 million for construction of both the art and natural-history museums. The Metropolitan’s trustees unsuccessfully petitioned the new commissioners to switch the site to Reservoir Square. In November, however, the Tweed forces were dismissed, Green regained his dominant role in the Department of Public Parks, and Olmsted and Vaux were reinstated. In March 1872, at Green’s insistence, the parks commissioners formally returned the art museum to its 1869 site.

## **Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould, 1870–80**

The choice of Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould as architects for the new museum was probably inevitable. The parks commissioners were authorized to select the architect as well as the site, and these two men had been intimately involved with construction in Central Park—the bridges and arches, the gazebos and pavilions—from its inception. Though sometimes personally at odds—Vaux was supported by Andrew Green, Mould by the Tweed ring—their views on architecture were complementary. And their master plan for the Museum, so long derided, can now be seen as having a logic and a simplicity that might have been appreciated had any part of it been realized unaltered.

Born in the mid-1820s and trained in London architectural firms, Vaux and Mould immigrated in the early 1850s to New York. Vaux joined the great American landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing in Newburgh, New York. When Downing drowned in 1852, Vaux went into partnership with another recently arrived Englishman, Frederick Clarke Withers. Four years later Vaux and Withers moved their practice to New York City. In 1857 Vaux published *Villas and Cottages*, his influential book of Gothic designs for domestic architecture, and invited Olmsted to collaborate with him in what turned out to be the winning design in the Central Park competition. From the late 1850s until 1872, Vaux, Olmsted, and Withers were united by a complex web of professional partnerships in which they undertook large-scale projects around the country. It was early in 1872, during Olmsted’s short tenure as president of the board of commissioners of the parks department, that Vaux and Mould’s final plans for the



Metropolitan's first wing were approved. Vaux resigned from the department in 1873, forming his own private architectural practice to oversee construction of the Museum project.

Mould, a student of the noted British ornamentalist Owen Jones, came to the city in 1852. Mould was assistant architect of Central Park from 1858 until 1870 and associate architect from 1871 to 1874, except for the brief period under Tweed's appointees (1870–71), when he was architect in chief. Until 1875, when Mould went to Peru, he was responsible for most of the beautifully rendered designs for small park structures.

Vaux and Mould brought to America a deep-seated commitment to the Gothic Revival: not the monochromatic early English designs of such established Gothic Revivalists as James Renwick, but the bold eclecticism of the High Victorian Gothic, inspired by the recent writings of John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53). Ruskin, the greatest architectural critic of the time, was a passionate advocate of the Italian Romanesque and Gothic (particularly Venetian) styles. The one that became synonymous with his name, "Ruskinian," or High Victorian Gothic, was vigorous and vertical; its most prominent features, of obvious Italian parentage, were multicolored

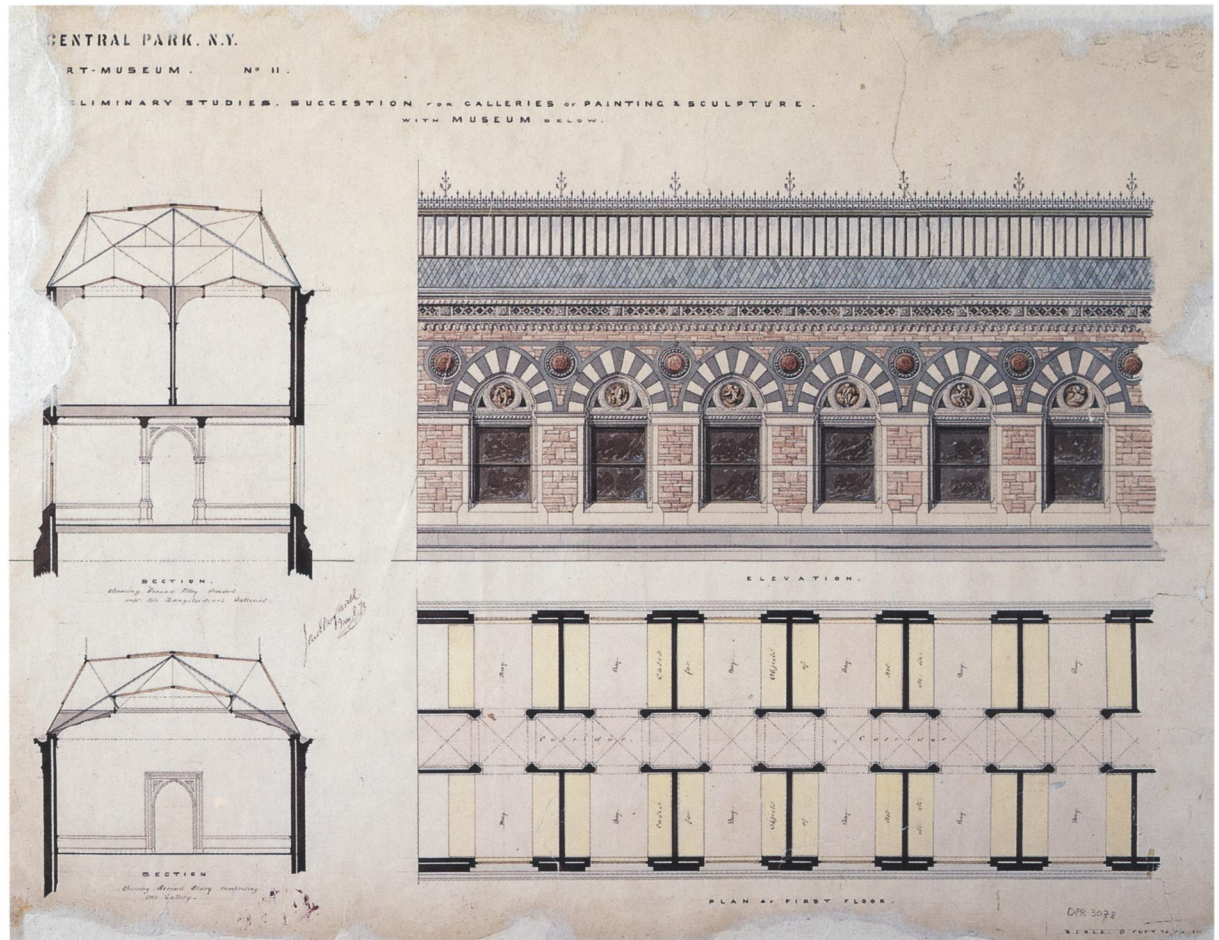
masonry, sometimes called "permanent polychromy," and the pointed-and-banded arch.

The first Ruskinian Gothic structure in New York City, the Trinity Church Parish School of 1860, was by Mould. Much more influential, however, was the polychrome Venetian Gothic building by P. B. Wight that won the 1861 competition for the National Academy of Design. Championed by a generation of English-trained architects, the High Victorian Gothic reached its apogee in America in the decade 1865–75. It was the style chosen for a number of major museums, among them the Metropolitan, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1870), and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia (1871).

The earliest visual evidence of the Vaux and Mould scheme for the Metropolitan is the plot plan for the "Proposed Art Museum and Hall," published in the Central Park map for the year ending 1869, dated January 1, 1870 (see fig. 7). Broadly schematic, it established the general features of the master plan that was later accepted. The museum part of the proposal consisted principally of three large attached quadrangles formed by narrow wings and, at their intersections, projecting square pavilions. A large domed pavilion was centered in the Fifth Avenue facade at Eighty-second Street. Despite the fringe of

8. Vaux and Mould's Museum building from the southwest, 1880. Stereograph. Gift of Herbert Mitchell, 1995 (1995.114.1)

9. Jacob Wrey Mould. Plan, elevation, and sections for an art museum in Central Park, March 8, 1870. Ink and watercolor on paper. New York City Municipal Archives (3078)



trees indicated on the park map, this pavilion was clearly intended as the main entrance.

In the spring of 1870 Vaux and Mould undertook detailed studies for the plan, the elevation of a typical gallery wing, and the treatment of a dome. Only one of these drawings can now be identified with certainty, and it offers the earliest vision of what the Museum was meant to look like (fig. 9). Beautifully rendered by Mould, it depicts six bays of a narrow two-story exhibition building (presumably one of the shorter wings in the plan in fig. 7). The upper floor, the “Galleries of Painting & Sculpture,” is skylighted; the lower floor, the “Museum,” has “cases for objects of Art” (ancient pottery, glass, and other small objects) within bays, or alcoves. The exterior shows the pointed-and-banded window arches so characteristic of High Victorian Gothic. The wall treatment is extremely rich and polychromatic: within the arches are roundels with tan carvings and green soffits; between the arches, mottled-brown bosses; in the frieze, alternating red and blue square

tiles; the remaining wall surfaces are brownstone—all told, a very rich Ruskinian Gothic confection.

On February 11, 1871, the Museum trustees met to review the draft of an act that would provide for a grant from the city of money and a site for the two museums—of art and natural history. To that end, a supporting petition was circulated. Signed by 40,000 New Yorkers, it led swiftly to the legislation of April 5, 1871, which gave \$500,000 to each museum for construction. Since city funds were to be used to build on city land, it was determined that the buildings would remain city property; and since private gifts and donations alone were used to form the collections, they would be the property of the trustees. Through this simple device, the collections would be protected from political interference.

In response to the funding commitment, the parks commissioners, reflecting the wishes of the Tweed appointees, asked the trustees of the two museums to “communicate to them their opinions and wishes in regard to buildings to be erected in Manhattan

Square” (the site chosen by Tammany Hall). The Metropolitan’s board promptly selected a committee, including one representative from the American Museum of Natural History, to consider “the nature, style, distribution and general arrangement of the buildings for the two Museums.”

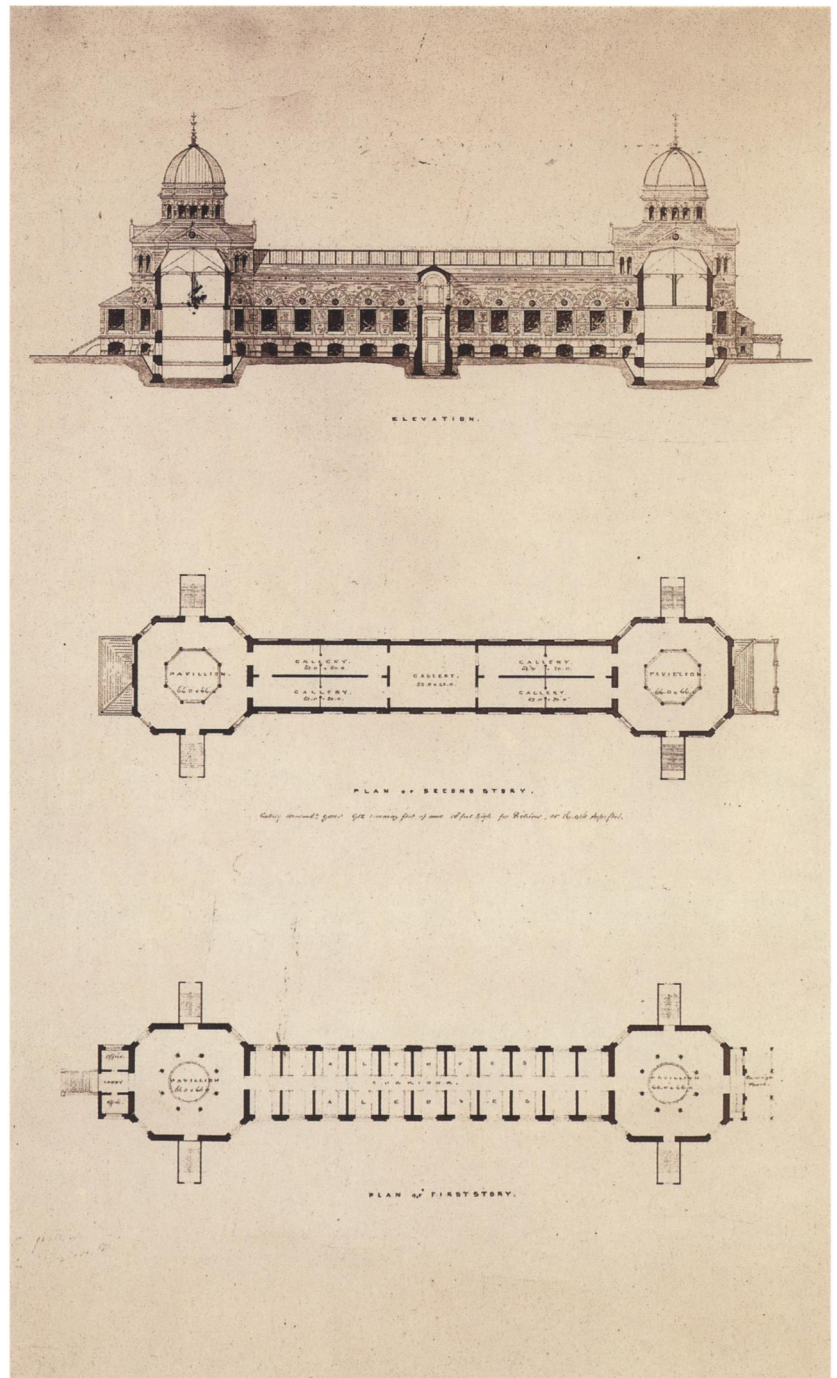
The committee’s chief recommendation was that, because of their different requirements, the two institutions should have separate structures of independent design. For the art museum it recommended that the exhibition buildings be no more than two stories high, with skylights and with courtyards that could be roofed with glass. These were, in fact, the principal features of the designs that Vaux and Mould had prepared in the spring of 1870. No new schemes for the Metropolitan were ever proposed for the Manhattan Square site. On May 1, 1871, Mould, as architect in chief of the parks department, issued a report in which he listed “Various Preliminary Studies on the site proposed by [the] former Board”—that is, at Eighty-second Street in Central Park.

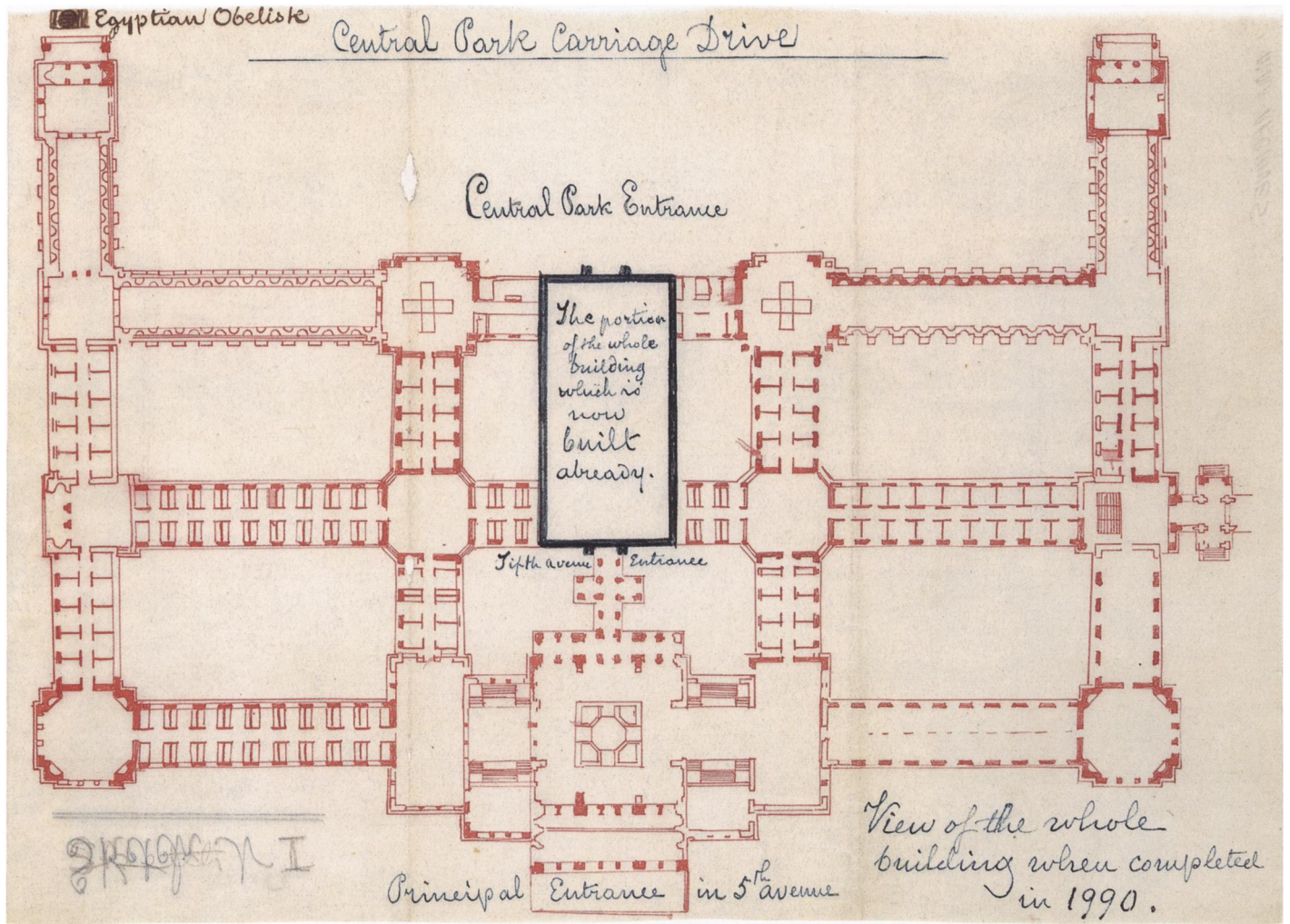
A second sheet of drawings, undated and known only from an old photograph (fig. 10), depicts another preliminary scheme, an expansion on the June 1870 design. It shows the plans and elevation for an eleven-bay exhibition wing, flanked by square pavilions with canted corners and surmounted by domes. Octagonal, ribbed, with pointed profiles, and raised on high pierced drums, the domes are of the late-Italian medieval style, beloved of Ruskin and epitomized by Brunelleschi’s celebrated Duomo in Florence. The temporary staircases and the “open” sides of the octagonal pavilions indicate that this drawing represents what was to have been the first building in a phased construction project. According to a note of the late 1870s pasted below the photograph, the trustees rejected this design in favor of “the building which is now being created.”

Though the drawing for the original master plan is now lost, a crude copy of it (probably by Cesnola), done after the first Museum building was completed in 1880 (fig. 11), clearly shows where the rejected scheme would have fit into the overall plan. It was to have been in the center of the building, parallel to and directly behind the principal Fifth Avenue entrance. Figure 10 shows the unfinished junction for the narrow corridor linking the two structures. What was built in its stead was superimposed upon it at right angles.

The master plan has a grid of narrow pavilions forming six rectangular quadrangles laid out parallel to Fifth Avenue. Vaux and Mould had added a series of western galleries to their 1869 scheme (see fig. 7), thereby doubling the number of courtyards. The plan is notable for its simplicity and rationality. The large courtyards provide unimpeded light. The first-floor galleries are divided into alcoves with cases for the display of objects; the second-floor galleries, with skylights, are for paintings and sculpture. Virtually

10. Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould. Plans and elevation for proposed first wing of the Museum, ca. 1872. Photograph, ca. 1874–80, of a lost drawing





11. Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould. Plan for the Museum, ca. 1872. Probably drawn by Louis P. de Cesnola, ca. 1880, and showing cross wing as built. Ink on linen

12. Vaux and Mould's master plan and cross wing (highlighted). Detail of map of Central Park, 1871-72. From "Second Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks" for year ending May 1, 1872 (New York, 1872). Colored lithograph



the same plan appears on the Central Park map for the fiscal year ending May 1, 1872 (fig. 12).

Some Museum trustees, however, were critical. Back in June 1871, the advisory committee had been authorized to meet with the parks commissioners to voice their objections to the plans as submitted and to express their stated "preference for designs of a simpler and less expensive character, based upon the experience of the South Kensington Museum." It is easy to understand the committee's wariness. Elaborate elevations and dramatic domes were, in the eyes of many of the trustees, inappropriately grand for an institution strapped for operating funds and struggling to acquire works of art. From the Metropolitan's earliest days, the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert) was seen as the ideal role model. Founded in 1851 with neither building nor artworks, the South Kensington, in a few short years, had



acquired extensive collections, a permanent home in England's principal city, and an international reputation.

As a result of these meetings, the general plan was accepted, though with a simplified facade treatment. But then came an abrupt change. Construction was to begin with the broad cross wing that brutally bisected the west-central quadrangle (figs. 12, 13). It seems that the architects were trying to accommodate sometimes contradictory demands by the Museum's architect-rich advisory committee. The programmatic quagmire they faced is summed up in a statement by members Hunt, Renwick, and Sturgis: "Now it is obviously of great importance that the building to be erected at once, with the half million already appropriated, should be made to include something of each part of the building: some picture gallery, some glass-roofed court, and some of the cloister or side-lighted gallery surrounding the court."

Only these shortsighted, ad hoc requirements, imposed long after Vaux and Mould had conceived their basic scheme, can explain the awkward insertion of this cross wing, with its great glass-and-steel-roofed hall (intended for monumental architectural casts and inspired by the South Kensington Museum's south court of 1860), in the middle of their central quadrangle. These same requirements were the cause of what became the building's most egregious shortcomings: the lack of suitable space for exhibition cases and the separation, at either end of the building, of the picture galleries. In view of these new demands, it is little wonder that relations between architects and client were strained.

In mid-July 1872, the parks commissioners approved the general plan for the cross wing. During the next two weeks, while still employed by the parks department, Vaux and Mould completed a set of studies as the basis for working drawings ordered on July 30. The first-floor plan (fig. 13) shows the cross wing superimposed upon the central quadrangle of the original plan. The section (fig. 14) shows the vaulted iron-and-glass hall generally as built and splendid two-story corner pavilions with round domes that were not built. (The classical wall mural was never executed, and a basement was added later.)

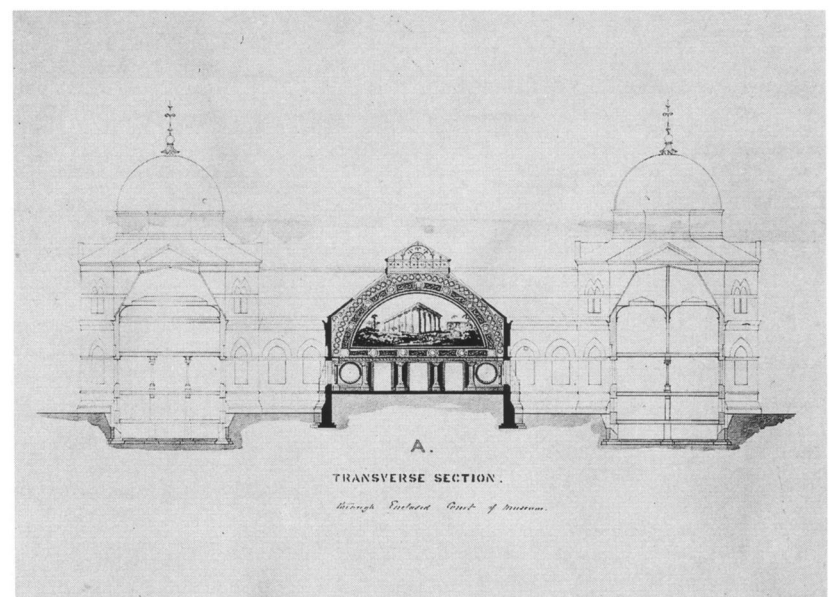
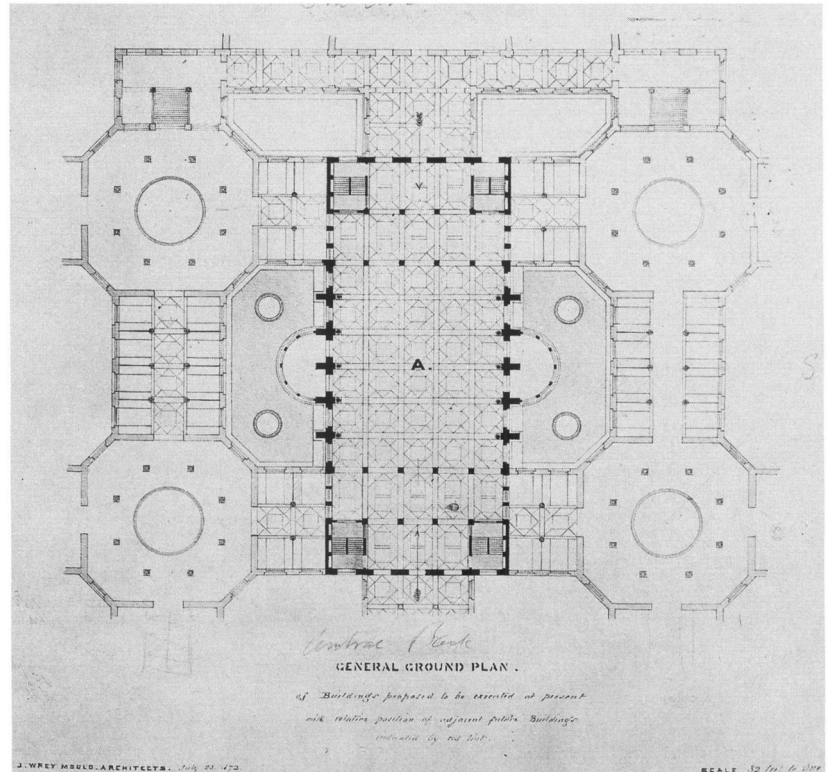
Although the basic design for the building was complete, construction was delayed, first (in the diplomatic language of the Museum's *Annual Report*) by "the uncertainty which has existed in all municipal

affairs" and then by the financial Panic of 1873.

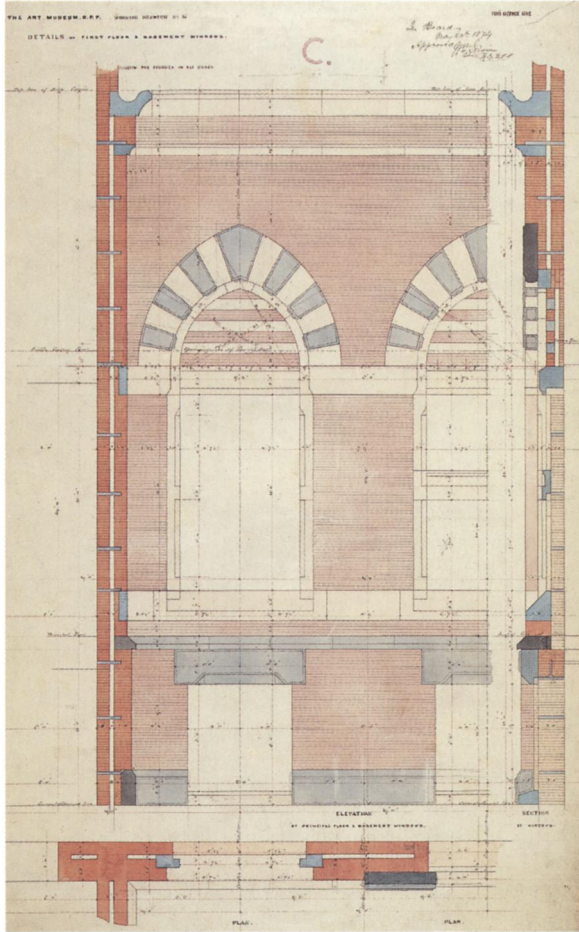
Finally, in mid-1874, excavating began. In May the parks commissioners approved the working drawings for the major structural components: the exterior facades for the stonecutters (fig. 15) and the arched ceiling of the main hall and the corner staircases for the ironmongers (fig. 16). In the latter the staircase balustrades, with their sextafoil openings, are shown supported by columns with octagonal pedestals, plain round shafts, and three different designs of

13. Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould. First-floor plan, July 23, 1872. Photograph, ca. 1874-80, of a lost drawing

14. Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould. Transverse section, July 29, 1872. Photograph, ca. 1874-80, of a lost drawing



15. Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould. Details of west elevation, 1874. Ink and watercolor on paper. New York City Municipal Archives (1519)

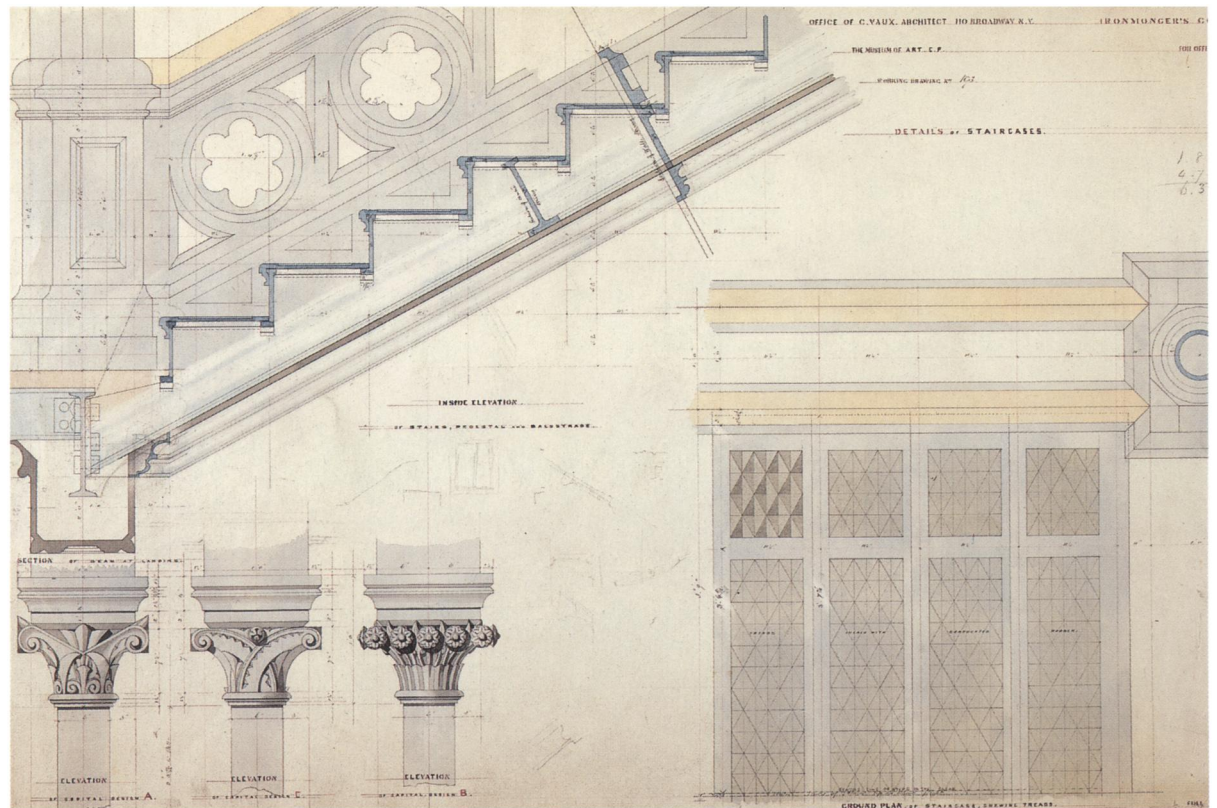


capitals—a Gothic Revival variation on the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian of the classical orders.

The working drawings, done after Vaux resigned from the parks department in 1873, are all inscribed “Office of C. Vaux, Architect, 110 Broadway N.Y.” Mould worked for Vaux there, and many of the drawings are also signed “Calvert Vaux & J. Wrey Mould, Architects” (see fig. 17). After Mould left New York in 1875, Vaux took engineer George K. Radford into partnership. It is telling that Vaux, who entered so many partnerships, never formed one with Mould. (Their only other important collaborations were the Museum of Natural History and the Central Park boathouse.) The reason probably had something to do with Mould’s personality. George Templeton Strong wrote of “that ugly and uncouth J. Wrey Mould, architect and universal genius.” Moreover, that Vaux had been fired and Mould promoted by the Tweed forces could not have helped matters. Though it is now hard to distinguish the role each played in the design, Vaux should probably be credited with the overall conception and plan and Mould with the architectural ornament and most of the drawings.

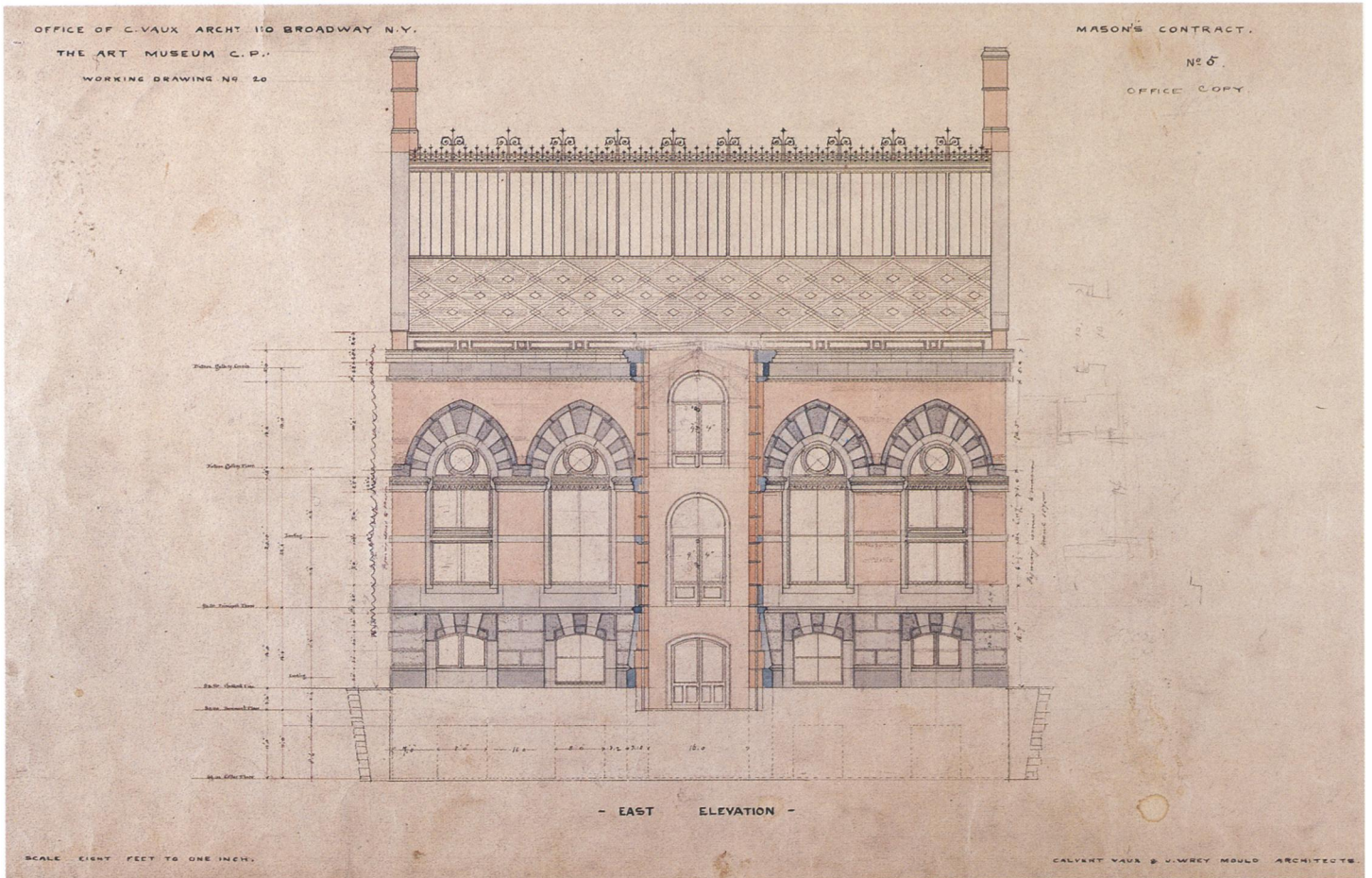
It was not until 1876 that the building was finally enclosed. Part of the delay was caused by the

16. Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould. Staircase ironwork, 1874. Ink and watercolor on paper. New York City Municipal Archives (1511)



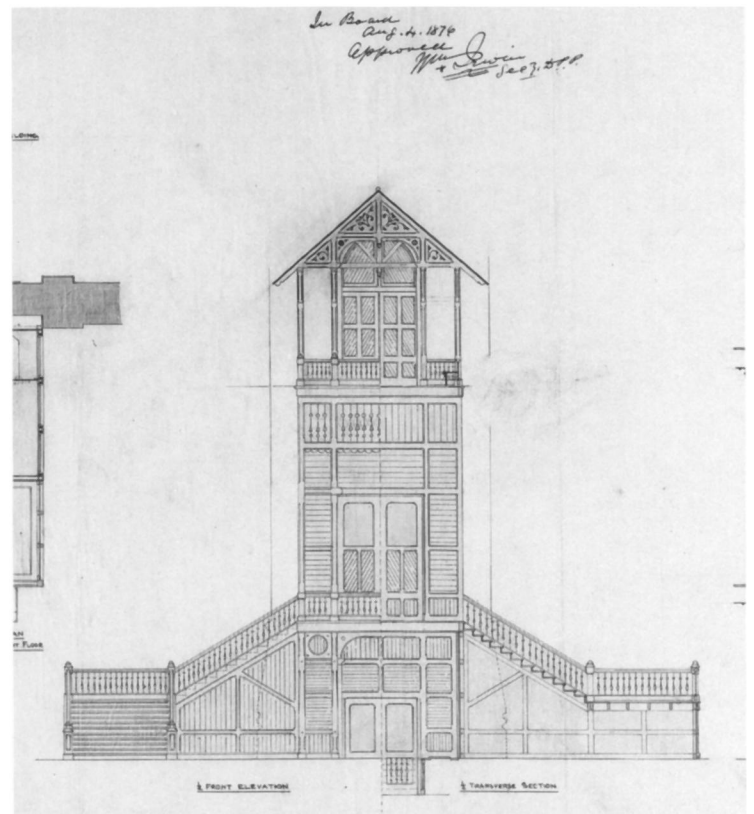
Opposite page:  
17. Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould. East elevation, 1874. Ink and watercolor on paper. New York City Municipal Archives (1491)

18. Calvert Vaux and George K. Radford. East entrance staircase, 1876. Ink and watercolor on linen. New York City Municipal Archives (1490)



Museum's executive committee, which inspected the site and, "finding that the plans were in some important respects unsuitable to the purposes of the Institution," appointed a special committee to negotiate changes with Vaux and the parks commissioners. The partial basement was deemed inadequate, so additional space had to be blasted out beneath the main hall of the half-built structure and new floor supports and windows were required.

In August 1876 contracts were approved for the plumbing, heating, and ventilating systems, for plasterwork, and for carpentry (fig. 18), including the temporary covered wooden stairs, which extended on the east facade to the cornice in order to cover the unfinished masonry. In 1877 the addition at either side of the main hall of cast-iron "galleries of communication" remedied the problem of the complete separation of the east and west suites of second-floor picture galleries. Equipping and furnishing the building required another appropriation, payable over two years. Thus it was only during March and April of 1879 that the Museum's collections





19. *The Museum from Fifth Avenue, 1880. At the far left is the crane being used to prepare the site for Cleopatra's Needle. Stereograph. Gift of Herbert Mitchell, 1995 (1995.114.2)*

were finally transferred from Fourteenth Street to their permanent home in Central Park.

The new building opened to the public on March 30, 1880, to decidedly mixed reviews. The interiors generally met with approval, but the exterior suffered from being so obviously incomplete. From almost any angle (figs. 8, 19) the most striking elements were the raw, unfinished brick walls, intended one day to sprout additional wings. The new museum was like a great beached whale, stranded in the park. Defensively, the Metropolitan's 1879 *Annual Report* reminded its readers that "the exterior of the building has been much criticised, but it must be borne in mind that it is part of a larger structure, and that every addition will tend to harmonize the whole edifice."

This admonition failed to mollify the outspoken art critic James Jackson Jarves, who in 1882 called it "a forcible example of architectural ugliness, out of harmony and keeping with its avowed purpose . . . fit only for a winter garden or a railway depot."

Today, although reroofed and entirely encased in

later structures, portions of Vaux's building are still visible to the observant eye. In the Robert Wood Johnson Jr. Gallery, at the top of the Grand Staircase, part of one of the windows of the original Fifth Avenue facade is visible. The massive pointed arch of banded granite encloses a blind roundel, which stares out like a great cyclopean eye. In the Robert Lehman Wing, at the main-floor level, Vaux's entire west facade now forms the entrance wall (see fig. 107).

The narrow corridors at either side of the Grand Staircase lead through the original facade's windows into the Medieval tapestry hall, one of two sculpture galleries that opened directly onto the main hall, now the Medieval Sculpture Hall (figs. 20, 21). Vaux's ceiling beams and molded cornices remain, although stripped of ornament. But what strikes the eye, because it retains the rich polychromy of the High Victorian Gothic, is the floor: a bold pattern of white and black marble, surrounded by narrow borders of red slate.

On either side of the hall, enclosed stairways lead to the second-floor galleries. In 1880 these were the



20. View from sculpture gallery into main hall. Wood engraving. From "Harper's Weekly," April 10, 1880



21. Main-floor sculpture gallery. Wood engraving. From "The Art Journal," August 1880



familiar landmarks at wildly disparate scale and also show the great iron roof ribs with their quatrefoil openings. The original picture galleries (fig. 24) were simply finished, revealing the strict economy required to complete the original building within budget. As the *New York Times* for April 30, 1880, editorialized:

Modest, even sober in form and adornment, the Museum as it stands is a guarantee to the public—who will have to pay, in the long run, for future additions—that the money has been so far carefully spent. It has gained, then, the confidence of the New Yorker of today, especially since he has been witness of so much rascality in the way of public expenditure in other places.

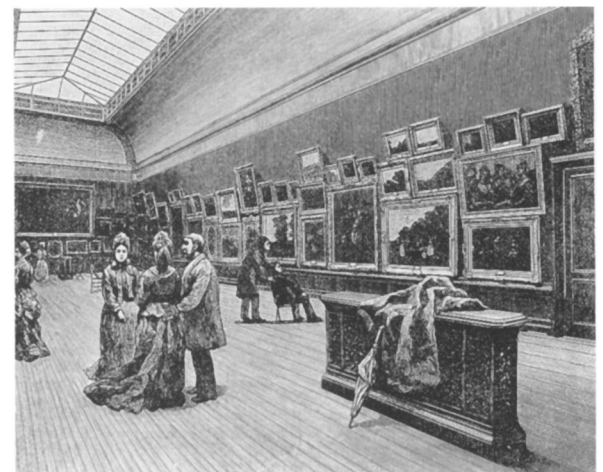
22. View of main floor from bull's-eye window in staircase. Wood engraving. From "The Art Journal," July 1880

23. Architectural casts installed in main hall, 1907

24. The gallery of the Museum's Old Master paintings. Wood engraving. From "Harper's New Monthly Magazine," May 1880

most-talked-about feature of the new building. When ascending the staircases, notable for their ample breadth and gentleness of ascent, one originally passed great circular windows that offered a view of almost the entire floor below (fig. 22). The staircases have recently been repainted to suggest their original polychrome glory.

The rest of the Vaux design has been altered beyond recognition. The "grand Centre Hall," at first filled with cases of Cesnola's antiquities (see fig. 20), later housed large-scale architectural casts. Photographs (fig. 23) record the cheerful clutter of



## Theodore Weston and Arthur Lyman Tuckerman, 1880–94

In December 1880, within months of the opening of the Museum building, the executive committee ordered the preliminary sketches necessary to request an appropriation for an extension. But instead of continuing to work with Calvert Vaux as architect, they ordered plans from Theodore Weston (1832–1919), civil engineer and Museum trustee. Though there had been changes in architectural fashion—classicism was on the rise and by 1880 Vaux’s High Victorian Gothic was somewhat out of date—Vaux was dismissed because the trustees of the Metropolitan had become thoroughly disillusioned, not only with the parks department’s role in the Museum’s design but with the building itself. (That many of the structure’s shortcomings resulted from last-minute changes made by the Museum’s committee, against Vaux’s advice, was not considered.) Johnston left no doubt of his dissatisfaction, writing to Cesnola in 1884, “Our first building was a mistake, there must be none about the second.”

The trustees renegotiated their *modus operandi* with the department so that, according to the enabling legislation of May 26, 1881, the “plans . . . shall be prepared by the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and approved by the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks.” At least in theory, the trustees would now be free to choose their own architect.

A year after the executive committee had asked Weston for preliminary drawings, a “Special Committee of Advisory Architects” was appointed to “decide about the plan for the new addition.” The members were James Renwick and Richard Morris Hunt (1827–1895), two of America’s leading architects, and Weston himself. Apparently Renwick and Hunt were meant to serve as Weston’s advisers. Renwick, who had designed the Smithsonian (1847–55) and Corcoran (1859–71) museums in Washington, D.C., was in his mid-sixties, and his career had peaked. But Hunt, now fifty-four, had just recently (1879) begun the most brilliant phase of his career with the design for the first of many sumptuous limestone palaces for the Vanderbilt family. How he must have chafed at the choice of Weston!

There seem to have been two principal reasons why Hunt was not selected to succeed Vaux. The



first was the prejudice on the part of some trustees against the kind of grand architectural statement that Hunt might demand. According to the *Annual Report* for 1880–81, for example, the trustees desired “that the appropriations shall be used for the construction of substantial extensions, affording the internal accommodation which the Museum now demands, and that external decoration be left, as far as possible, to the future.” Hardly an exciting prospect for an ambitious architect.

The second reason was simply a matter of personalities. Cesnola, a gregarious Italian, did not find Hunt, a reserved and formal New Englander, congenial. At the latter’s death in 1895, Cesnola admitted that “personally I did not care much for Hunt but for his architectural ability I always had the highest esteem.” With Weston, by contrast, Cesnola was to develop a remarkable rapport.

Weston was an engineer involved principally with the city’s water and sewer systems. He opened his own office as “Architect and Civil Engineer” only in 1882, after beginning the Museum commission, his first, and apparently sole, major architectural project. Weston’s selection may be seen as a reaction by the trustees to having had an outside professional (Vaux) and his grandiose ideas (the master plan) forced upon them. Weston had been a founding trustee in 1870 and thereafter active in the architectural affairs of the Museum, so it seemed expedient to choose this proven friend of the Metropolitan, a skilled engineer, and appoint an oversight committee to make up for his inexperience in design.

25. The Weston wing from the southwest, ca. 1889. Museum of the City of New York

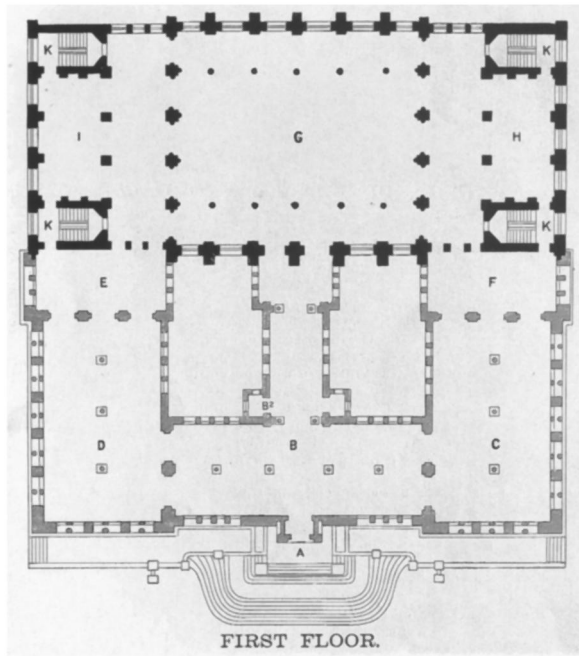
Getting an appropriation proved much harder than expected. The money authorized in the enabling legislation of 1881, for which Weston had originally been requested to make drawings, did not materialize. It was not until August 1883, when the nation's financial outlook was brighter and public funding again a possibility, that Weston was officially engaged by the Museum. At this time he must have been

instructed to ignore the original master plan and to think only in terms of modest wings to the north and south of the existing structure.

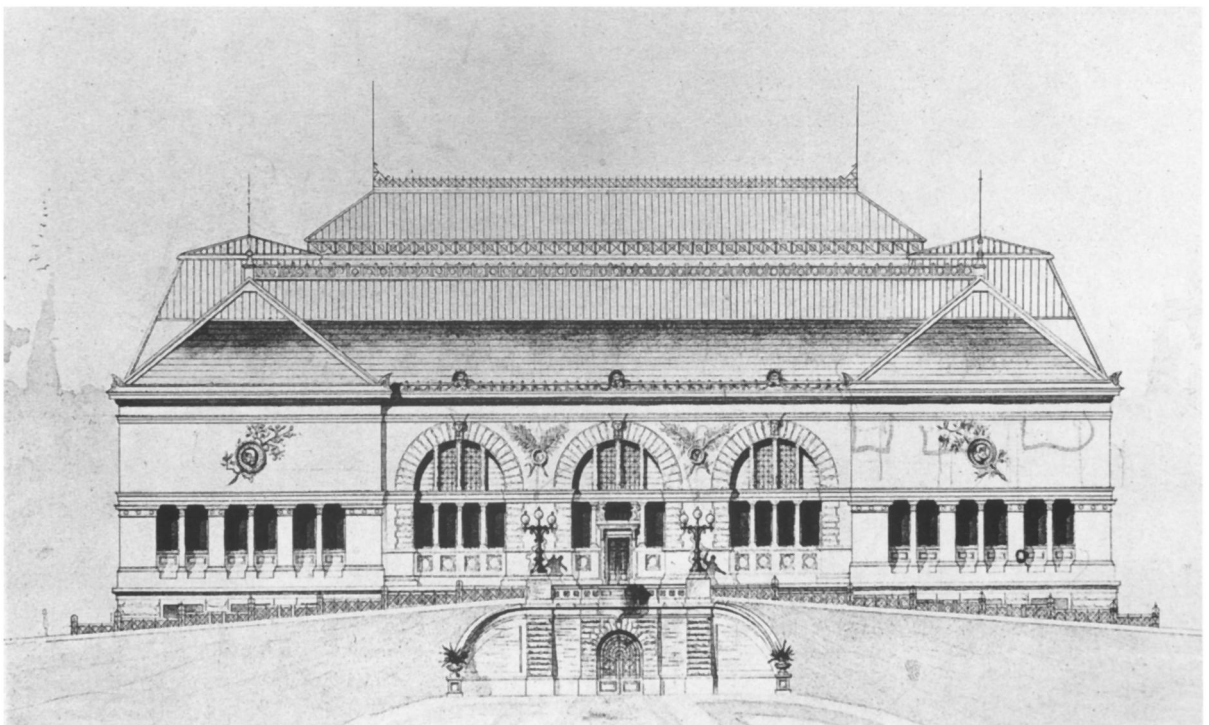
On August 14, 1883, Weston wrote Cesnola, "I have begun actively in making the ground plan sketches, and find I shall need all the old drawings [i.e., Vaux's]." Among Weston's first designs was "a plan of two wings toward the South." In September he drew up an alternate scheme based on a suggestion by Cesnola, and this was the one that was adopted: an E shape, which, when joined to Vaux's I shape, formed a square block with two light wells (fig. 26). In October Weston began a new facade design, writing, with disconcerting naïveté, that "a beautiful result can be obtained, dignified and most satisfying to my artistic feeling."

In November he sent Cesnola plans and two additional suggestions for the south facade. One of these may be identifiable with the earliest recorded drawing of this facade (fig. 27). In the background the high roof of Vaux's main hall is visible, and on either side are the steep-pitched mansards that Weston proposed to link his building to Vaux's (see fig. 30). The facade design is in three parts. The center section has three huge, arched openings: the central one has a modest door leading to a carriage drive at ground level; below the drive, at basement level, is a large arched door, the entrance to the Museum's Art

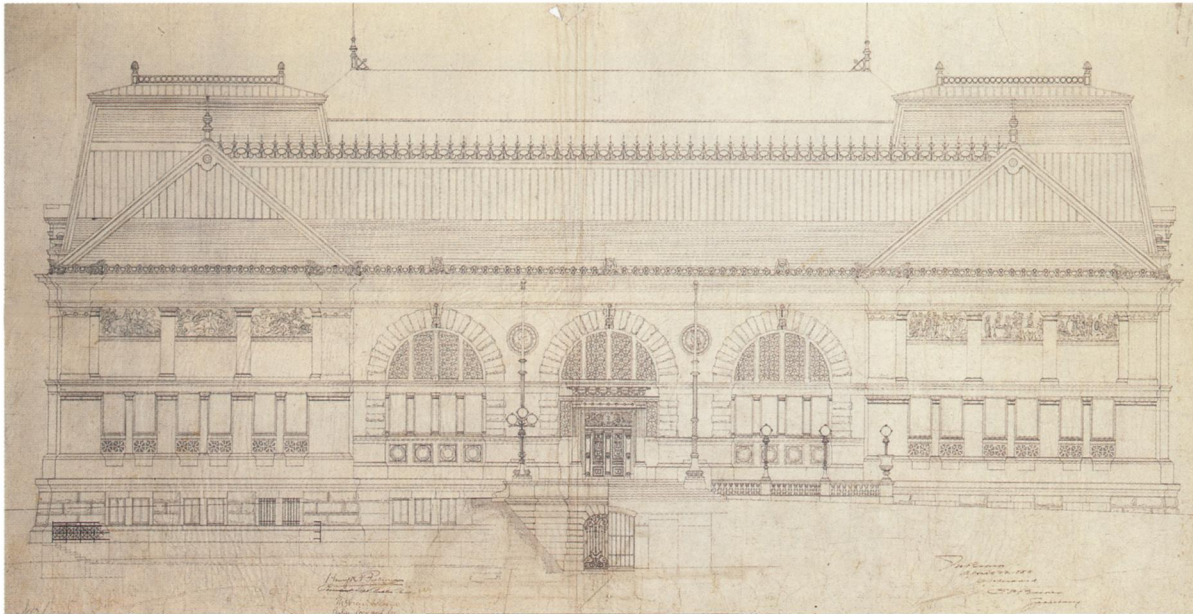
26. First-floor plan, 1888, with the Vaux wing above and Weston's south wing below. Photograph of a lost drawing



27. Theodore Weston. Preliminary study for the south (Central Park) facade, 1883. Photograph of a lost drawing







28. Theodore Weston. *Approved design for the south (Central Park) entrance facade, 1885. Ink and pencil on linen. New York City Municipal Archives (1520)*

Schools. On the projecting flanking sections, the first-floor wall is articulated by pilasters and pairs of double-window openings; the second-floor wall is blank (indicating that the rooms are skylighted picture galleries) and relieved only by a carved decorative motif. The upper half of the roof is a skylight.

In April 1884 the trustees endorsed Weston's plans, and that spring he made numerous trips to Albany to lobby for a Museum funding bill. He must have been ebullient when, in May, the legislature finally authorized a \$350,000 bond issue to underwrite the south wing. The parks department approved Weston's plans and unanimously appointed him "Constructing and Superintending Architect."

That same month, just when everything seemed to be in Weston's favor, Johnston appointed a trustee building committee (himself, Henry G. Marquand, Cesnola, and Hunt) to oversee the project. Hunt, who had been out of town when Johnston appointed him, could not contain his displeasure when he returned in July. "It will neither be convenient or agreeable for me to serve on the building committee," he wrote to Cesnola, "as the plan of the proposed addition does not meet with my unreserved approval."

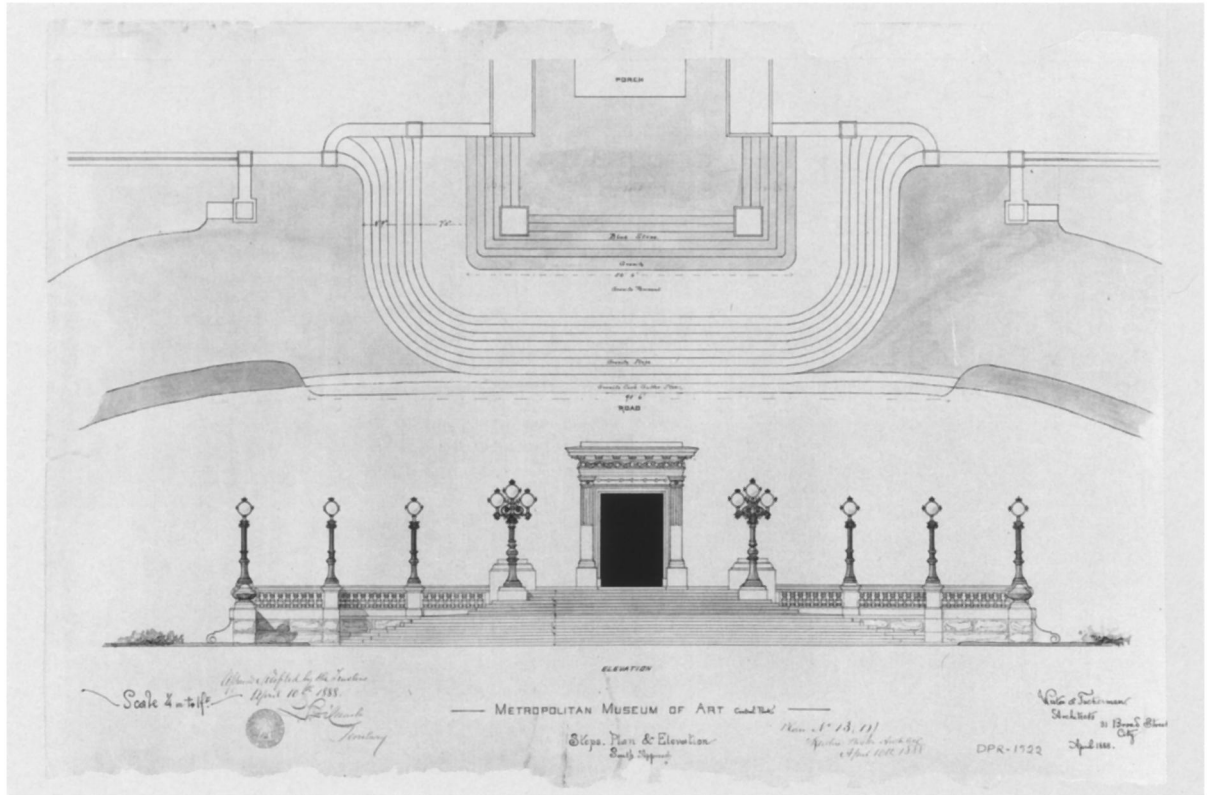
Weston decried the "discourteous tone" of Hunt's letter and told Cesnola, "I propose that we have a sensible, simple as well as artistic building, thoroughly correct architecturally. I do not believe that Mr. H is the *only man* in the country who is capable of carrying it out."

There were unanticipated money problems as well. Only \$25,000 worth of city bonds (out of the \$350,000 authorized) had been sold—barely enough to pay for excavating the site. Furthermore, in July it was decided to limit the cost of construction to \$250,000, plus \$100,000 for contingencies and equipment. Weston claimed that his building could be built for that sum. He completed the final plans and specifications in February 1885, and in April they were approved by the parks commissioners.

Weston's approved south-facade design (fig. 28) shows two obvious changes from the earlier scheme. The blank upper walls of the projecting ends were now treated with pilasters like the ones below, and carved panels suggestive of the Parthenon frieze (those to the west representing War, those to the east, Peace) were let in between the pilasters. Less obvious but more significant are the changes to the central door at grade. It was now greatly enlarged, to reflect the trustees' decision of November 24, 1884, to move the main entrance of the Museum from the east (Fifth Avenue) to the south.

In April 1885 the sale of revenue bonds for the south wing was authorized: \$162,500 in calendar year 1885 and a like amount the following year. But now, with the means at hand, the parks department chose not to act, leaving an unfinished building site open to the winter weather. As the Museum's *Annual Report* for 1885 acknowledged, "the exposed condition in which the South walls of the present building are

29. Theodore Weston and Arthur Lyman Tuckerman. Revised design for the staircase of the south-entrance facade, April 1888. Ink and watercolor on paper. New York City Municipal Archives (1522)



left by the neglected excavations is a subject of serious anxiety, but we are without power to remedy it.”

One reason for the delay was that in December the parks commissioners suddenly claimed that the plans—approved eight months earlier—were insufficiently clear. Apparently Hunt, disgusted with the quality of Weston’s working drawings, had raised questions with city officials, resulting in a list of recommendations being sent from Hunt’s assistant to Marquand, a friend and frequent client of Hunt. It was only with some arm-twisting by members of the board that, by the end of January 1886, more than five years after Weston was first asked to put pencil to paper, construction began in earnest.

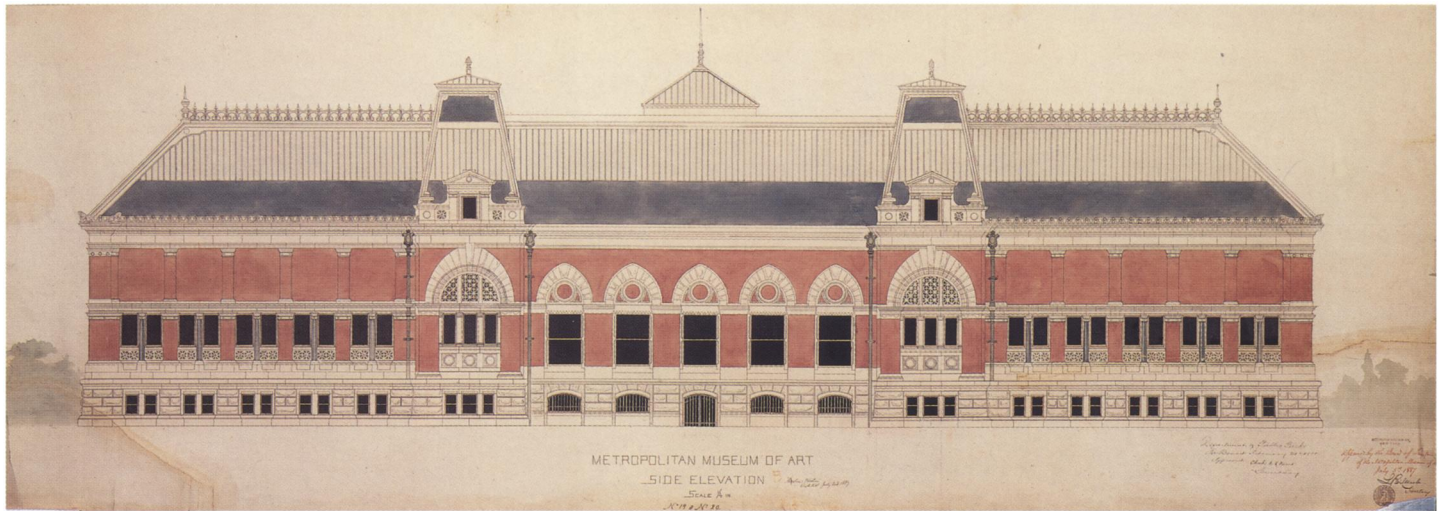
It soon became apparent that Weston’s blithe assurances—that the building could be erected for \$350,000—were overly optimistic. In February 1887 the building committee met and decided that, until more money could be found, the six frieze panels on the south facade would be left uncarved, and “the artistic bronze doors” for the main entrance, the bronze medallions of Michelangelo and Raphael, and the grillwork panels for the arched windows (all depicted in fig. 28) would not be ordered. When additional funds were forthcoming, however, they

were used to begin a third, north wing, and the south facade remains unembellished to this day (see fig. 110).

During 1886 and 1887 construction proceeded rapidly. Then, in April 1888, with the wing nearing completion, the building committee decided against having the Art Schools in the basement. Weston was instructed to do away with the basement entrance, which had figured in every plan, and to lower the carriage drive to the foot of a set of stairs. Visitors would now have to climb a grand, ceremonial staircase to enter the Museum.

The design for the new staircase (fig. 29), adding ten granite steps to the seven bluestone ones above, was approved by Cesnola on April 10, 1888. As there was no way to complete the stairs in time for the long-awaited public opening of the south wing on December 18, the inauguration ceremonies were held in the “old Central Hall” of the Vaux building, still entered by the temporary wooden staircases.

The new wing, like the first one, received mixed architectural reviews. An observer in *Harper’s Weekly* mourned the loss of a comprehensive master plan: “All who are familiar with the complete design of the late WREY MOULD must regret that it has been

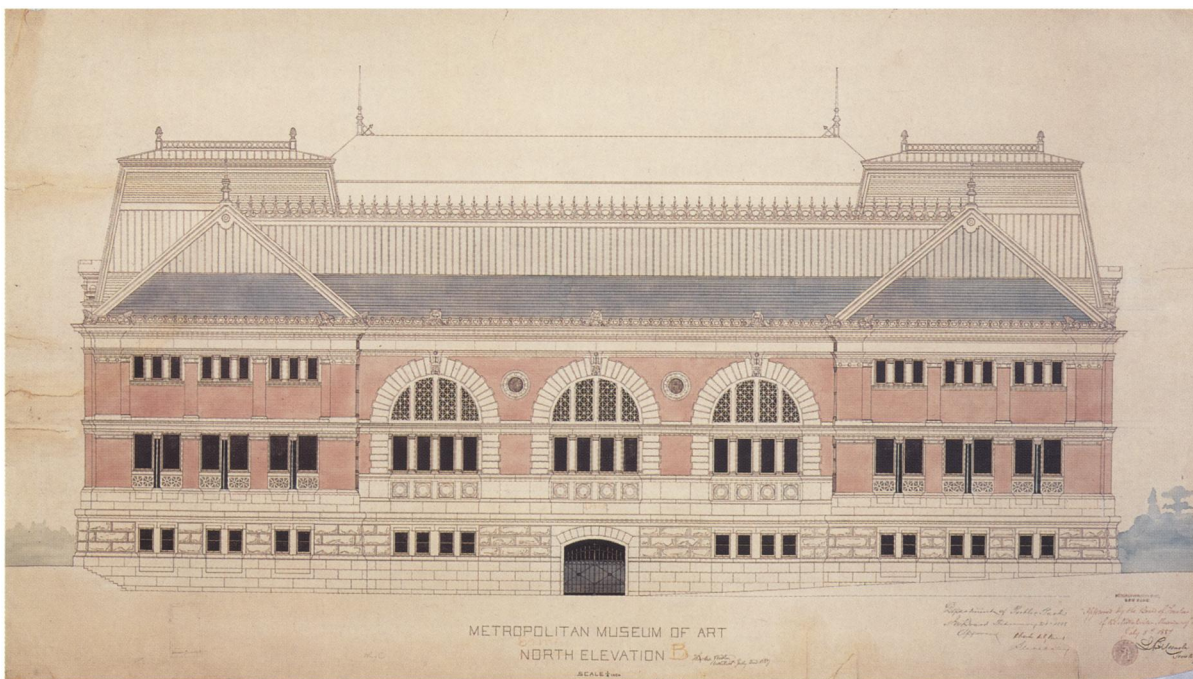


thrown aside to be replaced by the present squat and heavy structure.” (The critic’s failure to acknowledge Vaux is surprising.) However, once the new stairs were completed and became the sole public entrance to the Museum, attention naturally focused there.

Back in July 1887, emboldened by a new appropriation—\$312,000 to repair the existing building and to complete and furnish the extension—Cesnola had signed off on a series of drawings that included the three exterior facades of a north wing, designed by Weston as a mirror image of the south one. A rendering of the “Side Elevation” (fig. 30) depicts Vaux’s east front flanked by Weston’s matching wings. (Weston had removed Vaux’s temporary wooden stair-

case and completed the stone-and-brickwork behind it, clearly demonstrating that at this time he was making no provision for the further expansion of the building.) The rendering shows how Weston resolved the issue of joining his wall design, with its two classical orders—a continuation of his south facade—to Vaux’s Gothic arcade. He chose to blend the two styles by means of tall, projecting pavilions. In their brick walls he inserted round-arched, three-part windows with massive pointed arches. For the roofs, he installed tall High Victorian mansards, complete with massive granite dormers—a combination, introduced in the 1850s at the Louvre, which for thirty years was imitated internationally as a symbol

30. Theodore Weston. East (Fifth Avenue) elevation showing north and south wings flanking Vaux’s building, July 2, 1887. Ink and watercolor on paper



31. Theodore Weston. North elevation of north wing, July 2, 1887. Ink and watercolor on paper

32. Theodore Weston. Plan of Museum extension proposed for World's Columbian Exposition, 1890. Ink on paper. *The Prints and Drawings Collection, The Octagon Museum, The American Architectural Foundation* (78.595)

33. Theodore Weston. Perspective rendering of Museum extension proposed for World's Columbian Exposition. Wood engraving. From "The New York Herald," January 12, 1890

of cosmopolitan modernity. Another drawing, of the north facade (fig. 31), shows an elevation identical to the executed south facade, except for a service entrance rather than a public one and windows in the second floor instead of panels for sculpture. However, this treatment of the north elevation would be dramatically altered before construction.

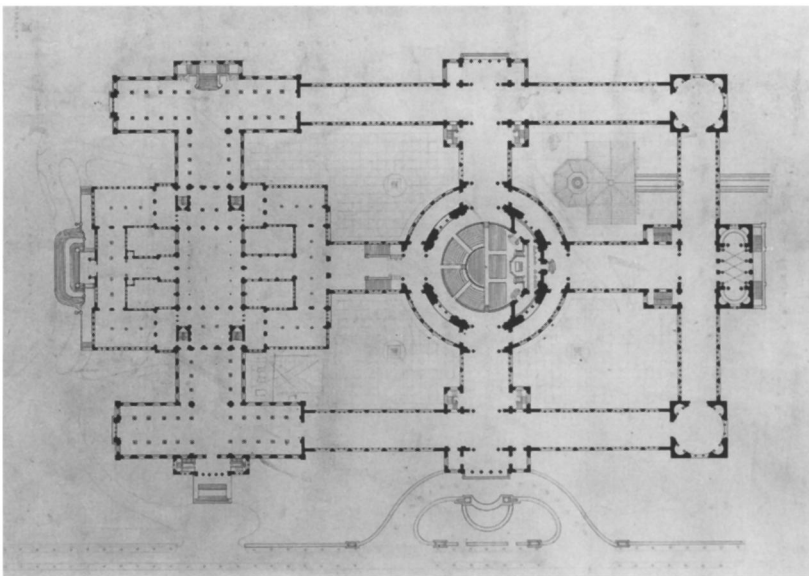
In February 1889, two months after the opening of the south wing, the building committee decided to seek additional funding for the north wing. Times were good economically, and in June 1890 the legislature authorized \$400,000 to "complete, equip and furnish the north extension." For once, it seemed the Museum would be able to proceed without delay.

In 1890 American cities were competing to be the site of the World's Columbian Exposition, originally scheduled to be held in 1892. Hunt was on the New

York committee, which proposed a plan to expand the Museum's building to house the artistic components of the fair. Weston provided the design for a vast extension to the north (figs. 32, 33). The idea of funding the expansion of the Museum through participation in an exposition was brilliant, but Weston's design was not. It was proof, if nothing else, of his inability to plan on a vast scale. Both plan and elevation seem endless and banal, and Weston was undecided about whether the Museum should be oriented to Fifth Avenue or to the park. Six weeks after Weston's drawing was published in the *New York Herald*, Chicago was chosen as the exposition site. When compared with the classical elegance of the buildings erected in that victorious city in 1893, Weston's design looked decidedly old-fashioned.

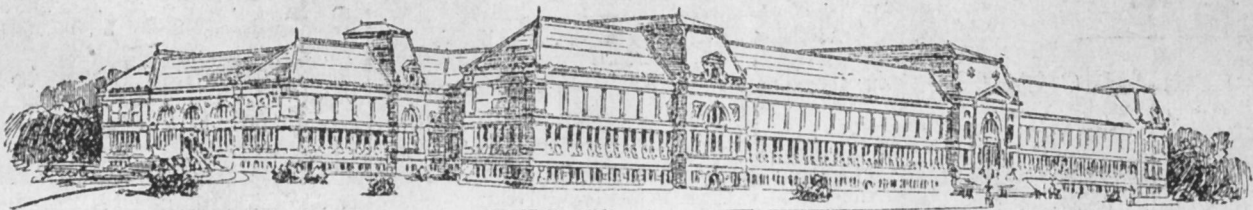
Such an undistinguished proposal for a major international competition must have precipitated Weston's downfall. On January 20, just a week after Weston's design appeared in the press, the Museum's building committee (Cesnola, trustee Heber R. Bishop, and Marquand, who had succeeded Johnston as president in 1889) discussed recommending a new architect to the parks commissioners. Presumably Hunt's disaffection was now shared by a majority of trustees, causing Weston to resign.

On February 17, at the parks department's request, the building committee recommended, in order of preference, three architects to take over the job: Richard Morris Hunt; the firm of McKim, Mead and White; and Robert H. Robertson. The next day Hunt tendered his resignation as a trustee, "to take effect when I may be appointed architect of said confirmation." The way seemed clear, finally, to hire



## THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART IN 1892.

Showing the Projected Fifth Avenue Facade, 800 Feet Long, and Giving a General Idea of the Building Where Works of Art Will Be Exhibited at New York's Big Fair.



The above sketch shows what the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Central Park will look like when it is enlarged to exhibit the southerly extension recently added and other art exhibits at New York's international exposition in 1892. It exhibits the southerly extension recently added and other art exhibits at New York's international exposition in 1892. It exhibits the southerly extension recently added and other art exhibits at New York's international exposition in 1892.



34. Weston and Tuckerman's north wing from Fifth Avenue (with the boiler house in the foreground). Photograph taken April 24, 1906, during excavations for the first McKim, Mead and White wing

a person of superior training and experience, an architect appropriate for a great public commission. But Hunt had spoken too soon. The parks commissioners balked and asked for more names. Marquand, running out of ideas, came up with those of George B. Post, James Renwick, and Weston's young partner, Arthur Lyman Tuckerman (1861–1892). On March 18 the parks commissioners accepted Weston's resignation and appointed Tuckerman to fill his post. Marquand was shocked and Hunt, outraged.

At least Tuckerman, who had been in practice with Weston since 1885 (a relationship that now came to an abrupt end), had unrivaled knowledge of the project and would provide continuity. In his application for the position, the young man claimed: "I myself drew the bulk of the filed plans and know the building and all its needs so thoroughly that there is scarcely a measurement I cannot recollect or a moulding or a stone." But otherwise his credentials were slim. He is said to have studied architecture at the *École des Beaux-Arts* and in 1885 began teaching architecture and draftsmanship in the Museum's Art Schools. In 1887, after publishing *A Short History of Architecture*, he was put in charge of the Art Schools.

The one sure thing about Tuckerman's appoint-

ment was that at this time, in 1890, the parks commissioners were unwilling to entrust the project to *any* architect capable of creating a comprehensive new master plan. A plausible explanation for their reluctance is that Vaux was still landscape architect to the city and insisted that his master plan not be abandoned officially. Furthermore, he felt particular antipathy toward Hunt, who, in 1863, had won a design competition for the southern entrances to Central Park. Hunt's classical gates, reflecting his Parisian training, were in direct conflict with the English-landscape tradition that the park embodied. And in 1865, after intense controversy, Vaux succeeded in having them set aside.

Tuckerman labored over his plans between April and August 1890, and they were approved by the parks department in September. In these drawings Weston's south-facade design had been turned inside out. (In fact, this change had been made earlier in the year as part of the proposal for the Columbian Exposition.) The center section now projected and had been expanded to seven bays (see fig. 34). Blind arches surmounted tripartite windows, the lower halves of which were themselves blind. Above the cornice was a huge "shed dormer" with seven more



35. *Weston, Vaux, and Tuckerman wings from the southeast, ca. 1895*

36. *Gallery of Egyptian and other antiquities, in Weston's south wing, 1907*

tripartite windows, creating an immense light-filled attic. Was its purpose to give the galleries below a balanced, even light? Or did Tuckerman harbor the dream of one day installing his beloved Art Schools there? Either way, it is hard to find much merit in these labored revisions.

Tuckerman, consumed with the project, wore himself out. In October 1891, with construction

under way, the building committee sent Tuckerman abroad for his health. But it was too late, and he died in Monte Carlo early the next year.

During Tuckerman's absence Joseph Wolf (1856–1914) was made “Superintending Architect for the North Wing” and, after Tuckerman's death, Wolf was appointed his successor. Wolf, although he had had his own office since 1886 and was a member of the Architectural League, did not have much prominence in the profession. He was, nevertheless, a competent supervising architect and brought the north-wing project to a refreshingly uneventful completion. The building was enclosed in 1893, but it was not furnished and open to the public until November 1894.

The Weston-Tuckerman wings formed a large rectangular block. While sympathetic to Vaux's structure in color and texture, the additions inevitably squashed its narrow facades (fig. 35). As far back as 1891, when it was decided to build a boiler house and an electric plant adjacent to the east side of the north wing, it was evident that one day a new Fifth Avenue wing would obscure the old building.

Large and inviting as it may have seemed from the outside, the new south entrance to the Museum was anticlimactic. One entered, without preamble, into an exhibition gallery (see fig. 26), on the opposite side of which, to give the visitor some sense of

axial progression, a narrow corridor led to the old main hall. But this was not part of Vaux's original plan, and one of his piers was directly in the way.

The first floor of the south wing consisted principally of three great galleries, intended, respectively, for sculpture, ancient pottery and glass, and Egyptian and other antiquities (fig. 36). The rooms were separated from one another by massive double or triple arches of load-bearing masonry. The floors were paved in "stone mosaic," a polished, pebble-filled concrete of Roman inspiration. Each gallery was the full width of the wing, with columns down the center (to support the floor above) and windows set high in each side wall. Thus, light flooded down upon works of art in their elaborate exhibition cases. Natural light was still the determining factor in art-museum design, and Weston had handled it rather skillfully.

The first-floor plan of the north wing was a mirror image of that of the south: three vast galleries, separated by massive masonry arches, with center columnar supports and large windows placed high in the side walls (fig. 37). These galleries originally housed the Museum's collection of plaster casts, the canonical masterpieces of ancient sculpture. Their white ceilings and cornices reflected daylight evenly throughout the galleries. In dramatic contrast to the pure white of the casts, the walls and woodwork were dark, as was the unbroken expanse of the variegated red marble floor.

The second-floor galleries of both north and south wings, reached by Vaux's polychrome staircases, were intended primarily for the display of paintings and served to link Vaux's east and west galleries in the way he had intended. In the south wing most of the galleries (fig. 38) had coved ceilings, skylights, and satisfying proportions. Like Vaux's picture galleries, their plain wood floors and doorframes, flat-paneled dados, and stenciled friezes bespeak a limited budget.

Today the south facade is all that is visible of the outside of the Weston-Tuckerman wings. Weston's entrance facade has been incorporated into the Carroll and Milton Petrie European Sculpture Court (fig. 110). Its roof is invisible and the original terracotta cornice has been replaced by a 1950s copper cap. The spreading steps and great basement are entirely gone; gone, too, is the chance to see the facade from a distance, as originally intended. Instead, we are insistently pushed up against its

monumental, gutsy composition of gray granite and red brick—a bold and effective foil to its new, monochromatic surroundings.

Almost nothing survives of the original interiors by Weston and Tuckerman. Only in what was formerly the first-floor east gallery of the north wing (now displaying Italian and French Renaissance decorative arts) do we see portions of the molded plaster cornices and of the variegated red-marble flooring of the old cast galleries.

37. Cast gallery in Weston and Tuckerman's north wing, 1912

38. Picture gallery in Weston's south wing, ca. 1900



39. *Fifth Avenue facade of Hunt's east wing. Photograph by P. E. Parsbley, 1902. The Prints and Drawings Collection, The Octagon Museum, The American Architectural Foundation (P 79.152)*



## Richard Morris Hunt and Richard Howland Hunt, 1894–1902

With the completion of the north wing in 1894, the trustees turned to Richard Morris Hunt for the building's next extension. This choice signaled a dramatic reversal of the Museum's approach: from ambivalence about the site in Central Park, the need for a new master plan, and the cost, to a commitment to face Fifth Avenue boldly and directly and to build with all the grandeur befitting a great institution.

In 1894 Hunt was sixty-seven years old, at the height of his fame and widely revered as the dean of American architects. Born in 1827 in Brattleboro, Vermont, he was educated for the most part in Europe. In 1845 Hunt was admitted to the *École des Beaux-Arts*, as the first American to study architecture there. He joined the atelier of Parisian architect Hector Martin Lefuel, where, in 1854–55, he worked on an extension to the Louvre. Returning to New York in 1857, Hunt immediately played a leading role in establishing the American Institute of Architects. To promulgate professional standards for architects

and to gain public recognition for them were two of his lifelong goals.

Hunt's selection in 1894, after twenty-four years of involvement with the Museum and its building committee, resulted from a complex combination of factors. First, the times were economically expansive and thus propitious for large architectural programs. Unprecedented new fortunes—deriving from railroads, banking, oil, and steel—made possible buildings on a grand scale, both private (the mansions lining Fifth Avenue) and public (the Museum in the park). A new generation of American artists had been trained abroad, and there was a sense that, culturally, America had come of age. Moreover, a new national sentiment favored great public projects as the embodiment of civic pride and virtue. The ultimate symbol of this period, known because of its artistic munificence as the American Renaissance, was the “White City” of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, for which Hunt had served from 1891 to 1893 as president of the board of architects.

In New York the Museum's Vaux and Weston wings suddenly looked very dated. Polychrome masonry



for public buildings was now passé, whereas pristine white classical edifices were de rigueur. The trustees' discomfort with architectural display, a holdover from the Tweed era and the Museum's lean early years, was now largely a thing of the past.

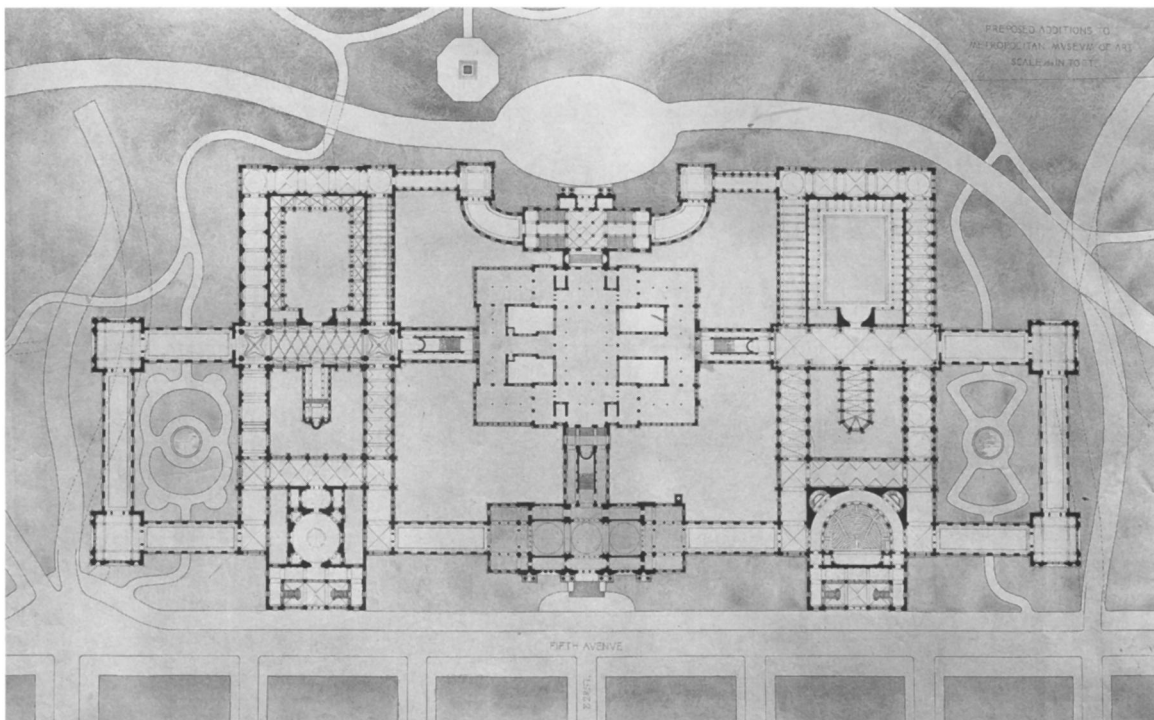
The pivotal figure in the decision to select Hunt as Museum architect was Henry G. Marquand, a distinguished collector and president of the board of trustees. Marquand, for whom Hunt had designed houses in Newport and New York, as well as the Marquand Chapel at Princeton, greatly admired Hunt and, as a member of the building committee, had championed him for the job after Weston resigned in 1890.

The earliest indication that Hunt was playing a dominant role in the Museum's architecture was in January 1892, when he insisted on moving the site of the new boiler house, east of the north wing, a few feet west, "so as not to cut out the light from the future building on the east side of it." But it was not until January 1894, with the opening of the north wing finally in sight, that Marquand officially convened the building committee. The committee—Marquand and Cesnola, with Hunt as chairman—had a power and unity of purpose heretofore lacking. It recommended that the new wing be located east of the existing structures and in a T shape. Behind it and

to the north would be the boiler house, and to the south, a library and lecture room. Joseph Wolf was ordered to produce a ground plan to initiate the funding, but it was actually Hunt who now plotted the Museum's architectural future.

The official records, however, are strangely silent about Hunt's selection. It seems that the building committee, skittish about the possibility of having another architect forced upon them, proceeded to work with Hunt (still a trustee) without explicit board approval. On April 5, 1895, the committee met at Hunt's office to review his progress. According to the minutes, Hunt "had, for several months, been studying and preparing a set of plans showing the entire architectural style of a building which, in his opinion, should be erected on the whole area which the City set aside for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and had also prepared a plan showing the elevation of a portion of the East Side."

Hunt's master plan (fig. 40) filled virtually the entire park area authorized for the Museum, from Seventy-ninth to Eighty-fifth Streets and from Fifth Avenue to the park drive, but it attempted no reconciliation with the park design. Hunt accepted the existing building as the center of his plan, floating it in an immense rectangular court. He located the main entrance wing to the east, on Fifth Avenue,



40. Richard Morris Hunt. Master plan for the Museum, 1895. Photograph of a lost drawing

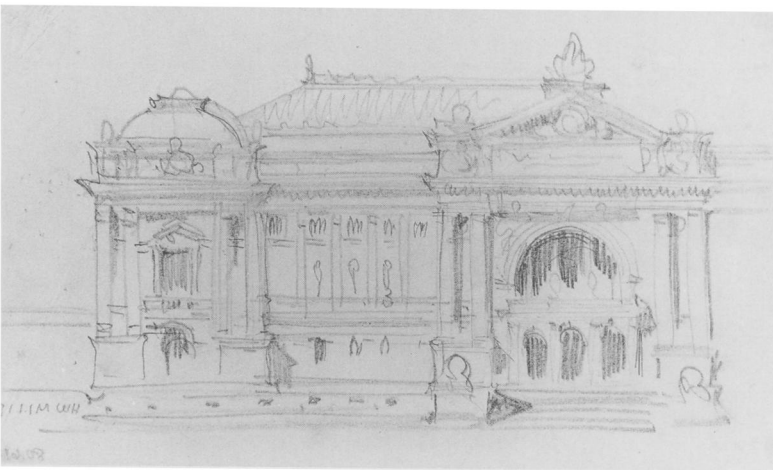
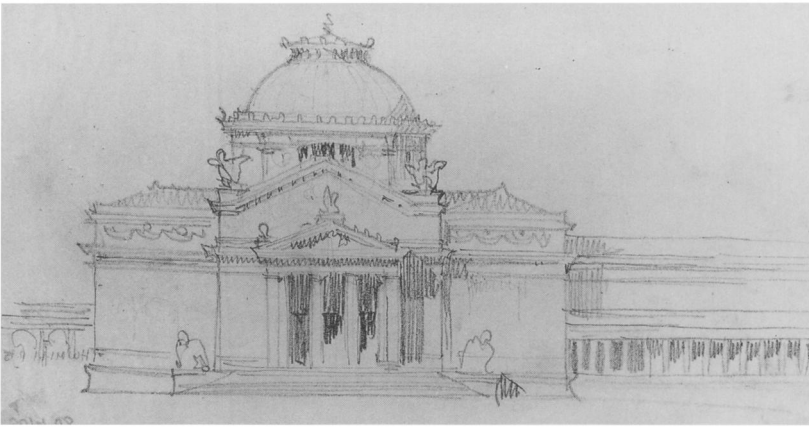
with a subsidiary entrance to the west, on the park drive. North and south were groups of pavilions, each forming three courtyards. In the north complex was an auditorium with its own entrance on Fifth Avenue; in the south complex, a library, also with an entrance on the avenue. Hunt's vast scheme would have required rerouting the Seventy-ninth and Eighty-

fifth Street transverse roads to accommodate pairs of corner pavilions. Perhaps by way of compensation, the pathways of the formal parterres within the north and south courtyards were to be continuations of park walkways.

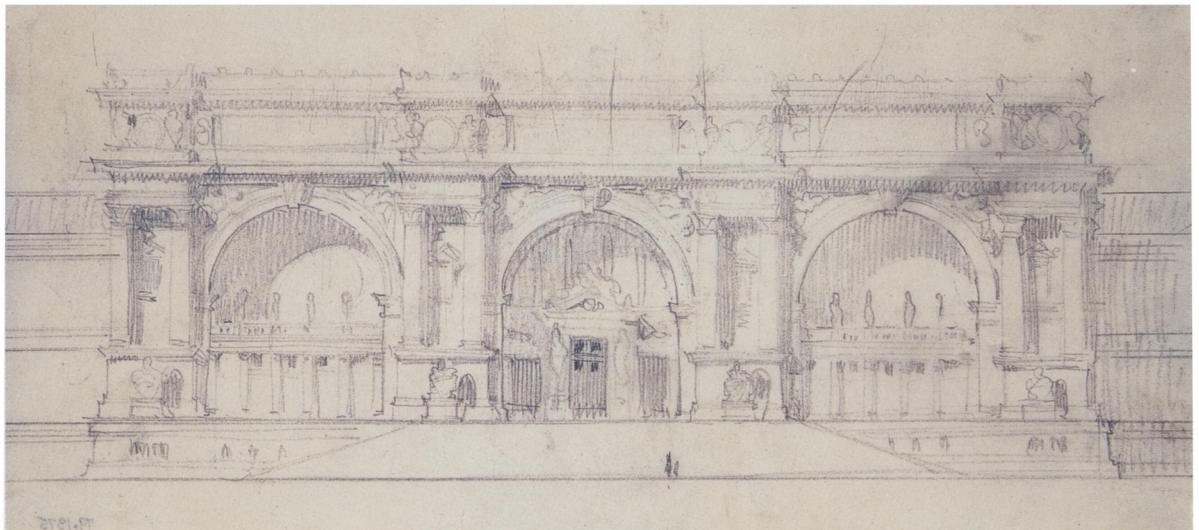
Hunt's design was made up almost entirely of narrow wings, each forming a single long gallery not quite the width of the present Great Hall. Light was provided by tall windows on the sides, and the ceilings were of various vaulted and ribbed types. On the plan the western quadrangles are treated like cloisters, and the middle ones have what look like Romanesque and Gothic choirs. Since no plans or elevations for the second floor exist, our knowledge of the building is sadly incomplete.

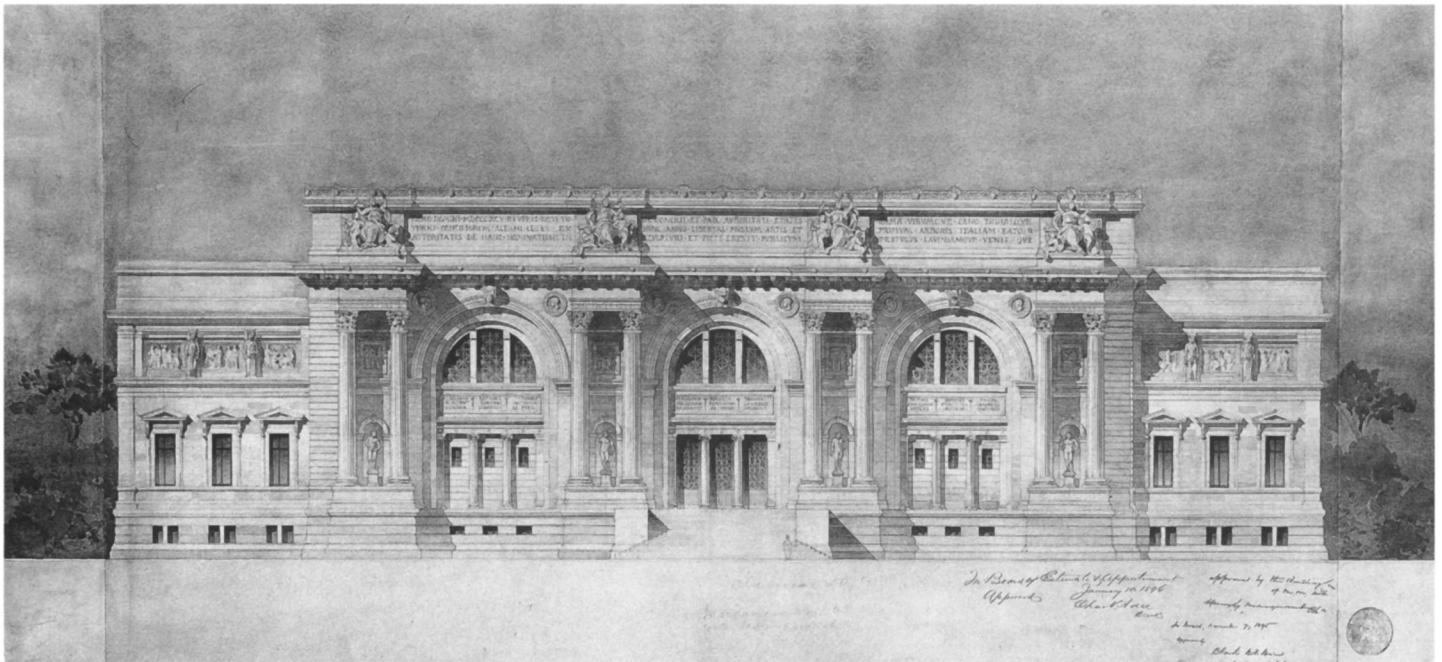
Hunt's scheme for the Metropolitan was a splendid exercise in Beaux-Arts architectural composition—the most ambitious he ever attempted. Having studied at the *École des Beaux-Arts* for the better part of a decade, he had learned how to design quickly as well as how to design monumental public buildings. The *École's concours sur esquisses* (sketch competitions) had taught Hunt to grasp the essential requirements of a commission and, since the school's primary function was to train architects for public structures, many of the competitions that Hunt had entered were for civic buildings. The design for the Metropolitan was exactly in this tradition. Its classical style, its symmetrical and axial plan, and the fact that its exterior masses accorded with the interior spaces were all features of Beaux-Arts design.

The east wing, the building to be erected immediately, included the new main entrance and was the focal point of this grand design. Hunt lavished



41–43. Richard Morris Hunt. *Studies for the Fifth Avenue facade of the east wing, 1894–95. Pencil on tissue. The Prints and Drawings Collection, The Octagon Museum, The American Architectural Foundation (80.6108a, 80.6108, 80.6104)*





attention on its Fifth Avenue facade. A series of quick pencil sketches in his own hand illustrates how he experimented with various treatments. The overall arrangement is always the same: a massive central block, flanked by low, setback wings and large end pavilions. The central block evolved from a square, domed structure into a flat-roofed rectangle. The early sketches (fig. 41) show a pedimented portico and a central dome; later ones (fig. 42) feature a broad facade with a single arched central opening flanked by paired columns; and in the final ones (fig. 43) a facade with three great arches is flanked by paired columns, very much as built.

On April 16, 1895, the state legislature appropriated \$1 million for the construction of the east wing. Hunt could not attend the trustees' spring meeting at the Metropolitan to submit his plans, since it coincided with a visit he had to make to Biltmore, the massive château he was erecting in North Carolina for George Washington Vanderbilt. He instructed his son Richard Howland Hunt (1862–1931), who had joined the firm in 1887, to make the presentation of seven finely rendered drawings: three elevations, two sections, and a floor plan for the east wing, as well as the general plan for the Museum. Although the trustees sent them back to the building committee for further study, these drawings in essence represent the scheme that was accepted by the Museum and the city.

Hunt died suddenly on July 31, before the designs

of his last great project were completed. Cesnola wrote to Marquand that

Hunt's unexpected death will place our Building Committee in a very difficult position. How far his plans of our new wing have progressed since we last saw them I do not know; but if they have advanced sufficiently, I think our Committee ought to stick to them, if we do not I am sure that some of our trustees will recommend their own architects and finish by selecting one of them, and all of the work already done will go for nothing.

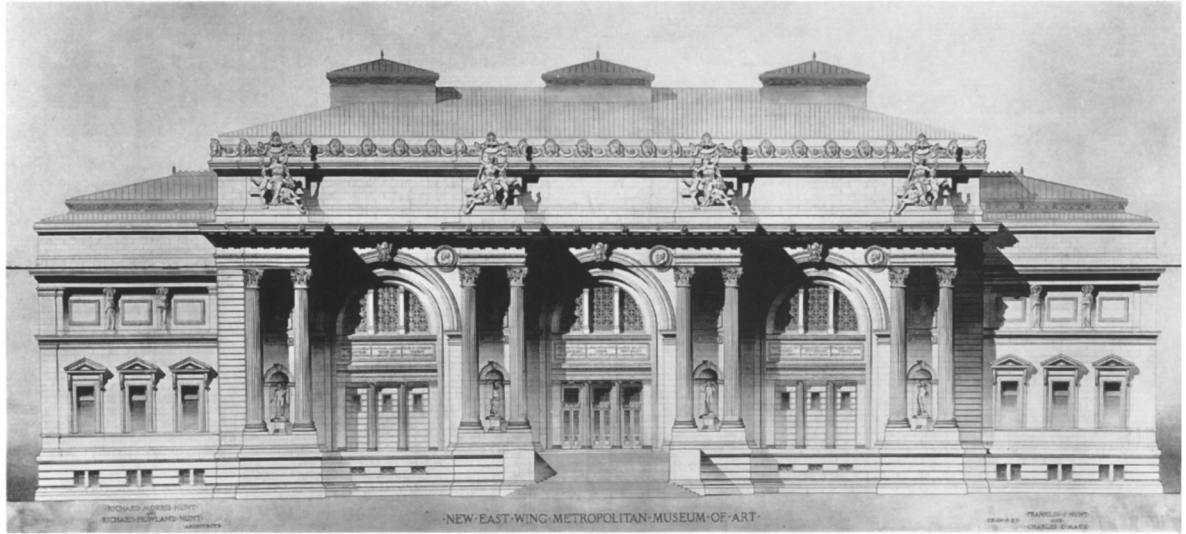
Marquand's response was unequivocal: "I expect to carry out the Hunt design—He went all over the work with Richard his son and had given much thought on the subject for a year—there will be no chance for any body else to come in and snatch his monument." Before the end of October the trustees had approved Hunt's plans for the east wing. Marquand himself wrote the letter of transmittal to the parks commissioners, commenting that

the prevailing style as seen in the elevation herewith submitted is intended to be carried out hereafter throughout the whole structure covering the 18 acres so that the same general architectural character shall be preserved in future additions. The Trustees intend that the principal entrance to the Museum should be at this eastern extension when completed.

On November 7 the plans, including the finished presentation rendering of the Fifth Avenue facade (fig. 44), were approved by the parks commissioners,

44. Richard Morris Hunt. Presentation rendering of Fifth Avenue facade of east wing, 1895. Photograph of a lost drawing

45. Richard Morris Hunt and Richard Howland Hunt. Rendering of Fifth Avenue facade of east wing, 1896. Photograph of a lost drawing by Franklin J. Hunt and Charles E. Mack



but not before Vaux (just two weeks before his death) got in one last jab at Hunt, his old nemesis. Cesnola recounted his conversation of November 5 with Charles Burns, secretary of the parks commissioners:

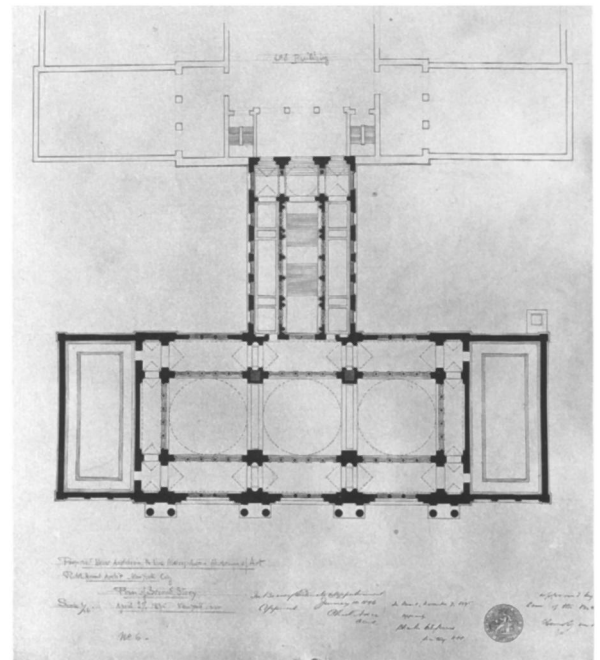
He also tells me that the plans were referred to Mr. Vaux and that he is “kicking about them” (these are Mr. Burns’ words). He says that Mr. Vaux “is dead against the general plan of the Museum.” This the Trustees can well understand because the plans which Vaux made in 1878 for the whole Museum building accepted and placed on file at the Parks Dept. have been ignored, and will be superseded by these new plans of Mr Hunt. Mr. Burns, however, does not think that Mr. Vaux’s opposition will carry any weight.

In January 1896 the building committee instructed Richard Howland Hunt to begin the working drawings for the new wing, but because of his relative inexperience, George B. Post (1837–1913) was appointed consulting architect to assist him. In November the younger Hunt presented twenty-nine sheets of drawings, including a massive rendering of the facade (fig. 45).

Cesnola signed off on the final working drawings in August 1897, the parks commissioners did so in September, and construction contracts were let in December, two and one-half years after the original presentation. Fortunately, the excavations had already been completed, and during 1898 the structure reached half of its final height. There was a long workers’ strike in 1899, but the building fabric was nearing completion by the end of 1900. By then the

\$1 million authorized in April 1895 was exhausted, and in February 1900 a supplemental appropriation of \$200,000 was made “to fit up, equip and furnish the east extension.” The official opening took place on December 22, 1902.

The facade of this mammoth structure shows Richard Morris Hunt’s absolute mastery of the art of classical Beaux-Arts composition. The principal motif, the arch with flanking pairs of freestanding columns—two distinct structural systems arranged in perfect harmony—is repeated three times across the central front. The whole is set off by plain, lower, slightly setback wings. Inside, directly behind and



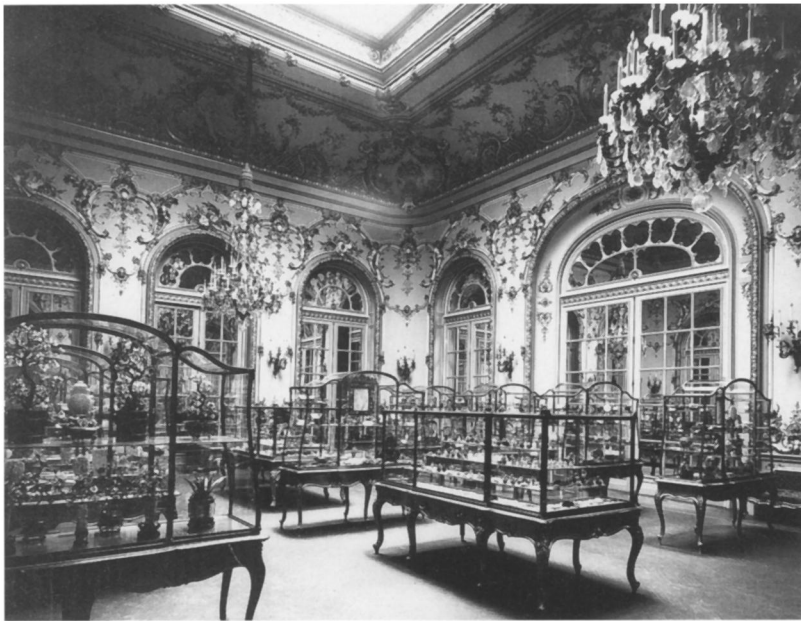
46. Richard Morris Hunt. Second-floor plan of east wing, April 1895. Photograph of a lost drawing



47. Hunt's Great Hall, 1902. Photograph Copyright Wurts Brothers, New York. The Prints and Drawings Collection, The Octagon Museum, The American Architectural Foundation (P 79.9)

echoing the arches of the facade, is the Great Hall, with its three immense saucer-shaped domes (figs. 46, 47). Each dome rests upon a plaster cornice, originally decorated with heavy cast swags. (They were altered in 1906 by Charles McKim.) The cornice, in turn, is supported on arches that spring from immense masonry piers. The four center piers have pediment-

ed niches (originally intended for classical sculpture, now used for flowers) and roundels (the stone blanks were never carved with their relief portraits). On the first floor, colonnades in the center and end bays provide access to the various parts of the building. On the second floor, behind the balustrade, is a continuous balcony with a vaulted ceiling. The domes



48. Hunt's second-floor south gallery (1902), 1907

49. The second-floor north gallery, a reconstruction (1903) by Carrère and Hastings of Hunt's ballroom (1892–94) for Heber Bishop's Fifth Avenue mansion, 1903

and vaulting were constructed by the Guastavino Company, which introduced their thin-shell, laminated-tile vaulting system to America from Catalonia. The “mosaic” floor is an aggregate of bits of marble (similar to what Weston had used), poured in sections framed by strips of yellow marble. Otherwise, the entire space was clad in limestone. Mammoth electrified cast-bronze *torchères* in the corners and along the balustrade provided illumination at night.

The architectural embellishments in the wing's other public spaces, though not of stone, were equal-

ly powerful. The second-floor south gallery, for example (fig. 48), had a gargantuan plaster cornice that dwarfed the cases full of porcelains below. In 1903 the second-floor north gallery, to be used as a setting (fig. 49) for the Bishop jade collection given the previous year, was altered to re-create the florid rococo ballroom Hunt had designed for Heber Bishop's Fifth Avenue mansion in 1892–94. In both instances Hunt's interiors overwhelmed the art, and the spaces were subsequently remodeled.

Although the Museum's new entrance building was executed in faithful adherence to the elder Hunt's design—the only noticeable change from his facade design was the increased size of the *chéneau* (the ornamental gutter)—financial constraints dictated different materials and the deletion of much of the decorative sculpture. On November 14, 1895, not long after his father's death, Richard Howland Hunt had written Marquand about the building: “Father's first choice was white marble, but in case that proved to be too expensive to use Indiana limestone.” Just before the construction contracts were let, and at Marquand's recommendation, the building committee decided that, “in order that there will be a sufficient margin in the million dollar appropriation to meet any unforeseen expenses,” the facade and the Great Hall would be built of the “first quality of Indiana lime stone.”

The sole visual record of the elder Hunt's original decorative scheme for the facade is the April 1895 rendering (see fig. 44), which the committee approved that November. Showing a white-marble facade with an extensive program of figural carving and inscriptions, it includes thirty-one pieces of sculpture. Above the paired columns are monumental figural groups; between the columns are niches containing freestanding statues and, above them, relief panels. In each arch is a keystone with a head of Athena, and in the spandrels, two portrait medallions. Over the windows in the wings three relief panels are separated by caryatid figures. The design also shows six panels with names or inscriptions carved in stone—three within the arched openings, three in the attic.

By the time of his death Hunt had not determined specific subjects for this program. On the drawing the depictions of sculpture are generic; for example, the four attic groups are but one design, alternately reversed. The inscriptions, while readable,



were hardly definitive: together with the names of famous Renaissance painters and architects (Raphael and Michelangelo, Bramante and Scamozzi) were those of Hunt, his son, and two draftsmen from their office.

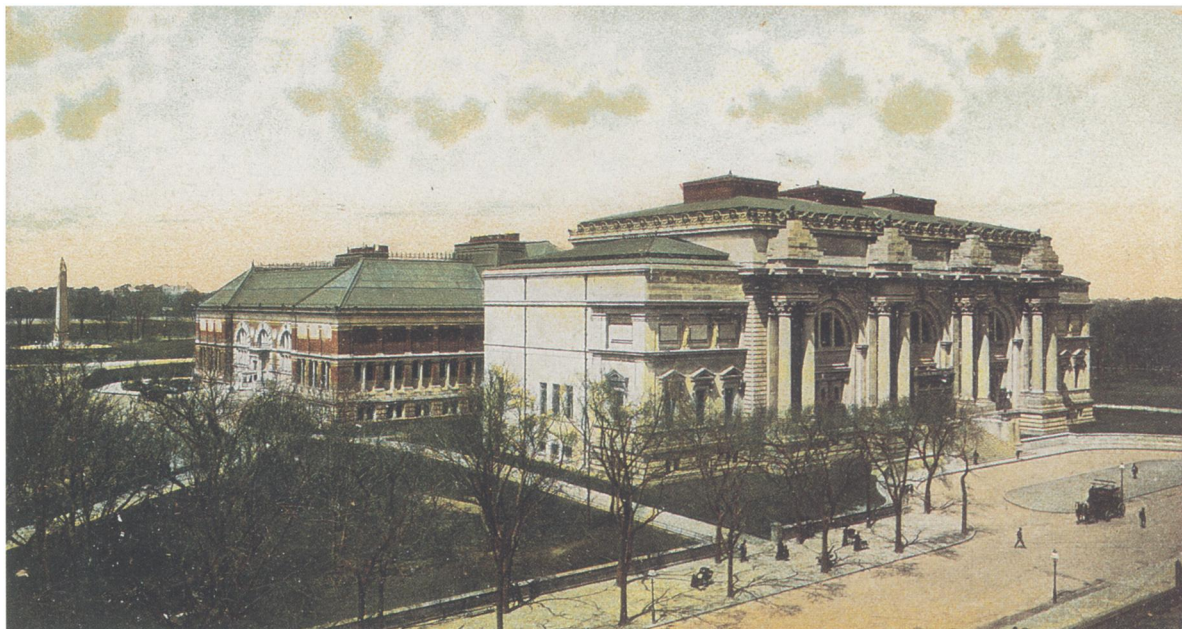
The scope of the sculptural program was reduced with every revision of the plans: the six relief panels in the side wings and the texts for the three attic panels were left off the facade rendering of late 1896 (see fig. 45). By the end of 1897 the program, at least

that part to be executed in concert with the building, had been cut back to three keystone heads, four caryatid figures, and six medallion reliefs.

A proposal for executing the caryatids (fig. 50) and the medallion reliefs was submitted to Richard Howland Hunt in December 1897 by Karl Bitter, a talented young Viennese who had come to New York in 1888 and shortly thereafter began a productive collaboration with the elder Hunt. (Bitter was largely responsible for the interior sculpture of some of Hunt's grandest houses.) He would sculpt full-size plaster models (at \$4,800 for the caryatids and \$3,000 for the medallions) and then have them carved in limestone (at \$1,500 and \$1,000, respectively). In June 1898 Hunt explained to the new head of the building committee, Salem H. Wales, that this work had been left off the general contract "as being too difficult for an ordinary stone cutter to perform."

In July the committee awarded the contract to Bitter and decided on the subjects: "the four Caryatides to be carved to represent the four branches of Art, i.e., Painting, Sculpture, Architecture and Music, and the six medallions to represent six of the most celebrated Old Masters, to be selected later." In October Cesnola asked Hunt to suggest the names of appropriate Old Masters, exemplars of the four branches of art represented by the caryatids. Four of his original suggestions—Bramante, Michelangelo, Raphael, and Rembrandt—were ultimately chosen; two others, Phidias and Beethoven, were rejected in

50. *Architecture, one of the caryatids designed by Karl Bitter in 1899 for the Fifth Avenue facade, 1995*



51. *Weston's south wing and Hunt's east wing. From a colored postcard, 1905. Collection of Herbert Mitchell*

favor of Velázquez and Dürer. (At a point when all six candidates were Italian, Cesnola expressed concern that it might look as though he had influenced the decision.) In February 1899 Bitter delivered his model for the keystone heads for the three arches, and in November his models for the caryatids and the medallions were installed on the facade for the committee's approval.

With the facade more or less complete, the committee revisited the issue of the unexecuted sculptures between and above the paired columns. Wales noted that the "masses of stone are designed to be carved into symbolic figures representative of the purposes and intentions of the building." Hunt recommended that the figural groups represent "the four great periods of Art": Egyptian (for ancient), Greek (for classic), Renaissance, and modern. In the niche directly under each principal group he would place a reproduction of the best work of art of the period expressed in the group above. Again, for financial reasons the work was never done, and today the piles of uncarved stone are an accepted part of the facade.

While a certain surface richness—the reflective qualities of marble and the chiaroscuro effects of ornamental carving—was undeniably lost in the changes made during construction of the elder Hunt's great wing, the darker, more textured limestone that was used has its own distinctive qualities of gravity and repose. The building, as constructed, depends for its effect almost exclusively on the perfect scale and proportions of its parts.

Unlike the Museum's prior architectural efforts, the Hunt wing was uniformly admired. On opening

day it was praised by the *New York Evening Post* as "the most outstanding building of its kind in the city, one of the finest in the world, and the only public building of recent years which approaches in dignity and grandeur the museums of the old world." The noted architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler, rarely one for fulsome praise, had to admit that Hunt's "success, as we can all now see, has been really brilliant."

However, the building had problematic features, which became apparent soon after completion—cramped and inadequate outside steps and the lack of adequate light in the Great Hall. In 1905 the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens expressed dismay at the gloom of the Great Hall: "My attention has been drawn to the dismal failure of Hunt's hall for sculpture there. It may be good architecture and a glorious bath of Caracalla thing, but it's a damn bad gallery for the proper disposition of works of art." To be fair to Hunt, he doubtless intended the Great Hall ultimately to serve as a grand vestibule to the Museum rather than as a gallery for the display of art; furthermore, his first choice of white marble would have made the space lighter.

Another drawback of Hunt's building, although never so clearly articulated, was that people found intimidating the overpowering scale of the interior architectural ornament. Accordingly, over the years much of it has been stripped away (see fig. 99). Thus, while Hunt's building continues to serve perfectly its original intended function as the ceremonial entrance to a vast museum complex, the visual effect of its interiors is much altered.





52. *Aerial view of the Museum from the southeast, ca. 1920, after construction of five wings and the library annex by McKim, Mead and White, and before the draining of the reservoir (1930)*

## **Charles Follen McKim and McKim, Mead and White, 1904–26**

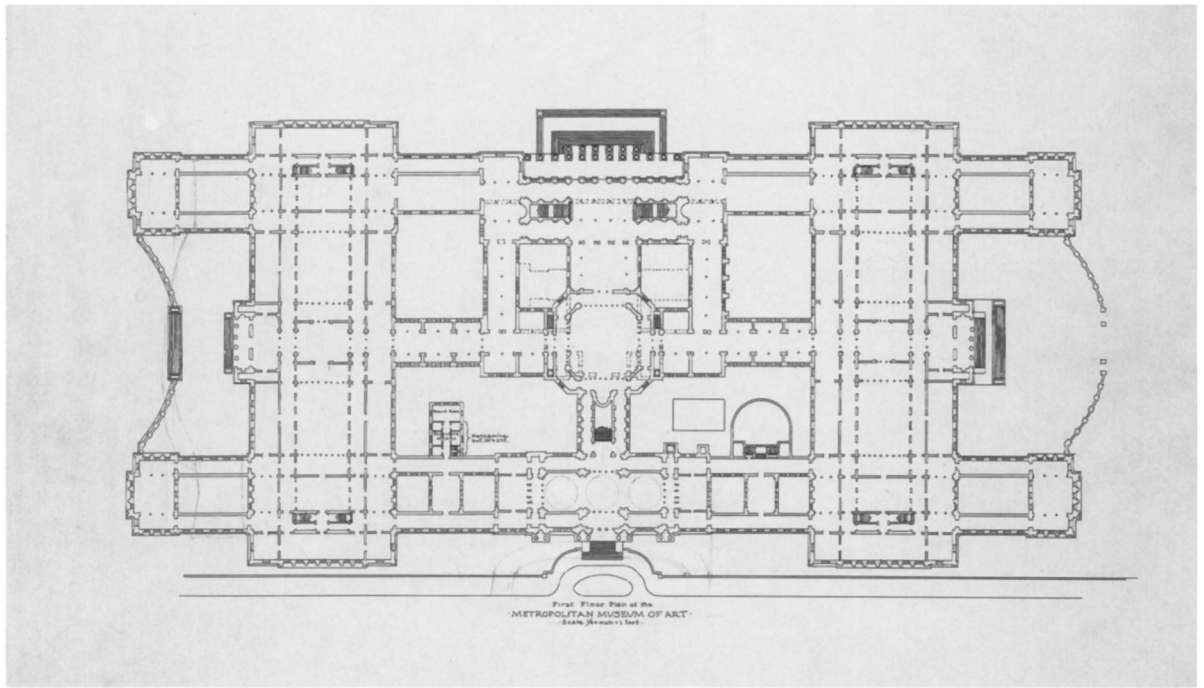
The selection, in January 1904, of the firm of McKim, Mead and White as the Museum’s architects ushered in one of the great chapters in the institution’s architectural history. The firm conceived a comprehensive new master plan and, over the ensuing thirteen years, until the work was halted by World War I, erected five exhibition wings (out of a planned sixteen), a library annex, and a new boiler house. Though McKim, Mead and White remained in name the Museum’s designers until 1926, they built little after 1917.

The need for additional space had never been greater. Hunt’s new entrance wing, consisting principally of the Great Hall and the Grand Staircase, had been conceived as only the beginning of an overall scheme for the Museum. The building did little to relieve the chronic lack of gallery space, a need exacerbated in 1901 by the acquisition fund created by the bequest of Jacob S. Rogers and by the election to the

executive committee of J. Pierpont Morgan, one of the great collectors of all time.

Although McKim, Mead and White, the largest and most prestigious architectural firm in the country, was the obvious choice to carry on with the Metropolitan’s master plan, the selection was by no means a foregone conclusion. The Metropolitan had a history of hiring its designers from within, and two other architectural firms were currently associated with the institution.

The first of these firms was, of course, Hunt and Hunt. (Joseph Howland Hunt had joined his brother in 1901.) Although Richard Howland Hunt had successfully executed his father’s design for the entrance wing, construction had not been without its problems, and Cesnola, who had closely followed the day-to-day details, was acutely aware of them. In late 1903 the members of the building committee—which included Cesnola and Frederick W. Rhinelander, a



founding trustee and since 1902 the president of the board—resolved that they “do not consider Mr. Richard H. Hunt has had sufficient experience in the line of his profession to enable them to entrust him [with] . . . so important a work as the proposed new wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.”

The second firm already actively involved with the Metropolitan was Carrère and Hastings. In 1886 John Carrère (1858–1911) and Thomas Hastings (1860–1929), both of whom had started as draftsmen with McKim, Mead and White, went into partnership and in 1897 won the competition for the New York Public Library, their masterpiece, on the Reservoir Square site once sought by the Metropolitan. Three years later they were chosen to design and supervise a miscellany of projects for the Museum, including revisions to the steps of Weston’s south entrance, and the addition of curving parapet walls leading up to the main steps of Hunt’s Fifth Avenue entrance (see fig. 56). They were also responsible for the re-creation, already noted, of the Heber Bishop ballroom designed by Hunt. During construction of the last, however, there were problems with some of the subcontractors, and the board lost confidence in the architects.

By early 1904 the committee must have decided in favor of McKim, Mead and White, for on January 12, Mead sent Cesnola sketches of a proposed addi-

tion to Hunt’s entrance wing as well as a new outline plan of the entire building. Twelve days later Cesnola offered the firm the commission.

McKim, Mead and White, founded in 1879, was now at the pinnacle of its success and well known to the trustees, having been proposed as designers of the north wing in 1890 and as consulting architects in 1896. By 1900, with the economic depression of the 1890s at an end, commissions poured in and the firm’s staff grew to upward of one hundred. Charles Follen McKim (1847–1909), with three years’ training at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, was a masterful designer. Stanford White (1853–1906), of an expansive and artistic temperament, was the perfect foil to the reserved McKim. (Though he was once a member of the Metropolitan’s committee on casts, White was never directly involved with the Museum’s architecture.) William Rutherford Mead (1846–1918), an accomplished businessman and architect, served in effect as the firm’s CEO. Within this triumvirate, McKim was the first among equals, his prestige within the profession unsurpassed. In 1902 and 1903 he was elected president of the American Institute of Architects, and in the latter year he won the gold medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He also mingled easily with government and financial leaders. In 1902, for example, while personally overseeing the remodeling of the White House for

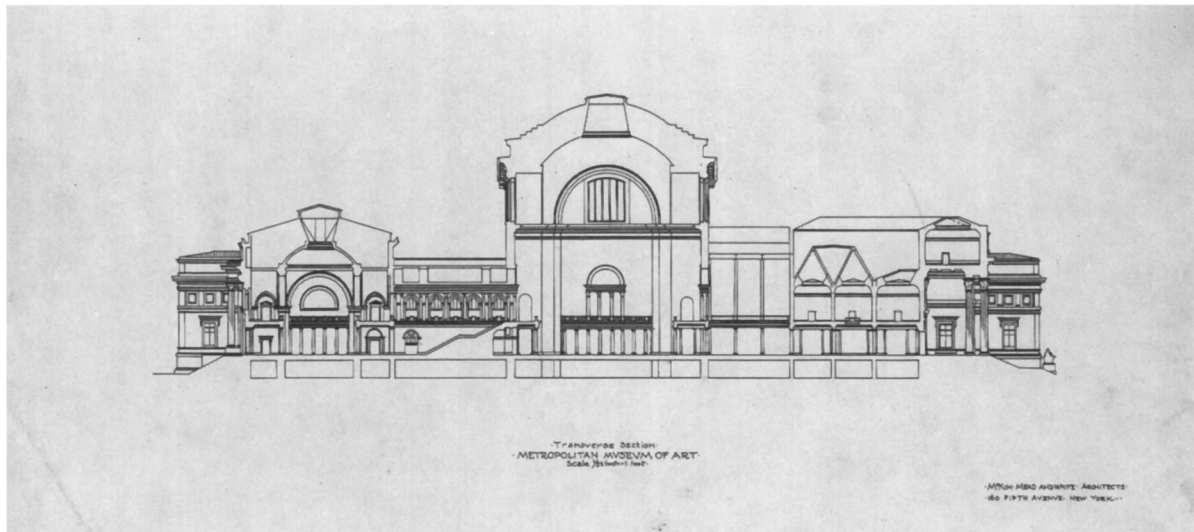
President Theodore Roosevelt, McKim was called on by J. Pierpont Morgan to design the Morgan Library.

The firm was capable of complex planning on a large scale. In 1902 the architects undertook the design of Pennsylvania Station and, the following year, that of the multiwinged Bellevue Hospital. McKim, Mead and White also had worked on museums. In 1891 the firm designed a diminutive domed classical structure, the Walker Art Gallery, at Bowdoin College, and two years later, the massive complex, also domed, of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (now the Brooklyn Museum).

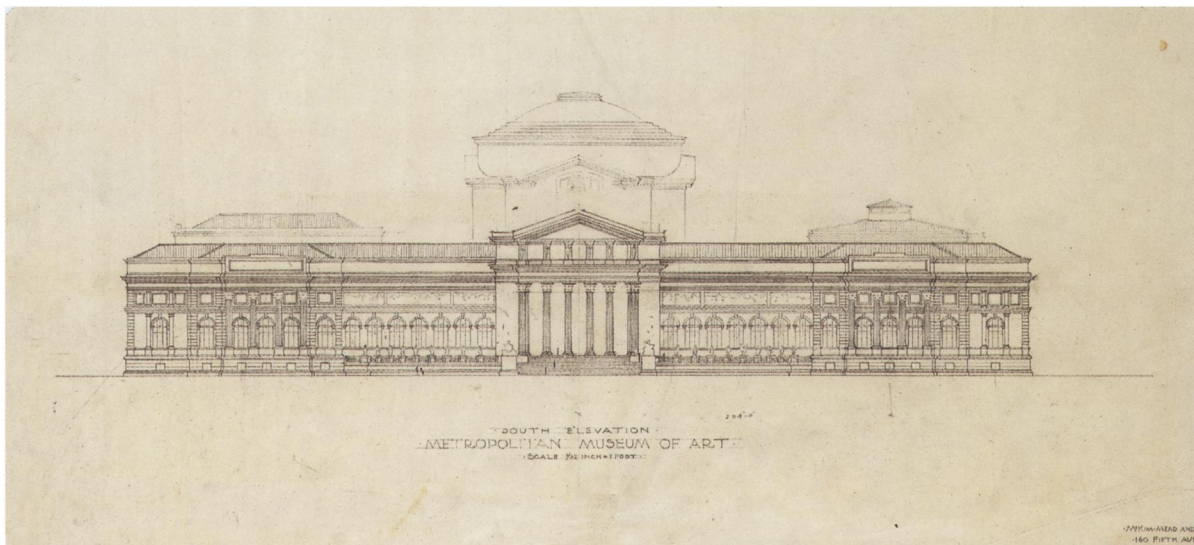
McKim, Mead and White did not accept the appointment as architects of the proposed new wing until February 15, after the Hunt brothers, who had

felt entitled to carry on with their father's master plan, finally resigned. In March McKim assured Cesnola that he was proceeding with his preliminary sketches. Though the immediate charge was to undertake an extension to Hunt's wing, the ultimate task was to rethink his master plan, to come up with a scheme that would incorporate the latest in museum design. McKim, and later Mead, kept up with new developments, mainly German, in museum planning. The principal issues addressed were traffic patterns (size and arrangement of galleries) and lighting (ceiling heights, skylights, and window sizes).

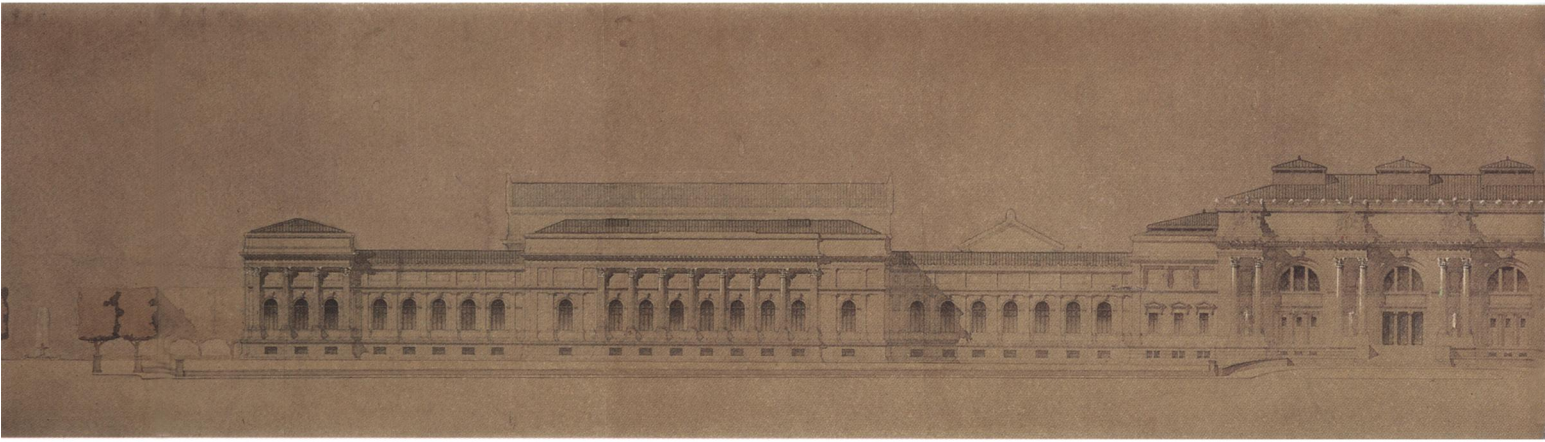
McKim took charge of the Museum project and controlled it personally until ill health and the shock of White's highly publicized murder in June 1906 took their toll. He remained involved until his



54. McKim, Mead and White. Transverse section of preliminary master plan, 1904. Ink on linen



55. McKim, Mead and White. South elevation of preliminary master plan, April 1904. Pencil on tissue



56. McKim, Mead and White. East (Fifth Avenue) elevation of revised master plan (first presentation rendering), 1904–5. Pencil and watercolor on paper

retirement in 1908. (Tragically, McKim died in 1909, before even the first part of his grand design had been completed.) During March and April 1904 he worked on elaborating his comprehensive scheme. Its principal features are all present in his first plan (fig. 53). McKim accepted Hunt’s east wing as the entrance, then simplified and tightened up the rest of his predecessor’s layout. He moved the central north-south axis from the middle of the original block (the Vaux-Weston wings) to its eastern edge. He did away with Hunt’s subsidiary Fifth Avenue entrances, relocating their functions to the auditorium and the library in inner courtyards, and transformed the pavilions into two vast skylighted rectangles placed at right angles to the avenue. He took Hunt’s north and south quadrangles and opened them up as grand entrances.

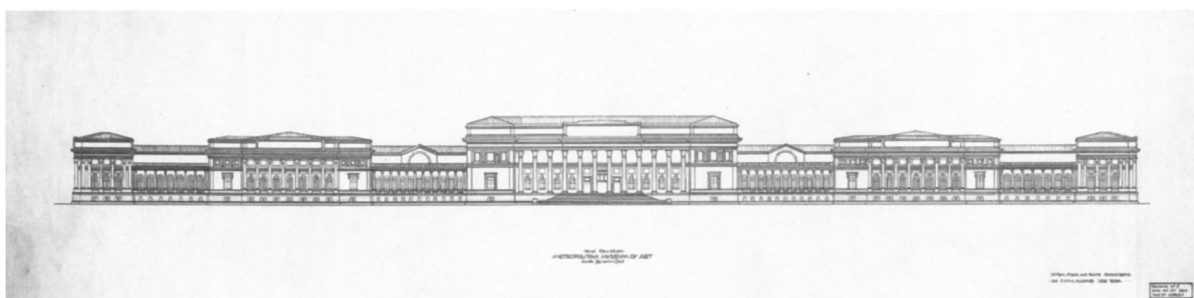
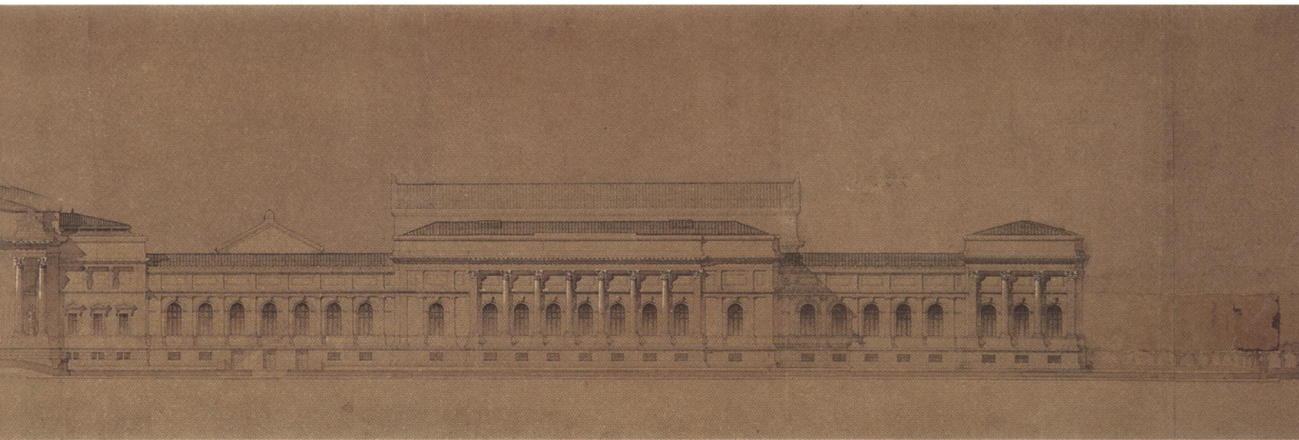
Perhaps the most significant change was the way McKim dealt with the various additions, introducing a corridor alongside virtually every gallery and interspersing among the galleries two-story skylighted courts and light wells. What he had in mind is most clearly stated in an excerpt of a report made by McKim, Mead and White in 1908, during a conference over floor levels and shortly after McKim’s withdrawal from the firm:

In undertaking the development of the general plan, it was our aim, first, to secure an arrangement of buildings and courts, of galleries and corridors, which should provide ample exhibition spaces, abundant light, free circulation and units of dimensions so flexible as to permit of the utmost freedom in the future development of individual parts. Architecturally we sought to establish a scale which would give a proper

sense of proportion and dignity to the building which was intended to house the greatest museum of fine arts in America, and which from its purpose, its setting, and its very dimensions was destined to be the most important public edifice in New York.

The most dramatic (and short-lived) feature of McKim’s first scheme was a square central hall with canted corners and a dome so vast that it would have dwarfed Hunt’s Great Hall (fig. 54). The dome, looming up behind each of the four public entrances (fig. 55), would have endowed the building with a true sense of its three-dimensional monumentality. The central dome, though a common Beaux-Arts design feature and almost a signature of McKim’s work, was not acceptable to Cesnola, who wrote the architect: “I have been requested to ask you if the dome which is shown in your plan could be dispensed with. I do not like domes and we already have more than we want, besides they take up too much space on the upper floors.” The dome was discarded before May 9, when the building committee resolved to “accept the plan submitted for the proposed addition and also the general plan for completion of the Museum as offered by Messrs McKim, Mead & White, Architects.”

Having arrived at a flexible and broadly conceived ground plan, McKim now set about composing the facades. Because he chose to honor Hunt’s entrance pavilion, he let its scale, material, and motifs be his inspiration and starting point. He used the same limestone and the same combinations of motifs (arches and classical orders), but at a smaller scale. Thus, on the east facade, as seen in a presentation rendering (fig. 56)—which, except for the lack of a



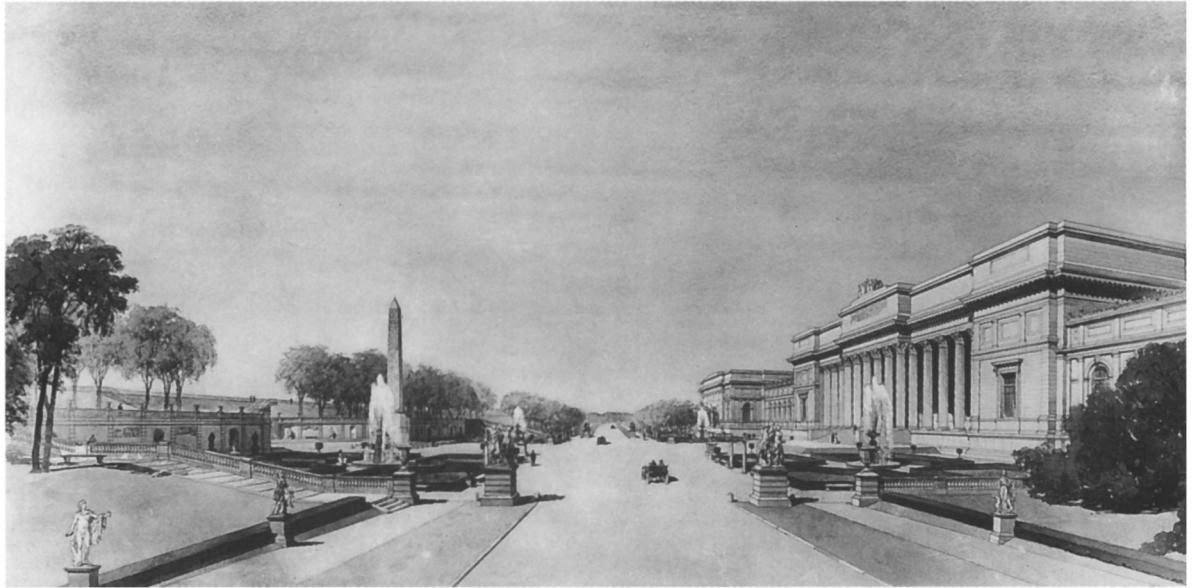
57. McKim, Mead and White. West elevation of revised master plan, May 31, 1904. Ink on linen

central dome, conforms to the first plans (see fig. 53)—the Hunt building is flanked sequentially by low, setback link structures, by larger projecting colonnaded wings, by more low link structures, and finally by colonnaded end pavilions. The facades of all these units have the same tall arched windows (illuminating the high-ceilinged first-floor galleries), flanked by either pilasters or projecting columns. The west facade (fig. 57) duplicates the east one except that the center part, a reworking of the Vaux-Weston block, is a tightly knit planar composition with a grand colonnaded entrance. (There is no better juxtaposition for judging the difference between Hunt’s bold baroque style and McKim’s restrained classicism than the center treatments of these two facades.) The north and south facades (see fig. 55) are compressed renditions of the same composition: a pedimented central portico with flanking link structures and projecting colonnaded wings.

Once the master plan had been approved, in mid-1904, McKim concentrated on detailed studies of the wings to be built first (see *Building Chronology*, pp. 45–53). The overall scheme was reviewed in

February 1907, when the building committee decided to seek massive new funding to ensure that the plan, at least the Fifth Avenue facade, would be completed according to McKim’s design. (Only one of the three wings then under construction faced Fifth Avenue.) For this effort, in April, McKim provided beautifully rendered presentation drawings “showing [the scheme] more completely than heretofore.” One of these, an elegant perspective drawing looking north along the park drive (fig. 58), presents a grand, formal entrance court in front of the Museum’s central pavilion. Another (fig. 59), a plan of the Museum and the surrounding parkland, depicts the park drive, parterres, fountains, and even the obelisk (Cleopatra’s Needle), relocated along the Museum’s central axis. The drawing’s floor plan exhibits a number of changes since 1904, refinements gleaned from having worked out the actual interior layouts of the three wings for which construction drawings had been prepared by February 1907. (It also incorporates McKim’s proposal to enlarge Hunt’s front steps.) Another drawing (fig. 60), a transverse section through one of the vast, skylighted rectangular

58. McKim, Mead and White. Perspective rendering looking north along the west facade. Photograph of a lost drawing by Jules Crow, 1907, Museum of the City of New York

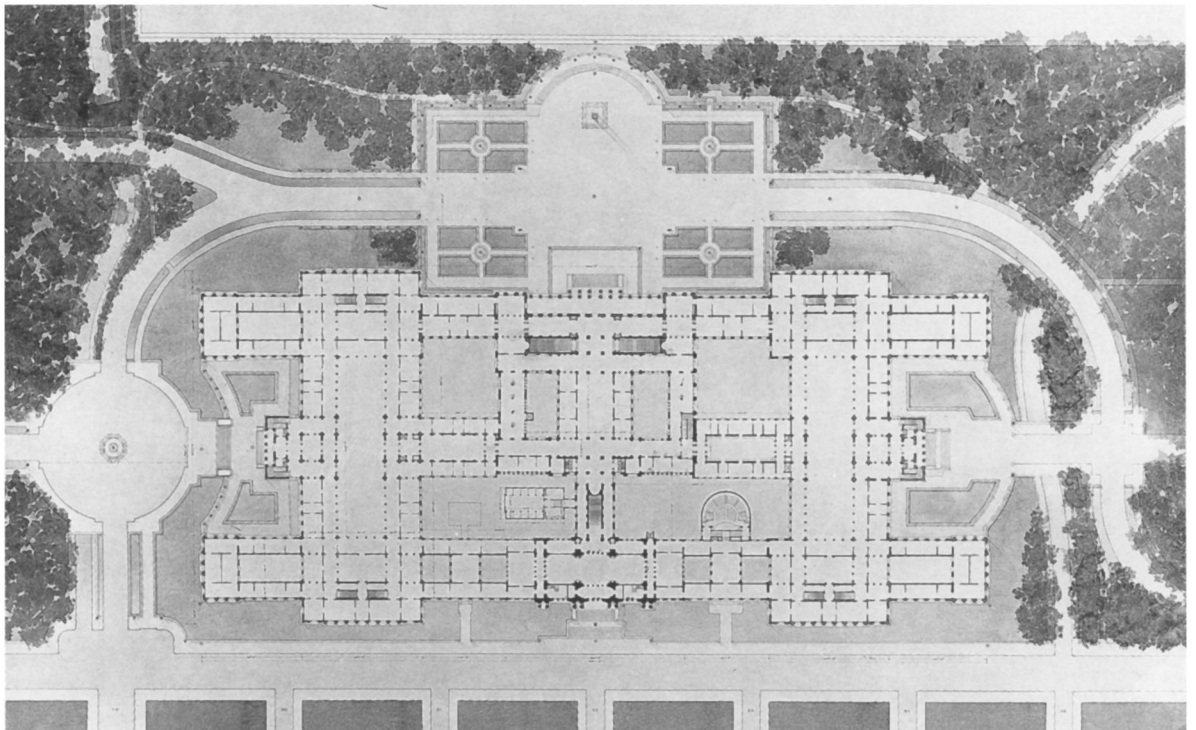


wings, shows the degree to which McKim depended on arcades and vaulted ceilings.

The master plan underwent one final important change after McKim's retirement in January 1908. When Mead took over the project, the building committee determined to proceed with the large Fifth Avenue north wing, which had been "proposed and partly designed by Mr. McKim last year." This forced a final decision about the entire north eleva-

tion. The Museum, partly in response to public concerns over expansion into Central Park, reduced the scope of the project. In June 1908 the pairs of nearly freestanding wings at north and south were jettisoned, and in April 1909 so were the terraces. New drawings, including an elegant perspective rendering of the Fifth Avenue facade (fig. 62), were prepared to promote the reduced master plan. In 1926, at the end of the firm's tenure, the architects took a copy of

59. McKim, Mead and White. First floor and surrounding landscape of revised master plan. Photograph of a lost drawing, ca. 1907





60. McKim, Mead and White. Transverse section of south wing, ca. 1907. Photograph of a lost drawing

the final version of the master plan and highlighted the buildings that were already erected (fig. 61).

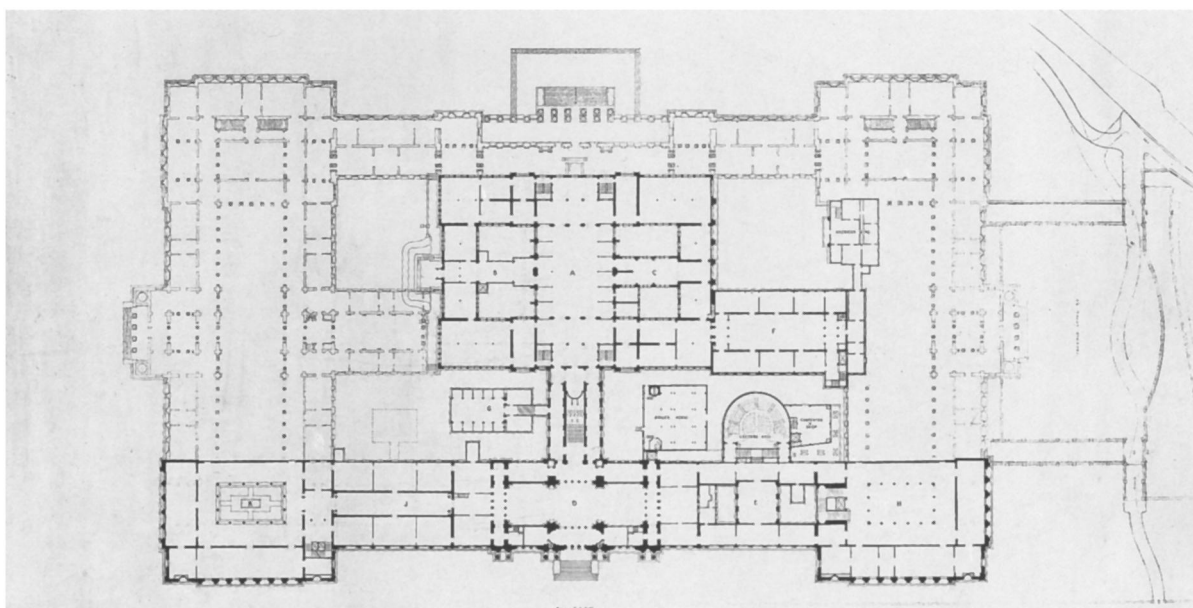
### Building Chronology

The engine that had powered this planning was the legislation of March 23, 1904, authorizing the sale of \$1.25 million of New York City bonds, in annual amounts not to exceed \$500,000, for construction of an extension to the Museum. Now it became imperative to have designs ready to be put out to contractors for bids: for \$500,000 in 1905, \$500,000 in 1906, and \$250,000 in 1907.

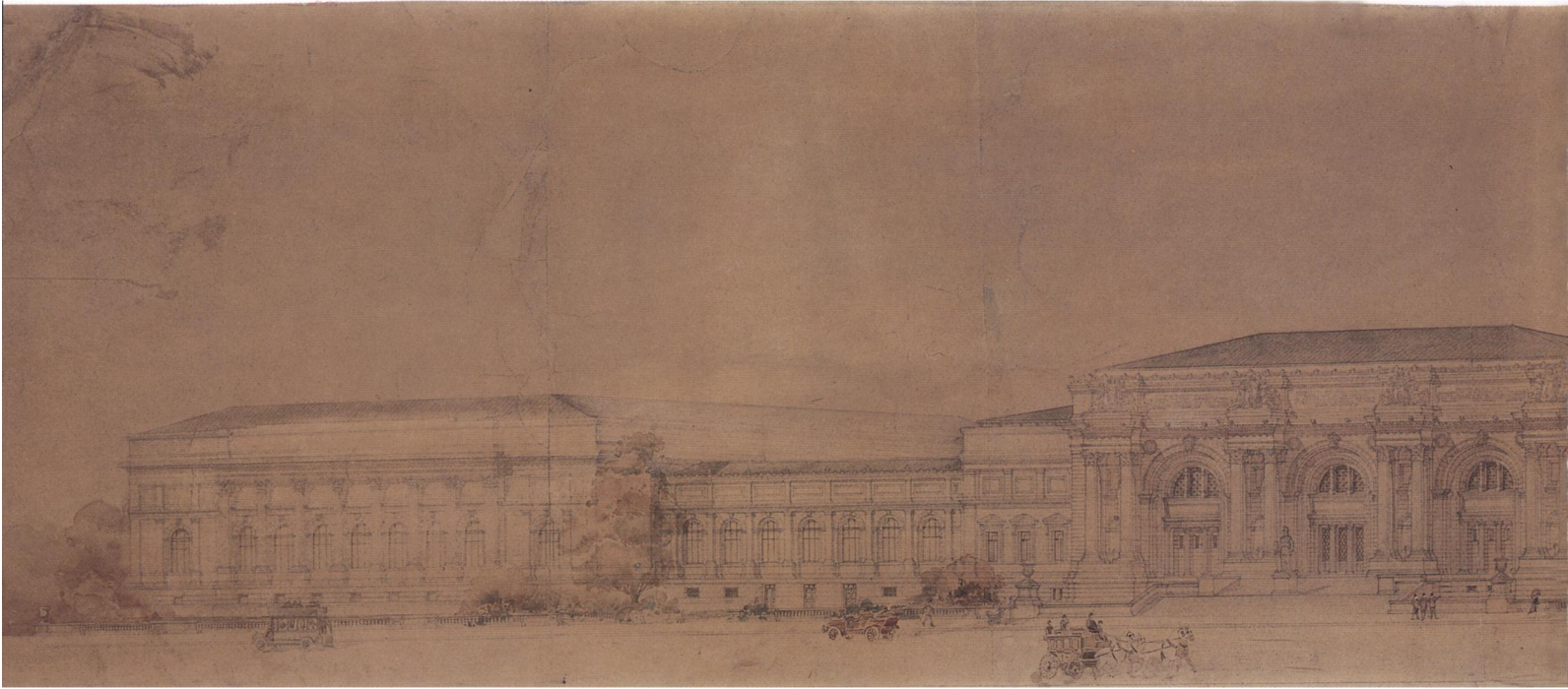
During the fall of 1904 the architectural program

was interrupted by the deaths of Rhinelander and Cesnola. Morgan became the next president; Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke, director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the new director; and Edward Robinson, director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the assistant director. The Museum's commitment to rapid expansion was, if anything, strengthened by these changes. The initiative was assumed by Morgan. Clarke generally left architectural matters to his brilliant understudy.

In March 1904 the building committee had requested the preparation of detailed plans for extensions north and south of the Hunt wing, but it was April 1905 before the committee finally decided to build to the north. (Plans to build to the south had

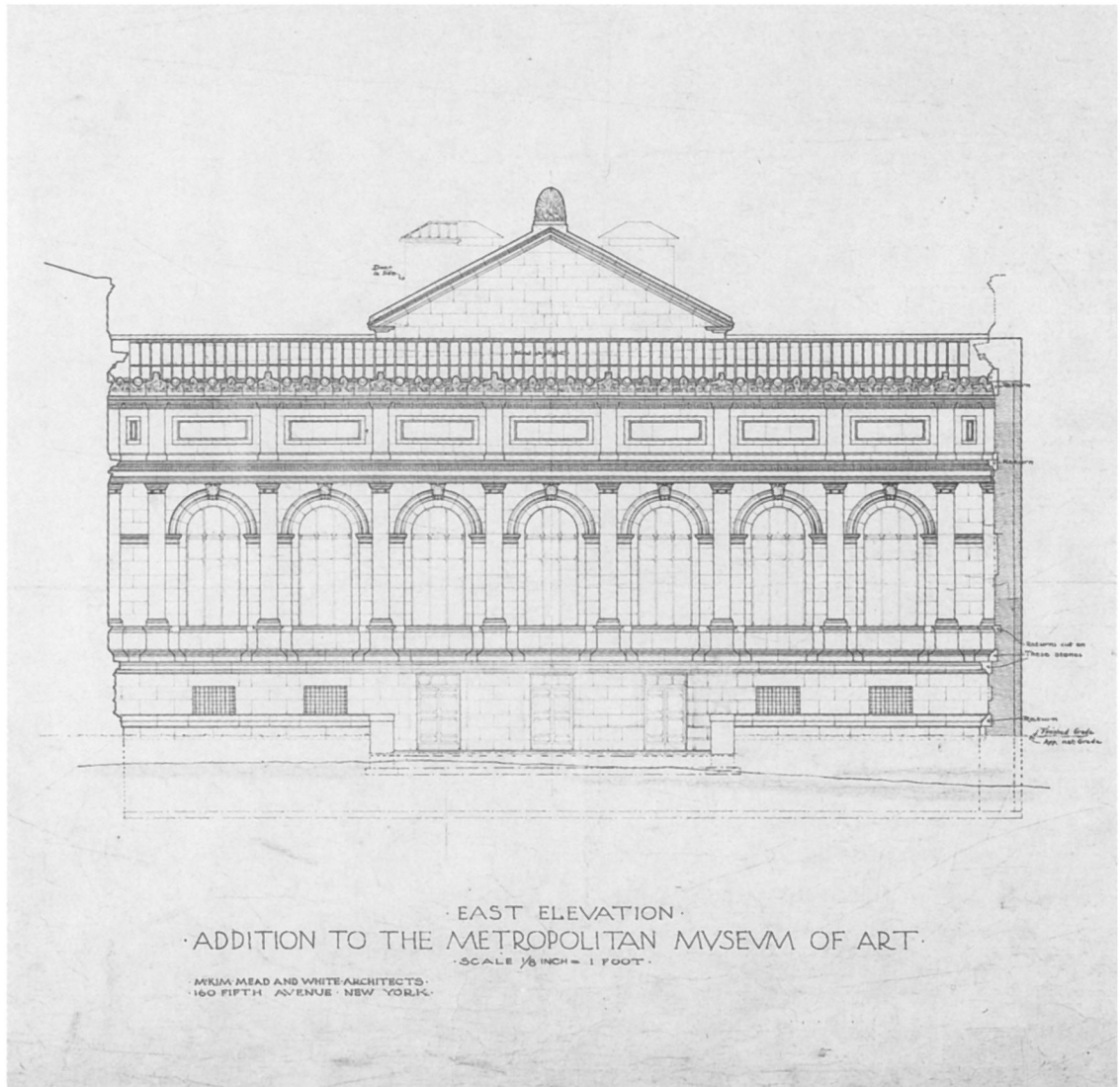


61. McKim, Mead and White. First floor of reduced master plan of June 1908, annotated as of June 1, 1926, to show work completed. Ink on linen

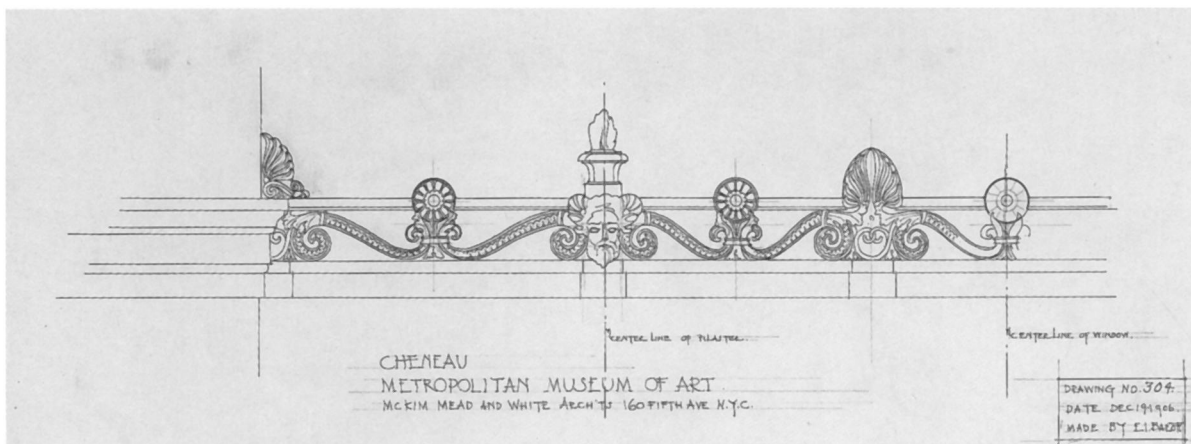
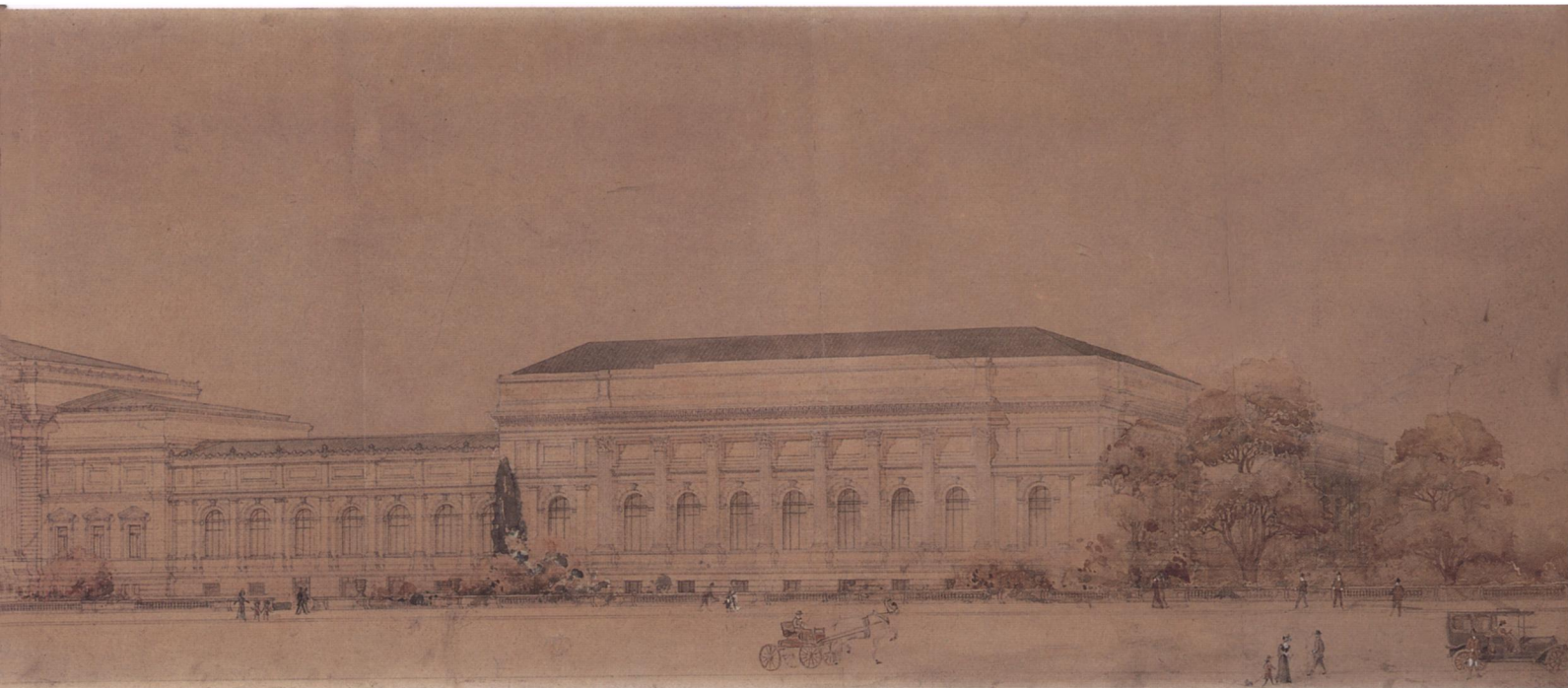


62. McKim, Mead and White. East (Fifth Avenue) elevation of reduced master plan, final presentation rendering by Maurice J. Prevot, 1908. Pencil and watercolor on paper

63. McKim, Mead and White. East (Fifth Avenue) elevation of Wing E, June 19, 1905. Ink on linen







64. McKim, Mead and White. Detail of "chéneau" of Wing E, December 19, 1906. Ink on linen

been approved by the trustees, but were later canceled because of potential problems with the Croton Reservoir water mains on the site.) The north extension was to be followed by the projecting north wing facing Fifth Avenue, and this construction would use up all the appropriated funds. However, in the fall of 1906 it was decided to build the "north-central" wing (later designated Wing F) to house some of J. Pierpont Morgan's collections. As this left just enough money from the 1904 appropriation for an additional modest project, the trustees decided to proceed immediately with the library annex. (It was at this time, in order to distinguish among the concurrent projects, that the wings were given letter designations, beginning with Vaux's as Wing A.)

### Wing E

The north extension on Fifth Avenue (Wing E), the first in which McKim addressed the Museum's programmatic needs, had three principal requirements: that its exterior be in harmony with the existing building, that its interior provide well-lit galleries, and that access to the future buildings to the north be unimpeded. McKim designed his facade (fig. 63) so that the horizontal features would conform to Hunt's. The exception was the uppermost cornice, which had to be lower and smaller than Hunt's to indicate the subsidiary role of the link building. McKim alternated arched windows with pilasters, also an echo of Hunt's entrance treatment. Aside from the keystones (by A. A. Weinman, a studio assistant to Saint-Gaudens), the only carved ornament that McKim

allowed on this chaste facade was the elaborate *chêneau* (fig. 64). (He took the design, which features a horned-and-bearded head surmounted by a flaming torch, from the *chêneau* on a sixteenth-century wing of the Louvre.) The only flaw in the exterior is that, because of space requirements within, McKim's facade is not sufficiently set back from Hunt's.

McKim laid out the first floor (see fig. 53) with narrow side corridors flanking two large light wells and a square gallery in the center of the plan, providing maximum daylight to every room. But at what cost! He gave up irrevocably a grand vista north from the entrance hall, a feature central to Beaux-Arts design. The decision can be explained only in reference to public dismay over the lack of light in the Hunt wing.

In May 1906, after construction had begun, Robinson suggested altering the plans "with a view to increasing the exhibition space by constructing rooms instead of corridors on both floors." Though this proposal challenged McKim's overall conception and would at this late date entail delays and added expense, the building committee concurred and construction was halted. As a result, all the corridors in the original comprehensive plan, not just those of this wing, were made into narrow galleries (see fig. 59). A revised contract was signed in December 1906 and some of the galleries were in use by 1909.

The most contentious issue arose after basic construction of Wing E was nearly completed. In February 1908, at Robinson's insistence, the trustees passed a resolution to lower the level of the second floor in the new wing to correspond to that of the adjacent Hunt wing. They cited the great inconvenience of having to use staircases between various parts of the same floor. McKim, Mead and White responded in March, carefully summarizing the history of the decision to increase the main-floor ceiling height from 20 feet 6 inches in Wings A–D to 25 feet in all succeeding wings. They noted (in language seemingly at odds with McKim's self-effacing designs):

It is to us inconceivable that, if the old building did not exist, so inadequate a height as twenty feet, with its resultant limitations of horizontal dimensions, would be adopted for the principal story of the greatest American Museum, and we believe that a broad view of the problem demands that the old building, in so far as it hampers or impedes the growth of the new and greater, should be considered as practically non-existent.

In the end, with construction so far advanced, the trustees felt compelled to go along with the recommendations of their architects. Thus today there are steps from the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery containing Chinese sculpture to the Asian galleries (on the north); from the Raymond and Beverly Sackler Gallery for Assyrian Art to the Ancient Near East and Islamic galleries (on the south); and a ramp from the Robert Wood Johnson Jr. Gallery to the Nineteenth-Century European Paintings and Sculpture Galleries.

### Wing F

Plans to commence building to the north adjacent to Wing E were short-lived. In 1906 Morgan acquired the Hoentschel Collection, an immense assemblage of French decorative art and architectural woodwork, with the intention of displaying it at the Museum. Robinson had McKim survey the objects, and McKim recommended erecting the north-central wing (F), which would extend north from Weston's old north wing (C), to house them. During the fall of 1906 McKim prepared detailed plans for the building, which Morgan approved in March 1907. In what was certainly the most rapid construction project in the Museum's experience, the Wing of Decorative Arts opened in March 1910. (It was renamed the Pierpont Morgan Wing in 1918.)

Wing F, an interior wing, had no need for exterior architectural detailing (fig. 65). Its outside walls were of buff-colored brick to provide reflected light in the courtyards east and west of it. Consequently, McKim was free to design from the inside out. He conceived an immense central hall (fig. 66), 67 feet high, rising far above the surrounding two floors of smaller galleries to provide for ten large semicircular clerestory windows. When the building was finished, Robinson described them and the ambient light:

These give to the hall a high side light which is beautifully diffused by the cream-white, vaulted ceiling, and falls most becomingly upon the sculptures and other objects on the floor and walls below. The shadows cast by it are never too sharp, and it is equally good in all parts of the hall. To prevent reflection and inverted shadows from the floor, it was necessary to use material of a neutral tone, and for this Tennessee marble with an unpolished surface was successfully adopted.

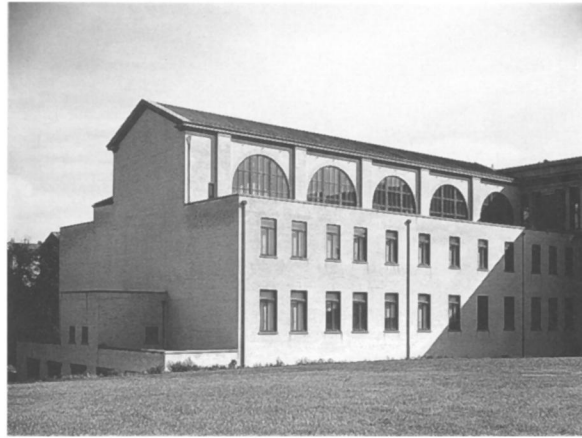
In 1956 the arms and armor collections were installed on the first floor, and in 1971 the musical instruments collections, on the second floor. The central hall's architectural features were restored in 1991.

## Wing G

The library annex (Wing G; fig. 67) was an almost freestanding structure centered in the courtyard between the entrance building and Weston's south wing. It was entered by a narrow staircase from the corridor on the south side of Hunt's Grand Staircase. Like the auditorium, it had been thus located by McKim to distinguish it from the galleries and to make it a destination in itself. And, like Wing F, the library had no public facade and was simply clad with plain buff bricks.

To judge from what was built, the principal requirement (other than shelving for books) was that it have a stately, light-drenched reading room. McKim's solution was a two-story rectangular chamber (fig. 68) with tall clerestory windows on all sides. Flanking it were lower wings, each with book-lined alcoves. The piers and walls were articulated with pilasters, and the flat ceiling featured elaborate Roman-style coffering. Even the reading-room furniture—tables, chairs, and card catalogues—was designed by the architects.

Plans and estimates were ordered from the architects, and drawings were received in February 1907. The bids came in high, however, and it was not until March 1908 that a construction contract was signed. The library annex opened in July 1910. Described as in the "style of the Italian Renaissance," it had space for forty readers and 40,000 books. In 1962 the annex was torn down to make way for a larger modern facility



65. Exterior of Wing F, 1910



66. Central hall of Wing F, 1910

housing 250,000 volumes. To experience a McKim-designed reading room today, one must go to the Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University.

### Wing H

By February 1907 three building projects were either under construction (Wing E) or at advanced stages of design (Wings F and G), and the 1904 appropriation effectively was fully committed. Now the build-

ing committee found itself in a quandary: the wings fronting Fifth Avenue were the clear priority, but most of the construction was taking place out back. Until the Fifth Avenue facade was completely built, the Museum would be broadcasting its unfinished state to every passerby. Realizing that something had to be done to ensure immediate additional funding to complete McKim's Fifth Avenue front, the committee came up with a simple yet audacious scheme: to adopt McKim's general plan in its entirety and request a multiyear appropriation of unparalleled scale. On February 11, 1907, as an indication of the prestige of their institution and of the willingness of government then to support the arts, the committee recommended adopting McKim's "general plan" and applying for an open-ended appropriation of \$750,000 a year. In June 1907 the state legislature authorized annual appropriations of \$750,000 for ten years, the funding that would make possible the completion of the Fifth Avenue facade.

In October 1909 Mead presented the committee with plans for the northeast wing (H; fig. 69). He made two changes to McKim's facade designs: first, for architectural effect, the arched windows in the plain end bays of the Fifth Avenue elevation became niches for the display of sculpture; second, to provide the galleries with more light, the Corinthian columns flanking the windows on both north and east facades were redesigned to be engaged rather than freestanding.

Much more controversial was the question of the placement of the skylight above the central court. The main floor consisted of a central court with arched openings into a surrounding cloister, with enfilade galleries around the outer walls. Robinson favored having a skylight at the level of the second floor so that the light well above would better illuminate the adjacent second-floor galleries. Mead favored raising the skylight above the second floor to create a grand architectural space. In the end, to the assistant director's great displeasure, the building committee sided with Mead.

A construction contract was signed in December 1909, and foundation work began in March 1910 (fig. 70), but it was another year before the exterior walls were up. Plans for the interior finishes were completed in June 1911, and the contract for them was signed in January. The first-floor galleries, originally used for the display of arms and armor but later

67. Exterior of Wing G, the library, 1910



68. Reading room of the library, 1910



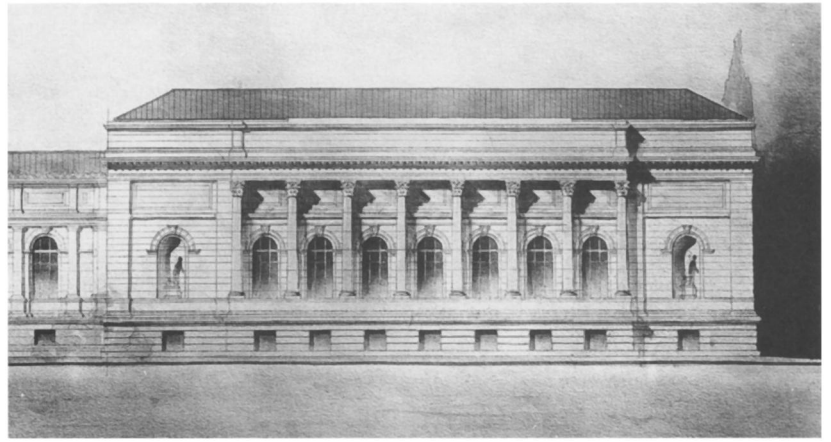
taken over by Egyptian art, opened to the public in June 1913, and the second-floor galleries were completed the following February. The much-debated two-story court (fig. 71)—with walls of artificial stone, floors of foot-square red tiles from the Grueby Pottery Company, and flanking galleries with variously vaulted and beamed ceilings—turned out to be very handsome. Except for the splendid marble staircase (now leading to the Costume Institute below and to the Asian galleries above), with its Tennessee-marble treads and Botticino marble baseboard and handrail, the original McKim, Mead and White interiors of Wing H are now gone, superseded by modern installations of the arts of Egypt (first floor) and Asia (second floor).

### Wings J and K

In January 1912, with Wing H approaching completion, the building committee turned its attention to the southern extension of the Fifth Avenue facade, Wings J and K. (Construction of Wing I, the new boiler house, began during the summer of 1912.) The committee recommended that McKim, Mead and White provide the design, with the understanding that the new structures “correspond in external development to the present North Wing,” but that “plans for interiors be left for consideration in connection with collections to be placed there.” Mead estimated that the outer shell of both wings and the interior finish of Wing J could be put up for \$750,000, the year’s appropriation. Thus the Fifth Avenue facade would be completed during this phase of construction even if all the interiors were not.

Robinson saw the south extension as an opportunity to design galleries with specific collections in mind. He chose to gather together in the first-floor spaces of Wings J and K the arts of Greece and Rome, the collections that he knew intimately. (In addition to having been made director in 1910, Robinson had been named curator of classical art in 1905.) In the planning of the new galleries Robinson and Mead once again clashed, but this time the director would win out.

There were two principal design issues: the treatment of the center court of the south pavilion (Wing K) and the approach to the center court through the link wing (Wing J). Both men agreed from the start that Wing J would have a monumental hall leading from Wing D all the way to K.



69. McKim, Mead and White. East facade of Wing H, 1909. Photograph of a lost drawing

70. View of Fifth Avenue across the building site for Wing H, October 15, 1910

71. Center court of Wing H, before the installation of the arms and armor collections in 1912–13

(This was a tacit acknowledgment that the illumination provided by the light wells in Wing E was not worth the loss of the vista from the entrance hall to the north.) But how was the court to be treated? Robinson, concerned with the appropriateness of the architecture to the collections and anxious for side-lit galleries on the second floor, wanted a one-story court.

72. South facade of Wing K under construction, March 1915



In April 1912 Robinson wrote from Rome, recommending that “the court in the middle of Addition K shall be treated as a Greek or Pompeian peristyle, with a garden in the centre, in which sculpture and other works of classical art would be exhibited with some suggestion of their original surroundings and atmosphere.” He sent plans prepared by the faculty and students of the American Academy, and he noted pointedly that the court would have to be glazed at a one-story height.

Mead, however, still favored a two-story court. “Personally I think it would [be] bad,” he wrote to Robinson, “to come from the Hunt grand hall—through the high gallery—and land in a one story peristyle.” In January 1913 the director finally got his way: a two-story central corridor, reduced in width to allow for larger side galleries, leading to a one-story court. The working drawings are dated May 18, 1913, but the general contract was not signed until April 1914.

Excavation of the site for Wings J and K began

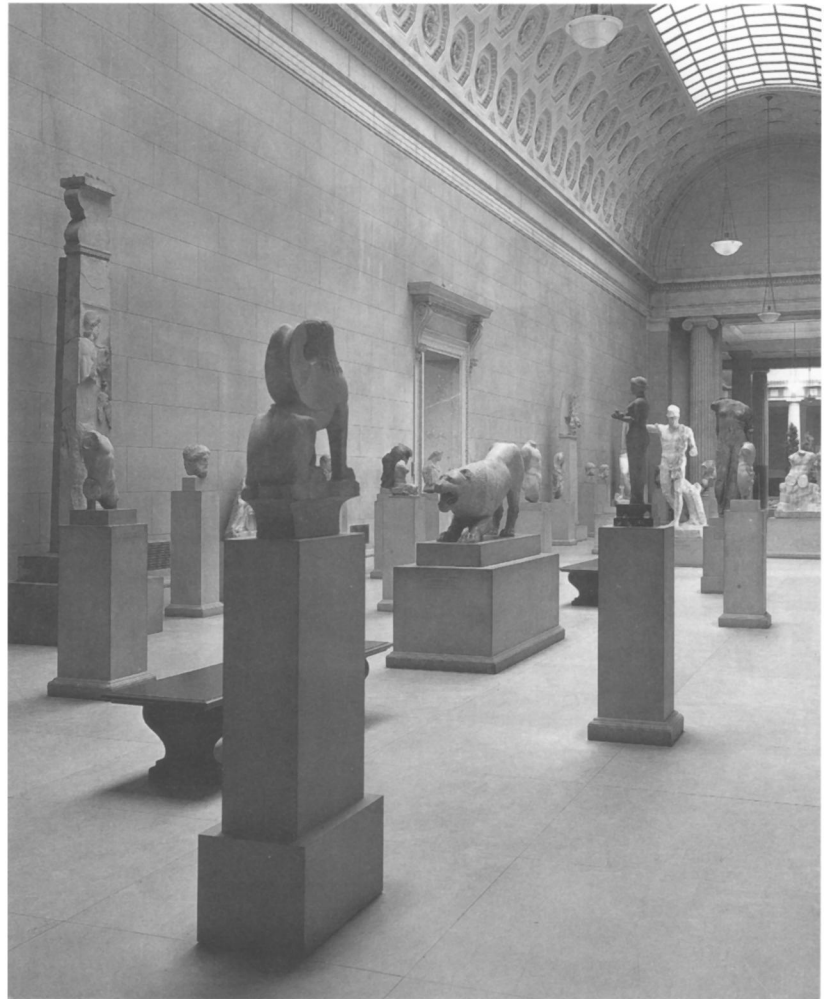
in July, and the first stone course, of granite from Stonington, Maine, was laid in January 1915 (fig. 72). The rest of the stonework, of limestone from Bedford, Indiana, had been laid by the end of July.

Work on the first-floor galleries of Wing J proceeded immediately after the building was enclosed. The war in Europe initially affected the project in the spring of 1915, when ships carrying the French Euville limestone for the door trim and the columns of the great corridor, originally scheduled to leave from Le Havre, had to sail from Bordeaux to avoid German submarines. In July the plasterers began on the coffered ceiling of the corridor. But it was not until December 1917 that parts of Wing J opened to the public.

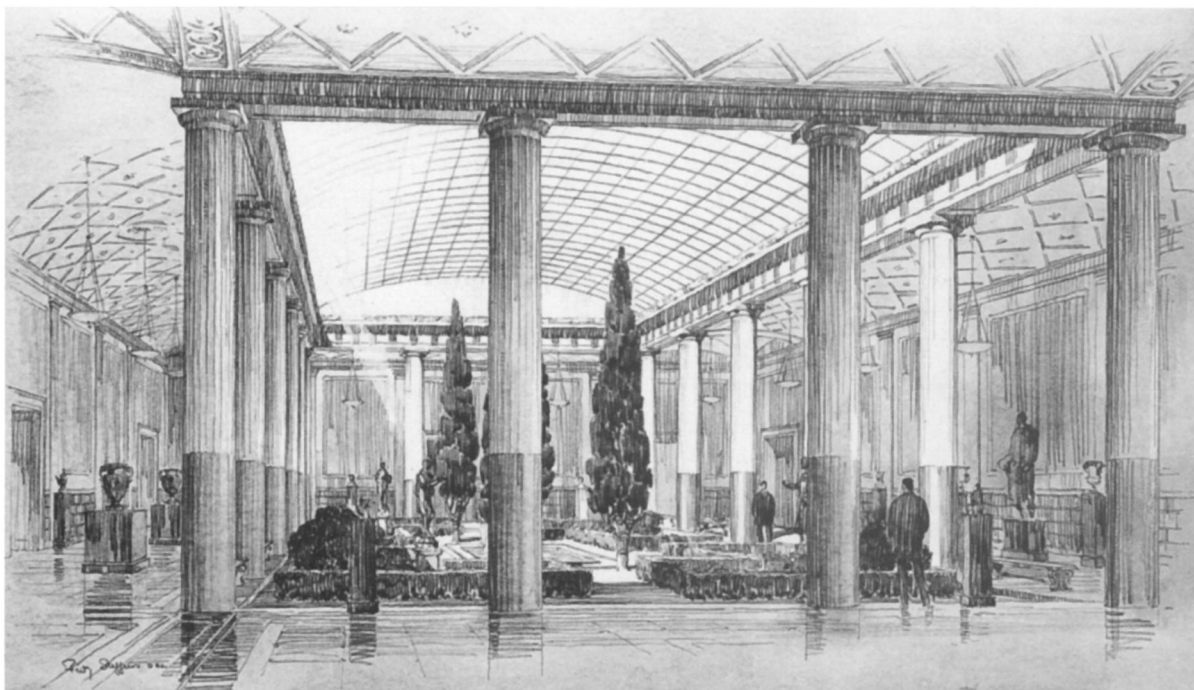
The great first-floor rooms of Wing J are among the best preserved of the Beaux-Arts galleries in the Museum, and current plans for the reinstatement of the Greek and Roman collections include restoration of the rooms to their former splendor. The arrangement, a great barrel-vaulted central hall flanked by

two levels of galleries, recalls McKim's Morgan Wing. This hall (fig. 73), however, is longer and narrower, a corridor, with skylights in its coffered ceiling. The similar treatment of the interior was noted by Robinson in the Museum's *Bulletin* on the occasion of the public opening (December 1917): "The ceiling is left in the white of the plaster, to gain as much reflection and diffusion of light as possible . . . and the floor, as well as those of the side galleries, is of Tennessee marble, unpolished."

The shell of Wing K remained vacant for six years, until the war was over and sufficient prosperity returned to obtain further appropriations. During the fall of 1922 Robinson dusted off his Pompeian court design (fig. 74) and proceeded to work with William M. Kendall (1856–1941), who in 1906 had become one of the new partners in McKim, Mead and White. The court, finished in 1926, was the culmination of Robinson's grand series of galleries of classical art.



73. Central hall of Wing J, 1929



74. McKim, Mead and White. Pompeian court in Wing K. Drawn by Fritz Steffens, ca. 1922. Pencil and watercolor on paper

## Grosvenor Atterbury 1919–24

75. *Branch Bank of the United States, by Martin E. Thompson, 1824, shown on Wall Street, ca. 1915*

Only two important projects were undertaken during the 1920s, and neither entailed a conceptual revision of McKim's overall scheme. One, as already recounted, was the completion of Wing K and the Pompeian Court in 1926. The other was the fulfillment of a personal passion of the Metropolitan's president, Robert W. de Forest.

In 1922 the Museum announced the gift by de Forest and his wife of a separate wing for the display of American architecture and decorative arts of the periods before 1825. Plans for this new wing had been taking shape for many years.

De Forest, a lawyer, was married to Emily Johnston, a daughter of John Taylor Johnston, the Museum's first president. He became a trustee in 1889, secretary of the Museum in 1904, and Museum president in 1913. The de Forests were pioneer collectors of American antiques. As part of the Metropolitan's participation in the city's Hudson-Fulton celebration in 1909, the trustees planned a loan show of early Americana. In de Forest's words, such an exhibition could "test out the question whether American domestic art was worthy of a place in an art museum." An affirmative answer led to the Museum's decision to collect American decorative arts, from their seventeenth-century beginnings up through the years of the early Republic, and to acquire authentic domestic interiors in which to display them.

Mrs. de Forest promptly (1910) gave the first room, from a mid-eighteenth-century farmhouse in Woodbury, Long Island. But not much else happened until the "acquisition" in 1915 of the facade of the old Branch Bank of the United States. This magnificent architectural element turned out to be the determining factor in the whole conception of the new wing.

Designed by Martin E. Thompson (1787–1877) in 1822 and completed in 1824, the two-story, seven-bay structure was located just east of the Custom House (now Federal Hall) on the north side of Wall Street (fig. 75). In January 1913 the secretary of the treasury announced plans to demolish the bank (most recently housing the Assay Office), noting that legislation was being sought for a suitable disposition of the facade. After no practical public use had been found, de Forest offered, as a private citizen, to have the

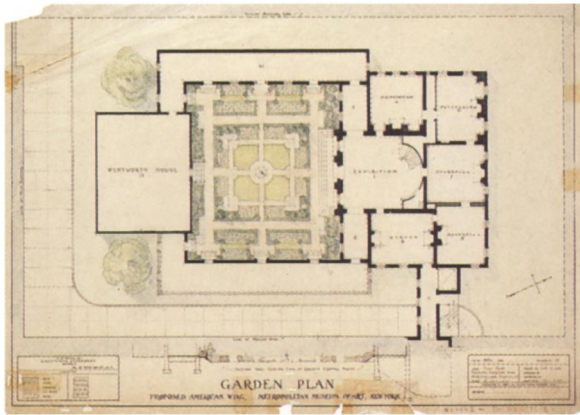


facade disassembled and stored pending final placement. In January 1915, after the appropriate authorizations had been obtained, de Forest's offer was accepted.

De Forest must have had the Museum in mind for the facade all along, but at first he had no specific idea for its future role. On February 3, 1915, he wrote, "If it could be certain that it could be used in connection with the Museum it would be better to put the matter in charge of McKim, Mead & White, but it is extremely uncertain." (The firm was still busy constructing Wings J and K.) In 1919, after a number of rooms and an entire house had been acquired, de Forest employed Grosvenor Atterbury (1869–1956) to take the bank facade; the Wentworth-Gardner House, from Portsmouth, New Hampshire; and twelve historic interiors and create the American Wing. Atterbury, an old friend of de Forest and the designer of his country house, was best known for the planned community of Forest Hills Gardens, Queens, as well as for being an innovator of prefabricated concrete housing. But what most influenced de Forest's choice was Atterbury's recently completed, sensitive restoration of New York's City Hall.

Atterbury's plan of October 1919 (fig. 76) shows the Wentworth-Gardner House at the left, the garden with flanking covered walkways in the center, and his American Wing building at the right. The last was a rectangular three-story structure with, on each floor, a central gallery surrounded by the historic interiors, or "period rooms." It was fronted on one side with the bank facade, which was to form the north elevation of the proposed northwest court of McKim's master plan. The reason for this placement within the Museum was the new wing's close prox-





building committee until March 1922, by which time the plans had changed again. The Wentworth-Gardner House, never brought to New York, was subsequently sold, and the parterre and flanking covered corridors were not built.

76. Grosvenor Atterbury. *Preliminary plan for the American Wing, October 9, 1919.* Ink and watercolor, on paper

imity to the European decorative arts in Wing F and to the future north wing, which was also intended to house European decorative arts.

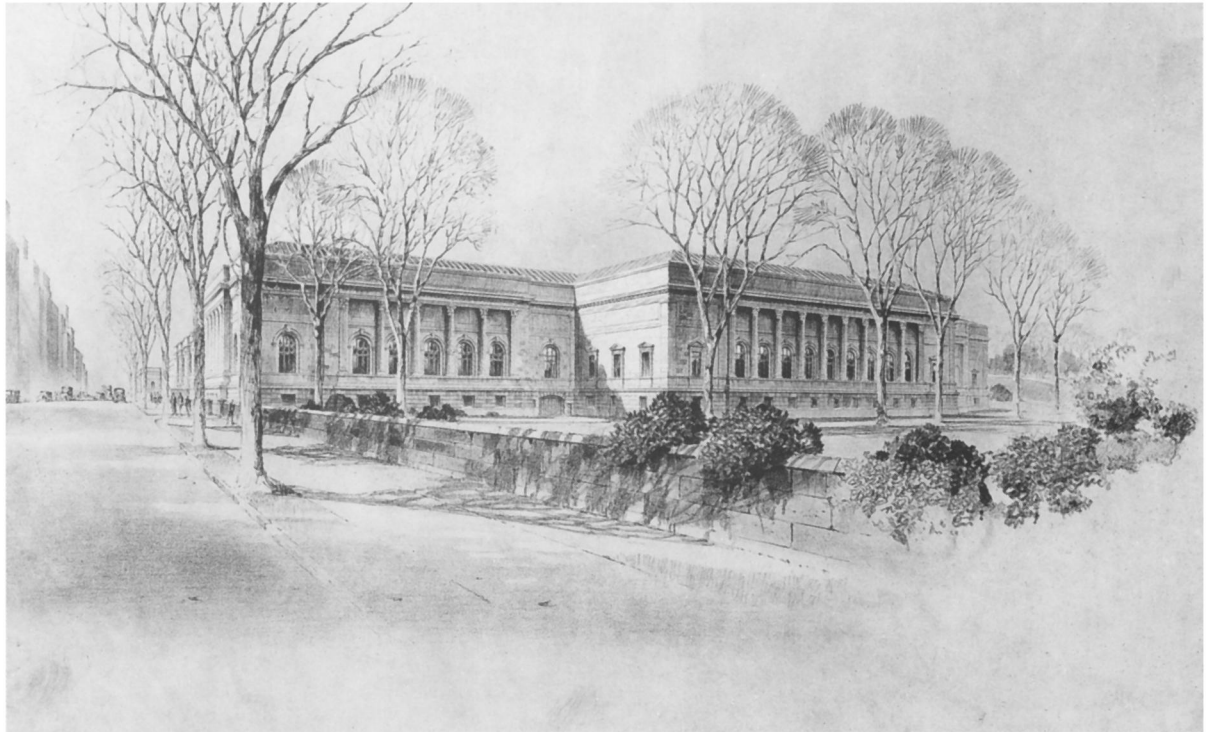
In the aftermath of the war's devastation in Europe, construction of this kind was impossible. Thus, Atterbury's plans were not approved by the

In January 1923 Atterbury presented plans for a small addition, at the north end of the Morgan Wing, that would provide access to the American Wing proper as well as to the future north wing. This became Wing L, and the American Wing became Wing M. When the American Wing opened, on November 10, 1924, it was the first privately funded Museum building and the only structure by an architect selected by the donor. Freestanding in the park northwest of the main building (fig. 77), the wing would not be incorporated into the Charles Engelhard Court—part of the Museum's 1970 master plan—for more than a half century (see fig. 109).



77. *The American Wing, 1925*

78. Probably Otto R. Eggers in the office of John Russell Pope. Perspective study for proposed north wing, 1929–30. Photograph of a lost drawing



## John Russell Pope and Otto R. Eggers, 1929–39

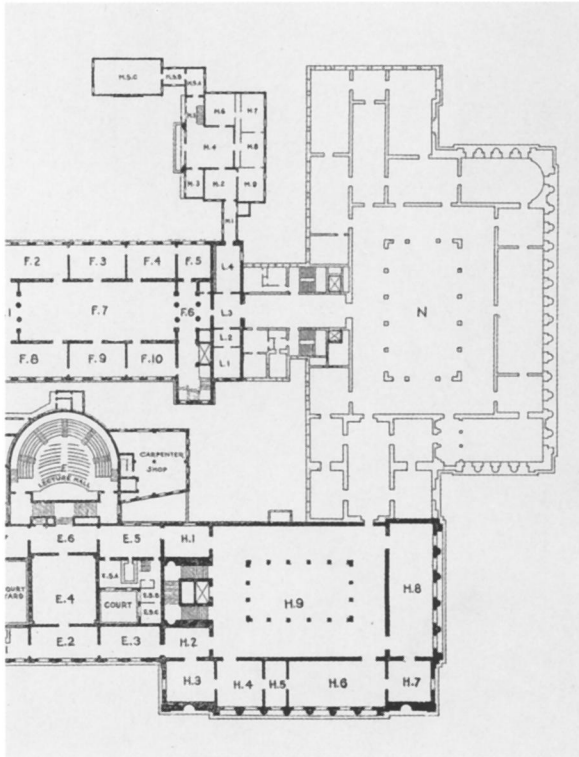
In 1929, twenty-five years after McKim had begun his revamping of the master plan, the Museum once again thought about overall architectural development—what the building committee, when it met in May, called the “general arrangement of spaces in the ultimate museum.” This renewed interest must have been inspired in part by the Havemeyer bequest, which had been accepted in January: the thousands of works would clearly need exhibition space. But the committee decided to focus primarily on a new north wing, with the first floor given over to the arms and armor collections and the second, to European decorative arts.

Robinson and de Forest, who had worked with McKim, still ran the Metropolitan, and they remained committed to his broadly conceived, classically styled scheme. But the firm of McKim, Mead and White had changed. The original partners were dead, and their successors lacked that vital spark. Everywhere classicism was in decline. Who could be found to carry on the grand tradition?

In September 1929 the committee selected John Russell Pope. Pope (1874–1937), a graduate of Columbia’s school of architecture, had studied at the American Academy in Rome and at the École des

Beaux-Arts in Paris. He first made a name for himself with his large Georgian houses on Long Island, but by the late 1920s he was recognized for his appropriately restrained classical designs for a number of public buildings. In 1925 he had won the competition for the New York State Roosevelt Memorial at the Central Park entrance of the American Museum of Natural History. A year later he began working on the Baltimore Museum of Art, and then, in 1929, on the imposing National Archives building in Washington, D.C.

In November Pope’s firm was asked to review plans for a new addition off the American Wing and to provide designs for administrative offices to be built over Hunt’s Grand Staircase. A month later, signaling the end of McKim, Mead and White’s association with the Museum, Kendall sent Pope photographs and renderings of McKim’s south and west facades. In January 1930, based on the projected need for 90,000 square feet of exhibition space, Pope submitted a block plan for the new north wing (N). Since the American Wing intruded on McKim’s design for a grand north gallery, Pope pushed out the center of the north facade, which enabled him to provide the top-lit center and side-lit subsidiary armor galleries as stipulated. One of his facade studies (fig. 78) shows Pope’s intent to blend his wing almost imperceptibly with the existing building. In January 1931 the committee approved in principle the



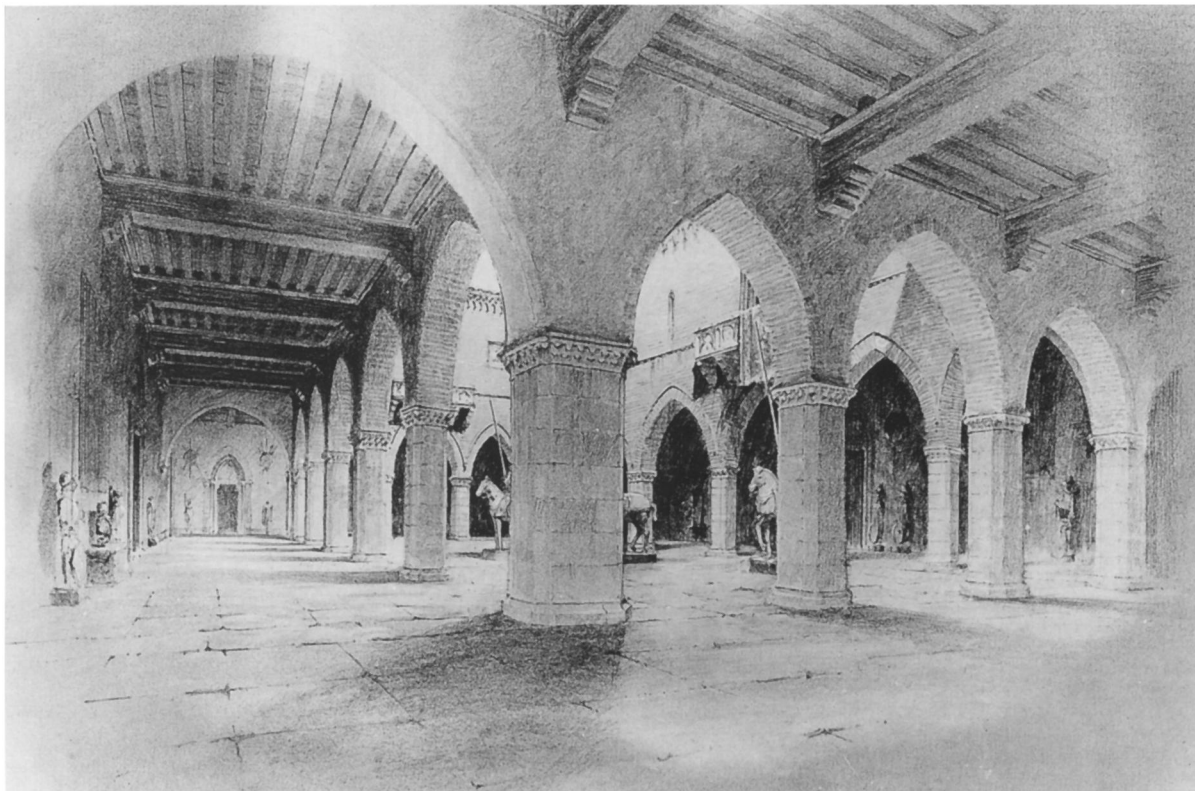
final revised plan (fig. 79), in which the armor hall (fig. 80) was to have a suitable medieval flavor.

The timing of the project could not have been worse: momentum was lost when both Robinson

and de Forest died in 1931. Even more damaging to the schedule was the Depression—Pope had been engaged just a month before the Crash. Four years passed before a much revised and reduced program was unveiled. The north wing was put on hold, and, instead, the old west building (Wings A–C) was slated to be modernized. It was the undertaking of a new administration: the Egyptologist-director Herbert Winlock and the banker-collector-president George Blumenthal. As soon as they believed there was a reasonable chance for public funding, they called a meeting of the building committee.

In preparation, Winlock had written the members, explaining his proposal to replace the collection of casts in Wing A with the armor collection then in Wing H. In addition to the long-standing imperative to move the armor to give more space to the material from the great Egyptian Expeditions (1906–36), the Museum now had to contend with an increasingly hostile public attitude toward plaster casts and Victorian architecture. As Winlock later noted (1935), “It is generally admitted that the old cast hall, installed as it has been for about forty years, is today a most incongruous feature in the Metropolitan Museum.” The committee approved in principle Winlock’s plan to begin dismembering the cast

79. Probably Otto R. Eggers in the office of John Russell Pope. Revised plan for proposed north wing (N), 1931. From “The Building,” published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932

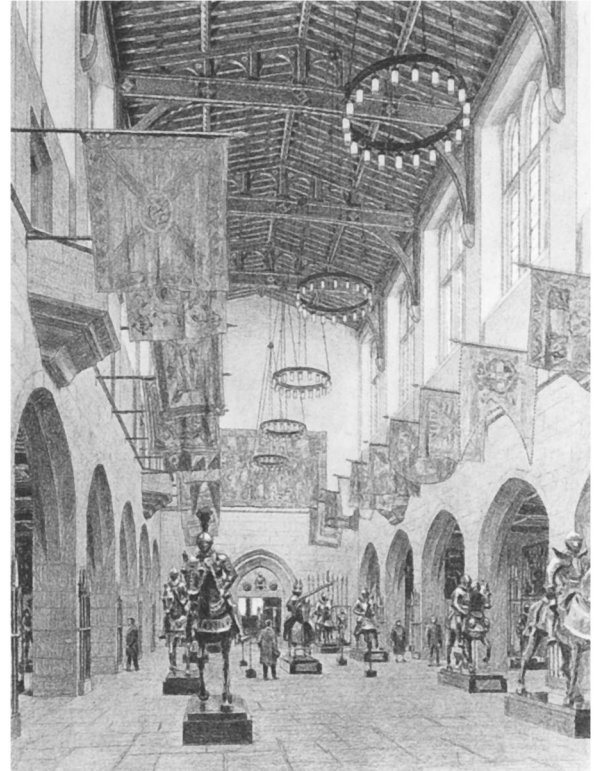


80. Probably Otto R. Eggers in the office of John Russell Pope. Rendering of armor hall in proposed north wing, 1931. Photograph of a lost drawing

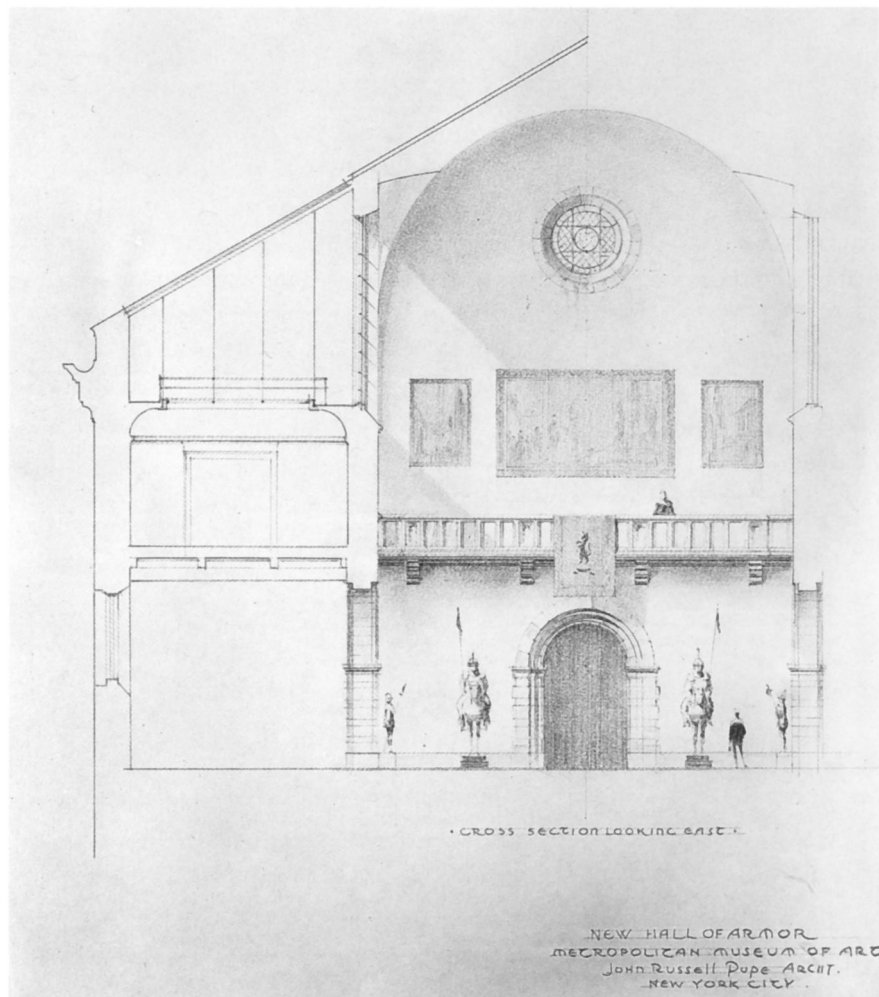
81. Otto R. Eggers in the office of John Russell Pope. Proposal for armor hall in Gothic style for Wing A, ca. 1936. Photograph of a lost drawing

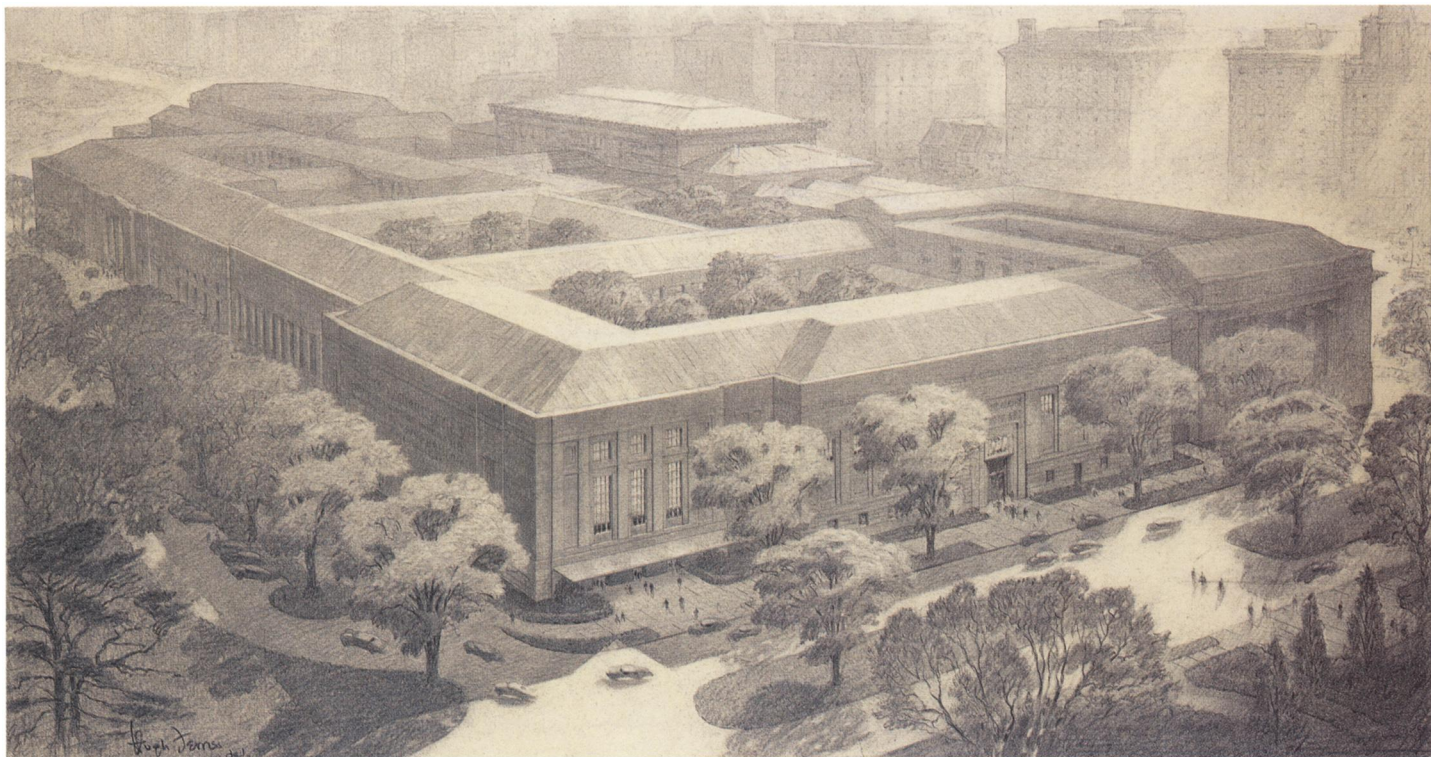
galleries on the main floor of Wings A and C, but it was 1936 before they agreed that the architect for the renovation would be Otto R. Eggers (1882–1964), an important designer in Pope’s office since 1909 and principally responsible for the Wing N. (Pope was now too ill to practice.)

Eggers submitted a number of schemes, both Gothic and Romanesque, for the armor hall that would fill the old Vaux space. One, in Gothic style (fig. 81), with a wooden hammer-beam ceiling, has a pointed-arch arcade reminiscent of the courtyard planned for Wing N. The Romanesque design (fig. 82) ultimately executed has such a cool and reasoned monochromatic quality—so characteristic of Pope’s classicism—that Winlock once described it as “in modern style.” The new armor hall opened to the public in January 1939. In 1956 it became the Medieval Sculpture Hall.



82. Otto R. Eggers in the office of John Russell Pope. Approved design in Romanesque style for the new armor hall in Wing A, December 21, 1936. Pencil on tissue





## Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II, 1940–54

During the 1930s, with the major exception of The Cloisters in Upper Manhattan (completed in 1938 and outside the scope of this history), the Metropolitan's installations began to fall behind the times. While the Depression was the main reason for delaying construction of the north wing, there was also the problem of an old-guard staff oblivious to new public needs and to new trends in the museum world. Thus it was that, late in 1939, a few months after Winlock's retirement, the trustees selected as his successor Francis Henry Taylor, the articulate young director of the Worcester Art Museum, in Massachusetts.

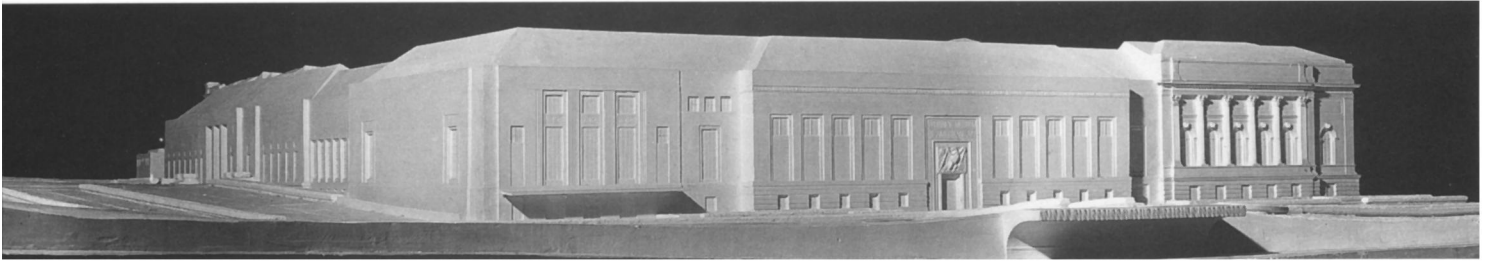
In June 1940 the Museum needed an architect to advise on building another addition to the American Wing. Taylor recommended Robert B. O'Connor (1896–1993), of the New York firm of Morris and O'Connor, on the basis of its Avery Wing at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford. Constructed in 1932–34, this wing was generally thought to have the most modern galleries in America. O'Connor's partner (and father-in-law), Benjamin Wistar Morris, was a trustee and chairman of the Metropolitan Museum's building committee. Although at his death, in 1944,

Morris was recognized for his major role in the Museum's postwar development, his name did not appear on any of the drawings.

By December 1940, O'Connor, in association with Harvey Stevenson, another partner, had not only completed plans for the American Wing addition but also had surveyed the entire building for Taylor. O'Connor's report, dated December 31, included a number of dramatic proposals: a curved ramp to replace the front steps, the removal of Hunt's Grand Staircase, and the filling in of the barrel-vaulted and coffered ceiling of the central corridor of Wing J (see fig. 73). In 1942 Taylor stated that the new designs were based on the premise that the north wing (N) would never materialize. (Pope's fully approved project and a \$3.5 million appropriation were carried on the capital budget of New York City for nearly a decade.) Moreover, Taylor added, such a sum, when available, would be better spent on revamping the present structure. It seems that the glories of Beaux-Arts public architecture were lost on Taylor and O'Connor. To them, lofty rooms and outmoded ornament were the reason why only 60 percent of the building's existing space was useful, an unacceptable luxury.

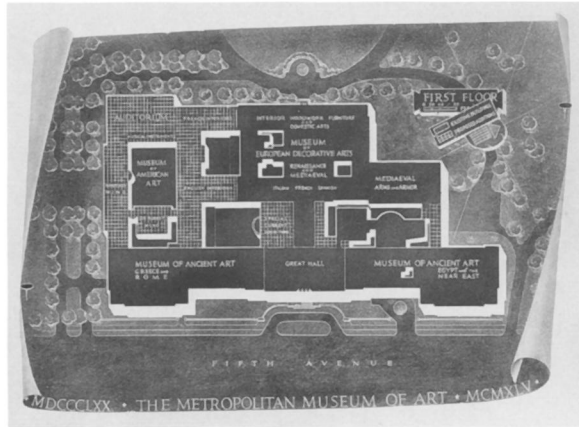
Taylor, seeking construction funds, approached

*83. Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II. Proposal for southwest addition to the Museum, including the Whitney Museum of American Art. Drawn by Hugh Ferriss, 1944. Graphite on paper*



84. Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II. View of model showing proposed southwest addition, 1945

85. Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II. First-floor plan of the proposed southwest wing and remodeled Museum, 1945. Photograph of a lost drawing



86. Lili Retbi. "The American Wing Takes Flight," 1946. Charcoal on paper



Robert Moses, the parks commissioner responsible for vast WPA projects under Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. Taylor was told that the days of the city's picking up the entire tab were over and that hereafter costs would be shared. Furthermore, if the Museum wanted city help, Moses recommended employing Aymar Embury II (1880–1966), consulting architect of the parks department (and a key player on Moses's team). Thus in 1942 the Museum's architectural firm became Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury, Associate Architects.

During the winter of 1942–43 the scope of the Museum's building program was enlarged. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, art patron and sculptress, had died, and the trustees of the Whitney Museum of American Art signed a tentative agreement with the

Metropolitan to merge, whereby the Whitney would erect its own building as a wing of the Metropolitan. In addition, the city had set aside \$3 million for Museum construction. Taylor, who was going to have to raise more than half of the \$7.5 million cost of the overall program from private sources, decided to announce the venture in 1945, the Museum's Seventy-fifth Anniversary and the turning point of the war in Europe in favor of the Allies.

To promote his project, Taylor had a plaster model of the building assembled in the Museum's Great Hall. He ordered floor plans with stylized modern graphics and employed Hugh Ferriss, the most famous architectural renderer of his generation, to provide dramatic images of the new Metropolitan.

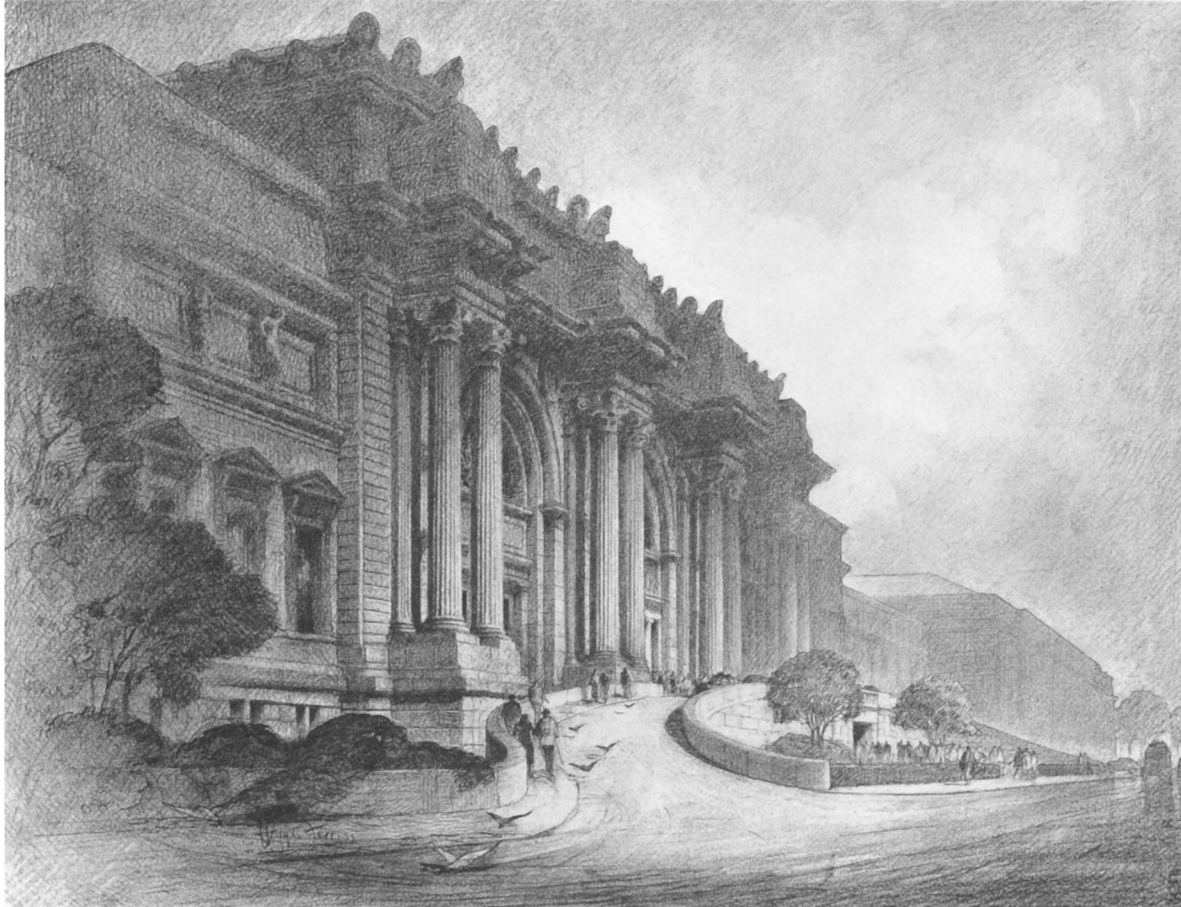
The principal focus of the construction was on the southwest corner, the proposed site of the Whitney Museum wing (designed by that institution's architects, Noel and Miller). The Whitney wing, its entrance portal flanked by ten windows, is clearly visible in a photograph of the model (fig. 84). A wing with the auditorium and broadcasting facilities is at the bottom center in the Ferriss view (fig. 83), while the roof of Richard Morris Hunt's entrance pavilion glistens at the top center. The additions were all in a stripped-down "modern classicism" (echoing McKim's scale and material but not his ornament) that was to become typical of government buildings.

The ground floor was reserved principally for service and educational facilities. On the first (fig. 85) and second floors the galleries are divided up among the five separate "museums," by which Taylor intended to reorder and simplify the collections: ancient art, oriental art, American art, decorative arts, and what he called the "Picture Gallery." Taylor's "museum" of American art was the only one of these five museum collections that required a totally new building, hence the proposal for the southwest wing. One scheme would have required actually dragging south, on skids, Atterbury's three-story American Wing (fig. 86).

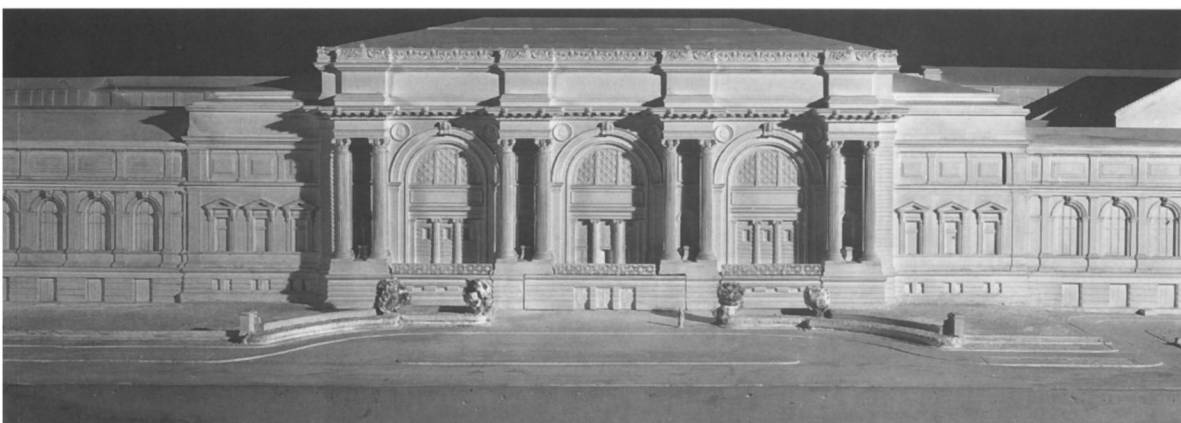
The other focus of attention was the Museum's main entrance: Richard Morris Hunt's pavilion, with its cramped, inadequate steps and what was considered by many to be heavy, overbearing ornament. O'Connor's first scheme was to provide a vehicular ramp at the first-floor level and pedestrian access to the ground floor (fig. 87). An alternative idea, one of the options shown in the plaster model (fig. 88), was to remove the staircases altogether. Taylor probably preferred this approach, for in 1952 he was to urge "the elimination of the front steps that now strike

terror in all persons who have reached middle age." In October 1945 O'Connor drew the staircase flanked by escalators, the plan agreed on by both the Museum and the Municipal Art Commission.

Most of O'Connor's proposals for renovation included the removal of the uncarved piles of stone above Hunt's paired columns—the obvious way to modernize the facade. Inside, there was a concerted effort to bring Hunt's Great Hall up-to-date. The heavy bronze lighting fixtures, the oversize decorative carving, and even some of the classical



87. Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II. Proposal for vehicular ramp to Fifth Avenue entrance. Drawn by Hugh Ferriss, 1944. Charcoal on paper



88. Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II. View of model showing proposal to remove Fifth Avenue steps, 1945

moldings were to be stripped away—an exercise in purging the past that was rendered persuasively by Ferriss (fig. 89). The net result, while still a great and dramatic space, would have lacked the original's color, texture, and shadow (fig. 90).

Taylor buttressed these eye-catching plans with his own writings. In *Babel's Tower* (1945) he declared, "The public are no longer impressed and are frankly bored with museums and their inability to render adequate service. They have had their bellyful of prestige and pink Tennessee marble."

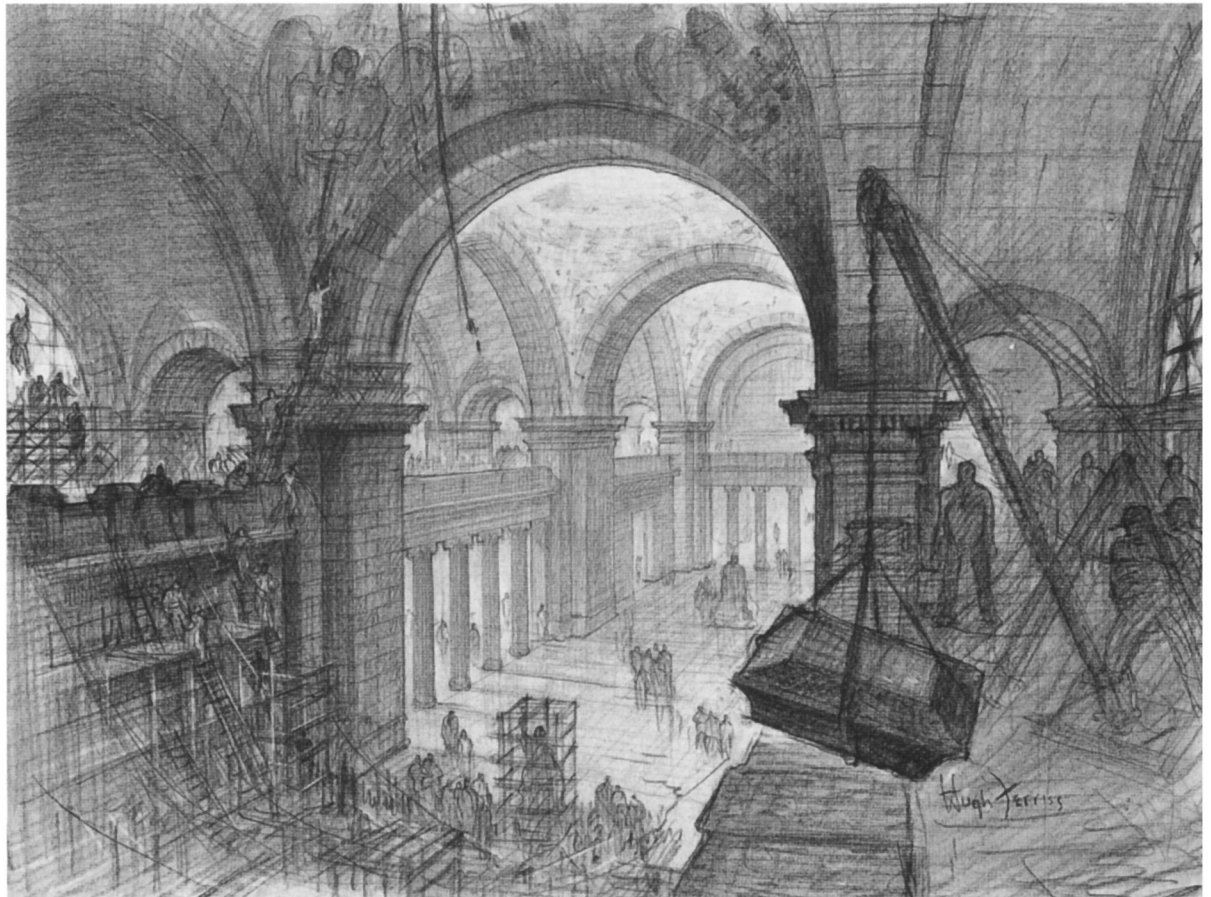
In the *Art News Annual* (1945–46) Taylor proposed that, with the realization of his five specialized "museums," the Metropolitan would at last "take its rightful place as a free informal university for the common man." In the *Bulletin* (January 1946) he urged Museum members to support what was now a \$10 million building program.

The money was not forthcoming, and in 1948 the Whitney withdrew its offer to relocate. Building projects were scaled back to the renovation of existing structures, and even this reduced effort was divided into four stages.

Construction began on only the first stage of the project, when it was incorporated in the New York City capital budget for 1950. During July 1949 O'Connor and Embury had worked up the final plans. Movable partitions in the paintings galleries were considered and then rejected. A pool was decided on as the centerpiece of the restaurant that would replace the old Pompeian court. And, with the advent of private funds, an entirely new auditorium was added to the list of works in progress. Bids were received in November 1950, and just over three years later ninety-five galleries and six period rooms, the new restaurant and auditorium, and new administrative offices were completed. Taylor, particularly proud of a 30 percent increase in exhibition space, noted, "We are indeed fortunate that the sense of grandeur of the architects of the past endowed us with such monumental 'salles d'espace perdu.'"

The biggest part of the job was the renovation of the old Vaux and Weston wings (A–C). The first-floor galleries were made into European decorative arts galleries, which were severely plain except for travertine doorframes and terrazzo floors. Sprinkled

89. Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II. *Dramatization of proposed modernization of the Great Hall, 1944.* Drawn by Hugh Ferriss. Charcoal on paper. Gift of Mrs. Hugh Ferriss, 1963 (63.82.1)







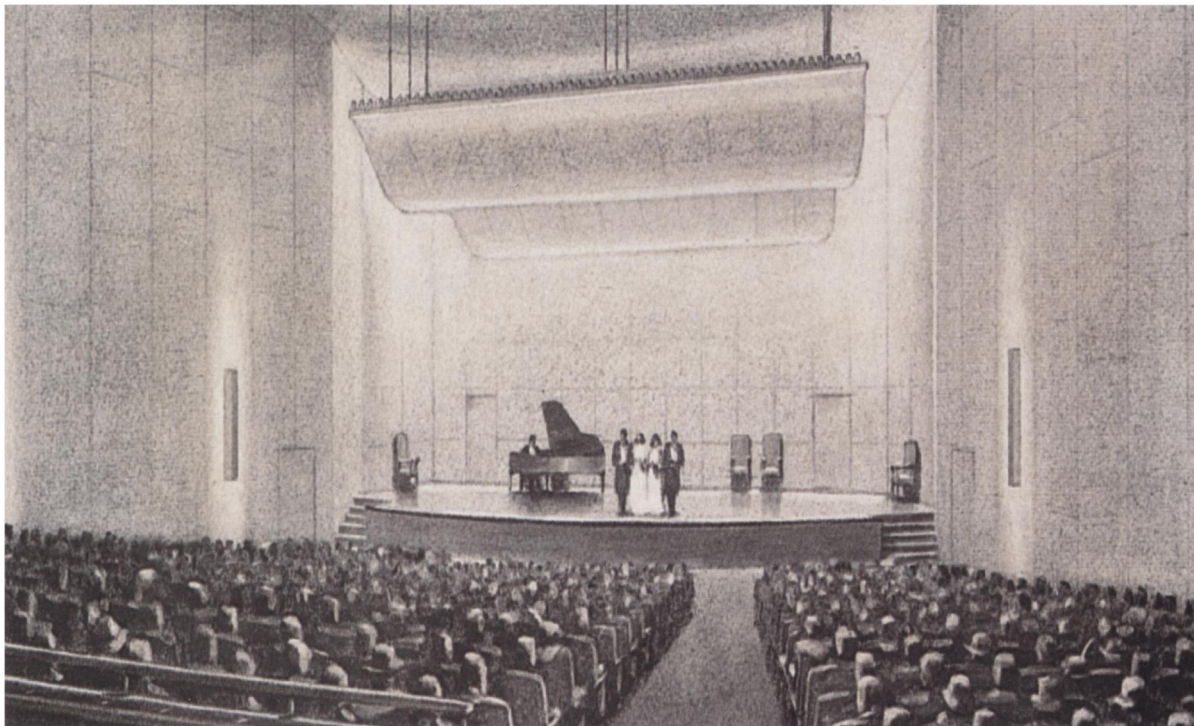
among them were a handful of great eighteenth-century period rooms, including those from Kirtlington Park and Lansdowne House. The second-floor picture galleries, little altered since the nineteenth-century, had their ceilings lowered and coves simplified. Their architectural trim was stripped away and

replaced with plain travertine. Vaux's ornamental staircases were boxed in.

Another major transformation was in McKim, Mead and White's Wing K. The south and east galleries were converted into offices and a kitchen, and the Pompeian court became the restaurant court. In 1949 Carl Milles, the Swedish-born sculptor, was commissioned to produce *The Fountain of the Muses* for the pool. A year later the firm of Dorothy Draper, Inc., was selected to design the restaurant.

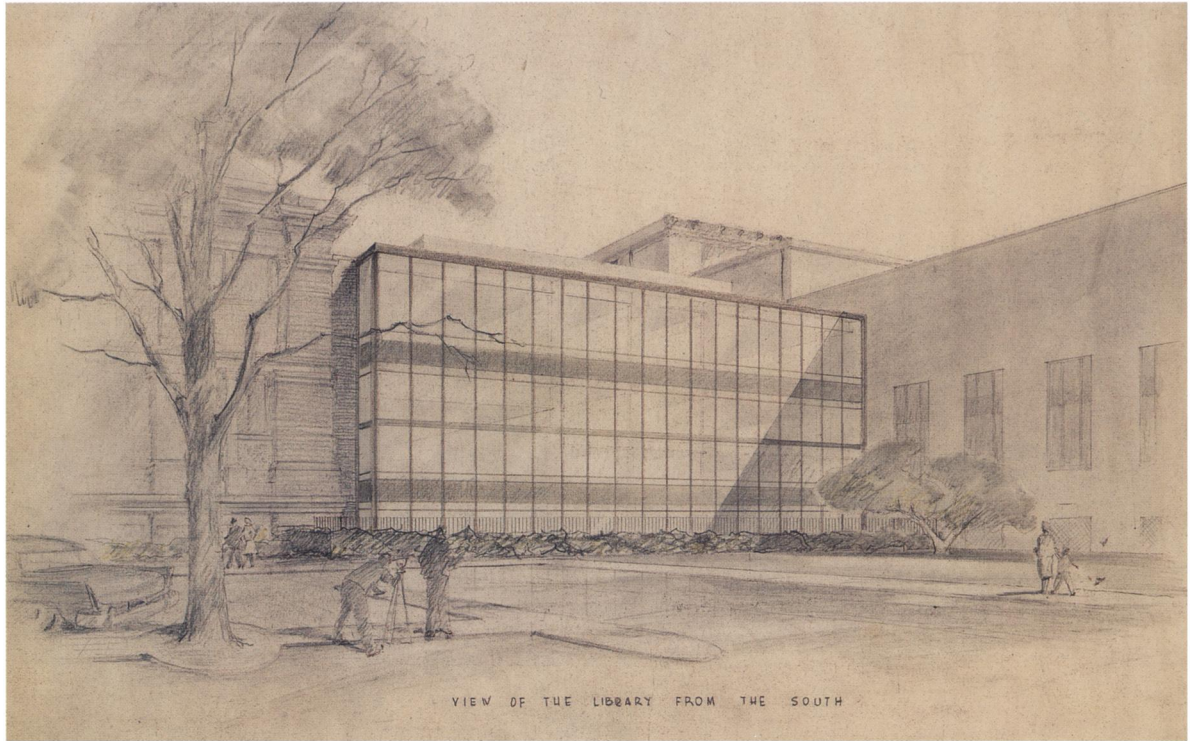
In the early 1950s the trustees of the Grace Rainey Rogers estate elected to use her bequest for a new auditorium on the site of McKim's original one in Wing E. (Mrs. Rogers, an art collector, had died in 1943.) By summer 1952, designs, generally reminiscent of O'Connor's, had been prepared by another firm, Voorhees, Walker, Foley and Smith. The old lecture hall was demolished, and the new auditorium (fig. 91), opened on May 11, 1954. The interior design was sleek and modern, with the walls and ceiling lined with thin plywood panels—of light tan "korina," South African white wood—which have hard surfaces intended to reflect sound. The critic from *Architectural Forum* wrote of the acoustics, "not simply good; they are exquisite." That the auditorium remains unaltered after forty years is a testament to its elegance and utility.

90. Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II. *The Great Hall as it would look when modernized*. Drawn by Hugh Ferriss, 1944. Charcoal on paper



91. Voorhees, Walker, Foley and Smith. *Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium*. Drawn by E. P. Chrystie, ca. 1952. Charcoal on paper

92. Brown, Lawford and Forbes. *The Thomas J. Watson Library, view from the south, 1958. Pencil, ink, and crayon on paper*



## Brown, Lawford and Forbes, 1954–65

In January 1954 Taylor announced that the Museum had retained the New York firm of Brown, Lawford and Forbes to study the subsequent stages of the building program. This group was known for having recently designed a new research laboratory for the New York Botanical Garden. Why O'Connor and Embury were replaced, however, is unclear. The change does not seem to have had anything to do with Taylor's impending retirement, which was announced in December 1954. With the election of James J. Rorimer Jr. as the Museum's sixth director on August 3, 1955, there was a new team in place that had every opportunity to alter the course of the building campaign.

Rorimer, who had joined the Museum staff in 1927, directly out of Harvard, was a medievalist in the Department of Decorative Arts until 1934, when he became curator of the newly formed Department of Medieval Art. His success in working with John D. Rockefeller Jr. on the design and construction of The Cloisters is legendary, and that building is witness to Rorimer's remarkable sensitivity to architectural values—to planning, massing, and materials.

In October 1956 Rorimer announced his own renovation plan, saying that all across America museums

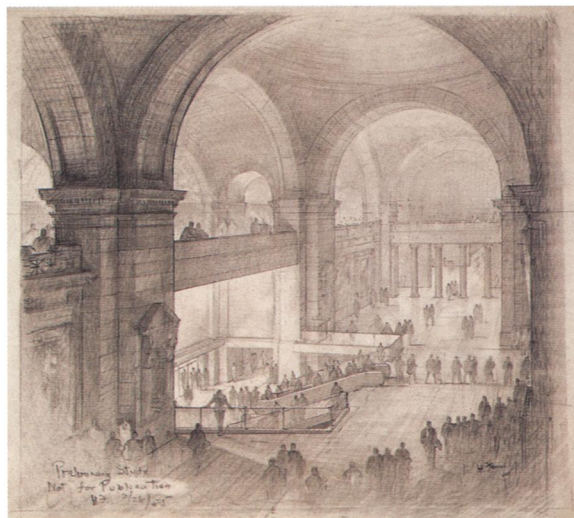
“are being remodeled to satisfy present-day requirements. . . . The public is no longer satisfied with conditions which obtained earlier in the century.” Rorimer's plan was basically a continuation of the program Taylor had instituted in 1940. This fact is not surprising, considering that both men were of the same generation and shared a belief in the efficacy of modern design and technology to make over the Museum's old building for a new and larger audience.

The principal focus of Rorimer's efforts with Brown, Lawford and Forbes was Richard Morris Hunt's Fifth Avenue entrance pavilion and the areas immediately adjacent to it. In addition to modernizing the existing building and improving visitor circulation, Rorimer proposed filling in the open spaces between Wings A–C and D. No longer was it necessary to have interior courtyards serve as light wells and airshafts. Electric light was now considered ideal for viewing art, and air conditioning was preferred for ventilation. Thus began an informal program, today nearly complete, to fill in the vast interstices between the Museum's wings.

Behind Wing D, to the north, the old boiler house would be replaced by a new service building. To the south, McKim's freestanding library (Wing G) would be supplanted by a new facility. It was to be approached



93. Brown, Lawford and Forbes. Proposal for ground-floor entrance. Drawn by Hugh Ferriss, 1955. Charcoal on paper. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University



94. Brown, Lawford and Forbes. Proposal for escalators leading up to the center of the Great Hall. Drawn by Hugh Ferriss, 1955. Charcoal on paper. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University

through a glass-roofed courtyard housing the sixteenth-century patio from the castle at Vézé Blanco, in Spain, a bequest of George Blumenthal in 1941. The new library was Brown, Lawford and Forbes's one opportunity to provide a modern exterior design for the Metropolitan. The firm selected a glass curtain wall with anodized aluminum trim (fig. 92), emblematic of the latest corporate architecture in the International style: the United Nations Secretariat of 1949–50 and Lever House of 1952. Planning began in June 1954, but actual construction, which had to be done in tandem with the other renovation projects, did not proceed until 1962. The Thomas J. Watson Library opened in November 1964.

Rorimer's program also addressed the age-old problem of Hunt's front steps—now totally inadequate for the growing crowds of Museum visitors. With the unveiling of the rebuilding scheme in October 1956, Rorimer gave considerable attention to, in his words, "what some of us hope will be the ultimate solution for a new main entrance to the Museum." Hugh Ferriss was brought back to dramatize the Brown, Lawford and Forbes design: the replacement of the staircase by a ground-floor entrance with a vast projecting marquee (fig. 93), leading to escalators up to the center of the Great Hall (fig. 94). Though it is not spelled out in the records, there must have been determined opposition from some quarters, and in May 1963, just when the contracts for all the various projects were being let, the director recommended abandoning this particular one for the foreseeable future.

The implementation of Rorimer's renovation plan between 1962 and 1964, with a goal of completion for the opening of the New York World's Fair in 1964, also included changes within the McKim, Mead and White wings facing Fifth Avenue: the creation of special exhibition galleries on the second floor of Wing K and replacement of the structurally inadequate floor in Wings E and H. Brown, Lawford and Forbes's remodeling of the first-floor Egyptian galleries and the second-floor Asian galleries in Wings E and H was carried out during 1967–68, after Rorimer's death. The ground floor was given over to the Costume Institute, where galleries—their floors, fountains, and doorframes liberally encrusted with travertine—were designed by the noted architect Edward Durrell Stone.

Today we may cringe at the thought of some of these changes—both proposed and executed—to the Museum's historic buildings during the twenty-five-year period from 1940 to 1965, but at the time they reflected an almost universally accepted concept of progress. Taylor does not appear to have had much interest in the building, but Rorimer was passionate about it. In 1965, on the occasion of the completion of his project, Rorimer wrote: "We have endeavored, moreover, not to violate the essential integrity of the building itself. . . . We have tried to bring out the best in the Museum building—its monumentality and noble proportions—and to accept its limitations even as we have to surmount them."

95. *Aerial view of the Museum from the northwest, 1991*



### **Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates, 1967–**

James Rorimer died suddenly in May 1966. In December the board elected Thomas P. F. Hoving as his successor. Hoving, like Rorimer, was a medievalist. He began as a curatorial assistant at The Cloisters in 1959, and it was there that Rorimer picked him out as his likely successor, a role certainly not anticipated before the latter's planned retirement in 1970. But Hoving was impatient and in January 1966 joined Mayor John V. Lindsay's new administration as parks commissioner. During his fourteen months with the city, Hoving energized the parks with a multiplicity of public events. The trustees must have understood that Hoving, although a Rorimer protégé, would represent an aggressive new populist approach at the Museum, a clear and dramatic break with the past. But no one could have foreseen that the construction program Hoving initiated would, with only one architectural firm and in a little less than a quarter of a century, complete the

entire fabric of the Museum building. More than anything else, it was through the efforts of Douglas Dillon, president of the Museum (1970–78) and chairman of the board of trustees (1978–83), that such rapid progress was made.

A grand opportunity for expansion awaited Hoving even before he moved into his new office. In August 1965 the United Arab Republic had formally offered the first-century-b.c. Temple of Dendur to the United States, in recognition of the American contribution in rescuing Abu Simbel from the rising waters behind the Aswan High Dam. More than twenty American cities vied for the temple, in what the press called the "Dendur Derby." In January 1966 Rorimer had staked New York's and the Metropolitan's claim to it on the basis of having the greatest collection of Egyptian art in the nation. And early in April 1967 the brand-new director made a spirited bid for the prize, with a promise to install the temple in a glass pavilion adjacent to the Egyptian collections at the north end of the Museum. When Hoving's effort proved successful, the Museum was irrevocably

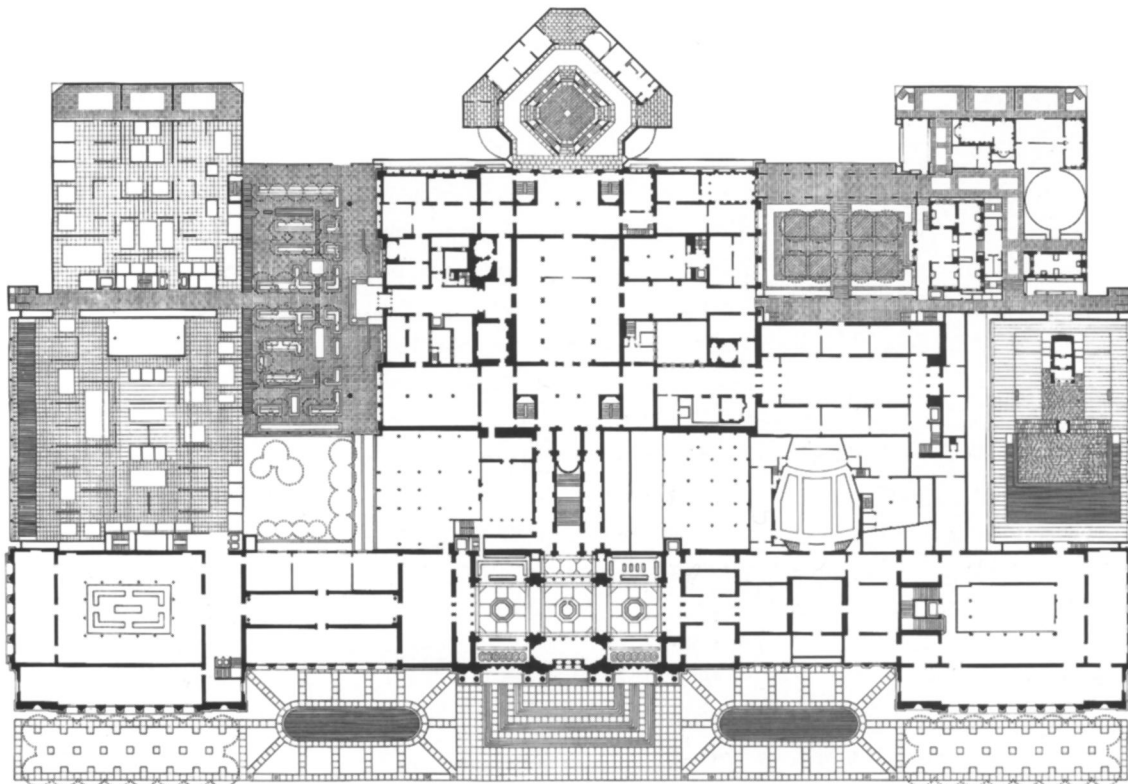
committed to expanding westward into Central Park.

Dendur was not the only building project under consideration. Hoving, naturally, wanted to tie the long-awaited expansion of the American Wing to the nation's Bicentennial in 1976. In addition, he was aggressively pursuing Robert Lehman, recently made chairman of the board of trustees, in hopes of acquiring his fabled collections—Old Master paintings, drawings, and decorative arts—which would need their own space. Other requirements for new galleries, such as those for European decorative arts, would have to be addressed later.

Hoving did not consider Brown, Lawford and Forbes, the Museum's current architects, suited to a project of this magnitude. What was needed was a firm as fresh and timely as Hoving himself, but with the proven ability to mastermind and execute a large, complex program. At this moment the darling of the architectural critics, including the influential Ada Louise Huxtable of the *New York Times*, was Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. The firm had recently completed two highly regarded commissions, the Oakland Museum in California and the Ford

Foundation headquarters in New York. Furthermore, Roche had been contacted by the curator of the American Wing, James Biddle, who, during the directorial interregnum—and in anticipation of the Bicentennial—had begun planning to expand the American Wing. In late summer 1967, when Roche came to the Metropolitan to talk about one wing, Hoving told him that he wanted a master plan for the entire Museum. As Hoving describes it, he persuaded Arthur Houghton, then president of the board, to allow him to select the firm without the approval of the trustees' architectural committee.

Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates was formed only in 1966, but Roche, who was born in Dublin in 1922, and Dinkeloo (1918–1981) had long been associates. Roche had been the principal design associate and Dinkeloo the head of production in the office of Eero Saarinen in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. When Saarinen, the distinguished Finnish-born modernist, died in 1961, in the midst of moving his office to Connecticut, Roche and Dinkeloo carried out the move. From 1961 to 1966 they were partners in Eero Saarinen and Associates, completing Saarinen's unfinished work, including such major projects as



96. Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. Master plan, 1970



97. Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. Model of the Museum from the west, 1970

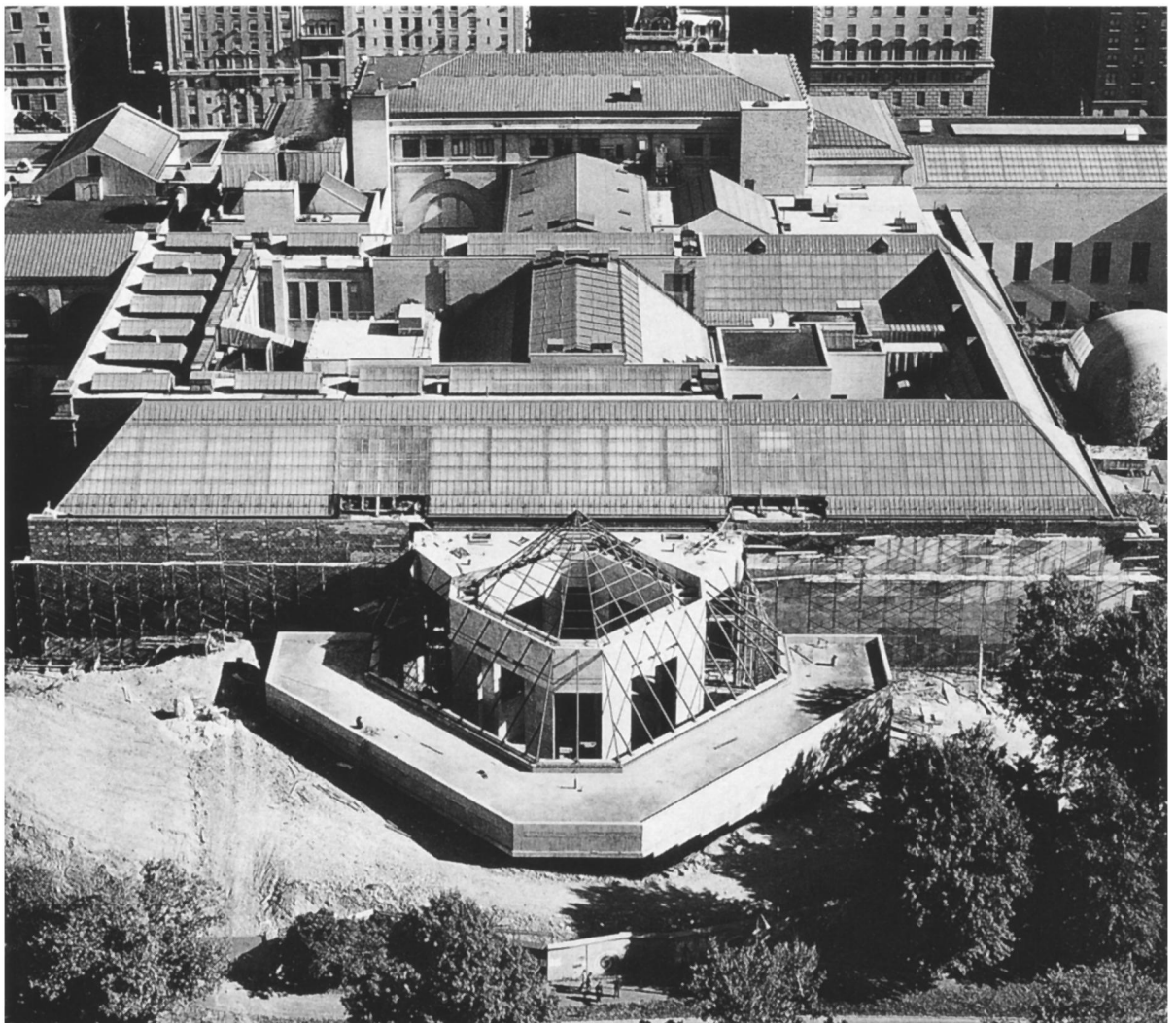
the TWA Terminal (1956–62) at Kennedy Airport and the CBS Building (1960–64) in New York, as well as getting new commissions on their own. The most influential of these were the multilayered, multipurpose Oakland Museum (1961–68) and the luxurious Ford Foundation headquarters, with its vast glazed atrium and sheer walls of glass or stone (1963–68).

The comprehensive program that Roche and Dinkeloo had been engaged to prepare gave them

the opportunity to conceive of the Metropolitan as an architectural whole. Not since the halcyon days before World War I, when public moneys for construction were plentiful, had such a grand architectural vision been contemplated.

Roche, as the designer, was faced with a situation similar to that confronted by McKim in 1904: a hodgepodge of buildings constructed at different times and as parts of different schemes. The por-

98. Aerial view, from the west, showing the Robert Lehman Wing under construction, 1974



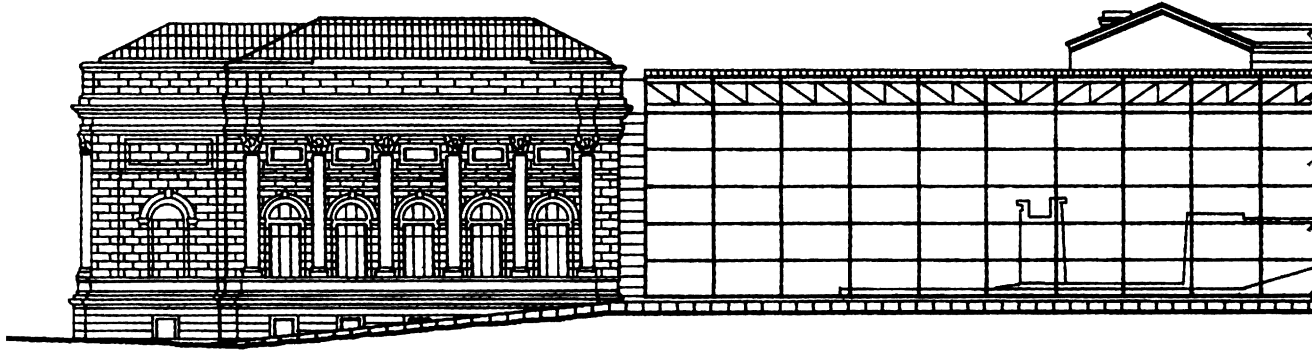
*99. Hunt's Great Hall as restored by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates in 1970, about 1992*



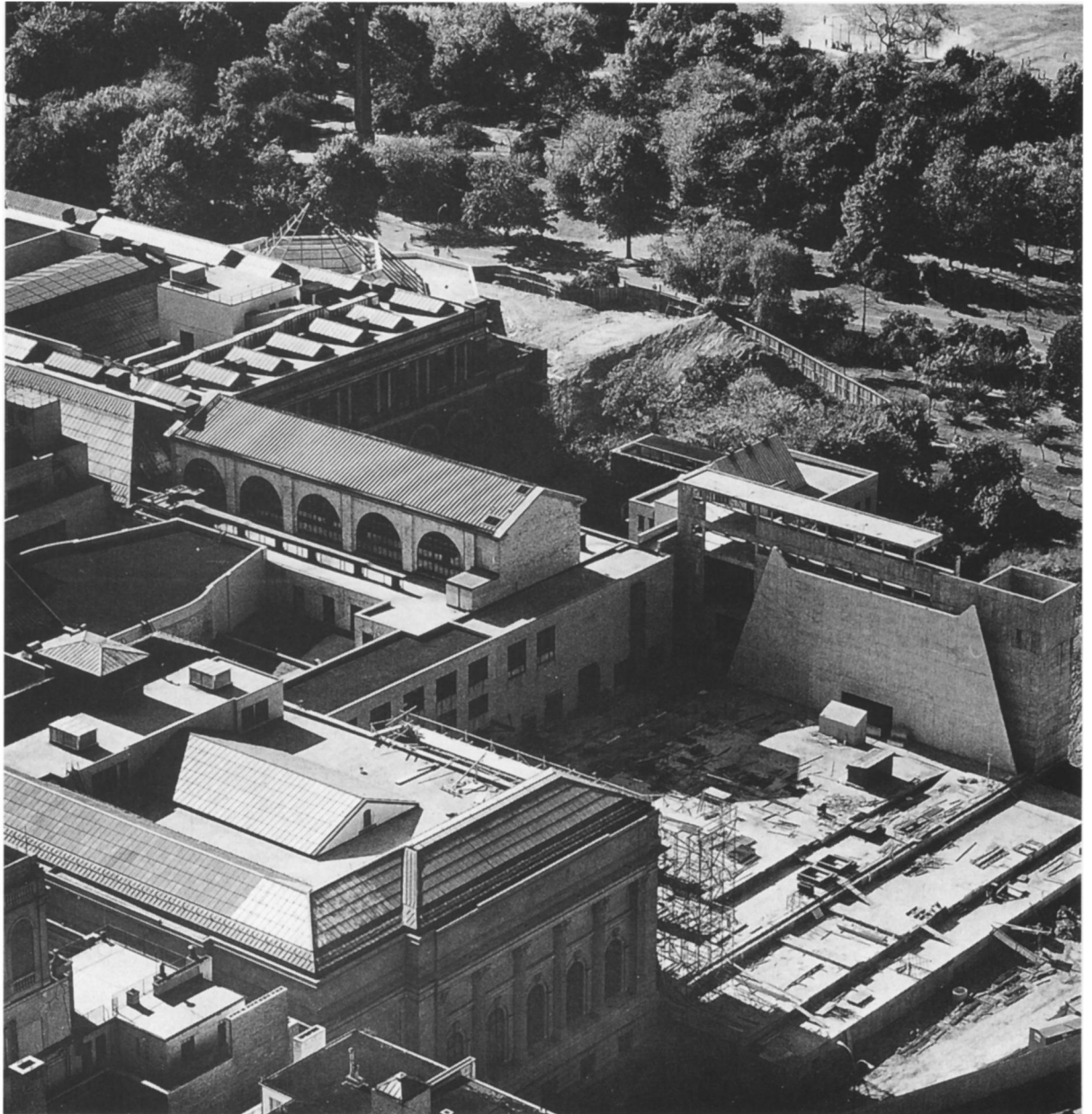
tions of the existing building that Roche considered particularly significant historical features to be preserved were Hunt's Great Hall, Hunt's and McKim's Fifth Avenue facades, Weston's south facade, and Pope's armor hall. His task was twofold: on the outside, to design a coherent west elevation that would blend with Central Park; and on the

inside, to improve the traffic patterns and to rationalize the placement of new and existing collections. Just as McKim had had to honor Hunt's entrance pavilion, so Roche had to honor McKim's Fifth Avenue facade. But, whereas McKim could plan generally and schematically for as-yet-undefined collections, Roche had to accommodate massive and

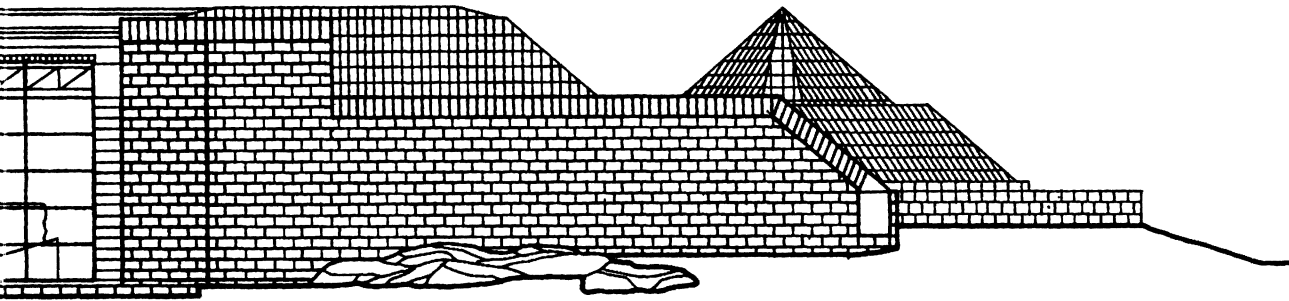
100. Kevin Roche  
John Dinkeloo and  
Associates. North  
elevation. Ink on  
paper, 1970



101. Aerial view, from  
the northeast, showing  
the Temple of Dendur  
in The Sackler Wing  
and the Robert  
Lehman Wing under  
construction, 1974







diverse holdings within a building that had a ground plan (footprint in the park) smaller than either Hunt's or McKim's.

In the fall of 1967, with funding supplied in part by the city, Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates began the task of developing the Museum's

master plan (fig. 96). They surveyed existing buildings and compiled detailed dossiers on the collections to be newly housed. But their orderly overview was repeatedly interrupted. First, there was the need to prepare, discretely, a proposal for housing the Lehman collections, a proposal so compelling that it



102. *The Temple of Dendur, 1995. Given to the United States by Egypt in 1965, awarded to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1967, and installed in The Sackler Wing in 1978. In the foreground are colossi of Amenhotep III, from the Temple of Luxor, Thebes. Rogers Fund and Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1921*

103. Detail of north elevation showing the juncture of McKim, Mead and White's Wing H (1913) and Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates' enclosure for the Temple of Dendur (1978), 1995



would secure the gift. Then they were confronted with the redesign of the Fifth Avenue entrance plaza and the Great Hall, an initiative precipitated by the

new parks commissioner, August Heckscher, who insisted that about \$500,000 appropriated by the city in 1963 to redo the front steps be used or removed from the capital budget. Finally, there was to be a glass-fronted wing on the south—the pendant to the one housing Dendur on the north—to accommodate Governor Nelson Rockefeller's gift of collections of the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. None of these projects could wait. As a result, the order of priorities became the front plaza and Great Hall (completed 1970), the Robert Lehman Wing (1975), the Temple of Dendur in the Sackler Wing (1978), the new American Wing (1980), and the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing (1982). The last two of these undertakings were finished after Philippe de Montebello became director in 1978. Later, in the 1980s, there was a renewed initiative leading to the funding and construction, in the southwest corner of the Museum, of the remaining pieces of the master plan: the Lila Acheson Wallace Wing (1987) and the Henry R. Kravis Wing and Carroll and Milton Petrie European Sculpture Court (1990).

The comprehensive plan was completed in the spring of 1970, in time for the Museum's Centennial. At a public hearing held in June, opponents of the Museum's expansion into the park nearly derailed

104. The American Wing with the Charles Engelhard Court, from the west, 1995

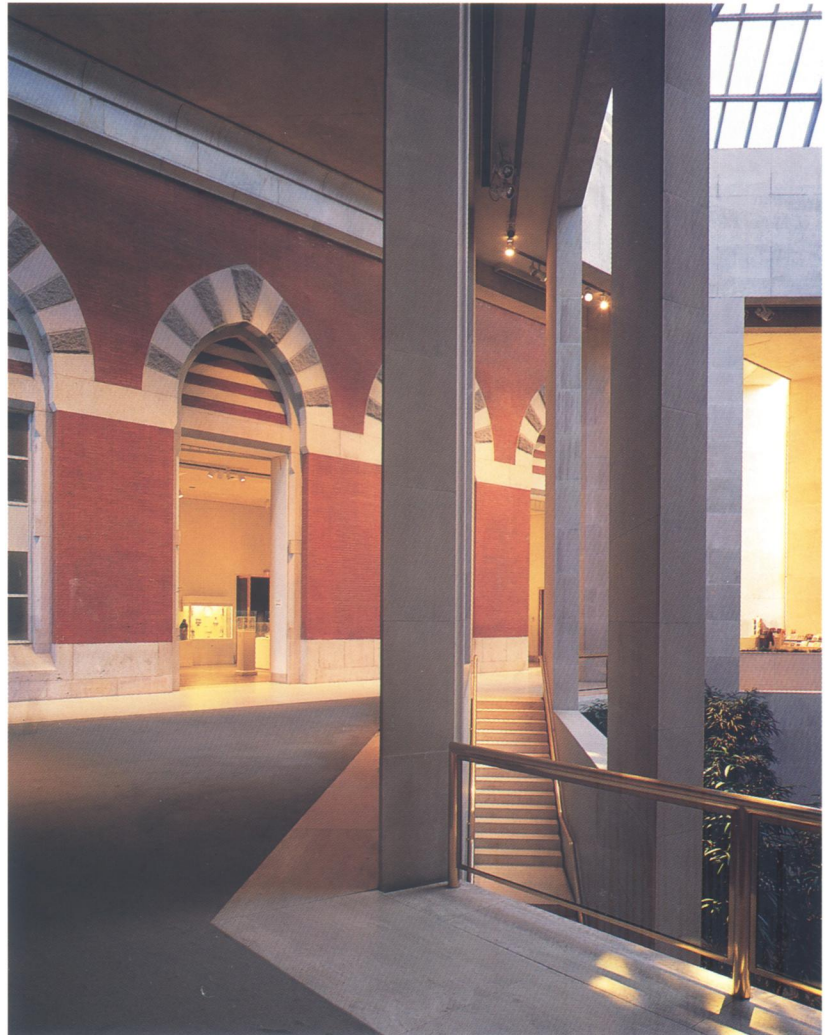


the whole project. Their counterproposal was decentralization—the distribution of the Museum’s collections throughout the city—an approach wholly antithetical to the Metropolitan’s encyclopedic nature. Finally, in January 1971, after protracted negotiations, the comprehensive plan was approved and the building permit issued for its first phase—the Robert Lehman Wing.

Roche’s first plan for improving circulation within the Museum’s existing building was simple, dramatic, and of unassailable logic. He suggested opening up broad avenues north and west of the Great Hall, similar to the great vaulted corridor to the south. The north one, through the Egyptian galleries, would have required moving the Temple of Perneb and filling in McKim’s light wells (see fig. 96). The west one would have required removing Hunt’s Grand Staircase, an integral part of his Great Hall complex—and even in the modernist 1960s such a proposal was unacceptable. In the end, neither avenue was realized.

Roche had better luck with a new north-south corridor in the western half of his plan (see fig. 96). He chose a route that bisected the Vaux-Weston block (Wings A–C), thus making use of the original front entrance of Weston’s facade, which was to be the focal point of a glass-roofed courtyard.

For the Central Park facades, Roche chose walls of glass alternating with walls of masonry (a limestone like that of the Fifth Avenue facade). The juxtaposition of materials was similar to that used so effectively in the Ford Foundation Building. The Dendur and Rockefeller enclosures, with their great slanted-glass walls, abutted McKim’s north and south wings (fig. 103). (Roche underscored the unbridgeable gulf between the classical and modern architectural styles by leaving a space between them.) West of the glass enclosures projected the square stair towers that terminated the north-south corridor. They are limestone-clad, as are the northwest and southwest wings. Between these wings and the original Vaux-Weston building, on the west elevation, curtain walls of reflecting glass enclose two glass-roofed garden courts, inspired by nineteenth-century conservatories (see fig. 104). An unbroken expanse of slanting glass roofs became the dominant feature of the entire west elevation. From the park the building appears low-slung, receding before one’s eyes. (In summer the glass reflects park greenery, and over the years the limestone has become covered with ivy.)



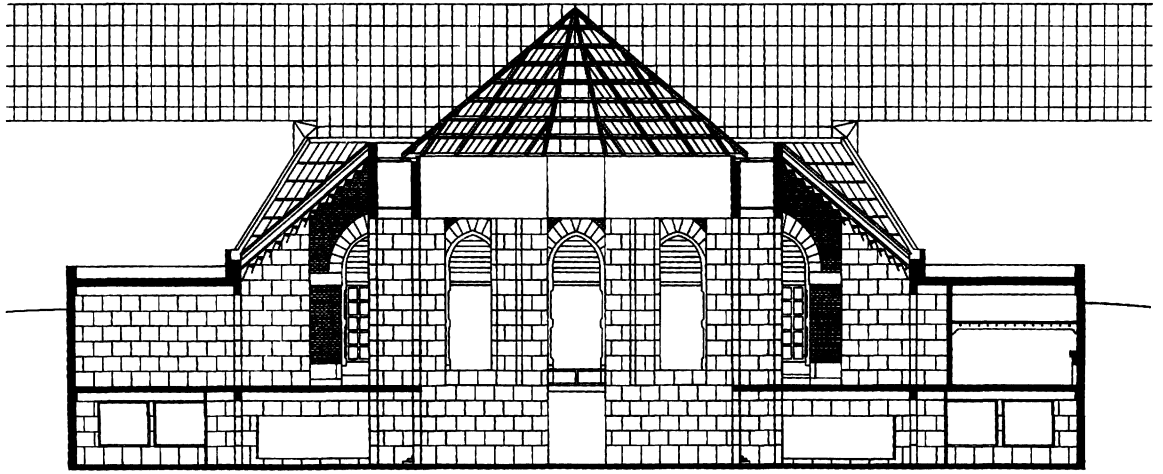
The clean, modern style of the design—its understated quality and absolute absence of ornament epitomize Roche’s early work—was to be expected from a disciple of Eero Saarinen. The alternative would have been the “modern classicism” of Robert O’Connor’s scheme, but it was rejected by Roche as inappropriate. (To have even considered a continuation of McKim’s Beaux-Arts treatment would have been unthinkable for any serious-minded architect in the late 1960s.)

The renovations of the front plaza and Great Hall, designed by Roche in 1968 and underwritten by Lila Acheson Wallace, were completed in time for the Centennial celebrations in the spring of 1970. The design for the Fifth Avenue plaza (see figs. 1, 96) was a departure from the traditional combination of paved walks and narrow stretches of green. In order to characterize the area between the Museum and the avenue as part of the urban fabric and not part of the park, Roche chose to pave it. He subdivided the

105. Robert Lehman Wing (1975), looking south toward part of Vaux and Mould’s west facade (1880), 1995

106. Kevin Roche  
John Dinkeloo and  
Associates. Longitu-  
dinal section of the  
Robert Lehman Wing,  
1974. Ink on paper

107. Robert Lehman  
Wing (1975), looking  
east toward the arches  
of Vaux and Mould's  
west facade (1880),  
1995



plaza to reflect the five-part facade, which served as its backdrop: at the center, broad new steps; on either side, oblong fountains encircled with discrete vehicular drives; at the ends, tree-shaded seating.

Not only were Hunt's front steps too narrow but they had no space, above or below, for gathering crowds. Recognizing that the majority of visitors approached the Museum from the north or south on Fifth Avenue, rather than from the east on Eighty-second Street, Roche designed a broad, expansive staircase with a three-way slope.

The most complex and creative of the new interior spaces designed by Roche is that in the wing built for the Lehman collections, directly on the axis of the Museum's main entrance. The square skylighted center court is set on an angle to the Museum's original west facade. It is separated from the adjacent galleries by two concentric walls, with large openings through which, from numerous vantage points (figs. 105–107), one glimpses Vaux and Mould's pointed arches, with their red bricks and gray granite—the perfect foil to the monochromatic palette of Roche's limestone and concrete.

Historic facades play a more direct role as focal points in Roche's two great glazed courtyards. Martin Thompson's 1824 bank facade is the center of attention in the Engelhard Court (fig. 109), and Theodore Weston's 1888 south facade forms an entire side of the Petrie Court (fig. 110). What a fitting way to honor the varied and colorful architectural history of the Museum.



*108. The Carroll and Milton Petrie European Sculpture Court (1990), looking west, with the arcaded south wall designed by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates and part of Theodore Weston's south facade (1888), 1995*



109. *The Charles Engelhard Court (1980) with the facade of Martin E. Thompson's Branch Bank of the United States (1824), 1995*










110. *The Carroll and Milton Petrie European Sculpture Court (1990), with Theodore Weston's south facade (1888), 1995*

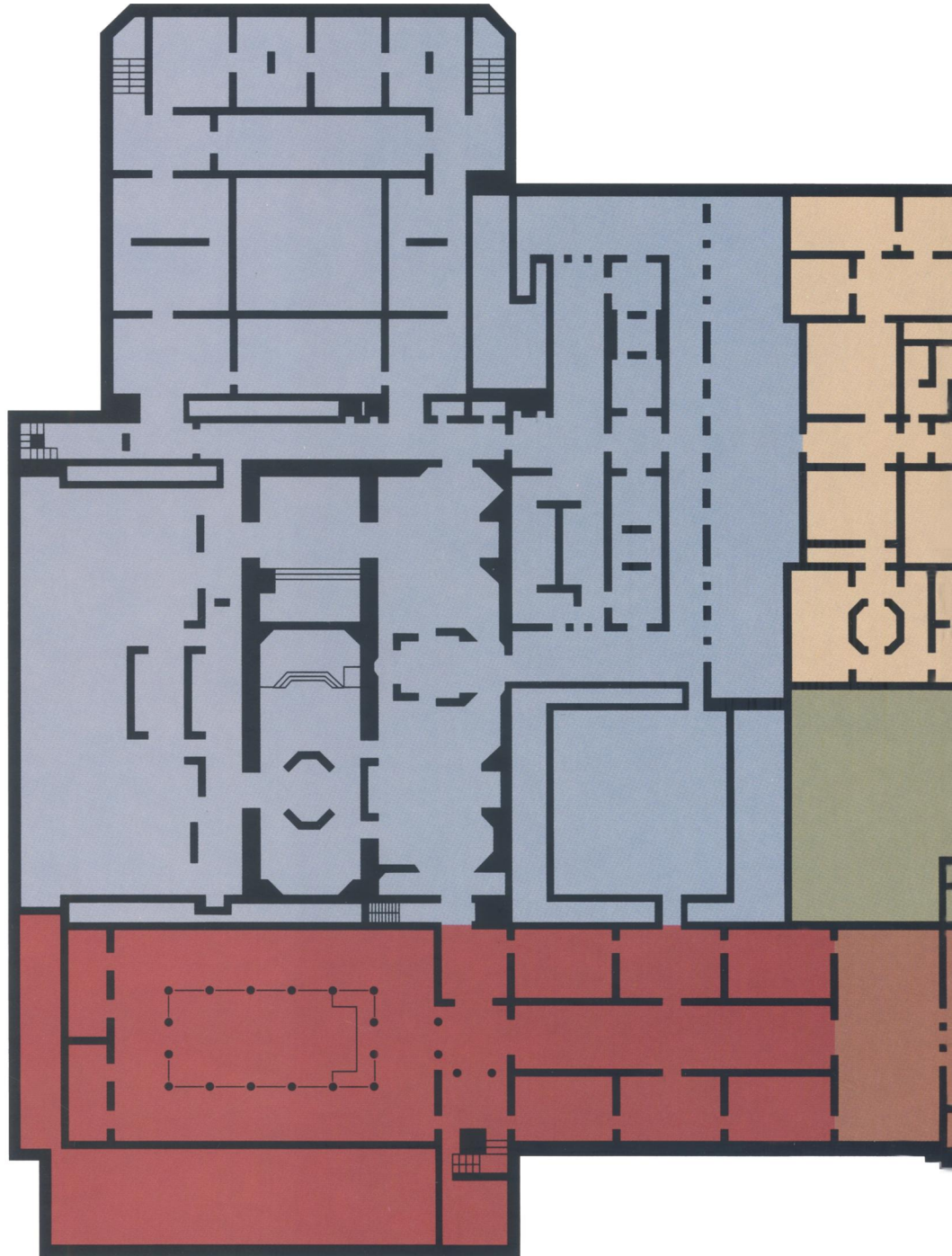


*III. View of the  
Museum from the  
northeast, 1995*

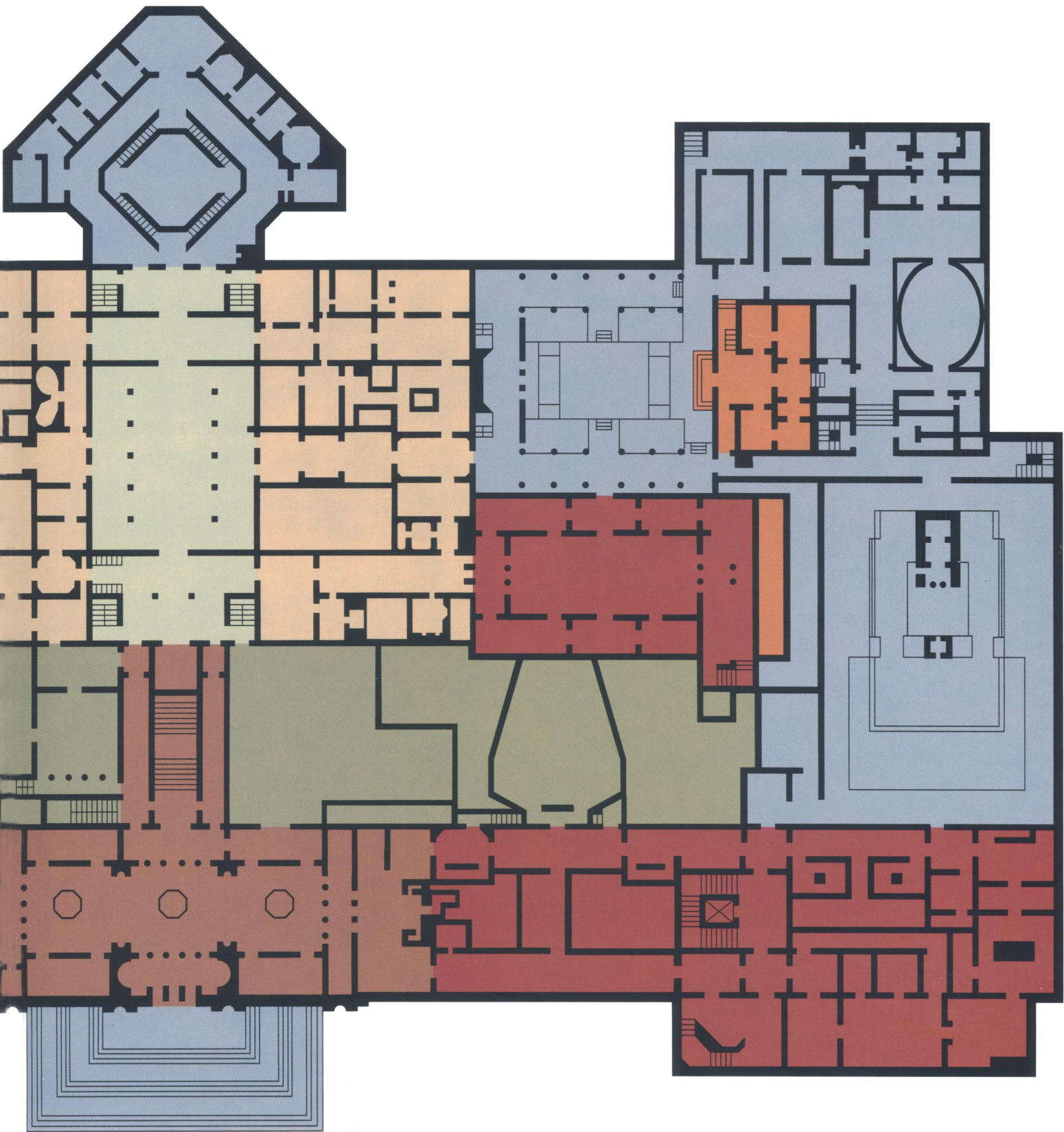
# First-floor plan of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995

*Color-keyed to show architect*

-  Vaux and Mould: Wing A (1880)
-  Weston: Wing B (1888)  
Weston and Tuckerman: Wing C (1894)
-  R.M. Hunt and R.H. Hunt: Wing D (1902)
-  McKim, Mead and White: Wings E (1909), F (1910), H (1913), J and K (1917)
-  Atterbury: Wings L and M (1924)
-  Voorhees, Walker, Foley and Smith: Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium (1954); Brown, Lawford and Forbes: Thomas J. Watson Library, Blumenthal Patio, and service buildings (1964)
-  Roche Dinkeloo Associates: Front steps and plaza (1970); Robert Lehman Wing (1975); Temple of Dendur in The Sackler Wing (1978); American Wing and Charles Engelhard Court (1980); Michael C. Rockefeller Wing (1982); Lila Acheson Wallace Wing (1987); Henry R. Kravis Wing and Carroll and Milton Petrie European Sculpture Court (1990)







*Invitation to the  
inauguration ceremonies  
for Weston and  
Tuckerman's Wing C,  
November 5, 1894.  
Engraving on paper  
by E. D. French*



### Illustration sources

Lost drawings and accessioned works are reproduced from MMA negatives in the Photograph Studio. Drawings, photographs, and prints in The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives: figs. 2, 4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 23, 27, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 61, 62, 63, 64, 70, 74, 76, 78, 82, 83, 85, 86, 87, 90, 91, 92, p. 80. Maps of Central Park in the Thomas J. Watson Library: figs. 7, 12. Figs. 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 106 courtesy of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. Floor plan on pp. 78–79 by Steven Hutchinson of the Design Department, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

### Photography

Unless otherwise noted, photography of works belonging to the Metropolitan Museum and the New York City Municipal Archives is by Katherine Dahab and Eileen Travell and architectural photography is by Bruce Schwarz of the Photograph Studio, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bernstein Associates, fig. 95. Scott Francis/ESTO, fig. 99. Brian Rose, figs. 1, 102, 105, 107, 110.

### Bibliographical Notes

The principal source of information about the Museum's building is The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, wherein are housed the trustee and building committee minutes and all official correspondence of the institution.

Many, but by no means all, of the architectural drawings produced for the building survive. A number of important images are known only by old photographs. The Vaux and Mould material, mostly working drawings, is divided between the New York City Municipal Archives and the Metropolitan. A handful of pencil sketches for the Fifth Avenue facade are in the Hunt Collection in the Prints and Drawings Collection, the Octagon Museum, the American Architectural Foundation, Washington. A great mass of McKim, Mead and White drawings are in the Metropolitan's Archives. Ferriss's renderings of the 1940s are at the Museum, and those of the 1950s at the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University. The work of Kevin Roche is in the office of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates, Hamden, Connecticut.

Another publication, of source material, is envisaged to complement this one. It will contain a catalogue of the architectural drawings, listings or transcriptions of relevant building committee minutes and correspondence, and a chronology.

### Acknowledgments

The research for this publication and the preparation of the drawings for the accompanying exhibition would not have been possible without the enthusiastic cooperation of Jeanie James and the staff of the Museum's Archives; Helen Otis and the staff of the Paper Conservation department; and Barbara Bridgers and the staff of the Photograph Studio. Invaluable assistance was provided by departmental interns Elizabeth S. F. Cooper, Catherine Drillis, Audrey Manley, and Jay Tobler. I am indebted to the following colleagues and institutions for lending drawings and photographs: Sherry Birk, the Octagon Museum, American Architectural Foundation; Kenneth Kopp, the New York City Municipal Archives; Janet Parks, the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library; Kevin Roche, Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates; and Herbert Mitchell.

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Summer 1995–Spring 1996 New Series, Volume LIII

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