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HOUSE No. 131

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Mass:
FIRST REPORT OF THE ART COMMISSION.

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The State Art Commission was created by chapter 422 of the Acts of 1910, which is as follows:—

SECTION 1. An art commission for the commonwealth is hereby established, to consist of five citizens of the commonwealth, to be appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the council, to hold office for the term of five years from the date of their commission. Any vacancy occurring in the membership of the commission may be filled for the unexpired term in the same manner in which the original appointment was made. The commission shall serve without compensation, and shall have power to adopt its own rules and to elect such officers from its own members as may be deemed proper.

SECTION 2. It shall be the duty of the commission to act in an advisory capacity relative to the creation, acquisition, construction, erection or remodeling by the commonwealth, or upon any land owned by the commonwealth, of any work of art, and relative to the artistic character of any building constructed, erected or remodeled by the commonwealth, or upon land owned by the commonwealth; and when, upon the request of the governor, there shall be submitted to said commission any plan, proposal or offer relating to the creation, acquisition, construction, erection or remodeling by the commonwealth, or on land or in a building owned by the commonwealth, of any work of art, or relating to the erection, construction or remodeling of any building to be owned by the commonwealth or on commonwealth land, and such plan, proposal or offer is accompanied

by designs, descriptions, specifications, drawings or models sufficient to enable the commission to determine the artistic character of such work of art or building, it shall be the duty of the commission to file with the governor within sixty days after the submission of the matter descriptive of such work of art or building, its opinion, either approving or condemning the same, to which the commission may add such suggestions and recommendations as it deems proper. The term "building", as used herein, shall include structures intended for human occupation and use, and also all bridges, arches, gates, walls or other permanent structures of any character, and the term "work of art", as used herein shall include any painting, portrait, mural decoration, stained glass, statue, bas-relief, ornament, fountain, or any other article or structure of a permanent character intended for decoration or commemoration.

The said commission respectfully submits the following report:—

On Oct. 13, 1910, the members of the commission organized at the State House, when Walter Gilman Page was elected secretary. A communication was received from Governor Draper enclosing the following letter from Mr. Sylvester Baxter, secretary of the Metropolitan Improvement League, with a request for a reply:—

HON. EBEN S. DRAPER, *Governor of Massachusetts.*

DEAR SIR:—Permit me, in the line of my duty, to call Your Excellency's attention to the labels attached to the portraits of the Governors of the Commonwealth in the State House. The glaringly bad taste in the design and wording of these labels is the subject of much unfavorable comment on the part of visitors, and surprise is expressed that Massachusetts, which has a reputation for good taste in art, should be responsible for such a display.

These labels are offensive in two particulars. They are altogether too large and conspicuous; but, worst of all, the abbreviation "Gov. of Mass." violates the rules of propriety for inscriptions in a public place, both being undignified and vulgar.

The name of the State is superfluous in this connection. Simply the name of the Governor and the year or years of his service would be sufficient. I would suggest that the new State Art Commission be requested to submit suitable designs for a new form of label. The cost of the change would be trifling.

Most respectfully yours,

SYLVESTER BAXTER.

The commission made reply to His Excellency as follows:—

HON. EBEN S. DRAPER, *Governor*.

DEAR SIR:—The communication from Mr. Sylvester Baxter, secretary of the Metropolitan Improvement League, which was referred to this commission October 6, has received careful consideration, and it is the unanimous opinion of this commission that Mr. Baxter's objections to the labels of the past Governors of the Commonwealth are well based.

In accordance with Your Excellency's request the commission respectfully offers the following suggestions:—

(1) That a brass cartel of proper proportions, and bearing on a gold ground in black letters the full name of the subject of the portrait, the word "Governor" and the time of service, be attached to the frame.

(2) As the cartel may be difficult to decipher and of too concise a character for historical purposes, it is further suggested that a card be placed in the rooms where these portraits are to be found, containing a brief biographical sketch of the subjects of the portraits.

As these suggestions have not yet been adopted, the commission respectfully recommends that steps be taken to put them into effect.

Provision was made by the Legislature of 1910 for the erection of two battlefield memorials, one at Valley Forge, Pa., the other at Petersburg, Va. The design for the Petersburg memorial, when submitted to the commission, was unanimously disapproved as possessing no artistic merit. The commission thinks it proper to point out that it is in such projects as these (where the appropriations are too modest to attract a highly skilled order of artistic talent) that the official taste of the Commonwealth may most easily be compromised. That this is so is attested by the custom, which the commission finds to be long established, of entrusting the design as well as the execution of such memorials to granite contractors, — the very condition out of which has developed so many inartistic memorials of the civil war all over the country. It is the conclusion, therefore, of the commission that the first step in the expenditure of the State's appro-

priation should be to procure the services of a skilled architect. This policy was successfully tested in the case of the Petersburg memorial. On the recommendation of the Art Commission, an architect was employed by the committee in charge and a very satisfactory design was secured. The plans submitted by the Valley Forge Military Monument Commission, on the other hand, were of a distinctly meritorious character, and were, with some slight modifications of detail unanimously approved. Blue prints of the plans as well as photographs of these completed works are filed with the commission.

In February, 1911, there was submitted to the commission a model at full size of the memorial group by Bela Pratt, intended for placing in the Hall of Flags in the State House. The model and the situation met with the approval of the commission.

In November, 1911, the commission was asked to approve, for placing in the State House, a bronze tablet containing Lincoln's address at Gettysburg, accompanied by a bronze bust of Lincoln, after the death mask by Volk. The commission having learned that a similar tablet was already in a neighboring city, this was inspected by a subcommittee of the commission and found unworthy of acceptance. A course similar to that pursued in the development of a satisfactory design for the Petersburg memorial was then adopted. An original design was prepared under the guidance of the Art Commission, with studied regard for the situation chosen, — in this instance the eastern wall of Doric Hall.

Two oil portraits of past Governors have received the approval of the commission, one of the Hon. W. Murray Crane by William W. Churchill, the other of Hon. William L. Douglas by Arthur M. Hazard. In the matter of the selection of the artist, whether painter, sculptor or architect, it is obviously important to the interests of the State that his ability and standing are so well established that his work when finished shall in all probability meet with the approval of the Art Commission. In this interest, the commission recommends that its opinion in such case be invited when the employment

of an artist is under consideration. The Commonwealth may in this way be saved the embarrassment of paying, more or less substantially, for work which the commission may feel consistently bound to reject. In the exercise of such discrimination the commission would sacrifice none of its rights freely to criticise and correct the artist's work when submitted for final judgment.

A matter of very large importance was submitted to the consideration of the commission in the form of an architectural scheme for the extension of the State House. The commission examined, in the rooms of the Executive Council, certain sketches therefor by Mr. William Chapman, architect. These contemplated a detached unit in the form of an office block extending from Hancock Avenue to Joy Street, with frontage on Mt. Vernon Street.

The following report was written to the Governor and Council:—

HON. EUGENE N. FOSS, *Governor, Commonwealth of Massachusetts,*
Executive Department, State House.

YOUR EXCELLENCY:—This commission has carefully considered, in consultation with their author, the preliminary drawings for a proposed State office building designed to occupy, in its complete development, the land west of the State House bounded by Joy Street, Mt. Vernon Street, Mt. Vernon Place and Hancock Avenue. Approximately half of this property is now owned by the Commonwealth, and only that measure of the ultimate structure as will accommodate itself to this area is proposed for immediate erection. The building, as shown, is six stories high above the line of Mt. Vernon Street, and is set so as to be distant about 45 feet from the State House, communication with which is secured by means of a tunnel connection.

It seems to have been assumed that the mere physical independence of the construction thus situated, favored for the present at least by a screen of trees and dwellings from a critical view, sufficed to remove it out of responsible architectural relation to the main structure. The commission cannot agree with this principle. Indeed, it is denied even by the author of the design, who has made the attempt of establishing a relationship by his scheme of color and by the incorporation, in an otherwise frankly utilitarian design, of certain decorative details peculiar to the original mass. It is admitted, moreover, that even the complete structure, as proposed, would pro-

vide only partially for the future needs of the State, which would ultimately have to be met by a construction of corresponding design on the east side. It is apparent, therefore, that the merits of this scheme must be considered in association with the architectural demands of the central building. That these are of a nature to compel more than the usual respect is well recognized. What is popularly known as "the Bulfinch front" is one of the most remarkable examples of colonial architecture now remaining, and unquestionably a great artistic asset of this community. The veneration in which it is held by the architectural profession and the public was strikingly illustrated some years ago when it was proposed to alter it. To contrive such a scheme of extension as will satisfy, with reasonable regard for economy, the needs of utility, and develop at the same time a harmonious relationship with this remarkable composition, is to state the general terms of the problem. The present design does not accomplish this in the following respects: (1) It is unrelated, and, so far as we can perceive, unrelatable to any organic scheme of development. Even though it could architecturally qualify as a unit of such a scheme, it is clear that such a mass could not be symmetrically repeated on the east side, as the available space towards Bowdoin Street would not nearly admit of it. When this eastern development did take shape, it would manifestly be necessary, in the interest of mere architectural decency, to remove the screen of buildings from in front of the western extension, when the lop-sidedness of the scheme would be glaringly apparent. (2) Whereas, the existence of Hancock Avenue might explain the separation of the extension from the main structure on the west, the corresponding hiatus on the east would, by the absence of such a condition, be meaningless as well as ugly. (3) The longitudinal extension of the central mass on a single axis is fundamentally an error, which would result in architectural monotony and in serious prejudice to the importance of the dome.

On coming to this negative decision the commission conceived it to be its duty to examine the scheme recently published with the official endorsement of the Society of Architects. This provides for the organic and symmetrical development of the central structure by means of two comparatively short wings terminated by pavilions of considerably southerly projection, junction with the main mass being saliently contrived so as to admit of the interior corridors being related to the great central staircase. This scheme results externally in a composition of remarkable stateliness and beauty, recalling in its skyline, rather strikingly, the capitol at Washington. The spirit of the Bulfinch architecture is continued into the development with thorough understanding and skill. Artistically, this solution of the problem, so far as it is concerned with the Beacon Street end of the capitol, is convincing and admirable. Nor does the com-

mission perceive that this scheme is put at disadvantage by the other even on the most practical basis of comparison. Obviously, the office building idea carried to its logical issue means the serious economical waste on each side of the central building of 45 feet of valuable frontage. It need hardly be pointed out, too, that a development which admits of organic extension of the various floors possesses a large measure of practical advantage over one which provides communication only by a subterranean passage 45 feet long. Indeed, while we deprecate a too utilitarian point of view, it may even be seriously questioned whether, on exact comparison of available floor areas, a partial realization of the artistic scheme would not be found to be the cheaper proposition. Such partial realization might consist of the western wing without its pavilion, which would involve the taking of a single building lot beyond the property now owned by the State. It is obvious, however, that the construction of the eastern wing and pavilion would represent the most intelligible unit of development, and one which would prove none too extensive to provide for the growing needs of the Commonwealth.

Respectfully submitted,

WALDO LINCOLN.

CHARLES D. MAGINNIS.

HENRY S. HUNNEWELL.

WILLIAM A. BURNHAM.

WALTER GILMAN PAGE.

Subsequently, other plans by the same architect were submitted, which took account of the criticism directed against the office building type by such bodies as the Society of Architects and many individuals. The commission, however, felt very strongly that the project demanded professional direction of an unusually skilled order, and, without putting to question the experience and ability of the architect already associated with the enterprise, were convinced that the best interests of the Commonwealth called for the placing in association with him another architect of trained taste and authority. At a consultation on the subject between the Art Commission and the members of the State House Commission, it was agreed that the work be entrusted to three architects, namely, Robert D. Andrews, W. W. Chapman and R. Clipston Sturgis. For a number of months these gentlemen have been studying the problem to arrive at a more economical and artistic solution. From time to time they

have brought into conference the State House Commission and the Art Commission.

Many other meetings besides the formal ones of the commission have been held, and considerable work has been done on the part of the individual members which is not here made a matter of record.

As the commission has no appropriation, it depends on the good will of the Executive for meeting its expenses. There should be a small annual appropriation. The commission feels that it has amply demonstrated its usefulness as an advisory body. Its work has aroused considerable interest throughout the country, and its advice has been sought by public bodies in other States.

Respectfully submitted,

WALDO LINCOLN.
CHARLES D. MAGINNIS.
HENRY S. HUNNEWELL.
WILLIAM A. BURNHAM.
WALTER GILMAN PAGE.