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## October 2008: The Architecture of the Capitol

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# Government Documents News

## *The Architect of the Capitol*



“This aerial of the East Capitol Grounds shows the Capitol Visitor Center project site as it appeared on September 23, 2008. All major historical elements from the 1870s, including lanterns, fountains, seatwalls and lampposts, have been returned to their original locations. Most of the landscaping in the House and Senate “eggs” and along the CVC entrance zones has been completed. The central promenade – one of the character-defining elements of the original Frederick Law Olmsted-designed landscape – has been reestablished on grade with the rest of the East Front Plaza.”

From United States Capitol Visitor Center:

<http://www.aoc.gov/cvc/weekly/2008/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=40955>

The **Architect of the Capitol** is a federal government agency that is responsible to the U.S. Congress for the maintenance, operation, development, and preservation of the United States Capitol Complex which is comprised of the:

- ❑ Capitol
- ❑ House and Senate Office Buildings
- ❑ U.S. Botanic Garden
- ❑ Capitol Grounds
- ❑ Library of Congress buildings
- ❑ Supreme Court Building
- ❑ Capitol Power Plant
- ❑ Various support facilities

The Architect is appointed for a term of ten years by the President and is an official of the legislative branch as an officer and agent of Congress. The Architect is eligible for reappointment after completion of the term.

Stephen T. Ayers is the current acting Architect of the Capitol



[1846 Photograph of the Capitol's East Front](#)

Construction of the Capitol building began three years after the ratification of the Constitution. It was to be a “meaningful expression of America’s new political and social order.” Though the first Congress met in the new Capitol building in November 1800, the construction would take thirty-four years and six presidents before full completion. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/us.capitol/s0.html>



[The East Front ca. 1861](#)

Did you know that:

- The Library of Congress was located in the Capitol building until 1897 and the Supreme Court was held in the Capitol building until 1935.
- French engineer, Pierre Charles L’Enfant, was chosen to design the Capitol but was dismissed after he refused to produce any drawings for the building, claiming that he carried the design “in his head.”
- A contest was held to select a plan for the Capitol building. The winner would receive \$500 and a city lot, but none of the seventeen plans submitted were chosen.
- On August 24, 1814, British troops set fire to the building during the War of 1812.
- Construction was suspended in 1861 so that the Capitol could be used as a military barracks, hospital and bakery for the Civil War.
- The Capitol covers a ground area of 175,170 square feet and has a floor area of about 16.5 acres.



[The East Front in 1961, after the Extension Project](#)

For more information, see the *Timeline of the Construction of the Capitol building*:  
[http://www.aoc.gov/cc/capitol/capitol\\_construction.cfm](http://www.aoc.gov/cc/capitol/capitol_construction.cfm)

Read Full-Text Online:

William C. Allen, *History of the United States Capitol: a chronicle of design, construction, and politics*.

<http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/capitol/>

## Capitol Visitor Center



Construction of the [Capitol Visitor Center](#) is under way; the Center is located under the East Front Plaza and will contain exhibits, orientation displays, theaters, and other facilities to make the visitor's experience in the Capitol more informative and meaningful. The Center will measure 580,000 square feet and cover three levels. The building will be three quarters the size of the Capitol building and will include 170,000 square feet. It will also provide 170,000 square feet of new building space for the House and Senate. The Capitol Visitor Center is scheduled to open on December 2, 2008. The new Capitol Visitor Center website can be accessed online on November 14, 2008. Book your tour in advance: <http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/>.

An exhibit featuring the Capitol and other buildings in the Capitol Complex is located in the Government Documents Department of Dacus Library.

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