

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

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GLEANED FROM RECENT SKYSCRAPERS IN NEW YORK

By HENRY W. FROHNE



IX or seven years ago architectural critics could, with reason, have asserted that the treatment of the skyscraper had attained a perfected form which succeeding decades were not likely materially to alter. Today such an assertion would not be supported by satisfactory evidence. The architect was not then and is not yet entirely content with the external appearance of the tall building, and this view is fully concurred in by that portion of the enlightened public which is sensitive to its architectural surroundings.

In 1904 or 1905 an interesting argument might also plausibly have been constructed, around the rapid erection of large commercial buildings, to show that the architect was soon to become merely a minor factor in their creation.

It was at about this time that a large number of construction companies had succeeded in perfecting organizations

to handle a hitherto unknown volume of work in an incredibly short period of time, a most convincing argument with the investor and realty operator to whom speed of erection is of great importance. These highly perfected organizations, however, as time has proved, were not destined to minimize the architect's position as the leading factor of the building operation. On the contrary, their activity has been one of the most potent elements in winning a wider appreciation for competent architectural services and in spurring on the architect to greater exertions especially as regards the problem of the skyscraper. Moreover, the coordination of the trades engaged in large operations has resulted in economy for the owner and constitutes one of the most needed reforms in American building. The limited number of highly competent and experienced builders then existing belonged to a period in our business development which was rapidly giving way to a new order of things demanding a more complete and versatile organization than



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THE HILLIARD BUILDING, JOHN AND DUTCH
STREETS, NEW YORK
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UPPER STORIES
THE HILLIARD BUILDING, JOHN AND DUTCH
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these older firms were able to muster. The construction companies were the result; they have made good beyond their own fondest expectations and the architects can have only the highest regard for their marvelous efficiency and helpful co-operation.

The next two years, 1906 and 1907, were the most prolific in skyscrapers the country has yet known and marked a notable advance over those of the years immediately preceding in their design. Most of them, of course, followed the regular recognized type, consisting of a division horizontally into three parts analogous to the major parts of a Classical column, viz. base, shaft and capital, elaboration being confined to the upper and lower of these divisions and especially to the former, horizontal lines predominating and Classical motives, columns, arches and detail being generally employed. Such a system of external treatment for the tall building was, perhaps, first definitely expressed in a design of conspicuous merit in the building for the American Surety Company in New York, by the late Bruce Price in the early 'nineties. He cannot be called the originator of this type as a number of other skyscrapers of earlier date than the one just mentioned, by George

B. Post, Napoleon Le Brun, R. H. Robertson, Clinton and Russell and others had already incorporated the same idea less skillfully handled.

Going back a little further in the history of skyscraper design, it was in Chicago that the first sustained attempts were made to arrive at an architectural solution for its exterior. There two distinct theories were being pursued: that prevailing in the works of Burnham and Root, who through the number and extent of their operations, exercised a powerful influence on the younger designers throughout the country during the early 'eighties, secondly, the theory of Louis H. Sullivan who attracted wide notice more for the individual distinction of his designs than for their number or extent.

The results of these two theories could hardly be more different: the first consists in a treatment which makes no attempt to emphasize either horizontal or vertical dimension, as witness the Monadnock Block in Chicago in which the walls are pierced by the necessary number of window openings, in a regular spacing, as they happen to come, treated alike on all floors and the whole de-



DETAIL OF ENTRANCE
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VIEW FROM READE STREET



VIEW FROM BROADWAY

EAST RIVER SAVINGS INSTITUTION, BROADWAY AND READE STREET, NEW YORK

MESSRS. CLINTON & RUSSELL, ARCHITECTS

tailed with little idea of scale in relation to the great mass.

Mr. Sullivan's theory, on the other hand, is more philosophic. It contends that the tall building by reason of its height is an object of distinction and beauty expressing architecturally certain phases of our life and times. Upon this assumption and a structure, more or less determined by conditions of economy, he builds up his designs, remarkable for their individuality, because they owe no allegiance to historical precedents and because they are the products of a talent of a high order. One may disagree with the author but hardly for lack of consistency in such compositions as the Wainwright Building in St. Louis, the Schlesinger and Mayer in Chicago and the Condit in New York. The powerful vertical lines of these façades, with their characteristic ornament, of which there seems at times, perhaps, a little more than is warranted by conditions, and the flat far-projecting cornices, are combined with a skill carrying the conviction

that their author is a man of force and a thinker. The sound logic of his ideas and his ability to embody them as an artist, though admired by the more progressive among the profession, did not find many disciples. The point of view was apparently so boldly American that those who saw a light in its suggestiveness found it difficult to reconcile, with a training founded on too close a dependence upon precedent.

Latterly, however, such men as Francis H. Kimball in his Trinity Buildings, Cass Gilbert in his West Street Building, Robt. D. Kohn in his Evening Post and Spero Buildings and Henry Ives Cobb in his Liberty Tower, all in New York, have seen new possibilities in the application of its basic ideas and have produced in these buildings compositions of interesting variety and originality which is no mere novelty.

To a lesser degree, many other designers have been influenced by the theories of Sullivan, and today it may be said, without fear of contradiction, that there is, among

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THE UNDERWOOD BUILDING, VESEY AND CHURCH
STREETS, NEW YORK

MESSRS. GOLDWIN, STARRETT & VAN VLECK, ARCHITECTS

View looking across St. Paul's Churchyard

architects, a feeling that the further development of skyscraper design lies very largely in the direction first pointed out by him. This statement involves also the proposition, which is coming to be more widely recognized, that the standards of classical proportions should not be regarded as the criterion of good design where the problem is one of merely dressing a skeleton of metal with a thin sheeting of architectural apparel. From a practical standpoint the most important office of such an exterior covering is to protect the structural members from deterioration. In so doing it should add no excessive burden for the construction to bear. And finally it should be satisfactory to the aesthetic sense wherein the problem of the skyscraper as an architectural thing presents its most formidable obstacles. Established architectural conventions and precedents are, of course, irrelevant and useless in designing a type of building for which history supplies no parallel. New standards of excellence must be set up founded upon the

special nature of the problem and upon a certain amount of fidelity to the means which make it possible to build safely to a great height. Such a view of the architectural treatment of a steel-skeleton building implies a vastly different artistic standard from the one that would be applied in the case of a building in which the relation of the visible exterior materials to the structure is not primarily one of protection.

In making the assertion that the notion of structural logic in skyscraper design is gaining a foothold it must, at the same time, be admitted that evidences are abundant in recent work in which architects still cling conservatively to classical treatment and Roman motives.

Several office buildings recently completed in New York and illustrated herewith are cases in point. As regards height they are not in the first rank as skyscrapers, though they are typical examples of the influence to which more specific reference has been made above, showing a compromise between horizontal and vertical emphasis with the latter gaining the ascendancy. Two of them, the headquarters of the Knickerbocker Trust Co., at New Street, Exchange Place and Broadway, by McKim, Mead & White, and the new home of the East River Savings Institution at Broadway and Reade Street, represent the two most recent large office buildings of importance erected in the city. In these designs it will be noticed, that while considerable attention has been given to emphasizing the upper and lower stories by arcades and orders, these features are so restrained in handling as to impose no considerable burden upon the skeleton; the intervening stories totally disclaim any attempt at decorative conspicuity, exhibiting the structural facts behind them by their rows of well placed and nicely proportioned windows separated by slightly projecting or moulded piers carrying the eye upwards, giving their façades the effect of verticality rather than of horizontality despite the strong horizontal members below and above. The architects of both buildings were fortunate in the conditions of site. Each building has three fronts, thus offering the architects the opportunity of making a design in which mass and silhouette come into play instead of merely attached façades

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theoretically possessing no depth and being but a screen. In the case of the Knickerbocker Trust the advantage of its three free sides is somewhat offset by the extreme narrowness of Exchange Place, bounding one of its long sides, on which the architects have been compelled to sacrifice a portion of the rentable lot area to secure better daylight in the offices. The building is in strong competition with others in the vicinity and could hope to be successful financially only by offering a more convenient floor plan and superior light. Many of its older competitors enjoy better strategic positions but are handicapped by inferior planning and by façades that obstruct the light with their ponderous reveals. It was necessary, therefore, for the architects of the Knickerbocker Trust to give first consideration to these matters. The same applies, in a lesser degree, to the East River Savings Institution. In that instance the chances for securing

light were more favorable, and to place themselves practically beyond competition in that section the owners found it advantageous to secure adjacent property in Reade Street rather than sacrifice a portion of their valuable corner site as in the Knickerbocker Trust where there was apparently no alternative.

In the matter of exceptional lighting opportunities the Underwood Building at Vesey and Church Streets is even more fortunate. Above the fifth story all four walls stand free and are liberally pierced with windows making the floor space especially desirable for office purposes. In its appointment the Underwood does not pretend to the lavishness of the Knickerbocker and East River Savings. The rents obtainable in Vesey Street, West of Broadway, dictated extreme economy in finish with the maximum of the lightest rentable area, which objects have evidently been secured to the fullest extent. The architects in their exterior treatment have used with discretion the means at their command. The blunt brown of the face brick, to be sure, in contrast with the pure white glaze of the terracotta trimmings in the upper stories, is not calculated to prejudice the casual observer in favor of the building's general appearance. On closer inspection, however, there is much to admire; for example, the designers' discretion in carrying a simple though highly effective architectural membering around the East and rear walls when the appearance of decency imparted to what would otherwise be raw brick walls amply warrants the extra expenditure of a few thousand dollars. The architects as well as the owners are to be congratulated respectively for promoting and encouraging architectural decency and thus, in a measure, showing their appreciation of the entirely exceptional opportunities at their disposal.

Another office building, in many ways governed by conditions similar to those operating in the Underwood, is the Hilliard, a sixteen-story structure fronting on John Street and on an alley known as Dutch Street, and planned to be occupied exclusively by insurance brokers. The exterior, though hardly one to attract popular attention for its richness, clearly and frankly indicates its purpose and fits its location. There is as much window space as it is possible to



DOWNTOWN BUILDING

THE KNICKERBOCKER TRUST CO., BROADWAY,
NEW YORK

MESSRS. MCKIM, MEAD & WHITE, ARCHITECTS

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obtain in a building of this type where the most elastic division of the floor space is of prime importance. The windows have been placed as close to the face of the wall as a reasonable stability of appearance would permit and what depth of reveal there is has been obtained by the use of continuous slender vertical piers very much in the same

way as in the Knickerbocker Trust. The happy choice of front materials, a warm buff brick above a limestone base, has been turned to good advantage to produce a modest building of quietly substantial appearance in a street where most of its neighbors still tell of a smaller and less ambitious New York.

EXTRACTS FROM COMPETITION PROGRAM WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

DESCRIPTION OF SITE, BUILDING, ETC.

FOR the group plans, a carefully studied general scheme only is expected. This may be presented in (a) a plan which need not comprise more than the site and its closely adjoining territory and which is to show buildings in block plan only, that is to say, without any internal division, (b) one elevation taken from any standpoint, and (c) one section taken through the group. Plan, elevation and section at a scale of sixty-four feet.

The foundation for the Capitol Building as shown on the blue print is in place.

An axis developed through the center of the building north and south shall be the main or principal axis in the grouping plan.

The main façade of the Capitol Building faces the north.

While the Governor's Mansion is at present located where shown on the blue print, competitors will understand that it need not necessarily be considered as permanently located or interfere with any general scheme which a competitor desires to submit.

It is presumed that the main approaches to the Capitol Building and grounds will be from the north and east.

The act requires that architects competing shall submit ground plans for a series or group of buildings, showing the main building or Capitol, a court building or Temple of Justice and at least two other buildings for general offices.

A suggestion is offered that the gulch situated at the northeast corner of the plat may eventually become the site of a stadium with seating capacity of from ten to twelve thousand people.

The best view is looking due north from the center of the proposed Capitol Building, which gives on Puget Sound.

Adequate provision for roadways and other thoroughfares should be indicated, both for vehicular traffic and pedestrians, and the best gradients suggested from the upper to the lower levels looking towards a boulevard surrounding Capitol Place along Budd's Inlet.

TEMPLE OF JUSTICE

It is suggested that architects submitting designs for the Temple of Justice shall consider the building as set on a level plateau. The building is to be planned so as to provide adequate quarters for the Supreme Court and its officers and offices for the Attorney General and the State Law Library. It is desirable that the building should be designed with reference to the Capitol Building, which Capitol Building should be considered as the dominant feature. The building is to be of fireproof construction throughout—the exterior to be of such material as the competitor deems best and most satisfactory for the execution of his design. Inasmuch as the exterior of the Capitol Building will probably be of stone, it is suggested that this would be an appropriate material for the exterior of the proposed building. It is suggested that the conditions hereinafter specified may possibly be obtained in a two-story and basement building. Due allowance should be made throughout the building for lobbies, corridors, halls, elevators, etc., in addition to the requirements hereinafter set forth.

The steam for the heating and ventilating apparatus, and also the electricity required for power and lighting, etc., will eventually be generated in a station outside. The system should be designed with this in

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PUBLIC OPINION

THAT the time is fast approaching when the architectural profession, through existing organizations or others the formations of which cannot with safety be delayed, must take a decided and unequivocal stand as a body before the public or accept the popular estimate which apparently does not accord any more dignity to the practice of architecture than to the selling of dry goods, is probably obvious to the most casual observer in the profession. Instances multiply in which the architect does not appear to advantage before the public and there can be no doubt but that their cumulative effect will work an injury which will be felt by individual members in their relations to clients.

A recent case in point, given wide publicity through the daily press, had to do with the conduct of a competition in a city

of the Middle West. One or more of the competitors, prominent in the profession, and recognized in its organizations were made to appear as unmindful of professional ethics when they conflicted in the slightest degree with the possible securing of a commission. Cognizance of this situation has not been formally taken by any representative body in the profession, or if taken the fact has not been given the publicity which attended the reported transgression.

Another instance reported at length in the daily newspapers is that arising from the holding of a competition in one of the Eastern States. In this case a committee of the local chapter of the A. I. A. has notified one of the competitors that he will be heard in opposition to charges which have been filed against him. Such course would indicate that the matter was receiving merited attention with every prospect of a satisfactory result, were it not for the fact that the defendant's counsel has already given an interview to the public press, sneering at the investigation of his client's conduct and stating that even in the event of the charges being sustained the worst that can befall his client is dismissal from the organization which is bringing charges, as it possesses no punitive powers and cannot under any circumstances disbar a member from the practice of his profession.

Such comment carries with it a suggestion of revisions or additions to the governing instruments of the A. I. A. that might well receive careful consideration.

Perhaps the public impression concerning the dignity of the calling is well exemplified in an instance now at hand in which the President of one of the Boroughs of New York City is reported to insist, in the awarding of a commission for a municipal building of some importance, that the architects credit the city with the sums already paid to various firms for architectural services in connection with this work, amounting to something like \$60,000.00. Although the request is based on the assertion that considerable study and effort will be saved the architect by the use of the plans already prepared by his predecessors, stripped of all pretense the proposition is simply one of accepting a rate of payment much less than that prescribed by the American Institute

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and generally adhered to by architects of standing throughout the country, irrespective of membership in the Institute. So far as publicly reported, no action has been taken by any authoritative body in the profession concerning this matter, and the reported attitude of the architects whose names are announced as having been selected for the work is one of acquiescence. Under all the circumstances, the profession is not in a position to expect great consideration from the public for its *theoretical* standards of practice.

Prompt action on the part of the Ameri-

can Institute and the various chapters throughout the country would seem to be demanded. If it is necessary to revise the Constitution of this body giving greater disciplinary powers to the various committees, the situation should be squarely and promptly met. If it is a case of inaction on the part of present committees, this fact should receive vigorous attention. Some action of a decisive character must be undertaken without delay which will put an end to the growing feeling that already practically amounts to disrespect for the profession on the part of the public.

PROGRAM

WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL COMPETITION

(Continued from page 106)

view. Adequate provision, however, must be made for heating boilers, dynamos, chimney, etc., to accommodate the needs of the building.

It is suggested that the building may be connected with the Capitol Building by a tunnel between the buildings and the basement planned with reference thereto. This tunnel is not to be included in the estimate of the cost of the building.

The First Prize of the competition will be the commission to design and supervise the construction of the Temple of Justice. Other prizes, in the order of merit, will be awarded as follows:

Second Prize.....	\$1,000.00
Third Prize.....	750.00
Fourth Prize.....	600.00
Fifth Prize.....	500.00

The Jury of Award composed of C. H. Bebb, Seattle, professional advisor; Kirkland K. Cutter, Spokane; Wm. D. Faville, San Francisco, in accordance with the pro-

visions of the program, designated the ten most meritorious designs, and from these the Commission made the following awards: as:—

First Prize, Wilder & White, New York.
Second Prize, Howells & Stokes, New York.

Third Prize, David J. Myers, Seattle.
Fourth Prize, Wilcox & Sayward, Seattle.
Fifth Prize, Ernest Flagg, New York.

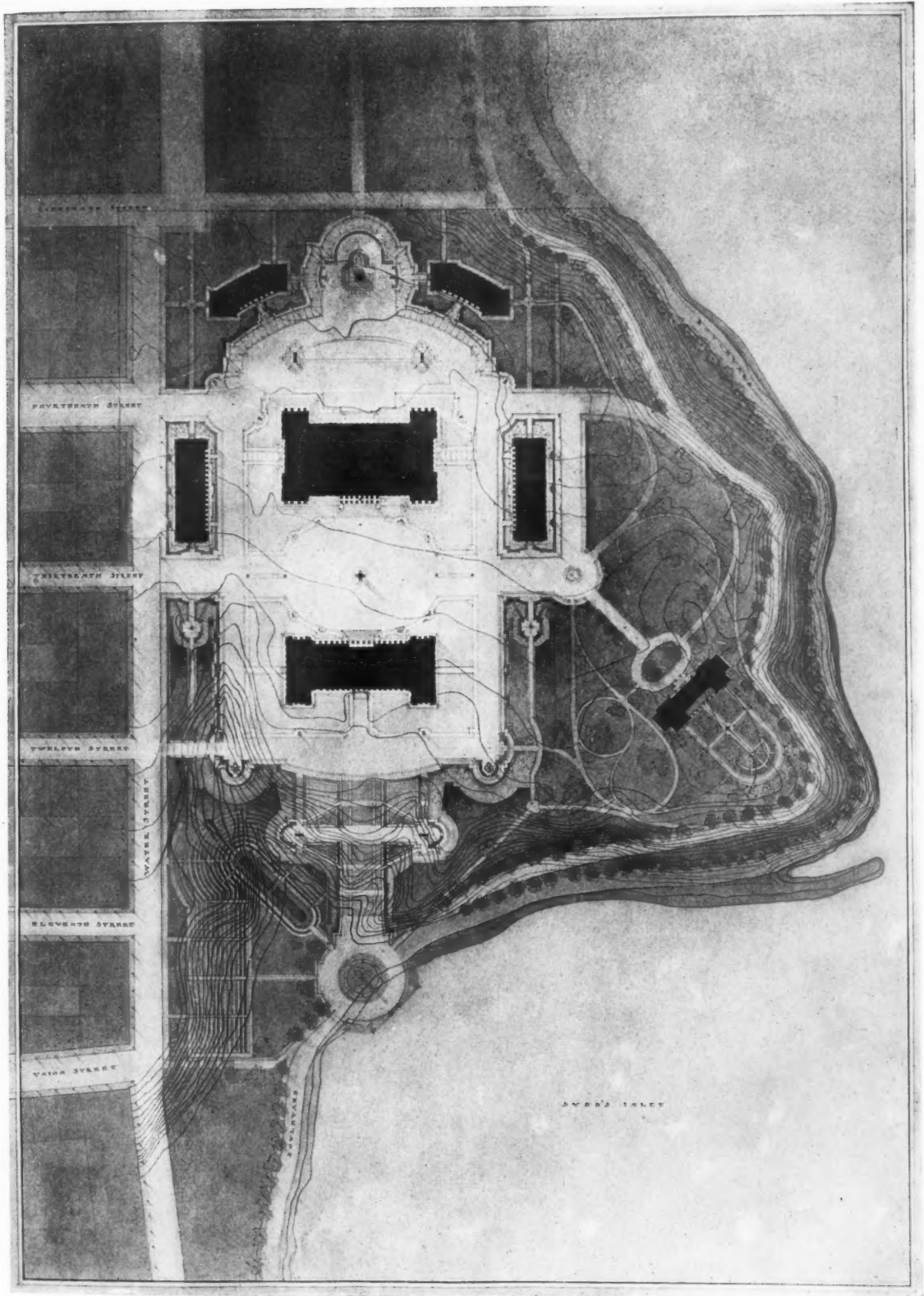
HONORABLE MENTIONS

Gilbert Lounsbrough, San Francisco.
Milton Lichtenstein, San Francisco.
W. Marbury Somerville, Seattle.
Wm. Macomber, Seattle.

J. A. Longe & Lawrence Ewald, St. Louis.

Olmsted Brothers, of Brookline, employed by the Commission as Landscape Architects.

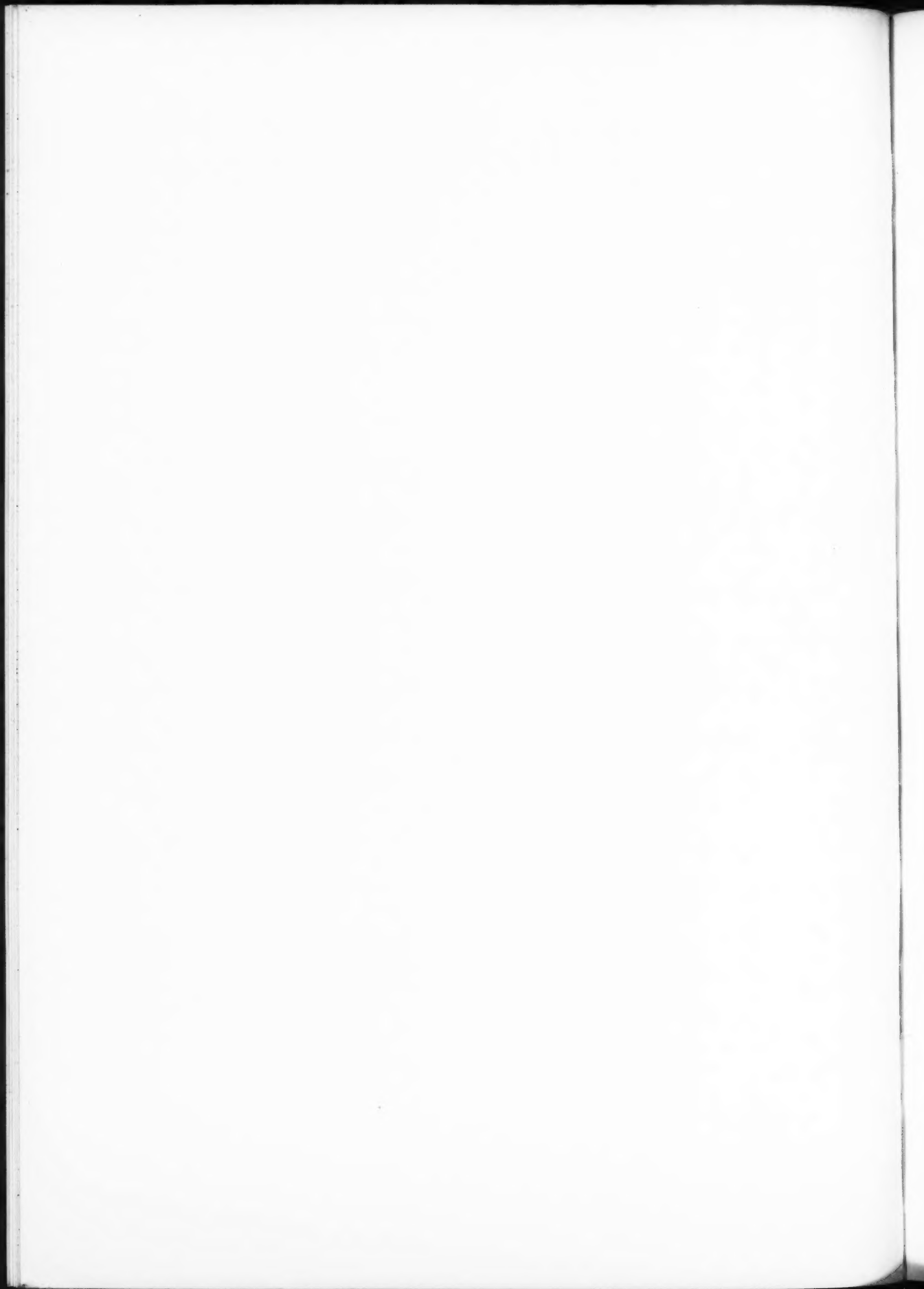
The Commission was composed as follows: Hon. M. E. Hay, Governor; Hon. C. W. Clausen, State Auditor; E. W. Ross, Commissioner of Public Lands; J. E. Frost, Member State Tax Commission; A. S. Taylor, of Everett; A. Polson, of Hoquiam, and M. Harris, of Olympia.

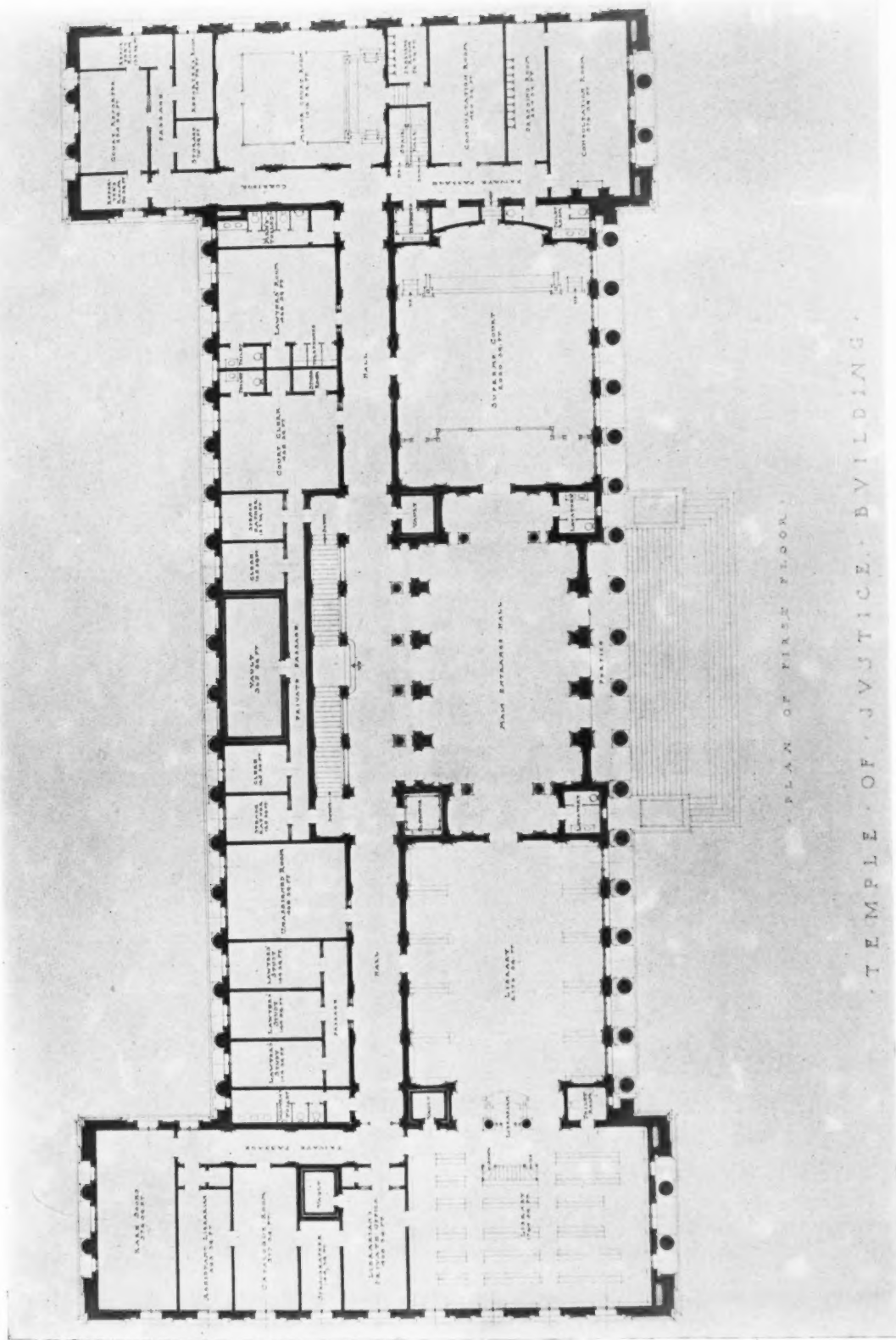


BLOCK PLAN, ACCEPTED DESIGN

WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL COMPETITION

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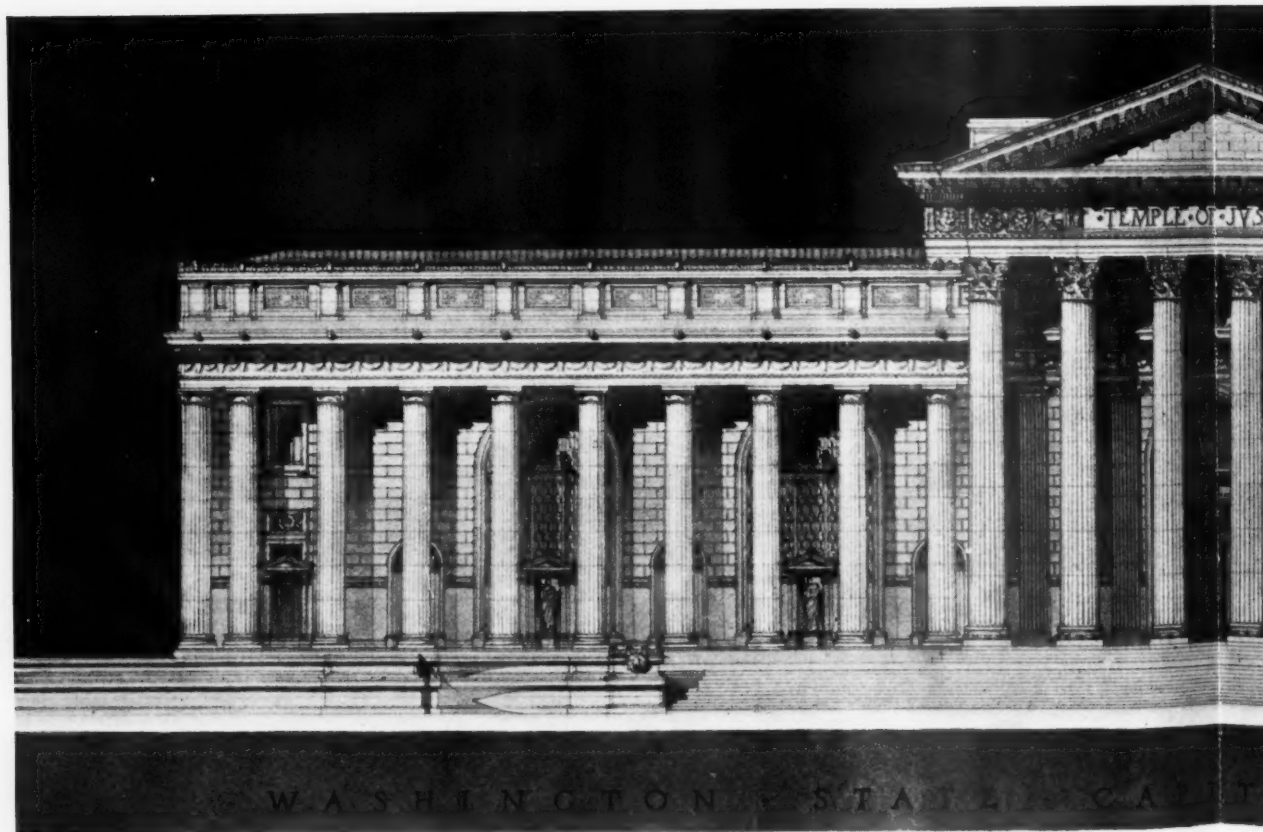
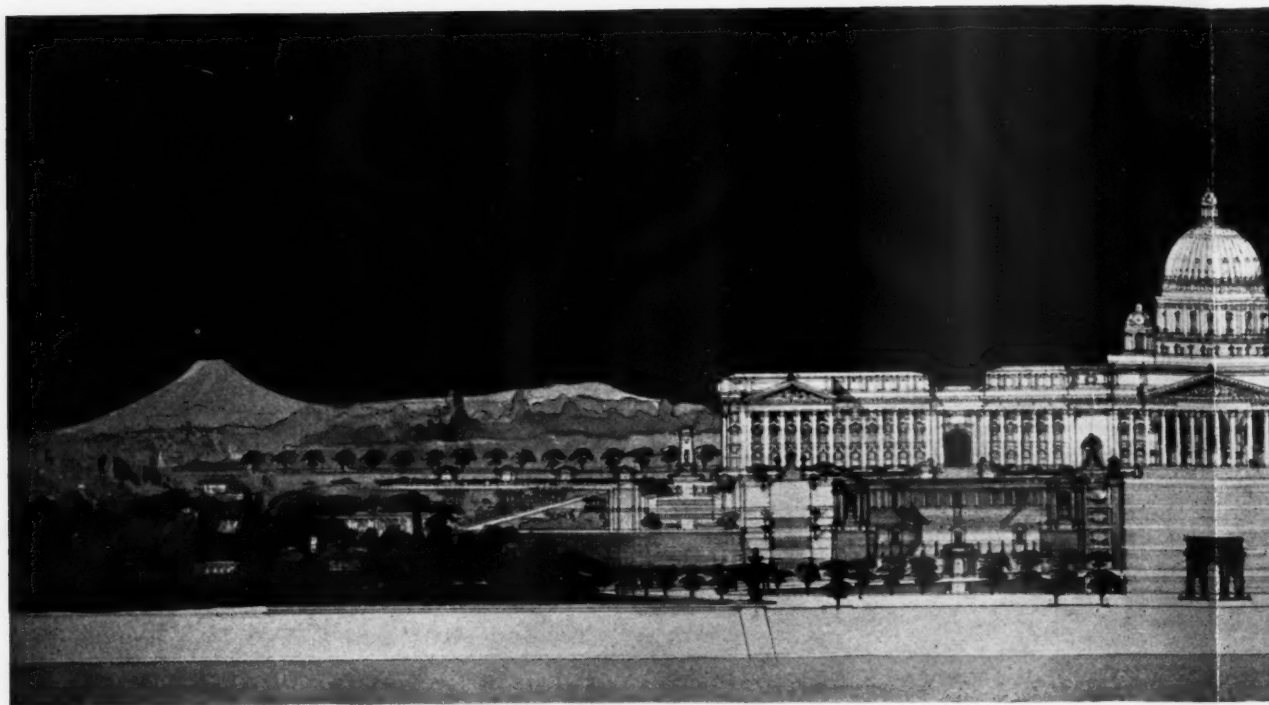




ACCEPTED DESIGN

WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL COMPETITION

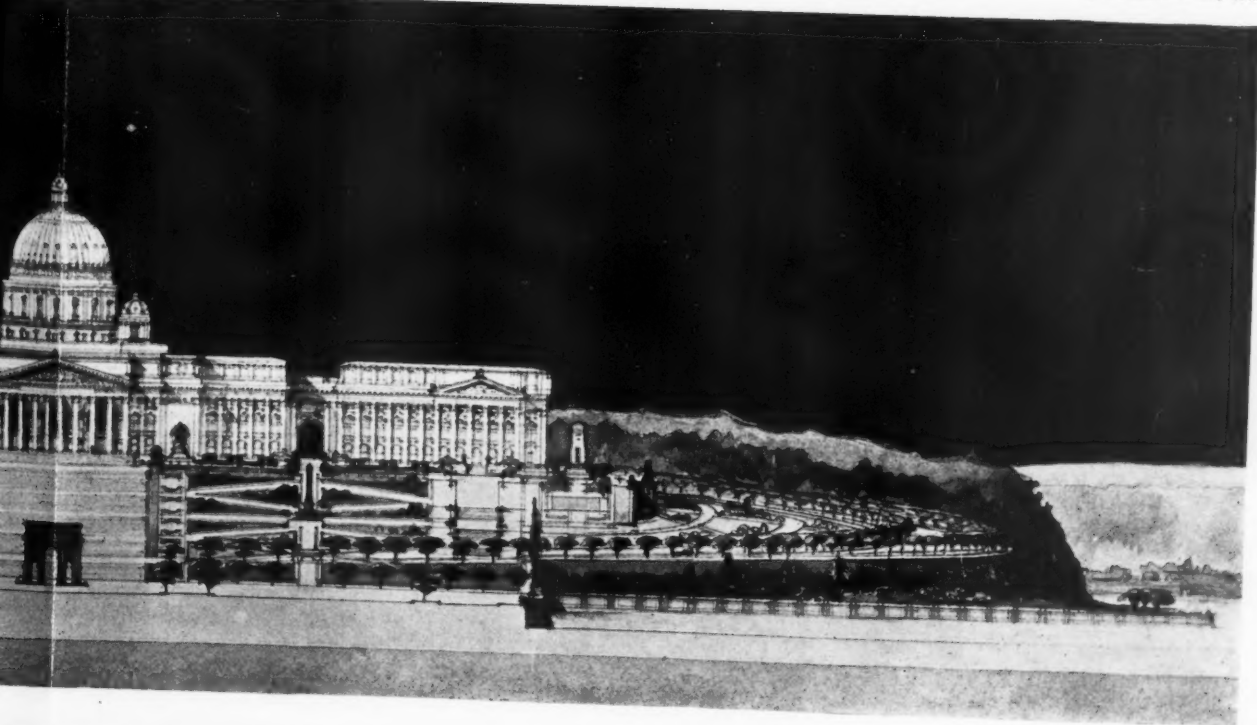
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SECOND PRIZE DES

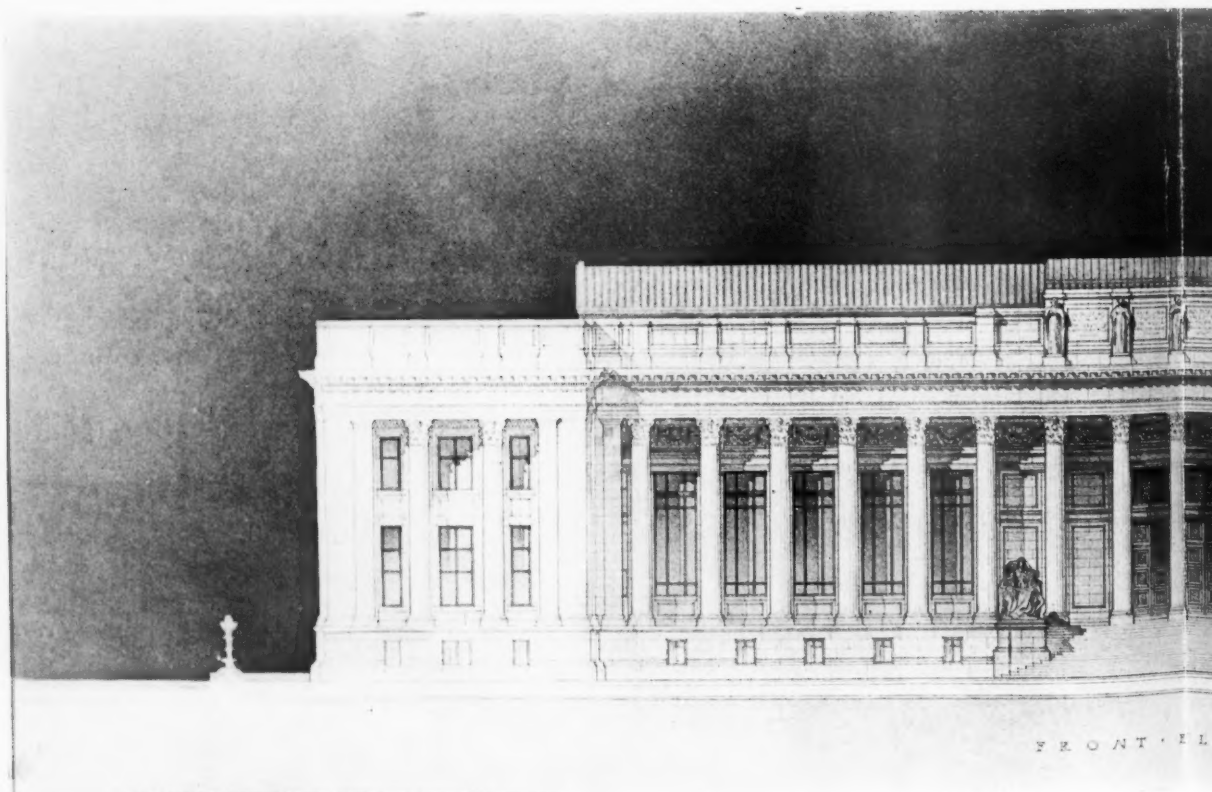
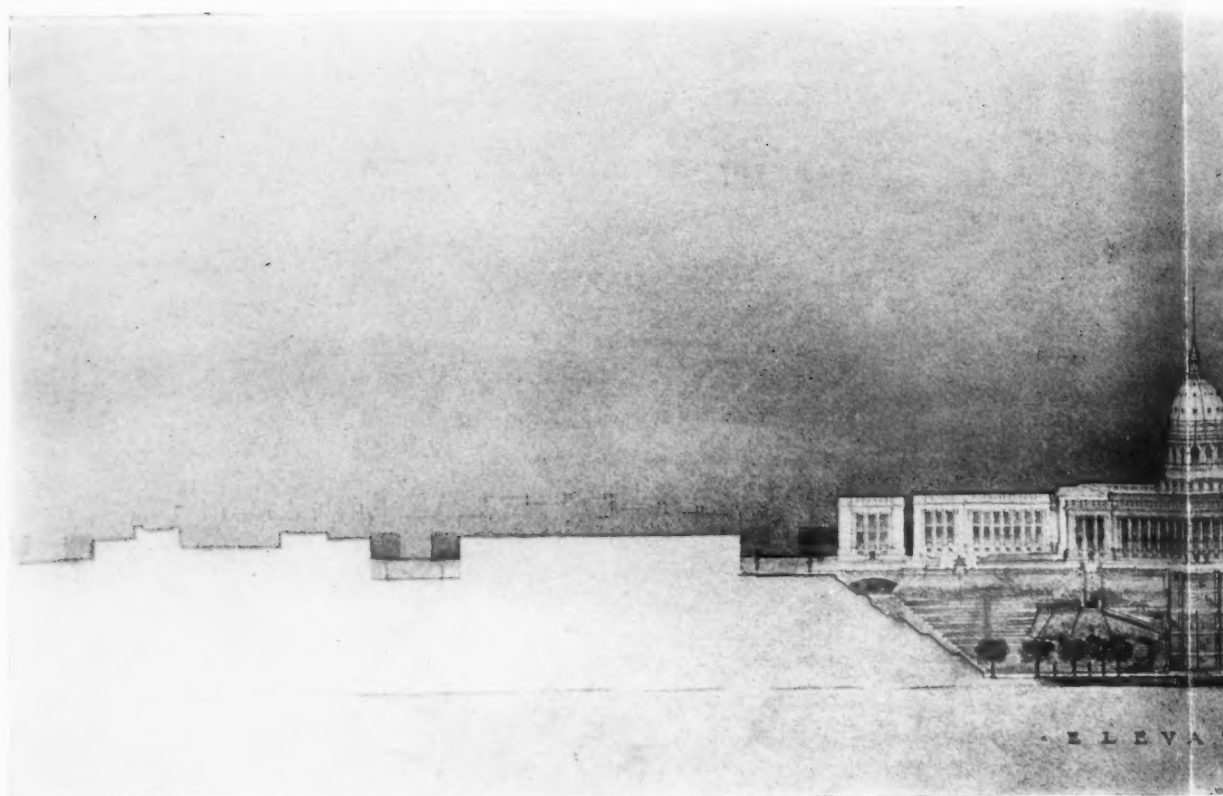
WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL COMPETITION, ME

SEPTEMBER 13, 1911



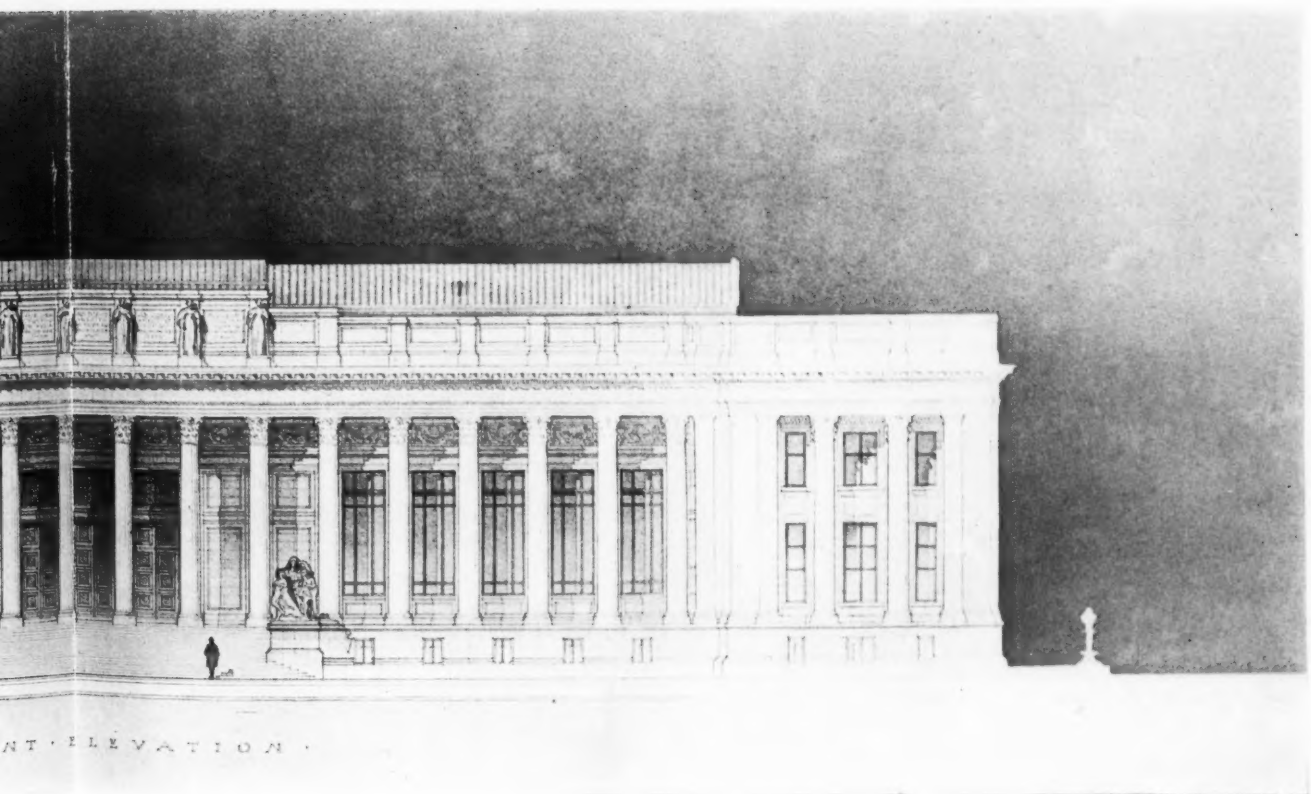
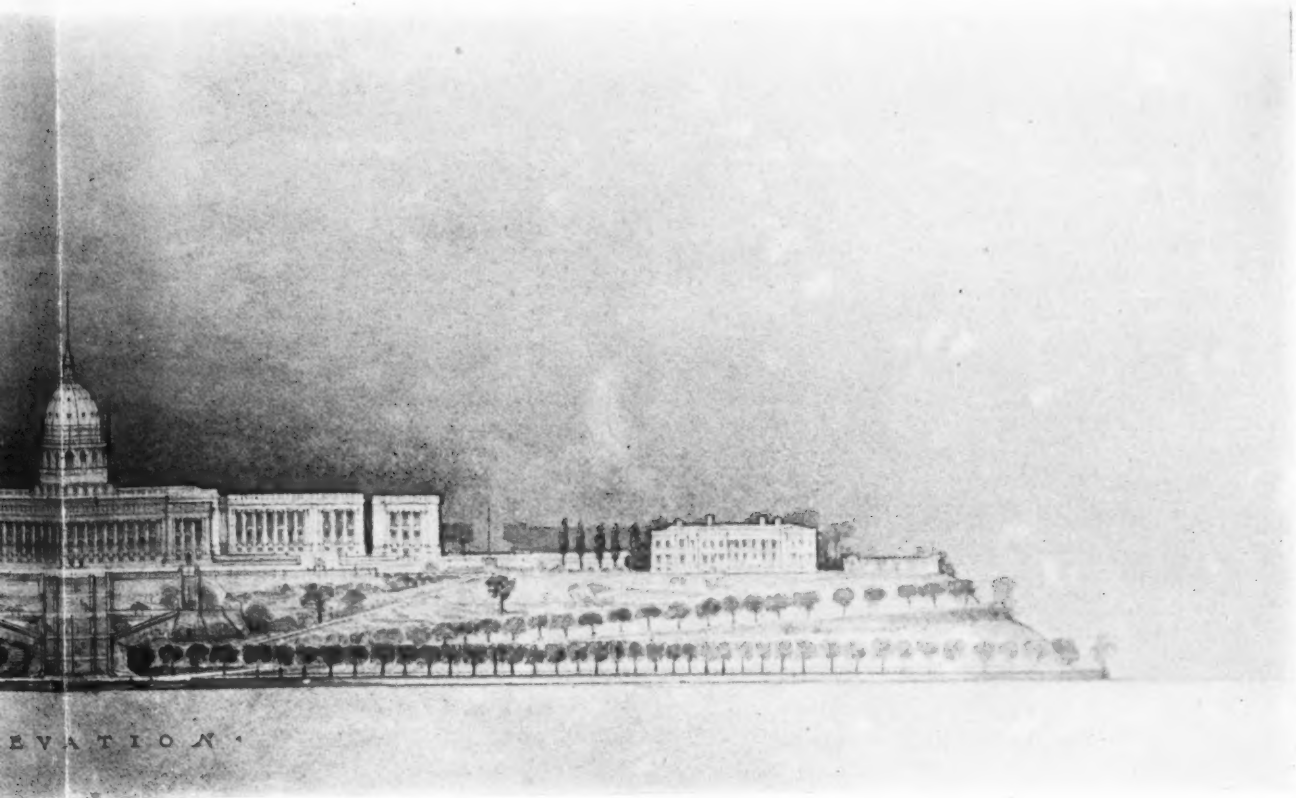
PRIZE DESIGN

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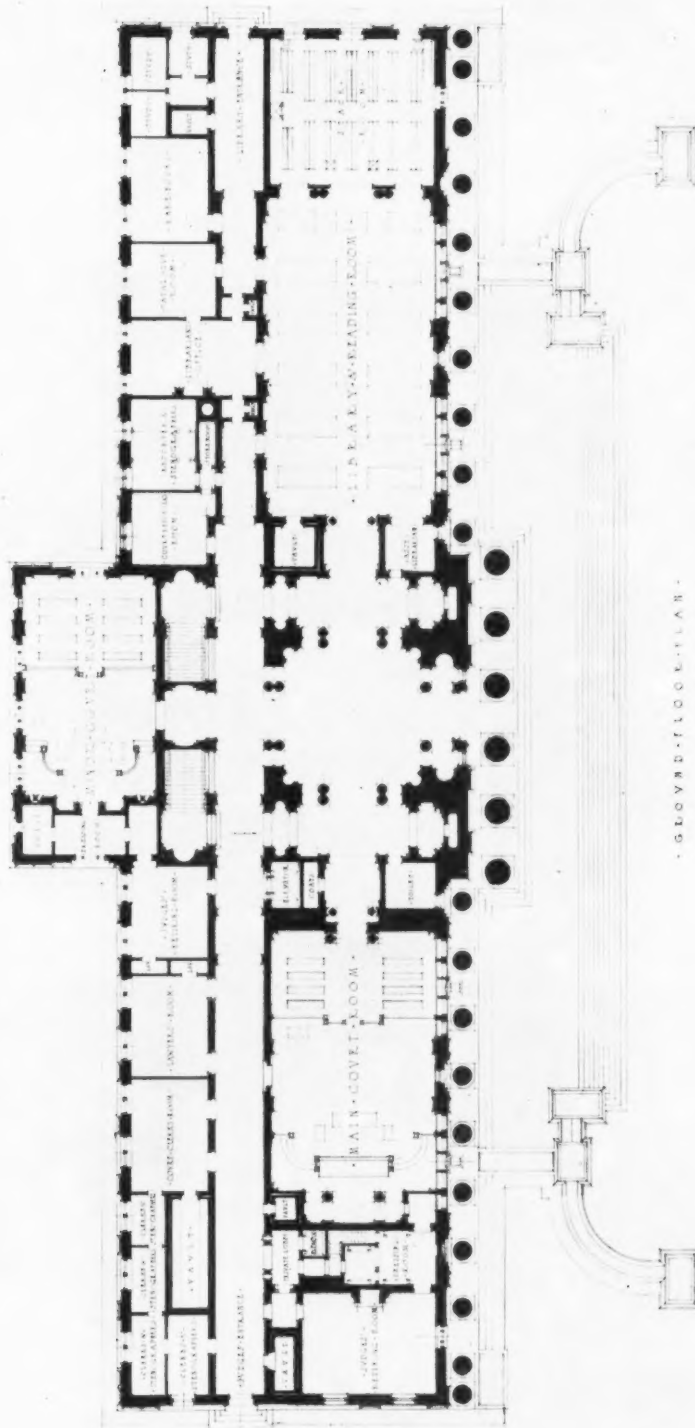
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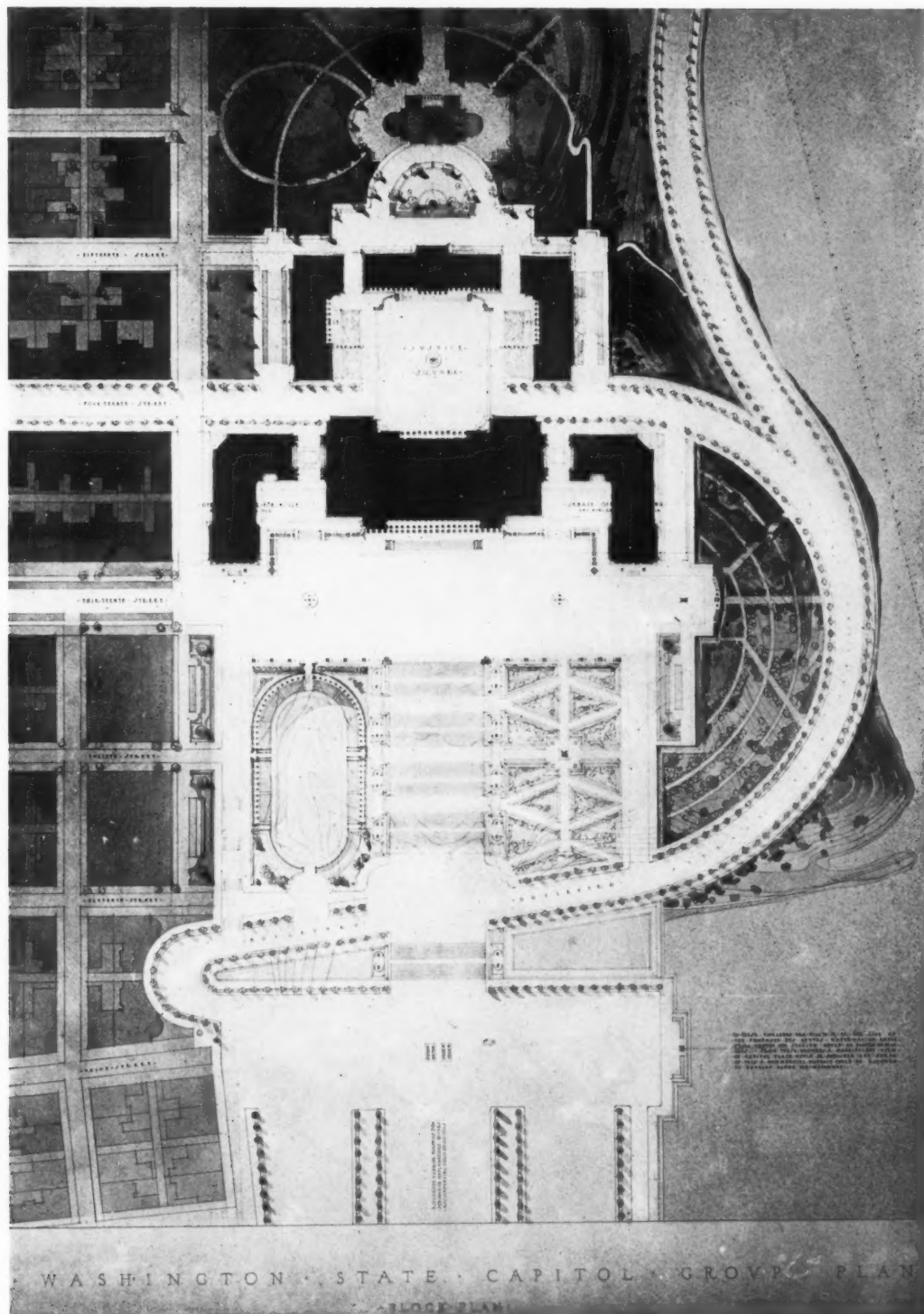
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

WASHINGTON STATE CAPITOL TEMPLE OF JUSTICE

SECOND PRIZE DESIGN

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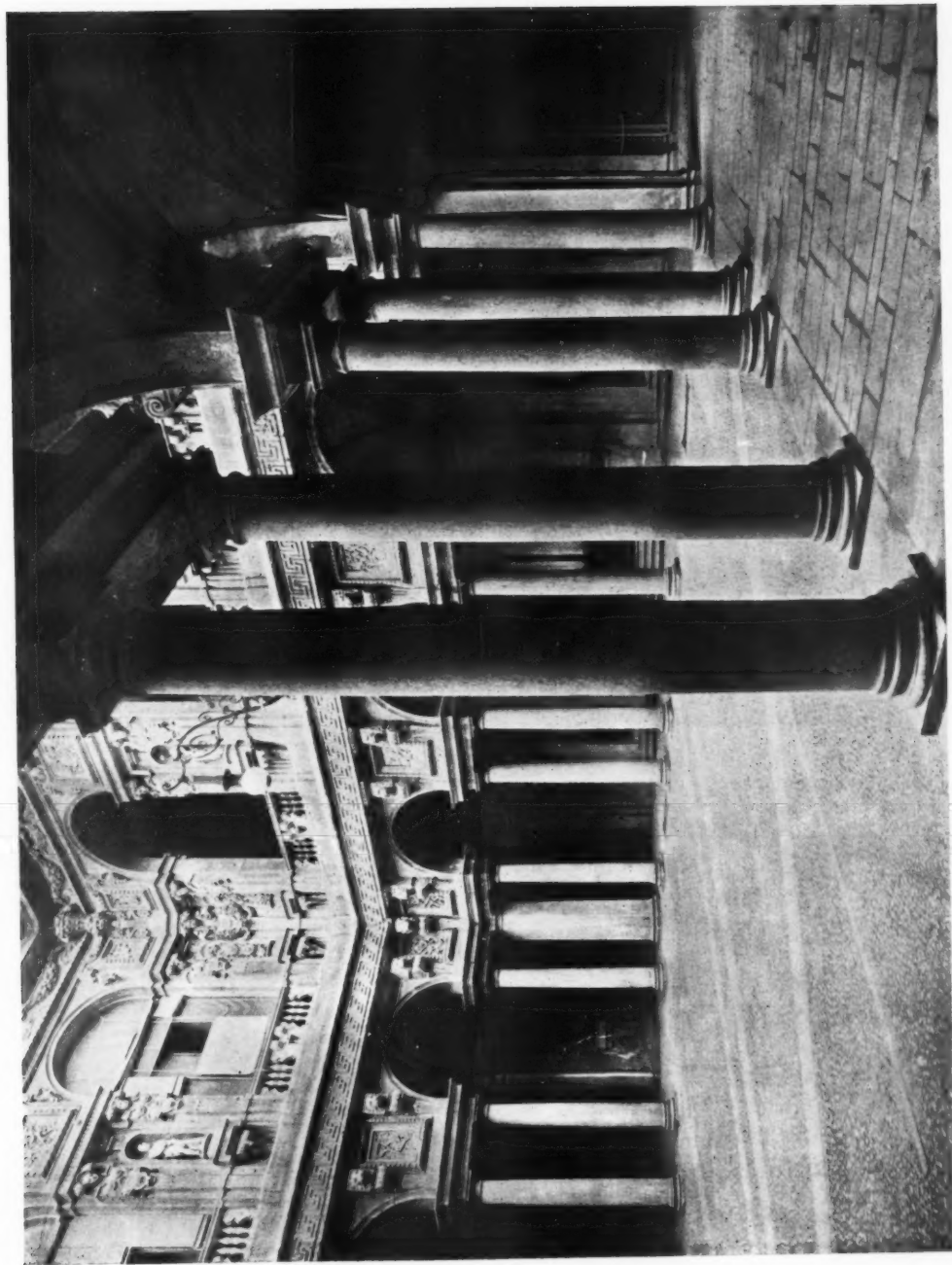


SECOND PRIZE DESIGN

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COURTYARD, PALAZZO MARINO, MILAN, ITALY