

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

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VIEW FROM THE TERRACE, THE DUOMO IN THE DISTANCE

THE RESTORED PALACE OF THE DAVANZATI, FLORENCE, ITALY

BY LOUIS C. NEWHALL, A. A. I. A.



HE increasing use of terra cotta block and concrete construction today is being marked by as distinct a change in the character of our architecture as that following the introduction of steel columns and girders twenty years ago.

While the latter invention produced feats of engineering which were mere skeletons masquerading as buildings, this latest introduction of structural terra cotta and concrete in our building arts has produced just the opposite effect, perhaps to an extent

not yet fully appreciated, balancing the former extreme swing of the architectural pendulum.

Simplicity and repose—if these terms may be used of any American production—are to an interesting extent marking these new designs. Large wall surfaces with an absence of detail and ornamental mouldings present new problems for our designers and decorators which, let us hope, will result in a revival of genuine mural decoration, an art that for many centuries has been dead.

Not since the Middle Ages have such opportunities for wall treatment present-



THE SMALL SALON ON THIRD FLOOR

ed themselves to architectural designers. The wonderful cathedrals of Monreale and Palermo, the matchless Capella Palatina, St. Mark's in Venice, and the Churches of San Francesco of Assissi and the Chapel at Subiaco, with their painted wall decorations are typical of the wall decoration common to those days. Domestic architecture of that time—if the castles and palaces can be truly classed as domestic work—reflects the same influences, though for the most part such domestic wall decorations have entirely disappeared.

Good examples of this last type of work are especially rare and for that reason alone the restoration of a beautiful old Florentine Palace to its original condition is doubly interesting. That built for the Davizzis in 1300 has had a history that even for Florence is most eventful. Always the home of families prominent in the affairs of state, changing hands frequently, its records are part of the history of the city. It passed to the Davanzati

family and remained with them from 1578 to 1838.

It is now one of those delightful surprises that too rarely, in these days, greets a traveler in searching for the unusual in Europe. A visit to this old mediæval building will furnish one, however sated he may be in things architectural, with a series of genuine thrills.

For many decades it was used as a tenement house, and until six years ago, its fine rooms were sub-divided into apartments and all its wealth of decoration and detail was buried under many coats of whitewash. However, its mediæval characteristics were never entirely eradicated, and its use for tenements was not so disastrous as to render impossible the attempt at restoration made by its present owner, Prof. Elia Volpi. How entirely successful this restoration has been will be seen by the accompanying illustrations, and too high praise cannot be given the patience, skill and artistic discernment of its present owner under

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whose personal direction the work of restoration was accomplished. It is a pleasure to record here the gratification given one of its many visitors by the rare beauty and charm of the restored building.

Briefly, the plan of the building is very simple, there being a central court that goes directly up through the building, around which is a staircase with balconies and columns. The entrance court is typically Florentine, of simple massive stone construction, with a harmony and elegance of proportion that marks the period in which it was built. Stone brackets above support three galleries in masonry, which give access to the various rooms arranged around this central space. There are many bits of detail extremely interesting alike to the architect and the historian, which have all been carefully brought back and restored with the utmost taste

and discretion. Of the rooms, the illustrations speak for themselves. Unlike the restorations that were undertaken in the Chateau Blois and Fontainebleau, these have been carried only far enough to give the suggestion of the original decoration and to bring it back only so as to give definition and a suggestion of its former color. In short, saving what was possible of the old painting and bringing all that had been obliterated by time up to the same color so that the decorations today are wonderfully effective and look as if they had never been touched, except by the hand of time. The furniture placed in the rooms shown in the illustrations, has been selected to harmonize as far as possible with the "period" of the building. The whole gives a very complete idea of the appearance of a Florentine Palace of the time of Dante and Arnolfo.



THE SMALL SALON ON SECOND FLOOR



MAIN CHAMBER, SECOND FLOOR
PALAZZO DAVANZATI, FLORENCE, ITALY

RECENT LEGAL DECISIONS

LIABILITY WHERE ESTIMATED COST EXCEEDED

A builder, in response to the owner's request, and after the statement of the latter that a projected movement could not be proceeded with, should it cost in excess of the owner's resources, informed the owners that it could be done for that amount.

The owners claimed that in reliance on this information they made a contract with the builder for the improvement on the basis of cost of labor and materials, plus the builder's compensation. The question whether the builder was under any duty to give the information was held to be immaterial on the issue of estoppel against him

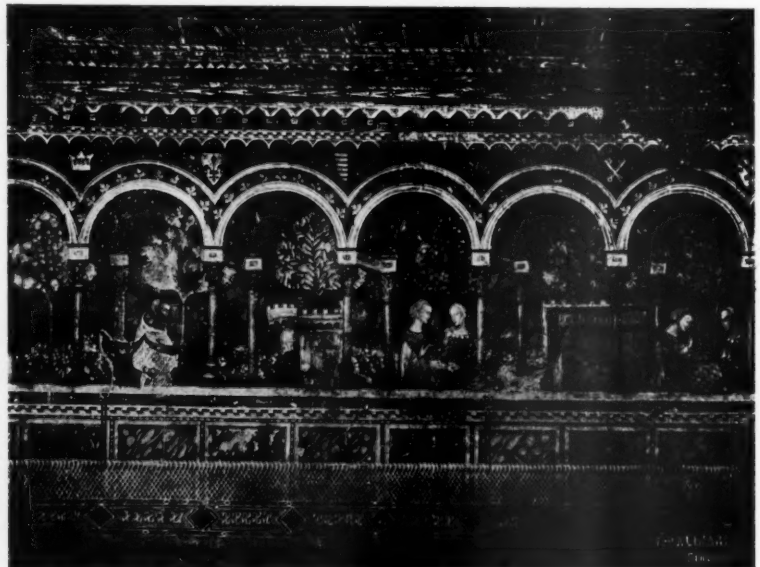
to charge an increased amount. But the mere fact that the owners or their agents exceeded the expenditure anticipated by a majority of the owners furnished no reason why the contractors should not be paid the amount expended by them by the direction of the owners.

John V. Schaeffer &
Co. v. Ely. (Conn.)
80 Atl. 775 (J. S.)

CONSTRUCTION OF BUILDING CONTRACT

Sub-contractors agreed in their contract to provide materials and perform work

"for the brickwork from curb level up, terra cotta, cut granite, fireproof partitions and plastering." It was held that the construction of this phrase was that the words "from the curb level up" applied only to the brickwork, and a claim for extra work



DETAIL OF FRIEZE IN MAIN CHAMBER ON SECOND FLOOR
PALAZZO DAVANZATI, FLORENCE, ITALY



RECESSED CASEMENT IN SMALL APARTMENT, THIRD FLOOR
PALAZZO DAVANZATI, FLORENCE, ITALY

for erecting tile partitions in the basement was disallowed.

Murphy v. No. 1 Wall Street Corporation, New York Appellate Division, 127 N. Y. Supp. 735.

BEVELING CORNER BRICKS — CLAIM FOR EXTRA WORK

Sub-contractors knew when they took the contract for the brickwork of a building that the corner of the building would not form a right angle, and that they could not do their work without beveling the corner bricks. It was held that this work must be deemed to be included in their estimates, and a claim for grinding brick for the corner was disallowed.

Murphy v. No. 1 Wall Street Corpora-

tion, New York Appellate Division, 127 N. Y. Supp. 735.

PROVISION TO LAY BRICKWORK WITH REFERENCE TO ANOTHER BUILDING

The exterior walls of a building were provided in the principal contract to be laid by the sub-contractors therefor by reference to another building. The front walls of the latter were laid in a Flemish bond with irregular joints. Before the sub-contractors commenced work, or certainly before they had proceeded far, correspondence took place between the general contractors and the architects as to the manner in which the brick should be laid. At one point in this correspondence it appears to have been contemplated that the brick should be laid with one-inch joints; but this was found to be impracticable, and the final order given to the sub-contractors was to lay the brickwork with regular Flemish bond. The evidence resulting from an actual examination of the work after completion indicated that the

bed joints were not laid to one inch or to any other actual size, but were irregular, varying above and below one inch precisely as the similar joints varied in the agreed model. Held that evidence did not justify claim for extra work for laying exposed exterior walls with measured one-inch joints.

CONTRACTORS AS EXPERT WITNESSES

Contractors and builders of experience acquainted with both the premises and the circumstances surrounding the falling of a building, caused by excavations on adjoining land, are peculiarly qualified to give information, as expert witnesses, as to what is necessary to be done and what is usually done under such circumstances to make the excavation with safety to adjoining buildings.

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TAKING A LEAF FROM OUR BOOK

MUCH has been written in the English architectural press with reference to the adoption of a code of ethics to regulate practice. The diversity of opinion expressed ranges from that of the man who stoutly maintains that the code should be an "unwritten" one and every man in the profession left to his sense of honor and integrity, to him who would draw up a rigid set of rules and impose severe penalties for their infringement.

The following clipped from our English contemporary, *The Architectural Review*, will show how closely along the lines adopted in this country is that proposed by a member of the Council of the Society of Architects, for adoption by the profession in England:

"For some time the Council of the Society of Architects have had under consideration the question of drafting a Code of Ethics relating to matters of professional etiquette in the architectural profession, and the following summary of such a code as suggested, after careful investigation, by Mr. C. McArthur Butler, will probably provoke considerable discussion:—It is unprofessional for an architect—(1) to engage directly or indirectly in any of the build-

ing trades, except as owner; (2) to guarantee an estimate or contract by bond or otherwise; (3) to accept any commission or substantial service from a contractor or from any interested party other than the client; (4) to advertise; (5) to take part in any competition the terms of which are not in harmony with the principles approved by the Board of Professional Control; (6) to attempt in any way, except as a duly authorized competitor, to secure work for which a competition is in progress; (7) to attempt to influence either directly or indirectly the award of a competition in which he is a competitor, or in which he is interested in any other capacity; (8) to accept the commission to do the work, either personally or by partnership, for which a competition has been instituted, if he has acted in an advisory capacity either in drawing up the programme or in making the award; (9) to injure falsely or maliciously, directly or indirectly, the professional reputation, prospects, or business of a fellow architect; (10) to undertake a commission while the claim for compensation or damage, or both, of an architect previously employed and whose claim has been referred to arbitration, or issue has been joined at law, or unless the architect previously neglects to press his claim legally; (11) to attempt to supplant a fellow architect after definite steps have been taken toward his employment; (12) to compete knowingly with a fellow architect for employment on the basis of professional charges; (13) to criticise in public print the professional work or conduct of another except over his own name; (14) to deviate from the scale of charges without permission of the Board of Professional Control."



THE PRINCIPAL APARTMENT, MAIN FLOOR
THE PALAZZO DAVANZATI, FLORENCE, ITALY

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THE POSSIBILITY OF DETERIORATION IN ARCHITECTURE OF FUTURE GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

IT is with considerable satisfaction that we have had our attention called to an editorial which appeared in a recent issue of *The Nation* anent the proposed repeal of the Tarsney Act and the probable effect of such action on the economic and artistic features of Government architecture in this country.

It is not reassuring to contemplate the fact that as a people we supinely allow our interests to become subverted through an indifference toward those things that affect us as a nation, while we are ever alert to guard our personal welfare. There can be no doubt but that the repeal of the Tarsney Act, coupled with certain threatened legislation inimicable to the support and effective future administration of the office of Supervising Architect of the Treasury, stands disapproved by a majority of those engaged in the practice of architecture in this country and also by a majority of those belonging to the affiliated professions in the field of art. But notwithstanding this general attitude, readily ascertainable on inquiry, if we except the active efforts of the Committee of the Institute, there appears to have been little, if any, expression

of disapproval of the proposed repeal of this Act by any organized body. The protest of the American Institute has been vigorous and well directed, but there is, of course, danger that it will be regarded by Congress as in a certain sense the expression of a directly interested body of men. We are led to this belief because experience has taught, and the records of the proceedings of Congress will show, that there is but scant appreciation in that body of the dignity which attaches to the practice of the profession of architecture and the high moral and professional standards fixed by the representative organization. Under such a condition the probabilities are that the Institute's protest will not be given the weight to which the opinion of a body of men eminently qualified to judge and really concerned in the artistic welfare of the country, above and beyond any possible personal gain, is justly entitled. If other art societies would join in a vigorous movement against the proposed legislation, the probability of results being accomplished which would avert the harm that otherwise will almost certainly befall us would be greater.

The Nation treats the subject as follows:

It was supposed to be in a spasm of economy that the House voted recently to repeal the Tarsney Act. This is the law under which the Supervising Architect at Washington is empowered to invite the submission of plans for public buildings by outside architects. Figures were submitted to Congress intended to show that this method was more costly than the old one, in accordance with which a Supervising Architect like the unlamented Mullett was able to inflict his standardized horrors in the way of public buildings upon the country. This was really the only argument made for the change; if a few hundred thousand dollars could be saved by no longer employing the leaders in the profession to add beauty and variety to our official architecture, and by leaving all the work to employees at Washington, why not do it? A readiness to squander millions upon pensions is consistent with absolute penuriousness when it comes to Government building.

In reality, however, it is by no means certain that the new system is more costly than the old. The whole question turns, of course, on architects' fees and the expenses of office work. In a statement sent by the Supervising Architect to the Committee on Appropriations an analysis of costs under the two methods was undertaken. In this it was freely admitted that the difficulties in the way of entire accuracy of estimate were very great. So many items enter into the comparison, and some of them are so elusive, that a precise contrasting of one system with the other is almost impossible. Yet in the compilation referred to it was reckoned that if all the construction work done in 1909 had been carried out by the Supervising Architect's office a saving to the Government of some

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\$276,900 would have resulted. These official figures, however, have been closely scrutinized by a committee of architects, who contend that there was a neglect of certain allowances and percentages which would make a very great difference in the conclusion. This committee, taking a range of years—1905 to 1910—found that the total building contracts awarded amounted to \$32,796,000 and that it cost the Government for work done in the Supervising Architect's office, during that period, \$2,002,780. But this is above 6 per cent., slightly more than a private architect receives for his entire service, including local supervision.

Into this mathematical and financial dispute we do not think that it is necessary to enter. It is a nice question, one way or the other, and the balance of cost on either side would probably not be very considerable. It is, of course, desirable that our official architecture should not countenance needless extravagance. If it were to be demonstrated that public buildings erected by private architects were excessive in cost, for purely professional charges, there would be a natural suspicion that something was wrong and that reforms in practice should be made. We are bound to say that we believe the presumption to be all the other way. If Government architecture is cheaper than private, all other things being equal, it would be the one marked exception to the general rule that Government work is more expensive than that done by individuals or corporations. But even granting that the plan of calling in eminent architects may be somewhat more

costly in operation than it would be to turn everything over to the Supervising Architect's office, it does not in the least follow that the latter course would be wise.

Some things are more important than trifling economies. We believe that if the question were submitted to any competent and impartial jury they would agree that a possible saving of \$200,000 a year by the repeal of the Tarsney Act would not begin to make up for the loss the country would suffer. People of taste could not think without a shudder of going back to the period when our post-office buildings and our Federal court-houses were turned out at a central Government office like so many dry goods boxes issuing from a factory. If we are to have public buildings at all, the finest skill and artistic judgment ought to be enlisted. Great public monuments ought not to be run on the cheap. They cannot be without lowering at once the value of the work and the sense of national dignity. We are entitled to the best public architecture, and if it costs slightly more than the mediocre we may be sure that the people will cheerfully foot the bills. As we have said, the high probability is that it does not cost more; but in any event, it would be deplorable to take such a step to check the architectural revival in this country as would be involved in excluding our finest talent from competing for the monumental building which the Government has to undertake. It is strongly to be hoped that the Senate will see the point more clearly than did the House and leave the Tarsney Act in full vigor.



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THE TOWER ANGLE

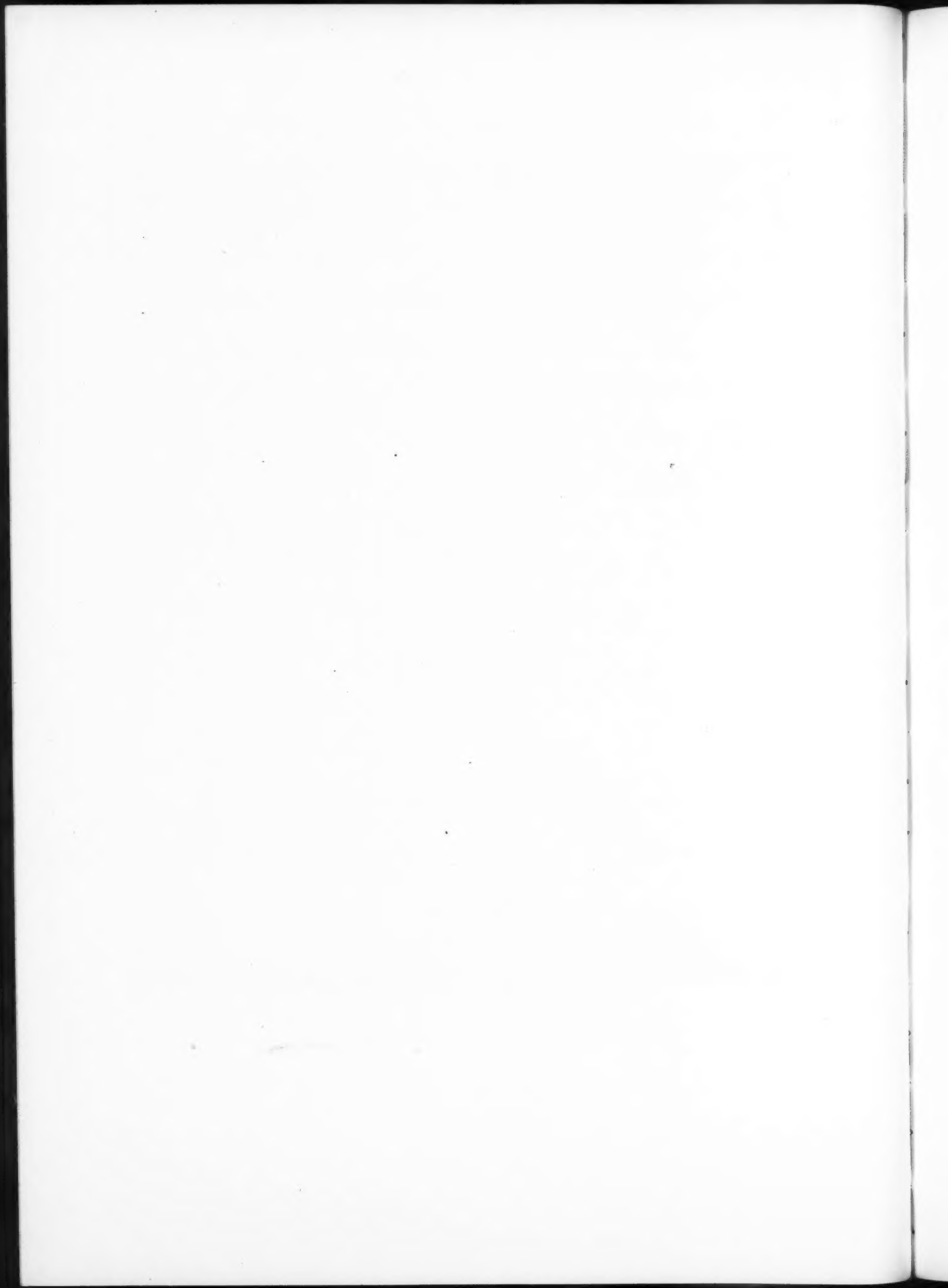
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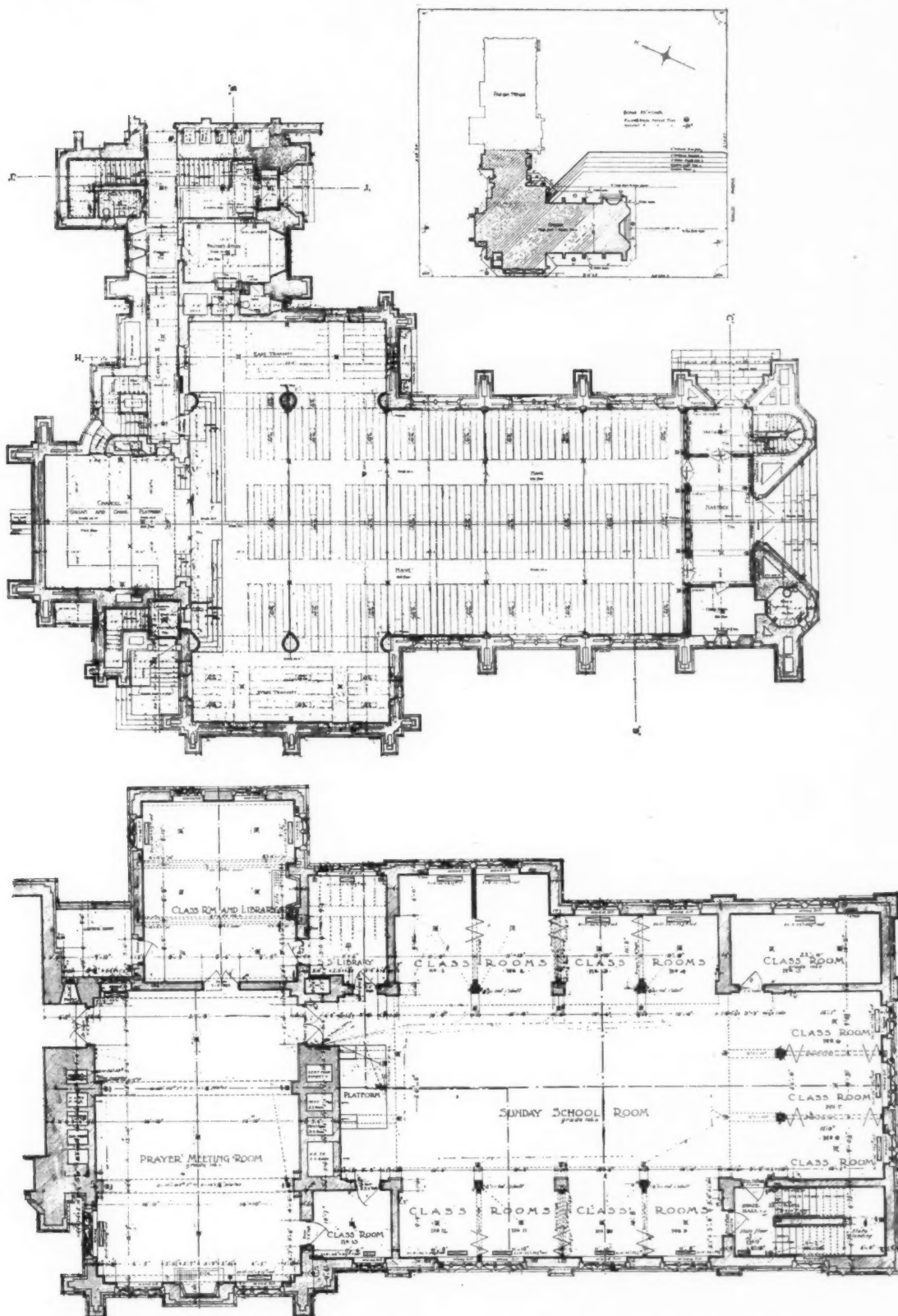


REAR VIEW

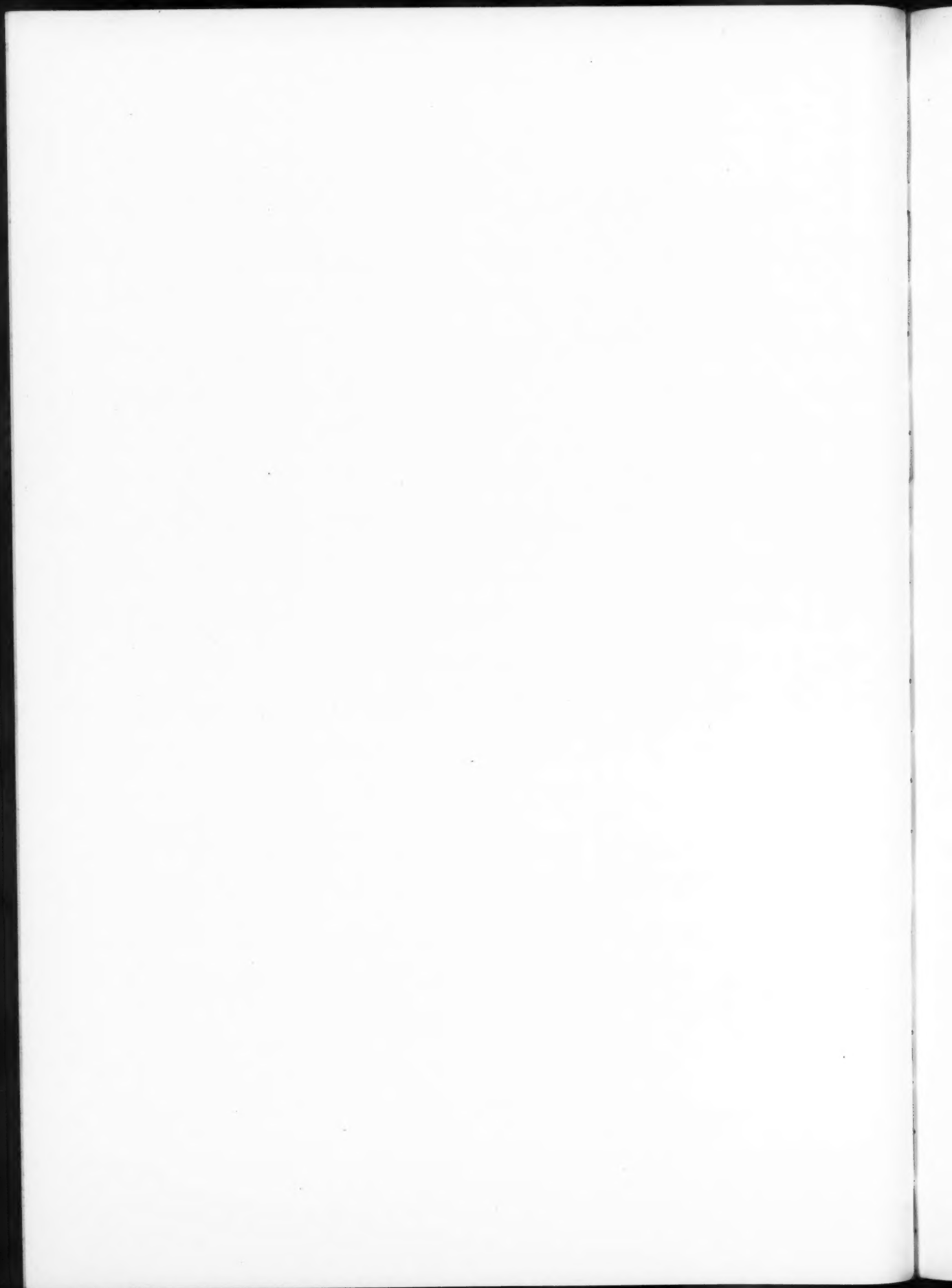


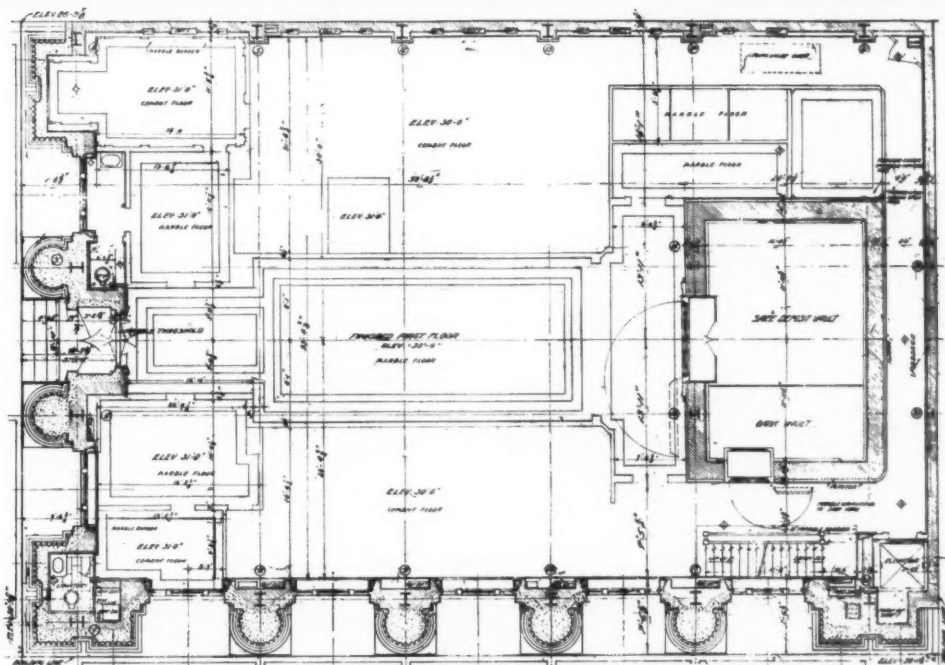
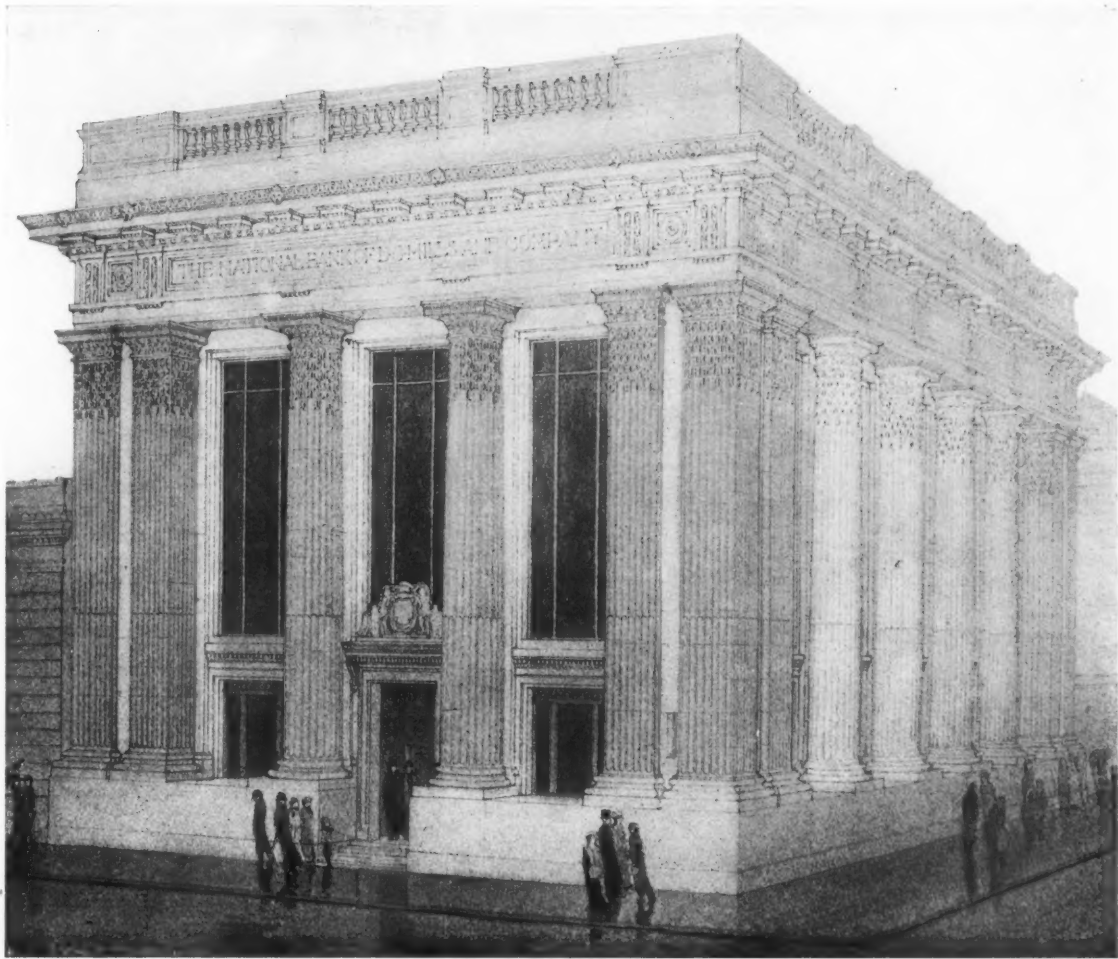
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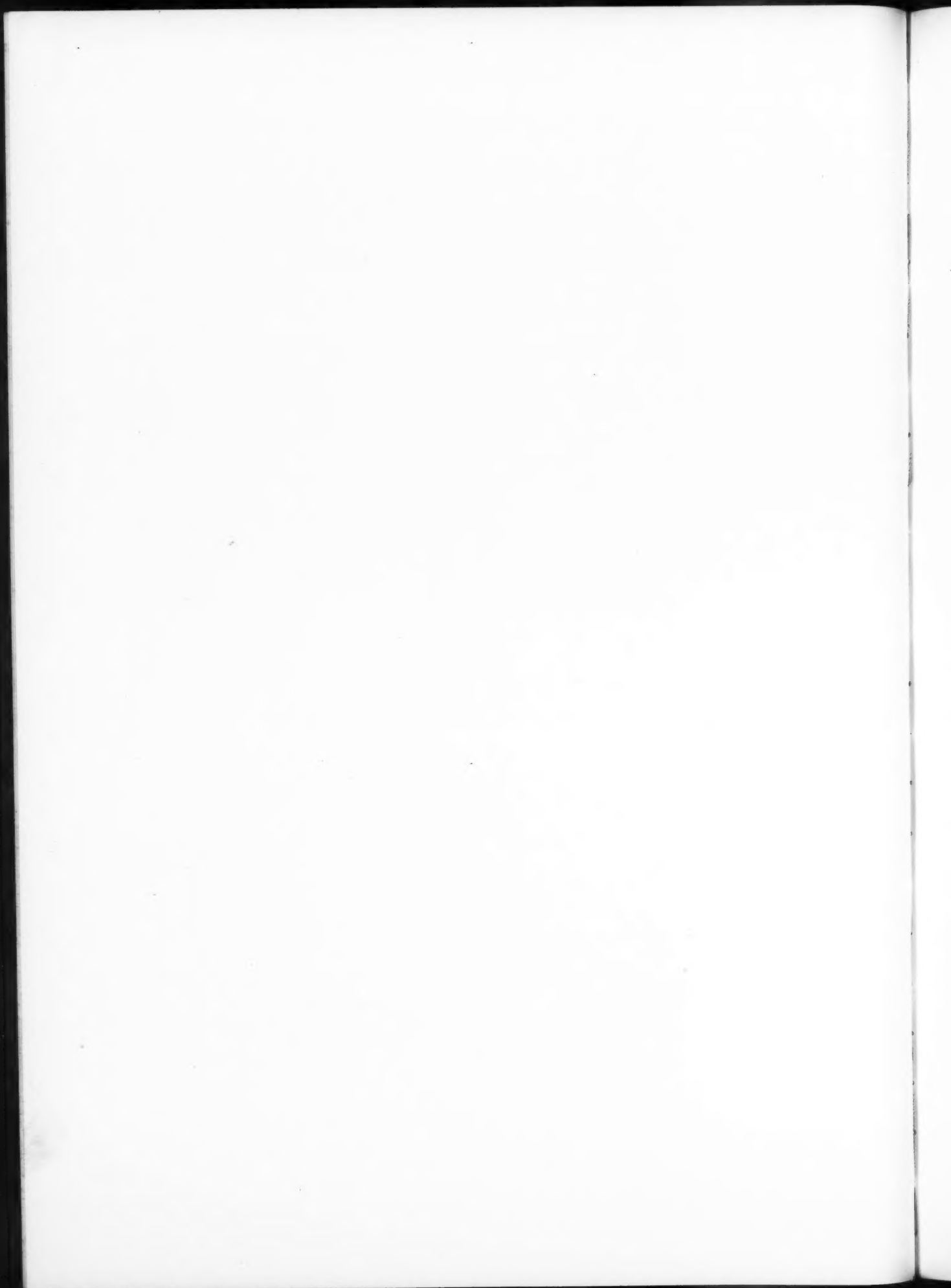


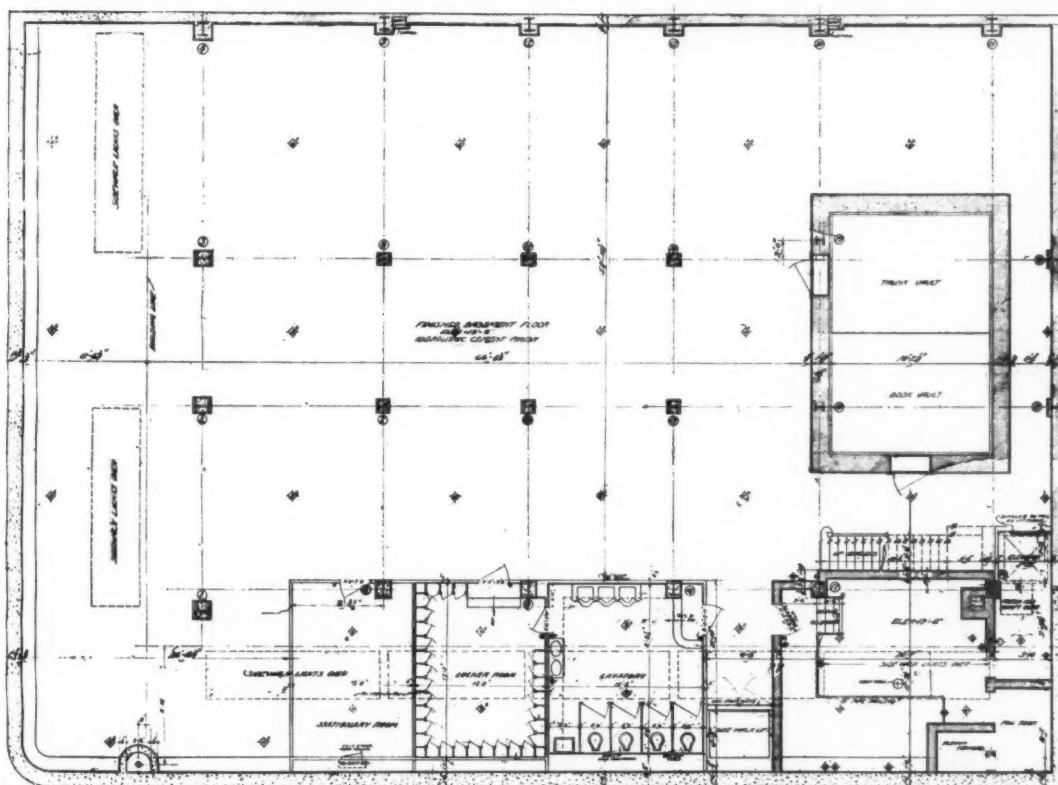
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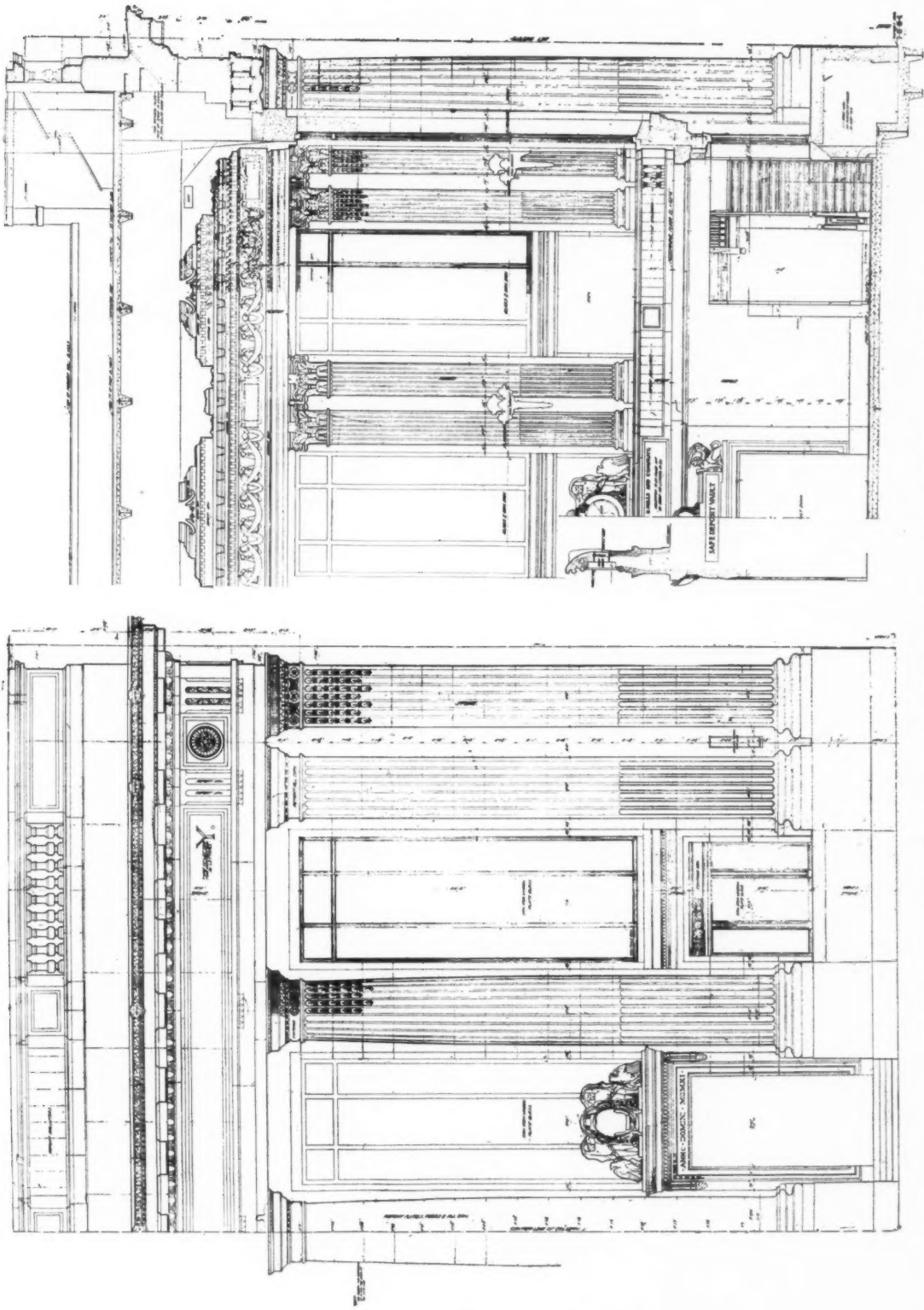


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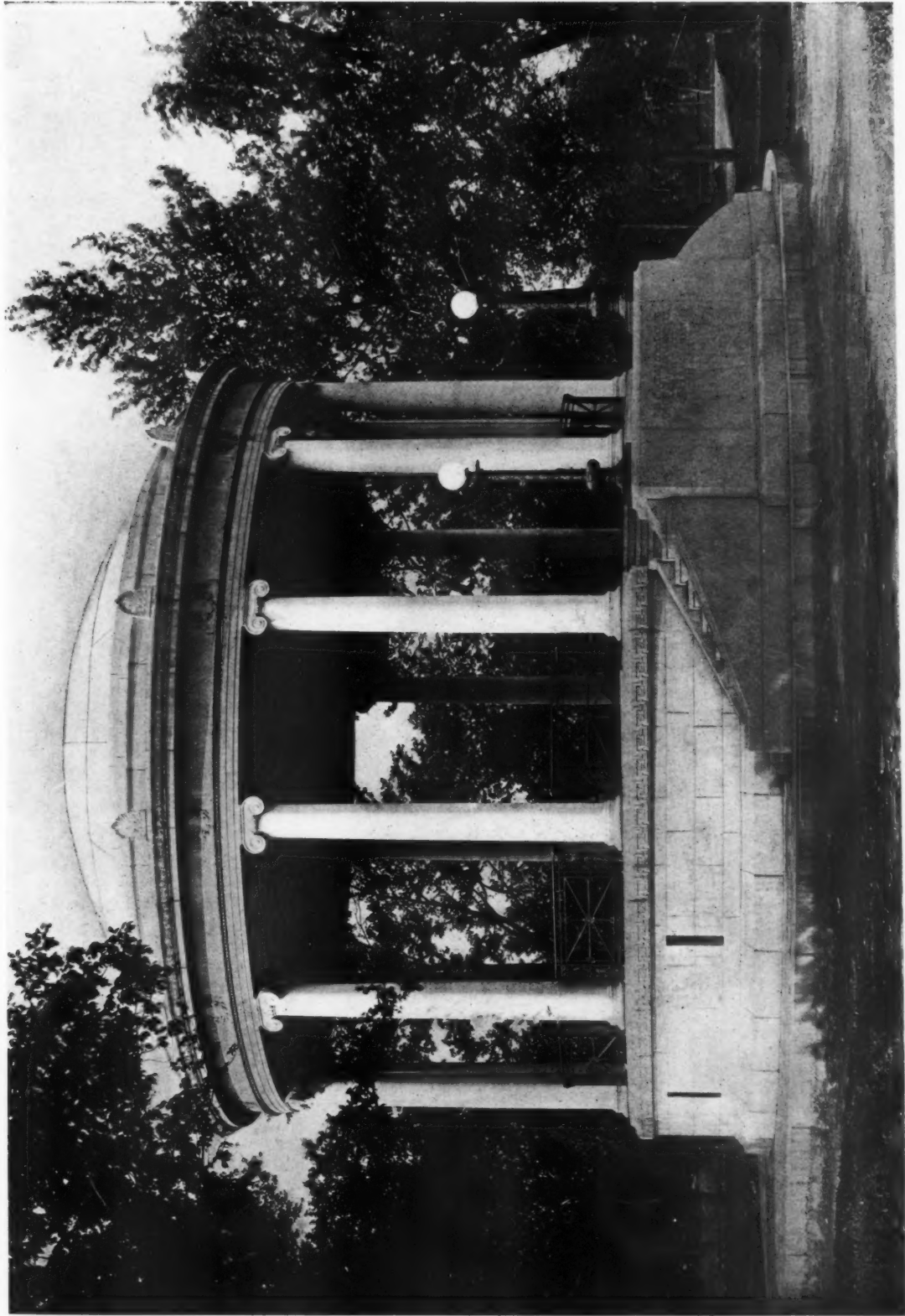




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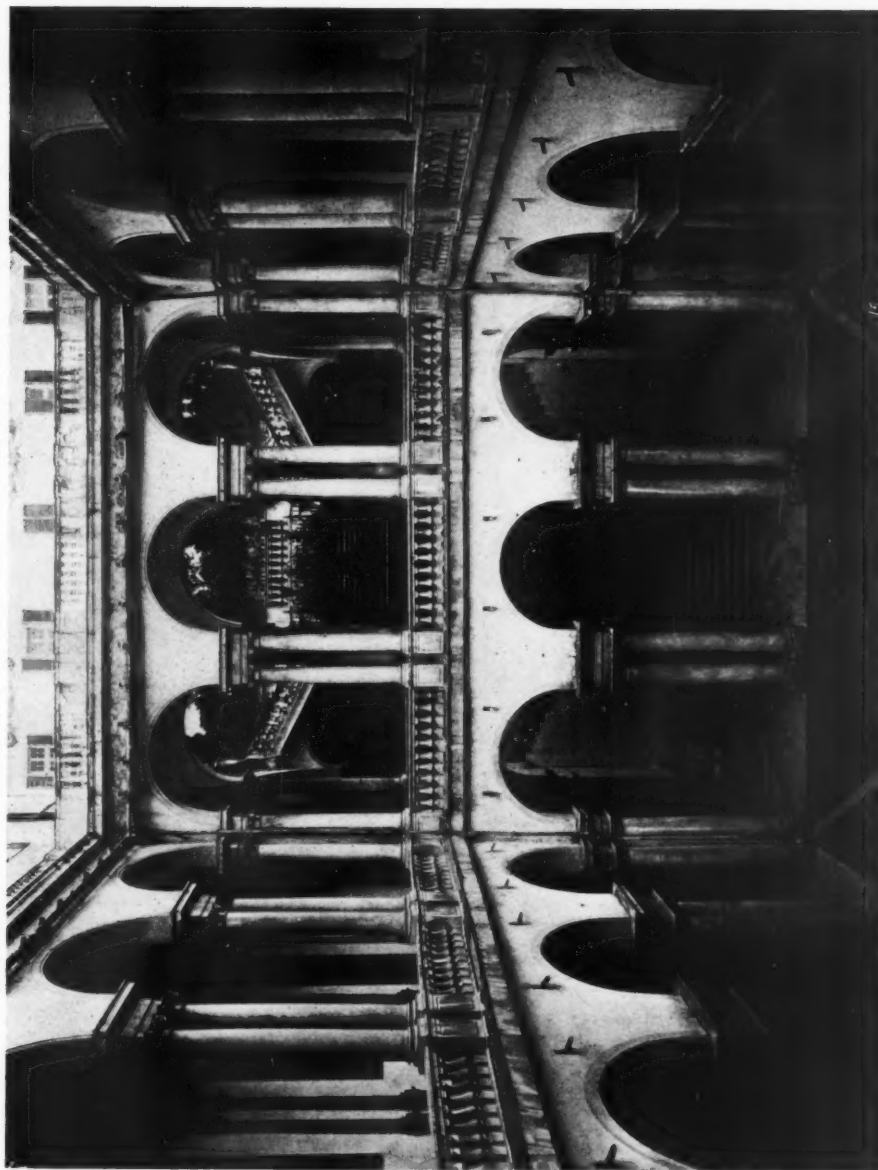


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