

The Canes of the Martyrdom are a very real part of the Mormon heritage. Shrouded in mystery as they are, the canes stand as a testimony of the love the owners shared for the Prophet Joseph Smith and his work.

A LITTLE LEAVENING

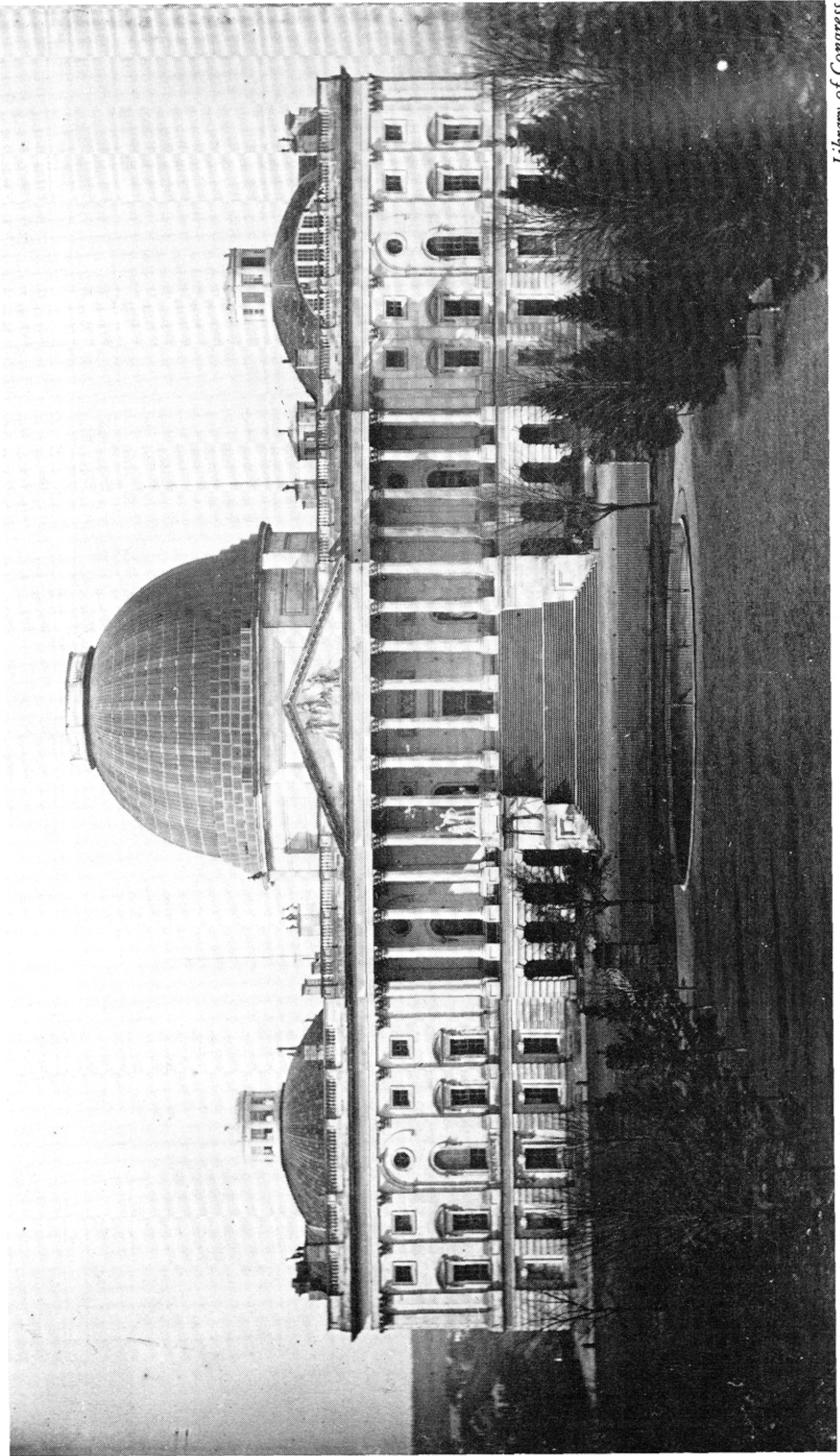
Florian H. Thayn

Over the car radio during a recent morning rush hour, the impersonal voice from the traffic helicopter circling Washington, D.C., droned, "Traffic on the beltway is backed up to the Mormon temple." A few weeks earlier while on a flight leaving from Washington's national airport, I was surprised to hear the pilot suggest over the intercom, "Look to the right and see the spectacular Mormon temple." Nearly everybody in the metropolitan Washington area knows where the Mormon temple is. Its pristine towers pierce the sky like a beacon to the motorist and the airline pilot. Yet how many other less spectacular, even secluded, places in the nation's capital hold little nuggets of interest that refer to Latter-day Saint or Utah history? A few anecdotes will show the wealth of Utah memorabilia and history in Washington, however obscure and hidden to most of its many visitors.

The earliest contact between Mormons and the city of Washington appears to have been late in 1839 when Joseph Smith sought redress from the U.S. government on behalf of the Missouri Saints who had lost their property and other possessions to the mobs earlier that year. It was November and the young prophet bounced along in a stagecoach filled with passengers who were oblivious to his identity. The old post road unwound through the Alleghenies, jutting out over the more rugged outcroppings of marble and stone before reaching the wooded farmlands of Maryland, and continuing southward toward the infant city of Washington.

In B. H. Roberts's account of the journey, he states that the coach was approaching Washington when the coachman stopped at a tavern for his grog. The driverless horses became frightened and started running. After calming a hysterical mother and preventing her from throwing her infant out the coach window, Joseph gradually

Florian H. Thayn is head of the Art and Reference Division in the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, in Washington, D.C.



Library of Congress

Earliest known photograph of the Capitol. This 1846 "Plumbeotype" shows the Capitol as Joseph Smith would have seen it in 1839. The old House Chamber is on the left, the Senate Chamber on the right. The present dome and wing extensions were added 1855-1865.

worked his way topside through the door to the driver's seat and successfully brought the runaway horses under control after three miles of terror. The grateful passengers included Congressmen returning to Washington for the December opening of Congress. They showered Joseph with praise and indicated that plaudits might be given to him in the Halls of Congress—until, that is, they learned he was the “Mormon Prophet.” After that discovery, they said no more about his heroic deed which saved passengers, coach, and horses.¹

Joseph and his companion, Elias Higbee, arrived in Washington the following morning, 28 November 1839. They searched for nearly a day to find “as cheap boarding as can be had in this city”² and eventually settled near the Capitol in a rooming house on the corner of Missouri and 3rd streets, where they remained for three weeks. From the convenient location, Joseph and Brother Higbee walked to the White House for their fruitless visit with President Van Buren and to their almost daily visits to the Illinois delegation at the Capitol.³ The corner where the rooming house once stood is now occupied by the east wing of the National Gallery of Art. Identification of that location had been an enigma to some historians because the present-day Missouri and 3rd streets are nearly four miles north of the Capitol, a location that would have been farmland outside the city limits at the time Joseph visited. But during various redevelopment programs in Washington, many streets disappeared, and their names have been transferred to streets in newly developed areas. Downtown Missouri Avenue near the Mall was one of those casualties, thus causing the confusion surrounding Joseph's Washington visit.⁴

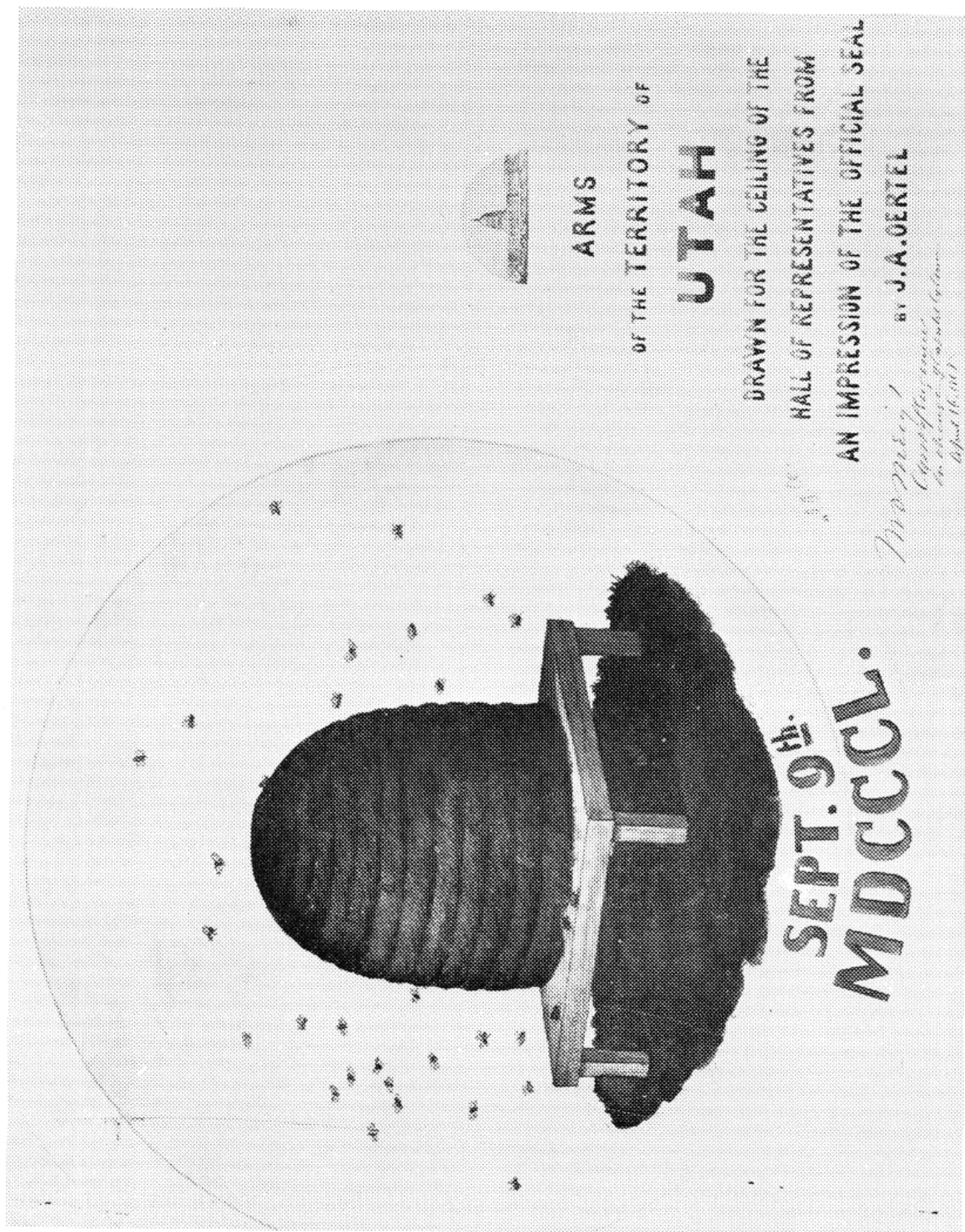
About twenty years after that 1839 trip, evidence of Utah found a permanent place in the U.S. Capitol itself. Utah's seal has been represented in the ceiling of the present House of Representatives Chamber since 1857 when that chamber was constructed while Utah was a territory. The design of the immense rectangular ceiling was composed of painted glass seals of the states and territories. In extensive remodeling nearly a century later, the chamber ceiling was redesigned and the glass seals were replaced with painted plaster replicas. The present seals are arranged in the order in which each state was admitted to the Union. Utah as the forty-fifth state is

¹B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 2:29–30.

²Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932–1951), 4:40.

³Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, pp. 29–30.

⁴E. F. M. Faehtz and F. W. Pratt, *Real Estate Directory of the City of Washington, D.C.*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Fitch and Fox Publishers, 1874), vol. 1 [folio].



Seal of the Territory of Utah removed from the House of Representatives Chamber ceiling. This print from an old glass plate.

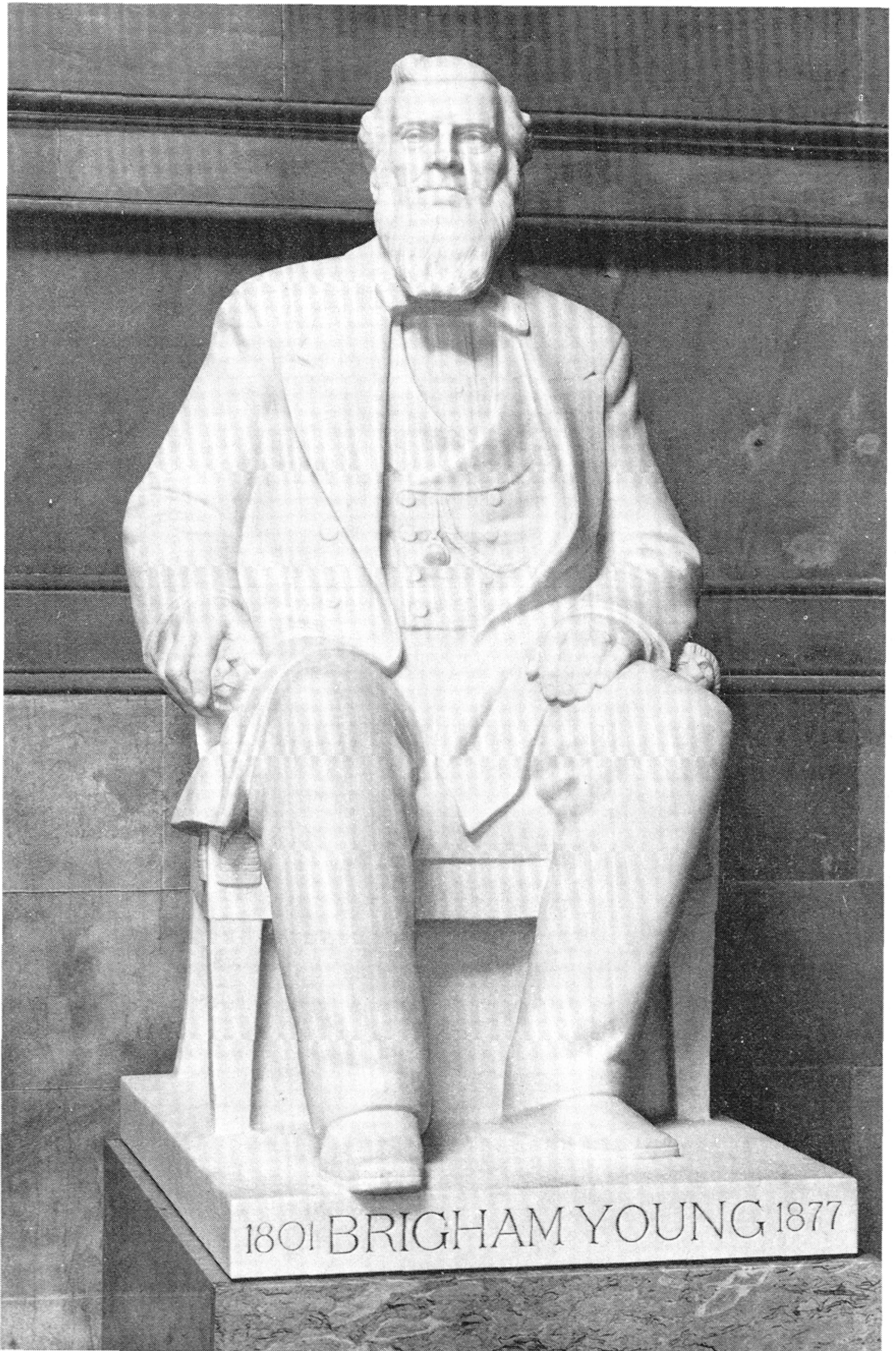
represented on the south border behind the Speaker's chair—a difficult, if not impossible area for visitors to see.

A few hundred feet from the present House Chamber is the Old Hall of the House used by the Representatives for nearly fifty years. It was here that Joseph Smith consulted with his Congressmen, but since 1864 the old chamber has been designated as National Statuary Hall. By law each state may contribute two statues to the collection. Utah's single gift is the seated statue of Brigham Young, memorialized in white Carrara marble by Mahonri Young, sculptor and grandson of the pioneer leader. Brother Brigham faces three statues, sent by Wyoming, Washington, and North Dakota, that were created by another renowned Mormon artist, Avard Fairbanks, who also was the sculptor for the nineteen-foot high Angel Moroni on the Washington Temple.

At the opposite end of the Capitol from Statuary Hall is the President's Room. It holds perhaps the most unseen bit of Utah memorabilia. Presidents formerly used this room when it was necessary to sign legislation in the Capitol in the last hours before Congress adjourned. Every inch of the walls is covered with fresco and oil painting by the skilled artist Constantino Brumidi. A political refugee from Rome, he spent the twenty-five years between 1855 and 1880 beautifying the Capitol of what he called "the one country on earth in which there is liberty."⁵ Tucked in a corner behind the door and beneath a painting of a cherub is a Brumidi painting of a beehive about fourteen inches high, silently testifying that Utah Territory was organized on 9 September 1850. It is incorrectly labeled "Utar" and bears an impossible numeral, MDCCOL, in its date; the correct Roman numeral should read MDCCCL. These errors possibly occurred during subsequent retouching after Brumidi painted the room in 1859.

Mormon beliefs have influenced the form of yet another room in the Capitol. A small room off the Rotunda in the center of the building was designated by law as a place of meditation and prayer for members of the Senate and the House. The focal point of the Prayer Room is the stunning stained glass window bordered with a rope of laurel leaves tied with a ribbon bearing the names of all the states. That the name of Utah is readily visible in the lower left corner is not the significant feature. The more interesting story is about the design that was *not* selected. In 1953 a special committee composed

⁵Myrtle Cheney Murdock, *Constantino Brumidi—Michelangelo of the United States Capitol*. (Washington, D.C.: Monumental Press, 1950), p. 6.

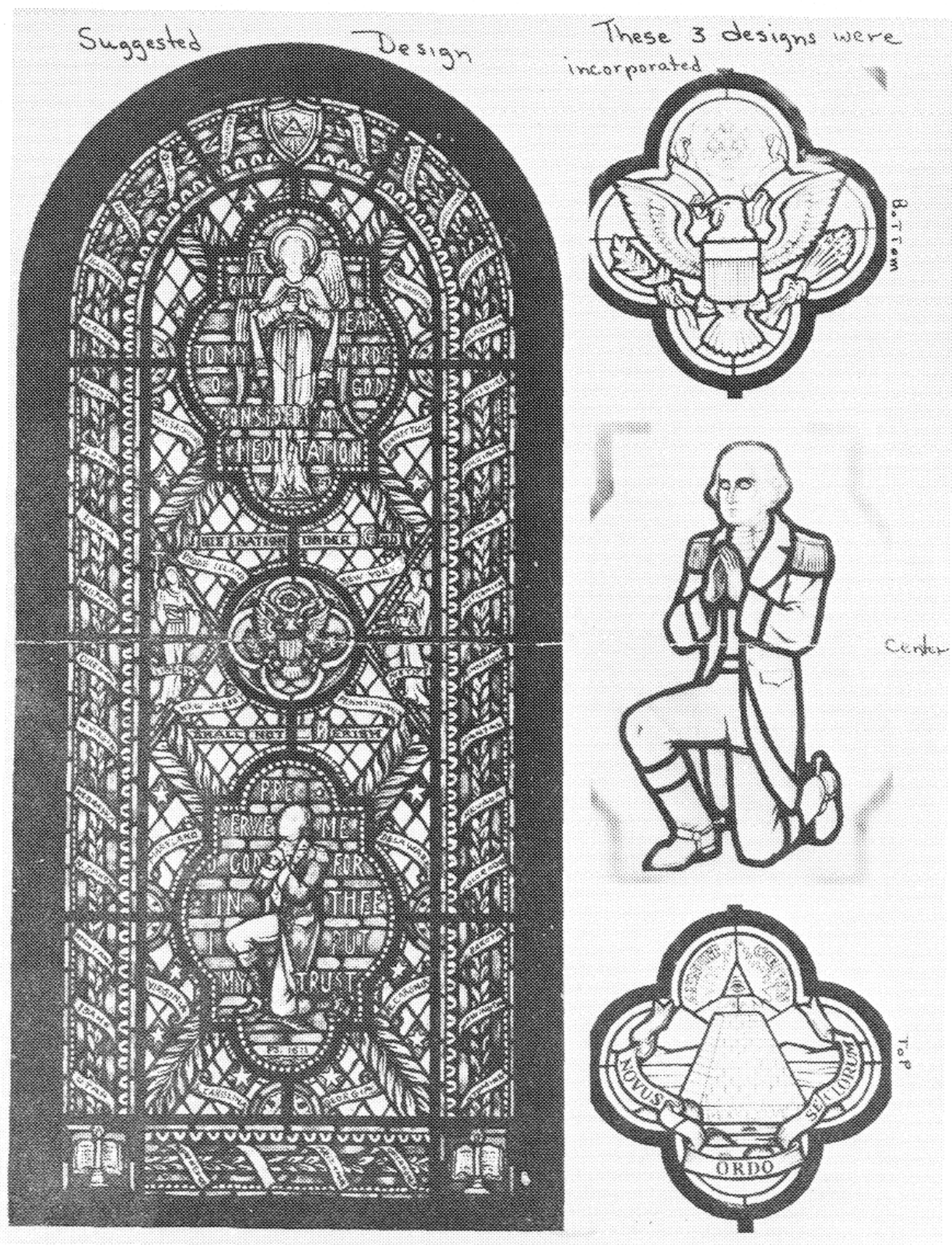


Brigham Young Statue by Mahonri Young *Architect of the Capitol*
in National Statuary Hall, United States Capitol



Utah Seal in the President's Room, United States Capitol

Architect of the Capitol



Architect of the Capitol
Proposed Prayer Room Window, United States Capitol

of two prominent Protestant ministers, a Jewish rabbi, and a Catholic priest conferred with a Congressional committee to determine the theme of the window. Their great concern was that nothing depicted in the window or the furnishings should offend the various religious beliefs of Congressmen who would use the room. Among the designs that were discarded were a cross, a triangle as the sign of the Trinity, and angels with wings. A spokesman for the group indicated those symbols would offend some beliefs and specifically noted that "Mormons do not believe that angels have wings."⁶ The deliberations of those knowledgeable gentlemen resulted in the present beautiful window depicting George Washington kneeling in prayer.

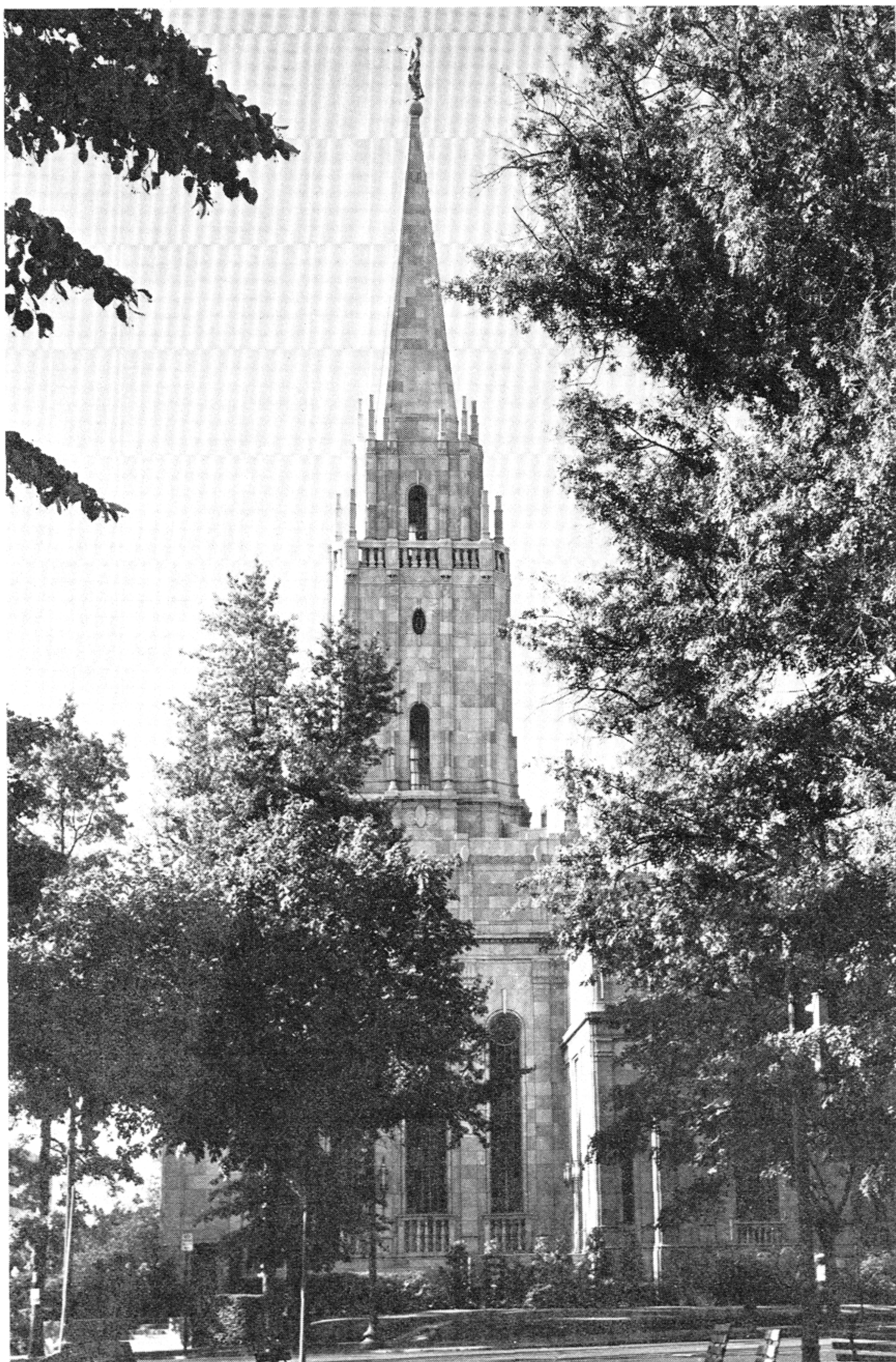
Directly north of the White House on 16th and Columbia Road stands the former Washington chapel, a center of Latter-day Saint activity for forty-two years until it was sold in 1976. It is with nostalgia that one passes the familiar stained glass windows depicting the Hill Cumorah, Utah's sego lily, continents of the world, and the ships, trains and planes which enabled "all nations to flow" to the United States. Originally, the chapel also boasted a gilded statue of the Angel Moroni fashioned by Thorlief Knapsus; for three years, Washington members could boast of two Angel Moroni statues, one on that chapel and one on the temple. In 1979, however, the statue was removed from the top of the Washington chapel.

One final anecdote will be of particular interest to Mormon visitors to the nation's capital. The interior of the Washington Monument holds a fascinating piece of Utah history. Only the hardy souls who walk up the stairs rather than ride the elevator to the top of the 555 foot shaft will see the memorial stone of Deseret on the twentieth landing, about midway to the monument's top. For most visitors the original stone was a curiosity without explanation. What does a beehive capped with the incised phrases, "Holiness to the Lord" and "Deseret" represent? The story of the stone, however, while not generally known, is well documented.

The cornerstone for the Washington Monument was laid on a rainy Fourth of July in 1848. To stimulate financial interest in the project, the Washington National Monument Society solicited memorial stones for the interior walls from hundreds of organizations, countries, and local governments, including the self-proclaimed Territory of Deseret.

Brigham Young presented the invitation to the General Assembly of the Provisional State of Deseret. The Saints were loyal to

⁶Manuscript files, Architect of the Capitol.



Courtesy of Visual Resources Library

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Former Washington, D.C., Chapel

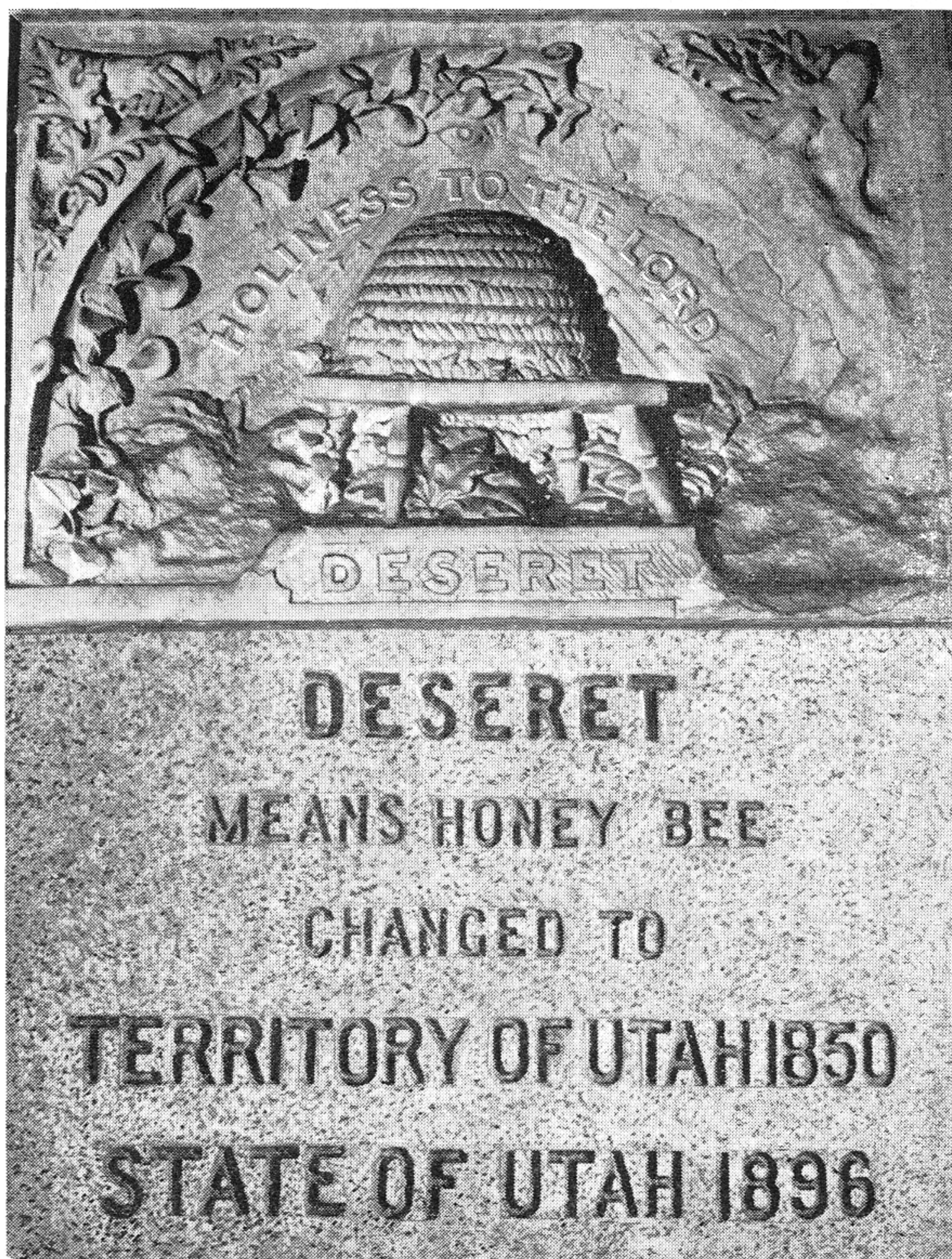
the memory of George Washington and they wanted to be part of the memorial to him. However, they were still bitter because Congress had rejected their petitions to become the State of Deseret but instead had created the Territory of Utah. To the industrious pioneers their new home was Deseret, and therefore they were determined that the design for the memorial stone must commemorate Deseret. A block of limestone obtained from the San Pete quarries at Manti was carved and embellished by stonecutter William Ward in about six weeks. Measuring 3' x 2' x 6'', the completed design included the symbolic beehive, capped with the All-Seeing Eye, borders of classic foliage, and a cornucopia symbolic of blessings of abundance. The inscription "Holiness to the Lord" is now reserved for use solely on the temples.⁷

An opportunity to cart the stone to Washington came two years later in 1853, when missionaries heading eastward accepted the laborious three-month task. However, construction on the monument was halted for lack of money, and the crisis of the Civil War and subsequent financial depression prevented work on the monument from progressing. The Deseret memorial stone languished in a nearby storage shed for more than thirty-one years. Although the monument was dedicated in 1885, it was not completed and opened to the public until three years later. Sometime during those three years the Deseret stone was set in place.

Interested citizens in Utah and Washington, D.C., began agitating in 1950 for proper identification of the Deseret stone. It was determined that an explanatory inscription should be carved on a piece of granite obtained from the same quarries that supplied stone for the Salt Lake Temple. The project was financed mainly with pennies collected from the children of Utah. Thus it was that on a rainy January day in 1951 a small group of patriots representing the Church and federal and state governments huddled in the confines of the twentieth landing in the monument and dedicated the new stone that was set in the wall immediately below the original beehive.

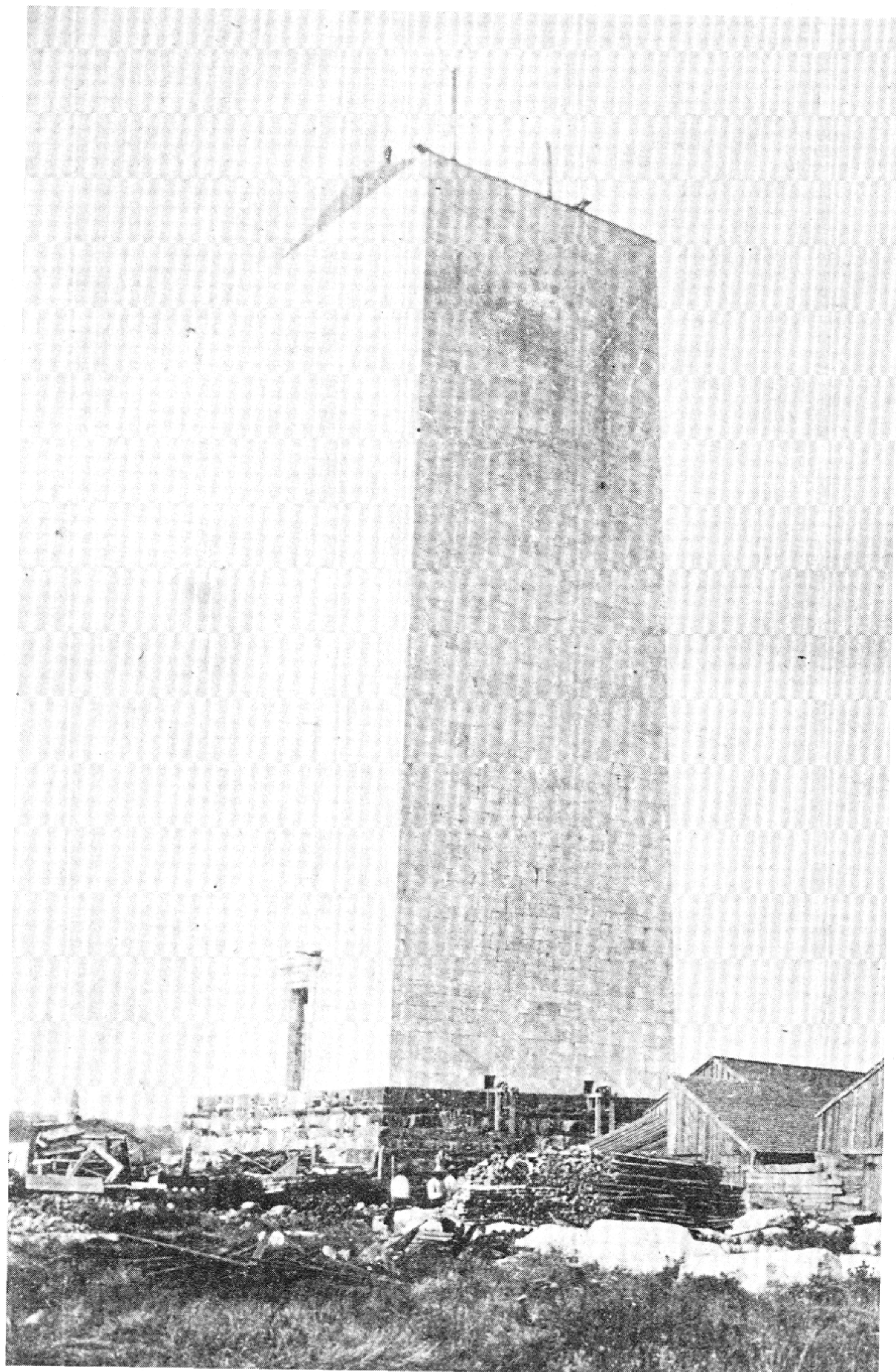
The late Howard R. Driggs, as president of the American Pioneer Trails Association, made the following statement during the dedication services:

⁷The following summary is an amalgamation of two Senate documents: *Senate Document 224, History of the Washington National Monument*, 57th Cong., 3d sess., February 1903, Frederick L. Harvey Government Printing Office, 1903; and *Senate Document 12, Utah State Memorial Stone*, 82d Cong., 1st sess., 12 March 1951, Washington, D.C., Govt. Print. Office.



Utah State Stone, Washington Monument

Author's Collection



Partially Completed Washington Monument *Architect of the Capitol*

There is vital meaning for all America and the world in the words and symbol carved on the old weathered stone. Deseret means honeybee. This and the beehive mean work, thrift, cooperation. "Holiness to the Lord" means reverence and righteousness. In other words, these stones stand for what has made and what will save our America: UNITY, FAITH, WORK. May they be preserved in this shrine for centuries to come.⁸

That stone silently reflects the pioneers' patriotism for the nation and their affection for George Washington.

As the nation's and the Mormons' history continue to be entwined, Washington will continue to hold interesting items of Mormon memorabilia.

⁸*Senate Document* 12, p. 9.