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Pamela Scott. *Fortress of Finance: The United States Treasury Building.* Washington DC: Treasury Historical Association, 2010. Illustrations. xiv + 318 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-615-36629-6.

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Commissioned by Mary Beth Corrigan

The Architecture of Money

Pamela Scott, the premier architectural historian of Washington's monumental buildings, has produced a handsome volume on the Treasury Building. In it, she charts the design and construction of both the current building (constructed between 1836 and 1869) and its predecessor (1798-1800). Drawing on primary sources, she provides a detailed and authoritative account of an arduous and complex building process.

The question that haunts the Treasury Building is: why is it where it is, blocking the reciprocal view, as laid out in Pierre L'Enfant's plan, between the Capitol and the White House? While Scott dismisses the tale of President Andrew Jackson impetuously sticking his cane in the ground and saying "build it here," her exhaustive research comes up only with conflicting accounts. Jackson did play a role in choosing a site for the building; his architect, Robert Mills, suggested other sites but ultimately acceded; and the preexisting Treasury and State buildings affected the new building's location. The vista down Pennsylvania Avenue ends at the south portico of the Treasury Building, as the author points out, but it seems like small consolation for an interruption to such a grand urban plan.

No architect had complete control over the design of the Treasury Building, but the list of eminent mid-nineteenth-century architects in addition to Mills was impressive: George Hadfield, James Hoban, Ammi B. Young, Thomas U. Walter, Isaiah Rogers, and Alfred B. Mullett. For none but the last, however, was their involvement satisfactory. Outside architects brought in to critique the work of the current architect vied for the job, congressional funding was erratic, workers went on strike repeatedly, suppliers reneged on contracts, and so on. Particularly dramatic is Scott's account of the public attacks on Mills's design; it is not a tale that would recommend anyone to government service!

The Treasury Building's four sides, arranged in a hollow square with a center wing, represent four building campaigns, four designers, and four designs. Most notable is the first, east wing, including Mills's enormous colonnade of thirty thirty-six-foot-high Ionic columns along Fifteenth Street. The wing is also the least satisfactory, putting all of the third-floor windows in deep shadow. Because of the wing's location up against the street, no monumental stairway was possible. Mullett described Mills's colonnade as "'a box of cigars escaped as they stood on end,"' but Scott is more generous in her evaluation (p. 266).

Scott places Mills's use of the Ionic order in the context of his other work in Washington. Mills used the Greek Doric order for the Patent Office, the Greek Ionic for the Treasury Building, and the Roman Corinthian for the General Post Office. In addition, Mills found ancient building types to be appropriate: a temple form for the Patent Office, a stoa or market house for the Treasury Building, and a palace for the General Post Office. Mills designed two other monuments in Washington: an obelisk for the monument to George Washington and an unbuilt medieval design for the Smithsonian Institution.

Scott is concerned with not only the exterior but also the interior. J. Goldsborough Bruff's designs for elaborate chandeliers, railings, and other decorative elements receive detailed attention and analysis. She also addresses the building's landscape, including its evolving relationship to the White House, an aspect that is lost amid today's security concerns. Scott's consideration of technological innovations that affected the building is also intriguing; she mentions steam power, lithography, and photography, as well as the "Boston Granite Style," as promoted by A. B. Young, which resulted in a pier and spandrel type of design on the south wing.

While Scott demonstrates persuasively that the evolution of the various designs is significant, her determina-

tion to relate all of the stops and starts and wrong turns of each architect's design tends to confuse the story. More summary or introductory paragraphs that describe the final outcome might have helped the reader. She also assumes that the reader has a basic knowledge of Washington's architectural history. The architects are introduced perfunctorily, as if the reader should be aware of their backgrounds and careers. She makes brief reference to the Department of the Treasury's larger role as the home of the supervising architect and the vast building program that that office oversaw nationwide. And this is not the book to go to for social history related to the Treasury. The role of the department in employing women and African Americans in the mid-nineteenth century is referred to only in passing.

But these very failings point out what a rich topic the Treasury Building is (and what a huge volume this could have been). More investigation could lead the reader in a host of different directions, but the author keeps a tight focus on the design and construction, ending her story in 1869 with the completion of the north wing. President Ulysses S. Grant's inaugural ball, accommodating six thousand guests in that not-quite-finished space, serves as a climax. This book is as opulent as that event; production qualities of this volume are excellent, with large photographs and an ample use of color. And deservedly so: while the exterior of the building may be an unrelieved gray, the interior is, in places, a riot of color, with tiled floors, marble walls, gilt trim, and frescoed ceilings. An appendix outlining the establishment of each division within the Department of the Treasury, in effect describing the evolving function of the building, rounds out the volume.

The magnificence of this building is somewhat lost today. I recently passed by the Treasury Building and watched as a family of tourists confronted the sturdy metal fence in front of the building; the boy asked his father if the building were a jail. This book reminds us of a time when government buildings were designed to inspire pride in all Americans. It also reminds us that the process of building such monuments is never easy. *The Fortress of Finance* is a well researched, definitive account of the design and construction of an architecturally contested building, whose grandeur reflects the nineteenth-century sense of Washington's role as the national capital.

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