

# Capitol Architect Under New Attack

**By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE**

The current fight over the proposed \$34-million extension of the West Front of the United States Capitol is generating enough heat and smoke to obscure a \$75-million Capitol Hill project going ahead in near-secrecy that informed observers are convinced contains the promise of another Rayburn Building.

Moving along quietly behind the Capitol smokescreen is the James Madison Memorial Library, a branch of the Library of Congress to be constructed on the block bounded by Independence Avenue, C Street and First and Second Streets, adjacent to the Capitol Building.

Although it has never been officially announced, the architects will be the same ones who remodeled the Capitol's East Front and have the contract for the West Front ex-



Associated Press

**J. George Stewart**

tension now under debate.

The Library's \$75-million starting budget is about the same as that of the Rayburn Building, which grew and

grew, and cost close to \$122-million before it was finished.

The new library is another undertaking of the 76-year-old Architect of the Capitol, J. George Stewart, who is not an architect but an engineer. His projects include the debated East Front remodeling and the new Senate Office Building completed in the late 1950's, which was castigated by the architectural press and qualified professionals on esthetic and economic grounds until his later and larger Rayburn Building diverted the critics' full scorn and indignation.

Mr. Stewart is the man who decides what gets built where on Capitol Hill, subject only to questions from Congress, for whom he builds, with no Fine Arts Commission, no National Capital Planning

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# Capitol Architect Comes Under Attack Over His Plans for New Library

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Commission, no National Capitol Landmarks Committee approval or design or esthetic review of any kind. And like Lola in "Damn Yankees," what Mr. Stewart wants, Mr. Stewart gets, as his construction record shows.

What Mr. Stewart wants now is the West Front extension and the Madison Library.

On Oct. 19, 1965, Congressional authorization of the Madison Library became law. As the direct result of public and professional outcry about the Rayburn Building, however, the law contained a special control.

It authorized and directed the Architect of the Capitol to construct the library, including the preparation of all necessary designs, plans and specifications, "after consultation with the committees designated by the American Institute of Architects."

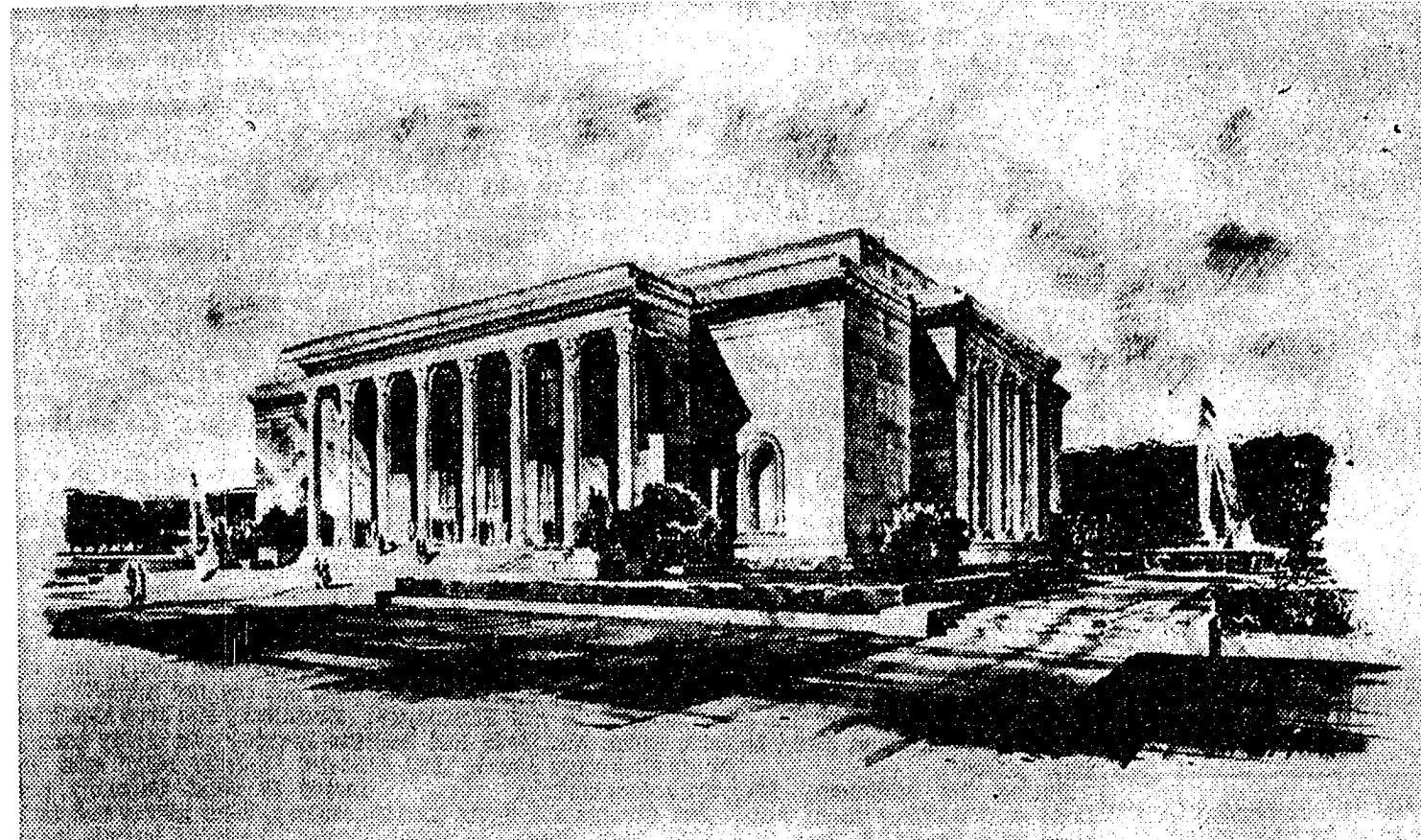
It was understood that the purpose of this clause was to open Mr. Stewart's closed shop to the advice and opinion of the country's leading architectural organization for the best and broadest approach to both the commission and the design.

On Oct. 31, \$500,000 was appropriated for preliminary plans and cost estimates. The Architect of the Capitol gave the contract for these preliminary studies to his Capitol remodeling group. They are Roscoe DeWitt and Fred Hardison of Dallas; Alfred Easton Poor and Albert Homer Swanke of New York, and Jesse M. Shelton of Atlanta.

In December, the American Institute of Architects appointed its advisory committee. The members are Charles M. Nes Jr. of Baltimore, now A.I.A. president; George E. Kassabaum of St. Louis; Nicholas Satterlee and David N. Yerkes of Washington, and Llewellyn W. Pitts of Beaumont, Tex.

## Committee Is Named

After Congress reconvened in January, a Coordinating Committee was appointed to represent 22 members of various Congressional commissions and committees having jurisdiction over the Madison Library, to get the project going. This Coordinating Committee met for the first time on March 10. The Librarian of Congress and the Architect of the Capitol were



An artist's concept of the James Madison Memorial Library in Washington, prepared at the inception of the project in 1962 under the direction of the Architect of the Capitol.

present, but the Institute of Architects was not represented.

At that initial meeting, the architects for the Madison Library were selected and approved. They were the same group hired for the East and West Front remodeling of the Capitol and for the preliminary studies of the Library, with the addition of J. P. Almond of Atlanta.

The argument for their selection was that since these architects had completed the preliminary library studies, it would be both ethical and economical to give them the job. According to professional practice, however, it is quite customary for preliminary studies to be conducted by one group of architects or consultants and for design contracts to be given to another. Applications of at least 20 qualified, interested firms were turned down.

Of the 22 members of Congress responsible for the Library project, six plus a

Senator's aide approved the commission for the \$75-million monument at that March 10 meeting. Later, the necessary signatures were obtained from the others, often through an aide or a secretary.

On May 25, the A.I.A., tired of waiting for a call for advice, sent a delegation to Mr. Stewart to find out the status A.I.A. committee at the beginning of the project. The visitors were stunned to hear that the architects for the Library had been chosen.

Mr. Stewart told the delegation that he would call on the advisory committee as soon as the architects' contract was signed. Bitter controversy has followed.

At Congressional hearings in June, while the West Front controversy made a convenient red herring, the Madison Library affair seethed invisibly, except to architectural watchdogs.

Mr. Stewart contended that the law merely called for consultation before construction, not before awarding the com-

mission or developing the design. It is not a rendering of the building as now proposed—those plans are still being prepared; rather, the sketch was made to show what the library might look like.

mission or developing the design.

Senator A. S. Mike Monroney stated the law's intention had clearly been violated. The wording, he said, was a mandate for Mr. Stewart to use the A.I.A. consultants from the beginning, for guidance in all phases of the project from architect selection to design development. Senator William Proxmire noted that competition had been bypassed.

The A.I.A. cried foul. The architects accused Mr. Stewart, who is known as an experienced political maneuverer, of having circumvented the provisions of the law to railroad through his own preselected architects.

They charged that his action presented them with exactly the situation that the law was designed to avoid: an architectural fait accompli. Ethically, they were unable to discuss the merits or qualifications of architects already under contract, and the award of the commission had irrevocably determined the nature of the design.

After the furore of the hear-

ing of July, and it then met with the associated architects for the Library on July 15. The result of the meeting was that all agreed on the necessity of a fine building, which smoothed some ruffled feelings, but left the basic situation unchanged.

In professional circles, the associated architects, who are somewhat weighted toward Mr. Stewart's age group and personal tastes, are known to be sympathetic to the kind of "classicism" that the Architect of the Capitol has favored for the Rayburn and Senate Office buildings.

Critics have characterized them as the last gasp of the early 20th-century academic establishment and its last toe-hold in Government construction. Protests have centered on the fact that the toe-hold seems to be a stranglehold on Capitol Hill, with a virtual Congressional endorsement of the faded past over a vigorous present.

What Mr. Stewart has had in mind for the building was evidenced at the time of site selec-

tion, in 1962, when a sketch was made under the direction of his office to suggest what the Library might look like. It was a temple type of structure topping vast subterranean areas of a kind that critics of the Washington scene call not only tired, but exhausted.

As things stand now, observers feel that Mr. Stewart has once more had his way, despite the protests of his critics.

The questions being raised are the usual ones of how it all happened. Were the Congressmen on the Coordinating Committee unfamiliar with the provisions and intent of the law under which they were operating when they authorized the selection of the architects at their first meeting, without A.I.A. advice? If there was any doubt about it, why did they accept without reservation Mr. Stewart's interpretation of the role of the A.I.A. advisory committee?

Were the Congressmen who later signed their approval, apparently without investigation, aware of these factors? Were they just busy, or bamboozled?

Other questions are beginning to be asked.

Is Mr. Stewart's close architectural club invulnerable?

Why does Congress continue to have such blind confidence in his selections in spite of the fact that they evoke almost universal distress and dismay among critics and professionals?

Should the architects of the controversial Capitol remodeling also be used for the Madison Library? Or should it not have been mandatory, in view of the size, expense and national importance of this project, to consider other qualified architects including the country's cream?

Mr. Stewart argues that his recommendations are confirmed by his own architectural advisers, a circular arrangement which includes the designer of the Rayburn Building.

The only certainty among experts is that the Madison Library seems already set in the path of the style and standards that have made the Rayburn Building an international scandal. They said it could not be done again, but Mr. Stewart may prove them wrong. The wags are already saying that one bad building deserves another.