

Frederic G. Mather
Photographs of Carvings in the New York State Capitol, ca. 1890

PRI3199

QUANTITY: 25 sepia-tone photographs and 2 architectural elevation drawings (various sizes; most mounted on 43 x 35.5 cm. board which is very brittle)

ACCESS: Open for research

ACQUISITION: Unknown; accessioned December 1975

RESTRICTIONS: White cotton gloves must be worn when handling photographs.

PROCESSED BY: Phil Brown, Clerk, and Vicki Weiss. Senior Librarian, Manuscripts & Special Collections, April 2008

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

The Albany city directories for the 1880s and 1890s carry listings for Frederic G. Mather, journalist, at 120 Lancaster [Street], and Brown Studio, 15 & 17 North Pearl [Street]. Isaac Perry was the architect of the New York State Capitol from 1883 through its completion in 1899.

HISTORICAL NOTE:

This historical note is extracted from pages 97-[117] of Cecil R. Roseberry's *Capitol Story* ([Albany]: State of New York, 1964)

Isaac Perry "doted on carving" and the "majority of the carvings, and especially the portraiture, were created during the 1890s." Roseberry noted that "the stone carvers of America enjoyed their last unalloyed field-day on the Capitol at Albany. The taste for that type of ornamentation in public buildings waned soon after."

Perry hired Louis J. Hinton to serve as foreman of the carvers on the Great Western Staircase and Hinton designed all the purely decorative carving.

"Variety was the invincible rule on that staircase. Not even the smallest of decorative themes could be repeated in two different locations. For the sake of authenticity, Hinton hiked about the countryside collecting foliage and flowers for his designs – roses, clematis, trumpet-vine, tulips, passion-flowers, lilies, and grape vines ...

"Perry's rapt interest in the carvings and his rigid standards for them are reflected in the specifications for a contract (in 1895) to complete the upper portions of the Western Staircase: 'The carving of the corbels, cornices and label moldings is to have deep sinkages and be made free and bold, in accordance with the full-size plaster models. There must be no feeling of monotony in the design and much variety must be obtained in the decorative work. Great care is to be taken in carving the heads, as well as the foliage. The whole work is to be cut deep, clean and sharp, so that the light and shadow will be satisfactory to the capitol commissioner.'"

The carvers sculpted the faces and designs in Corsehill freestone, imported from Scotland, which had a "soft workability when fresh from the quarry (it hardened after exposure to the air)."

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE:

This collection consists of photographs of capitals, corbels, a lintel, and the ceiling of the New York State Assembly Chamber plus two elevation drawings of the exterior of the New York State Capitol in Albany, New York. On the back of most of the images, in handwriting: "F.G. Mather, Compliments of I.G. Perry."

Architecturally speaking, a capital is the head or uppermost part of a column, a corbel is the supporting projection from the face of a wall, and a lintel spans an opening, such as a door or window, to carry a superstructure.

Included are sculpted portraits of Champlain, Christopher Columbus, James Fenimore Cooper, Henry Hudson, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and Amerigo Vespucci.

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS:

Photo No.	Caption / [Remarks] (Size given in parentheses is the size of the photograph.)
	Capitals
1	View of Western Staircase, First Floor, New York State Capitol, Albany N.Y. / [A capital containing one row of dentils and two rows of stylized leaves.] (32 x 27 cm.)
2	View of Western Staircase, First Floor, Looking Northeast, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [Capitals of stylized leaves top square columns from round arches] (26 x 34 cm.)
3	Capital in Western Staircase, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [Close up of a capital which contains stylized leaves, geometric designs, and an animal head] (25.5 x 30.5 cm.)
4	Capital in Western Staircase, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [A capital containing stylized leaves, geometric designs and a portrait of a woman in a rondelle] (26.5 x 32 cm.)
5	Capital in Western Staircase, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [A capital on an outside corner; contains acanthus leaves and stylized leaves with a male face and a geometric design] (26.5 x 27 cm.)
6	[Capital entitled] Champlain, 1567-1635 / [This capital contains a likeness of Champlain, surrounded by stylized leaves, a compass, family emblem, rope, acorns, and a dart-and-shield motif.] (26.5 x 36 cm.)
7	Capital in Western Staircase, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. [entitled] J. Fenimore Cooper, 1789-1851 / [This capital contains a likeness of James Fenimore Cooper, faces of characters from his novels, stylized oak leaves and acorns, and maple leaves.] (26.5 x 35.5 cm.)
8	Capital in Western Staircase, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. [entitled] Jefferson, 1743-1826 / [This capital contains a likeness of Thomas Jefferson and is

	surrounded by stylized leaves and a cherubic face.] Label on back: "This photogene made by Brown Studio, 15 & 17 N. Pearl St., Albany, N.Y." (26.5 x 34 cm.)
9	[Capital entitled] "Henry Hudson" / [This capital contains a likeness of Henry Hudson below a dart-and-shield motif surrounded by stylized leaves containing on the right a bird (peacock?) and on the right two gargoyle faces.] (27.5 x 35 cm.)
10	Capital in Western Staircase, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. [entitled] Americus Vesputius, 1451-1512 / [This capital contains a likeness of Americus Vesputius [Amerigo Vespucci] surrounded by stylized leaves; on the right is an ivy-basket motif surmounted by a bow and a quiver of arrows; on the left are stylized grape leaves surmounted by a bird.] (26.5 x 35.5 cm.)
11	Capital in Western Staircase, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. [entitled] Washington / [This capital contains a likeness of George Washington. It is surrounded by stylized leaves.] (26.5 x 35.5 cm.)
	Corbels
12	Corbel under Balcony, Western Staircase, Third Floor, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [This corbel contains a likeness of Christopher Columbus and a rondelle containing a sailing ship on either side of the portrait.] (24.5 x 34 cm.)
13	Corbel under Balcony, Western Staircase, Third Floor, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [Enlarged detail of photograph 12, centering in on the portrait and the ships.] (24.5 x 34 cm.)
14	Corbel, South Terrace, Over Colonnade, Eastern Approach, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [This corbel contains the face of a balding man with a beard surrounded by stylized leaves, wheat and corn.] (26.5 x 35.5 cm.)
15	Corbel, South Terrace, Over Colonnade, Eastern Approach, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [This corbel contains a face with a hat surrounded by stylized branches and leaves.] (26.5 x 35.5 cm.)
16	Corbel, South Terrace, Over Colonnade, Eastern Approach, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [This corbel contains a face with a trimmed beard surrounded by Masonic Order symbols and stylized leaves.] Label on back: "This photogene made by Brown Studio, 15 & 17 N. Pearl St., Albany, N.Y." (26.5 x 34.5 cm.)
17	Corbel Under Balcony, Western Staircase, Third Floor, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [This corbel contains an image of a ship powered by both sail and steam surrounded by stylized leaves.] (27 x 34 cm.)
18	Corbel Under Balcony, Western Staircase, Third Floor, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [Close-up and detailed photograph of photo 17 showing details of the ship] (26.5 x 34 cm.)
19	Corbel Under Balcony, Western Staircase, Third Floor, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. [This corbel contains an image of a square-sail Viking-style boat with oars surrounded by stylized leaves.] (21 x 32 cm.)
20	Corbel, Over South Terrace, Over Colonnade, Eastern Approach, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [Stylized leaves and branches around a quatrefoil rondelle.] (26.5 x 35.5 cm.)
21	Corbel, South Terrace, Over Colonnade, Eastern Approach, New York State Capitol, Albany, NY. / [Linear quatrefoil surrounded by stylized leaves] (26.5 x 35.5 cm.)
22	Semi-Circle Corbel at the End of the Platform Dividing the Upper Run of the Stairs. New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [This corbel contains two figures, one of a man

	with beard on the right, the other of an animal in the center, both surrounded by stylized leaves and plant parts.] Label on back: "This photogene made by Brown Studio, 15 & 17 N. Pearl St., Albany, N.Y." (26.5 x 34 cm.)
	Lintel
23	Lintel over Entrance Door to State Library, New York State Capitol, Albany, N.Y. / [The lintel is divided horizontally into three sections. The top division contains stylized leaves. The middle division contains two birds divided vertically by a face wearing a helmet, probably the Greek goddess Athena. The lowest division contains stylized leaves surrounding the words STATE LIBRARY.] (14 x 33.5 cm.)
	Assembly Chamber
24	Photograph showing ceiling, chandeliers, visitors' balcony, lights and speaker's podium. [Penciled on back: Assembly Chamber] Stamped on back: F.A. Tremaine "Photo" Pittsburgh, Penna. (Item No. 312A) (26.5 x 35 cm.)
25	Photograph showing ceiling, chandeliers, and a bronze plaque of the seal of the State of New York. [Penciled on back: Assembly Chamber] Stamped on back: F.A. Tremaine "Photo" Pittsburgh, Penna. (Item No. 313) (26.5 x 35 cm.)
	Architectural Elevation Drawings
26	Elevation of Eastern Entrance and Main Gable, State Capital, Albany, N.Y. / [Detail of the center of the east front. Scale is: ¼ inch equal 1 foot]. Stamped on back: Frederic G. Mather, 120 Lancaster St., Albany, N.Y. (34.5 x 17.5 cm.)
27	Elevation South Side of Eastern Approach / [Detail of south side of front exterior staircase. Scale is: ¼ inch equals 1 foot.] Stamped on back: Frederic G. Mather, 120 Lancaster St., Albany, N.Y.; however, most of the information has been trimmed away. (32 x 26 cm.)

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