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NPS Form 10-900

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name George Washington Building

other names/site number Virginia State Office Building; VDHR File Number 127-6518

### 2. Location

street & number 1100 Bank Street

☐ not for publication

city or town Richmond

☐ vicinity

state Virginia code VA county Richmond (City) code 760 zip code 23219

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

     national X statewide X local

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official

March 25, 2011  
Date

Deputy Director / Deputy SHPO  
Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register

☐ determined eligible for the National Register

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register

☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other (explain:)

*for Edson H. Beall*  
Signature of the Keeper

*5-18-11*  
Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- |                                     |                  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | private          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | public - Local   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | public - State   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | public - Federal |

##### Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- |                                     |             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | district    |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | site        |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | structure   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | object      |

##### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
0	0	buildings
2	0	<b>Total</b>

##### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

##### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

#### 6. Function or Use

##### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Government Office

##### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Government Office

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Skyscraper (Italian Renaissance/Beaux Arts)

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Stone

walls: Stone: Sandstone; Brick, Terra Cotta

roof: Metal

other:

## Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

See Continuation Sheets for Narrative Description Section

### Summary Paragraph

### Narrative Description

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

☒ A

Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ B

Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ C

Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ D

Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:


- |   |  |
|---|--|
| A | owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.           |
| B | removed from its original location.  |
| C | a birthplace or grave.   |
| D | a cemetery.  |
| E | a reconstructed building, object, or structure.                            |
| F | a commemorative property.  |
| G | less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years. |

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**Architectural Description-Summary Paragraph**

Designed by William Leigh Carneal Jr. (1881-1958) and James Markam Ambler Johnston (1885-1974), the George Washington Building is a V-shaped (or U-shaped), twelve-story skyscraper completed in 1923, and officially opened on February 22, 1924 (while opened on George Washington's birthday, the building was not called the George Washington Building until 1980). The building exhibits the Beaux Arts approach to skyscraper design with most of the detailing in Classical and Renaissance motifs. The building has a one-story basement, two-story limestone base, nine-story brick shaft, and attic story with a deep cornice that features elaborate terracotta ornament. The site, on the southeast corner of Capitol Square, has a steep descending grade, and the basement, which is submerged on the front facade, has full exposure on the rear façade (Bank Street entrance), and is made of rusticated ashlar-faced stone. A circular water fountain is included within the boundary. Predating the Washington Building, the fountain is part of the 1850s John Notman plan for Capitol Square. The current fountain has been updated, materials probably dating to the 1920s, and it is a significant part of the setting for the Washington Building's Capitol Square entrance, tying the building, axially, to the historic State Capitol Building.

**Narrative Description**

**Construction Materials**

The Washington Building has a steel frame core structure with a variety of masonry cladding: grey and tan limestone (possibly granite at the low and subgrade levels), brick, and terra cotta.

**Overall Form and Style**

The George Washington Building is a traditional early twentieth century skyscraper. Essentially modeled on Italian Renaissance palazzo form, the Washington Building elevation is comprised of the tripartite formula: base, shaft and capital (analogous to the sections of a classical column) and also following the "base, shaft, and pediment" formula popularized by architect Louis Sullivan. As on the traditional Italian palazzo, typically the base or first floor was executed in heavier materials, larger block and fortress-like detailing. The piano nobile was often the second floor and had more delicate detailing. The third floor terminated at the roof line often with a finely-detailed cornice. Adapting this formula to skyscraper design meant that the shaft became the largest expanse of vertical extension, generally the area above what would be considered the piano nobile. The Washington building exhibits the palazzo formula with a base (rusticated basement) a piano nobile section of two stories, a middle section (brick shaft) and capital/pediment (an attic story with a complex entablature).

The Washington Building base is two stories on the Capitol Square side and reads as three stories on the Bank Street elevation. The basement, at Bank Street level, is executed in a rusticated ashlar-faced grey stone with only two courses of this grey stone showing at grade level of the Capitol Square elevation. The grey ashlar exhibits wide squared off, deep joints and is emphatically more rusticated than the finer upper story tan-colored stone work. The two-story section that reads as a piano nobile starts at Capitol Square grade level. The large

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tan ashlar panels on the piano nobile have fine joints and feature more refined levels of detailing around windows and doors.

The base transitions to the shaft with several simple belt courses (four levels). The lower course features an ivy leaf pattern while the upper course is in leaf and dart motif. The shaft, which is comprised of tan brick, somewhat matching the tan of the piano nobile, rises nine stories. There is no ornamentation on the shaft section.

The shaft terminates into the twelfth attic story which is a transition into an elaborate cornice. The twelfth story wall is defined at bottom edge by a row of dentils, and panels with shield motifs alternate with window openings. The most elaborate panel motif features an oval shield bracketed by torches. A course of swags runs above the windows, just below the upper wall entablature. The entablature is in the Roman Corinthian order and features, in ascending layers: modillion blocks, an egg and dart course, console modillions (that alternate with inset rosettes on the soffit), and a cymatium that features an Acanthus leaf pattern.

The roof features a mechanical penthouse for elevator machinery. While not visible from most common vantage points, especially in 1923, when few buildings were taller than the Washington Building, the penthouse has subtle design features. Completed in tan brick with square brick panels, the penthouse has a simple Tuscan entablature that sits at middle level in the tan brick wall. The large cornice and penthouse details are executed in tan terra cotta somewhat lighter in color than the tan brick. The brick and terra cotta has recently been cleaned.

Four of eight wall corners have been rounded. The rounding extends from the base through the attic floor and is expressed at the corners of the entablature. The two wall corner joints at the Bank Street entrance have been left as a straight edge.

Window openings are organized in different vertical patterns around the building. The 3-bay entrance elevation walls, on Bank Street and Capitol Square sides have openings that are evenly spaced. The two walls flanking the entrance elevations feature a pattern of single and paired openings. The single openings appear to be used (in vertical rows at edges) to bracket the paired openings (similar to "closer" bricks). Pairing openings has a tendency to emphasize the vertical line of the building on the horizontally-longer walls. A similar use of paired openings appears, for instance, on McKim, Mead and White's U-shaped Municipal Building in New York City (1908-1910).



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## **Exterior Architectural Details**

### *Exterior Window Treatments*

Keeping with the tradition of Beaux Arts Renaissance Revival, the Washington Building windows at the lower stories, the rusticated basement and piano nobile, are more elaborate in detailing and feature a variety of design. Above the rusticated basement and first two stories, the windows are simple double-hung sash with unadorned openings.

The windows at the rusticated level, on Bank Street and side alley elevations (south and east sides), are deeply inset in archtop openings. These windows have four-light transoms and six-light casement sash. The first floor windows (piano nobile) are set in large openings and are six-light casement style with four-light square transoms. Above the Bank Street entrance, in the 3-bay wide wall, the windows are set in pediment topped aedicules. On all other sides of the building, the first floor windows are set in aedicules with simply flat-top hoods with molding.

During the recent renovation, the fixed plate glass windows, dating to post 1960 renovations, were removed and replaced with operable double-hung sash that matched the original (1923) window design and functionality. The new windows have a light tan color meant to contrast and compliment the generally tan palette of the masonry work.

### *Exterior Entrance Treatments*

The two primary, and most ceremonial, entrances are at the center of the building on both Capitol Square and Bank Street elevations. Both of these entrances access directly to elevator lobbies. There are also two secondary entrances at the north and west elevations. All entrances have classical detailing of varying elaboration. The Capitol Square entry is the most formal and ceremonial. The door is under a large Ionic portico. The Ionic order echoes that of the Capitol Building. (Carneal, Johnston and Wright would rework the nearby Oliver Hill Building, in 1929, simplifying its design and adding Scamozzi Ionic columns that match Jefferson's columns on the Capitol.) The four columns in the Washington Building entrance are set in antis, on a four step crepidoma, each on a high plinth. The columns support an entablature that is labeled STATE OFFICE BUILDING in the portico frieze. Ferruccio Leguaili's sculpture of two recumbent figures frames a shield with the seal of Virginia, which is centered over the lettering. The ceiling of the portico features a coffered pattern, echoing the coffered ceiling in the first floor lobby. The door has a classical surround, with a row of dentils just below a hood, which is supported on two console brackets. The wall underneath the portico curves at either end of the space and window openings with moldings follow the curve. Two five-globe classically-inspired lamp posts stand on the stylobate, just in front of the portico.

The door at Bank Street is nearly identical, but features a metal transom screen. Both primary entrances have subtle setback pediments above the hoods. The Bank Street entrance is flanked by period globe-top lamps. The

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western entrance, also facing Capitol Square, has a more delicate segmental arch hood with modillions and dentils supported on console brackets. The double leaf doors have three panels each and are the most elaborate exterior doors on the building. This entrance also features cut stone steps with two classically-inspired lamp posts (replicas). The northern entrance, which faces the Hill building, is simple with a surround that matches flanking window surround treatments.

### **Interior Plan-Offices**

The Washington building has elevator lobbies at the center of the building on all twelve floors and at basement level. Access to office spaces, in most cases, is at one end of the lobby space, and restrooms are at the other end. The offices are arranged on either side of a single corridor that extends along the two legs of the "V" plan. All of the office areas in the building have been remodeled over the years and the current double-loaded hallway plan may not follow the same early office/hallway plan. All of the finishes in the office area date to the recent renovation completed in 2008. The interior walls are finished in sheetrock. The structural steel posts, clad with sheetrock are visible in areas where walls have been removed and space opened. The new operable sash windows open to about 1 foot at higher floors (for safety purposes).

The most intact areas of the interior are the lobbies, the stairwells and the machinery penthouse. The lobbies feature marble cladding and light fixtures based on historic period style fixtures. The stairwells still contain the original steel stair systems and the penthouse features the older elevator motors, which may date to the 1940s-50s.

### *Lobby Design*

The first floor lobby, accessed from Capitol Square, is the most elaborate historic architectural interior in the building. The rectangular room has an entrance at each end, and elevator doors and stair access on the room sides. The walls are clad in a pinkish-tan marble from floor to ceiling with marble floors. The coffered ceiling is above gilded cornice trim and each coffer is gilded with bead and reel and egg and dart molding. The wall has several blind niches and blind arched transoms (over doors). There is one arched opening in the corner of the lobby (which may have accessed an office in the original design). The blind niche adjacent to the elevator features the following inscription:

STATE OFFICE BUILDING  
ERECTED 1923

BUILDING COMMISSION  
GOVERNOR E LEE TRINKLE  
LEIUT GOV JUNIUS E WEST  
RICHARD L BREWER JR.  
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE  
WILLIAM H JEFFREYS JR

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FROM THE SENATE  
JAMES R JONES  
FROM THE HOUSE

CARNEAL & JOHNSTON  
ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS  
JOHN T WILSON CO INC  
SUPERVISING CONTRACTOR

The first floor lobby is lit by three hanging light fixtures. Each fixture is suspended from four strands of chain and consists of a circular brass rack with twelve globes mounted underneath. The upper floors have a similar design, but only feature four globes per fixture. All of these fixtures are replicas based on 1920s period style light fixtures, installed in 2008.

The upper floor lobbies have marble floors and wainscoting with plaster upper walls and a cornice molding. The original brass mail chute has been left intact in all lobbies (though not in use). Under the label "U.S. Mail," the manufacturer's name still appears: "American Mailing Device Corporation, New York."

The Machinery penthouse contains three elevator motors. Hollow tile wall material is visible at this level. This functional area has a concrete floor.

*Water Fountain*

The water fountain in front of the Washington Building, included within the boundary of this nomination, was built as part of the John Notman 1850 design for the Square. A second fountain in the southwest corner of the Square also dates to this plan. The fountain is circular with a ornamental iron fence set on a low brick wall. The fountain's pool is inside a circular planting bed. The pool has cut stone edges. The fountain is set in a brick path system that has been updated in recent years. The fountain dates to c. 1920.



**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Politics/Government

**Period of Significance**

1922-1960

**Significant Dates**

1924

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

William Leigh Carneal Jr. (Architect)

James Markam Ambler Johnston (Architect)

Ferruccio Leguaili (Sculptor)

John T. Wilson (Contractor)

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The beginning of the period of significance starts with the groundbreaking and ends in 1960. While significant for its high style architectural design, the Washington Building project became a subject of moderate controversy, primarily due to its proximity to Thomas Jefferson's historic State Capitol building. As it was proposed in 1922, the design was to be in a direct viewshed from the portico of the Capitol and it was to occupy land on Capitol Square. The debate that took place in planning the building started in the year of its construction, when ground was broken in August 1922. The building was the first state office building built with an architectural program for that purpose and it has remained a state office building to present. Since the historic use has been consistent, 1960, the fifty-year point from this nomination, has been chosen for the end of the period of significance.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

Not Applicable for this resource

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

See Continuation Sheet

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance)

See Continuation Sheet

**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

See Continuation Sheet

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The George Washington Building is locally significant, under Criterion C, in the area of Architecture, as a fine example of early twentieth century high-style Beaux Arts-Renaissance skyscraper design. It ranks as one of the most intact skyscraper exteriors from this period in Richmond, as many of the similar examples have lost their large terra cotta cornices. Completed in 1923, the building was designed by William Leigh Carneal Jr. and James Markam Ambler Johnston (Carneal and Johnston). The building was recently renovated with operable double-hung sash windows, exterior entrance lamps restored, and all masonry cleaned. Of the 1910s and 1920s skyscrapers surviving in downtown Richmond, it is one of the best examples, especially in the group featuring cornice structure on all elevations. In addition to the building, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century water fountain is included as a contributing structure. The fountain design dates to architect John Notman's 1850 plan, but the current fountain dates to later renovations. The fountain is included as a contributing structure because it created the axis point for the orientation of the building and is a critical part of the immediate setting.

As the first dedicated state office building for the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Washington Building is of statewide significance, under Criterion A, in the area of Government and Politics. The construction of the building was a subject of controversy at the period and involved a group of political and community leaders who debated the appropriateness of planning a large modern building directly in the viewshed of Thomas Jefferson's State Capitol of 1788. The debate about appropriateness of building on Capitol Square went beyond the local level of state planning. It is therefore appropriate to consider Criterion A at state level of significance.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

*Skyscraper Design*

Skyscraper design was pioneered in the United States by leading architects of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: Louis Sullivan, Daniel Burnham, and Holabird and Roche (to name just a few). Their ability to build tall was tied directly to the improvements of technology, namely the advances in the use of steel frame. Louis Sullivan developed the base, shaft and pediment formula and developed his own architectural vocabulary to break with the long use and rehashing of historic styles. His Wainwright (St. Louis, 1890) and Guaranty (Buffalo, 1894) buildings became iconic for architects working in America's large cities at the turn of the century. At the same period, the firm of McKim, Mead and White perfected and refined the vocabulary of historic styles and obtained large scale commissions, leading the City Beautiful movement and encouraging multiple strains of classical revival styles. The Washington Building, like many of the other downtown skyscrapers built in the first quarter of the twentieth century, used modern technology and showed strong classical elements in its design.

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*Carneal and Johnston Firm Early Years*

Carneal and Johnston formed their firm in 1907-08 and most of their early commissions were in Richmond where they employed Beaux Arts and Revival architectural vocabulary in their 1910s designs. The first quarter of the twentieth century was a period of steady economic growth in Richmond and this was manifested in the rise of the skyline, mostly in or near the financial district, centered along Main Street. Carneal and Johnston designed their Chamber of Commerce Building (known more popularly as the Eskimo Pie Building) in 1912, the same year that Alfred Bossom's First National Bank was completed. Both buildings employed the base, shaft and pediment model and incorporated large columns in a show of Beaux Arts temple-of-commerce flair. Bossom's bank had one of the more elaborate and deep cornices of this early skyscraper group (unfortunately, the cornice was later removed). The nearby 1909 Heritage Building, recently restored, was a more rare hybrid of Art Nouveau and Renaissance styles. It also had a deep and umbrella-like cornice (which has been restored). The Chamber of Commerce building was one of Carneal and Johnston's largest commissions to date at \$190,00.<sup>1</sup> In the 1920s, the Virginia State Office Building was the firm's opportunity to make a significant design statement in the park-like setting of Capitol Square. Although the original plan was for a shorter building, the eventual expanded project resulted in a building that represents one of best of skyscraper designs in 1920s Richmond. Finished in 1923, it just predates the predominant trend towards Art Deco design in the City's skyscrapers that would occur in the late 1920s. The Washington Building was in the last group of ornate Beaux Arts skyscrapers to populate downtown Richmond. The John Marshall Hotel (Marcellus Wright, 1927), a stripped Beaux Arts design with Colonial Revival elements, would be one of the last Revival-era skyscrapers built. By the time that Merrill Lee and Marcellus Wright designed the Jefferson Building (just east of the Washington Building) in 1956, another state office building, skyscraper design solidly exhibited the influence of the International Style and all downtown buildings of the 1950s and later, were markedly more functional and expressive of materials over historic stylistic references.

*Influences*

Referred to as a "corner cupboard," the State Office Building is the only large-scale V-plan building in downtown Richmond dating to the 1920s<sup>2</sup>. Carneal and Johnston may have been looking to other examples of public buildings for their design ideas. The site, at the corner of Capitol Square's well established landscape, prompted them to consider a more interesting design—breaking out of the architectural box. So many of the designs for commercial skyscrapers on downtown parcels called for filling out a rectangular site. Working on Capitol Square offered the opportunity to vary the building plan and demanded a more ceremonial gesture. Buildings had taken unusual shapes, such as the well known Flat Iron Building in New York City, but Carneal and Johnston's positioning of the Washington Building was a design response to the unique conditions of working at the edge of the park-like setting, a green space that contained one of the most revered buildings in Virginia, Jefferson's State Capitol. The V-plan, on axis with the Capitol and John Notman's 1850's fountain

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was a way to build a large building and make a ceremonial gesture to the Square in a formal manner. The possible influence for the design is McKim, Mead and White's Municipal Building in New York City (1908-1910). The "V" (or "U") plan of the Municipal Building features a portico spanning the entrance (inside of the "V"), much like that on the Washington (at different scales of design). The unusual rounded corners on the State Office Building may also come from McKim, Meade and White and their Gorham Company Building (also in New York City, 1906).<sup>3</sup> Unlike the rounded corners on the Gorham, which are under a cornice with square corners, the rounded corners on the State Office Building are expressed all the way up to the cornice crown molding. More research may reveal whether Carneal and Johnston did intentionally draw from these precedents directly.

*The following historical narrative was written by Dr. Margaret M. Grubiak, Assistant Professor at Villanova University. The study was completed for James E. Wootton, Executive Director of the Capitol Square Preservation Council in 2003. The section on the George Washington Building was part of the study: "Richmond's Capitol Square in the Twentieth Century: A History of the Twentieth Century Buildings of the Commonwealth of Virginia." Dr. Grubiak and Mr. Wootton have graciously given permission for the use of this research in support of listing the George Washington Building.*

The State Office Building, now known as the George Washington Building, marked a significant shift in the character of buildings on Capitol Square in the early twentieth century. The State Office Building was the first purpose-built office building for State officials and agencies on Capitol Square. Its purpose was clear: to gather all State departments, boards, and commissions in one building "to do away with the present inconvenience of having State officials scattered all over the city of Richmond, inaccessible to the public and to each other."<sup>4</sup> Such a building would not only increase the efficiency of the government, it was believed, but would also save the State the nearly \$50,000 it paid annually in rent to house its agencies.<sup>5</sup> In order to accommodate all State offices within a relatively small footprint, the Richmond architectural firm of Carneal and Johnston designed the State Office Building as a skyscraper that grew from an original seven stories to a final twelve. This introduction of a tall office building in the shadow of the Virginia State Capitol had far-reaching consequences in the development of Capitol Square for the remainder of the twentieth century.

In March 1922, the General Assembly passed a bill introduced by the Speaker of the House of Delegates R. L. Brewer appropriating \$750,000 for a fireproof State office building.<sup>6</sup> A Building Commission for the State Office Building, comprised of Governor Trinkle as chairman, Lieutenant-Governor Junius E. West, Delegate James P. Jones, Senator R. L. Jeffreys, and Speaker Brewer, was appointed to oversee the design and construction of the new building. While the building was originally envisioned to be only seven stories, the foundation was constructed so that additional floors could be added. The building commission increased the height of the building to eight stories just a month after the authorizing legislation was passed.<sup>7</sup>



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From the outset, John T. Wilson was chosen as the supervising contractor for the building. The building commission for the new state office building held an architectural competition for the design of the office building. While eleven architects were invited to submit drawings, only five firms participated in the competition.<sup>8</sup> The commission unanimously chose W. Leigh Carneal, J. Ambler Johnston, and O.P. Wright of the Richmond architectural firm Carneal and Johnston in May 1922.<sup>9</sup> The firm already had experienced success with office building competitions, having won the competition for an office building for the City of Richmond, which was to be located on the site of the Ford Hotel between Eleventh, Twelfth, Broad, and Capitol Streets, in 1914.<sup>10</sup> While this city office building ultimately was not constructed because of the World War, the design foreshadowed the State Office Building and the architects' attempt to overlay a sense of monumentality on what was essentially a commercial form.

Controversy over the new State Office Building swirled soon after the plans for the building were introduced. Heated objection arose over the placement of the building on the green space of Capitol Square. The authorizing legislation for the building required that it be placed specifically on the southeast corner of Capitol Square or some other site provided without cost to the State.<sup>11</sup> Numerous civic groups and individuals wrote to the governor in protest of the site, including the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, the Colonial Dames of America, the Travelers' Protective Association, the Housewives' League, the Woman's Club of Richmond, and even Lady Astor (born Nancy Langhorne, a native of Danville, who, in the 1920s, became the first woman to serve in the British Parliament).<sup>12</sup> For these people, the insertion of another building on Capitol Square was a violation of sacred ground. As one Virginian, attempting to convey the importance of Capitol Square to Governor Trinkle, wrote:

Every foot of this ground is consecrated by a thousand memories, it is part of the web of our history, and to use any portion of it, now, for the erection of an office building would be simply vandalism. The Square is a priceless heritage from our forefathers who established it as a setting for an architectural gem. Let us not do violence to the spirit of their act, but hold it *in trust* for future generations... To put [the building] in the Capitol Square would be almost as bad as putting it in the centre [*sic*] of the Roman Forum. [Emphasis in original]<sup>13</sup>

Other groups saw building on Capitol Square as decreasing the available green space in the center of Richmond. The students and faculty from Westhampton College in Richmond, who also opposed the location of the State Office Building in the square, argued that the square should "be preserved free from other buildings as a breathing space for the people in the heart of the city, a breathing space that will be increasingly needed as Richmond realizes her promised growth."<sup>14</sup> Despite the opposition to the location of the building, the



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“desecration of Capitol Square became a fact” on August 21, 1922, as ground was broken for the building’s foundation. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* published a photograph showing a steam shovel digging the foundation for the new office building on the southeast corner of Capitol Square with Governor Trinkle, Senator Morgan Mills, and others looking on.<sup>15</sup>

The design for the State Office Building was assailed on other fronts as well. The Art Commission of Virginia, a body that advised the governor and that, by law, was to approve the design for all State buildings, declared that the design of the building had “no proper relation in plan to the other buildings on the Square” and had “on the exterior an excessively commercial character.”<sup>16</sup> The commission believed that plan needed to be entirely reconsidered and that the elevations could be restudied by a “thoroughly competent architectural designer.” While the commission did not explicitly state that the height of the building was cause for concern, its height would indeed greatly dwarf the Capitol Building itself. After some corrections, the Art Commission finally approved the design for an eight-story building, which was first published in October 1922.<sup>17</sup>

The State Office Building would undergo yet one more permutation before its final form would be reached. In late 1922, Governor Trinkle, as chairman for the Building Commission for the State Office Building, went before the General Assembly asking that the office building be increased from eight stories to twelve stories. He believed that the smaller building “is not large enough to meet satisfactorily, even our present demands, and will not allow any space for future development or growth of the State departments.”<sup>18</sup> The appropriation for the building grew from \$750,000 to \$1,350,000 million for the additional stories, which was approved by the General Assembly in March 1923.<sup>19</sup> To accommodate the increased size, the power plant on the roof of the building was also enlarged.<sup>20</sup> The increase of the height of the State Office Building was significant, for it set the standard for later high-rise structures around the Capitol Square.

The twelve-story State Office Building followed the traditional tripartite division for a tall office building established by architect Louis Sullivan in the late nineteenth century, but it also incorporated several monumental features to mitigate its “commercial character”. Its first two floors, cast in stone, provided a monumental base. The four colossal Ionic columns, indicating a kind of stripped classicism, acted as the central focus of the V-shaped plan, embracing the fountain in the foreground. The building’s Ionic columns directly referenced the Ionic columns on the Virginia State Capitol, which the building faced, and also recalled Carneal and Johnston’s design for the Richmond municipal building. The inscription above the portico, STATE OFFICE BUILDING, directly signaled the building’s function, and an allegorical group of two reclining figures framing the Commonwealth of Virginia seal by sculptor Ferruccio Leguaili further reinforced the message that the building served a governmental rather than commercial purpose.<sup>21</sup> The marble floor of the elevator lobby lent a dignified air, while the rest of the floors were lined with more economical terrazzo.

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Nine floors of nearly uniform offices surmounted the monumental base of the building. Instead of stone, pressed brick formed the exterior of these offices, and it is in these uniform floors that the standardized steel frame construction is most expressed. The building's plan allowed each office to be directly exposed to the outside. Laboratories for the Board of Health were also included. The twelfth floor and cornice, articulated with architectural terra cotta, crowned the building.

In publishing Carneal and Johnston's plan for the eight story building in October 1922, *The Richmond News Leader* noted that while the limited ground area provided for the building required that a building "in the skyscraper class" be built, it opined, "the architects endeavored to envelop the new structure with an atmosphere of dignity and refinement that would be in keeping with the surrounding buildings, and the result is that the characteristics of a standard office building are entirely absent."<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the *Engineering News-Record* celebrated the "modern" appearance of the State Office Building:

Virginia is to be congratulated upon its enterprise and initiative in getting away from the classic style—the embrasured [*sic*] window and high ceiling, the marble corridor and ornamental fireplace—that marks our public buildings. The business of conducting a state requires a business office and that Virginia has provided.<sup>23</sup>

The souvenir pamphlet celebrating the building's opening on February 22, 1924, during the celebration of George Washington's birthday, took a more moderate position on the building and perhaps best described the modern and civic characteristics of the new State Office Building in proclaiming the building a "temple for service."<sup>24</sup> For some, however, the new building was far from a positive development in Capitol Square. The structure acquired the moniker "that overgrown corner-cupboard."<sup>25</sup> Richmond architectural historian and preservationist Mary Wingfield Scott saw the construction of the building as disastrous for Capitol Square and also the meaning of government:

[The State Office Building] has not only dwarfed the little Bell Tower but has added a completely inharmonious note to the Classic proportions of the Capitol, Governor's Mansion and former State Library, towering above them as if to proclaim, "Government is no longer a heritage and an ideal: it is a business, ruled by typewriters and dictaphones."<sup>26</sup>

Although the building was designed to accommodate the State's growth until about 1950, the State Office Building was already overcrowded by 1934, just ten years after its opening, and once again several State agencies were forced to rent office space in the downtown area.<sup>27</sup> The building was officially renamed the

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George Washington Building in 1980, together with the Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe buildings, in honor of the Virginian-born presidents.<sup>28</sup> The four buildings, named after Virginia-born presidents was a partially realized 1950s plan to extend state offices, in multi-story buildings, in an arc extending to the east and northeast of Capitol Square.

The Washington Building continues in use as a state office building today. While no other skyscrapers were built in the front of the Capitol Building, Virginia State Government continued to expand and require more room in the immediate vicinity of Capitol Square. In 1964, three new state office buildings were completed, all were skyscraper design in a conservative International Style. The planning concept for expansion was to place a line of skyscrapers beginning with the Washington Building and arcing to the north, around Governor Street, ending at Broad Street. The Jefferson Building, just to the east of the Washington Building, at 15 stories, was the only one of the three close to the Capitol. The Madison was next in the arc, also 15 stories, and also finished in 1964, the Virginia Department of Transportation Annex Building, at 17 stories. The planned buildings between Madison and the Annex was never built, the modernist arc was left incomplete. The state went on to build the Monroe Building at Bank and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets in 1981. At 29 stories, 450 feet, it was and still is the tallest building in Virginia. While the Commonwealth of Virginia pursued a building program of modernist planning and style, Capitol Square has remained open without further intrusion. In the recent Capitol renovation, all additions were kept under the Square's lawn.

Today the view from the Capitol to the James River is obscured by the large post 1960 highrise buildings of the Main Street financial district. The Washington Building, recently restored/renovated to its 1920s appearance, is one of the more successful and elegant architectural statements in Richmond's community of tall buildings.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☒ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned) \_\_ VDHR File Number 127-6518 \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data****Acreage of Property** About 1 Acre

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

**UTM References (TO BE COMPLETED)**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 18S 284996 4157305  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property)

The Washington building boundaries are drawn as an irregular polygon on the attached map that is at scale 1 inch equals 200 feet (also depicted in aerial version as additional data).

**Boundary Justification** (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The Washington Building boundary includes the building and a water fountain, located on the northwest elevation. The fountain is included in the boundary because it is a key part of the building's setting. The architects used the fountain to inform their design and orientation of the building. The building's most ceremonial entrance is centered on the fountain.

**11. Form Prepared By**name/title Marc C. Wagner (VDHR) and Dr. Margaret Grubiak (Villanova University)organization Virginia Department of Historic ResourcesDate April 20, 2010street & number 2801 Kensington Avenuetelephone 804-367-2323 X-115city or town Richmondstate VAzip code 23221e-mail Marc.Wagner@dhr.virginia.gov**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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**George Washington Building  
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Box 33, folders "Office Building (3)," "Office Building (4)," "Office Building (5)," "Office Building (6)," "Office Building (7)"

Valentine Richmond History Center, Richmond, Virginia.

Vertical Files, drawer 30C, folder "Capitol Square: Buildings, Office & Court Bldgs, State Office Building"

Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia.

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"Begin Initial Work on State Office Building." *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (2 May 1922): 12.

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"8-Story Office Building is Planned for State." *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (19 May 1922): 12.

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"Art Commission Does Not Favor Building Plans." *The Richmond News Leader* (27 May 1922): 24.

"Denies Art Body Approved Design of Office Building." *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (28 May 1922): 10.

"Big Steam Shovel at Work on Task in Capitol Square." *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (22 August 1922): 1, 2.

"First Picture of Virginia's New State Office Building, Will Be Ready by Next Sept." *The Richmond News Leader* (14 October 1922): 1, 15.

"State Office Building, Being Built, Is Inadequate." *The Richmond News Leader* (3 November 1922): 1.

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"Trinkle Seeks Permission to Add 4 Stories." *The Richmond News Leader* (2 December 1922): 1.

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Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *The Virginia Architects 1835-1955*, John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, (1997) p.69.

<sup>2</sup> The nickname "corner cupboard" was a perjorative term most likely coined by Richmond preservationist Mary Wingfield Scott. The actual source has not been identified so further research would need to be conducted to confirm the source.

<sup>3</sup> Architectural historian Calder Loth has suggested this possible influence. The McKim, Meade and White monograph had been published in 1915.

<sup>4</sup> J.R. Horsley, letter to Governor E. Lee Trinkle, 14 December 1922, folder "Office Building (1)," box 32, Governor E. Lee Trinkle Executive Papers, 1922-1926, Archives and Manuscripts, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>5</sup> "Capitol Square Site Chosen for \$750,000 State Office Building," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (6 April 1922): 5. Before the construction of the State Office Building, the State rented offices in the Presbyterian Building, Chamber of Commerce, Richmond Hotel, Murphy's Hotel, Lyric Building, Traveler's Building, Mutual Building, and buildings on South Third Street. ("Break Ground in May For State's Building," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (16 April 1922): 4.) See also "State Office Building, Being Built, Is Inadequate," *The Richmond News Leader* (3 November 1922): 1.

<sup>6</sup> "Chap. 151--An ACT to provide for the erection of a fire-proof State office building, and the assignment of offices therein," *Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia* (Richmond, Virginia: Davis Bottom, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1922) 235-236.

<sup>7</sup> "Capitol Square Site Chosen for \$750,000 State Office Building," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (6 April 1922): 5; "8-Story Office Building is Planned for State," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (19 May 1922): 12.

<sup>8</sup> The low number of architects participating in the competition was reportedly due to the fact that the competition was not held under the guidelines of the American Institute of Architects, thus "barring many of the best men of the profession" from submitting designs. ("Big Steam Shovel at Work on Task in Capitol Square," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (22 August 1922): 2.) Notably, Governor Trinkle's papers do contain a copy of the AIA rules for architectural competitions.

<sup>9</sup> "8-Story Office Building is Planned for State," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (19 May 1922): 12. The architects were officially awarded the commission in June 1922. See Governor E. Lee Trinkle, letter to Carneal and Johnston, 17 June 1922, folder "Office Building (3)," box 33, Governor E. Lee Trinkle Executive Papers, 1922-1926, Archives and Manuscripts, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>10</sup> Marie-Louise Pinckney, "Prize Winning Municipal Design in 1914 Adapted Form to Function," *Richmond News-Leader* (3 April 1965): 8; and John O. Peters, "Monumental In The Very Highest Degree: The Municipal Building That Never Was, Richmond, 1914-1915," *Virginia Cavalcade* (Winter 2000): 4-15.

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<sup>11</sup> The provision that another site at no cost to the state could be chosen referred to the possibility that the so-called Ford lot, located on the southeast corner of Broad and Eleventh Streets, would be available to the State. Originally, the city of Richmond had donated the Ford lot to the state for the construction of the proposed World War I memorial library. While this idea for a war memorial library eventually failed, the proposed library was still under discussion in the early 1920s and thus the Ford lot was not available to the State to use for the new State Office Building. ("Capitol Square Site Chosen for \$750,000 State Office Building," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (6 April 1922): 1.) The Virginia State Library, erected in 1939, would occupy the Ford lot.

<sup>12</sup> "Travelers Oppose Erecting Building in Capitol Square," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (30 April 1922): 1.

<sup>13</sup> Mr. T. B. Pollard, letter to Governor E. Lee Trinkle, 8 May 1922, folder "Office Building (3)," box 33, Governor E. Lee Trinkle Executive Papers, 1922-1926, Archives and Manuscripts, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>14</sup> Dean May L. Keller and Olivia L. Hardy, President of the Student Government, Westhampton College, letter to Governor E. Lee Trinkle, 9 May 1922, folder "Office Building (3)," box 33, Governor E. Lee Trinkle Executive Papers, 1922-1926, Archives and Manuscripts, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>15</sup> The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported that some believed that the building commission did everything in its power "to railroad the erection of the building" on the square and would not consider alternate sites. ("Denies Art Body Approved Design of Office Building," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (28 May 1922): 10.) Some other sites were considered. The records in Governor Trinkle's papers, however, only indicate that the building commission was attempting to conform to the legislation.

<sup>16</sup> From Art Commission of Virginia Meeting Minutes, as quoted in "Denies Art Body Approved Design of Office Building," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (28 May 1922): 10; see also "Art Commission Does Not Favor Building Plans," *The Richmond News Leader* (27 May 1922): 24. The actual minutes and records of the Art Commission in this period remain as yet undiscovered.

<sup>17</sup> "First Picture of Virginia's New State Office Building, Will Be Ready by Next Sept," *The Richmond News Leader* (14 October 1922): 1.

<sup>18</sup> Governor E. Lee Trinkle, letter to the General Assembly, 1 December 1922, Governor E. Lee Trinkle Executive Papers (Newspaper Subscriptions—Office Building), 1922-1926, Box Number 32, folder Office Building (1). See also "State Office Building, Being Built, Is Inadequate," *The Richmond News Leader* (3 November 1922): 1 and "Trinkle Seeks Permission to Add 4 Stories," *The Richmond News Leader* (2 December 1922): 1.

<sup>19</sup> "Chap. 72—An ACT to appropriate the additional sum of not exceeding \$350,000 to carry out the purposes of an act approved March 19, 1922..." *Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia* (Richmond, Virginia: Davis Bottom, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1923) 94-95.



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- <sup>20</sup> "Office Building to be 12 Stories," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (27 December 1922): 1.
- <sup>21</sup> See Capitol Square, Richmond, Virginia Department of Historic Landmarks, File No. 127-521; Folder 1 of 6: Survey Files, which states that Leguaili is the sculptor.
- <sup>22</sup> "First Picture of Virginia's New State Office Building, Will Be Ready by Next Sept," *The Richmond News Leader* (14 October 1922): 1.
- <sup>23</sup> "Modernizing the Government Office," *Engineering News-Record* 93.7 (14 August 1924): 249.
- <sup>24</sup> "Virginia State Office Building," building opening, 22 February 1924, Repository: Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. See also "Open New State Building Today," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (22 February 1924): 1; "State's Newest Building Opens," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (23 February 1924): 1; "Scouts Take Part in Opening State Building," *The Richmond News Leader* (23 February 1924): 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Mary Wingfield Scott, "A Brief History of Capitol Square," 25 May 1956, MSS 6457, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.
- <sup>26</sup> Mary Wingfield Scott, "A Brief History of Capitol Square," 25 May 1956, MSS 6457, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.
- <sup>27</sup> "State's 13-Story Office Building, 10 Year Old Today, Already is Outgrown," *Richmond News-Leader* (22 February 1934): 2.
- <sup>28</sup> Claude Burrows, "Buildings Renamed in Capitol Square," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (23 October 1980): A-1.

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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

**Name of Property: The George Washington Building**

**City or Vicinity: City of Richmond**

**State: Virginia**

**Photographer: Marc C. Wagner**

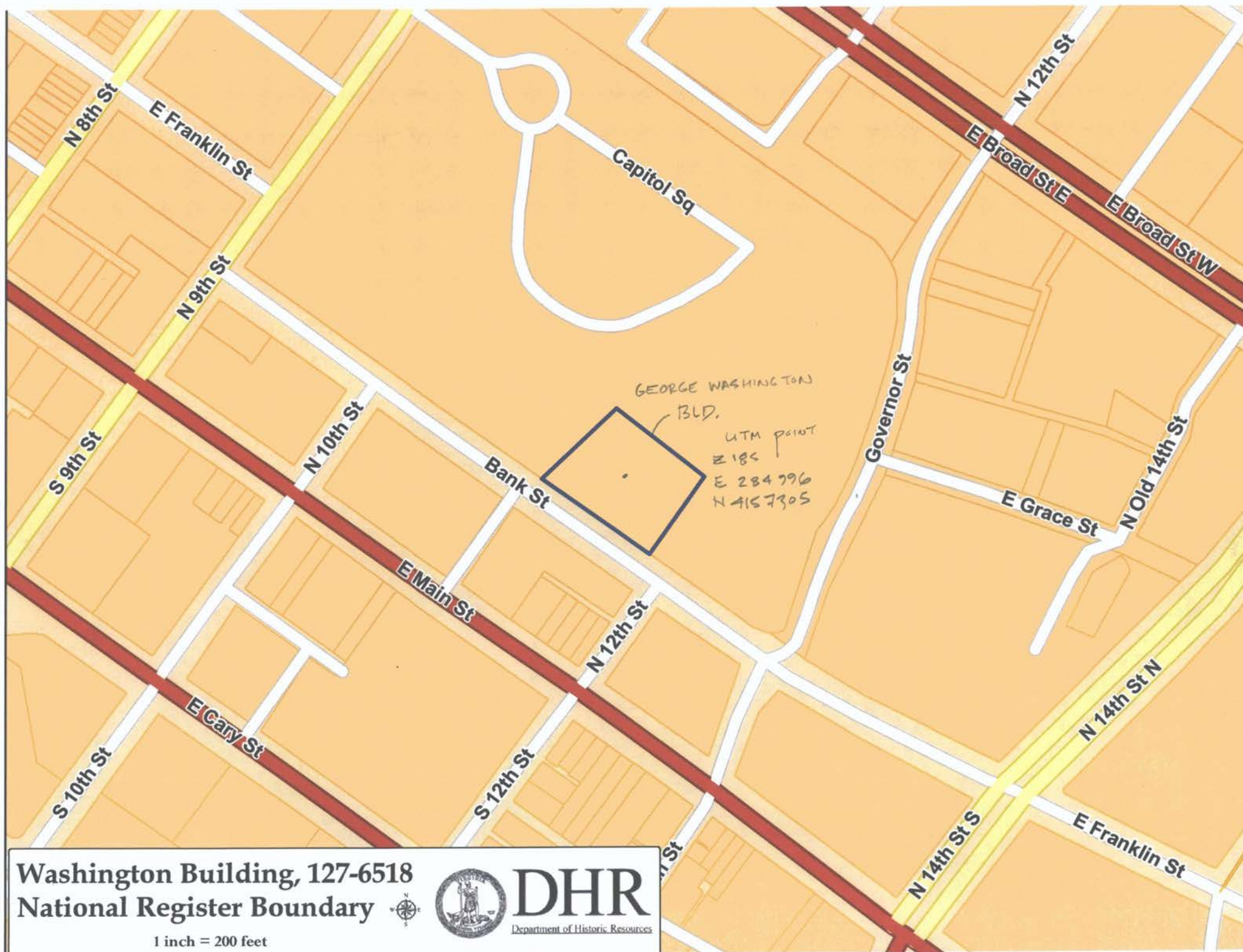
**Date Photographed: March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

- 1 . Northwest Elevation**
- 2 . Southeast Elevation**
- 3. Detail of Portico, Shaft, Cornice**
- 4. Detail of Capitol Square Main Entrance**
- 5. Detail of Capitol Square Western Entrance**
- 6. Detail of Bank Steet Entrance**
- 7. Detail of Portico Ceiling**
- 8. Detail of Portico Sculpture**
- 9. Detail of Machinery Penthouse**
- 10. Detail of Main, First Floor Lobby**
- 11. Detail of Fourth Floor Lobby**
- 12. Detail of Typical Upper Story Hallway**
- 13. Detail of Elevator Machinery**
- 14. View of Fountain**

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



Washington Building, 127-6518  
National Register Boundary



1 inch = 200 feet



**DHR**  
Department of Historic Resources



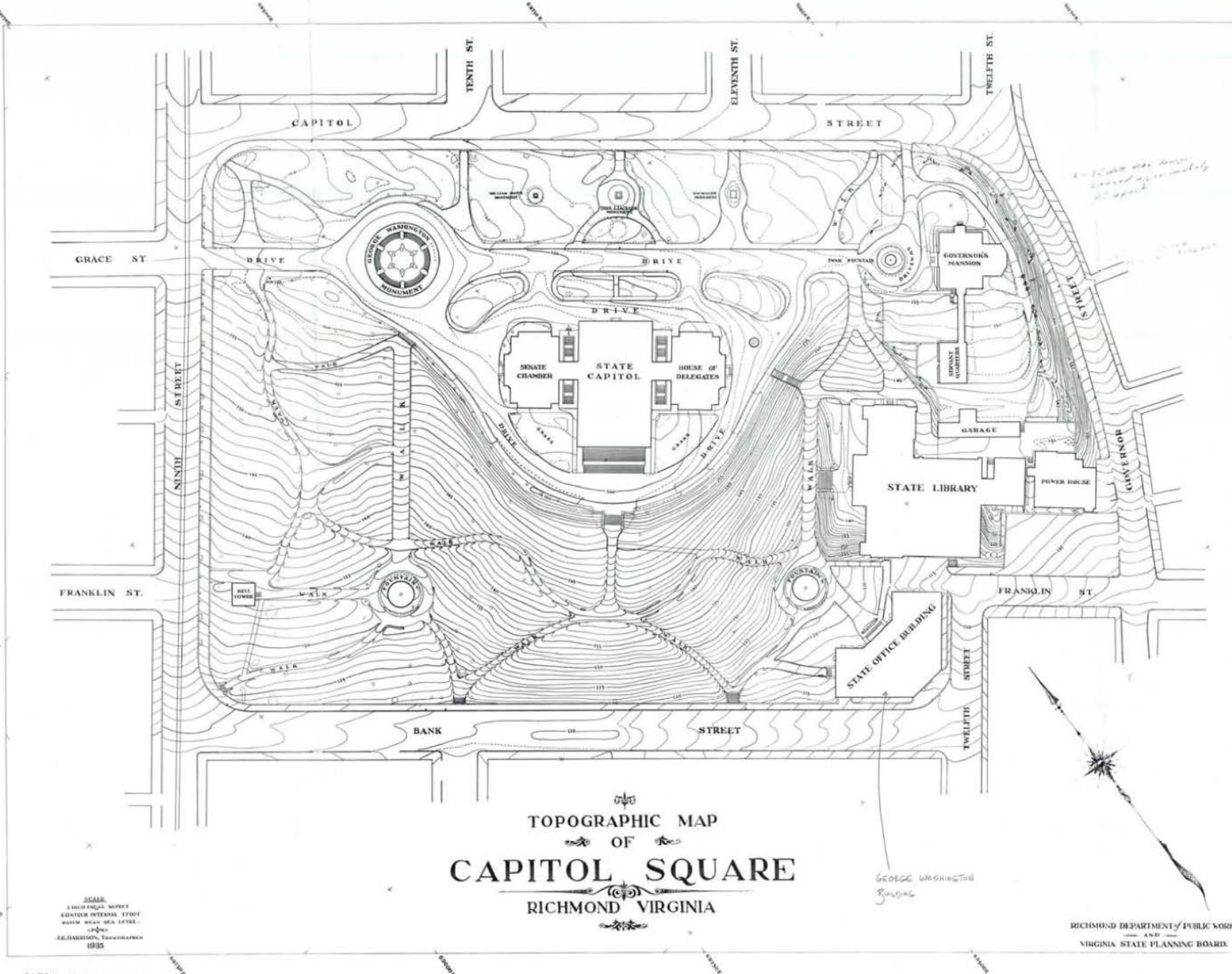


**Washington Building  
(State Office Building)**  
1 inch = 200 feet



**DHR**  
Department of Historic Resources





ADDITIONAL MAPPING  
FOR NOMINATION OF  
GEORGE WASHINGTON  
BUILDING  
AT CAPITOL SQUARE  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA  
1935

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT  
OF  
HISTORIC RESOURCES  
FILE # 127-6518  
(NOMINATION SUBMITTED MARCH 2011)  
MARC C. WAGNER  
DUE ARCHITECTURE HISTORIAN

TOPOGRAPHIC MAP  
OF  
CAPITOL SQUARE  
RICHMOND VIRGINIA

RICHMOND DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS  
AND  
VIRGINIA STATE PLANNING BOARD.