

The Bugle



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Pennsylvania Capitol Building

1822 – 1897

The “Red Brick” Capitol Building

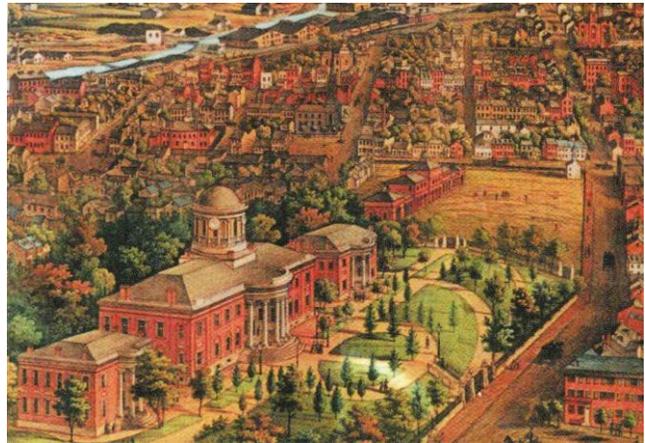
Originally, the Pennsylvania capital was in Philadelphia, with the legislature meeting in what is now called Independence Hall. In 1799, a yellow fever epidemic forced the legislature to temporarily move to Lancaster and a bill was passed to permanently move the capital to Harrisburg in 1812.

The legislature met in the Dauphin County Court House while the “Red Brick” Capitol was being constructed. The building was designed by Stephen Hills and was completed on January 2, 1822, at a cost of \$135,000. The building was about 150 feet in length and 70 feet wide and surrounded by an iron fence. It was this Capitol that would serve the Commonwealth during the Civil War and feature prominently in several important events during the years 1861 to 1865.

In February 1861, President-elect Abraham Lincoln came to the Capitol and spoke to a joint session of the legislature on his way to his inauguration. Governor Andrew Curtin would have a telegraph installed in his office to keep informed of the progress of the war, especially during the Confederate invasions of the North in 1862 and 1863. Curtin often reviewed troops leaving Camp Curtin for the war at the Capitol and presented flags to them to carry in battle.



The east side of the Capitol, looking from the current location of the State Street Bridge. This is a very early view since it does not show trees that appear in later pictures taken from the same direction. Soldiers’ Grove and the Medal of Honor Memorial now occupy this area.



This 1855 illustration shows the Capitol’s North and South Wings, along with the State Arsenal in Capital Park.

The capital park and the building itself were used to house troops. Major General Darius Couch established his headquarters in the Capitol in 1863 as he planned the defense of the Keystone State. In April 1865, a sad procession in the rain would carry Lincoln’s coffin from the train station to the Capitol, where his body would lie in state in the House of Representatives.

In July 1866, the Pennsylvania regiments officially returned their flags to the Commonwealth in a grand ceremony in Philadelphia. The flags were displayed in the Capitol Building for many years but, fortunately, were moved to the new Executive Library and Museum Building next door in 1895. Having survived the fiery trial of the Civil War, the “Red Brick” Capitol burned down on February 2, 1897, after seventy-five years and one month of service to Pennsylvania.

The “Red Brick” Capitol was replaced by a cheap and uninspiring building designed by Henry Cobb. Finding the Cobb Capitol unacceptable, Philadelphia architect Joseph Huston was commissioned to design a new and grander building. President Theodore Roosevelt came to Harrisburg on October 4, 1906 and dedicated the new Capitol Building, declaring it to be “the most beautiful state capitol in the nation.”