

# THE VERMONT STATE HOUSE

## *Vermont's Three State Houses A Brief History*

After almost 150 years, the Vermont State House still commands the landscape of Montpelier, the smallest capital city in America. The House and Senate Chambers are the oldest legislative chambers in their original condition anywhere in the country.

Vermont did not always have a state house, or for that matter, a state capital. From 1777 when the Republic of Vermont was founded during the early years of the revolution, until 1807, Vermont's General Assembly met 46 times in 14 different towns.

In 1805 Montpelier was chosen as the "permanent seat of the legislature for holding all their sessions." There were two conditions. First, Montpelier had to give land for the capitol. Second, the State House had to be built by September of 1808.

Thomas Davis, son of Montpelier's first permanent settler Col. Jacob Davis, donated the land, and the first State House was built on it at a cost of \$9,000. It was a three-story wooded meetinghouse-type structure located near the present site of Vermont's Supreme Court building.

The first State House has steep winding staircases flanking recessed galleries on its front façade, and a belfry surmounting its hipped roof. Warmed by a two-story stove in the center of its single legislative chamber, members of the General Assembly sat at pine desks on plan seats with straight backs. One historian notes that many of the desks and much of the building itself were "whittled out of use" by legislative jackknives. At any rate, the building deteriorated and was outgrown by the state's emerging bicameral legislature, so it was torn down.

Vermont's second State House, designed by Ammi Young, was completed in 1838 at a cost of \$132,000. With a front portico modeled after the temple of Theseus in Greece, this classically-inspired building displayed a low saucer-shaped Roman dome and was the perfect embodiment of the chaste principles that typified the Greek Revival fashion then sweeping the country.



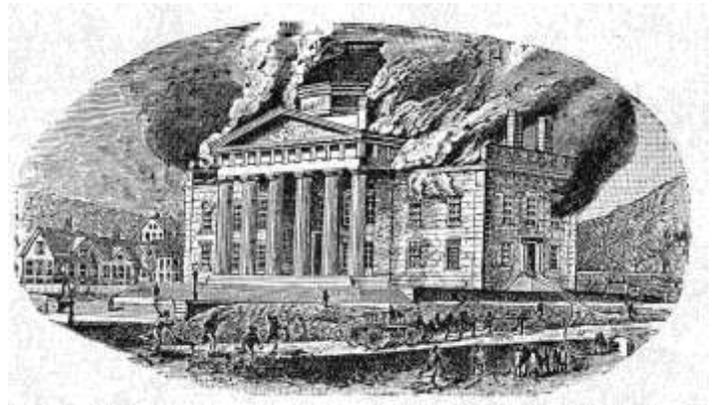


This State House was constructed of Barre granite. It took a team of four horses and a yoke of oxen 18 hours to deliver a load of granite and return to the Barre quarries about ten miles away.

Built on an elevated site blasted out of the hillside, the second State House enjoyed a stronger foundation and grander approach. The high ground would also serve to protect

the building from the flooding Winooski River across the road.

On a cold night in January, 1857, a fire caused by the wood burning heating system, destroyed nearly everything within the granite walls. Ultimately the walls themselves would come down, leaving only the Grecian portico to be incorporated into the design of the third State House.



The third and present State House was built on the same site as the second. Its basic plan is similar to Young's, but it was built on a larger scale with a distinctly different ornamental scheme reflecting the Renaissance Revival style popular at the time. This State House was constructed over a two and a half year period, cost \$150,000, and was dedicated in 1859. Additions in the rear date from 1888, 1900 and 1987.

