



December 2002

TREASURY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

# NEWSLETTER

## Inside this Newsletter...

- **Personalities from Treasury's Past.** THA continues its series of articles on people who have shaped Treasury history over the past two hundred years.
- **Treasury Building Holiday Sale.** Mark your calendar for December 10!

## Oldest Elements of Treasury Building Are Prehistoric

In the Treasury Building, begun in 1842 in the Nation's Capital that was established in 1800, there are elements of the Building that are much older than one might imagine.

"Think of it as walking on the floor of the Ocean," observed Dr. Raymond Rye, a paleo-biologist with the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, commenting upon what it was like to walk across the beautiful fossils found in the historic Treasury Building's marble floor tiles. The pinwheel fossils traced in the material of the black marble floor are ancient snails. Those fossils – now stone – were sliced in two when the marble was cut to form the square slabs used for Treasury's flooring. The slabs divulge symmetrical (clockwise) patterns.

When you walk through Treasury's South, West and North wings where the original marble flooring remains, it is easy to locate these marble floor tiles. The white marble comes from the Baltimore region. The dark marble is from Vermont. Long ago – 430 to 440 million years ago – clay sediment, very fine in texture, was laid down on the floor of an ancient sea. As that sediment built up, pressure was brought to bear on the soil which lithified it, turning it to stone that we know of as mudstone or shale.

With the passage of time and the application of greater magnitudes of pressure, the shale metamorphosed into a harder form of rock: marble. Depending on the chemical composition of the rock involved, the resultant marble would be colored lighter or darker — hence, marble of two kinds, differing in color from different locations. Also, depending on

the presence of marine life, fossils would be preserved first in the mudstone or shale and then in the marble. The metamorphosis was not cataclysmic enough for the fossils to lose their integrity.

Main Treasury's black marble fossils are **Maclurites magna**. They were snails – or escargot — that would sit on the clay floor of the ancient ocean in what was probably a very rich environment of seaweed-like algae. Food would come to the snail – rather than the opposite – as with other members of the **mollusk** phylum. These **Maclurites** were given the name **magna** because of their great size compared with other snails. They range up to 6 inches across, which means the original snail was relatively large in the scheme of snails.

Paleo-biologists, such as Dr. Rye, depend upon the rock in which fossils are found to accurately date the fossil. Dr. Rye indicated that these fossils are of the Ordovician period, and that this marble is a prolific fossiliferous rock. He suggested a visit to the Arts and Industry Building of the Smithsonian (constructed in the early 1870's) or to the Old Post Office Pavilion (constructed between 1892-1899) to see more of these **Maclurites magna** in their marble tiles.

## THA Is Joined by Industry Partner for Product Marketing

THA and White House Gear, Inc. (WHG) have entered into an arrangement for WHG to sell THA products at its retail stores and its website, through the use of credit cards. This arrangement will enhance THA's exposure to customers beyond the Treasury Building and Treasury bureau staff, where we have been limited in the past.

White House Gear was established in 1994 by and for the White House Press Corps, initially marketing primarily Air Force One collectibles and other White House items. WHG is now expanding its scope to include other patriotic commemorative items. More information about WHG may be found on their website—[www.whitehousegear.com](http://www.whitehousegear.com). Over the next several weeks, THA will phase in WHG's involvement by modifying our website to link to WHG's site. Discounts will be offered to current members.

### Treasury Building Holiday Sale Scheduled for December 10

As in past years, THA will participate in the Treasury Holiday Sale Event, to be held in the Cash Room on the second floor of the North wing of the Treasury Building on December 10.

The event is scheduled to be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., with the U.S. Mint, Bureau of Engraving and Printing, U.S. Secret Service Uniformed Division Benefit Association and Treasury Department Recreation Association participating in addition to THA. A wide variety of items will be available for purchase as holiday gifts.

Admission to the Treasury Building requires a Main Treasury or Treasury bureau building pass or identification.

### Special Offer to Members on 2000 Holiday Ornament

THA is extending through the end of the year a special members-only sale on its final holiday ornament issued in 2000. This "buy-two, get-one-at-two-thirds-off" offer is available at membership price of \$15 each ornament or 3 for \$35, including shipping, but the supply is limited.

This ornament commemorated the Bicentennial of the District of Columbia as the National Capital and of the Treasury Department in Washington.

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**Order for Treasury 2000 Ornament**

**SPECIAL MEMBER-ONLY OFFER  
EXPIRES DECEMBER 31, 2002  
(Postmark Date)**

\_\_\_ 2000 ornament(s) @ \$15 each or 3 for \$35 — a savings of \$10.

**TOTAL OF ORDER:**      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Personalities from Treasury's Past —*

### Thomas U. Walter, Master Architect of the "Treasury Extension"

Thomas U. Walter (1804-1887) is familiar to many readers as the architect of the current dome of the U.S. Capitol Building—one of Washington's most prominent landmarks — replacing the previous semi-spherical "Bulfinch dome." Yet, few people know of Walter's involvement in the design of the Treasury Building as it is today.

During two critical junctures in the Treasury Building's construction, this Philadelphia architect cast himself in the role of villain and later hero and, as a result, had a profound influence on the development of the overall design of the Building.

Walter, who had been born in Philadelphia to a builder, apprenticed with the architect William Strickland. After six years of training, Walter became a master mason—an occupation which he pursued for four years. After additional training in architecture and the fine arts, Walter again joined Strickland's office as a draftsman. Three years later, at age 27, Walter established his own architectural office. Early architectural commissions which won him acclaim include Girard College in Philadelphia and a number of churches in Richmond, Norfolk, and Petersburg, Virginia.

Walter first became involved in the Treasury Building during the period he was working to establish his own architectural practice. In 1838, in response to a myriad of criticisms of Robert Mills' design for the "New" Treasury Building (then under construction), President Martin Van Buren appointed Walter to study the Building and to prepare a report for the President and the Congress. Walter attacked Mills' Treasury Building for its location, as well as for its appearance (he de-

scribed the East colonnade of the Treasury Building as monotonous). Perhaps most alarming was Walter's charge that the Building was structurally unstable. After months of political wrangling, Congress voted on a bill which proposed demolishing Mills' unfinished Treasury Building. By a slim margin of three votes, the bill and Walter's advice were rejected, and Mills was allowed to complete the construction of what is today the East and Center Wings of Treasury.

Historians have noted that Walter's consulting work on this highly visible and politically charged Federal construction project may have been of help to him in gaining Government commissions for other public buildings. Indeed, in 1851 Walter was named Architect of the Capitol and the following year he was asked to propose designs for extending Robert Mills' Treasury Building—the very building he had recommended be demolished.

Walter's conceptual design for the Treasury Extension (today's South, West and North wings — completed in 1860, 1864 and 1869, respectively) determined the "figure eight" form the Building ultimately took in plan. Significantly, Walter also recommended that the Greek Revival style first established by Mills in the East and Center wings be continued in the Extension.

(This is the second in a series of articles on the people who have shaped Treasury's history.)

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