

House of Representatives (its third) will be rising from a Texas-size crater. If he should cock his ear, Senator Johnson might hear the wrecker's ball crunching against buildings on Capitol Hill and Lafayette Square, just across from the White House, to clear the way for still more projects dear to his native State.

Mr. Johnson would be forgiven a grateful glance at the Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, his fellow proconsul from Texas. During their joint rule over Congress since 1955, the grandiose taste of Texas has been firmly (and expensively) imprinted on the face of Washington. Ultimately, their plans for dressing the Capitol in a new wardrobe of marble and providing new comforts for the harassed servants of the people may cost us taxpayers up to \$200 million.

The scale of the construction program would impress any Caesar. The Third House Office Building alone will cost more to build than the Capitol and the three older office buildings combined. According to the General Services Administration inventory, the total cost of the four earlier structures was \$51 million—or \$22 million less than the overall cost of the splendid new House Office Building.

As always, the critics are voicing sour objections. Costly, flashy, huge—these are their favorite words. None of the projects has received adequate hearings, they contend. Ancient landmarks, they say, are being vandalized, and the program is being supervised by a Capitol Architect who is not an architect, but a cloakroom crony of Mr. Rayburn's. They predict that Washington will soon look like Houston on the half shell.

But these present objections are lost in the sound of bulldozers and pneumatic drills. For the benefit of future archeologists, therefore, here is an inventory of projects undertaken in the Rayburn-Johnson proconsulate—perhaps the most marble-minded since the days of Augustus.

EARLY RAYBURN: THE EAST FRONT

The first project began with the demolition of the old east front of the Capitol. Since the days of John Quincy Adams, the Nation's Presidents have been sworn in on the portico of the east front. But Speaker Rayburn found the old sandstone facade wanting, and used his gavel to put through the \$10 million renovation job.

In 1956 an obscure rider to the Legislative Appropriations Act authorized the extension of the east front by 32½ feet, thus reviving from limbo an old scheme—once thankfully forgotten—for “improving” the Capitol. These reasons have been put forth for the change: (1) a supposed flaw in the building would be corrected by extending the facade and thus putting the dome in better perspective; (2) the old sandstone entrance was unsightly and unsafe; and (3) more office space was needed in the Capitol.

Architects, informed laymen, and patriotic societies were overwhelmingly in accord in replying (1) that the alleged “flaw” was a cherished feature of the building and that correcting it was akin to mending the crack in the Liberty Bell; (2) that repair and restoration were not only feasible but less costly than the extension plan, since a Bureau of Standards study showed that the original sandstone was sound enough to be resurfaced; and (3) that while it was true, the extension would yield extra offices, the added floor space would cost about \$200 a square foot, compared with \$20 a square foot in the average office building. The new space would be the most expensive, observed one architect, “since they paved the lobby of the Teller Hotel in Central City, Colo., with gold.”

Three times, in annual convention assembled, the American Institute of Architects deplored the change. The editors of the three major architectural magazines expressed scorn. Frank Lloyd Wright called it absolutely incredible. Leading newspapers across the country were dismayed. And frequent thunderclaps emanated from the Daughters of the American Revolution: “Shall we destroy the evidence of the good taste of the Founding Fathers?”

But Speaker Rayburn did not budge. He was Chairman of the Commission for the Extension of the Capitol, and his fellow members—including Vice President Nixon and former minority leader of the Senate William F. Knowland—did not feel inclined to quarrel. Matters of taste were the department of J. George Stewart, Architect of the Capitol, who, notwithstanding his title, is not an architect. Additional esthetic support came from Roscoe P. DeWitt, an architect from Dallas, Tex., who was a major adviser to Mr. Stewart. Mr. DeWitt's portfolio of buildings in his home State includes the Sam Rayburn Library in Bonham and a suburban store for the Neiman-Marcus Co. in Dallas.