

Jefferson Market Courthouse, America's Fifth Most Beautiful Building in 1885

As the Jefferson Market Garden Historian, I have given many tours of this precious piece of greenery in the heart of Greenwich Village. And while the Garden has tremendous history, I am lucky to have as a backdrop a beautiful building, the Jefferson Market Library (formerly the Jefferson Market Courthouse), which in the 1880s was voted one of the most beautiful buildings in the United States.

When describing the Courthouse, I mention that it was voted the fifth most beautiful building in America in 1885. In that year, the readers of *The American Architect and Building News* were invited to name, by a consensus of votes, their choice of the ten most beautiful buildings in the country. Actually the vote was for "the best ten buildings" but I believe "best" can be defined as "beautiful." People on my tours are curious about the other winners in the poll, and I tell them.

So here they are with their architects as listed in the publication:

1. TRINITY CHURCH, BOSTON, Gambrill & Richardson.
2. UNITED STATES CAPITOL, WASHINGTON, D.C., Hallet, Thornton, Hadfield, Hoban, Latrobe, Bulfinch, Walter and Clark
3. HOUSE OF W. K. VANDERBILT, NEW YORK, R. M. Hunt
4. TRINITY CHURCH, NEW YORK, Richard Upjohn
5. JEFFERSON MARKET COURTHOUSE, NEW YORK, Frederick Clarke Withers
6. STATE CAPITOL, HARTFORD, CONN., Richard Upjohn
7. CITY HALL, ALBANY, N.Y., H. H. Richardson
8. SEVER HALL, CAMBRIDGE, MASS., H. H. Richardson
9. STATE CAPITOL, ALBANY, N.Y., H. H. Richardson
10. TOWN HALL, NORTH EASTON, MASS., H. H. Richardson

Frederick Clarke Withers, of course, has special meaning for us. It should be noted that he was also responsible for the William Backhouse Astor, Sr. Memorial Altar and Reredos at Trinity Church (the fourth most beautiful building).

steady them. The architectural effect of this roof is excellent, and I dare say some of those present have seen it.

The last modern timber roof which I shall refer to is the roof over the Guildhall, London, erected a few years ago from the designs of the City Architect, Mr. Horace Jones, whose fine roof over the new Council Chamber, in which, however, the main framework is iron carrying a timber ceiling, is also illustrated by some of the drawings on the walls. Guildhall is 159 feet long. Its width is not perfectly uniform, but the average is 49 feet 6 inches; it is 80 feet high. The roof is constructed, as every roof which is to form part of a public building of the first importance should be, of oak. Practical carpenters will be the first to appreciate the increased strength and solidity and the greater tenacity of the joints, and the freedom from the risk of their crushing in, which the use of oak secures, as compared with deal, or even pitch pine.

In the Guildhall roof there are seven principals, and therefore eight bays of about 19 feet each. The collar of this roof is 29 feet long, and it was cut out of timber about 2 feet 8 inches square. In this roof each principal springs from a cluster of strong shafts carried up within the walls for the purpose of receiving it. Both structurally and as a means of procuring architectural effect this is very advantageous. There might have been some risk in putting the heavy weight of this roof on parts of the very ancient walls of this venerable hall which had not been so weighted before, and these lines of support divide up the length of the hall, and so make its extent perceptible. They also carry up the apparent (and, in fact, the real) support of each principal from the solid floor, and so aid the architectural treatment in more ways than one. The curved ribs are made very prominent in this truss, and the hammer-beam is kept rather modest than otherwise; it is neither carved at the end, nor marked out by a pendant, so that the line which catches the eye is that of the cusped arch of the moulded rib. This is an original treatment, but the success of the roof fully justifies the architect in the course which he adopted.

With these modern examples we leave our subject. I trust that the accounts of great roofs which I have been able to give you, and the illustrations which, in addition to diagrams made specially for tonight, I have been enabled to show you, by the courtesy of the City Architect, Mr. Waterhouse, Mr. St. Aubyn, and others, have been sufficient to prove that a great timber roof requires no small amount of skill to be brought to bear upon its design. I hope that we have also seen that it, above most things, calls for very careful selection of good material, and, perhaps, most of all for honest, painstaking care in the workmanship of every part. No single joint should be defective, and every part should bear truly on those into which it is framed. I think, also, we have seen abundant cause for ranking

THE BEST TEN BUILDINGS IN THE UNITED STATES.



AS anything like an authoritative expression of opinion the votes cast for the "best ten buildings" in the United States cannot be held to have as much weight as we would like, and so far as this goes we are disappointed with the result; but as we have been furnished with the names of 175 buildings which at least one architect thinks deserving of such rank, the purpose we had in view has been admirably subserved, as we have already stated.

The results of the ballot are as follows:—

Total number of voters, 75.

" " " buildings mentioned, 175.

" " " receiving more than one vote, 66.

The great proportion of "scattering" votes shows that an adequate judgment could be deduced only from a very much larger number of votes than were cast, but when it is remembered that only 56 buildings received more than one vote each the balance is somewhat restored, and the final selection of the best ten from these 56 buildings may mean a good deal after all—especially in the cases of those which head the list.

The order in which they stand is:—

- I. Trinity Church, Boston. Messrs. Gambrel & Richardson, Architects. 63 votes, or 84 per cent of the votes cast.
- II. United States Capitol, Washington, D. C. Messrs. Hallet, Hadfield, Hoban, Latrobe, Bulfinch, Walter and Clark, Architects. 41 votes, or 55 per cent of the votes cast.
- III. House of W. K. Vanderbilt, New York. Mr. R. M. Hunt, Architect. 37 votes, or 49 per cent of the votes cast.
- IV. Trinity Church, New York. Mr. Richard Upjohn, Architect. 34 votes, or 45 per cent of the votes cast.
- V. Jefferson Market Court-House, New York. Mr. F. C. Withers, Architect. 23 votes, or 30 per cent of the votes cast.
- VI. State Capitol, Hartford, Conn. Mr. R. M. Upjohn, Architect. 23 votes, or 30 per cent of the votes cast.
- VII. City-Hall, Albany, N. Y. Mr. H. H. Richardson, Architect. 19 votes, or 25 per cent of the votes cast.
- VIII. Sever Hall, Cambridge, Mass. Mr. H. H. Richardson, Architect. 17 votes, or 22 per cent of the votes cast.
- IX. State Capitol, Albany, N. Y. Messrs. [Fuller,] Eidlitz and Richardson, Architects. 16 votes, or 21 per cent of the votes cast.
- X. Town-Hall, North Easton, Mass. Mr. H. H. Richardson, Architect. 15 votes, or 20 per cent of the votes cast.

Our readers can apply their own reasoning to this result and draw