

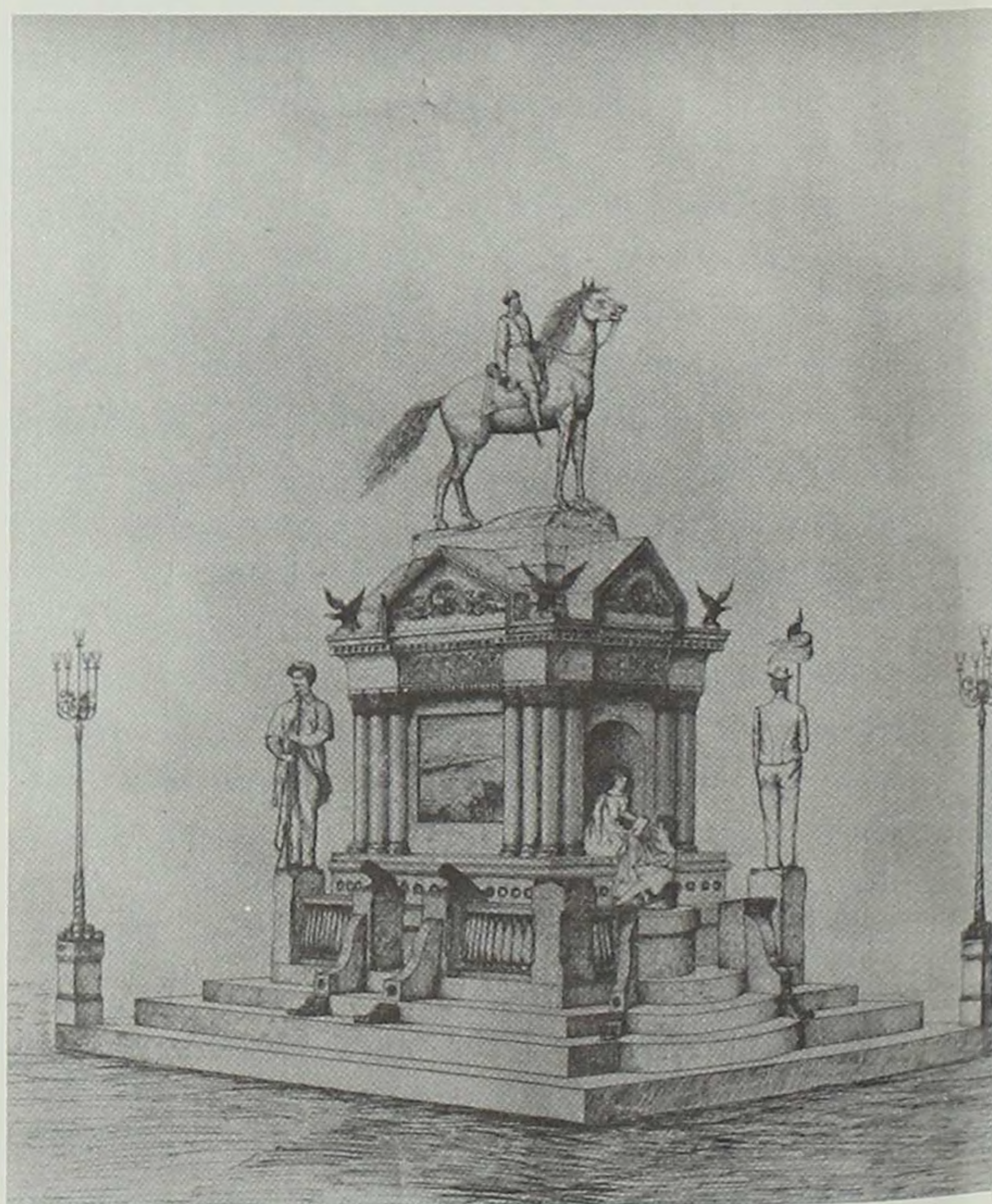
The Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument

by Louise Rosenfield Noun

Most people driving past the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, which rises to the south of the Iowa State Capitol, do not recognize it as a memorial to Civil War veterans. Even among those who know what this monument represents, few realize the depth of emotion and the years of planning which went into making it a reality. The history of the monument goes back to 1887 when the Iowa branch of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.), the organization of Civil War veterans, asked the Twenty-second General Assembly to provide for a suitable monument honoring those Iowans who had fought in the war. Iowa had done more than its share in supporting the Union cause. Nearly half of all Iowa men of military age had served in the military during the war. Of the 70,000 Iowans who went to war, 3,500 had been killed or mortally wounded in battle, 8,498 died of disease, 515 died in prison camps, and 8,500 had been seriously wounded. There was a strong feeling throughout the state that these men should be honored.

In response to the G.A.R.'s request, the legislature in 1888 appointed a six-member commission with authority to advertise for designs for a monument to be placed on the capitol grounds. The commission, however, was only given authority to examine these plans and report to the next session of the General Assembly. The commission accordingly advertised for designs to be submitted no later than April 2, 1889. Three prizes ranging

from \$500 to \$150 were to be awarded. Forty-eight competitors, nine of whom were Iowans, submitted plans. In June the commission announced that Harriet Ketcham of Mt. Pleasant was first prize winner. Robert Krause of Boston was awarded second prize, and J.D. Hunter of New York City was awarded third prize. Several well-known artists did not enter the contest because the commission was unable to designate a specific site for the monument.



Harriet A. Ketcham's design, which was the first choice of the monument commission. (SHSI)

Ketcham's design, which consisted of a large equestrian statue on an elaborate base was one of the few plans submitted which did not have an upward thrust. Most designs included tall columns or obelisks. Others were in the form of Romanesque towers. Ketcham's design was criticized by disappointed contestants who charged that it was modeled after a statue of Frederick the Great in Berlin. According to the *Des Moines Register*, Krause's proposed monument, which included a tall column surmounted by a figure of a soldier, had much more popular appeal. It certainly was a more competent design than Ketcham's and one can only wonder why the commission chose her plan over Krause's or several others which obviously had more merit. Ketcham subsequently revised her design, substituting a tall column surmounted by a figure of Victory for the large

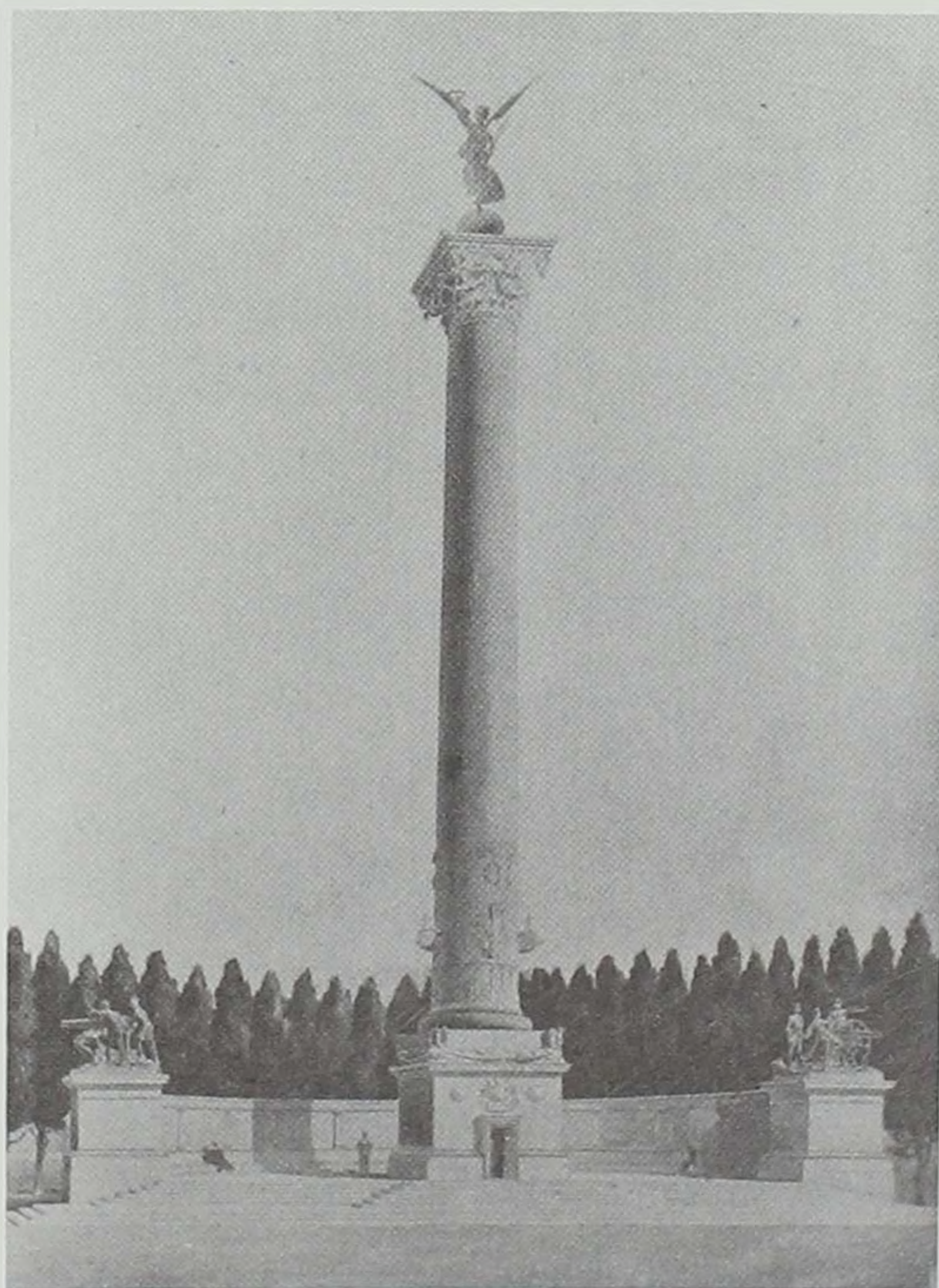
Of the forty-eight designs submitted for the competition, nine were from Iowa. The other eight designs by Iowa residents appear on the following two pages. In clockwise order from the upper left design on page 82, the artists are as follows: John Bawden, Keokuk; A.W. Richards, Indianola; Mrs. Eunice E. Gibbs Allyn, Dubuque; C.A. Dunham, Burlington; Albert R. Ross, Davenport; C.A. Menth, North Buena Vista; Theodore D. Boal, Iowa City; and, Elliott Waring, Oskaloosa. (SHSI)

equestrian figure on her original design. She died before the legislature authorized the construction of a war memorial but her design was retained by the commission and served as the basis for the monument as we see it today.

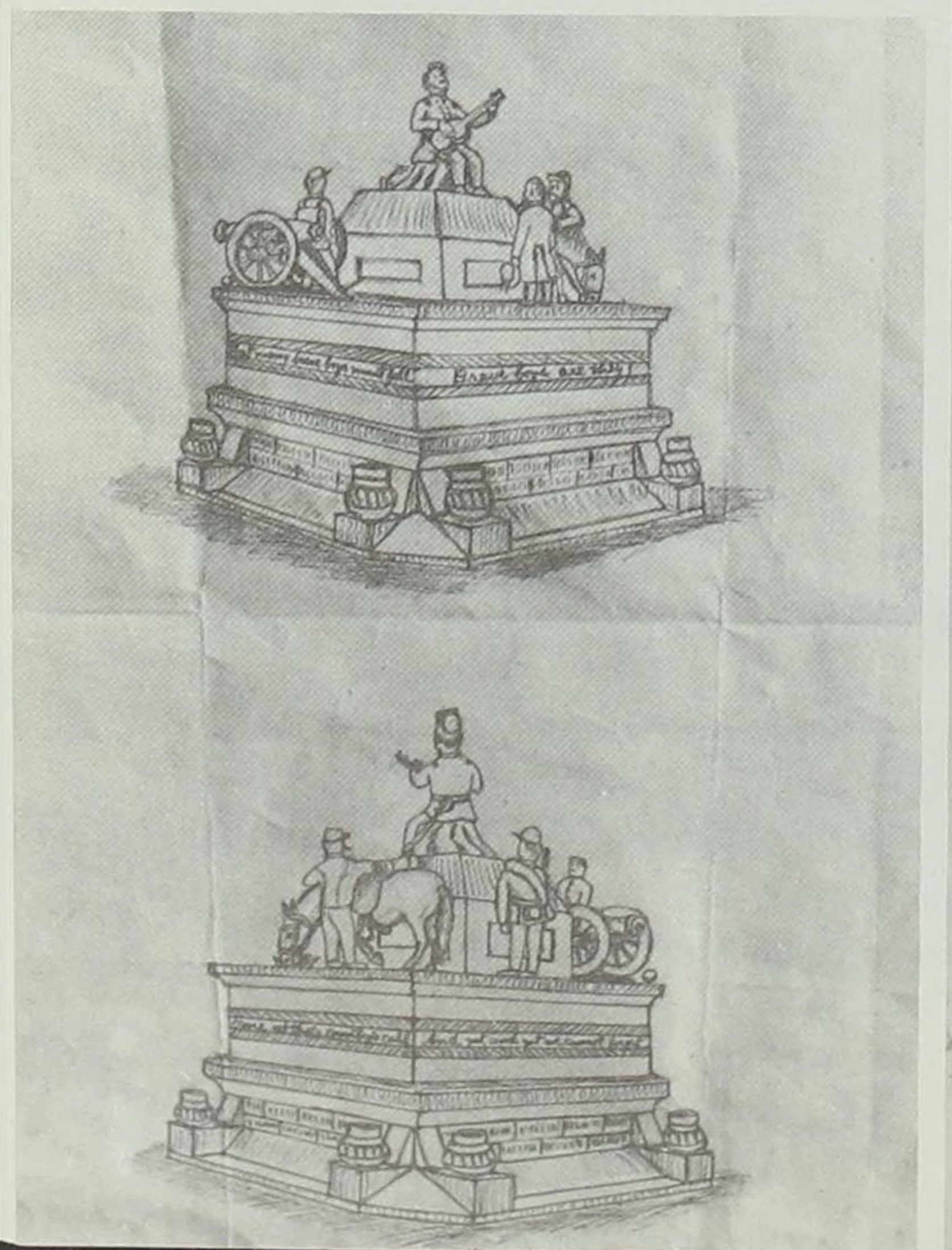
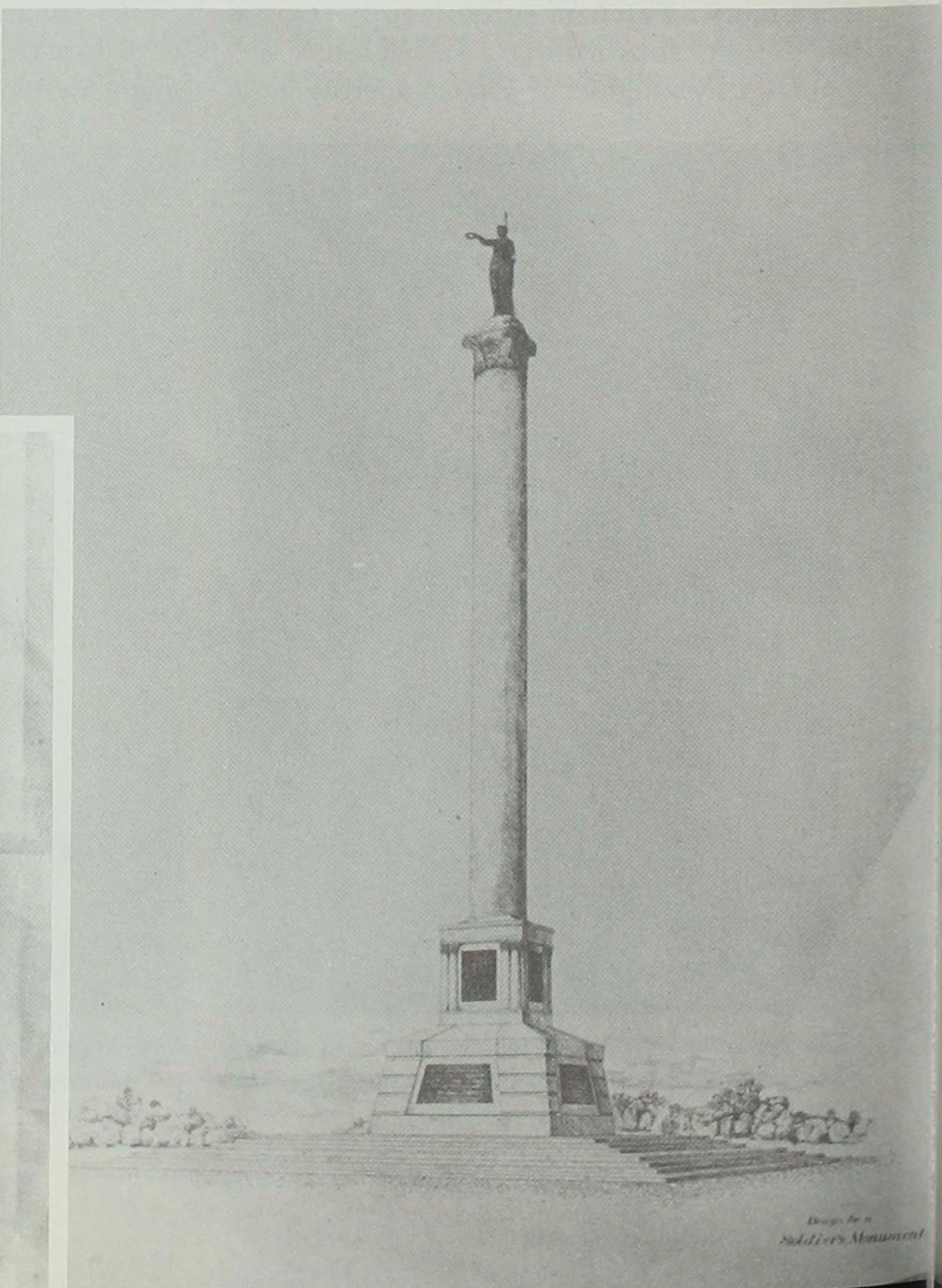
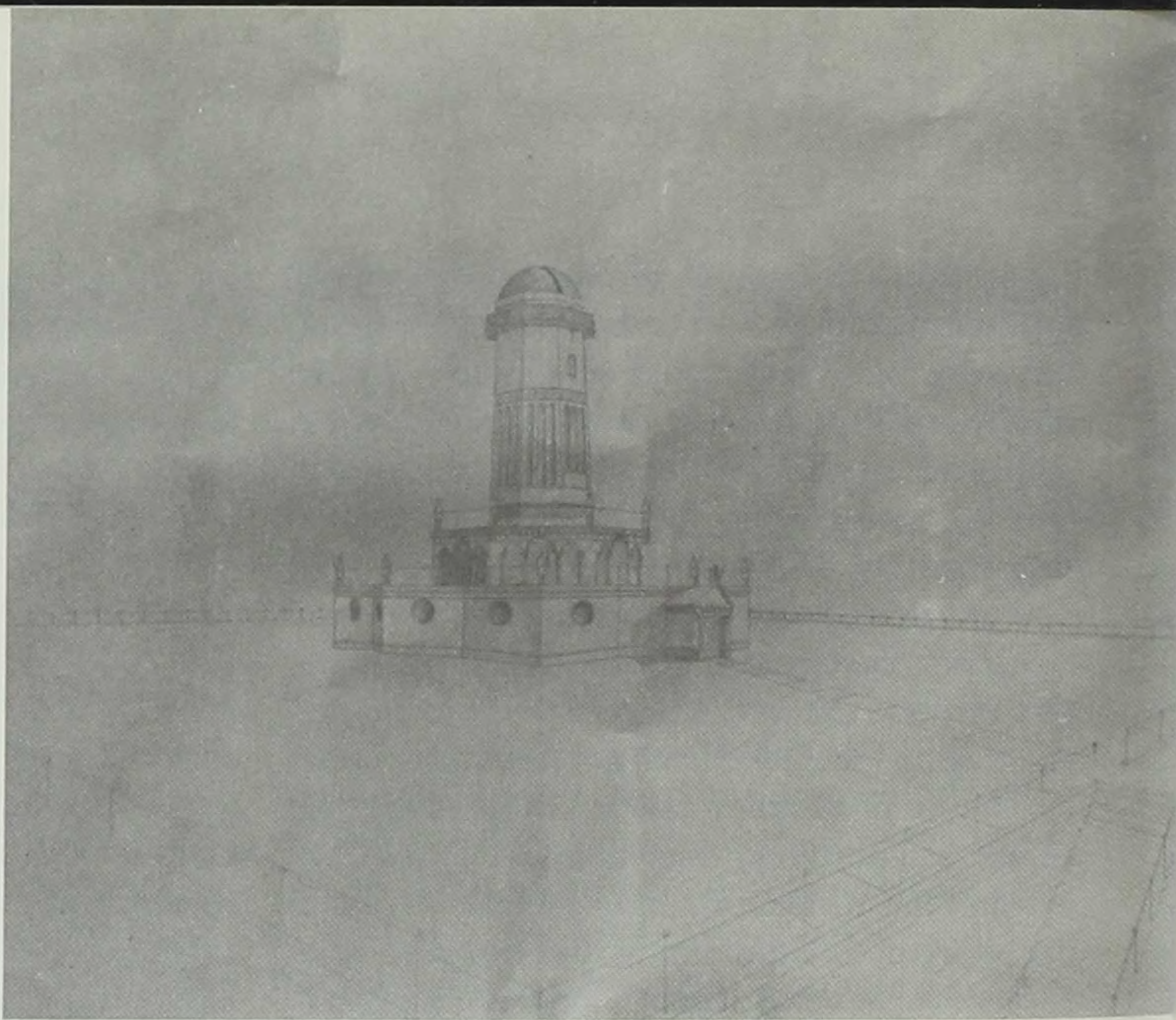
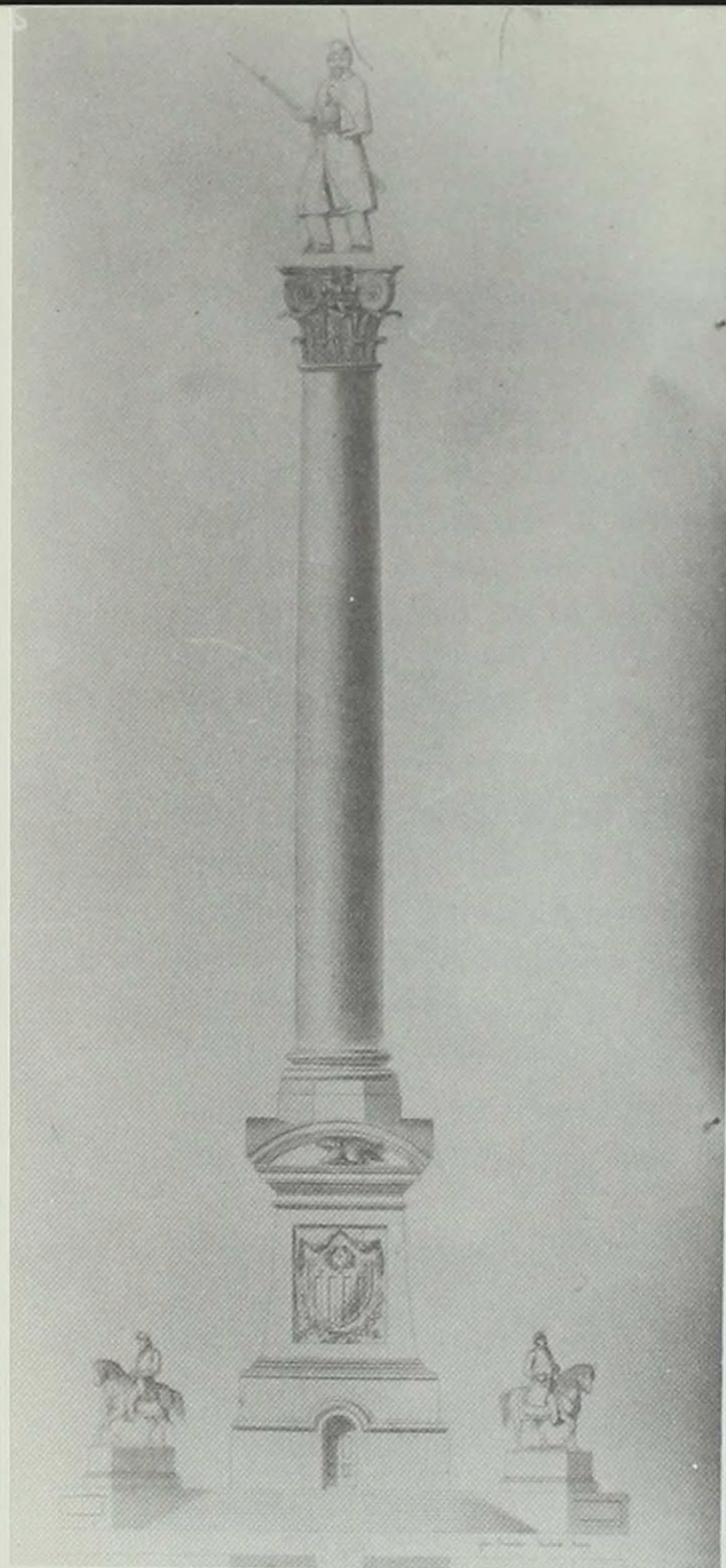
The commission in its report to the 1890 legislature expressed the opinion that no monument should be built within the narrow con-



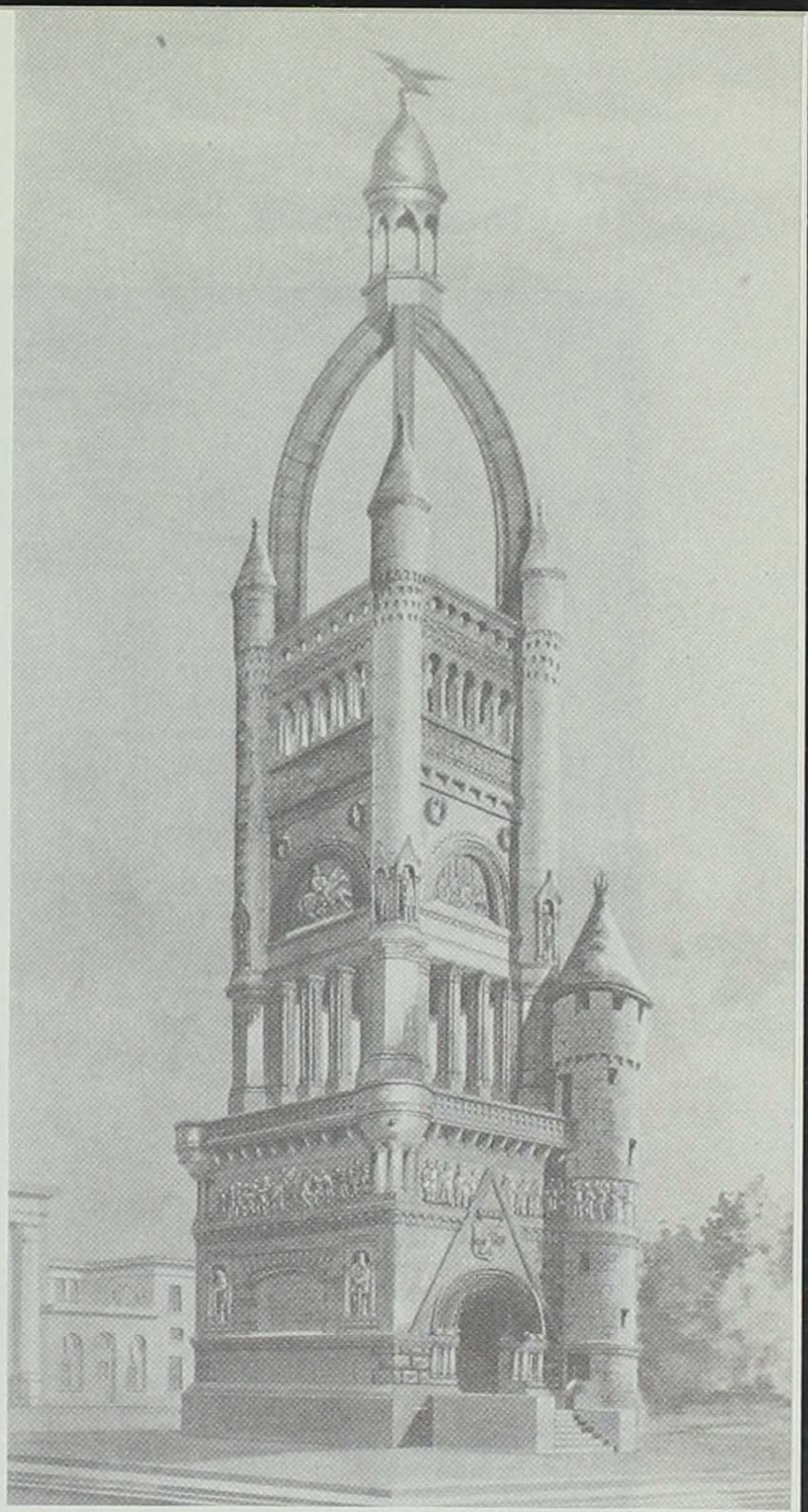
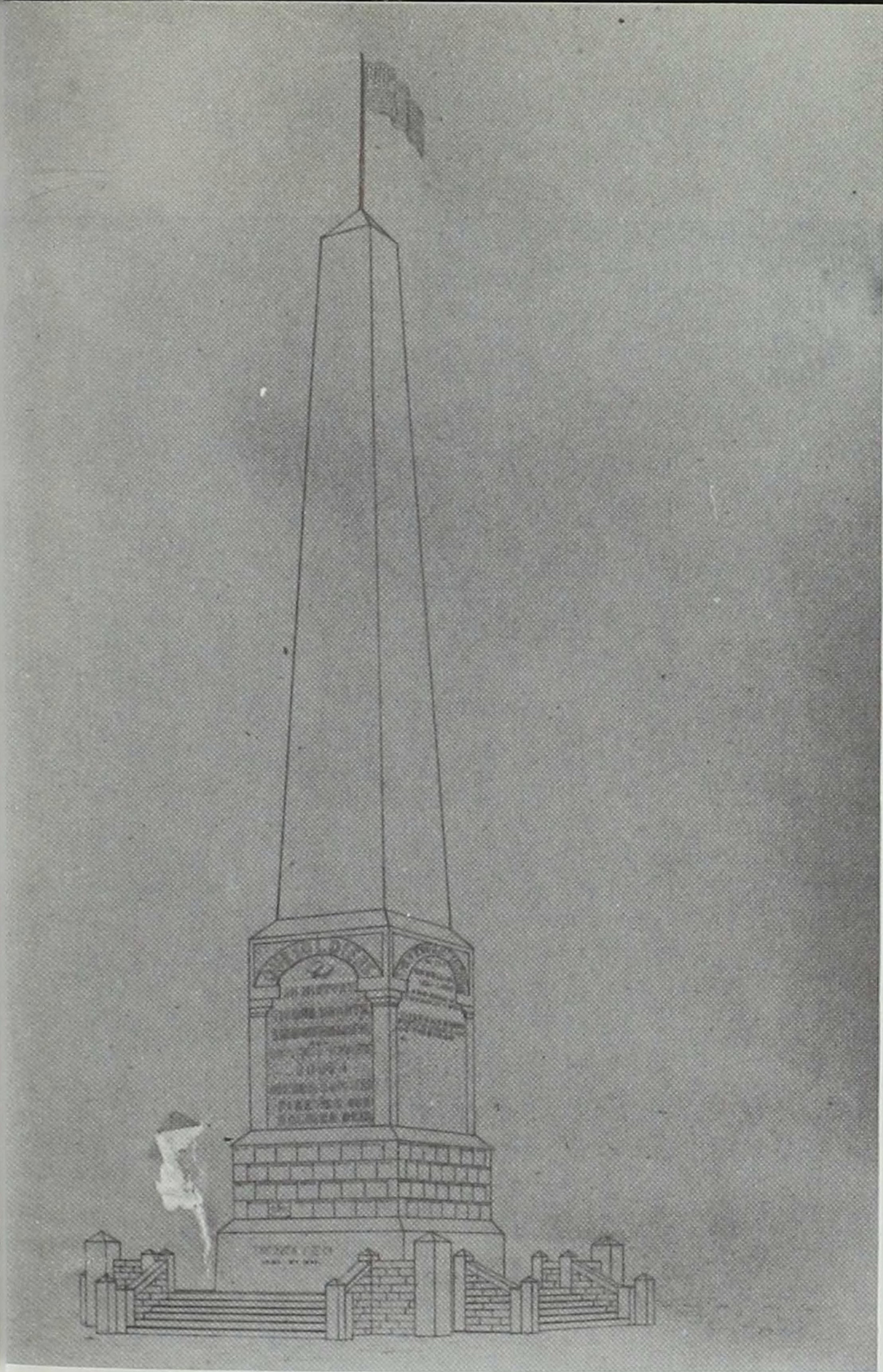
The commission's second choice was a design by Robert Krause of Boston, Massachusetts. (SHSI)

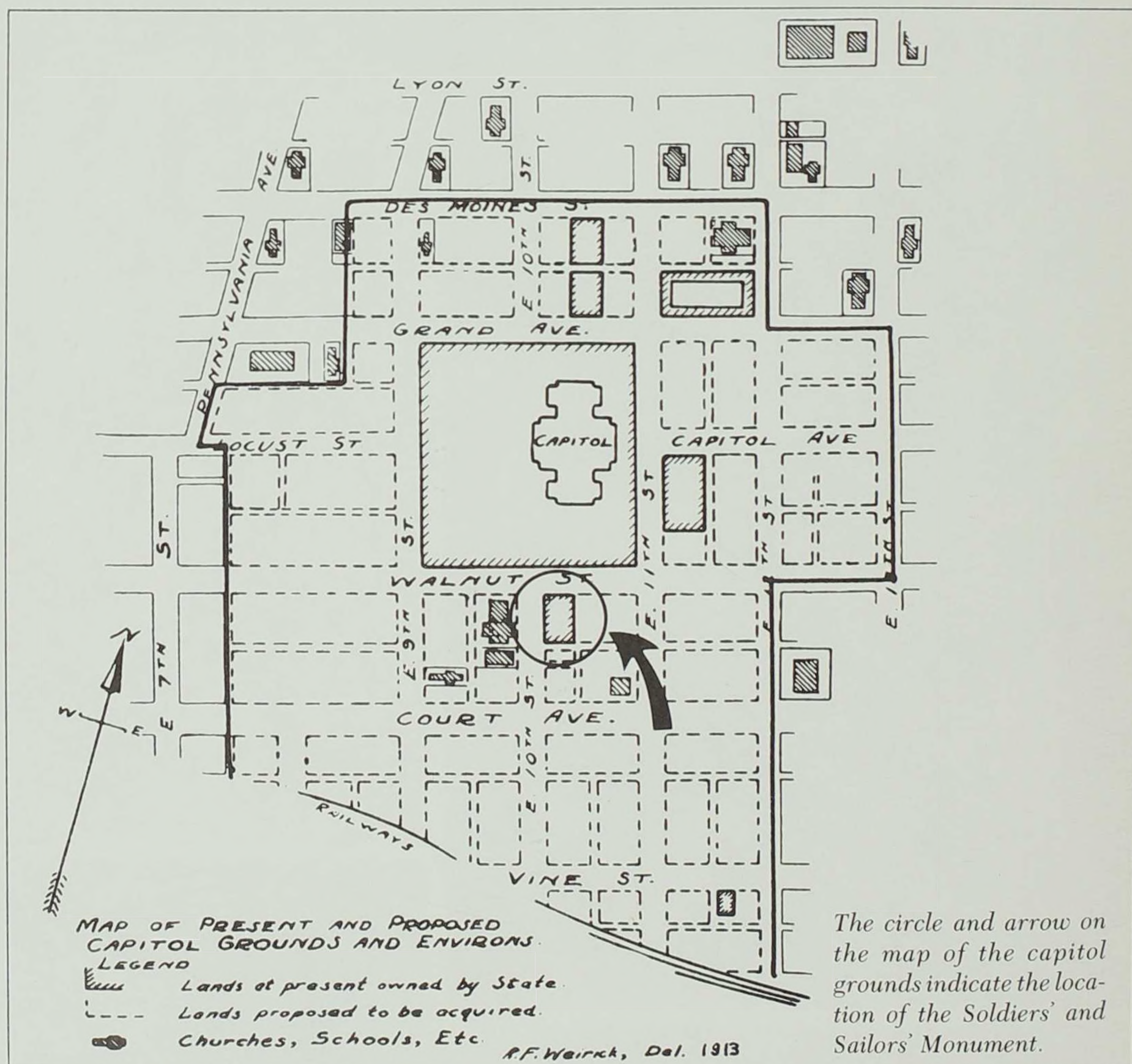


The design of J.D. Hunter, Jr., of New York, was the monument commission's third choice. (SHSI)



Design for a
Soldier's Monument





fines of the capitol grounds, which at that time consisted of less than ten acres. Commission members believed that the memorial should be placed in a spacious area such as that surrounding the Washington monument in the nation's capital. "Iowa should build nobly or not at all," the commission declared. Meanwhile, there was agitation for something other than a monument. Some wanted a memorial hall or a hospital. Others thought a triumphal arch would be more appropriate. The legislature referred the controversy to the commis-

sion and instructed it to report to the next general assembly with a recommendation as to whether a monument, a memorial arch, or a memorial hall and monument combined should be built.

Public opinion was divided on the question. Charles Aldrich, future curator of the Iowa Historical Department, in a letter to the *Des Moines Register* in July 1890, favored a memo-

Opposite is a photograph of Carl Rohl-Smith, the sculptor retained by the commission to complete Harriet A. Ketcham's revised monument.

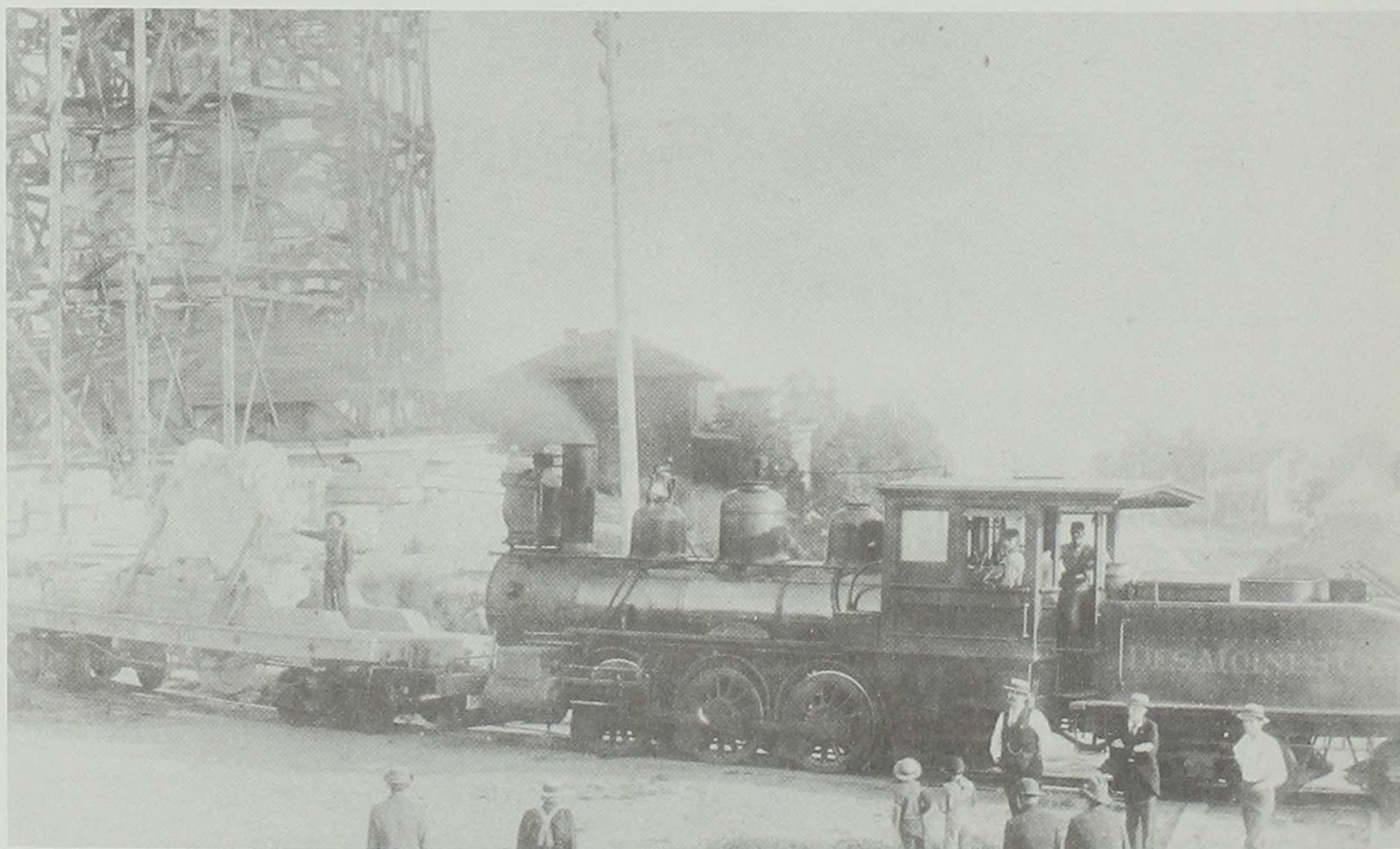


rial hall in which the name of every man who ever bore arms for the state could be inscribed. A monument, he said, perpetuates no one's name. A memorial hall could also serve as a historical building and art museum. On the other hand, the Iowa Women's Monument Association carried on an active campaign for a monument. Nettie Sanford Chapin of Marshalltown, a member of the women's association, argued for Ketcham's design with its marble shaft like the one in the Place Vendome in Paris. "Has Iowa always to be looking after pork or hominy?" she asked a meeting of the Dubuque G.A.R. in April 1891. "For the sake of the unknown dead who are sleeping on southern battlefields, let us have the shaft," she urged.

The commission reported to the 1892 General Assembly that it favored a monument over other types of memorials. Triumphal arches in Paris and Berlin were at the end of long boulevards. Des Moines had no such boulevards.

Soldiers' homes and soldiers' hospitals had no lasting historical value. A memorial hall could be used to show war mementos, flags, etc. "But flags decay and turn to dust and arms lose interest as years race on . . ." A monument, on the other hand, would last for centuries.

On April 17, 1892, the legislature finally approved \$150,000 for the construction of a monument and specified that it be placed on the site of the old capitol, a small lot (100 feet by 160 feet) directly across Walnut Street from the new capitol building. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction with this location as the site was considered too small; the monument would be dwarfed by the capitol building across the street; and private houses and other structures abutted the site which were both unsightly and a fire danger. The commission was empowered to purchase another sixty feet in order to square the lot but, probably because no appropriation was made for this purpose,



The railroad spur which was built in 1894 to haul materials to the construction site. (SHSI, Des Moines)



The Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument as it appeared in 1898, sometime after its completion.

the site remained unchanged until 1913 when the entire area surrounding the capitol grounds was enlarged.

In March 1894 the commission contracted with Carl Rohl-Smith, a Danish-born artist currently living in Chicago, to execute the sculptures for the monument. His low bid of \$21,500 was just \$500 less than that of the noted sculptor Lorado Taft. Rohl-Smith was to do the work in his Chicago studio and commis-

sion members were to approve each piece before it was cast by a Chicago bronze works. Construction of the monument also began in 1894. The walls of the foundation were dug twenty-seven feet deep to provide a sturdy base for the 3,800,000 pounds of granite which were used in building the monument. A spur from the railroad south of the capitol grounds was constructed to bring building materials to the site. On September 6 a cornerstone laying ceremony was held with James Harlan, a com-



An allegorical figure of Iowa as a young mother. Iowa is located on the north side of the monument and faces the capitol.

History is located on the south side of the monument. With her is a young Iowa presenting her with a record of Iowa in the Civil War.



mission member, the orator of the day.

Rohl-Smith's contract for sculptures, to be executed according to Ketcham's design, called for an impressive number of pieces. There are thirty-five medallions of servicemen which were to be "modeled from life if living; if not, from the best pictures to be had," also four life-size figures of actual servicemen representing the cavalry, the infantry, the artillery, and the navy, as well as four large equestrian figures of Iowa generals. There are two bas-reliefs on the base. One represents the Battle of Fort Donelson, in which 128 Iowa men were killed; the other is an imaginary triumphal scene of the return of troops from the war. Included in the triumphal scene are a welcoming committee of ten, among whom are three women, Mrs. John Scott, Mrs. William Larrabee, and Harriet Ketcham. Annie Wittenmyer, a Civil War nurse, stands among the returning soldiers. All the figures on the bas-reliefs, however, are so small that it is doubtful they were ever identifiable. Standing at the top of monument is an allegorical female figure representing Victory. Ketcham's design also called for two more female allegorical figures on either end of the base of the monument. One was to represent a mourning Iowa placing garlands on a funeral urn, and the other History, who was to be represented by a mother holding a book or scroll containing the story of the war and reading to a youth seated at her feet. Rohl-Smith, however, modeled History as a stiff-backed, gaunt old woman staring into space. A nude young boy stands at her side. Rohl-Smith chose to make the figure of the mourning Iowa representative of the state's bounty rather than of her war sacrifices. She thus became a young woman naked to the waist with head and shoulders thrust back and hands cupped under thrust-out breasts.

Commission members went to Chicago periodically to approve Rohl-Smith's sculptures before they were cast. In one

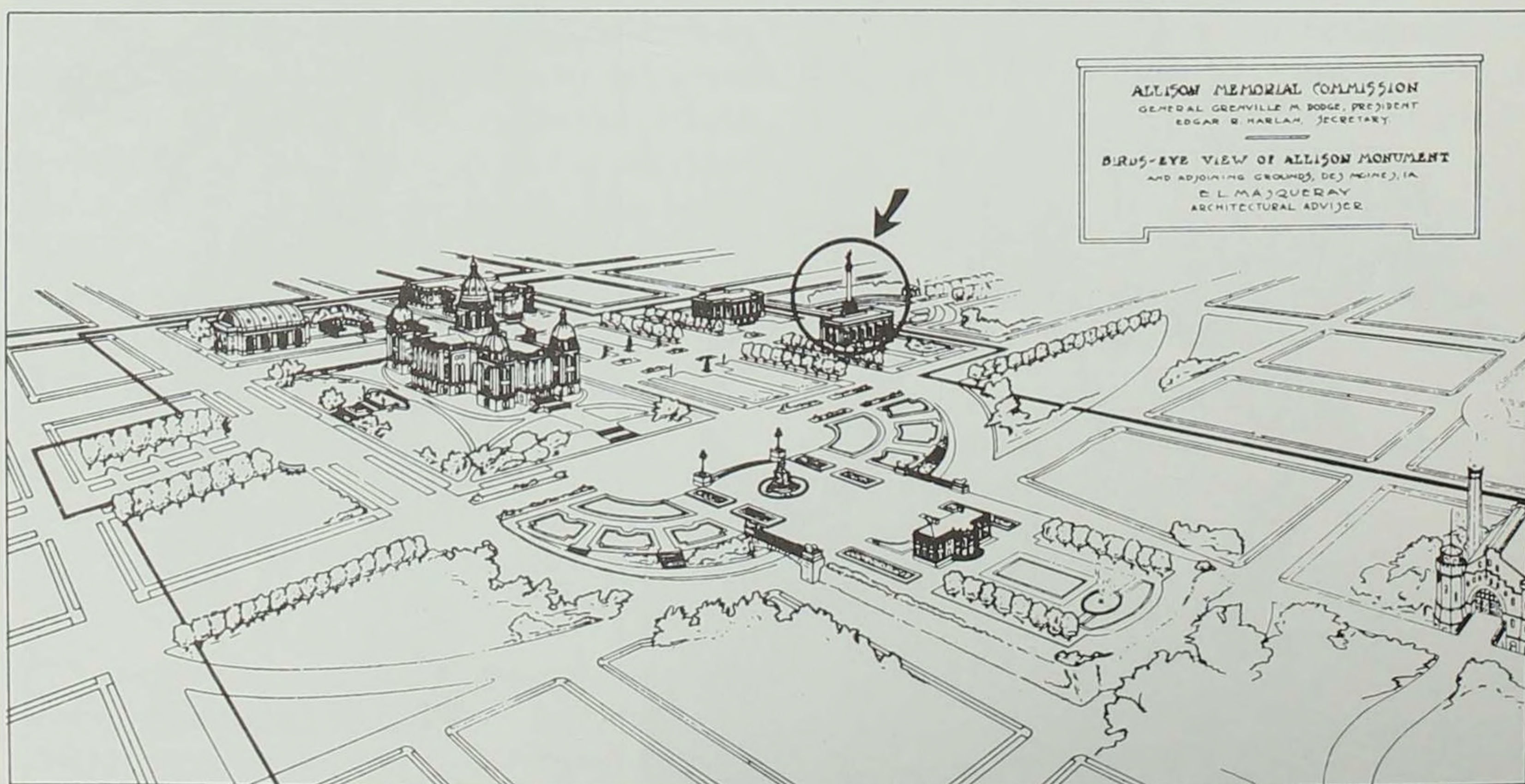
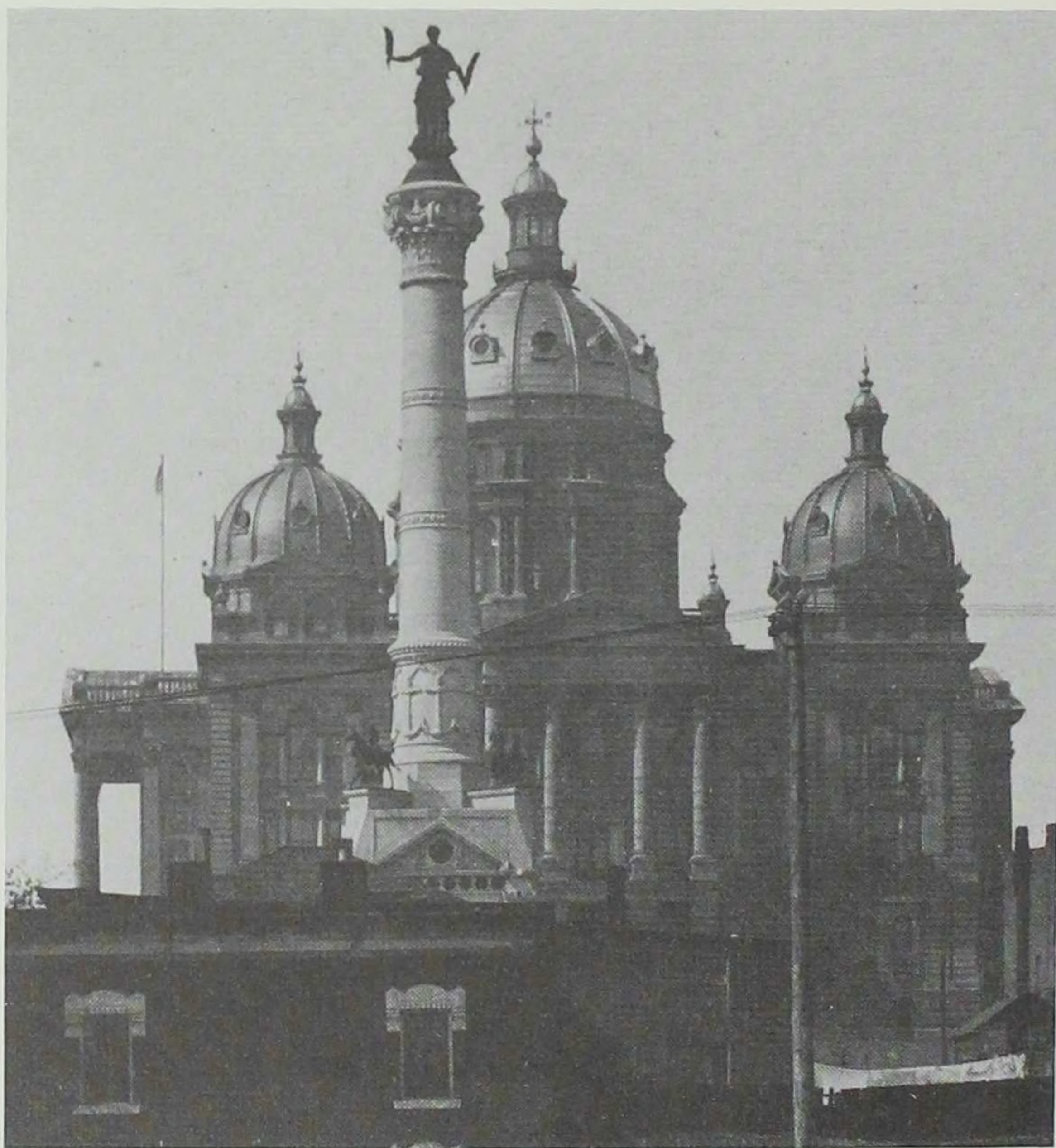
instance at least there was a serious division of opinion about the merit of the work. James Harlan was especially indignant about Rohl-Smith's interpretation of the group representing History. At a meeting in Des Moines in April 1894 the commission approved a motion by Harlan, "that History be so made as to represent an Iowa mother, not older than middle life in a sitting posture, in an attitude of instructing her son in the history of the war . . . and that the figure representing the son be not more than 10 years of age." The commission, however, reversed itself at its next meeting on a motion offered by Cora Weed of Muscatine. Two negative votes were recorded on this action. Harlan also objected to the figure of Iowa which in a speech several years later he called a "misconception" executed by an artist "born and educated in the north of Europe." Further indication of dissatisfaction with the artwork on the monument was indicated in a 1913 speech by Edgar Harlan, curator of the Historical Department of Iowa, in which he argued that if this monument were moved away from its present crowded location to a spacious setting it "[would] be regarded as the deliberate artistic expression of the generation producing it *and even if any slight deficiency of artistic merit then remain*, [emphasis added] the whole will be of too sacred a character to be touched by other hands."

Cora Weed, on the other hand, gave the allegorical figures of History and Iowa lavish praise in her 1898 *Hand Book for Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument*. She said that

Opposite: (top) Donelson, a bas-relief on the east side of the monument, depicts a victory highlighted by the charge of the Second Iowa Infantry; (bottom left) General John M. Corse, one of the four equestrian figures on the monument; (bottom right) Infantryman, a statue of Shelby Norman, who fell at Wilson's Creek in August 1861. This statue is found on the northeast corner of the monument. At the other three points are statues representing the artilleryman, the sailor, and the cavalryman.



A photographic indication of why proposals were often made to move the monument to a more spacious location. One of the proposals, made by the Allison Memorial Commission in 1913, would have enlarged the capitol grounds and offered greater and more varied opportunities for viewing the monument.



these two figures were the only ones on the monument which afforded the artist "full scope for his genius." History, she described as a "stern, inflexible, relentless chronicler of events, reminding one of Michael Angelo's Sybils, and even of the Sphinx." As History stares into the limitless future she is oblivious to the story of the war being offered her by the youth at her side. The figure of Iowa, Weed rhapsodized, is reminiscent of "the glorious goddesses on the frieze of the Parthenon." Her refined beauty of soul along with her "closed eyes, earnest brow and sensitive mouth" all convey the idea of Maternity. Her pose suggests "longing, waiting motherhood, with bounteous gifts for all her offspring." Weed pronounced this figure a true masterpiece of classical art. Differences of opinion among commission members over Rohl-Smith's work probably account for the fact that the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument was not dedicated until 1945.

There was also continuing unhappiness over the location of the monument on the small lot across the street from the capitol. The G.A.R. in 1911 complained that it was "almost an insult to the men it was intended to honor to let the monument remain in its present position." This group backed an effort to move the monument to the riverfront on the east side between Walnut and Locust. The Des Moines City Council offered to give the land if the legislature would pay for the monument's relocation. State officials, however, were cool to the idea and refused to cooperate.

Another proposal to move the monument to the end of a mall east of the capitol was made by the Allison Memorial Commission in 1913 in its plan for enlargement of the capitol grounds.

The proposed location would allow a clear view of the monument from all four sides and, in addition, there would be plenty of surrounding space for military festivities or parades. The G.A.R., however, opposed moving the monument to any location other than the riverfront. Other groups urged leaving the monument at its present site, pointing out that it might be greatly damaged in moving. By 1917 the capitol grounds had been enlarged and the site where the monument stands cleared of abutting buildings and debris. The G.A.R. at this time decided that the monument should not be moved. Even Harriet Ketcham's eighty-year-old husband, William, sent word from his home in Missouri that the monument should be left on its present site.

Despite the commission's hope of erecting a memorial which would last for centuries this monument is fast deteriorating due to lack of care. The stone needs pointing and the bronze work is being eaten by corrosive elements in the atmosphere. If it is to be saved — and it surely should be — immediate first aid is needed. □

Note on Sources

The manuscripts collection of the State Historical Society of Iowa has a complete set of photographs of the designs submitted to the Monument Commission. The collection is entitled "Entries for Iowa Soldiers' Memorial Monument Competition." One should note also Cora Chaplin Weed, comp., *Hand Book for Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument* (1898), and Edgar R. Harlan, *Proposed Improvement of the Iowa State Capitol Grounds* (Des Moines, Iowa, 1913). Photographs accompanying the two articles for which sources were not indicated were drawn from the two above-mentioned books. Key newspaper articles about Harriet Ketcham appeared in the *Burlington Hawkeye*, the *Mount Pleasant Journal*, the *Des Moines Register*, and the *Davenport Gazette*. James Harlan's piece, "The Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument," which appeared in the *Midland Monthly* 5 (February 1890):99-113, should also be noted.