

## **The Columns Controversy of 1914**

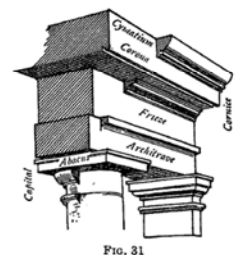
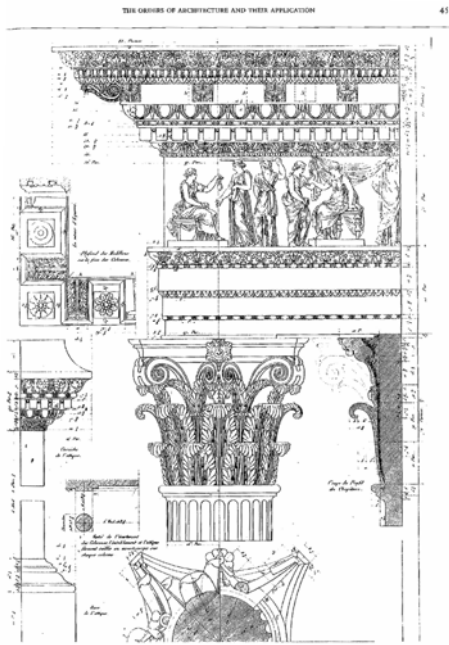
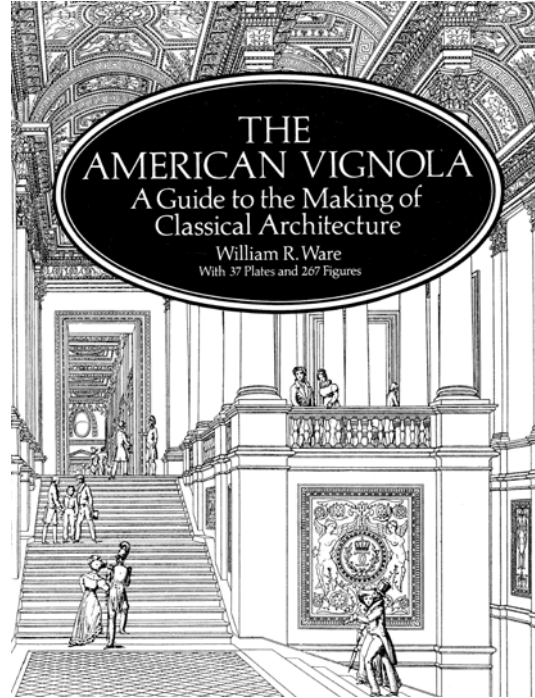
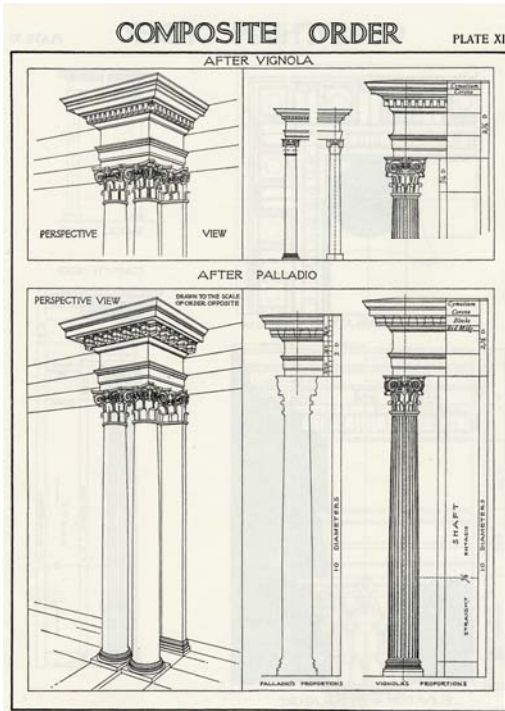
According to the records of the Capitol Commission, what came to be known simply as the Column Controversy was about two things: the use of Utah materials and the cost of making a change in the Capitol's design. Certainly those factors were of immense importance to the taxpayers and the Commission who, after all, were chosen to be its members because they represented various important constituencies of the state. There was also a sense that honorable contractual arrangements, the ethics of the situation, meant the Commission could not alter either Kletting's plan or the contractor's and subcontractors' binding contracts.

Local architects protested the changes for various reasons: Perhaps some of the Utah architects remained rooted in the Richardsonian model for civic building design. In that esthetic, segmented columns were of minor importance. Perhaps added expense of a change was a factor. Perhaps Utah-made suppliers had won the day. And it is entirely possible that the Utah architects were simply in support of their own "Dean of Utah architecture," Richard Kletting. Whatever the reason, they wrote an official objection to the move for monolithic columns.

The Columns Controversy was a significant enough argument that locals papers took up the issue on editorial pages. And Junius Wells wrote and published a pamphlet representing citizens and professionals who passionately wanted to see the 52 colossal order columns running three facades of the building to be monolithic and polished.

Most of the arguments in support of the change were about making the building a showpiece to the world, making Utah respectable in the eyes outside the state and the country. A few got at the heart of the matter: It was not about strength, cost, or Utah materials. It was all about appearance. But what was the standard to which the columns were to be measured? The answer could be that with the tastemakers of the country preaching the absolute superiority of classic revival building design as proper symbols of power and democratic ideals, Utah could not compromise and fail to measure up. It would, in the protesters eyes, be very much like dressing a grand lady in fake jewels. Whatever the reasoning – stated or implied – the Commission voted to continue construction as planned. The columns we see today are 52 segmented, unpolished (but

without fluting) colossal order columns with Corinthian capitols directly from William Ware's textbook drawings for Greek and Roman classical architecture.



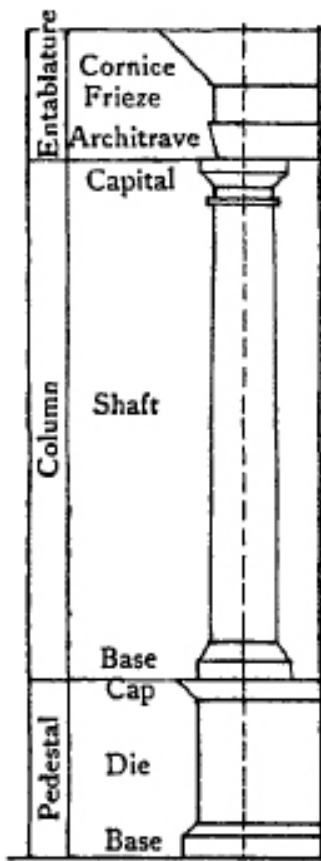


FIG. 34

