

The Philip Dern Decorating Company



Photo courtesy Judy Dencker

If seeing is believing, then the Philip Dern Company found the optimal method of advertising the special services they offered in early 20th century Salt Lake City. Dern's banner, along with his painters and other craftsmen, prominently shows the company's assets and upscale clientele in a Harry Shipler photo of the Gardo House on South Temple Street taken at nearly the same time as the Capitol was being constructed on Arsenal Hill.

Philip Dern founded the decorating company that would come to make a proposal of far reaching significance to the State of Utah. Dern became part of the ensemble of architects, builders and designers for the Capitol in 1914 with a proposal that included not only the interior wall surfaces, plaster ornamental moldings, gold leaf and decorative trims throughout the building now restored as part of the Capitol Preservation Project, but also murals for the legislative and judicial chambers, the governor's formal reception room and the Rotunda Dome. In language typical of the entire proposal, Dern "suggested" the "ceiling of the rotunda . . . will be painted to obtain clouds and sky with the suggestion of sea gulls flying. This bird is very characteristic of Utah and a very interesting effect can be obtained."

The Dern contract included hiring two New York City artists for the House Chamber. Vincente Aderente and A. B. Forringer painted them on site according to the specifications of the contract.

