

CRB/E #00206
391/134905

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT
PART II
ON
CONGRESS HALL
Independence National Historical Park

Chapter III
Architectural Data Section

Supplement No. 3
House of Representatives Gallery Rail

by
Penelope Hartshorne
Architect
March 1962

Region Five
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

H30

March 23, 1962

Nelligan
3/22
Condon
3/23/62

Memorandum

To: Director

From: Regional Director

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part II, Architectural Data Section, Supplement 3, Congress Hall, House of Representatives Gallery Rail

Enclosed for review is one copy of the subject report. The change in the gallery railing of Congress Hall is recommended by Superintendent M. O. Anderson, the EODC concurs with his recommendation, as does this office.

We would appreciate an early review of this report to expedite the completion of the Congress Hall rehabilitation project.

(Sgd.) Ronald F. Lee

Regional Director

In duplicate

Enclosure

Copy to: Chief, EODC
Supt., Independence

MHNelligan/cp

General
Daily
Area
Programs
Mr. Barnes

INDEPENDENCE - HISTORIC STRUCTURES RPT - ARCHITECTURAL DATA SECTION, SUPP. 3
CONGRESS HALL, HOUSE OF REPRES. GALLERY
RAIL

INTERPRETATION

✓	History	<i>OK</i> <i>3/12 - looks well-justified</i>
✓	Nat. Hist.	
✓	Archives	
✓	Public	
✓	Museum	
	Sec'y.	

OPERATIONS *EW 3/13/62*

OPERATIONS

✓	Ass't. Chief	
✓	Chief of Mgmt.	
✓	Lands	
✓		<i>omit 3/13</i>
✓		<i>EOC 3-13</i>
✓	Lands. Atty	<i>3/13</i>

DR. NELLIGAN - LAST

*OK by PK
" by EODL
" by Reg?*



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Independence National Historical Park
420 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H30-H

March 8, 1962

REGION FIVE		INITIAL
MAR 9 1962		AND
		DATE
REG DIRECTOR		
ASST. REG. DIR.		
OPERATIONS		
INFORMATION	2	3/22
ADM.		
REC. RES. PLAN		
RANGER ACCT'G.		

Noted 3/9 CP

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Superintendent, Independence NHP

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part II, Chapter III,
Supplement 3, Congress Hall, House of Representatives
Gallery Rail

We have reviewed the subject report and thoroughly agree with
its conclusions. We recommend its adoption without reservation.

M. O. Anderson
M. O. Anderson
Superintendent

Copy to: Chief, EODC



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Eastern Office
Division of Design and Construction
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

March 6, 1962

IN REPLY REFER TO:
H30-H

REGION FIVE		INITIAL
MAR 7 1962		AND
		DATE
REG. DIRECTOR		
ASST. REG. DIR.		
OPERATIONS		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INTERPRETATION		3/2
ADM.		
REC. RES. PLAN		
RANGER ACCT'S.		

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Chief, EODC

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part II, Chapter III,
Supplement 3, Congress Hall, House of Representatives
Gallery Rail

Attached for review and distribution are two copies of the Architectural Data Section for the subject report, which this office recommends for approval. One copy has been retained by this office.

With the fast approaching May 1 completion date for the Historic Structures work in Congress Hall, we hope that this report will be reviewed very soon.

Robert G. Hall
Chief

Attachment (in duplicate)

Copy to: Assistant Director, Design and Construction (2)
Superintendent, Independence w/attachment
Miss Hartshorne, Historic Structures w/attachment

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART II

ON

CONGRESS HALL

House of Representatives Gallery Rail

APPROVAL SHEET

RECOMMENDED

M. O. Anderson Date 3/8/62
Superintendent

Charles E. Peterson Date 3/5/62
Supervising Architect, Historic Structures

By: Henry A. Judd
Henry A. Judd
Robert G. Hall Date 3/6/62
Robert G. Hall
Chief

Arnold F. Lee Date 3/19/62
Regional Director, Region Five

APPROVED

A. Stratton Date 4/5/62
Director

Asst

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ILLUSTRATION	

Drawing #EODC 3210 sheet 8

Physical History

In the Congress Hall Historic Structures Report Part II Architectural Data Section, dated April 1960, it was established that the House of Representatives gallery was first built within the County Court House for the use of Congress in 1790, "to hold about 300 persons." The gallery was to be used by "the auditors of the debates" and was considered "capacious."¹

This balcony was used throughout the Congressional occupancy of the building, but was destroyed when Congress Hall underwent major interior alterations between 1800-1818.

In 1912 the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects reconstructed the balcony, having found the profile of the steps along the walls. The gallery as they rebuilt it had a solid paneled railing.

It is the purpose of this report to present the rationale for changing the solid paneled railing of 1912 to an open ballustraded railing.

The list of disbursements paid by the Commissioners of the City and County of Philadelphia for fitting up the building in 1790 for Congress, included several items which surely pertained in part to this balcony.

¹Pa. Packet, Dec. 6, 1790, p. 3, Col. 1

		2.
No. 14	To Matthew Armour, for 4 sets Pillaster Ornaments	3. 0. 0

107	To Samuel Fletcher, for Columns & Bannisters	8. 5. 3

122	To Joseph Rakestraw, for measg. Carpenters Work	4. 4. 0

129	To Anthony Outhbert, for a pr. Mast	1.18. 0

135	To Jones, Clark & Cresson, for Boards	25.17. 1

146	To Joseph Skerrett, for Smiths Work	2.11. 6

149	To John West, for Boards, Plank & Lath	13. 3. 8

156	To Jacob Eckfelatt, for Iron Work	4.10. 0

216	To Sadler & Govett, for Carpenters Work	366.14. 2

230	To Caleb Ealen, for Plank	4. 5. 0 ²

Because the County Court House in 1790 had been a working building for several years, the work listed here concerned only the additional needs of Congress. Item 107 for "Columns & Bannisters," therefore, would not have pertained to the stairways leading to the second floor, but instead could have been the open balustrade or rail for either or both the House of Representatives Speaker's dais and gallery.

The above document suggests an open railing. The form of the balcony shows it as a logical solution.

² MSS at Penna. Hist. & Museum Commission, Harrisburg.

In 1790 when the balcony was first built, Congress Hall had not yet been extended to its present length. It would have been a physical impossibility for seated persons to see any part of the House of Representatives floor if the railing had been solid paneled.³ With the extension southward of the building in 1793 only the most southern end of the room could have been viewed over such a paneled railing.

Mr. Horace Wells Sellers, a member of the 1912 AIA Restoration Committee, admitted a lack of documentation. He wrote, "we have found the profile of it on the walls after removing the modern plaster....nor have we any data as to its details other than might be inferred from the general character of the building."⁴

³Illustration No. 30 of Chapter II, Congress Hall Historic Structures Report Part I, dated May 1959, shows in 1900 the profile of the gallery steps found on the west wall chimney breast. The 1912 AIA restoration we assume followed this evidence, thereby giving us the correct floor levels in the gallery.

The following documents the fact that the visitors in the House of Representatives gallery were seated.

The Debates and President's Message

Preface

..., I resolved to be a punctual attendant in the [Representatives] Gallery from one end of the session to the other.

Most of the members will, without doubt, recollect seeing a little dark man, clad in a gray coat something the worse for wear, sitting in the west corner of the front seat: that has been my post: and I can boldly say, that I never deserted it; except during the five days that I was employed in writing the New Year's Gift [a Peter Porcupine publication]....

A Prospect from the Congress-Gallery during the Session begun Dec. 17, 1793 (Wm. Cobbett, 1796).

⁴"AIA Restoration," vol. 1, 1911-12, Feb. 9, 1912, HSP, [JHRP file #XCL].

Illustration No. 10 of Chapter XIII, Architectural Data Section of the Congress Hall Part II Report dated April 1960, shows the holes found in the east wall chimney breast in which the structural beams of the gallery rested. The corner beads of the chimney breast in this photograph may pre-date the 1790 balcony, for the beads have very clearly been interrupted by the balcony structural beams and subsequent to the removal of the balcony this interruption was patched with dutchman. Alas, we do not have these beads today. Otherwise some evidence might still exist to determine the type of railing, open or solid, which abutted the wall at the corner bead. From this photograph alone we have no proof one way or the other, for this corner bead could have remained in place with both an open railing and or paneled railing.

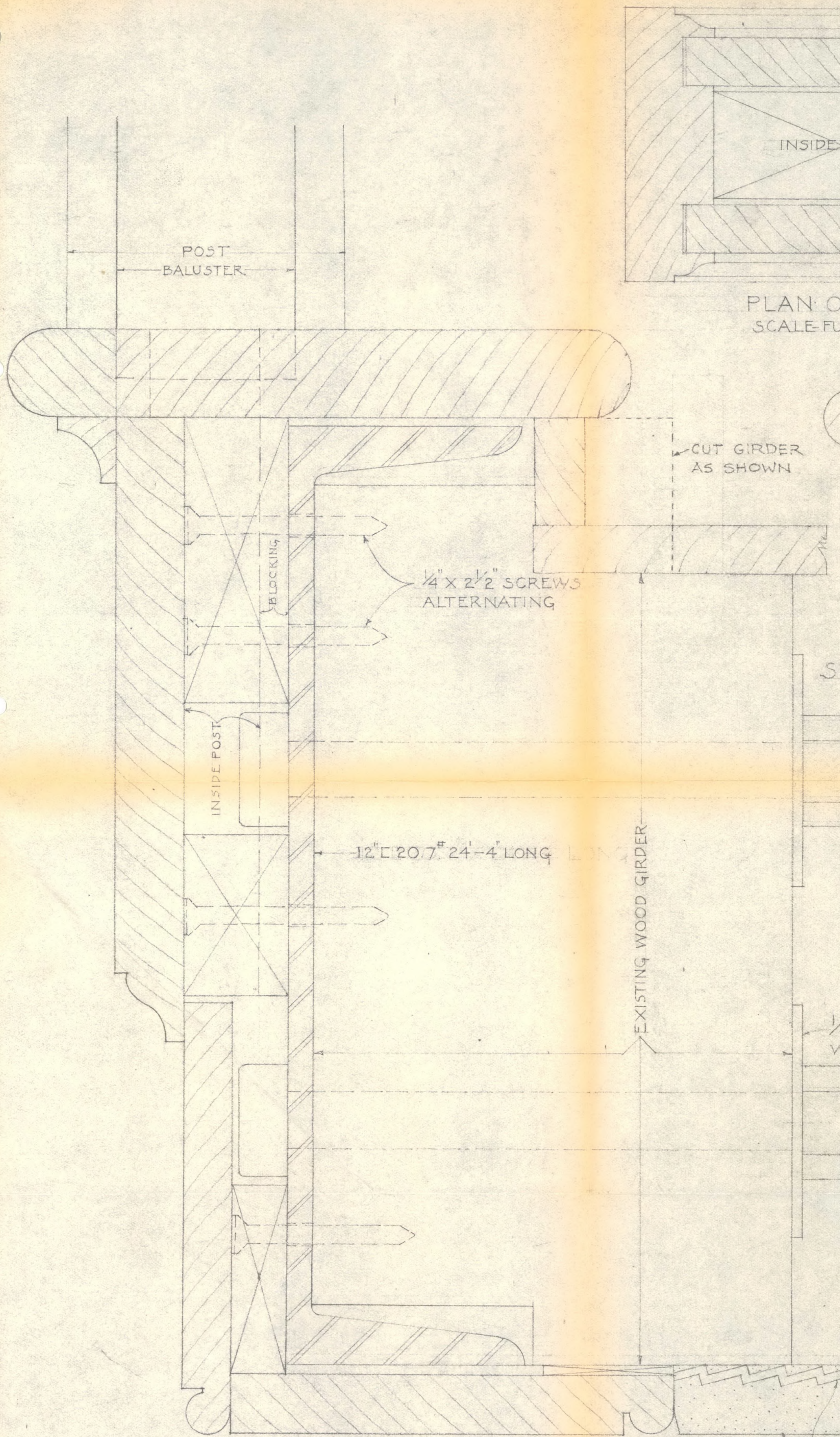
Recommendation

Although we have no definite proof that the gallery railing was an open balustrade, the above suggests that it was more than likely the form used. We therefore recommend that the House of Representatives Gallery railing be reconstructed as shown in the accompanying drawing, EDC #3210 sheet 8.

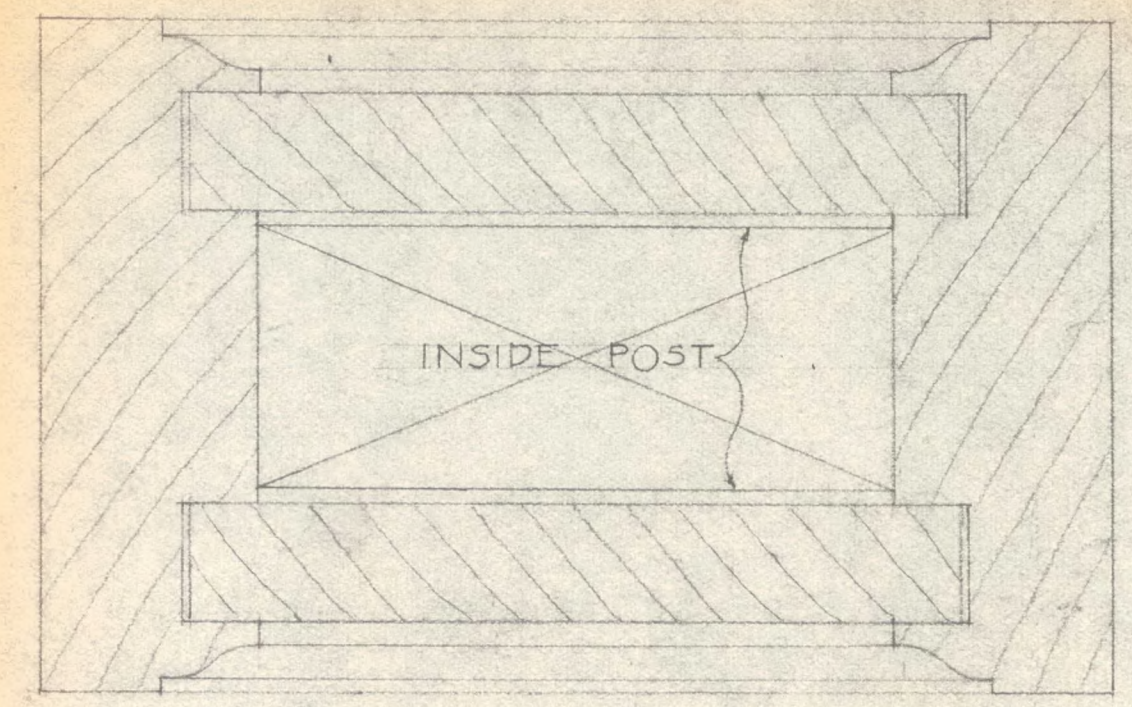
Precedent for open balcony railings exists in the Philadelphia area in two particular churches shown in Colonial Churches and Meeting Houses by Phillip B. Wallace. The

Bridgeton Presbyterian Church (1790) of Bridgeton, New Jersey (p. 204) has open balusters with a complex hand rail and full entablature edging the gallery floor. The railing is strengthened with periodic swan panel pilasters. A short space of open railing is used in the organ balcony in St. John's Lutheran Church of Philadelphia (1803), torn down in 1926 (p. 97). This railing has a thin hand rail, swan panel pilasters and a decorated frieze edging the balcony floor.

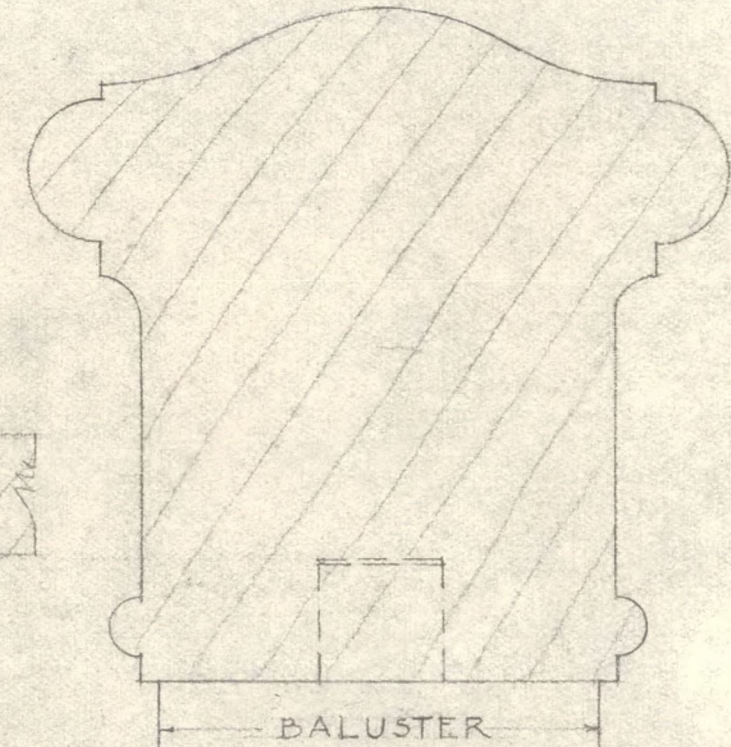
In Congress Hall we have some of the original balusters from the railing of the main stairway to the second floor. In designing the railing for the House of Representatives Gallery we thought it best to use this original baluster design. To allow the railing its needed stability, newel posts were introduced in the long center span. To carry out the appropriate symmetry these newels were placed at the ends of each section of the railing. The details were kept as simple as possible to fit the relative starkness of the rest of the architectural features in the House of Representatives.



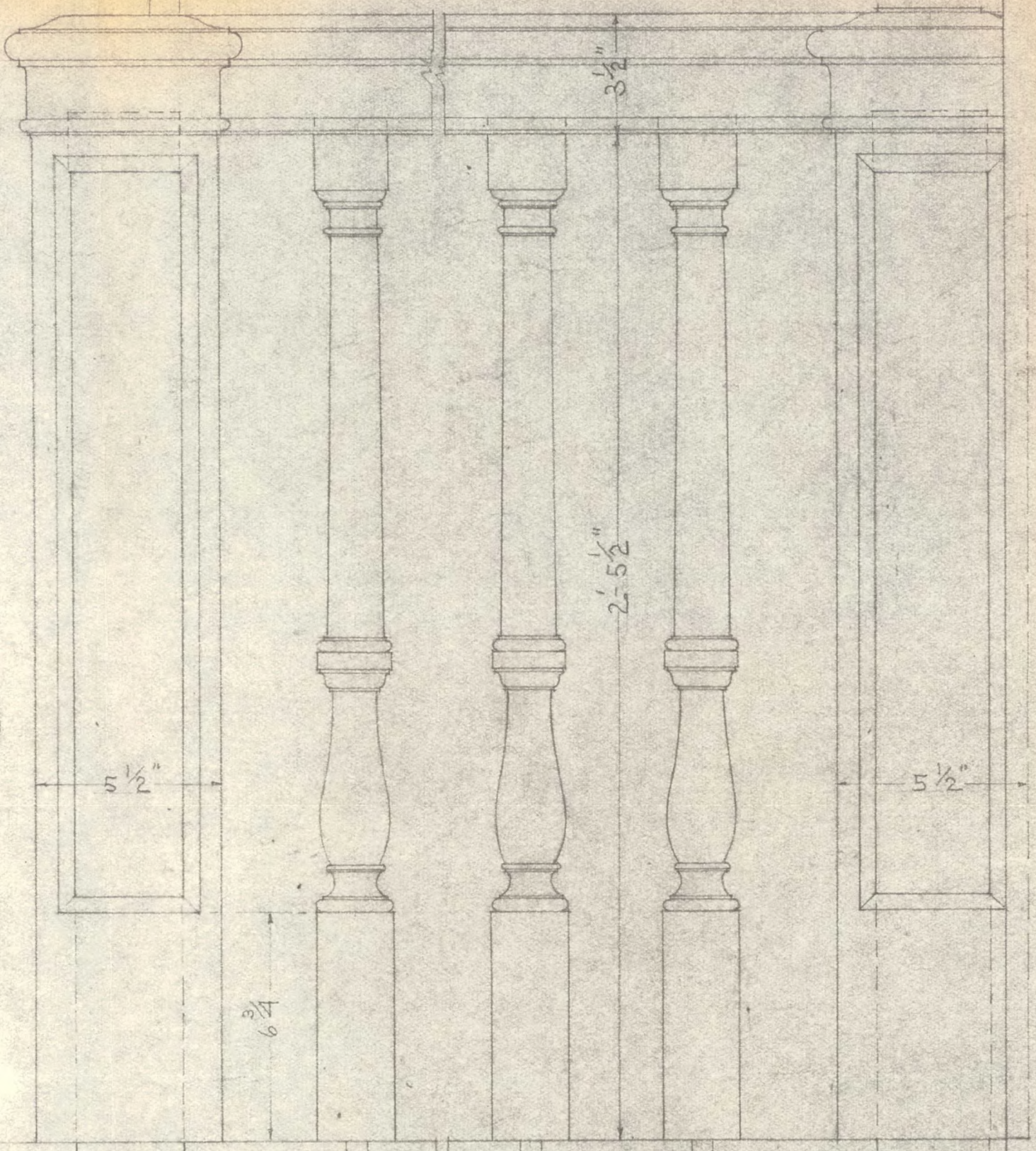
SECTION AT A-A
SCALE-FULL SIZE



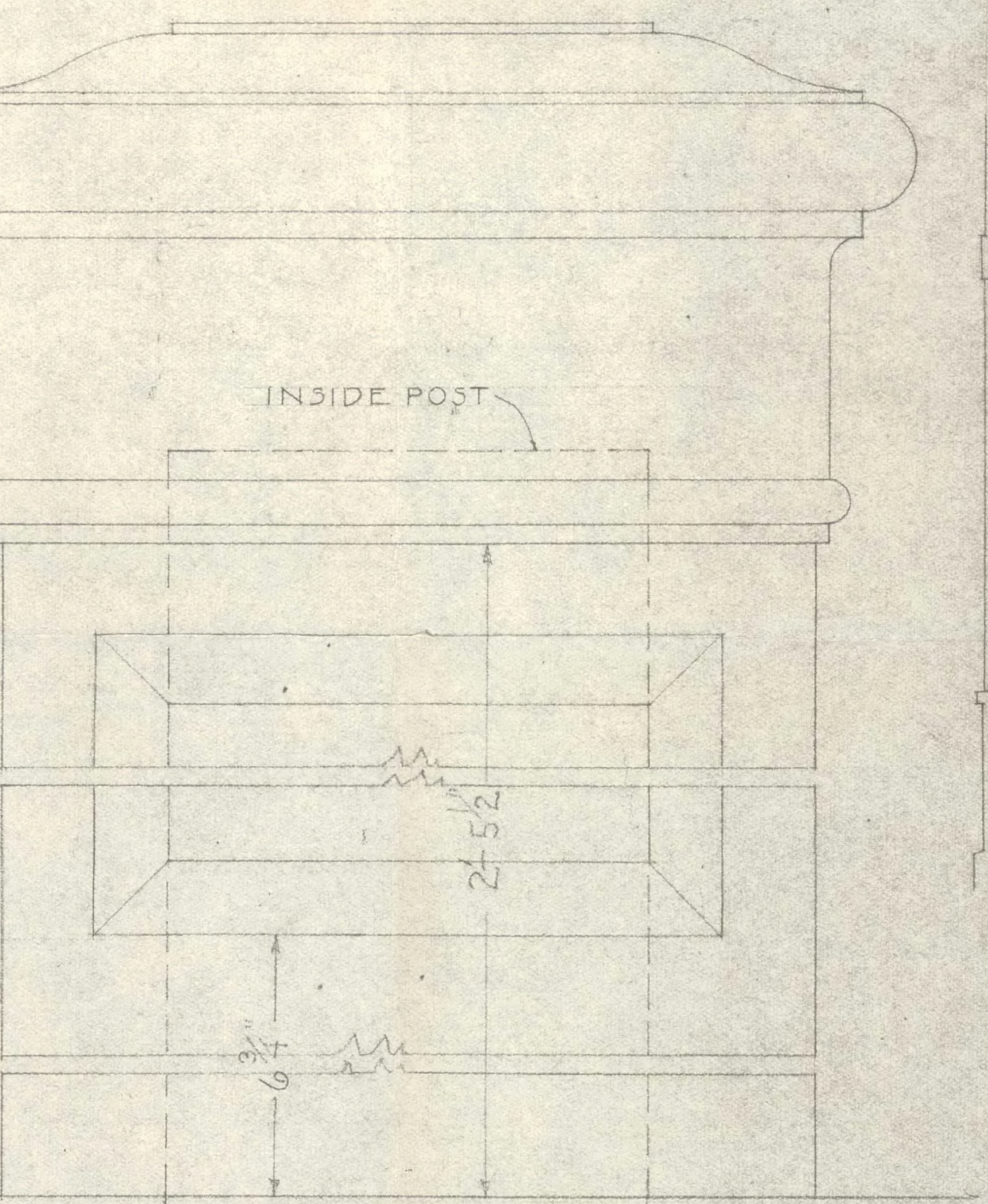
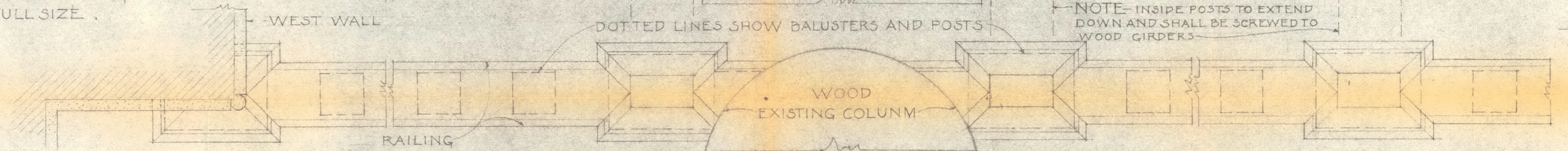
PLAN OF POST
SCALE-FULL SIZE



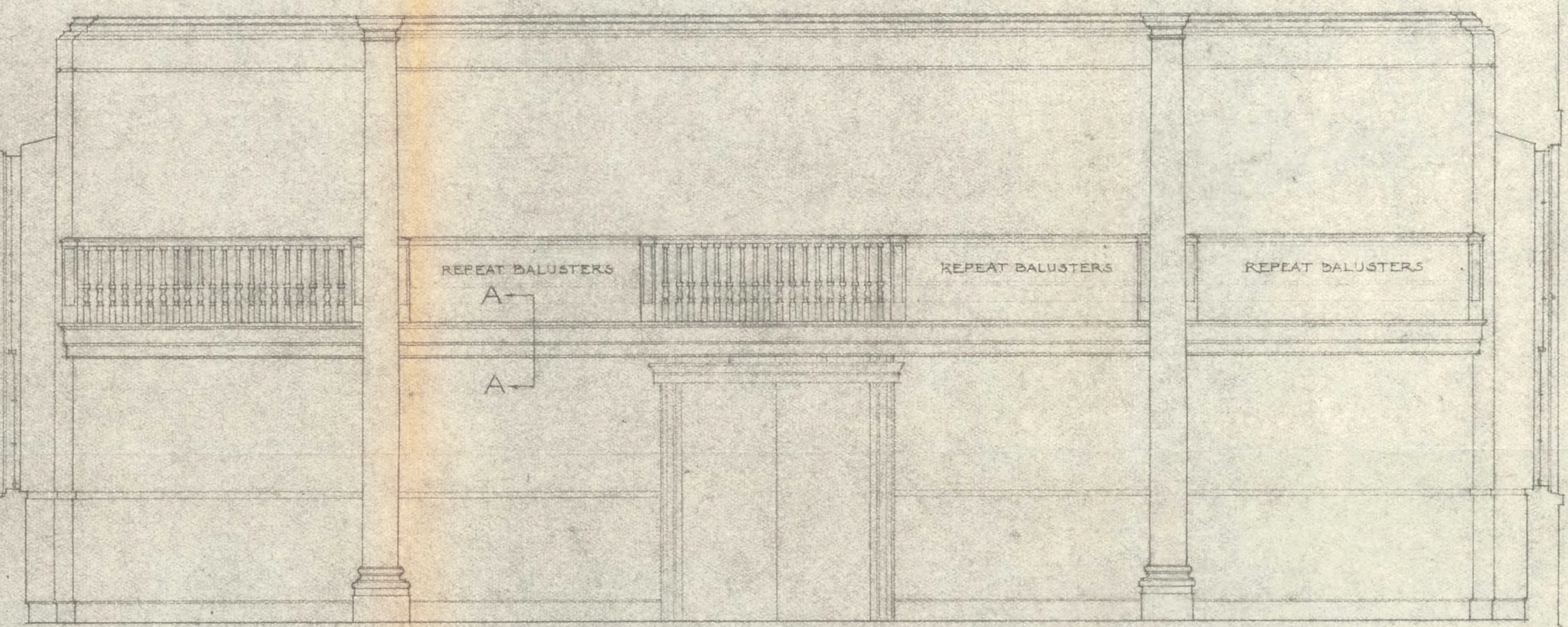
SECTION OF RAILING
SCALE-FULL SIZE



ELEVATION AND PLAN OF BALUSTRADE
SCALE 3/4\"/>



ELEVATION OF POST
SCALE-FULL SIZE



ELEVATION OF GALLERY
SCALE 1/4\"/>

RECOMMENDED	DATE	MARK	DESCRIPTION OF REVISION	DATE	INITIAL
			UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE DIVISION OF DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION PREPARED BY EASTERN OFFICE		REGION FIVE
			HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES GALLERY BALUSTRADE		PCP NO.
			CONGRESS HALL		SHEET 8 OF DRAWING NO. NHE:IND
			INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK		3210
					DATE: MAR. 02

ORIENTATION
PREPARED
PHARTSHORNE
DESIGNED
J.F. TALBUTT
DRAWN
PHARTSHORNE
CHECKED

DATE
INITIAL
REVISED
REGION
FIVE
PCP NO.
SHEET 8 OF
DRAWING NO.
NHE:IND
3210
DATE: MAR. 02