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Film traces Capitol's travels across state

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Staff writer



Ed Rabel narrated "A Moving Monument," and Diane Dimoff was the film's producer. Photo courtesy of MOTIONMASTERS

A new film tracing the history of six West Virginia state capitol buildings will air this Thursday on West Virginia Public Broadcasting television stations.

"A Moving Monument: The West Virginia State Capitol" is an hourlong documentary featuring photographs of all those buildings and the current Capitol in Charleston.

Diana Sole, president of MotionMasters in Charleston, produced the film in partnership with the University of Charleston.

"I was quite surprised no one had ever done a documentary on it," Sole said. "This one is rich in detail and it was very difficult to keep it under an hour in length."

President Kennedy's historic speech on the steps of the Capitol on West Virginia's centennial -

June 20, 1963 - is featured in one vintage film clip.

"A Moving Monument" also shows 1921 film footage of the demolition of the state's second Capitol building in Charleston after it was destroyed by fire and features an interview with a 95-year-old woman who watched the building burn.

"The Capitol is a moving monument cherished by the people it represents," Sole said.



A MotionMasters photographer films the Capitol building at night from below the statue of Abraham Lincoln. Photo courtesy of MOTIONMASTERS

Film crews shot or acquired nearly 70 videotapes and used about 900 photographs, historical postcards and other documents in preparing "A Moving Monument." (More film footage and information will be available on www.movingmonument.org)

"A Moving Monument" traces the state's multiple capitols, starting with the meeting of the first Legislature in the Linsly Institute Building in Wheeling after West Virginia was formed on June 20, 1863.

Legislators soon voted in April 1870 to move the Capitol, literally, to Charleston. A special boat was used to float the Capitol building, state officials and archives along the Ohio and Kanawha rivers to Charleston.

After they arrived there, legislators mandated construction of a new, three-story Capitol building.

But that move was short-lived; a new Legislature voted to return to Wheeling in 1875. It moved back to the Linsly Building, then shortly moved again into a stone structure donated by Wheeling city officials.

In 1877, legislators decided to let state residents vote on where to locate the Capitol, giving them three choices: Charleston, Clarksburg or Martinsburg.

After voters chose Charleston, legislators opened a new Capitol building in Charleston on May 1, 1885, which lasted for 36 years, until it burned down on Jan. 3, 1921.

State officials then moved into a temporary structure quickly built after the fire, staying there for six years until that building also burned down on March 2, 1927.

The current Capitol, finished in 1932, was designed by architect Cass Gilbert, who also designed the U.S. Supreme Court building in Washington and Woolworth Building in New York.

A newly created Capitol Building Commission had already completed part of the structure on the banks of the Kanawha River. By the time the Capitol was completed, the commission had spent \$10 million on construction and land costs.

MotionMasters' other documentaries include "The Soul of the Senate" about Sen. Robert Byrd, released in May 2005.

Both documentaries will be made available at no cost to all state public libraries and schools.

MotionMasters has also produced "A Principled Man: Rev. Leon H. Sullivan," about the role of Sullivan, who grew up in Charleston, in backing the international boycott of South Africa while it was under apartheid rule, and "John Marshall: Citizen, Statesman, Jurist."

Former television reporter Ed Rabel narrates the new documentary, and former Huntington Herald-Dispatch editor James E. Casto wrote the script.

Major funds for "A Moving Monument" came from the West Virginia Humanities Council, Appalachian Power and West Virginia Lottery.

West Virginia Public Broadcasting will air "A Moving Monument" across the state on Thursday at 8 p.m. and in Charleston on Friday at 7 p.m.

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