A History of
The Auditor General's Office
E120

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Michigan
STATE CAPITOL

Michigan's present Capitol, the state's third, opened on January 1, 1879, to great acclaim.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

The Golden Age of Capitol Construction

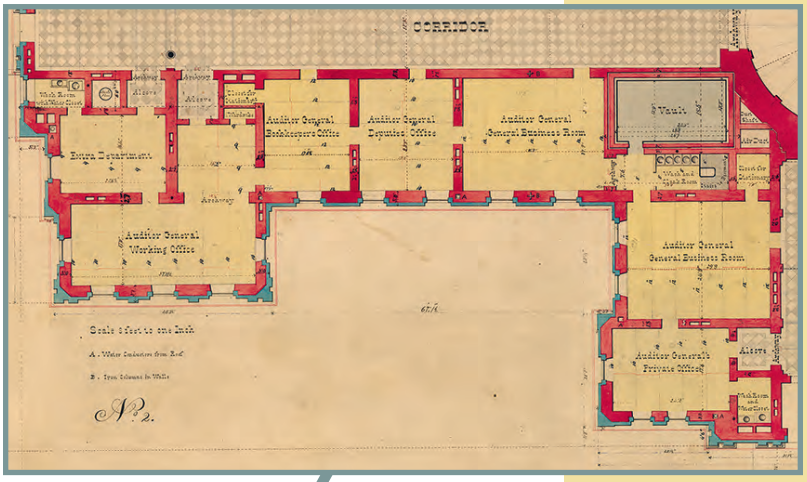
The Michigan State Capitol was built during the golden age of Capitol construction in the years following the American Civil War. From its inception, the building was designed to serve several functions and roles for the state. First, and most importantly, it is the official seat of government for the State of Michigan. It is a public forum where people can express their opinions, and a symbol of governmental traditions and the state itself. Yet the Capitol is also, at its very essence, an office building, where the day-to-day functions of government have played out for well over a century.

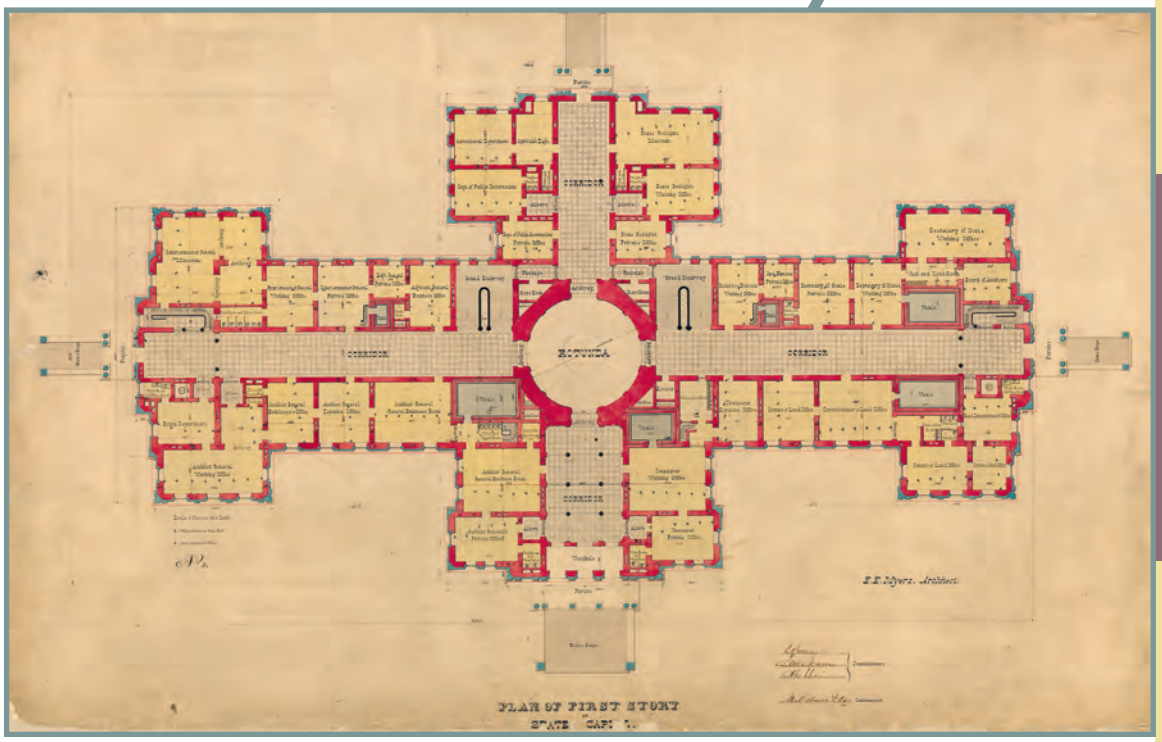
When the Capitol first opened in 1879, it was state government's only active office building, where all three branches of government were housed. The executive branch, including the Governor, State Treasurer, Secretary of State, State Librarian, Auditor General, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Adjutant General, claimed most of the offices within it. The judicial branch was represented by the Supreme Court, which occupied offices and an elegant chamber in the east wing of the third floor. The legislative branch used the House and Senate Chambers, the largest and most impressive rooms in the Capitol, as well as offices for the Secretary of the Senate, the Clerk of the House, and a few committee rooms. There were no offices for individual legislators, who, when in Lansing for brief part-time legislative sessions, worked from their desks on the chamber floors.

The Auditor General

The office of the Auditor General was designed to be one of the largest spaces within the new building. Architect Elijah E. Myers located the suite on the east side of the south corridor on the first floor. It wrapped around the corner to the south side of the east wing, creating a space in the shape of a backwards "L." The Capitol's original floor plans indicated that the entire suite originally contained eight rooms, plus a fireproof vault in which important documents were stored. Beginning at the eastern terminus of the office, the rooms were designated as the Auditor General's Private Office, two General Business Rooms, the Deputies Office, the Bookkeeper's Office, two Working Office Spaces, and a room labeled as an Extra Department. The suite also contained three washrooms and two stationary closets.

The first man to serve as Auditor General in the new Capitol was W. Irving Latimer of Big Rapids. Born in New York, Latimer worked on the Erie Canal as a young man before moving to Chicago and then Newaygo. After the Civil War, he moved to Big Rapids, and, in 1872 was elected Treasurer of Mecosta County.[1] In 1878, the people of Michigan elected him the state's Auditor General, returning him to that position for another two years in 1880.[2] Latimer was joined in his new Capitol office by Hubert R. Pratt, a longtime Deputy Auditor General, and Henry Humphrey, Bookkeeper.





The Capitol's original hand inked floor plans still survive in the Archives of Michigan. The first floor plan included suggested locations for each departmental office—some of which were ultimately changed.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

Michigan State Capitol Directory.

LEFT. CENTRE. RIGHT.

First Floor.

EAST CORRIDOR.
Auditor General. State Treasurer.

WEST CORRIDOR.
Board of Health. Superintendent of Commissioner of Railroads. Public Instruction.

SOUTH CORRIDOR.
Auditor General (Tax Department). Inspector General. Adjutant General. Commissioner of Insurance. Quartermaster General. Sup't of State Property.

NORTH CORRIDOR.
Board of Auditors. Secretary of State. Deputy Treasurer. Land Office. Swamp Land Office.

Second Floor.

EAST CORRIDOR.
Post Office. Private Secretary. Governor.

WEST CORRIDOR.
State Library.

SOUTH CORRIDOR.
Senate Chamber.

NORTH CORRIDOR.
Representative Hall.

Third Floor.

EAST CORRIDOR.
Attorney Gen'l. Justices' Rooms. Supreme Court.

WEST CORRIDOR.
Attorneys' Consultation Room. Law Library. Attorneys' Consultation Room.

SOUTH CORRIDOR.
Clerk of Supreme Court. Senate Gallery

NORTH CORRIDOR.
Representative Hall Gallery.

Fourth Floor.

EAST CORRIDOR.
Pioneers' Audience Room. Reporter Supreme Court. Pioneers' Office.

WEST CORRIDOR.
Library.

Basement.

EAST CORRIDOR.
Board of State Charities. Auditor's Working Rooms.

SOUTH CORRIDOR.
Auditor's Working Rooms. Pomological Society. State Board of Agriculture. State Armory and Military Store Rooms.

With Compliments of A. L. Burns, Superintendent of State Property.

This early Capitol Directory survives in the Jenison Collection, a series of six scrapbooks compiled to record the Capitol's 1872-1878 construction by historian and collector O.A. Jenison.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

The Auditor General's top level staff was in turn assisted by a bevy of clerks who executed audits and kept a myriad of records. A glance at the Auditor General's 1879-1880 report indicates that sixty-eight "extra" clerks were also employed for at least part of the fiscal year, of whom, interestingly, thirty-one were women.[3]

Like the rest of the Capitol, this suite was designed to be both functional and beautiful, as befitted a growing and prosperous state. "The offices throughout are elegantly fitted up," a reporter wrote following his visit on January 1, 1879, for the Capitol's official dedication. "All of the doors are massive in finish, and fitted with locks specially made to order and being on bronze hinges, and bearing the arms of the state."[4] Passing through the main doorway, visitors stepped onto a colorful Brussels wool wall-to-wall carpet, laid in strips and carefully sewn together by hand. Sturdy and tasteful polished walnut desks, chairs, tables, and bookcases stood at attention, ready for use. Tall windows, framed by crisp wooden pocket shutters, ushered in natural light, while elegant new gas chandeliers, purchased from the Mitchell Vance Company in New York, gleamed overhead.

The Auditor General's staff was among the first to move into rooms on what was then called the basement level. Unlike most of the ground floor rooms, this suite was furnished with stylish office furniture, a patterned floorcovering, and a chandelier similar to those found upstairs.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

Interestingly, Bours's directory also notes that some of the Auditor General's staff worked on the ground floor in the east wing at the time the Capitol opened. These less impressive rooms, which never made it into the newspaper, were linked to the elegant rooms above by a small iron staircase, carefully drawn on the original Capitol floorplans.[5]

The less formal atmosphere of the ground floor meant that some staff members decorated their offices with maps, calendars, posters, and flags.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

Early Changes

As might be expected, change to these offices, and the rest of the Capitol, was constant. Two major improvements were launched in the 1880s, only a few years after the building opened. First, starting in 1885, electricians began wiring the Capitol for a new technology—electric lights. Prior to this, the Capitol was lighted entirely by gas fixtures. That same year, painters began to decorate the Capitol's plain white plaster walls with an array of rich colors and ornate designs. Slowly, every room, including the Auditor General's office, was transformed by artists who stenciled, grained, marbled, and striped beautiful motifs on the walls and ceilings.

Male and female clerks worked together in close quarters in the Capitol, as seen in this c. 1900 photograph. Some staff members clerked for thirty and forty years, whereas others spent only a year or two in government before leaving for the private sector, or, in the case of some women, marrying.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

From the time the Capitol opened in 1879, a small but growing number of women and people of color worked in departmental offices. Wilmot Johnson, the African American man at the center desk, clerked in the Auditor General's office for thirty-three years.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

In 1892, the State Board of Auditors directed the Superintendent of the Capitol to survey the building and its contents. He recorded his findings in their annual bound report, which survives to this day. The completed inventory indicates that the Auditor General's suite contained dozens of desks and chairs, many bookcases and filing cases, stools, two iron safes, letter presses, electric clocks, and, for the personal use of the Auditor when visiting Lansing, a folding bed.[6] This last object serves as a reminder that most Auditors General did not live in Lansing, and in some cases, served as a somewhat absent figurehead. Instead the Deputy Auditors General, who were generally local residents, administered the office and oversaw its staff on a daily basis.

Turn of the century photographs of the ground floor offices show busy spaces full of tables at which many men and women worked closely together. These rooms were furnished with oilcloth floorcoverings (an early sort of linoleum), tables, rolling chairs, and a number of gas and electric lights. Posters, pictures, and flags decorated the walls, which were painted a plain, solid light color.

Another photograph, taken around 1920, shows that nearly all of these items had been replaced and updated. One of the most noticeable changes is the introduction of a number of typewriter machines, operated by young women sitting nearly elbow to elbow at wooden desks. They were joined in the room by two men, one of whom gazes on in supervisory fashion.

By the 1920s the walls of the Capitol rang with the clicking and dinging of typewriting machines. Popular culture quickly came to associate the machines and the women who operated them, who were themselves called "typewriters."

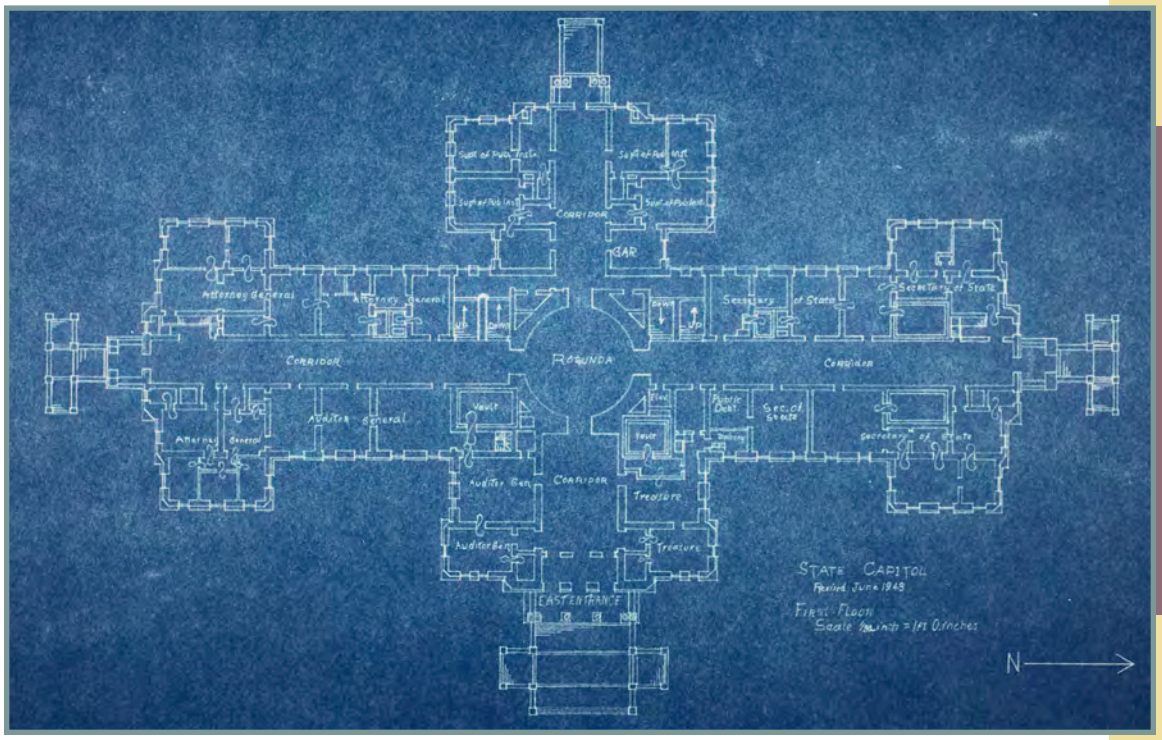
Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

During this period, the following Auditors General worked in this space.[7]

1879-1882	W. Irving Latimer
1883-1886	William C. Stevens
1887-1890	Henry H. Aplin
1891-1892	George W. Stone
1893-1896	Stanley W. Turner
1897-1900	Roscoe D. Dix
1901-1904	Perry F. Power
1905-1908	James B. Bradley
1909-1932	Oramel B. Fuller
1933-1935	John K Stack, Jr.
1935-1936	John J. O'Hara
1937-1938	George T. Gundry
1939-1944	Vernon J. Brown

The Mid-Twentieth Century

The next time these offices appeared in the known historical record was in 1941, when the State Treasurer's office surveyed the Capitol and inventoried the number of people, pieces of furniture, and machines in the building. The accompanying floor plan shows that the Auditor General had lost some of his floor space to the Attorney General, whose staff now occupied offices on both sides of the corridor.[8] The plans from



By the 1940s, space in the increasingly crowded Capitol was at a premium. Only the largest, most powerful departments retained their Capitol suites, while smaller divisions used rooms in the State Office Building, or in rented quarters downtown.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

this period also contain a new numbering system. In 1941, the Auditor General's rooms in the east wing were known as 103 and 104, whereas his spaces in the south corridor were 137, 138, and 139.[9] To make up for this loss, the Auditor General used an increasing number of ground floor spaces numbered 3, 4, 25, 26, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, and 38. In addition, the staff shared space in rooms 1, 2, and 33, with the Treasury and the Land Bank.[10]

The accompanying inventory of the number of people, pieces of furniture, and machines in each space testifies to their crowded nature. Thirty-two staffers shared the first floor offices, while eighty-one people worked in the ground floor rooms. All combined, the offices contained 114 desks, eight tables, 109 files, ten machines, and 156 bookcases.[11]

Two years later, in 1943, Treasury repeated the exercise. This time, they included not only the number of people, pieces of furniture, and machines housed in each office in 1943, but also in 1940. As was true in many facets of state government during the war, the number of people working for the Auditor General during the war temporarily declined. In 1940, the combined first and ground floor offices housed seventy-nine staffers, whereas only sixty-five people worked there by 1943. These shifts were probably due to male employees enlisting in the armed forces, and women moving into defense related industries. As might be expected, the number of desks and tables decreased, while the number of machines, files, and bookcases increased.[12]

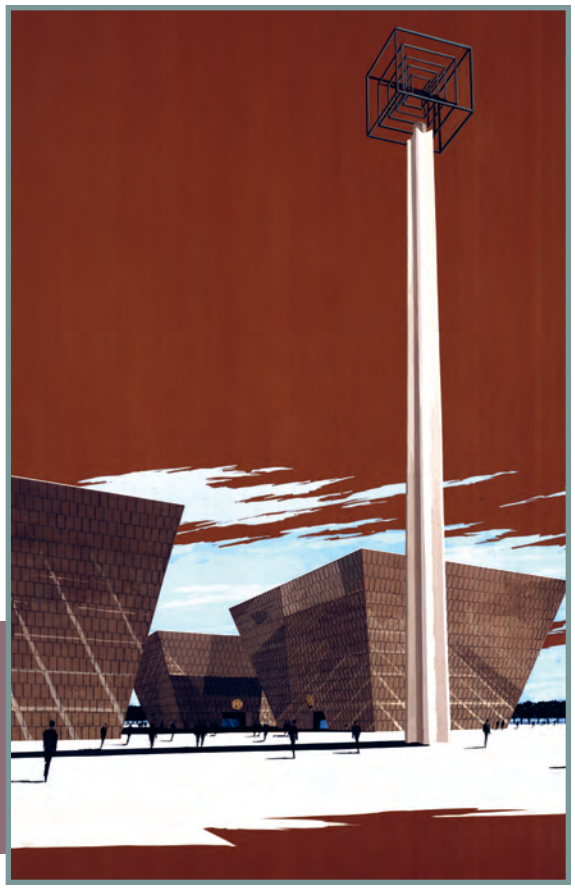
In 1957, architect George R. Page prepared another set of mid-twentieth century drawings for the Buildings and Construction Division of the Michigan State Administrative Board. Page's drawings indicate that the Auditor General continued to occupy the same rooms as in the previous decade. These rooms now bore new identifiers, with the eastern set marked 102 and 103, and the southern trio named 126, 127, and 128. Interestingly, Page also noted that room 127 included a mezzanine, or half-floor, another symptom of the Capitol's increasingly overcrowded condition.[13]

During this period, the following Auditors General worked in this space.[14]

1939-1944	Vernon J. Brown
1945-1946	John D. Morrison
1947-1950	Murl K. Aten
1951-1954	John B. Martin, Jr.
1955-1956	Victor Targonski
1956-1959	Frank S. Szymanski
1959	William R. Hart (Acting)
1959-1961	Otis M. Smith
1961	William A. Burgett (Acting)
1961-1964	Billie Sunday Farnum[15]
1965	Allison Green (Acting)
1965-1982	Albert Lee

The Governor's Team Moves In

The late 1960s and early 1970s were times of great change in the Capitol building. After ninety years of shuffling, squeezing, and relocating, the decision was made to dramatically remodel many of the offices in the Capitol. The action was motivated by a number of factors, including the state's move to a full-time legislature. This had dramatic repercussions for the Capitol building, where the pace of business in both House and Senate spaces increased significantly. As the number of legislators spending every week in Lansing rose, the call for additional office space reached a fever pitch. In order to accommodate all of these members, space had to be found—preferably in the Capitol. Governor Romney's preferred solution called for the construction of a new Capitol. While significant steps were taken towards this ambitious goal, ultimately the project was tabled over cost and aesthetic concerns.



Several of the plans considered for the new Capitol in the 1960s contained three buildings—designed to house and symbolize the three branches of government—and a central pylon.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

When it became clear that a new Capitol was not to be, another solution was proposed. Why not dramatically remodel the Capitol's offices and committee rooms? The timing seemed ideal, as several of the building's longtime departmental occupants, including the Auditor General's office, were moving out of the Capitol and into other office buildings in downtown Lansing.

By 1965, the Auditor General's traditional suite had been broken up. The rooms in the south wing were retrofitted into Senate legislative offices and committee rooms, whereas the spaces in the east wing became the new office of the Lieutenant Governor. William Milliken moved into the space in 1965, after being elected on a ticket with George Romney the previous year. A newspaper article touted the "modestly decorated suite on the Capitol's first floor" as an improvement over the "cramped office just off the Senate floor" previously used by Lieutenant Governors.[16] The move suggested that Milliken was now more concerned with his Executive responsibilities than of his role as President of the Senate.

Upon Romney's 1969 resignation, Milliken moved upstairs into the Governor's Office, where he took the oath of office in a quiet, low-key ceremony.[17] The first floor office stayed under the control of the Governor's staff. In 1971 the Governor's legal team, consisting of Glenn Allen and Ken Frankland, moved into the suite. Allen worked in the easternmost room, whereas Frankland worked in a mezzanine level space in the western portion of the suite. Upon Allen's departure, Frankland moved into the front office, sharing the suite with the Governor's new legislative liaison.[18]

It's likely that the mezzanine, or half-floor, where Frankland worked was constructed between 1969 and 1972, as part of a larger project to overfloor the first floor offices. This process consisted of subdividing the rooms in half to create two ten-foot high offices, one above the other. At the same time, offices were modernized by adding drop ceilings, fluorescent lighting, and institutional carpeting and furnishings. Original decorative paint had already been covered under layers of overpaint, paneling, and wallpaper. Almost every vestige of the Capitol's original elegance and character had disappeared.

It's believed that this suite stayed in the hands of the Governor's staff throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when it was used by members of the Milliken and Blanchard administrations.

Offices, corridors, and even the lobby into the House Chamber, seen here, were sliced in half horizontally to create additional office space in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

The Capitol's Restoration

In 1987, the Michigan Senate and the House of Representatives began the process of restoring Michigan's Capitol. Chief among their goals was to return the building to its original Victorian grandeur while modernizing the many outdated systems within it. They sought to make the Capitol a living, working museum, where the functions of government would continue to play out in a beautiful and inspiring historical setting. In order to carry out this mission, the restoration team, made up of supportive elected officials, architects, craftspeople, and artists, would need to touch every single space in the Capitol, including the offices once home to the Auditor General.

Photographs of the demolition of the suite show nearly unrecognizable work spaces.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

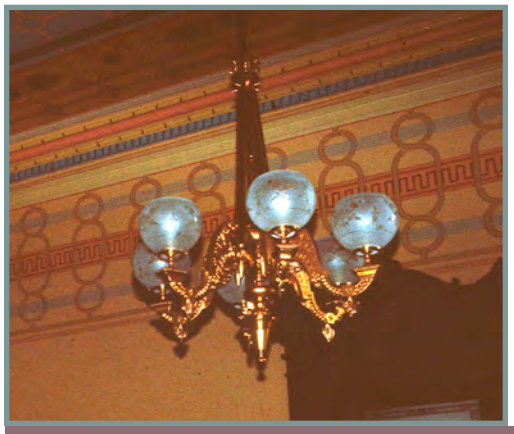
Changes came swiftly. Overfloors and suspended ceilings were removed, returning the height of the rooms to their full twenty-two feet. Tradespeople rerouted and disguised ductwork, wiring, and sprinkler heads. Appropriate carpeting, designed using colors and patterns from the Victorian era, and period inspired furnishings, were crafted and installed. Skilled designers and craftspeople used photographs to recreate original gas lighting fixtures removed in the early twentieth century. New windows, neatly trimmed with appropriate wood shutters and draperies, replaced old.

Before the restoration, contemporary lighting fixtures hung from a partially repainted ceiling in E120. Exposed wires linked multiple lights, flouting both codes and aesthetics.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

Of particular importance to the restoration was the recreation of the Capitol's historic decorative artwork. Michigan's Capitol contains approximately nine acres of hand painted art. A variety of techniques were used in the building when it was decorated in the 1880s, including stenciling, striping, marbling, and gilding. Over the years, the artwork was painted over many times as styles changed. For the first time, careful research was undertaken to determine the original colors and decorative paint motifs found in these rooms. These colors and motifs were then replicated by talented decorative artists who used traditional techniques to return the room to a proper late nineteenth century appearance.

One of the techniques used in this space is that of woodgraining. The original Capitol building commissioners made the decision to use white pine as the dominant wood throughout the building. White pine was relatively inexpensive and available in abundance in this period. They did not intend, however, for people to recognize the wood as pine. Once the pine was installed, it was woodgrained—that is, painted carefully to mimic a more expensive wood—by talented artists. In the Capitol, painters transformed yards of humble pine by painting it with the grain of walnut, the most fashionable (and therefore rather expensive) choice of the 1870s. The technique that they used was replicated by modern decorative painters during the restoration, who labored many hours to apply the necessary seven layers of paint needed to mimic the late nineteenth century process.



The restoration of the Capitol was completed in the fall of 1992. Rededication ceremonies held on November 19 and 20 of that year celebrated the success of the project, which won many significant state and national preservation awards. That same fall, the building was officially designated a National Historic Landmark, the highest honor accorded historic structures in America.

Craftspeople recreated late Victorian lighting fixtures for the Capitol using historic photographs and images from period lighting catalogues. This fixture is based on a design offered by the Mitchell Vance Company in the 1870s that originally hung in the Capitol.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

Post Restoration Use

The completion of the Capitol's restoration brought with it the need to resolve matters concerning the identification and future use of the Capitol's rooms, including this suite, which now serves as the office of the Governor's Legislative Affairs Director and staff. A new numbering system, devised by Capitol Preservation Architect Richard C. Frank, was introduced indicating the ownership of the space (House, Senate, Executive, etc.) and the room's number. The suite was renumbered to E120, E120A, E120B, E120C, and E122. In the years since the restoration, the office has been used by legislative teams for Governors Engler, Granholm, Snyder, and Whitmer.

End Notes

1 *American Biographical History of Eminent and Self-Made Men.* Michigan Volume, Western Biographical Publishing Company; Cincinnati, 1878, p. 18.

2 *Michigan Official Director and Legislative Manual for the Years 1913-1914*, p. 82-83.

3 *Annual Report of the Auditor General of the State of Michigan for the Fiscal Year Ending Sept. 30, 1880.* W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1880, p. 31-32.

4 *The Evening News*, January 2, 1879.

5 Today this staircase survives—the only one of its kind in the Capitol.

6 *Annual Report of the Board of State Auditors for the State of Michigan for the Year 1892.* Robert Smith & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1892, p. 515.

7 *Michigan Official Directory and Legislative Manual Published by the State of Michigan 1945-1946.* Herman H. Dignan, 1945, p. 89.

8 The drawings indicate that a partition was erected to separate the Attorney General's rooms and the adjoining offices of the Auditor General. The room numbers assigned to the Attorney General's portion of the suite were: 135, 135A, 135B, 135C, and 136.

9 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1941.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1943.

13 State of Michigan, Michigan State Administrative Board Buildings and Construction Division. "Capitol Survey," George R. Page, 1957.

14 *Michigan Manual 1993-1994*, p. 563.

15 Billie Sunday Farnum was Michigan's last popularly elected Auditor General. In 1963 Michigan adopted a new state constitution, in which the position became a gubernatorial appointment.

16 "New Capitol Look," *Lansing State Journal*, July 4, 1965.

17 "Milliken Pledges Best for Michigan," *Detroit Free Press*, January 23, 1969.

18 Frankland, Ken. "More Capitol History Questions." Email to Valerie Marvin, February 21, 2018.

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