



*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

**February 27, 2008**

**THIS WEEK: Tunnel of Progress**

**BACKGROUND:** This article is copied from the *Capitol Building Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook*. It appeared in the *Des Moines Register* on Sunday, July 19, 1931. The scrapbook publication contains clippings from 1906 to the 1970s and was compiled by the Iowa State Law Library. The tunnel mentioned in this article is the main part of the tunnel system used today. (From the power plant south of Court Avenue to where the tunnel connects north of the Capitol into the brick portion of the tunnel going north to the Ola Babcock Miller Building.)

## Rumbling Sounds Beneath Capital Come From Work in Tunnel.

BY AGNES ARNEY.

In a deep cavern underneath the state house a heavy rumbling continues interminably.

Stealthily the seeking pedestrian makes his way along, bent half over to dodge overhanging pipes.

Occasionally he can peer upward in secret chambers which run 50 feet high.

Always come queer rumbling sounds reminiscent of old Rip Van Winkle rolling tenpins with the dwarfs.

### Workmen Labor in Tunnel.

But it can all be explained. Workmen daily are laboring in Iowa's \$100,000 folly, the huge tunnel constructed from a point under the north steps of the statehouse, running east to Thirteenth st. and then south to the railroad tracks, a distance of almost a mile.

The tunnel was built just before the war to house steam pipes from a new heating plant, storage plant and warehouse to be constructed south of Thirteenth st. on the railroad tracks.

### Is 10 Feet High.

The huge concrete tunnel is 10 feet high and 8 feet wide. It has ventilators all along the sides. It was made the great size in order to accommodate a small electric car which would go through it on tracks carrying supplies from the warehouse to the statehouse basement.

But the dream didn't work out and the tunnel has laid unused until the last week.

### Architects Remember Tunnel.

When architects began planning the remodeling of the old Amos Hiatt building at East Twelfth st. and Court ave. they remembered the tunnel.

Steam is to be carried to the old schoolhouse through this tunnel from the heating plant on Grand ave. north to Thirteenth st. and then south to a point just east of the old building. A new tunnel is being constructed to

meet the original tunnel at this point.

When workmen began examining the old tunnel they discovered ventilator gratings above ground were filled with trash. These are being cleaned and steam pipes are being laid through the old portion now.

The strange rumblings one hears come from street cars which roll along the street just at the edge of the tunnel. Other strange sounds come from heavy footsteps

## Rip Van Winkle's Ten Pins? No, Just Noise of Progress



How spooky it looks, this tunnel way below the surface of the ground. Dolores Madole of Dows is exploring the abandoned concrete passage underneath the state house. Part of it is to be used to carry steam to the remodeled Amos Hiatt school at East Twelfth st. and Court ave., which is to house state offices after Sept. 1.

on the sidewalk and north steps of the statehouse.

### Basement Under Steps.

Down winding stairs there is a subbasement under the statehouse built more than half century ago. Arched and bricked its ceilings give the lower basement rooms the appearance of deep caverns.

Various rooms open off from the subbasement. Chutes run high into the building to the floor of the senate.

Also of interest are the private stairways constructed from the basement to the first floor. There were four formerly, according to Fred Willis, custodian, but two have been closed.

### Stairways Still Available.

Knowing first floor statehouse people can still escape secretly down these two stairways.

The fine big tunnel was never used because architects decided it wasn't practical and economical to build a heating plant at the railroad tracks where coal could be taken right from cars.