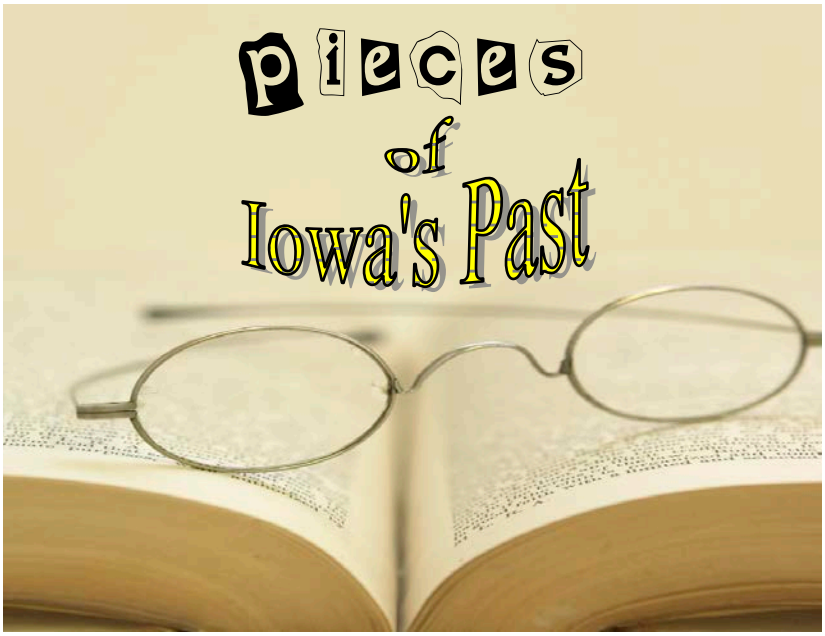


Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar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

March 28, 2012

THIS WEEK: ELECTRIC LIGHTING IN THE IOWA STATE CAPITOL

BACKGROUND:

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON LIGHTING THE BUILDING AND GROUNDS WITH ELECTRICITY—1882

The Capitol Commissioners submitted biennial reports throughout the 15 years it took to build the Capitol (1871-1886). Often there were committees formed to investigate a certain phase of the construction. The following is the report of the *Committee on Lighting*.

Note: The Capitol Commissioners determined the gas lighting to be the best choice in the 1880s. Less than 20 years later, the process began to convert the Capitol from gas to electric lighting. There was a period where both types of lighting were being used in the Capitol. The photograph of the 1904 apple harvest shows both electric and gas fixtures. The turn of the 20th century photograph of the library also shows chandeliers utilizing both gas and electricity. The photograph of the single fixture in the library is a mystery. It shows a fixture utilizing both gas and electricity, but no other photographs of the library exist where this fixture appears. Perhaps it was a prototype and never used in the Capitol.

To the Board of New Capitol Commissioners:

GENTLEMEN—Your committee appointed to investigate the subject of lighting the new Capitol by electricity, submit the following report:

We have corresponded with the different manufacturers of electric lighting apparatus with a view of gaining a full description in detail of each different system, and giving each manufacturer or electrician an opportunity to set forth his claim of superiority in any particular that he chose. The subject being a new one, your committee have, so far, been unable to determine which one of the different apparatus manufactured or patented is the best, or nearest to what may be termed successful lighting. We find that none are without serious objections, such as the unsteadiness of the light, and its intensity, or dazzling effect upon the eyes. So far these objections have not been overcome, and while the principal buildings of the large cities are employing electric light, the question is still an open one whether the light can be employed throughout such a building as our new Capitol and successfully compete with gas in all its details. This question we believe can best be solved by those who have used the light, and who have had the opportunity of studying its workings and computing its cost and service. As a committee, we do not believe it possible to dispense with gas, and the building should, in our opinion, be prepared for gas throughout, as the expense is small, and at such time as the electric light is perfected so as to replace gas it can easily be employed in the different parts of the building.

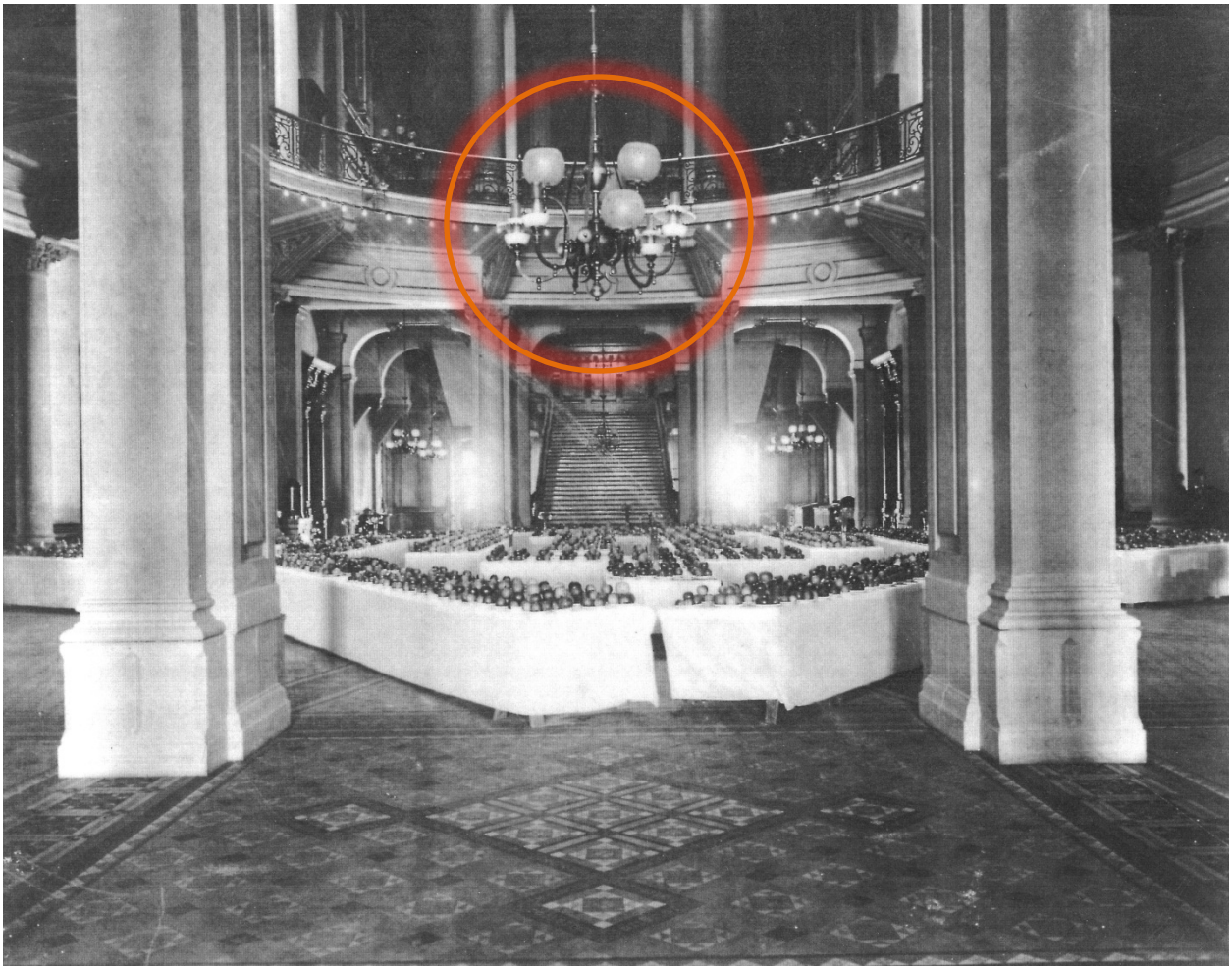
The information we have secured so far leads us to believe that the hall of representatives and senate chamber, the large library, corridors, inside of dome, the lantern of dome, and grounds, can be successfully and economically lighted with electricity. The apparatus can readily be placed in the boiler-room, where the power to run the engine is located, and the wires run to the different lamps located properly to light the different apartments mentioned.

For illuminating purposes it would seem desirable to light the departments mentioned by this means, if at the time that the light shall become necessary for use in the building it shall be found both economical and practical in its operations. Your committee feel that the efforts being made by the different inventors of electric light will eventually result in success, and having the subject under advisement, the cost of the entire apparatus and its utility should be carefully compared with gas, and also the cost of maintaining it from year to year. When it shall become necessary to put the lighting apparatus in the building, we believe that a personal examination of the different lights in use will be the surest mode of obtaining the information necessary to decide as to the merits of the different systems of electric lighting.

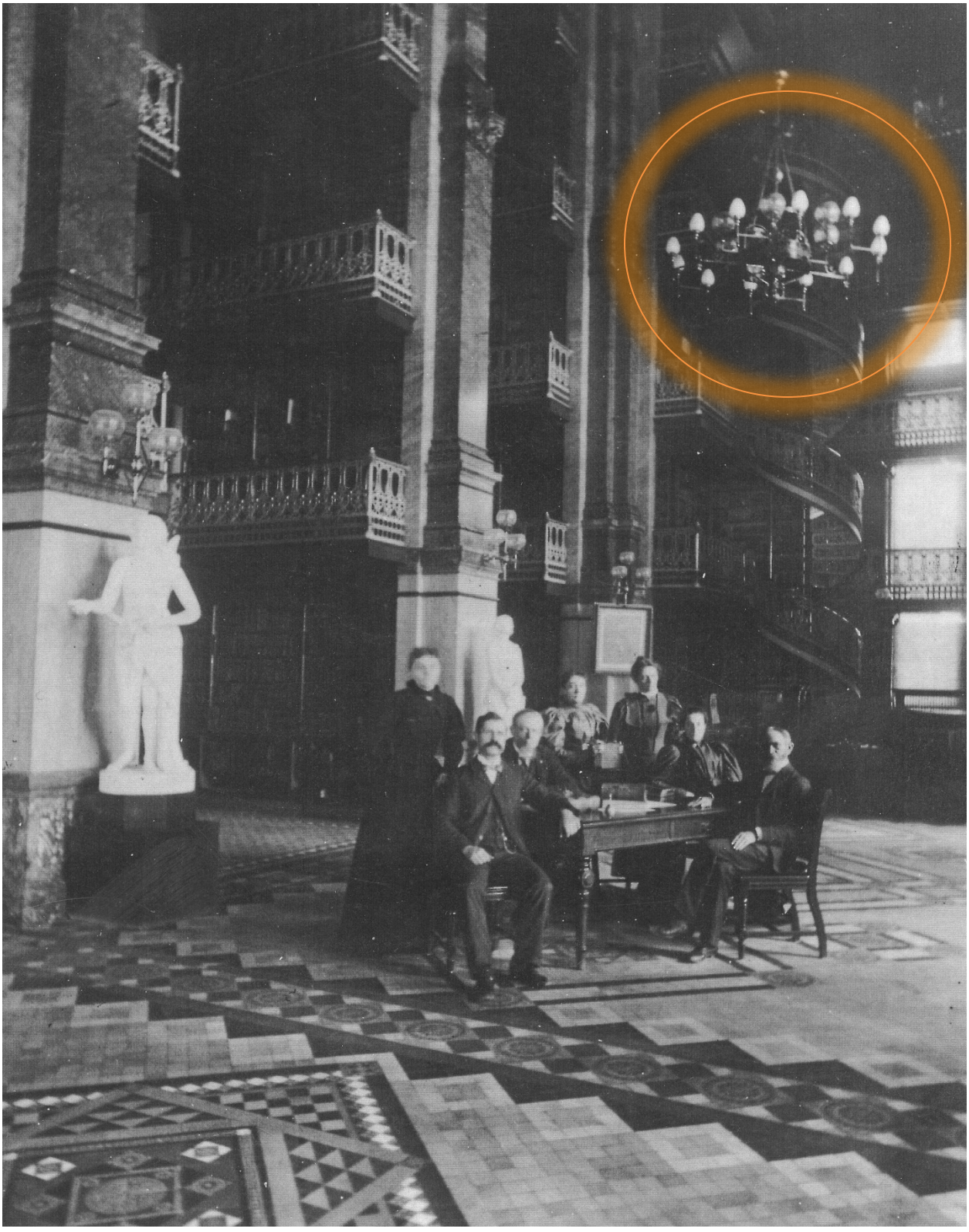
We herewith submit a statement from one of the manufacturers of electric lighting apparatus, after having received from us a description of the building: “It will, without doubt, require not less than 1,000 lamps of 16 candle power, and with that number as a basis we would make the following statement: Cost of engine and boiler, dynamo machine, lamps, sockets, and all wire, and other apparatus necessary for supplying a current for 1,000 lamps, each 16 candle power, $18,000.”

All of which is most respectfully submitted.

CYRUS FOREMAN,
JOHN G. FOOTE,
BELL & HACKNEY,
Committee.

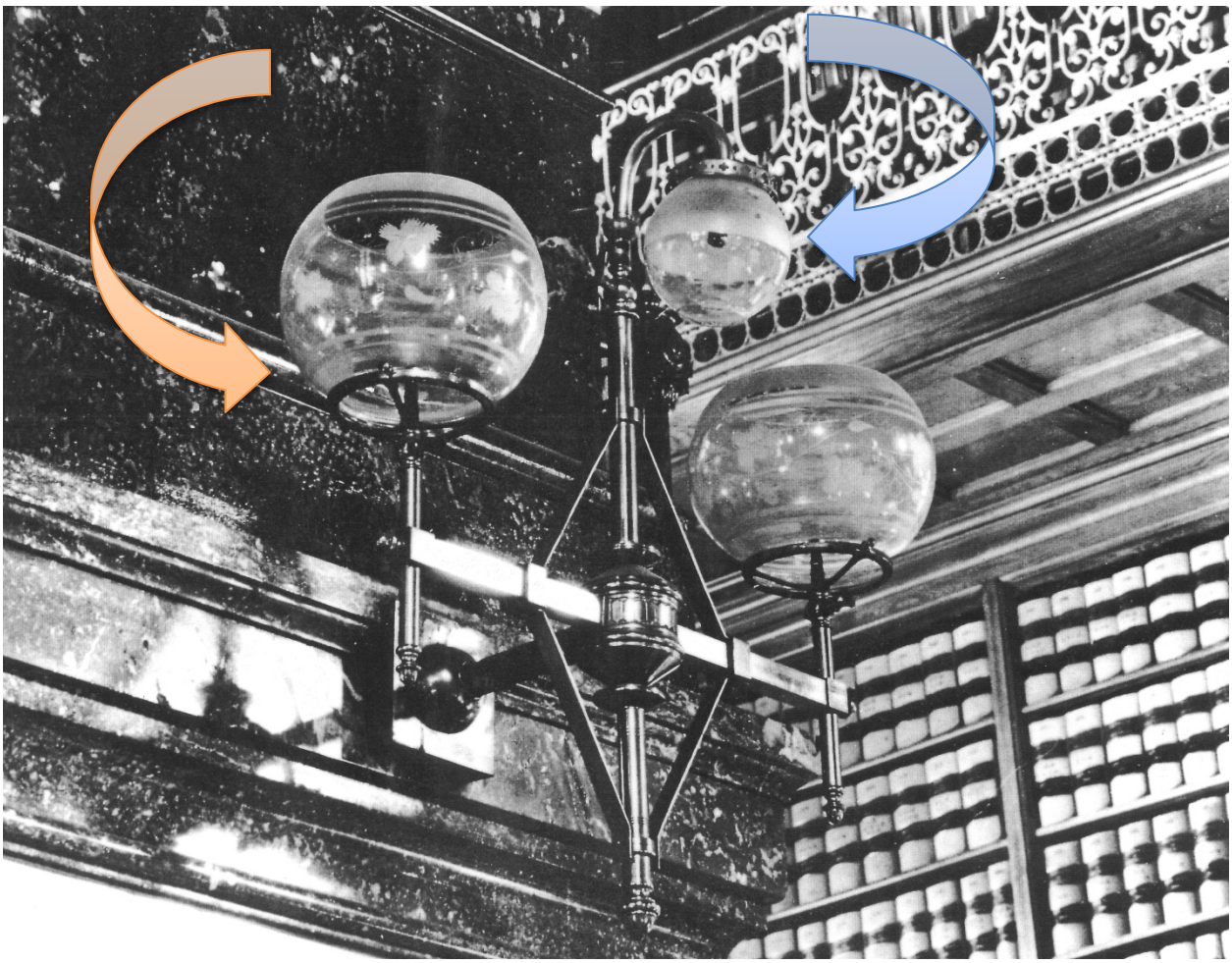


Apple Harvest
This is the Iowa Capitol on the first floor with a view looking east toward the Grand Stairway—1904.



Law Library—Turn of the 20th Century

Chandeliers utilizing both gas and electricity are pictured in the Law Library.



Law Library—Mystery Lighting Fixture

This light fixture utilizes both gas and electricity to produce light. The orange arrow points to one of the two matching gaslights, and the blue arrow points to the electric light in the center. This may have been a prototype fixture.