



# The Iowa State Capitol

## *The Capitol Story*

**T**he present capitol building is Iowa's third since statehood in 1846. The first capitol building was located in Iowa City. Called Old Stone Capitol, the building served as the seat of state government for 16 years. The building continues to be used by the University of Iowa.

With the influx of settlers to Iowa, citizens felt the state's capital should be moved to a more central location. The issue was the subject of intense political debate for over a decade. Ultimately, the Iowa General Assembly chose Des Moines as the new capital city. Money and land for the project were donated by a group of Des Moines businessmen and construction began on the new capitol in 1856. This structure, which became known as Old Brick Capitol, was located on the east side of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers. Old Brick Capitol served as Iowa's capitol for 26 years and was destroyed by fire in 1892. The Soldier's and Sailor's Monument now occupies the site, which is directly south of the present Capitol building.

The General Assembly established a capitol commission in 1870 to select an architect, a building plan, and to proceed with the construction of a new Capitol. The cost of the building was not to exceed \$1,500,000 and was to be completed without increasing taxes. John C. Cochrane and A. H. Piquenard were chosen as architects and a cornerstone was laid on November 23, 1871. The original cornerstone had to be replaced when much of the foundation stone deteriorated during the severe winter.

Under the direction of a smaller, full-time capitol commission appointed in 1872, a second cornerstone was laid on September 29, 1873. Cochrane resigned his position in 1872, but Piquenard continued until his death in 1876. Piquenard was succeeded by two of his assistants, M. E. Bell and W.F. Hackney. Bell resigned in 1883 to become supervising architect for the Treasury Department in Washington, D.C., but Hackney continued until the completion of the building.



The building was dedicated in January, 1884, when the General Assembly first met in the new chambers. The governor and other state officials moved into their offices in 1885 and the Supreme Court chamber was dedicated in 1886. The cost of the building totaled \$2,873,294.59. An audit showed only \$3.77 unaccounted for in fifteen years. Unfortunately, the commission did not have an additional \$30,000 needed to finish the interior decorative painting and build the south and west steps.

In 1902, in an attempt to modernize and complete the building, a third capitol commission was created. As work proceeded, a disastrous fire in the north wing on January 4, 1904, presumably started by a workman's candle, damaged the House chamber, Supreme Court chamber, and other offices. The commission restored the building, purchased paintings and mosaics and completed the decorative painting in the corridors. These expenditures raised the total cost of the capitol building to \$3,296,256.

Today, the Iowa Capitol Building stands as one of the nation's finest examples of 19th century architecture. The commanding feature of the building is the towering dome, constructed of steel and stone and covered with 23-carat gold leaf. The golden dome can be seen for miles, and is a symbol of Iowa's government and politics. It is a reminder of the true spirit of Iowa.

### *The Building Today*

The beauty and dignity of the building's interior become apparent as the visitor stands under the dome on the first floor. Broad, lofty corridors extend west, north and south, with the Grand Staircase to the east. The walls and ceilings are ornately decorated. Suites opening from the south corridor are occupied by the Governor, Auditor of State, and Treasurer of State. The Supreme Court and judges' offices are to the north, and the Secretary of State to the west. Legislative committee rooms are located on the east corridor.

The Grand Staircase ascends to a landing and divides north and south to bring visitors to the floor above, where the chambers of the House of Representatives is on the north, the Senate chamber is on the south, and the Law Library is on the west.

Circular staircases located around the rotunda lead visitors to the galleries on the third floor where they can view the proceedings of the House and Senate. One winding staircase, 130 steps, takes visitors to the balcony of the dome, and affords a view of the interior of the dome down to the basement level.



## *Decorations of the Capitol*

**E**xtending the full width of the wall over the Grand Staircase is the great mural painting "Westward," by Edwin H. Blashfield of New York. The painting cost \$10,000.

Above "Westward" are six mosaics in arched panels depicting Defense, Charities, Education, and the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary branches of government. The mosaics, made in Venice, Italy, are constructed of small pieces of colored glass. The artist Fredrick Dielman of New York was paid \$10,000 for his work.

At the base of the dome are eight half-moon-shaped paintings, and twelve statues surrounding the rotunda. These paintings, or lunettes, are the work of New York artist Kenyon Cox, who was paid \$8,000. They tell the story of "The Progress of Civilization," and, starting to the right at the Law Library entrance, represent Hunting, Herding, Agriculture, the Forge, Commerce, Education, Science and Art. The statues, high within the rotunda, represent History, Science, Law, Fame, Literature, Industry, Peace, Commerce, Agriculture, Victory, Truth, and Progress. They were sculpted by S. Cottin, who also did the work on the building's west exterior pediment.

To the south of the Grand Staircase on the second floor is a painting of a basket of corn by Floyd V. Brackney, a native of Marshall County. This picture was the center of the Iowa exhibit at the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco in 1915. Brackney was paid \$1,000 for the painting.

A large banner, suspended high in the dome, is the emblem of the Grand Army of the Republic. The banner was painted by Joseph Czizek on the occasion of a Des Moines convention of the Grand Army of the Republic and retained as a permanent decoration by order of Governor Kendall in 1922. Suspended on piano wire and painted on canvas, the banner is a reminder of Iowa's efforts to preserve the Union during the Civil War.

A model of the USS Iowa, on loan from the U.S. Navy Department, is on display on the first floor. The model is 18 feet 7 inches long and weighs about 1,350 pounds.

A collection of dolls depicting Iowa's 41 first ladies in replicas of their inaugural gowns is on display across from the Governor's office. The display was suggested by Billie Ray, wife of former Governor Robert Ray, as a Bicentennial project.



Above the doll case is one of the largest reproduction photographs in the world. Taken of the Rainbow Division, 168th Infantry after their return from France in 1919, the photograph is 26 feet long and six feet high.

The battle flags carried by the Iowa regiments in various wars are in display cases on the main floor. Surrounding the rotunda are four niches which display 138 Civil War flags, 26 First World War flags and 13 Spanish-American War flags.

In the west hall is a plaque done by Nellie V. Walker in commemoration of the work of Iowa women in the fight for civic and political equality.

### *Capitol Facts*

Year completed: 1886

Original cost: \$2,873,294.59

Building's dimensions: 363 ft. 8 in. from north to south; 246 ft. 11 in. from east to west

Number of steps from the ground to the the dome: 398

Height of dome: 275 feet above the ground floor

Diameter of dome: 80 feet

Type of gold: 23 karat

Combined weight of gold: 100 ounces

Thickness of gold: 1/250,000th of an inch

Original cost of gilding dome: \$3,500; Last time dome was regilded: 1965; Cost: \$79,938

Number of different types of marble used in the interior: 29

Weight of the brass chandeliers in the Senate chamber: 2,000 lbs.

Number of crystals in each chandelier in the House chamber: 5,600

Number of fireplaces in the building: 27

### *Tour Information*

**T**ours of the Capitol are conducted year-round and are free of charge. Groups need to make appointments for tours. Building tours are conducted Monday through Saturday between 9:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. If you need more information on tour times, or if you wish to schedule a tour, please call Capitol Tours at (515) 281-5591. Tours of the grounds are available June 16-August 30, Monday-Friday, at 10:00 a.m., weather permitting.



STATE LIBRARY OF IOWA



3 1723 02041 0593