

*A Brief History of  
House Rooms  
373, 374, and 375*



**By Valerie R. Marvin**

*Michigan State Capitol Historian & Curator*







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

*Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan*

## House Committee Rooms and Offices

Architect Elijah E. Myers took great care to make sure that all the House and Senate session staff would be accommodated with appropriate quarters. On his 1872 hand-inked floor plans, which still survive in the Archives of Michigan, Myers marked the rooms located northwest of the House Floor as committee rooms. The spaces directly north of the Floor were offices for the Speaker of the House and the House Clerk. The area to the immediate northeast of the Floor contained another committee room, and spaces for the Assistant Clerks and the Sergeants at Arms.

As might be expected, Myers continued this theme on the third floor. He tucked offices for the Enrolling Clerk, the Assistant Enrolling Clerk, and a committee room in the northwest corner of the wing (in the rooms now identified as H370, H371, and H372). Immediately behind the Reporters' Gallery (situated directly above the rostrum) was, appropriately, the Reporters' Room. And, in the northeastern corner, three more committee rooms (today known as H373, H374, and H375) stood ready for legislative business.

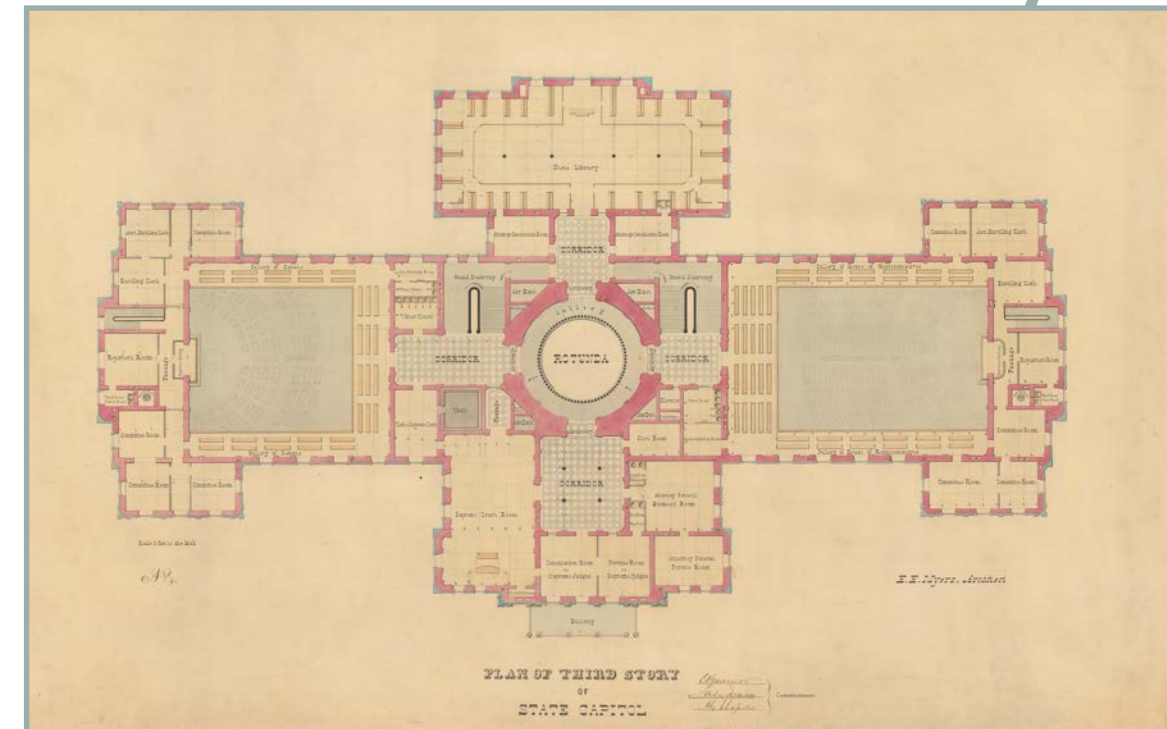
Like the rest of the Capitol, these rooms were designed to be both functional and beautiful, as befitted a growing and prosperous state. "The offices throughout are elegantly fitted up," a reporter wrote following his visit on January 1, 1879, for the Capitol's official dedication. "All of the doors are massive in finish, and fitted with locks specially made to order and being on bronze hinges, and bearing the arms of the state."<sup>1</sup> Passing through the doorways, visitors stepped onto colorful Brussels wool wall-to-wall carpets, 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 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 Capitol's original hand inked floorplans still survive in the Archives of Michigan. The third floor plan included the Legislative Chambers and the adjoining offices and committee rooms.

*Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan*



## The First Clerks and Reporters

The *1879 Michigan Manual* tells us the names of the men who had the pleasure of working in the rooms behind the Chamber when the Capitol first opened. The Clerk of the House, who occupied an office directly behind the Chamber on the second floor, was Daniel L. Crossman, of Williamston. His staff consisted of a Journal Clerk (Lewis M. Miller of Mt. Clemens), a Corresponding Clerk (John T. Page of Lansing), an Engrossing and Enrolling Clerk (V.W. Bruce of Howard City), an Assistant Engrossing and Enrolling Clerk (W.S. Plumb of Mattawan), and Clerks for the Judiciary, Ways and Means, Municipal Corporations, Taxations, and State Affairs Committees.<sup>2</sup>

A quick survey of the *Manual* relates two basic facts about the legislature in the late nineteenth century. First, the legislature was part time, meaning that they only met in Lansing three to five months in odd numbered years. While special sessions could be called by the Governor, they were the exception and not the rule. As a result, these spaces would have been incredibly busy during session, but very quiet once the House recessed.

Secondly, the men using these spaces were not professional civil servants, and generally did not live in Lansing. The *Manuals* tell us each clerk's home post office and county, his birthplace (all of the aforementioned clerks were born in Michigan, New York, or Ohio), his profession (among the clerks there were journalists, farmers, lawyers, one clerk, and one druggist), and the boarding house or hotel where he stayed during session.

The known historical record remains silent regarding the clerks' opinions of their new space. The same could NOT be said of the newspaper reporters, who found themselves exiled to a Reporters' Balcony located immediately one floor above, and directly overhead, of the Speaker's Chair at the rostrum. Several reporters complained—vehemently, and in print—about their new accommodations just one day after the Capitol's official opening. "It [the reporters' gallery] is voted by the knights of the quill to be far short of what it should be," an Ingham County reporter wrote a few days after the Capitol's opening. "I have been told that Mr. King, one of the reporters of the [*Lansing*] *Republican* [newspaper], refused point blank to take short hand notes of the speeches if he was not permitted to do so in a convenient place in the body of the hall, assigning as his reason that he could not do justice to himself or the speakers if he was compelled to take his seat in the reporter's [sic] gallery."<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, those early Representatives read the newspapers and quickly decided to relocate the press to the borders of the House floor, where they could hear—and therefore accurately report on—each legislative action and speech. The balcony became an architectural quirk, and the room behind it, designated originally as the Reporters Room, was quickly repackaged as Committee Room L.



J.H. Scotford of Lansing photographed grand spaces like the rotunda, the House Chamber (seen here), and the Governor's Office around the time the Capitol opened. Smaller, less impressive rooms, did not garner the same attention.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

## Early Changes

As might be expected, changes to these rooms, and the rest of the Capitol, were constant. Two major improvement projects 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 was transformed by artists who stenciled, grained, marbled, and striped beautiful motifs on the walls and ceilings.

In 1892, the Board of State 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. Its contents reveal not only the type of items in the Capitol, but also just how lavishly each space was furnished. Unlike the large first floor departmental suites, the rooms behind the House Chamber contained a modest number of very functional pieces. Room L, the former Reporters' Room (now H373), was furnished with two tables, one lounge, one mirror, six arm chairs, one revolving chair, and four cuspidors (or spittoons). Room M (now H374) housed one table, seven arm chairs, and two cuspidors, whereas Room N (located in the northeastern corner of H375) contained two tables, six arm chairs, two cuspidors, and one clothes press. Room O, the largest of the spaces (consisting of H375A and H375B), boasted two tables, one lounge, seven arm chairs, one bureau and writing desk, two small chairs, and three cuspidors.<sup>4</sup>

## Committee Rooms

Information regarding the use of the rooms now known as H373, H374, and H375 can be found in the small, pocket-sized Legislative Handbooks that have long been a quick and easy reference guide for people working in and around state government. Beginning in the early twentieth century, each notes the location of every single House and Senate committee room, as well as the respective committees and clerks who worked in them.

The 1907-1908 handbook reveals the following assignments:

*Room L – Committees on Revision and Amendment to the Statutes, Private Corporations, the University, and the Agricultural College – clerked by Miss Monroe*

*Room M – Committees on Village Corporations, Normal Schools, Drainage, the State Public School, the College of Mines, Supplies and Expenditures, and Horticulture – clerked by Miss. Beaudet*

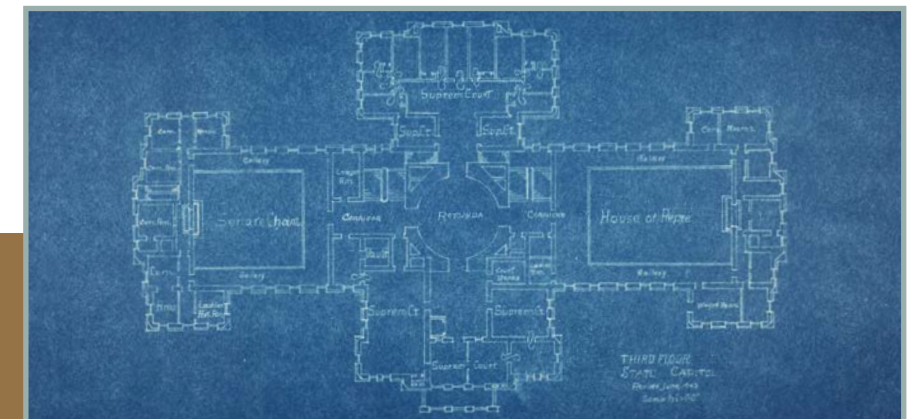
*Room N – Committees on Ways and Means, and Rules and Joint Rules – clerked by Mr. Brubaker*

*Room O – Committees on City Corporations, Railroads, Labor, and Apportionment – clerked by Miss. Poole<sup>5</sup>*

As the years passed, and different legislative philosophies rose and fell, different committees moved in and out of these rooms.

This 1943 floorplan reveals little about the rooms behind the House Chamber, where dozens of committees worked across the decades.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan





The most consistent tenant in this area was the Ways and Means Committee, which met for many years in Room N, and then Room O. The historical equivalent of House Appropriations, Ways and Means was the only House committee to have its own identified/dedicated room. It's likely that the sitting committee chair used the room as his makeshift office where he hosted budget discussions and brokered deals.

By the late 1940s, Way and Means had control of both spaces. Room O served as the Committee's official meeting space, whereas Room N was used by its clerk and stenographer. This scheme continued into the 1960s. By the end of the decades, however, the Ways and Means Committee was replaced by a new Appropriations Committee, which convened in rooms on the first floor.

## House Member Offices

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 the 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.

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

A scheme was developed to capture new space in the old building by subdividing the rooms in half to create two ten-foot tall offices, one above the other. From 1969 to 1972, almost every office on the Capitol's first, second, and third floors received an overfloor (sometimes called half floors or mezzanines). 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 by layers of overpaint, paneling, and wallpaper. Almost every vestige of the Capitol's original elegance and character had disappeared.

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*



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*

Happily, perhaps due to its proximity to the Chamber, the areas behind the House were not overfloored. This space was, however, modernized, receiving a suspended ceiling that was installed to hide duct work and sprinkler piping. Unfortunately, the ceiling also concealed the elaborate plaster cornice.

*Offices, corridors, and even the lobby  
into the House Chamber,  
were sliced in half horizontally . . .*



About this time, the function of these spaces also changed. By the publication of the *1969-1970 Legislative Handbook*, these rooms were being used as office spaces for House members. A survey of the handbooks indicates that the following members worked in this area over the years.

*Please note that the district numbers in the table reflect those in use at the time each respective handbook was printed.*<sup>6</sup>

<b>1969-1970</b>	Rep. Lucille H. McCollough	31st District	Dearborn	Rm. L
	Rep. Leonard S. Walton	18th District	Detroit	Rm. L
	Rep. Vincent J. Petitpren	37th District	Westland	Rm. N
	Rep. Joseph M. Snyder	74th District	St. Clair Shores	Rm. N
	Rep. Thomas Guastello	71st District	Sterling Heights	Rm. O
<b>1971-1972</b>	Rep. Richard J. Allen	88th District	Ithaca	Rm. L
	Rep. Bert C. Brennan	86th District	Saginaw	Rm. L
	Rep. Lucille H. McCollough	31st District	Dearborn	Rm. L
	Rep. E.D. O'Brien	5th District	Detroit	Rm. M
	Rep. Davis S. Holmes, Jr.	10th District	Detroit	Rm. O
<b>1973-1974</b>	Rep. Lucille H. McCollough	31st District	Dearborn	Rm. L
	Rep. Joseph M. Snyder	74th District	St. Clair Shores	Rm. N
<b>1975-1976</b>	Rep. Morris W. Hood, Jr.	6th District	Detroit	Rm. L
	Rep. John F. Markes	36th District	Livonia	Rm. N
	Rep. Lucille H. McCollough	31st District	Dearborn	Rm. O
<b>1977-1978</b>	Rep. Morris Hood, Jr.	6th District	Detroit	Rm. L
	Rep. Lucille H. McCollough	31st District	Dearborn	Rm. N
	Rep. John M. Engler	89th District	Mt. Pleasant	Rm. O
<b>1979-1980</b>	Rep. Ethel Terrell	9th District	Highland Park	Rm. L
	Rep. Lucille H. McCollough	31st District	Dearborn	Rm. N
	Rep. Richard D. Fessler	24th District	West Bloomfield	Rm. O
<b>1981-1982</b>	Rep. Ethel Terrell	9th District	Highland Park	Rm. L
	Rep. Lucille H. McCollough	31st District	Dearborn	Rm. N
	Rep. Richard D. Fessler	24th District	West Bloomfield	Rm. O
<b>1983-1984</b>	Rep. Edgar W. Giese	98th District	Manistee	Rm. L
	Rep. Ethel Terrell	9th District	Highland Park	Rm. N
	Rep. Mat J. Dunaskiss	61st District	Lake Orion	Rm. O
<b>1985-1986</b>	Rep. Edgar W. Giese	98th District	Manistee	Rm. L
	Rep. Ethel Terrell	9th District	Highland Park	Rm. N
	Rep. Mat J. Dunaskiss	61st District	Lake Orion	Rm. O
<b>1987-1988</b>	Rep. Edgar W. Giese	98th District	Manistee	Rm. L
	Rep. Ethel Terrell	9th District	Highland Park	Rm. N
	Rep. Debbie Farhat	97th District	Muskegon	Rm. O
<b>1989-1990</b>	Rep. Edgar W. Giese	98th District	Manistee	Rm. L
	Rep. Ethel Terrell	9th District	Highland Park	Rm. N
	Rep. Richard A. Bandstra	93rd District	Grand Rapids	Rm. O

## 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 historic 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 these three rooms.



Workmen took thousands of photographs during the restoration in the attempt to document the work being done. Original plaster cornices and the archway in H375 were preserved, whereas badly damaged wall plaster was removed and replaced in kind.

*Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection*

Changes came swiftly. The 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.



This view of H375 and H375A, from March 1990, shows a partially painted office. The walls and ceiling are done, but much of the woodwork remained ungrained.

*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 its proper late nineteenth century appearance.

One of the techniques used in this space was 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. They 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.



A decorative artist holds a straight edge while preparing to apply more paint to the ceiling.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

*... won many significant state and national preservation awards.*

## 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. These three rooms, now renumbered H373, H374, and H375 under the new system devised by Capitol Preservation Architect Richard C. Frank, became, once again, a topic for discussion. House leaders initially granted these spaces to the Clerk's staff, who worked in the area until 1997, when the rooms were reconfigured into two legislative offices. Two years later, in 1999, this scheme was abandoned, and the rooms designated for the use of session staff. Legislative members moved back into the space for a brief period in 2007, and then again in 2017.<sup>7</sup>

1991-1992	Resolution Clerk			H374
	Bill and Amending Clerks			H375
	Enrolling Clerks			H375
1993-1994	Resolution Clerk			H374
	Bill and Amending Clerks			H375
	Enrolling Clerks			H375
1995-1996	Bill and Amending Clerks			H375
	Enrolling Clerks			H375
1997-1998	Rep. Raymond E. Basham	22nd District	Taylor	H373
	Rep. Ted Wallace	5th District	Detroit	H375
1999-2000	Session Support Staff			
2001-2002	Session Support Staff			
2003-2004	Session Support Staff			
2005-2006	Session Support Staff			
Jan 2007-Sept 2007	Session Support Staff			
Oct 2007-2008	Rep. Chris Ward	66th District	Brighton	H373 <sup>8</sup>
2009-2010	Session Support Staff			
2011-2012	Session Support Staff			
2013-2014	Session Support Staff			
2015-2016	Session Support Staff			
2017-2018	Rep. Rob VerHeulen	74th District	Walker	H374
2019-2020	Rep. Jim Lilly	89th District	Macatawa	H374
	Rep. Jason Sheppard	56th District	Lambartville	H375
2021-2022	Rep. Jim Lilly	89th District		H374
	Rep. Andrea Schroeder	43rd District		H375
	Rep. Jack O'Malley	101st District		H375
	(Rep. O'Malley moved into H375 in December 2021, following Rep. Schroeder's death.)			

## End Notes

- 1 *The Evening News*, January 2, 1879.
- 2 *The Red Book for the Thirtieth Legislature of the State of Michigan*. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, p. 98-99.
- 3 *Ingham County Democrat*, January 9, 1879.
- 4 *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. 519.
- 5 *Michigan Legislative Handbook*, 1907-1908, p. 76-77.
- 6 *Michigan Legislative Handbooks*, 1971-1990.
- 7 *Michigan Legislative Handbooks*, 1991-2022.
- 8 Republican Rep. Chris Ward began this term as the Minority Floor Leader. During a budget crisis at the end of the Fiscal Year, he agreed to cross party lines and vote for a tax increase in order to stave off a government shut-down. As a result, he lost his position as Minority Floor Leader, and the accompanying first floor Capitol office. In thanks, Democratic House leadership team allowed him to use H373 for the remainder of his term.







*Michigan*  
STATE CAPITOL

[Capitol.Michigan.gov](http://Capitol.Michigan.gov)