

A sepia-toned photograph of the Michigan State Capitol building, featuring a prominent central dome and classical architectural details. The building is set against a background of large, stylized, overlapping shapes in shades of red and gold. The title text is positioned to the right of the building, within the gold-colored area.

# The Watch of the Capitol

*Mary Jane McClintock Wilson*

Michigan Department of Education

Cover: “The New Capitol, as taken July, 1879, showing the new lamps and posts at entrance of front walk together with grounds complete.”

***O.A. Jenison***

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How does one celebrate a building?

It's a question that Capitol caretakers, aficionados, and chroniclers began asking themselves 150 years ago, when our current Capitol – Michigan's third – was being built.

Construction began in 1872 with little fanfare. Work hummed along until October 2, 1873, when 30,000 Michigan citizens flooded into Lansing for the laying of the Capitol's cornerstone. It was an auspicious day for the young capital city. Military units paraded, elected officials gave speeches, and Masons performed their ancient rites in celebration. Finally, a steam-powered derrick lifted the granite cornerstone, packed with historical documents and coins, twelve feet into the air for all to see before lowering it carefully into place.

Today, historians can still read the plans for the ceremony and handwritten notes of Allen Bours (Secretary to the State Building Commission), thanks to a man named Orien Austin Jenison. "Uncle Jen" was the bookkeeper to the state printer and an omnivorous collector who assembled six scrapbooks full of newspaper articles, photographs, and ephemera chronicling our Capitol's construction.

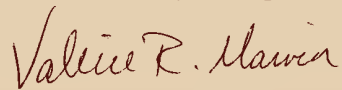
The Jenison scrapbooks sat on the shelves of the Library of Michigan for years before local historian and author Mary Jane McClintock Wilson rediscovered them. Born and raised in Lansing, Mary Jane spent her youth orbiting the Capitol. She made regular visits to walk across the glass floor, examine the ladies in the dome, and climb the ladder into the lantern. With each visit, the Capitol's magic permeated her mind and heart.

In the 1970s, a friend suggested Mary Jane write about the history of the Capitol. Soon Wilson was spending hours in the Library, pouring over Uncle Jen's scrapbooks. After intense study, she wrote *The Watch of the Capitol*, the first modern history of our Capitol's construction. The Department of Education published it in 1979 – just in time for the building's centennial.

The publication of *The Watch of the Capitol* helped spark a movement to restore the much modified and neglected building. As its author, Wilson was elected the inaugural president of the Friends of the Capitol, a body formed by Governor Milliken in 1982 to study the Capitol's condition and make recommendations for its improvement and partial restoration.

Over the next several years, Wilson played a critical role in the efforts to restore our Capitol. She celebrated its rededication in 1992 and attended the 2022 dedication of Heritage Hall. Now 96 years old, Mary Jane continues her proud watch over her beloved Capitol.

The Michigan State Capitol Commission is delighted to partner with her to republish her greatest work, *The Watch of the Capitol*, to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the cornerstone laying.



Valerie R. Marvin  
Historian & Curator, Michigan State Capitol

## THE WATCH OF THE CAPITOL

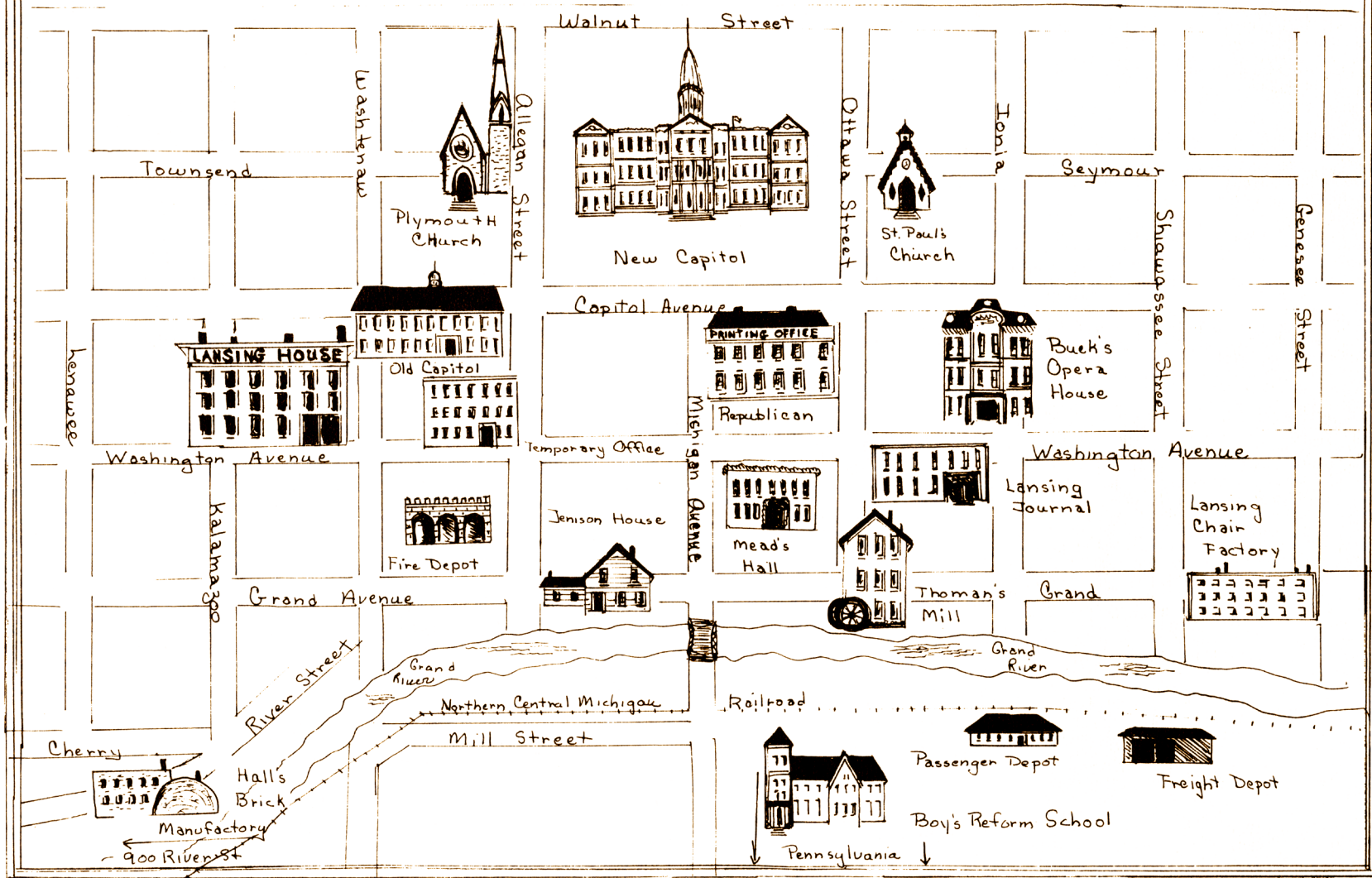
Mary Jane McClintock Wilson

Michigan Department of Education  
State Library Services  
Lansing, 1979

1871

# LANSING

1879



# THE WATCH OF THE CAPITOL

## Prologue

**O**rien Austin Jenison, a young man of twenty-three, arrived in Lansing by stagecoach Christmas Day, 1847. Though wearied by his two-day journey from Detroit, he was eager to see the newly-established Capital and to join the settlers, land speculators, and legislators moving into town daily.

He stepped down from the coach, stretched his legs and looked at his surroundings. Throngs of people walked on planked sidewalks and rough roads. Crude buildings, shanties, and tents dotted the cleared land. Dense woods encircled the hamlet, broken only by a river to the east. In the midst of all, as if standing guard, was a two-story frame building, topped with a quaint belfry and tin dome that glistened in the winter sunlight: the just finished Capitol whose construction had brought about the flurry of activity and flood of newcomers and whose empty rooms now awaited the 1848 Legislature.<sup>1</sup>

Jenison spent his first days in this crowded backwoods settlement seeking rooms: a place to bed and a place to establish an office for his employer, Macy and Driggs, a Detroit land company. Lodgings were hard to find, and for three weeks he slept at night in a barroom chair, until he “procured an office room...in a large structure which stood directly opposite the Capitol...”<sup>2</sup>. By adding a bedstead and bedtick, he had a sleeping room as well.

Lansing became his home. His penmanship and bookkeeping knowledge brought him a clerkship with the Auditor General’s office. Later he served Lansing as City Auditor, opened a mercantile business, became bookkeeper for John Kerr and Company, State printers and binders. During the years he also kept his eye on the Capitol, watching a growing government overcrowd the once adequate State House. By the late 1860’s, the unsatisfactory housing led to rumors which Jenison heard; rumors of erecting a New Capitol as well as rumors of threats to build in a more civilized and accessible area.

On January 1, 1871 newly inaugurated Governor Henry P. Baldwin spoke to the Legislature. Jenison listened as Baldwin called attention to the urgent need for adequate housing, asking the legislators to consider constructing a New Capitol. Jenison then heard the senators and representatives agree.



Orien Austin Jenison

As plans for the New Capitol became a reality, Jenison began his detailed recording of important transactions and daily activity. He scissored items from local and state newspapers and secured original House and Senate Bills as well as the notice to architects. He obtained photographs of officials involved in New Capitol construction and photographs of the various stages of the building's growth. He collected ribbons and badges worn by men officiating on Cornerstone Laying Day, impressions of State seals used for designing the Legislative Halls' glass ceilings, and duplicates of newspapers placed in the cornerstone. He filled six scrapbooks with these materials, linking the information together with artistically penned personal notes. With the dedication of the building January 1, 1879, Jenison completed his collection, having created a valuable and unique record of the growth of the building, the community in which it grew and the people involved in its construction.

After Jenison's death in 1895, his collection was placed in the Michigan State Library where it resides today, 100 years later, and where it is known as the Jenison Collection. From its pages has emerged this story that enables us to look backward to the years 1871-1879 and to join Orien Austin Jenison, Esq., in his *Watch of the Capitol*.

## The Watch Begins

The watch began March 31, 1871. That day the people in the Capital City, statesmen and townfolk alike, were jubilant. Governor Baldwin had just approved an Act providing for the erection of a new State Capitol and a building to be used temporarily for State offices. There would be a New Capitol, and it would remain in Lansing, to be built on Capitol Square, that 11.3 acre site located at the head of Michigan Avenue and bounded by Allegan, Walnut, Ottawa, and Capitol Streets. Michigan senators and representatives would move from stuffy, bulging halls to spacious well-ventilated rooms; town harness-makers and mill hands would welcome factory workers and industrialists; roads and rails would grow to meet increased trade and passengers; and Lansing would not only be the state's permanent governing center, but, hopefully, its commercial and financial center as well.

Governor Baldwin promptly appointed to the Board of Building Commissioners a prominent Jonesville banker, Ebenezer O. Grosvenor, and two respected architects and master builders, James Shearer of Bay City and Alexander Chapoton of Detroit. By May 8, 1871, they had taken the oath of office, filed bonds and, with Governor Baldwin as ex-officio President and Grosvenor as Vice President, they set about to superintend the erection of the New Capitol.

The State office building, located on the New Capitol site, had to be razed, and a structure erected for the use of the displaced offices. This temporary structure was the Board's first consideration. Construction for the building began in June on the northeast corner of old Capitol Square, Allegan at Washington. When completed in November, the three-story structure housed State Offices, Library and Supreme Court. It was built at a cost slightly above the \$30,000 appropriated.

## Planning

Meanwhile, the Commissioners worked on plans for the New Capitol. They toured the Capitols of Illinois and Wisconsin looking for ideas, then prepared a pamphlet of instructions to be used by architects submitting drawings. On June 6th they began national advertising for Capitol designs. New Yorkers, Chicagoans, and Detroiters as well as Lansingites read the ads and by December, twenty sets of drawings had been submitted.

The Commissioners pondered over these drawings, consulted State departments for their desired locations, space needs and special requirements. On January 24, 1872 they selected Elijah E. Myers<sup>3</sup> design. His cruciform plan, topped with a high central dome, was designed in a Palladian style of architecture and was void of unnecessary ornamentation. It called for modern heating and lighting systems and would involve low construction costs. Myers became Architect and General Superintendent of the New Capitol, moved his office from Springfield, Ill. to Detroit and began to prepare detailed plans.

In March, 1872, the Legislature appropriated \$1,200,000 for the New Capitol, to be raised by taxation, to cost each citizen 16 1/8¢ per year for six years. With this appropriation and Myers' finalized plans, the Board of Building Commissioners, now aided by their Secretary, Allen L. Bours (bookkeeper at the State Treasury), advertised for a contractor. Nehemiah Osborn and Company, Rochester, New York, who had built Custom Houses in Milwaukee and Chicago, the Courthouse in Baltimore and the City Hall in Detroit, was the only builder within the limit of the allowed expenditure. On July 15 the Commissioners signed a contract with this company. The agreed price was \$1,144,057.20 with work to begin August 29th.

## Foundation

The Capital City stirred with new activity. Men arrived to sign up for work crews. Horse-drawn wagons lumbered up and down roads delivering tools, equipment and machinery. Boarding houses, shops and stores multiplied. The Jackson, Lansing, and Saginaw Railroad laid double track, south of Michigan Avenue and east of the Grand River, in order to handle heavy loads of stone. George B. Hall's River Street Brick Manufactory stepped up its brick production. On the Capitol grounds, laborers began to wield shovels and hammers as onlookers gathered daily to watch preparations for the New Capitol construction.

The first load of brick was drawn onto the ground August 12th. Three days later the first load of lumber was delivered. Hughes Co., Bellevue, Michigan, began deliveries of limestone which would be used for cement. A two-storied 18 x 28 foot building was erected on the southeast corner of Capitol Square to serve as Osborn's office. On the south side of the Square the boiler and engine for stone-hoisting purposes was set within a small frame enclosure. Nearby were a carpenter shop, a storage shed, a long, wooden building in which stone would be cut, and a small shanty in which the Blake stonecrusher was placed. The State Office Building had earlier been razed. Its bricks were stacked nearby to be used later to construct a block of stores on South Washington Avenue and its excavation was enlarged to become the New Capitol's basement. As September closed, work on the New Capitol was well under way.



By October, the first of ten wooden-sparred derricks, 70 feet high, had been raised, waiting the time it would lift stones into place. Loads of Lemont, Ohio limestone, to be used for the footing stones, started to arrive and were added to the sand, brick and lumber piles. Bricklayers and stonecutters reported for work, and, on October 24, 1872, head stonemason, Richard Glaister, commenced cutting the first stone for the New Capitol.

Throughout the autumn workmen manned the Blake stonecrusher, reducing the Bellevue limestone to egg-size pieces. Other laborers mixed cement, laid concrete foundation and cut and smoothed stone. But when winter's cold weather arrived, work on the New Capitol slowed. Spectators drifted away and the grounds were emptied except for a small crew of stonecutters who remained to prepare stone inside the wooden building.

A sewer was needed for the New Capitol. A problem arose when government officials not only wanted one built on city property (on Ottawa Street from Capitol to Grand River), but wanted the city to pay for it. Mayor John Tooker called a citizen's meeting and city leaders, F. J. Cowles, D.L. Case, and Edwin Merrifield, along with many other townpeople, vigorously discussed the problem. One citizen expressed concern that Ottawa's drainage to the river would infect the city with disease. Another suggested building a sewer on Seymour and Washington below the dam. A farsighted Lansingite proposed adopting a general system of drainage. All agreed that the city should not pay the total cost for the Capitol's sewage. The meeting closed with the decision to allow construction of a sewer on Ottawa and an offer to pay \$1,000 of the costs.

Inauguration Day, 1873, John J. Bagley became governor. Now President of the Building Commissioners, he immediately focused on a Cornerstone Ceremony as he asked officials and citizens to give thought to the stone's inscription, contents, and special celebration. On April 24th he approved the Legislature's joint resolution to appropriate \$10,000 for the laying of the cornerstone, and then appointed a Committee for Arrangements consisting of ten citizens plus the Commissioners. He, as Governor, became the ex-officio chairman and Bours, the Secretary. Their first actions were to designate October 2, 1873 as Cornerstone Laying Day, to assign committees for Contents, Invitations and Programme, and to request Bours to write a Michigan history.

With the arrival of spring activity returned to the Capitol grounds. The small crew which had labored all winter working stone grew to 100 men. Oliver Marble, assistant building superintendent, directed men laying concrete and raising derricks. James Appleyard, mason work superintendent and James VanKeuren, his foreman, supervised the stonecutters. Daily visitors now peered over a high tight board fence built around the premises to protect the soft stonework from injury by careless outsiders. Nearby, workers laid pipe from the Capitol, along Ottawa Street, past Thoman's Mill to the river. This pipe would carry water, forced up from the river by the mill's steam-powered pump, to the Capitol where it was needed for construction work.

Down at the railroad's unloading site, limestone for the basecourse arrived from Joliet, Illinois in addition to the stone that continued to come from Lemont and Bellevue. Teams of horses hauled the massive blocks from the double tracks up newly-planked Mill Street to Michigan Avenue and across the iron bridge and onto Capitol Square. In the forenoon of June 24th (Detroit papers incorrectly stated it was the 25th) the first Lemont stone, the initial footing stone for the foundation, was laid on the southeast corner of the building. These footing stones, cut six feet in breadth, would be built to reach four feet above the concrete foundation.

During the summer the footing stones rose even with the ground. Four more derricks were raised and concrete was laid in the trench for the Dome's foundation. The first casualties occurred. In August a crank slipped out of a workman's hand striking his cheek and breaking his nose in a frightful way. A few weeks later, foreman Van Keuren broke his arm while trying to prevent damage to a stone that was being lifted.

These were also the months of preparation for Cornerstone Laying Day. Officials selected the cornerstone contents, and planned a dedication ceremony using Masonic rites. Special invitations were sent to officials and organizations of Michigan as well as to dignitaries of surrounding states. A general invitation was issued to all the people of the State. Thousands of citizens were expected to fill the Capital City on Cornerstone Laying Day.

On September 26th word arrived that the cornerstone, quarried at Cape Ann, Massachusetts Bay, had been shipped from Concord, New Hampshire. Three days later, on the 29th, the stone arrived at the Lansing depot where a noisy, excited crowd waited. It was loaded on a wagon and drawn by four horses up Michigan Avenue to the Capitol grounds where it was safely deposited on the platform near the northeast corner of the New Capitol's foundation. Richard Glaister accepted the stone and pronounced it to be in good condition. However, when he checked the dimensions of the opening that would hold the box of contents, he found it was 2" too small. Glaister and stonecutters Evan McPhee and Jack Smeaton picked up axes and proceeded to chip away. There followed a great scramble as bystanders sought to retrieve cornerstone chips as mementos.

On the eve of Cornerstone Day, the Capital City was ready to greet the guests and bid them hearty welcome. Hotels, boarding houses and private residences had full larders and extra beds. Store fronts were decorated, restaurant owners and churchwomen prepared to serve warm meals and oyster suppers. Even J.E. Warner had brought his Grand Pacific Circus Show to town to help along the Capitol.

On the Capitol grounds the high board fence had been removed and two platforms erected. A small speaker's stand, located on the northeast corner of the New Capitol basement, was surrounded by a large visitors' platform set with 1,500 chairs. The platform lumber was to be used later for scaffolding, thus justifying its cost. The speaker's stand was decorated with tattered battle flags of Michigan regiments and United States flags with 37 stars flew from the long evergreened necks of the ten derricks. Nearby rested the five-ton granite cornerstone with letters on the east face "1872 A.D." and on the north face "187-, A.D.". The blank letter was to be chiseled in later with the year of completion.



Cornerstone for the new Capitol. Gentleman on extreme left is O. A. Jenison.

## Cornerstone Laying Day

**I**n the early morning hours of October 2, people coming from all parts of the State began to appear. They came on foot and by buggy, by horse-drawn wagon and ox-pulled cart. They came by regular and special steam trains with extra coaches loaded to capacity, with even the tops of some cars covered with excursionists.

The crowd moved throughout the town that crisp autumn day. The military troops marched to old Capitol Square where they stacked arms. Then they went to Representative Hall where they were fed a meal paid for by a group of Lansing citizens. The Knights Templar were met at the railroad station by their brothers, Lansing Commandary 25, who escorted them to their various places of entertainment and paid their bill. The general multitude was everywhere, sightseeing and eating food at corner stands and church basements, while seeking places along the parade route to watch the Cornerstone Day march.

The procession, arranged by the Chief Marshal, General William Humphrey, started at two o'clock, an hour late. In the lead was a detachment of Detroit Metropolitan Police under Sergeant P.W. Girardin and the State Troops Battalion under Captain James Hinckly. The expected lead battalion, the First United States Infantry from Fort Wayne, never did arrive for the parade. Their special train had been taken over by Detroiters before they could board and their Captain, who objected to sending his men in boxcars, marched them back to the Fort. The parade's marching men did include more than twenty-five bands of music, fifteen state military companies, the Knights Templar, with nodding plumes and glittering swords, and 3,000 Masons and Oddfellows. Special applause followed Orange Risdon, the oldest Free Mason in the United States, who marched the entire route with his Ann Arbor group.

The parade, one and one-half miles in length, ended at Capitol Square, where the grounds overflowed with 30,000 people striving to get within seeing and hearing distance of the speaker's stand. Visitors filled the platform seats, covered the standing room, and sat atop wagons, fences and twenty-foot high brick piles. They even draped themselves around the derricks. Governor Bagley, Secretary Bours and other officials of the day took their places on the speaker's stand. Reporters with platform cards, issued only to members of the daily press who were also State officers, sat at tables located in front of the stand. To the south were massed the military and Knights Templar, and to the east, the bands, Masons and Oddfellows.

At 3:40 the exercises commenced with music by Crossettes Cornet Band from Constantine, the boyhood home of Governor Bagley. The Governor bid welcome, Rt. Reverend Samuel McCoskry, Episcopal Bishop, prayed and the 50-voiced male choir, led by House Clerk, William Marston, sang **America**. Former United States Congressman William Howard, Orator of the Day, eloquently discoursed for one hour! Then came the laying of the cornerstone, directed by the Masonic Fraternity and laid in accordance with their majestic ceremonies. During this time a massive copper box, enclosing a glass casket containing historical documents and memorials with a list of the same, was placed in the cornerstone. It was covered with a block of dark-colored slate engraved with the coat of arms of the State. The derrick lifted the stone twelve feet in the air that all might behold it, then slowly lowered it to its proper place. The entire assemblage united in singing **Old Hundred**. Reverend Noah Fassett gave the benediction and the National Salute of 37 guns was fired. By 6 o'clock the stone was effectively sealed. The visitors then departed and the town returned to normalcy.

It had been a great day. The finest celebration ever with an immense, well-behaved crowd and the cornerstone laid with impressive ceremonies. Yet, there had been a few problems. No one had greeted the Masons of Muir. Citizens waited at hometown stations for extra trains that never arrived while spectators waited for a late procession and ceremony that many of them could neither see nor hear. Reverend M.W. Fairfield of Plymouth Church called the use of Masonic rites an insult to the people of Michigan. Mrs. Adele Hazlett of Hillsdale complained that women were not properly recognized; no women received invitations, nor were asked to march in the procession, nor participate in the program. They were only mentioned in the news as “patriots who had climbed to the top of a huge pile of debris to watch the festivities”. *The Lansing Republican* replied to Mrs. Hazlett that only 600 men had been specially invited and suggested that women were obviously more interested in making refreshment stand profits for their churches than marching with swords and muskets.

Of the \$10,000 appropriated for the Day, approximately \$3,000 remained. The Detroit mayor felt the left-over money should be given to reimburse those who entertained the Knights Templar and the military. Mayor Tooker agreed. Governor Bagley didn't. A rumor circulated that the Governor was planning to use the excess money for late evening orgies at the Lansing House, serving champagne and expensive liquors. A State clerk (a church elder) who was accused of starting the rumor, promptly received notice that his services were no longer needed, although he was later reinstated when found innocent. Meanwhile, Bagley used the money for additional printings of the **Pamphlet on Proceedings at the Laying of the Cornerstone of the New Capitol of Michigan**. Two thousand copies of this pamphlet, which included Bours' Michigan History and a lithograph of the proposed New Capitol, had been distributed on Cornerstone Day. This additional printing was on parchment, bound in full Russian leather and sent to prominent persons throughout the state and in other states as well. While favorably received by most, the *Detroit Free Press* called it an unwise way to spend the money, an expensive waste that would “only teach how much easier it is to spend money than to earn it”.

Stoneyard of the New Capitol.



## Walls Begin To Rise

Freezing weather came early the autumn of 1873, and New Capitol workmen, who had commenced laying the base course of Joliet stone, stopped work. They covered the walls with paper to prevent injury from winter's ice and snow, stored their tools, and departed. Only stonecutters remained to work on huge rough stones scattered about the grounds. Once cut, these stones were inspected. If accepted, they were dated and numbered for placement, and put to one side in orderly arrangement. However, if a stone had a dark metallic spot, a flaw in texture, or a mar by a workman's error, it was marked with an R and rejected. In December, even the stonecutters took a holiday and the Capitol grounds were empty except for a few casual sightseers and one unusual visitor, Thomas McEwan's lively runaway horse. He had broken from the wagon he was hauling, leaving portions of it in different places and his teammate eating peanuts at Smith Hunter's Grocery, while he trotted to the Capitol grounds to take a look at the Cornerstone.

In the spring of '74 deliveries of construction materials increased again. Brick piles were replenished daily. Amherst, Ohio sandstone, to be used for the superstructure, began to arrive. Green, undressed lumber was unloaded from wagons and stacked to the right of the front entrance to remain there until thoroughly seasoned. Bricklayers returned to work and stonecutter crews, who had resumed cutting in January, were enlarged. Workers began the Dome's foundation by placing eight stones at eighteen foot intervals in a circular pattern, and they set the first basement doorsill. Work continued at an increasing pace despite a temporary delay caused by a stonecutters' strike. The men demanded \$3.75-a-day wages, but the contractors had enough prepared stone to wait out a strike and refused the pay raise. The stonecutters soon returned to work.

The morning of May 29th, the large stone temporarily placed over the cornerstone was removed. It was permanently replaced by two face stones set to form an L and backed, not by the usual five-foot-thick brick wall, but by the same stone which had temporarily covered it. The contents were now inaccessible to tampering hands.

## First Floor

Iron joists for the first floor were laid in June and the ten-foot high walls, rising above the height of the board fence, were visible to the sidewalk superintendents. Brickmasons, laying 70,000 bricks daily, built a brick lining behind the growing sandstone wall. Throughout the summer 170 men worked on the Capitol, preparing and setting stones for the wall, the doors, and the windows around the building's first floor, until the final north door was reached and its keystone put in position on September 2, 1874.

While the shell of the Capitol grew, Lansing grew also. By the fall of '74 the town had built a fire depot and two Grand River iron bridges. Three railroad companies had laid tracks, offering increased passenger and freight service. Licenses had been issued to twenty-four saloons, six hotels, and Buck's Opera House on North Washington.

E.W. Sparrow and J.H. Moores, land, tax, and loan agents, encouraged citizens to invest in the Capital City, while Lansing Chair Company stockholders voted to erect a building along the river's west side between Shiawassee and Saginaw. The town's news expanded to include the Capitol workmen. *The Journal* reported that Willie Green, age 11, was injured while operating derrick machinery, while the *Republican* carried ads for the Capitol contractor seeking common laborers at \$1.50 a day. Both newspapers advertised the Bricklayers Annual Ball at Mead's Hall where gentlemen and their ladies were invited to a two-dollar supper followed by dancing to the music of Boyce and Royer's String Band. Saloon frequenters made front page news. One intoxicated Capitol worker shot his lady friend's husband and was put behind bars. Another, a bricklayer who had drunk freely on election day, was picked up by police and taken to jail in a handcart where he died a victim of "King Alcohol."

## Second Floor

**I**n October bricklayers and stonecutters commenced second floor walls, laying the first stone for the second floor on the southeast corner. By November they had set the first window caps and before they ceased work for the season, they had positioned perfectly cut ashlar to a thirty-foot height. According to Architect Myers, not a chisel was placed on a stone after its elevation, as every stone fit like a glove.

During January, February, and March of 1875, the Commissioners, the Legislature, and a small crew of stonecutters worked on the New Capitol. The Commissioners recommended easing of main portico steps and changes in the roof, balustrade and cornice. They also sought provisions for heating,

ventilating, and lighting. The Legislature responded by appropriating \$70,000 for steam heating and ventilating, \$30,000 for a copper roof, and \$65,000 for a stone cornice and balustrade. Stonecutters, who continued to cut and smooth stone by working the steam-powered iron wheel or moving flat iron strips back and forth on the stone surfaces, also had to cope with problems caused by the cold weather. The pipe which pumped water from the river to the Capitol froze. The icy obstruction had to be dug up and water hand-hauled up from the river. Snow that fell on walls and partitions had to be removed to prevent damage from repeated thawing and freezing. A six-horse team hauling a 12-ton stone needed four span of horses and extra hands to restart the load. Returning bricklayers were also affected by the cold weather when the late frost that made Hall's Brick Manufactory lose 250,000 bricks, saw bricklaying halted. The Commissioners ordered suspension of work, feeling the frost was not yet out of the ground. The indignant contractors felt the suspension unnecessary and the workers returned after one day's absence. The work went bravely on.



Winter view of the New Capitol, December 1874.



## Third Floor

An April Fool's Day flood that brought disaster to five of Lansing's bridges left the Michigan Avenue span across the Grand River. Loads of stone continued to be delivered to the Capitol grounds, but now had to share this bridge with increased traffic. The full force of workers returned from their winter rest to complete the second floor and begin the third. An evening crew was added to elevate bricks to the upper floors in readiness for the next day's work. Their stop-work whistle sounded at eleven P.M. announcing to laborers and townpeople alike that the New Capitol's workday was finally over.

On April 30, 1875, there occurred a confrontation between Secretary Bours and George P. Sanford, *Lansing Journal* publisher. The two men had been at odds for several years. As neighbors they had had a dispute over a chicken. In 1870 Bours had blocked Sanford's renomination for State representative. When Bours became Building Commissioner Secretary, a job Sanford had wanted, Sanford began his written attacks. His newspaper articles called the Secretary a "salary grabber" and accused him of obtaining money unwarranted, noting that he was drawing not only \$1,200 a year salary as Building Commissioner Secretary, but also \$500 as Cornerstone Committee Secretary and \$300 as Reform School bookkeeper. On the morning of the confrontation Bours, incensed by the latest Sanford article, went to the *Journal* office, conversed briefly with Sanford, then drew from under his coat a small riding whip with which he struck Sanford. A struggle followed. Sanford grabbed a nearby stove poker and Bours ran out the door and over to the town's other newspaper, *The Lansing Republican*, where he announced that he had "just whipped Sanford". Bours was arrested for assault and battery on Sanford's complaint. The case went to trial amid much publicity and resulted in a hung jury. Bours was rearrested on a new warrant for the same offense, which Bours' attorney, A.E. Cowles, argued was illegal. The judge ruled otherwise. A new jury was impaneled, a new trial was held. The defense refused to have anything to do with the second trial and the jury, deliberating five minutes, returned a verdict of guilty. Bours, fined \$25 or 30 days in jail, appealed to Circuit Court. His appeal was denied.

On July fourth, laborers, having completed third-floor window jambs, took a holiday. They joined in the day's celebration that began with a thirteen-gun sunrise salute. Farmers came to town to see the New Capitol's progress, creating a traffic jam on principal streets. Families picnicked. Lads lit firecrackers. Young people strolled along the river banks or took excursion rides on one of Captain Loomis' Grand River sidewheelers. A crowd of 25,000 residents and visitors viewed afternoon exercises held on the old Capitol lawn. Many remained until six o'clock to watch the stonecutters and brickmasons play baseball on the square just south of the Lansing House.

Summer and autumn tourists using special excursion rates, came in increasing numbers to see the "Lion of Lansing" grow. One of the largest groups (members of the Jonesville Methodist Episcopal Church) filled seven train cars. The visitors watched walls and roofs of the North and South wings completed, and fourth floor walls raised. They saw ground crews prepare materials and followed derricks that lifted finished stones and iron trusses 60 feet upward. They craned their necks and strained their eyes to make out distant figures creeping around the edge of the top floor to complete the stone cornice and balustrade.



The west side of the Capitol looking north with old Lansing High School in background.

Meanwhile, the Commissioners, in special as well as regular monthly meetings, settled increasing Capitol business. In addition to the cornice and balustrade contract which they had awarded to Osborn, they selected S.J. Creswell of Philadelphia to supply the cast-iron and chose Herman Wehner, a 28 year old Prussian immigrant, to model the bas relief figures for the east pediment. When they were unable to obtain copper for the roof at the specified 25½¢ per pound limit, they chose the best of double cross tin to be manufactured in Wales. They sought steam heating and ventilating bids for a second time and accepted Walworth Manufacturing Company's bid of \$59,313.03. The bid included pipes, ducts, radiators and a first class steam passenger elevator. The cage was to be made of oak and iron, finished with French veneered panels and carved work of richly variegated black walnut. It would be ornamented, gilded and surrounded with cut stained plate glass and furnished with a leather upholstered sofa.

In February, 1876, as stonecutters finished cutting the last of the stones, the Board closed the contract with Brownell Company of Dayton, Ohio, for steel boilers and made the important decision to use electricity for lighting the gas jets and operating the annunciators (call bells). To educate themselves on various systems of electric gas lighting they toured twenty buildings in New York and Philadelphia, including the new Tammany Hall and the Centennial Exposition Building. They then compiled electric specifications, advertised for bids, and awarded the contract to Western Electric Manufacturing of Chicago for \$4,630.00.

During the same period they also considered ornamental designs for the glass ceilings of the Legislative Halls, adopting those of George Misch & Brothers. Plans called for ruby and white plate glass panels to be manufactured by Ravenshead and Sutton, Lancashire, England, and installed by Israel Gillett. The panels would be etched with seals of all States of the Union: the seal of Michigan occupying the panel over the seat of the presiding officer of each house and the seal of the United States over the entrance. States were contacted, requesting a print or impression of their seal and permission to use it. There was difficulty in obtaining just one seal, the Great Seal of the United States, which at first was denied. However, with perseverance, on the part of O.A. Jenison, even that seal was obtained.

Work resumed on the Capitol in May. Wing roofs were finished, stone facing placed on the gables' round windows, and the outside fourth floor work neared completion. While Osborn crews nailed down Norway Pine flooring, Walworth men set the first foot of steam pipe in the sub-basement. The heating system when finished would include this basement's network of more than 32 miles of iron pipe through which steam would travel to bring heat to every part of the building. Equally sophisticated was the ventilating system the crews were installing. It had flues well located to exhaust the building's stale air upward and outward. Stale air was of much concern to the Legislators who had experienced old Capitol furnace smoke and foul odors that increased with the length of the session and number of cigar stems and tobacco quids.



## Statuary, Roof, and Dome

All spring sculptor Wehner had worked on the plaster casts for the east pediment statuary, following L.T. Ives' sketches. During the summer skilled stonecutters, directed by Richard Glaister, took the casts and cut them into stone. On October 4th, workmen began putting pieces into position and by the afternoon of the 8th, the statuary was completely set. The keystone to the east pediment, the top stone in the New Capitol, was then positioned above the statuary. The group included three figures: the central figure, **Michigan**, a woman in Indian costume, holding a volume in her left hand, and a globe in her right; the right figure, **Agriculture**, holding a horn of plenty in her right hand and a laurel wreath in her left, her arm resting on a plow handle and a sheaf of wheat and other agricultural emblems around her; and the left figure, **Commerce**, sitting on a bale of goods, her right arm resting on an anchor and in the background a partly constructed schooner. Also included were a rock with mining tools to represent Michigan's mining interests and shingles, log, chain and a stone and ax to represent Michigan's lumber interests.

Crews finished up the statuary and completed the fourth floor balustrade. Other workmen using horse-pulled scrapers, dug the north boiler room excavation. This room would be one of two fuel rooms to supply the Capitol steam. In November three boilers were placed in the finished room, completing it before winter's cold weather arrived and work on the New Capitol was once again discontinued.

## Dome

The following spring a new skyline appeared in the Capital City as the Dome's skeleton began to rise between Plymouth's church spire and St. Paul's bell tower. Now, visitors approaching town could see this growing silhouette and know that Lansing was near. Neighboring farmers and town residents could watch from their windows as sixteen iron trusses were set and surrounding pillars positioned. When the great iron ribs were in place the Dome towered 85 feet from its six-story, brick foundation. Topped with the lantern, it would reach 267 feet from the ground. By December the Dome was enclosed and the outside painted to correspond with the light color of the Amherst sandstone.

Throughout the work season of 1877 laborers had moved inside and out working on the New Capitol. They had plastered walls, set skylights, finished the tin roof and added four porticos. They had also set two boilers in the partially finished second boiler room, located on the south side of the New Capitol. By the time freezing temperatures arrived, even the water, gas, and heating pipes had been installed so that a fire built under the three north room boilers gave the New Capitol its first winter with heat.



New Capitol with dome beginning to rise and Plymouth Congregational Church to the south, spring 1877.

## Furnishing

Meanwhile, thought was given to New Capitol furnishings. The appointed Board for furnishing the New Capitol met in October to consider furniture and fixtures. They decided to use all suitable furniture from the old Capitol and to purchase new for principal offices and chambers. These purchases were covered with appropriations that had been made by the Legislature. Forty thousand dollars was allocated for improving grounds and furnishing Legislative Halls, Library and Supreme Court, and \$75,000 to complete the furnishings. As a Board they sought samples of chandeliers, advertised for gas bids, and prepared a schedule of appointments viewing items needed. They traveled to Illinois to view the interiors of banking houses and the public library in Chicago and the Capitol in Springfield. Then they made their decisions. They ordered settees from Kappes and Eggers of Chicago and electric clocks from E. Howard and Company of Boston. They selected the legislator's heavy walnut chair with cane seat and tilting and rotating attachments. They ordered the Supreme Court's eighteen-foot three-step rostrum and the state treasury's safe with its massive vault door. The Board also accepted bids for galleries, library cases, and for fitting the Legislative Post Office. However, they rejected all bids for gas fixtures, which led to a trip east for Bours and Furnishing Board member William McCreery where the fixtures were purchased for \$2,000 less than any previous bid.

## Finishing

The last year of construction arrived and from January to September, 1878 the finishing work was done. Using a portion of the \$25,000 the Legislature had earlier appropriated for electrical work, electrical wires were set for speaking tubes, call bells and 371 of the 1,702 gas burners. The winding library stairs were finished, black limestone and white Vermont marble squares were laid on corridor floors. Pipes were connected to five attic tanks that would hold 2,000 barrels of water and to the Walnut Street sewer, built below the dam. Despite the sudden disappearance of Walworth's foremen, the steam heating and ventilating work was finished as were the boiler rooms. The elevator was installed, the grand staircases embossed with Ives' ornamental designs and carved mantles were set. Doors were hung, including the front entrance's six massive, 14' 6", carved, black walnut doors with decorated columned windows. The interior of the Dome's lantern was paneled to be frescoed later, and the scaffolding was removed. The cast iron frame floor in the rotunda was laid and woods and walls painted, grained and varnished.

Adam Oliver, Kalamazoo landscape gardener, was hired to beautify the grounds; Ayers, and Sons to supply the iron fence surrounding Capitol Square and William Appleyard to direct the laying of the cobblestone drive and the Ohio Blue Freestone flagwalks. Plans for the walkways included a thirty-foot grand approach from the east to the main entrance and twelve-foot wide walks leading to the north, south, and west entrances. Walks from portico to portico and walks from all corners diagonally to porticos were also laid out.





Nearly completed Capitol with men on lantern at top of dome, June 29, 1878.

On June 18th a pole with a broom flying the stars and stripes appeared at the top of the Capitol. As a gathering crowd watched, workmen mounted the dome to salute this American flag flying over the New Capitol for the first time. The hearty hurrahs of workmen and spectators were heard throughout the neighboring streets of Capitol Square.

As stone flagging was being brought on the grounds and tile being laid, construction cleanup commenced. At auction the wooden fence surrounding the Capitol was sold for \$43.00. The blacksmith shop was purchased to be used for a barn. Osborn's office was purchased to be used for a dwelling. The long wooden building in which the stonecutters worked was torn down and the remaining construction materials gathered up and carted away.

Excursionists by the trainload arrived in Lansing to view the Capitol's progress. Many returned home disgruntled when they were denied admission to its interior. Secretary Bours received numerous complaints from those refused entrance. He announced publicly that the contractors were still in possession and control of the building and responsible for any damage to it. Until the State formally received the New Capitol there would be no admitting of the public.

September 23, 1878, the contractors had the building ready for delivery. The Commissioners made full settlement with Osborn and Company and formally accepted the building. The Board also made a final settlement with Walworth, discharged Architect Myers and appointed the Capitol personnel: a chief engineer and assistant, six janitors, two firemen and one watchman.

Visitors were now allowed within the New Capitol. In the middle of October Superintendent Howe of the Boys Reform School on Pennsylvania Avenue, marched 320 of his boys down Michigan Avenue to the Capitol's east entrance. Secretary Bours met them there and conducted them on a special tour of the building. Rain prevented their planned drill demonstration on the grounds, although they did a few evolutions on their return march. A few evenings later the Capitol was opened to the public for a demonstration of the lighting system. Visiting ladies and gentlemen, greeted by a glowing Capitol, gazed with wonder as over 1,000 gas jets illuminated the rotunda and Representative and Senate Halls for the first time.

As the Capitol neared completion plans for the Inauguration Day dedication were announced. The Governor, Boards of State Auditors and Building Commissioners adopted the Programme of Exercises, inviting all living ex-governors to participate. Arrangements were made for an evening Governor's Reception. No special invitations were issued to the reception and no refreshments would be served.

On the eve of the dedication, December 31, 1878, the New Capitol was once again lighted. Clocks ticked, windows sparkled, and roll-top desks shone. Newly-laid carpeting was swept, including the replaced area that had been damaged by a fire caused by polishing rags. Librarian Harriett Tenny had library shelves stacked with books. Secretary of State E.G.D. Holden had cabinets filled with state records. The Quartermaster General had arranged for display the first floor Museum's historic relics, including many recently contributed by State citizens. In Representative Hall where the ceremony would take place, the 38-starred flag hung from an iron standard, gallery chairs and lounge settees were pushed together to make way for the expected crowd. On the main floor, additional chairs had been specially arranged around the Speaker's desk. All was in readiness for the State to officially use its most splendid building.

## Dedication Day

The historic day, January 1, 1879 began with the stars and stripes hoisted on the north end of the New Capitol. A steady stream of visitors of all ages traveled snow-covered streets to reach the Capitol grounds. They moved up the portico steps, entered through the giant doors and crowded into the halls. At 9:30 the doors of Representative Hall opened and the people quickly filled the galleries. State officials, ceremony participants, and the Governor, sporting his gold-headed cane, arrived from the Lansing House and were escorted to their chairs. Ex-officials, legislators, and their ladies sat in the main body of the Hall while the Knights Templar band sat in the reporter's gallery above the Speaker's desk.

Governor Charles M. Croswell called the assemblage to order, the band played, and Bishop Gillespie offered a prayer. Chief Justice James V. Campbell administered the oath of office to Governor Croswell and Lt. Governor Alonzo Sessions. Lengthy addresses were made by ex-Governors Alpheus Felch, William Greenly, Austin Blair, Henry Baldwin, and John Bagley. At last, Building Commission Vice President Grosvenor read the Commission Report, giving the history of construction and expenditures. He noted that during the six years of building there had been no loss of life, nor limb nor major property. Later, when all the bills were in the total costs for the New Capitol would be \$1,510,130.59.<sup>4</sup>

Grosvenor then turned to Governor Croswell, the other Commissioners having risen, and with streaming eyes and broken words formally presented the New Capitol. Governor Croswell spoke with great dignity, accepting the building with the hope that “...from the New Capitol walls would...emanate the results of wise statesmanship, impartial justice and patriotic devotion to country.” The dedication ceremony closed with the Reverend Prudden’s benediction.

The 30th Michigan State Legislature immediately came to order and went about the State’s business in the New Capitol. Opening exercises consisted of a voluntary by the choir reading scripture and singing an Ode written by the Reverend George Duffield of First Presbyterian Church.

For the Governor’s evening reception, the New Capitol again glowed with light shining from the lampposts, to the chandeliers to the lofty lantern. Sounds of music came from the Knights Templar Band again seated in Representative Hall. Crowds once more filled the corridors. At eight o’clock the Governor’s parlor door opened and Governor Croswell, with his son and daughter and staff, received the waiting citizens.

Throughout the day and evening men, women, and children toured their New Capitol. They walked on the rotunda’s glass bricks and gazed up at the dome’s magnificent summit. They saw the museum’s regimental flags, the Senate’s ornamented glass ceilings, the Supreme Court’s handsome walnut carvings. They climbed the lower floors’ grand staircases and the library’s winding iron steps. They rode the steam elevator up to the fourth floor Pioneer Assembly Room and down to the basement Armory and Pomological Society office. They shook Governor Croswell’s hand, talked with their legislators, and even danced in the first floor north hall.

In the late evening the great doors finally closed and the last of the citizens departed in the midst of a heavy winter storm, leaving their New Capitol, now darkened and enshrouded by falling snow, a completed and dedicated State House, fitting, convenient, and secure for the proper administration of government.

*The watch was over.*

## SOURCES

The material for this story was taken from the six volumes of the **Jenison Collection**, located for many years in the Michigan State Library, Lansing, Michigan. Today the Collection is in the Archives of Michigan. In many instances direct quotes taken from the Collection have been woven into the text. The pictures used in this publication, with the exception of the Jenison photograph which was provided by Jenison's granddaughter, Judith Breakey, were also taken from the Collection. Supportive material and background information came from the following sources:

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Durant, Samuel, *History of Ingham and Eaton Counties - Michigan*, Philadelphia, D.W. Ensign and Company, 1879, pp. 76-79
- 2 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, Volume 2 (1877/78) Second Edition, Lansing, Robert Smith Printing Co., 1901. p. 133
- 3 Myers, a Philadelphian, studied architecture in offices of Samuel Sloan, Philadelphia, and at Franklin Institute. He began his architectural career after serving as an engineer in the Union army. The Michigan Capitol was his first major contract. He later designed city halls, courthouses, state institutions, and the Capitols of Idaho, Colorado, Utah, and Texas.
- 4 *Michigan Official Directory and Legislative Manual for the years 1919-1920*. (Lansing, 1919), p.2.





*Michigan*  
STATE CAPITOL

