The Superintendent of Public Instruction's Office H153



















By Valerie R. Marvin

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

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

The Golden Age of Capitol Construction

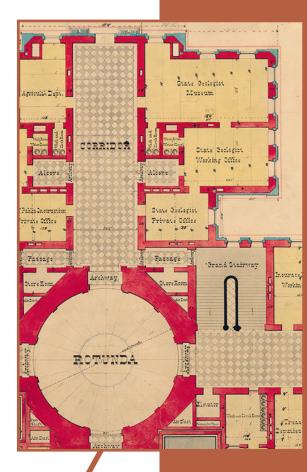
The Michigan State Capitol was built during the golden age of Capitol construction in the years following the American Civil War. From its inception, the building was designed to serve several functions and roles for the state. First, and most importantly, it is the official seat of government for the 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.

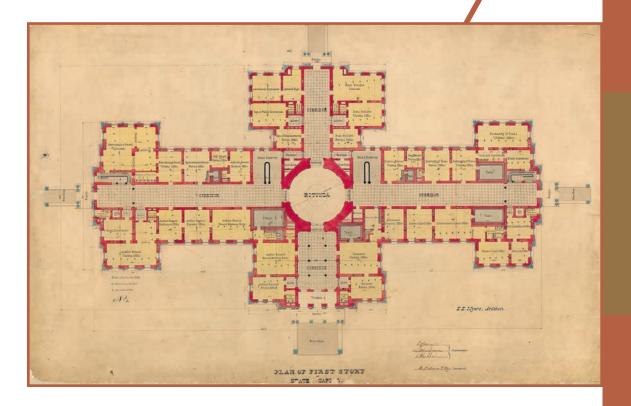
When the Capitol first opened in 1879, it was state government's only active office building, where all three branches of government were housed. The executive branch, including the Governor, State Treasurer, Secretary of State, State Librarian, Auditor General, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 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 Superintendent of Public Instruction

The initial tenants of the modern office known as H153 are surprisingly difficult to identify, as various historical sources suggest a variety of schemes for the first floor's west wing. Architect Elijah E. Myers's original floor plans assigned the spaces on the wing's north side to the State Geologist for his use as a Private Office, a Working Office, and a Museum. One newspaper reporter, in his description of the new Capitol, noted in passing that "we find on the right [of the west corridor] the quarters of the state geologist." His contemporaries, however, never mentioned the geologist or his museum, though several did note that a variety of historical objects and geological specimens could be seen upstairs in the new State Library.

One strong piece of evidence opposing this theory is the "Michigan State Capitol Directory" compiled by A.L. Bours, the Superintendent of State Property, around 1879. In it, Bours wrote that the west wing of the Capitol's first floor was home to the offices of the Board of Health, the Commissioner of Railroads, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. He placed the first two entities on the left of the hall, which most likely means that they were on the south side. The Superintendent of Public Instruction had his offices on the right side, which equates to the north side of the hallway.





The Capitol's original hand inked floor plans still survive in the Archives of Michigan. The first floor plan included suggested locations for each departmental office—some of which were ultimately changed.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan



Michigan State Capitol Directory.

LEFT. CENTRE. First Floor. EAST CORRIDOR. Auditor General. State Treasurer WEST CORRIDOR. Board of Health. sioner of Railroads. Auditor General (Tax Department) Commissioner of Insurance, Sup't of State Property. Board of Auditors. Deputy Treasurer, Land Office, Swamp Land Office, Second Floor. EAST CORRIDOR. Post Office. Private Secretary Governor WEST CORRIDOR. State Library. SOUTH CORRIDOR Senate Chamber NORTH CORRIDOR. Representative Hall. Third Floor. Justices' Rooms, Attorney Gen'l. WEST CORRIDOR. Law Liorary, Attorney Consultation Room Consultation Room. SOUTH CORRIDOR. Clerk of Supreme Court. Senate Gallery NORTH CORRIDOR. Representative Hall Gallery. Fourth Floor. Pioneers' Audience Room. Pioneers' Office Reporter Supreme Court. WEST CORRIDOR. Easement. Board of State Charities. Auditor's Working Rooms. Auditor's Working Rooms. State Armory

Pomological Society. and State Board of Agriculture. Military Store Rooms.

With Compliments of A. L. Borns, Superintendent of State Propert

The first Superintendent of Public Instruction to work in the Capitol was Mr. Cornelius A. Grower, who came to Michigan in the 1860s to attend the University in Ann Arbor, from whence he graduated in 1867. After teaching for several years, he became superintendent of the schools in Fenton, Genesee County, and Saginaw City, respectively. In 1878 Governor Croswell appointed him the new Superintendent of Public Instruction upon the resignation of H.S. Tarbell. Later that year Michigan voters retained him in the position.2

Like the rest of the Capitol, this suite was designed to be both functional and beautiful, as befitted a growing and prosperous state. "The offices throughout are elegantly fitted up," a reporter wrote

This early Capitol Directory survives in the Jenison Collection, a series of six scrapbooks compiled to record the Capitol's 1872-1878 construction by historian and collector O.A. Jenison.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

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." Passing through the main doorway, visitors stepped onto a colorful Brussels wool wall-to-wall carpet, 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.

Early Changes

As might be expected, changes to these offices, and the rest of the Capitol, were constant. Two major improvements 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, including the Superintendent's Offices, 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

The offices throughout are elegantly fitted up . . .

their annual bound report, which survives to this day. The completed inventory (which moves through the building in geographic fashion) tracks nicely with Bours's directory, confirming that the Superintendent of Public Instruction used this suite of three rooms, which were then identified as a front office, a back office, and a private office. Among the furnishings found in them were a number of desks, bookcases, stepladders, office chairs, waste baskets, umbrella stands, cuspidors (or spittoons), a mimeograph,

a barometer, a water tank and marble topped stand, and a typewriter stand.4

Some of these contents are visible in a rare photograph of one of the rooms, taken about 1893, featuring Superintendent Henry Pattengill and his staff.

The image provides a tantalizing peek into a workspace adorned with gas lights (which may or may not have been retrofitted for electricity at this time), an elaborate carpet, and interesting decorative art motifs, visible on the wall above the wainscot and beneath the edge of the ceiling. This art would have been, by this time, a relatively new addition, as decorative painters had only finished their five-year effort to transform the Capitol three years earlier in 1890.

of their rooms to the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the North's largest and most powerful Civil War veterans organization. Under a new statute passed by the Legislature, the GAR was given a permanent office in the Capitol, where they could store records and histories chronicling the service of Michigan's Civil War veterans.⁵ Such a move likely elicited mixed reactions, as the GAR, for all its political clout, was ultimately a private organization funded by member dues. Never before—and never again—would such a body receive their own official space in a taxpayer supported public building.6

Four years later, in 1897, the Superintendent's staff suffered a blow when they were forced to give up one



State Superintendent of Public Instruction Henry Pattengill (seated on the far right) and his staff posed for this photo in 1893. At the time, both his niece, Mary Johnson (far left), and his wife's niece, Nora Belle Sharpsteen (middle), served as clerks.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

During this period, the following Superintendents of Public Instruction worked in this office.⁷

1879-1881	Cornelius A. Gower	1887-1890	Joseph Estabrook
1881-1883	Varnum B. Cochran	1891-1892	Ferris S. Fitch
1883-1885	Herschel R. Gass	1893-1896	Henry R. Patteng
1885-1886	Theodore Nelson	1897-1900	Jason E. Hammon

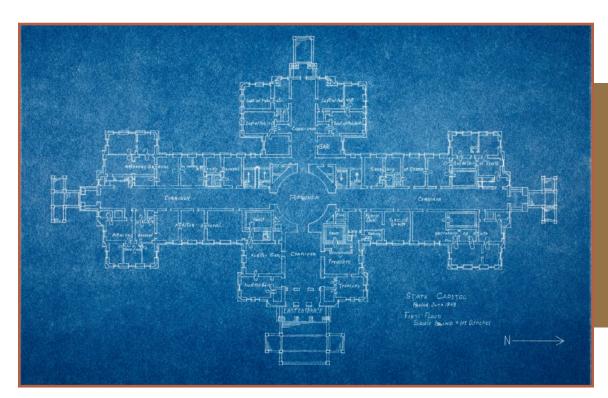
The Twentieth Century

The turn of the twentieth century saw the Superintendent intent on reacquiring the GAR room. In 1909, Superintendent Luther L. Wright petitioned the State Board of Auditors (the entity that oversaw the Capitol) to "restore to the department of Public Instruction that part of its suite of rooms now occupied by the Assistant Adjutant General of the GAR." While the board initially promised to consider their request, they ultimately declined to make any changes, noting that they were bound by statute to provide a home for the GAR and there was simply no other place to put them in the increasingly crowded building.⁸

To make matters even more complex, in 1915 the legislature revised the statute to require the State Board of Auditors to also provide Spanish American War veterans with a place of their own. While the language in the law seemed to indicate that this was to be a separate space, it's believed that the Spanish American War veterans simply moved in with the GAR, adding their records to those already being stored.⁹

Perhaps partly in compensation for this loss, the Superintendent managed to acquire the suites on the south side in the west wing, formerly occupied by the Board of Health and the Railroad Commission. These two entities were relocated from the Capitol to other office buildings in the early twentieth century (no later than 1922), thereby providing the Superintendent of Instruction with the opportunity to expand his staff across the hall.

In 1941, the State Treasurer's office surveyed the Capitol and inventoried the number of people, pieces of furniture, and machines in the building. The accompanying floor plan shows that the GAR room was staffed by one person, whereas the Superintendent's first floor staff (now working in five rooms on both sides of the hall numbered 122, 123, 123A, 124, 124A, 125, and 126A) included thirty people. Their first floor offices contained thirty-two desks, four tables, thirty-five files, and, unlike their colleagues in other offices, zero machines. Four of these rooms were used by clerical workers, whereas the fifth room, number 122, remained a private office. Additional staff worked in five more rooms on the ground floor.¹⁰



By the 1940s, space in the increasingly crowded Capitol was at a premium. Only the largest, most powerful departments retained their Capitol suites, while smaller divisions used rooms in the State Office Building, or in rented quarters

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

Two years later, Treasury repeated the exercise. This time they included not only the number of people, pieces of furniture, and machines housed in each office in 1943, but also in 1940. When compared with the numbers from 1941, they show an office in flux, due in part, perhaps, to the heavy demands of the war. The 1943 survey counted thirty-four people working in the first floor suite, whereas the size of the staff in 1940 totaled thirty-six—a higher count than either of the subsequent numbers. As might be expected, the numbers of desks and tables fluctuated slightly, while the total of files continued to grow. It's also interesting to note that by 1943 the Superintendent's first floor staff now had the use of one machine.¹¹

This recently rediscovered c. 1940 photograph of three female employees working in the Superintendent's first floor suite (probably room H155) contains a surprise—an ornate wood and etched glass partition wall. This wall may have been installed as early as the 1890s, when the Superintendent lost a room to the GAR.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

In 1947, the legislature revised the statute concerning the GAR room yet again, this time adding in provisions that the records and history of Michigan's

World War I and World War II soldiers should be added to the collection. They would be maintained by a carefully selected custodian, who was himself a veteran of one of the world wars. In addition, a plaque commemorating the GAR was to be placed in or near the room.¹²



A typist examines her work in a ground floor office (H55) used by the Superintendent's staff in the early 1940s.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan



This space continued to be known as the GAR room into the mid 1950s. In 1957, architect George R. Page prepared another set of mid twentieth century drawings for the Buildings and Construction Division of the Michigan State Administrative Board. Page's drawings indicate that the Superintendent of Public Instruction's staff continued to occupy the same rooms as in the previous decade. These areas now bore new identifiers, with the rooms on the north side of the hallway marked 115 and 116, and the south side rooms marked 117, 117A, 117B, 117C, 118, 119, and 119A. Interestingly, Page also noted that several of the rooms in the south suite included mezzanines, or half-floors, another symptom of the Capitol's increasingly overcrowded conditions.¹³

During this period, the following Superintendents of Public Instruction worked in this office. 14

1901-1904	Delos Fall	1933-1935	Paul F. Voelker
1905-1906	Patrick H. Kelley	1935-1948	Eugene B. Elliott
1907-1913	Luther L. Wright	1949-1953	Lee M. Thurston
1913-1919	Fred L. Keeler	1953-1957	Clair L. Taylor
1919-1926	Thomas E. Johnson	1957-1965	Lynn M. Bartlett
1926-1927	Wilford L. Coffey	1966-1969	Ira Polley
1927-1933	Webster H. Pearce		



The Legislature Moves In

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

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 legislature. This had dramatic repercussions for the Capitol building, where the pace of business in both the House and Senate spaces increased significantly. As the number of legis-

lators spending every week in Lansing rose, the call for additional office space reached a fever pitch. In order to accommodate all of these 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, another solution was proposed. Why not reconfigure the Capitol's offices and committee rooms? The timing seemed ideal, as several of the building's longtime departmental occupants, including the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, were moving out of the Capitol and into other buildings in downtown Lansing.¹⁵

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.

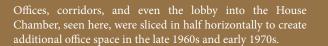


Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection



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 historical 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 the old Superintendent of Public Instruction's suite.

When the restoration began in 1987, no one knew the extent of the art in the Capitol's offices. Decorative artists spent months investigating and revealing the original motifs and color schemes, all of which were carefully recorded and recreated.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection



Office Occupants

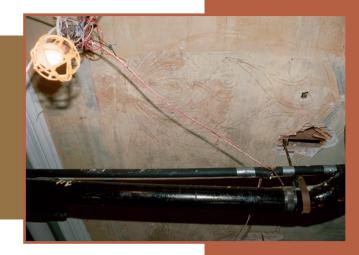
By the publication of the *1973-1974 Michigan Legislative Handbook*, this suite of rooms was being used as House member offices. A survey of the handbooks indicates that the following members and one committee worked in this space over the years.

Please note that the district numbers in the table reflect those in use at the time each respective handbook was printed. 16

1973-1974	Rep. Dominic J. Jacobetti Rep. George Montgomery Taxation Committee	108th District 5th District	Negaunee Detroit	Rm. 115 Rm. 116 Rm. 116 ½
1975-1976	Rep. Dominic J. Jacobetti Rep. George Montgomery Taxation Committee	108th District 5th District	Negaunee Detroit	Rm. 115 Rm. 116 Rm. 116 ½
1977-1978	Rep. Dominic J. Jacobetti Rep. George Montgomery Taxation Committee	108th District 5th District	Negaunee Detroit	Rm. 115 Rm. 116 Rm. 116 ½
1979-1980	Rep. Dominic J. Jacobetti	108th District	Negaunee	Rm. 115
	Rep. George Cushingberry Jr.	4th District	Detroit	Rm. 115 ½
	Rep. George Montgomery	5th District	Detroit	Rm. 116
1981-1982	Rep. Dominic J. Jacobetti	108th District	Negaunee	Rm. 115
	Rep. George Cushingberry Jr.	4th District	Detroit	Rm. 115 ½
	Rep. Thomas H. Brown	37th District	Westland	Rm. 116
1983-1984	Rep. D.J. Jacobetti	108th District	Negaunee	Rm. 115
	Rep. Raymond M. Murphy	17th District	Detroit	Rm. 115 ½
	Rep. David H. Evans	72nd District	Mt. Clemens	Rm. 116
1985-1986	Rep. Margaret O'Connor	52nd District	Ann Arbor	Rm. 115
	Rep. William Van Regenmorter	55th District	Jenison	Rm. 115
	Rep. John Bennett	34th District	Redford	Rm. 116
1987-1988	Rep. Jim B. Connors	109th District	Iron Mountain	Rm. 115
	Rep. William Van Regenmorter	55th District	Jenison	Rm. 115
	Rep. John Bennett	34th District	Redford	Rm. 116
1989-1990	Rep. Jan C. Dolan	69th District	Farmington Hills	Rm. 115
	Rep. Raymond M. Murphy	17th District	Detroit	Rm. 115 ½
	Rep. John Bennett	34th District	Redford	Rm. 116
1991-1992	The office is not listed in the 1991 Leg undergoing restoration.	rislative Handbook and Di	rectory, as the offices were	then

Once the Capitol's original decorative art was hidden under additional layers of paint, workmen thought little of punching holes into the ceiling for new pipes and electrical lines. It wasn't until the original art was revealed again that everyone began to understand the need to hide and disguise modern systems.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection



Changes came swiftly. Overfloors and 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.

Of particular importance to the restoration was the recreation of the Capitol's historic decorative artwork. Michigan's Capitol contains approximately nine acres of handpainted art. A variety of techniques were used in the building when it was decorated



Decorative painters from across the country and around the world worked for years to carefully recreate the Capitol's original motifs and designs. In this image a man stands on a scaffold painting scrollwork in the old Superintendent's office.

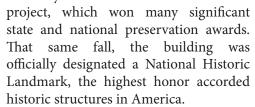
Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

in the 1880s, including stenciling, striping, marbling, and gilding. Over the years, nineteenth century appearance.

One of the techniques used in this space is 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.

In the spring of 1992, the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (the descendant organization of the Grand Army of the Republic) petitioned the Michigan Capitol Committee for permission to place a plaque outside of the old GAR room. Aware of the GAR's rich history, the Committee agreed. The Sons unveiled and dedicated a new bronze plaque on June 13, 1992, during their 103rd Department Encampment, held in Lansing.17

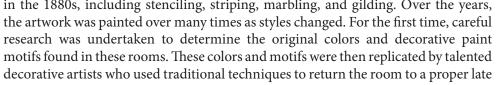
The restoration of the Capitol was completed in the fall of 1992. Rededication ceremonies held on November 19 and 20 of that year celebrated the success of the



The restoration of the Capitol was completed in the fall of 1992.

The Capitol's traditional woodgraining recipe calls for oil paints, umber pigment, and stale beer, which serves as the binder.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection



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, including this suite, which now serves as the office of the House Majority Floor Leader. (No committees have met in this area since the restoration.) A new numbering system, devised by Capitol Preservation Architect Richard C. Frank, was introduced indicating the ownership of the space (House, Senate, Executive, etc.) and the room's number. Today this suite is numbered H151, H153, H153A, H155, and H155A.

The following members have served in this suite since the Capitol's restoration.¹⁸

1993-1994	Rep. Pat Gagliardi	107th District	Drummond Island	Rm. H153
1995-1996	Rep. Pat Gagliardi	107th District	Drummond Island	Rm. H153
1997-1998	Rep. Pat Gagliardi	107th District	Drummond Island	Rm. H153
1999-2000	Rep. Andrew Raczkowski	37th District	Farmington Hills	Rm. H155
2001-2002	Rep. Bruce Patterson	21st District	Canton	Rm. H153
2003-2004	Rep. Randy Richardville	56th District	Monroe	Rm. H153
2005-2006	Rep. Chris Ward	66th District	Brighton	Rm. H153
2007-2008	Rep. Steve Tobocman	12th District	Detroit	Rm. H153
2009-2010	Rep. Kathy Angerer	55th District	Dundee	Rm. H155
2011-2012	Rep. Jim Stamas	98th District	Midland	Rm. H153
2013-2014	Rep. Jim Stamas	98th District	Midland	Rm. H153
2015-2016	Rep. Aric Nesbitt	66th District	Lawton	Rm. H153
2017-2018	Rep. Dan Lauwers	81st District	Brockway Township	Rm. H151
2019-2020	Rep. Triston Cole	105th District	Mancelona	Rm. H151



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. 516-517.
- 3 The Evening News, January 2, 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. 516-517.
- 5 Public Acts of the Legislature of the State of Michigan Passed at the Regular Session of 1897 with an Appendix. Robert Smith Printing & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1897, p. 11.
- 6 Interestingly, only three months later the Legislature passed a resolution to move the old Armory, which housed surviving Civil War armaments, out of the Capitol and into the nearby State Office Block.
- 7 Michigan Official Directory and Legislative Manual Published by the State of Michigan 1943-1944, p. 88.
- 8 Annual Report of the Board of State Auditors for the Year Ending June 30, 1910. Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., State Printers, 1910, p. 10, 21.
- 9 *The Compiled Laws of the State of Michigan 1915.* Vol. I, Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., State Printers, 1916, p. 603.
- 10 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1941.
- 11 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1943.
- 12 Public and Local Acts of the Legislature of the State of Michigan Passed at the Regular Session of 1947. Franklin De Kleine Company, State Printers, Lansing, Michigan, 1947, p. 313.
- 13 State of Michigan, Michigan State Administrative Board Buildings and Construction Division. "Capitol Survey," George R. Page, 1957.
- 14 Michigan Manual Compiled and Published by the Department of Administration, 1971-1972, p. 90.
- 15 The Superintendent of Public Instruction had moved to the Prudden Building by the printing of the 1965-66 *Michigan Manual*.
- 16 Michigan Legislative Handbooks, 1973-1990.
- 17 Gibson, Gary L., Department Commander, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Received by The Honorable John Engler, Governor of Michigan, 10 May 1992.
- 18 Michigan Legislative Handbooks, 1993-2020.





Capitol.Michigan.gov