

A History of
The Auditor General's Ground Floor Rooms
S-2



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

The Early Years

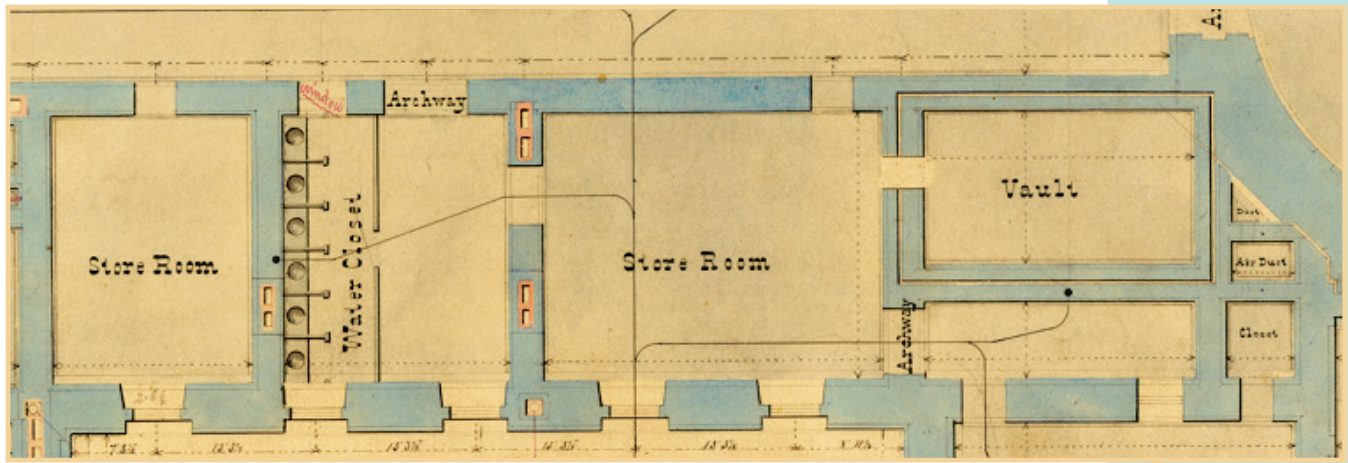
The Michigan State Capitol was built during the golden age of Capitol construction in the years following the American Civil War. From its inception, the building was designed to serve several functions and roles for the state. First, and most importantly, it is the official seat of government for the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

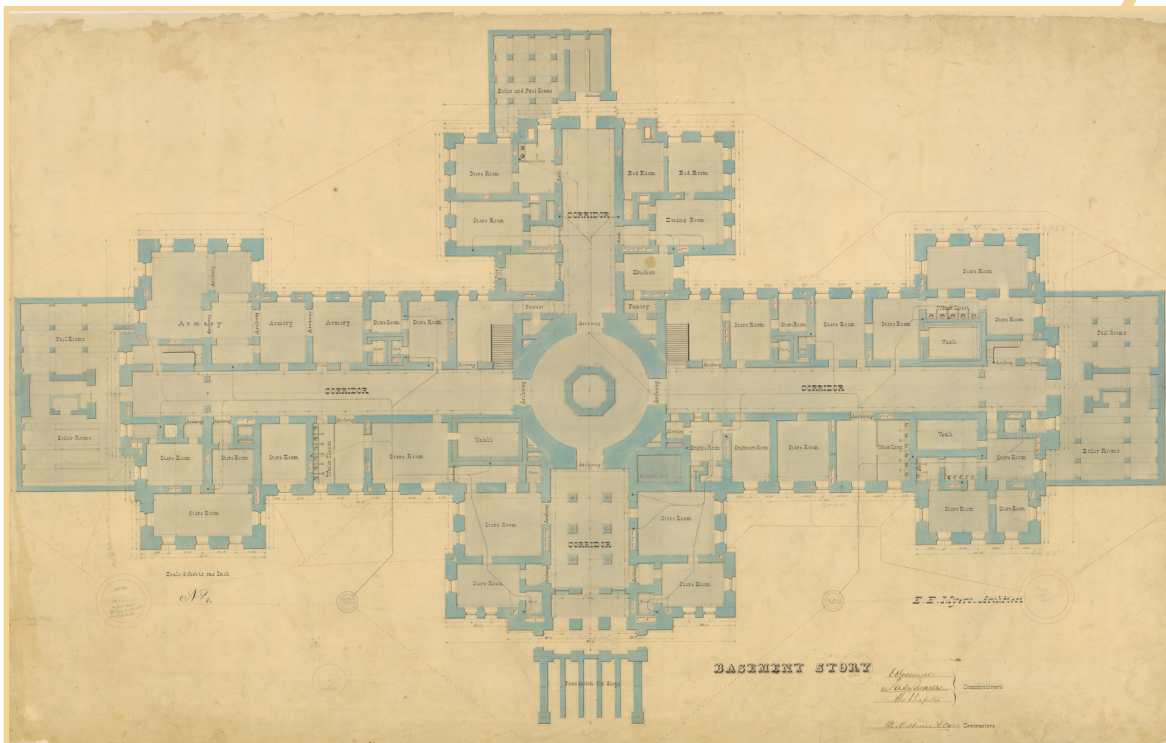


The First Occupants

The early history of the spaces on the ground floor is tightly tied to the former departmental offices on the first floor. Capitol architect Elijah E. Myers identified the ground floor rooms as “Store Rooms” on his 1872 ink-on-linen plans, suggesting that these areas had no specifically designated use. The reality of the situation, though, was that the new Michigan State Capitol—while much larger and far superior to the former wooden building—still wasn’t big enough for the state’s growing government. (During the six years of the Capitol’s construction, the state created multiple new boards and commissions, each of which wanted its own Capitol meeting space!) With every inch of departmental space occupied on the first floor, there was only one place that the departments could look to expand—into the storage rooms on the basement, or ground floor, level.



An 1879 building directory, authored by inaugural Capitol Superintendent Allen Bours, notes that the ground floor offices on the east side of the south wing were used by the Auditor General’s staff, the Pomological Society (later renamed the Horticultural Society), and the



The Capitol’s original hand inked floor plans still survive in the Archives of Michigan. It is doubtful that the bathroom shown here ever existed. Other documents show a woman’s restroom on the other side of the hall.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

Michigan State Capitol Directory.

LEFT.	CENTRE.	RIGHT.
First Floor.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Auditor General.		State Treasurer.
Board of Health.	WEST CORRIDOR.	Superintendent of
Commissioner of Railroads.		Public Instruction.
SOUTH CORRIDOR.		
Auditor General		Inspector General.
(Tax Department).		Adjutant General.
Commissioner of Insurance.		Quartermaster General.
Sup't of State Property.	NORTH CORRIDOR.	
Board of Auditors.		Deputy Treasurer.
Secretary of State.		Land Office.
		Swamp Land Office.
Second Floor.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Post Office.	Private Secretary.	Governor.
WEST CORRIDOR.		
SOUTH CORRIDOR.		
Senate Chamber.		
NORTH CORRIDOR.		
Representative Hall.		
Third Floor.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Attorney Gen'l.	Justices' Rooms.	Supreme Court.
WEST CORRIDOR.		
Attorneys' Consultation Room.	Law Library.	Attorneys' Consultation Room.
SOUTH CORRIDOR.		
Clerk of Supreme Court.		
Senate Gallery.		
NORTH CORRIDOR.		
Representative Hall Gallery.		
Fourth Floor.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Pioneers' Audience Room.		Pioneers' Office.
Reporter Supreme Court.		
WEST CORRIDOR.		
Library.		
Basement.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Board of State Charities.		Auditor's Working Rooms.
SOUTH CORRIDOR.		
Auditor's Working Rooms.		State Armory
Pomological Society.		and
State Board of Agriculture.		Military Store Rooms.
With Compliments of A. L. BROWN, Superintendent of State Property.		

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

State Board of Agriculture. The latter two probably used the rooms now known as S-10, S-10A, and S-8A. The Auditor General's staff used the rest of this bank of offices, stretching from what is today S-8 to the rotunda and around the corner into the east wing.

The first Auditor General to work in our current Capitol was W. Irving Latimer. Born in New York, Latimer labored on the Erie Canal as a young man before moving to Chicago and then Newaygo. After the Civil War, he moved to Big Rapids and, in 1872, was elected Treasurer of Mecosta County.¹ In 1878, the people of Michigan sent him to the Capitol as the state's Auditor General, returning him to that position again in 1880.² Latimer was joined in his new Capitol office by Hubert R. Pratt, a longtime Deputy Auditor General, and Henry Humphrey, Bookkeeper.³

Surviving images also reveal a surprisingly diverse staff. Beginning in the 1870s, the Auditor General's workforce was among the first in Michigan state government to include women. At least 43 of the 99 people who worked for the department during the 1878-1879 fiscal year (the first in the current Capitol) were identified as Miss. or Mrs. in records.⁴ The department was also a leader in hiring Black employees. Daniel Cole, a Black man born in Kentucky before the Civil War, begins appearing on a list of departmental clerks in the spring of 1887. According to one source, he remained in the office for eight years.

When considered all together, the Auditor General's first and ground floor staff occupied the largest single block of rooms in the Capitol at the turn of the twentieth century. Those on the first floor enjoyed beautifully decorated rooms with tall ceilings, elegant chandeliers, and highly patterned Brussels carpets. In contrast, the department's ground floor offices were extremely plain and utilitarian. Humble pine boards comprised the floor, and the walls were coated with smooth plaster and finished in a single light color. Modest, two-arm gas chandeliers and windows flanked by wooden shutters provided light.

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 first, second, third, and fourth floor room was transformed by artists who stenciled, grained, marbled, and striped beautiful motifs on the walls and ceilings. In contrast, the ground floor remained extremely plain.

In 1892, the State Board of Auditors directed the Superintendent of the Capitol to survey the building and its contents. Together, the Auditor General's ground and first floor suites contained many desks, chairs, bookcases, and filing cases, as well as stools, two iron safes, letter presses, electric clocks, and, for the personal use of the Auditor when visiting Lansing, a folding bed.⁵ This last object serves as a reminder that most Auditors General did not live in Lansing and that, in some cases, they were somewhat absent figureheads. Instead, the Deputy Auditors General, who were generally local residents, administered the office and oversaw its staff on a daily basis.

Turn of the century photographs of the Auditor General's offices reveal busy spaces full of tables at which many men and women worked closely together. These rooms were furnished with oilcloth floorcoverings (an early sort of linoleum), tables, rolling chairs, and a number of gas and electric lights. Posters, pictures, and flags decorated the walls, which were painted a plain, solid, light color.

Sometime before 1910, the State Board of Agriculture moved out of the Capitol. Not surprisingly, the Auditor General quickly acquired its former space, as well as the ground floor spaces on the other side of the south hallway, previously home to the state armory. This roughly doubled the department's ground floor space. Eventually, the Auditor General would also acquire additional rooms in the east and west wings, thereby making the department the largest ground floor occupant.

By the 1920s, the Auditor General's Office, like most departments, employed mostly women, who worked as clerks, secretaries, and stenographers.⁶ Multiple Lansing-based schools offered typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, and accounting classes to prepare young people for these jobs. Women were considered particularly adept at typing, having developed excellent hand-eye coordination during childhood piano lessons.



From the time the Capitol opened in 1879, a small but growing number of women and people of color worked in departmental offices. Wilmot Johnson, the African American man at the center desk, clerked in the Auditor General's office for thirty-three years.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan



By this time, the Capitol's basement was a hub of everyday activity. Many people walked through the building while visiting downtown, and local students stopped in frequently to see the dome, check in with working parents, or smoke an illicit lunchtime cigarette away from the watchful nuns at nearby St. Mary's. Many made use of the public bathrooms and water fountain and bought a snack or newspaper at the ground floor cigar stand.

By the 1920s the walls of the Capitol rang with the clicking and dinging of typewriting machines. Popular culture quickly came to associate the machines and the women who operated them, who were themselves called "typewriters."

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan



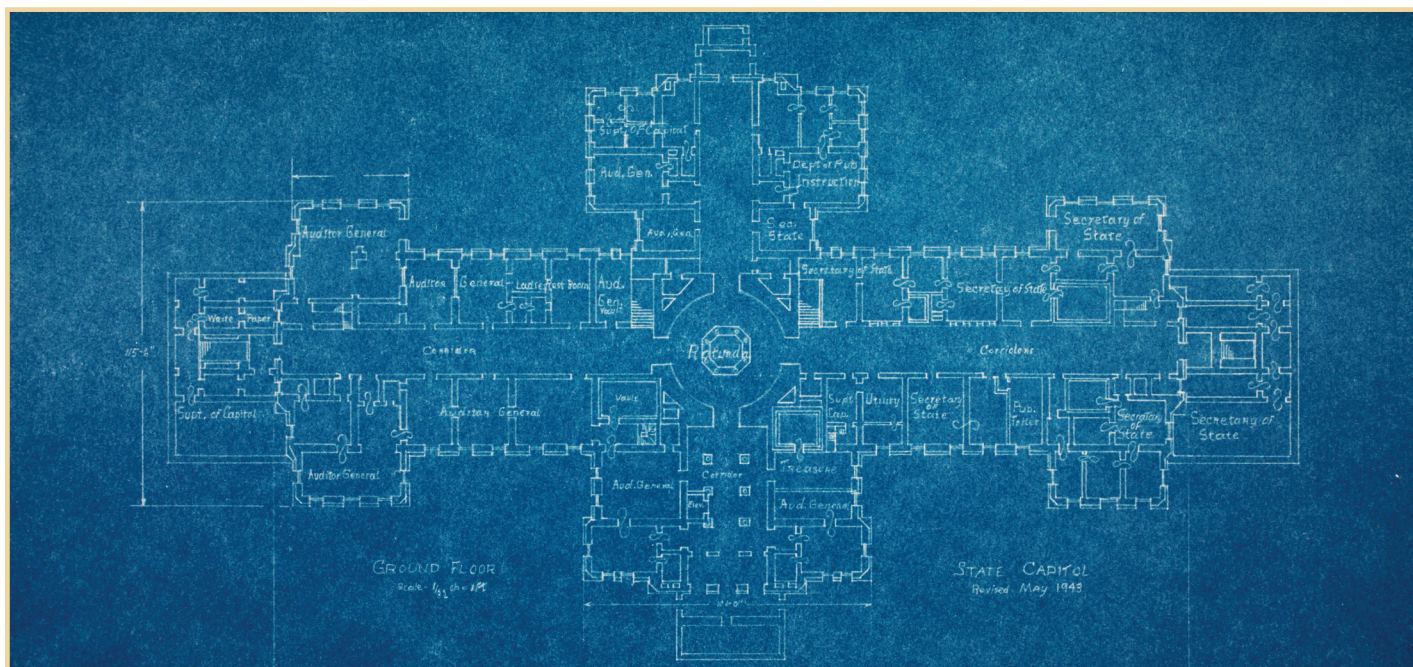
Comptometer Rose Calkins (back left end standing, with arms crossed) and over thirty of her colleagues paused their work to pose for this photograph, taken in November 1933. Solid state jobs were a bulwark for many Lansing families during the Great Depression.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

Located in the east wing of the basement, the cigar stand was probably the origin point for the largest fire in Capitol history. On Monday evening, January 19, 1931, a fire started in the east wing of the ground floor, where fresh linseed oil had been recently applied to the wood corridor floor. The blaze spread quickly into the rotunda, where the heat cracked hundreds of glass floor tiles and damaged the wooden cases that housed a downsized military museum and the state's first flag. Newspaper coverage from the time also noted considerable smoke damage which, along with water, affected the surrounding offices.⁷

No one had much money to fix things after the fire, as the Great Depression was in full swing. Finally, in 1937, the State Treasurer pulled together funds to refresh and remodel the ground floor. Wainscotting was ripped out, the walls were repainted cream, and the ceilings white. The cigar

stand was moved into the south corridor, and new directional signage was installed. Further, the old, worn wooden floor was replaced with a cement-based terrazzo containing white, green, gray, and black marble chips, poured in dramatic geometric patterns.⁸ This was a very different, and very modern, basement!



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 (now the Elliott-Larsen Building), or in rented quarters downtown.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan.

The next time the Auditor General's ground floor offices appear in the known historical record is in 1941, when the State Treasurer conducted a survey to document the amount of space each department was using and the number of people and items within each respective area. The accompanying inventory lists some surprising statistics about the space, including the fact that it housed 19 workers doing clerical work, 21 desks, 2 tables, 9 files, and 40 bookcases. It must have been a very tight fit!⁹

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. Interestingly, the number of people working in these offices actually decreased between 1940 and 1943.¹⁰ This change most likely occurred as the result of World War II.

In 1957, architect George R. Page prepared another set of mid-twentieth century drawings for the Building and Construction Division of the Michigan State Administrative Board. While Page had nothing to say about the tenants of this space, he did include a (presumably) new numbering system, under which the suite is labeled G-32 and G-33.

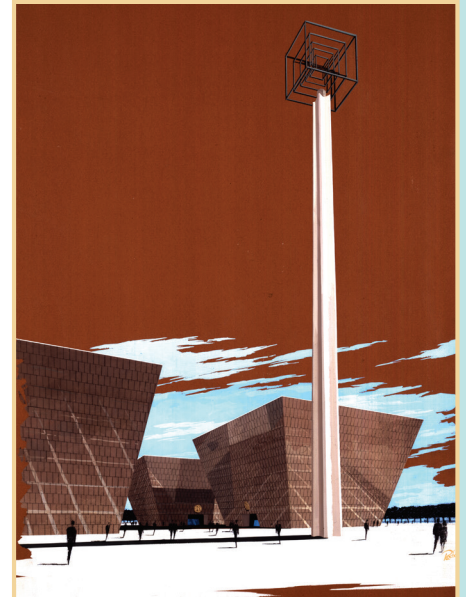
The Legislative Years

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 the 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 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.



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. Ground floor rooms were never overflowed due to their shorter ceilings.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection



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

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 longtime departmental occupants, including the Office of the Auditor General, were moving out of the Capitol and into other buildings in downtown Lansing.

By the publication of the *1973-74 Michigan Legislative Handbook*, this suite of rooms was being used as a Senate member office. A survey of the handbooks indicates that the following members worked in this space over the years:¹¹

1975-76	Sen. George S. Fitzgerald	30th District	Alma	Rm. 30
	Sen. Carl D. Pursell	14th District	Plymouth	Rm. 30
	Sen. Robert D. Young	35th District	Saginaw	Rm. 30
1977-78	Sen. R.J. Allen	30th District	Lansing	Rm. 30
	Sen. Robert D. Young	35th District	Saginaw	Rm. 30
	Sen. Charles O. Zollar	22nd District	Benton Harbor	Rm. 30
1979-80	Sen. R.J. Allen	30th District	Lansing	Rm. 30
	Sen. Ed Fredericks	23rd District	Holland	Rm. G-30
	Sen. Harry Gast	22nd District	St. Joseph	Rm. 30
1981-82	Sen. Richard J. Allen	30th District	Lansing	Rm. 30
	Sen. Ed Fredericks	23rd District	Holland	Rm. G-30
	Sen. Harry Gast	22nd District	St. Joseph	Rm. 30
1983-84	Sen. Connie B. Binsfield	36th District	Maple City	Rm. 30
	Sen. Harmon Cropsey	21st District	Decatur	Rm. 30
	Sen. Norman Shinkle	11th District	Lambertville	Rm. 30
1985-86	Sen. John F. Kelly	1st District	Detroit	Rm. 30
	Sen. Arthur Miller, Jr.	27th District	Warren	Rm. G-30
1987-88	Sen. John F. Kelly	1st District	Grosse Pte. Woods	Rm. 30G
	Sen. Art Miller, Jr.	27th District	Warren	Rm. 30

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. 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 Pomological Society, State Board of Agriculture, and Auditor General's rooms.



By the late 1980s the Ground Floor corridors were packed with wooden storage cabinets, modern soffits, florescent lights, and, in the south wing, a snack stand.

*Image Courtesy of the
Michigan State Capitol Collection*

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 a proper late 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.



For many years Capitol offices contained a messy assortment of finishes and furniture that didn't date to any one historical period. Note the original woodwork around the modern window, which has been obscured at the top by a modern soffit.

*Image Courtesy of the
Michigan State Capitol Collection*

Changes came swiftly. 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 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 done to determine the original colors and



Prior to the restoration, the ground floor offices contained drywall built out from the walls, drop ceilings, fluorescent lights, and modern, inefficient windows.

*Image Courtesy of the
Michigan State Capitol Collection*

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.

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 continues to serve as a Senate leadership office. 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.

The following members have served in the old Auditor General's rooms since the Capitol's restoration:

1991-92	Sen. Phil Arthurhultz	33rd District	Whitehall	Rm. S4
1993-94	Sen. Dan L. DeGrow	28th District	Port Huron	Rm. S2
1995-96	Sen. Mat J. Dunaskiss	16th District	Lake Orion	Rm. S-2
1997-98	Sen. Mat J. Dunaskiss	16th District	Lake Orion	Rm. S-2
1999-2000	Sen. Mat J. Dunaskiss	16th District	Lake Orion	Rm. S-2
2001-02	Sen. George A. McManus, Jr.	36th District	[Traverse City]	Rm. S-2
2003-04	Sen. Mike Goschka	32nd District	Saginaw	Rm. S-2
2005-06	Sen. Mike Goschka	32nd District	Saginaw	Rm. S-2
2007-08	Sen. Michelle McManus	35th District	Lake Leelanau	Rm. S-2
2009-10	Sen. Michelle McManus	35th District	Lake Leelanau	Rm. S-2
2011-12	Sen. John Pappageorge	13th District	Troy	Rm. S-2
2013-14	Sen. John Pappageorge	13th District	Troy	Rm. S-2
2015-16	Sen. Jim Marleau	12th District	Lake Orion	Rm. S-2
2017-18	Sen. Jim Marleau	12th District	Lake Orion	Rm. S-2
2019-20	Sen. Dan Lauwers	25th District	Brockway	Rm. S-2
2021-22	Sen. Dan Lauwers	25th District	Brockway	Rm. S-2
2023-24	Sen. Darrin Camilleri	4th District	Trenton	Rm. S-2
2025-26	Sen. Darrin Camilleri	4th District	Trenton	Rm. S-2 ¹²

End Notes

- 1 *American Biographical History of Eminent and Self-Made Men. Michigan Volume*, Western Biographical Publishing Company; Cincinnati, 1878, p. 18.
- 2 *Michigan Official Directory and Legislative Manual for the Years 1913-1914*, pp. 82-83.
- 3 *Annual Report of the Auditor General of the State of Michigan for the Fiscal Year Ending Sept. 30, 1879*. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, p. 24.
- 4 *Annual Report of the Auditor General of the State of Michigan for the Fiscal Year Ending Sept. 30, 1879*. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, pp. 24, 38-40.
- 5 *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. 515.
- 6 *Annual Report of the Auditor General of the State of Michigan for the Year Ending June 30, 1922*. Fort Wayne Printing Company Contractors for Michigan State Printing and Binding, 1922, p. 154-156.
- 7 “Fire Scorches Capitol; Loss is Seen \$5,000.” *The [Lansing] State Journal*. January 19, 1931.
- 8 “Looks Like a New Capitol Building If You Stay on the Ground Floor.” *The Capitol Bulletin*. December 28, 1937.
- 9 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. “Capitol Space and Contents Survey,” 1941.
- 10 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. “Capitol Space and Contents Survey,” 1943.
- 11 *Michigan Legislative Handbooks*, 1973-1990.
- 12 *Michigan Legislative Handbooks*, 1991-2026.



Capitol.Michigan.gov