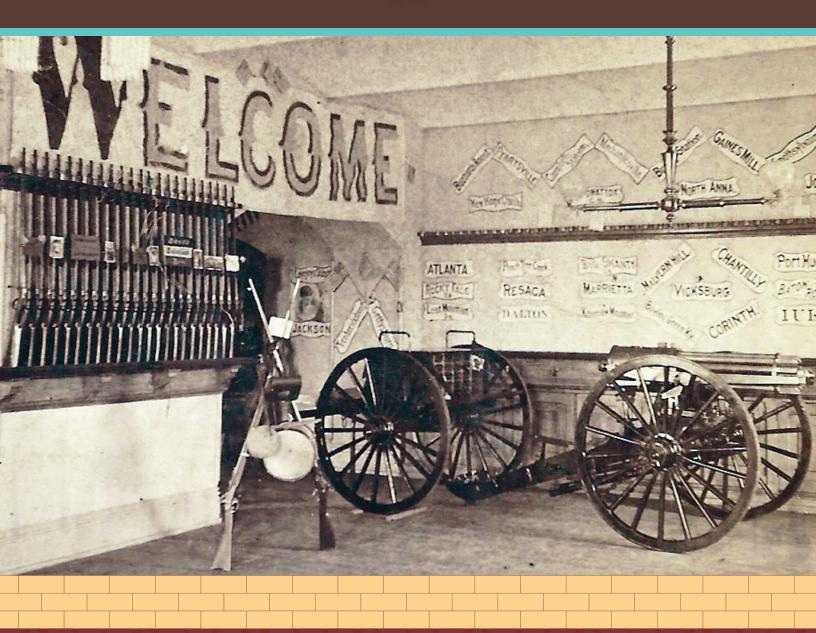
A History of The Ground Floor Armory S-9



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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 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.



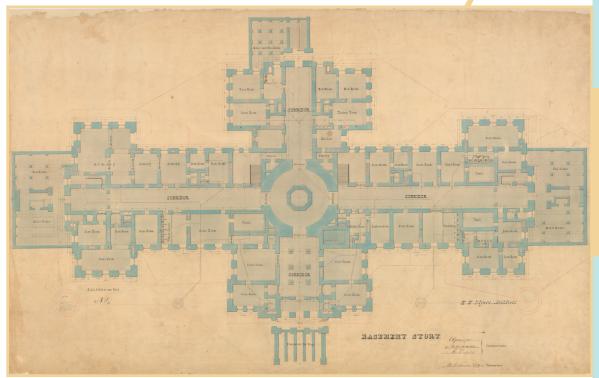
The First Occupants

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.

The first-floor suite directly above what is today the S-9 suite was occupied by Quartermaster General L. Saviers, Inspector General Lewis W. Heath, and Adjutant General John Robertson. Scottish born, Robertson, a very important figure in Michigan military history, immigrated to the United States in 1833 and immediately joined the United States Army. After enjoying a successful career in military-related positions, he was appointed to the office of Adjutant General by Governor Austin Blair in 1861, just before the fall of Fort Sumter. This positioned him to lead the state's military department throughout the entire

Civil War. Widely admired, Robertson was reappointed by subsequent Governors Crapo, Baldwin, Bagley, Croswell, Jerome, Begole, Alger, and Luce, serving until his death in 1887.1



The Capitol's original hand inked floor plans still survive in the Archives of Michigan. The Armory was the only portion of the basement designed for a unique use.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan



Michigan State Capitol Directory.

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

Saviers's and Robertson's first floor office was home to a number of clerks and staff, in addition to a dignified military museum where relics of the war, including the state's bloodstained battle flags, were stored and displayed in elegant walnut cases. Robertson noted that the museum inspired "recollections of past victories and defeats, of friends lost and a country saved," among those who visited.² The office also contained the records of all 90,000 soldiers who served during the War of the Rebellion, as the conflict was then known.

It was natural, then, that the space directly below Robertson's suite would be set aside for the storage of additional military provisions. According to the 1879 *Michigan Manual*, this area, known as the Armory, housed an interesting assortment of arms and weapons, including a light brass, three-pound mountain howitzer and carriage captured at Raleigh, North Carolina, by Battery B of the First Michigan Light Artillery. The collection also included a Gatling gun, capable of firing 160 shots a minute, and a brass breech-loader that the Fourth Michigan Cavalry "resurrected" from a site marked "small-pox grave" in a Macon, Georgia, cemetery at the encouragement of a local African American man.³

Given the nature of the space, this area was not finished as elaborately as the rest of the Capitol. 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. The rooms' decorations included military banners, flags, gun racks, and the names of battles painted onto the walls.

Always a popular destination for visitors, the armory was watched over by the State Armorer, an appointee of the three member State Military Board. Not surprisingly, the armorer

was also generally a veteran. His duties included making sure that the armory was well kept and transporting its contents to Michigan State Troops (MST) summer encampments. He also escorted the much-admired Gatling gun to events around the state, including an 1881 military levee in Detroit.⁴

State Armorer J.W. Tobin made unfortunate news in the summer of 1893, when he accidently shot off the Gatling gun. "A sensation occurred at the State Capitol this morning, when the Gatling gun in the basement of the building was accidentally discharged," the *Detroit Free Press* reported. "The muzzle of the gun was pointed out of one of the windows and commanded a good range on the buildings in the west part of the city. State Armorer Tobin was exhibiting the gun and extolling its merits when it went off. The bullet crashed through the window and went over the tops of the houses, probably alighting in the country." No injuries were reported.



A Departmental Office

By the mid-1890s, Michigan's new Capitol was extremely full. The departments housed in it were growing steadily and openly eyeing each other's workspaces. But there wasn't enough room for everyone, which meant that some entities were soon forced to relocate to the State Office Block. Constructed in 1871 at the corner of Washington and Allegan to hold offices displaced during the construction of the third Capitol, the Block's offices were rented out to private businesses in the 1880s before being returned to governmental use. Lansing city directories show that both the Commissioner of Labor and the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics had been relocated there by 1891.

It didn't take long for other departments to zero in on the Armory and the military museum. The Capitol was an office building! Why not take those big guns and military weapons elsewhere? They'd be better appreciated in another space, devoted solely to Michigan's military. Bills calling for the construction of a new Armory and Museum, with accompanying military offices in either Lansing or Detroit, were introduced during both the 1897⁶ and 1899⁷ sessions, but the legislation failed.

The 1897 Legislature did adopt Concurrent Resolution No. 12, which stated "That the Board of State Auditors be and are hereby directed to arrange

The Armory housed a number of weapons, including a Gatling gun (in the foreground) and dozens of rifles, stored on wall racks. Some of these weapons were used by the Michigan State Troops for training purposes.

Image Courtesy of the Craig Whitford Collection

without delay for the removal of the stores belonging to the Quartermaster's and Adjutant General's departments now occupying room on the basement floor of the Capitol building to safe and convenient quarters in the building owned by the State on the corner of Washington avenue and Allegan street in the city of Lansing; and that the room so vacated in the Capitol building be at once put in proper condition for the use of the Auditor General's department, to facilitate the proper dispatch of the business of that office."



According to surviving records, hired laborers helped the Quartermaster's staff pack and move the Armory holdings from the Capitol to the State Office Block in the fall of 1897. Members of the Auditor General's staff moved in quickly afterwards, keen to put that additional square footage to productive use. By the time the Auditor General's staff gathered their statistics on Capitol employees for their 1898-1899 annual report, their department's staff comprised 143 people, making them the largest in state government.

The Armory's walls featured the names of battles in which Michigan regiments earned honors for courage and bravery under fire.

Image Courtesy of the Craig Whitford Collection



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

Photographs of Auditor General clerks in their ground floor workspaces reveal relatively tight quarters in which adjoining wooden desks formed clusters or columns. Lighted by electrified gas lights or early electric fixtures, the rooms had plain, single-colored walls and patterned linoleum floors. Other furnishings and decorations included

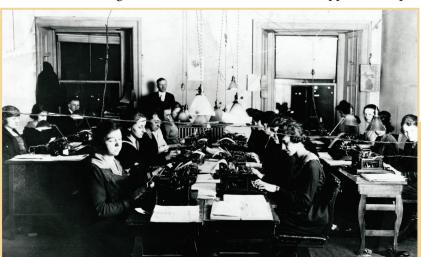


caned chairs, wicker waste baskets, metal spittoons, coat racks, calendars, and framed prints or photographs.

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.¹⁰ 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 1887.¹¹ According to one source, he remained in the office for eight years.¹²

By the 1920s, the Auditor General's Office, like most departments, employed mostly women, who worked as clerks, secretaries, and stenographers. ¹³ 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.

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.

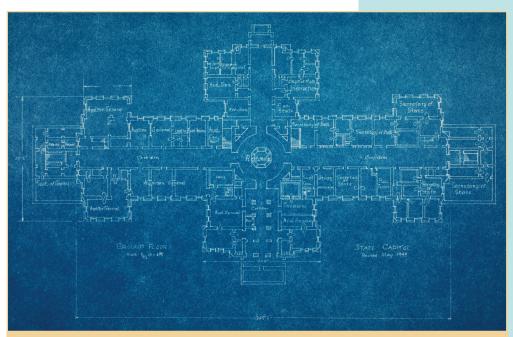
By the 1920s the walls of the Capitol rang with the clicking and dinging of typewriting machines. Popular culture quickly came to associate the machines and the women who operated them, who were themselves called "typewriters."

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

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. ¹⁴

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. Wainscoting 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. This was a very different, and very modern, basement!

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. Now known as Room 33, the area was shared by the Auditor General and the Land Board.¹⁶ (The State Land Board was recreated in the late 1930s to dispose of properties that reverted to the State due to tax delinquency. It is not the same Land Board that originally worked in the current Speaker's office.)17



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 inventory lists some surprising statistics about the space, including the fact that it housed 25 workers doing clerical work, 24 desks, 20 files, four bookcases, and five "machines." It must have been a very tight fit!¹⁸

Room 33 was only a small portion of the Auditor General's overall basement quarters. By this time, the department held rooms on the south side of the west wing, the entire south wing (except for a women's restroom), and most of the east wing.



(The Land Board and Treasury also used portions of the northern side of the east wing.) All together, the department's ground floor staff numbered 81 people, while another 32 worked in the first-floor suite (now part of the Senate Minority Leader's Office). On average, the offices provided 80 square feet per person, which wasn't much considering ceiling heights.¹⁹

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. The ground floor plan indicates that the space was now solely within the control of the Auditor General's staff. However, the accompanying inventory includes Room 33 as part of the Land Board's space. A careful eye will note that the number of employees working in these offices actually decreased between 1940 and 1943.²⁰ 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-28.21

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.

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.



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 overfloored 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



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:²²

1973-74	Sen. Patrick McCullough	10th District	Dearborn	Rm. 26A
	Sen. David A. Plaweck	12th District	Dearborn Heights	Rm. 26 A
	Sen. Coleman A. Young	4th District	Detroit	Rm. 26
1975-76	Sen. Robert W. Davis	37th District	Gaylord	Rm. 26 A
	Sen. Thomas Guastello	9th District	Sterling Heights	Rm. 26
1977-78	Sen. Robert W. Davis	37th District	Gaylord	Rm. 26 A
	Sen. Harold J. Scott	29th District	Flint	Rm. 26
1979-1980	Sen. Harold J. Scott	29th District	Flint	Rm. 26A
	Sen. Robert VanderLaan	31st District	Grand Rapids	Rm. 26
1981-82	Sen. Harold J. Scott	29th District	Grand Blanc	Rm. 26A
	Sen. Robert VanderLaan	31st District	Grand Rapids	Rm. 26
1983-84	Sen. Gary G. Corbin	29th District	Clio	Rm. 26
	Sen. Jackie Vaughn	3rd District	Detroit	Rm. 26-A
1985-86	Sen. Basil W. Brown	2nd District	Detroit	Rm. 26-A
	Sen. Jack Faxon	15th District	Farmington Hills	Rm. 26
1987-88	Sen. Jack Faxon	15th District	Farmington Hills	Rm. G-26
	Sen. Basil W. Brown	2nd District	Detroit	Rm. 26

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 Armory.

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.



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 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 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



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

building. White pine was relatively inexpensive and available in abundance in this period. They did not intend, however, for people to recognize the wood as pine. Once the pine was installed, it was woodgrained—that is, painted carefully to mimic a more expensive wood—by talented artists. In the Capitol, painters transformed yards of humble pine by painting it with the grain of walnut, the most fashionable (and therefore rather expensive) choice of the 1870s. The technique that they used was replicated by modern decorative painters during the restoration. They labored many hours to apply the necessary seven layers of paint needed to mimic the late nineteenth century process.

The restoration of the Capitol was completed in the fall of 1992. Rededication ceremonies held on November 19 and 20 of that year celebrated the success of the project, which won many significant state



and national preservation awards. That same fall, the building was officially designated a National Historic Landmark, the highest honor accorded historic structures in America.

Today, there are few signs of the old Armory left, save for the big archways and the distinctive double doors that once opened to allow for the easy movement of large artillery pieces in and out of the building. While their function has long passed, they serve as a testimony to the evolution of this unique and interesting suite of rooms.

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



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 the office of the Senate Minority Floor Leader. 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 Armory since the Capitol's restoration:

1991-92	Sen. Debbie Stabenow	24th District	Lansing	Rm. S-9
1993-94	Sen. John D. Cherry Jr.	29th District	Clio	Rm. S-9
1995-96	Sen. John D. Cherry Jr.	29th District	Clio	Rm. S-9
1997-98	Sen. Virgil C. Smith Jr.	2nd District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
1999-2000	Sen. Virgil C. Smith Jr.	2nd District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
2001-02	Sen. Robert L. Emerson	29th District	Flint	Rm. S-9
2003-04	Sen. Mark Schauer	19th District	Battle Creek	Rm. S-9
2005-06	Sen. Mark Schauer	19th District	Battle Creek	Rm. S-9
2007-08	Sen. Buzz Thomas	4th District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
2009-10	Sen. Buzz Thomas	4th District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
2011-12	Sen. Tupac A. Hunter	5th District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
2013-14	Sen. Tupac A. Hunter	5th District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
2015-16	Sen. Morris Hood III	3rd District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
2017-18	Sen. Morris Hood III	3rd District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
2019-20	Sen. Stephanie Chang	1st District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
2021-22	Sen. Stephanie Chang	1st District	Detroit	Rm. S-9
2023-24	Sen. Dan Lauwers	25th District	Brockway	Rm. S-9
2025-26	Sen. Dan Lauwers	25th District	Brockway	Rm. S-9 ²³

End Notes

- 1 *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Michigan, 1887.* Vol. 1, Thorp and Godfrey, State Printers and Binders, 1887, pp. 1050-1052.
- 2 Robertson, Jno. Michigan in the War. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1882, p. 118.
- 3 The Red Book for the Thirtieth Legislature of the State of Michigan. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, p. 371.
- 4 "The Governor's Levee." *Detroit Free Press.* February 16, 1881.
- 5 "A Surprise at the Capitol." *Detroit Free Press.* July 4, 1893.
- 6 *Journal of the Senate of the State of Michigan 1897*. Vol 1. Robert Smith Printing Co., State Printers and Binders, 1897, p. 279.
- 7 *Journal of the Senate of the State of Michigan 1899*. Vol. 1. Robert Smith Printing Co., State Printers and Binders, 1899, p. 380.
- 8 Public Acts of The Legislature of the State of Michigan Passed at the Regular Session of 1897. Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Co., State Printers and Binders, 1897, p. 446.
- 9 Annual Report of the Board of State Auditors for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1898. Robert Smith Printing Co., State Printers and Binders, 1898, pp. xiv, xviii, 260.
- 10 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.
- Annual Report of the Auditor General of the State of Michigan for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1887. Thorp & Godfrey, State Printers and Binders, 1888, p. 39.
- 12 "Fatally Hurt in C.P.R. Wreck." The [Lansing] State Journal. September 12, 1905.
- 13 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, pp. 154-156.
- 14 "Fire Scorches Capitol; Loss is Seen \$5,000." *The [Lansing] State Journal.* January 19, 1931.
- 15 "Looks Like a New Capitol Building If You Stay on the Ground Floor." *The Capitol Bulletin*. December 28, 1937.
- 16 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1941.
- 17 "State Land Sold by Two Agencies." *Battle Creek Enquirer*. December 21, 1947.



End Notes (continued)

- 18 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1941.
- 19 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1941.
- 20 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1943.
- 21 State of Michigan, Michigan State Administrative Board Buildings and Construction Division. "Capitol Survey," George R. Page, 1957.
- 22 Michigan Legislative Handbooks, 1973-1990.
- 23 Michigan Legislative Handbooks, 1991-2026.



Capitol.Michigan.gov