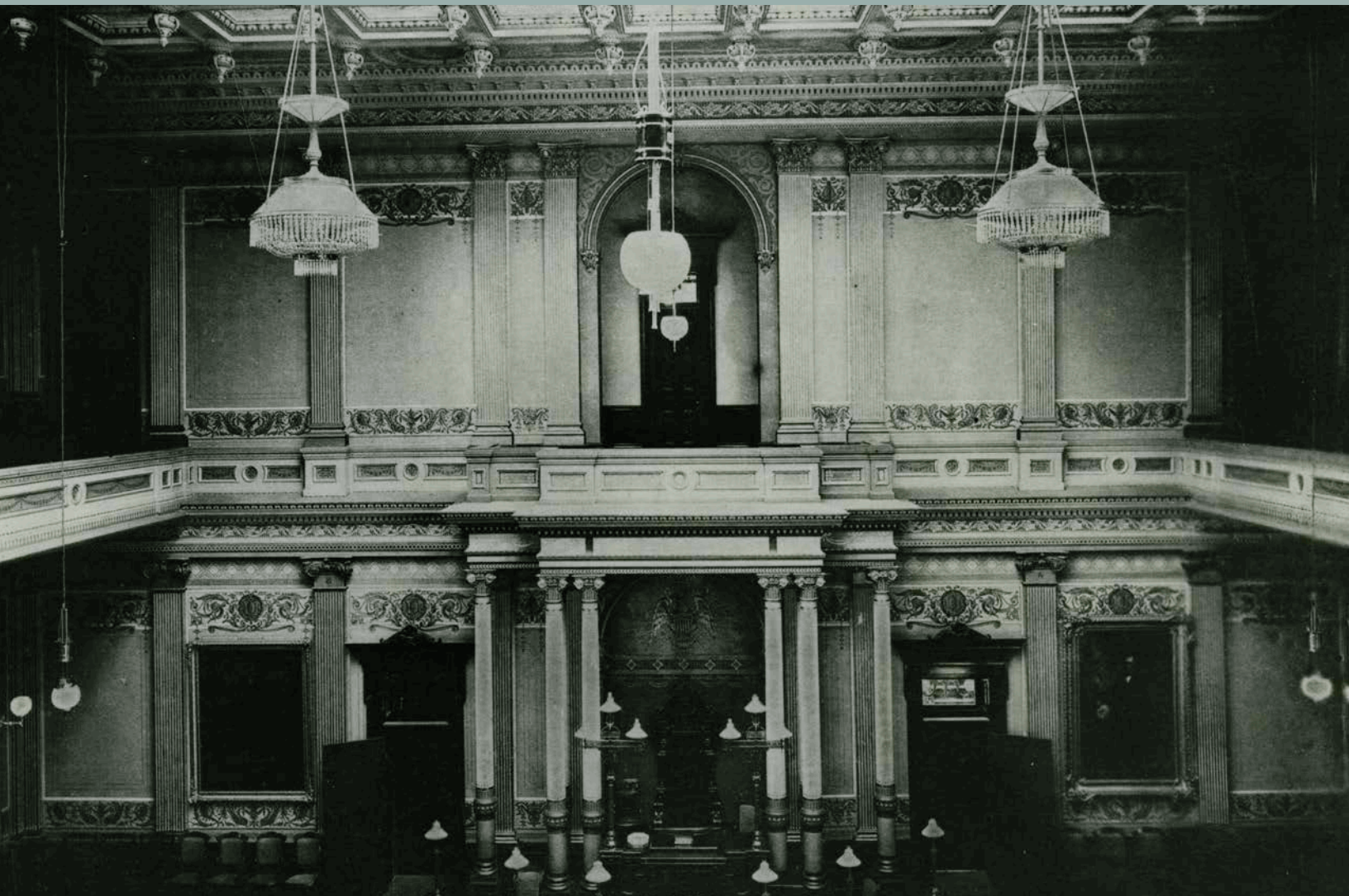


*A History of*  
The Lieutenant Governor's Office  
S209



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.

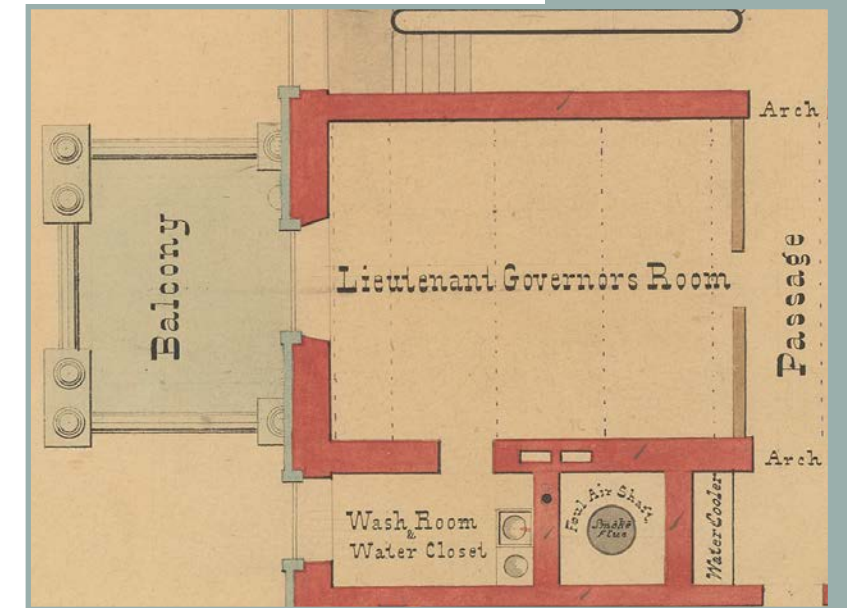
*Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan*

## The Lieutenant Governor

The modern office of the Lieutenant Governor is rare in that it is still used by the office holder for which it was originally designed. Architect Elijah E. Myers located the suite on the second floor to the immediate south of the Senate Chamber, as the Lieutenant Governor has always served as a presiding officer of the Michigan Senate. The Capitol's original floor plans indicate that the office originally consisted of only two rooms: an office (now S209) and a small adjoining washroom and water closet (now S209B). The Secretary of the Senate worked next door.

Interestingly, Myers's floor plans also assigned the Lieutenant Governor a small apartment located on the basement (or ground) floor in the west wing where he could stay during legislative sessions. This unique suite, the only one of its kind proposed for the Capitol, was to contain a dining room, a kitchen, and two bedrooms. Ultimately this scheme was scrapped, and the space used as storerooms and offices.

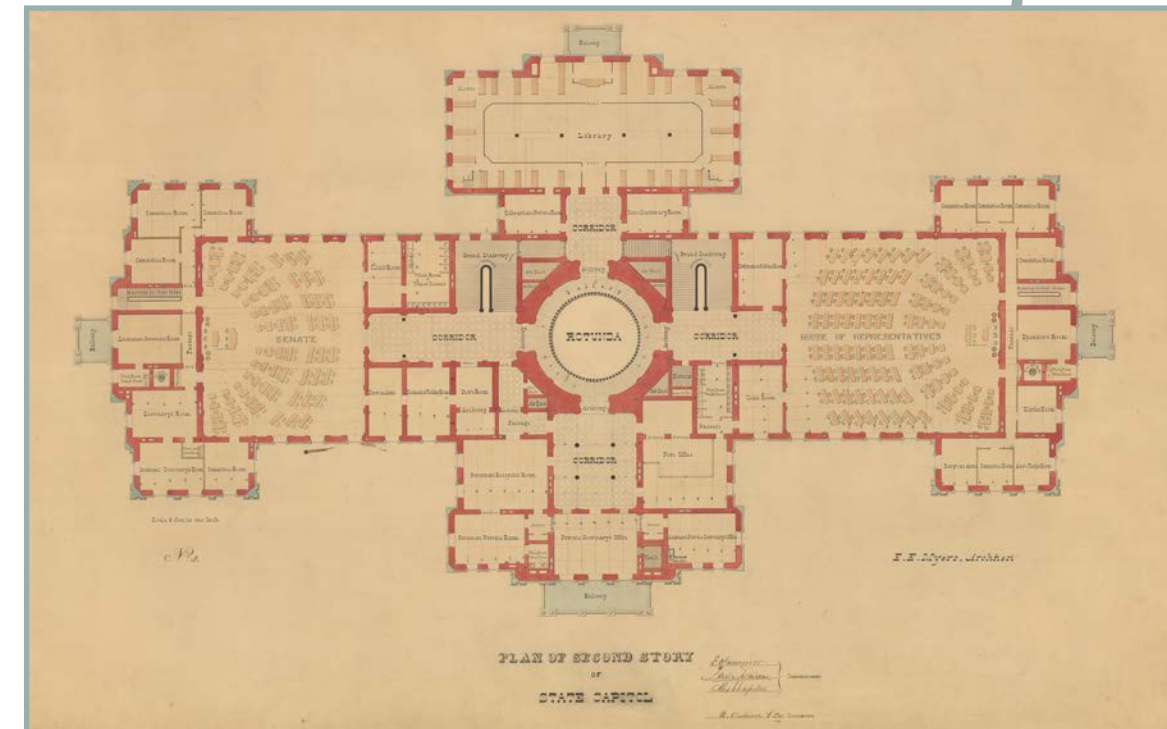
The first Lieutenant Governor to work in the present Capitol was Mr. Alonzo Sessions, a native New Yorker who came to Michigan in 1833 to acquire land. Two years later he began farming in Ionia County, where he eventually held several local offices and positions including Justice of the Peace, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, Ionia County Sheriff, and President of the First National Bank of Ionia. In 1856



## 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 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, 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 Capitol's original hand inked floor plans still survive in the Archives of Michigan. The second floor plan included the Legislative Chambers and the adjoining offices and committee rooms.

*Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan*





he was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives, where he served for six years. Michigan voters sent him back to Lansing in 1876 and 1878 when they elected him to the office of Lieutenant Governor.<sup>1</sup> At this time, Governors and Lieutenant Governors were elected individually.

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

*Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection*

Like the rest of the Capitol, the Lieutenant Governor's Office 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 following his visit on January 1, 1879, for the Capitol's official dedication. "All of the doors are massive in finish, and

fitted with locks specially made to order and being on bronze hinges, and bearing the arms of the state."<sup>2</sup> 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 rooms, 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 Lieutenant Governor's Office, was transformed by artists who stenciled, grained, marbled, and striped beautiful motifs on the walls and ceilings.

*First, starting in 1885, electricians began wiring the Capitol for a new technology—electric lights.*

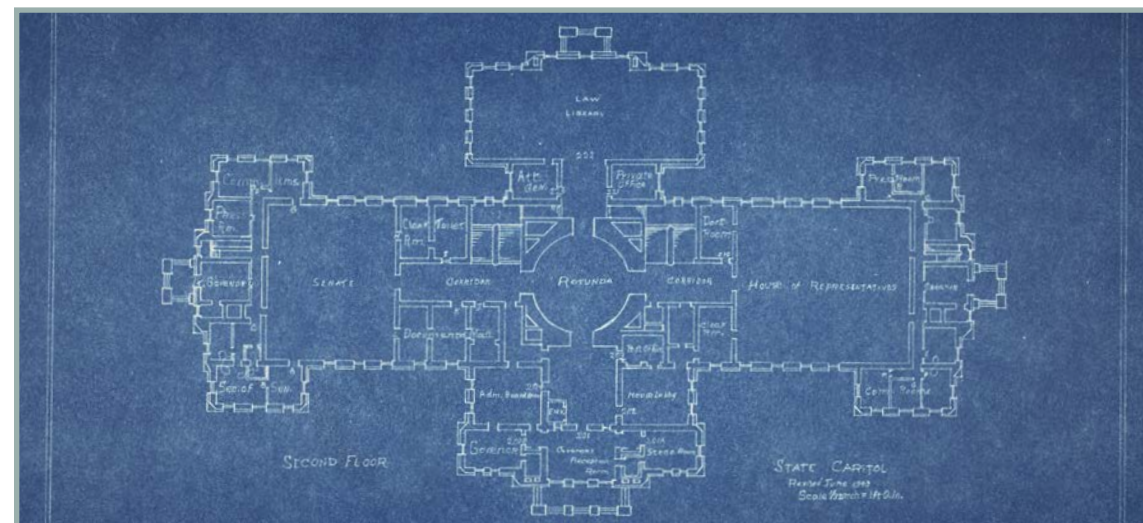
In 1892, the Board of State Auditors directed the Superintendent of the Capitol to survey the building and its contents. He recorded his findings in their annual bound report, which survives to this day. Among the furnishings found in the Lieutenant Governor's office were one lounge, one table, one writing desk, eight arm chairs, one footstool, one revolving book stand, one clock, three cuspidors (or spittoons), a marble topped bureau, and a folding bed—an indication that the Lieutenant Governor may have used his office as his boarding house.

During this period, the following Lieutenant Governors worked in this space.<sup>4</sup>

1877-1880	Alonzo Sessions	1907-1910	Patrick H. Kelley
1881-1884	Moreau S. Crosby	1911-1914	John Q. Ross
1885-1886	Archibald Buttaris	1915-1920	Luren D. Dickinson
1887-1889	James H. MacDonald	1921-1924	Thomas Read
1889-1890	William Ball (Acting)	1925-1926	George W. Welsh
1891-1892	John Strong	1927-1932	Luren D. Dickinson
1893-1894	J. Wright Giddings	1933-1934	Allen E. Stebbins
1895	Alfred Milnes	1935-1936	Thomas Read
1895-1896	Joseph R. McLaughlin (Acting)	1937-1938	Leo J. Nowicki
1897-1898	Thomas B. Dunstan	1939	Luren D. Dickinson
1899-1902	Orrin W. Robinson	1940	Matilda R. Wilson
1903-1906	Alexander Maintland		

## The Mid-Twentieth Century

The next time this room appears in the known historical record is in 1941, when 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 plans show that the Lieutenant Governor still used only the one room office (now identified as Room D) and its small adjoining wash room. The accompanying inventory reveals that two people worked in the room, using two desks, two tables, one file, and one machine.<sup>5</sup>



This 1943 floor plan confirms the Lieutenant Governor's ongoing presence behind the Senate Chamber.

*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. Unlike many of the offices, the Lieutenant Governor's space witnessed few changes during this short window. Whereas, in 1940, the office housed two people, two desks, two tables, one file, and one machine; by 1943 there were no machines, only one table, and two files.<sup>6</sup>

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 Lieutenant Governor continued to occupy the same rooms as in the previous decade. These rooms now bore somewhat new identifiers. The office, formerly known as Room D, was simply listed as belonging to the Lieutenant Governor. The adjoining wash room was marked with a "T" for toilet room.<sup>7</sup>

During this period the following Lieutenant Governors worked in this office.<sup>8</sup>

<b>1941-1942</b>	Frank Murphy	<b>1951-1952</b>	William C. Vandenberg
<b>1943-1944</b>	Eugene C. Keyes	<b>1953-1954</b>	Clarence A. Reid
<b>1945-1946</b>	Vernon J. Brown	<b>1955-1958</b>	Philip A. Hart
<b>1947-1948</b>	Eugene C. Keyes	<b>1959-1960</b>	John B. Swainson
<b>1949-1950</b>	John W. Connolly	<b>1961-1964</b>	T. John Lesinski

## The Senate Moves In

The mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s were times of great change in the Capitol building. After ninety years of shuffling, squeezing, and relocating, the decision was made to dramatically remodel many of the offices in the Capitol. The action was motivated by a number of factors, including the state's move to a full-time legislature. This had dramatic repercussions for the Capitol building, where the pace of business in both House and Senate spaces increased significantly. As the number of legislators spending every week in Lansing rose, the call for additional office space reached a fever pitch. In order to accommodate all the members, space had to be found—preferably in the Capitol. Governor Romney's preferred solution called for the construction of a new Capitol. While significant steps were taken towards this ambitious goal, ultimately the project was tabled over cost and aesthetic concerns.

When it became clear that a new Capitol was not to be, 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 were scheduled to relocate soon into new office buildings west of the Capitol. This meant that their offices would be available for the first time since the Capitol opened. Conveniently, these spaces generally boasted ceilings that were roughly twenty-two feet tall. Why not, the thinking ran, seize the opportunity to double the amount of space available by splitting the rooms horizontally?

A scheme was developed to create new space in the old building by subdividing the rooms in half to create two ten-foot tall offices, one above the other. From 1969 to 1972, almost every office on the Capitol's first, second, and third floors received an overfloor (sometimes called half floors or mezzanines). At the same time, offices were modernized by adding drop ceilings, fluorescent lighting, and institutional carpeting and furnishings. Original decorative paint had already been covered by layers of overpaint, paneling, and wallpaper. Almost every vestige of the Capitol's original elegance and character had disappeared.



Several of the plans considered for the new Capitol in the 1960s contained three buildings—designed to house and symbolize the three branches of government—and a central pylon.

*Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection*

*In 1965 the  
Office of the  
Lieutenant Governor  
moved . . .*

About this time the function of the Lieutenant Governor's Office began to change. In 1965 the Office of the Lieutenant Governor moved from its traditional location behind the Senate Chambers to the first floor in the south corridor. Here William G. Milliken, the first Lieutenant Governor independently elected under the new 1963 constitution, worked until becoming Governor in 1969.

The space went through a number of changes in the 1970s and 1980s when records suggest it was used as a committee room, legislative office, and then the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Senate, the home of Senate Payroll, and, on the mezzanine level, the Senate Bill Clerks Office.

## Office Occupants

The following committees and/or members worked in this space in the 1970s. Please note that the district numbers in the table reflect those in use at the time each respective handbook was printed.

<b>1971-1972</b>	Municipalities and Elections Committee			Rm. D
<b>1973-1974</b>	Sen. Milton Zaagman	32nd District	Grand Rapids	Rm. D
	Municipalities and Elections Committee			Rm. D
<b>1975-1976</b>	Sen. John F. Toepp	36th District	Cadillac	Rm. D
<b>1977-1978</b>	Sen. John F. Toepp	36th District	Cadillac	Rm. D

## The Capitol's Restoration

In 1987, the Michigan Senate and the House of Representatives began the process of restoring Michigan's Capitol. Chief among their goals was to return the building to its original Victorian grandeur while modernizing the many outdated systems within it. They sought to make the Capitol a living, working museum, where the functions of government would continue to play out in a beautiful and inspiring historic setting. In order to carry out this mission, the restoration team, made up of supportive elected officials, architects, craftspeople, and artists, would need to touch every single space in the Capitol, including these three rooms.

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 period, 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 undertaken to determine the original colors and decorative paint motifs found in these rooms. These colors and motifs were then replicated by talented decorative artists who used traditional techniques to return the room to its proper late nineteenth century appearance.



Offices, corridors, and even the lobby into the House Chamber, seen here, were sliced in half horizontally to create additional office space in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

*Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection*

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



A construction worker removes a beam from the overfloor, or mezzanine, that once subdivided the south corridor near the Lieutenant Governor's Office.

*Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Commission*

*That same fall, the building was officially designated a National Historic Landmark . . .*

At the request of the Senate and the Lieutenant Governor, architects also modified the old offices behind the Senate Chamber. By combining together the spaces originally designed for the Lieutenant Governor and the Secretary of the Senate, they created a spacious four room suite comprised of a reception area, a meeting room, a small wash room, and an office for the Lieutenant Governor.

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 is once again used by the Lieutenant Governor on session days and for special functions. (The Lieutenant Governor also keeps a second office in the George W. Romney Building.) 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. Under this system, the Lieutenant Governor's suite was renumbered S209, S209A, S209B, S210, and S211.

The following Lieutenant Governors have served in this suite since the Capitol's restoration.<sup>9</sup>

1991-1998	Connie B. Binsfeld	2011-2018	Brian Calley
1999-2002	Richard Posthumus	2019-	Garlin Gilchrist II
2003-2010	John D. Cherry, Jr.		



## End Notes

- 1 *The Red Book for the Thirtieth Legislature of the State of Michigan.*  
W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, p. 513-514.
- 2 *The Evening News*, January 2, 1879.
- 3 *Annual Report of the Board of State Auditors for the State of Michigan for the Year 1892.*  
Robert Smith & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1892, p. 519.
- 4 *Michigan Manual 1987-1988*, p. 60.
- 5 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1941.
- 6 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1943.
- 7 State of Michigan, Michigan State Administrative Board Buildings and Construction Division. "Capitol Survey," George R. Page, 1957.
- 8 *Michigan Manual 1969-1970*, p. 87.
- 9 *Michigan Legislative Handbooks*, 1991-2020.



*Michigan*  
STATE CAPITOL

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