

THE CAPITOL SOWER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CAPITOL COMMISSION | VOLUME FOURTEEN | NUMBER TWO | JUNE 2022

Special Guests Tour Courtyard Restoration

The Nebraska State Capitol and its associated landscape were designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service in 1976. It is one of the few landscapes recognized by the Park Service in association with a building on the National Register of Historic Places. The Capitol's historically significant landscape plan was created by Ernst Herminghaus, Nebraska's first formally trained landscape architect. Herminghaus used Capitol architect Bertram Goodhue's brief comments about the landscape to inspire his Capitol design. Herminghaus' original 1934 planting plan was researched and documented by Richard Sutton, FASLA, in 1985 and updated by Big Muddy Workshop during the 1998-2010 Exterior Masonry Restoration Project.

Sutton's document has guided the replacement of trees and shrubs on the exterior grounds. Big Muddy's plan was used to restore the courtyard landscape following the 2017 installation of the courtyard fountains originally called for in

1932. Big Muddy identified needed infrastructure associated with the landscape and updated the courtyard plant list with modern cultivars of Herminghaus' original flowers and shrubs.



Above, Capitol Administrator Bob Ripley discusses courtyard fountain symbols with Willa Herminghaus Dyche, center, and Fritz Herminghaus, right, Herminghaus' children.

Following the Nebraska Association of Former State Legislators successful fund-raising campaign to finance the restoration and endow courtyard maintenance, Herminghaus' children were invited to Lincoln. Willa Herminghaus Dyche and Fritz Herminghaus, were born in Lincoln, but have lived away from the state for many years. They returned with their children to celebrate the restoration of the Capitol Courtyard's original Herminghaus design and tour their father's other work in Lincoln, including Pioneers Park. In his Pioneers Park design, Ernst Herminghaus included three long vistas with the Capitol's tower as the terminus. While Herminghaus went on to work all over the world, his work in Lincoln will be his most enduring legacy.

Nebraska Capitol Commission Membership

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Congressional District 1

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Congressional District 2

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Congressional District 3

Robert C. Ripley
Capitol Administrator
Secretary



Above, Kate Sullivan, Nebraska Association of Former Legislators President welcomes the Herminghaus family, before presentations about Herminghaus and his Capitol work.



The People of the OCC Office of the Capitol Commission

ADMINISTRATION

Bob Ripley, Administrator
Matt Hansen, Preservation Architect
Vacant, Preservation Architect
Brett Daugherty, Capitol Manager
Tammy Honnor, Facilities
Construction Coordinator
Vacant, Administrative Assistant
Clark DeVries
HVAC Project Manager

ARCHIVE

Karen Wagner, Archivist

CARPENTRY

Vacant, Shop Supervisor
Lana Gabel,
Furniture Conservator
Dawn Hickmon,
Furniture Conservator
Vacant, Finisher
Dan Kratky, Mason
John MacKichan,
Hardware Conservator
Mike Marshall, Cabinet Maker

CUSTODIAL

Perry Shuman,
Capitol Conservation Supervisor
Richard Mallam, Custodial Leader
David Hoelscher, Custodial Leader

GROUNDS

Heather Dinslage,
Groundskeeper Leader
Vacant, Mechanic

MAINTENANCE

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Harry Holcomb,
Maintenance Technician
Tahir Karimi, Electrician
Chris Lahmon,
Maintenance Technician

TOURS

Roxanne Smith,
Public Information Officer/
Tourism Supervisor/
Special Events Coordinator
Susan Myers, Tourism Aide
Jessica Richard, Tourism Aide
Kirk Wiota, Tourism Aide

OCC AT WORK

Experience and Service

Nebraska Capitol Collections

The Office of the Capitol Commission is fortunate to have Preservation Architect Matt Hansen and Archivist Karen Wagner on staff to collect, preserve, research and interpret the objects which make up the Nebraska Capitol Collections. There are two collections -- the Permanent Collections and the Circulating Collections. The Permanent Collections includes the Archives and three dimensional objects. The Circulating Collections include all Capitol original furniture used throughout the building. Karen Wagner, Capitol Archivist oversees the administration of the Collections, with emphasis on the two dimensional objects, photographic and paper, of the Archival Collections. Wagner graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in biology and received a Masters in Museum Studies from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Prior to joining the OCC team she worked at the Durham Museum in Omaha. During her 25 years with the Office of the Capitol Commission, Wagner has overseen the digitization of the minutes of the Nebraska Capitol Commission (1919-1935) and the organization and cataloging of the material collected during the 1922-1932 construction of the Capitol. The Archival Collection has thousands of documents associated with the construction of the Capitol, including architectural drawings and Commission correspondence. Wagner facilitates access to these documents by OCC staff and contractors as they preserve and restore the Capitol.

Preservation Architect Matt Hansen graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a Masters in architecture and LEED accreditation. Prior to joining OCC's team he was employed with BVH Architects and worked on the 1998-2010 Exterior Masonry Project. Hansen oversees restoration projects involving preservation space, including the replication of original furnishings. Using original materials retired from service due to age or wear and placed in the Permanent Collection, Hansen has overseen the replication of textiles and light fixtures. Most recently he worked with conservators on the replication of the West Chamber's leather doors. 



Above, Archivist Karen Wagner prepares the original patterns used to create the gold leaf designs in the ceiling of the West Chamber for storage in the Permanent Collection.



Above, Capitol Preservation Architect Matt Hansen, AIA, LEED AP, on ladder, discusses the conservation of a Hall of Fame bust with Capitol Administrator Robert C. Ripley, FAIA.

CONSERVATION PROJECTS

West Chamber Doors

The Nebraska Capitol Commission exists to provide the highest quality preservation, restoration, and enhancement of and long-term planning for the State Capitol and capitol grounds for the perpetual use by state government and the enjoyment of all persons. The Office of the Capitol Commission, as the administrative arm of the Nebraska Capitol Commission, carries out this mission. Preservation for the perpetual enjoyment of all persons requires the Office of the Capitol Commission consider the long term survival of the building and its furnishings. Such consideration was given to the decorative leather West Chamber doors. Designed by Capitol muralist Hildreth Meiere and manufactured by Baldwin Brothers, New York, by 2020 the doors were showing their age.

Capitol architect Bertram Goodhue specified durable materials like limestone, marble and ceramic tile for the structure of the Capitol, understanding these building materials could survive for a thousand years. But some finishes in the Capitol, such as the leather used on legislative chamber doors, have limited durability. After 90 years the leather on the West Chamber doors had reached its service limit. Previous work was undertaken to extend the lifespan of the leather doors, but the deterioration was now at the point where irreparable damage was possible. The decision was made to recreate the leather panels while the original artwork was intact and able to provide a pattern.

Jensen Conservation of Omaha had worked on the doors previously and was given the task of recreating the design. The conservator purchased 41 different leather stamping tools to recreate the intricate Assyrian-style image on the doors. Once reproduction was done, the original leather door covers were placed in the Capitol Collections. The leather will be archivally stored for reference by future generations of Capitol caretakers when they once again need to recreate the leather door design. The conservator's report documenting the replication process, and the tools used, will become part of the Capitol Archive and will be available in perpetuity. 



Above left, a 1980 photo of the West Chamber leather doors prior to the first conservation treatment. Above right, the doors following the 1980 treatment.



Left, in 2004, a small tear in the leather was stabilized with fabric tape, and leather moisturizers applied to slow drying and cracking. By 2020 the cracking had expanded the opening in the leather and a destructive act of vandalism was feared.



Above, the replicated doors as they appeared following installation in January 2022.

Below, a detailed section of the border shows an example of the beautiful hand tooling on the doors. Replication of the doors required 41 different stamping tools.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Doors Receive Attention

Doors in the HVAC project area touched by many hands.

Phase 3 of the current Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Project is focused on the northwest quadrant of the Nebraska State Capitol. The northwest quadrant contains adaptive use space with very few preservation spaces. HVAC work in adaptive use, or office space, does not require Office of the Capitol Commission staff address special surfaces and finishes, freeing OCC staff to do their ongoing preservation work, inspecting and restoring chairs, desks and doors as needed. Removed furniture and doors are reviewed and those needing more than cleaning and touch up are taken to the furniture and finish shops for restoration. The HVAC project is allowing a holistic review of the walnut doors, enabling the furniture conservation team to efficiently do their work. 

When the system being removed by the current Heating Ventilation, and Air Conditioning Project was installed in the 1960's, soffits and chases containing ducts were added throughout office and corridor spaces. Attic spaces and chases holding the original system and the updated heating and cooling system were difficult to access for maintenance. Ease of access for maintenance is being addressed as the new system is rerouted and the infrastructure covering the mechanical equipment is replaced. The new geothermal heating and cooling system will have new and enlarged access doors to aid in future mechanical system maintenance. Office of the Capitol Commission staff are creating new doors and improving existing doors. 



Above, an office door rests on a stand in the finish shop, while Lana Gabel, OCC furniture conservator, begins the restoration process by washing the finish off a section of molding removed during the inspection process.



Above, the area under the kick plate has not been exposed to sun fading and shows the door's original color. Inset, using finish samples, staff match the original stain color and finish which informs their restoration work.



Above, with one side of the door cleaned, staff prepare to apply stain and finish to restore the surface. Staff leave any intact and usable finish in place, conserving as much original finish as possible.



Above, the back of the door is ready to be cleaned. The removed and cleaned molding section will be stained and returned to its proper place as the restoration work is completed.



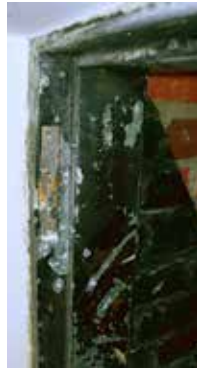
Above, a close-up view of the door shows the extent of daily use and wear. Staff will repair the damaged surface prior to restoration and molding replacement.

New Door Fabrication

Using the in-house expertise of team members, the carpenter/cabinet maker and the machinist, with maintenance staff support, the work of Carpentry shop in support of the HVAC project is saving money.



Left and right are examples of existing maintenance access. The door on the left is relatively intact, repainted and missing only a latch. The access opening on the right is missing the door and the frame is damaged. A new door will be created for this opening.



Above left, removed access doors on a cart in the finish shop are an example upon which staff will base the new access doors they create. Above right, a close-up shows two types of doors, a more decorative door used in public spaces, and a basic door which staff will recreate. Staff will use the hinge type and placement for reference on their doors. The door casings on the cart shows the basic construction which will be copied.



Left, creating a new door begins when OCC's cabinet maker Mike Marshall constructs a wooden core structure. The two by two butcher block style core will be covered with metal to form the finished door.



Above left, once the steel covers are in place on the wooden doors, OCC's machinist, John Mackicken locates the position of the door hinges. Above right, the sparks fly as John cuts the openings for the hinges.

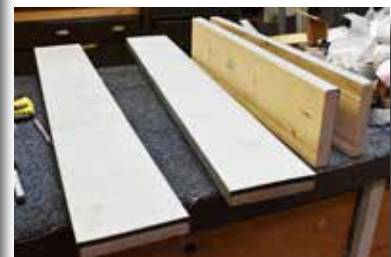
Below left, sheets of steel in the basement await transformation by staff. Using on-site cutting and bending equipment the machinist creates the steel covers for the access doors.



Above, OCC maintenance specialist Chris Lahmon tests his technique before he welds the covers together over the wooden core. Right the covers are spot welded every three inches to hold them together.



Left, the newly fabricated doors are structurally complete. Moved into the finish shop the doors will be sanded and cleaned before putty is applied to seal seams in the metal work. Then another round of sanding and cleaning will occur before the doors are primed and painted and hardware applied. Below, door casings are being fabricated in the machinshop following the technique of the original sample, a wooden core with steel cladding.



WHAT'S OLD IS NEW

While researching events surrounding the 50th anniversary of the completion of the 1922-1932 construction of the Bertram Goodhue's Nebraska State Capitol, a file documenting items that were loaned to the state for a display held in 1982 was discovered. One of the items loaned was a jigsaw puzzle. The letter that accompanied the return of the loan identified the puzzle as "Nebraska State Capitol on Christmas Eve" and "Puzzle No. 2". This artifact was not represented in the Nebraska Capitol Collections.

Conversations among Office of the Capitol Commission staff about this discovery led to the donation of two separate examples of this puzzle. Both puzzles have the same image created by Omaha artist Kenneth Willmarth in 1929. Capitol Puzzle No. 1 is mounted on wood with interlocking pieces. Capitol

nickel a night. Initially puzzles were made on wood and hand cut using a jigsaw. Paperboard puzzles were introduced in the early 1930's but were not widely



Above, a paperboard puzzle with intricately shaped pieces, Left, a wooden puzzle with uniformly shaped pieces, unfortunately, one is missing.

Puzzle No. 2 is mounted on cardboard and features curvilinear pieces. Both are hand cut, measure about 14.5" x 10", and were marketed in beautiful boxes with hand-decorated paper covers.

Jigsaw puzzles were immensely popular during the depression as an inexpensive form of entertainment, with sales peaking in 1933. References have been found that indicate people could rent puzzles for a

available until there were improvements in both the durability of cardboard and the creation of processes to mechanically die cut the puzzles. Wood puzzles were largely phased out by 1939.

Research by Capitol Archivist Karen Wagner and Capitol Preservation Architect Matt Hansen have been unsuccessful in finding any information about the manufacturer Capital Sales Co. or pinpointing the specific date of manufacture. Based on the date of the image, and the fact that both puzzles are hand cut, the best estimate is the early 1930's, shortly after the Capitol was completed. 



Above, the box label identifies the puzzle maker or distributor.

CAPITOL EVENTS

Cornhuskers Girls State

June 9, 2022

The American Legion Auxiliary will hold the Girls State Inauguration Ceremony at 2:00 p.m. in the 2nd floor rotunda.

Star City Pride Parade

June 18, 2022

The Star City Pride parade will be held around the Capitol beginning at 10:00 a.m. with a gathering on the north plaza.

Independence Day State Holiday

July 4, 2022

The Capitol will be open holiday hours 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. in observance of the federal and state holiday.

Lights of Hope

August 31, 2022

The Capitol tower will be illuminated with purple light to recognize those who have been lost to overdose.

Hunger Action Month Display

September 1-15, 2022

The Feeding America Network and Nebraska Food Banks are sponsoring a display in the 1st floor rotunda.

Labor Day

September 5, 2022

The Capitol will be open holiday hours 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Bar Induction Ceremony

September 20, 2022

The Nebraska Supreme Court will induct new attorneys in a 2nd floor rotunda ceremony at 10:00 a.m.

Columbus Day

October 10, 2022

The Capitol will be open holiday hours 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Spina Bifida Awareness Month

October 14, 2022

Nebraska Spina Bifida Inc. will have the Capitol illuminated in teal and yellow light to recognize Spina Bifida is the most common recurring birth defect in the United States.

Veteran's Day

November 11, 2022

The Capitol will be open holiday hours from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and there will be a tower lighting to recognize Nebraska's veterans.

Thanksgiving Holiday

November 24-25, 2022

The Capitol will be closed.

State Patrol Graduation

December 16, 2022

The Nebraska State Patrol Camp 66 will have their graduation ceremony in the 2nd floor rotunda at 10:00 a.m.


Christmas Day

December 25, 2022

The Capitol will be closed on December 25, 2022.


Christmas Holiday

December 26, 2022

The Capitol will open holiday hours for tours from 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. 

All events at the Nebraska State Capitol are free and open to the public.

Guided Tours are offered Monday-Friday hourly from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, except at noon. Saturday and Holidays from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, except at noon and Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. Please call 402.471.0448 or visit www.capitol.org for more information.

Dignitaries from the Nebraska Forest Service, the Arbor Day Foundation, the Nebraska Association of Resource Districts, the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, and the Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service joined Lt. Governor Mike Foley in celebrating Arbor Day on the northeast lawn of the Nebraska State Capitol. On the 150th anniversary of Arbor Day, the Arbor Day Foundation and the Nebraska Natural Resources Districts celebrated their 50th anniversaries. Following remarks in which Woodrow Nelson, Arbor Day Foundation Vice President for Mission and Membership, and Dr. Orval Gigstad, Board President of the Nebraska Association of Resource Districts, both discussed their organization's past and future efforts to promote tree planting, Dr. John Erixson discussed the Forest Service's many decades long work in tree planting and forestry management in Nebraska. All agreed tree planting has a major role to play in Nebraska's economic and environmental health. Above photo, Lt. Governor Foley reads the Governor's Arbor Day Proclamation. Photo right, l. to r. Mr. Foley, Erixson, Nelson and Gigstad ceremonially plant the replacement red Oak tree in the location dictated by the Capitol's Original 1934 Herminghaus Landscape Restoration Plan. 



April 29, 2022 Arbor Day Proclamation Reading and Tree Planting Ceremony





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The Capitol Sower, published by the Office of the Capitol Commission, is available online at www.capitol.org. Contact the Tourism Supervisor at <roxanne.smith@nebraska.gov> for more information.

Please contact us if you have any questions or comments about the content. All images are property of the Office of the Capitol Commission unless noted.

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Capitol Architect
Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, 1869-1924

Capitol Art Commemorated

Capitol artist Hildreth Meiere's beautiful Nebraska State Capitol mosaic art will travel the nation representing Nebraska. Under the guidance of First Lady Susanne Shore, Meiere's floor mosaic "The Genius of Creative Energy" was selected and adapted for use as the graphic image on the new Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles license plates being issued in 2023.



Image: Nebraska DMV

The Office of the Capitol Commission's 2022 commemorative ornament features Meiere's mosaic of the White-tailed Deer. Capitol mosaicist Hildreth Meiere created circular mosaics of native animals to decorate the arches around the Vestibule dome. Found in all 93 counties of Nebraska, the White-tailed deer was designated state mammal by the Nebraska Legislature in 1981. For information about purchasing the ornament please contact the Tourism Supervisor at (402)471-0449 or go to capitol.nebraska.gov/visit/gift-shop.

