

Capitol Groundbreaking -1922

In 1919, with the second Capitol crumbling around them, the Nebraska Legislature voted to establish a Capitol Commission, giving the Governor, State Engineer, and three citizen members the task of holding a competition to commission an architect to design a new Capitol, and then oversee construction. Commission architectural consultant Thomas Rogers Kimball's uniquely structured architectural competition, held in 1919 and 1920, featured designs from ten Nebraska and national architects. New York architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue used the requirements of the competition to free his imagination and create the nation's first truly vernacular State House, a building specifically for Nebraska. Other competitors designs were based on classical architectural forms or the United States Capitol. When the competition judges entered the room where the designs were displayed on June 25, 1920, they were immediately drawn to Goodhue's design. The tower rising from the center of the square base was very different. Goodhue's design was quickly chosen and soon work began to transform his architectural plans into construction documents. In the winter of 1921, load tests verified the sandstone substrata beneath the site would support the weight of the limestone, brick and marble building. On April 15, 1922, after months of design and planning, ground was broken by Governor Samuel R. McKelvie.



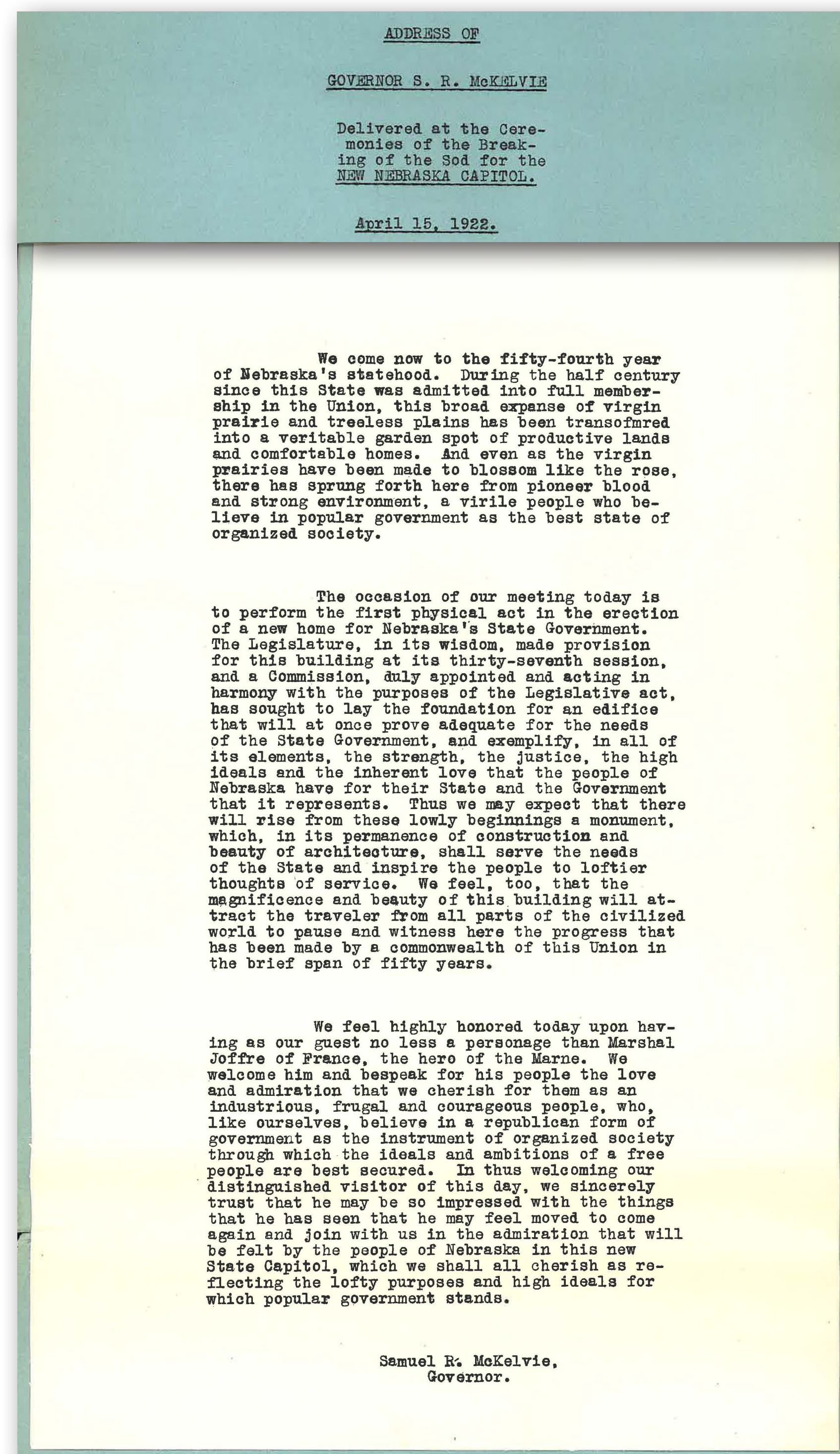
Photo courtesy History Nebraska [HN-RG1234-71-44]

Above, Governor Samuel R. McKelvie addresses those assembled on Groundbreaking Day, 1922.

Below, Governor McKelvie plows a ground breaking furrow to begin construction of the new Capitol.



Photo courtesy History Nebraska [HN-RG1234-PH]g-4



Above, an original copy of Governor Samuel R. McKelvie's address for the groundbreaking ceremony is housed in History Nebraska's collection of Governor McKelvie's papers. [HN-RG1-SG27-S2-F1]



Above, Governor Pete Ricketts has proclaimed April 15, 2022, Capitol Groundbreaking Day in Nebraska. This proclamation will become part of the Nebraska Capitol Collections Archive, a copy will also be housed in History Nebraska's collection of Governor Ricketts' papers.

Because Nebraska's third Capitol was to honor "the memory of those who fell in the service of their country", General Joseph Joffre, Commander-in-Chief for French forces in the recently fought world war, came to participate in the ceremony. The ceremony began with the state historian presenting a brief history of Nebraska capitol to Governor McKelvie. Governor McKelvie next read his remarks, emphasizing the transformation of the vast virgin prairie and treeless plains into a garden by the pioneers who settled the state. In keeping with Nebraska's pioneer spirit, Governor McKelvie, then turned to two white horses pulling a sod cutting plow, took hold of the plow handles, snapped the reins, and plowed a groundbreaking furrow across the northeast lawn of the Capitol site.