

# 100 years ago - Foundation Excavation

Prior to the ground-breaking for the third Capitol to be located on Capitol Square, platted in 1867 as the site for Nebraska's State Capitol, the Nebraska Capitol Commission charged with building the new Capitol was very busy. After the June 1920 selection of New York architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue to design the new Capitol, architectural designs were being finalized, site preparation work was underway, and soil and bedrock stress tests were conducted. The decision was made to build a railroad to haul away excavated soil and bring building materials on site. Goodhue, thematic consultant Hartley Burr Alexander, Ph.D. and sculptor Lee Lawrie were planning the decoration of the Capitol's exterior. The Commission, acting as the owner for the project had received bids for materials and from the trades for plumbing, heating and electrical work. On April 14, 1922, one day before Governor Samuel McKelvie broke ground, the Nebraska Capitol Commission awarded the contract for the first section of the foundation to The W. J. Assenmacher Company. Mr. Assenmacher assured the Commission his company would complete one-half of the foundation work in four months and complete all the foundation work in six and one-half months. By May of 1922 the railroad tracks were laid, excavation of the basement had begun and foundation walls were being poured. Everyone was working toward a November 11, 1922 cornerstone laying ceremony.

*The images below are cropped from period photographs taken by George DeFord, a UNL engineering student, and William Younkin, Goodhue's on-site architect. The scrapbooks containing these photographs are part of the Nebraska Capitol Collections and the archives of History Nebraska (HN). Photographs taken during construction provide information about building techniques used, and the impact of construction on the physical and social landscape of Lincoln and Nebraska. The Office of the Capitol Commission always seeks additional materials associated with the Nebraska State Capitol.*



HN-RGI234 Group-71 Younkin Album

Through the winter of 1921 and the spring of 1922 crews removed trees from around the 2nd Capitol. Once the site was clear, railroad tracks would be laid to facilitate the movement of materials on and off-site. View from the southeast.



HN-RGI234 Group-71 Younkin Album

This view shows progress made clearing the grounds of fallen trees, and was taken from the southwest corner of the four square block Capitol site where the railroad would enter and exit the construction area.



Photo by George DeFord, Nebraska Capitol Collections

This May 1922 photograph shows the tracks of the state-owned Lincoln, Haitch Street and Capitol Railway being laid in the middle of H Street to connect the Capitol site with the Burlington yard at 6th and J Street.



Photo by George DeFord, Nebraska Capitol Collections

This photo shows railroad tracks laid, ready to carry materials on and off the site via the southwest corner and the H Street spur. Tracks circled the grounds and included sidings where stone and other material could be unloaded for storage before use.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

This April 25, 1922, photograph of the northwest corner of the Capitol site shows excavation of the outer square base beginning with the old Capitol still in use. With phased construction, Goodhue intended to save the state money over the ten year project.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

Looking across the excavation work toward St. Mary's Church and downtown Lincoln a dragline and bulldozer can be seen. Railcars wait to be loaded with the soil excavated for the basement and foundation of Goodhue's Capitol.



Photo by George DeFord, Nebraska Capitol Collections

Basement excavation continued through the spring and summer of 1922. Notice how close the railroad was located to what would eventually become the exterior walls of the new Capitol.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

By the end of May 1922 crews were pouring the concrete foundations on the northwest corner of the basement. The W. J. Assenmacher Company worked continuously on all aspects of foundation construction.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

By June of 1922 excavation had moved east. Hand dug holes in the image's center and being dug on the right are for piers 30 - 60 feet deep. The building's weight will rest on the piers in the bedrock located under foundation walls. Horses were used to haul material.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

In this July 1922 photograph of the north side of the foundation, concrete walls are visible to the west. A ramp in the center was used by horses pulling wagons filled with excavated soil and then returning with loads of concrete to fill the piers.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

In this August 1922 photograph looking toward the corner of 14th and K Streets, framing for basement walls is in place. Horse-drawn wagons loaded with concrete are lined up ready to pour their loads into the wood forms.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

The W. J. Assenmacher Company crews moved quickly on the foundation for the new Capitol. This September 1922 image shows the east side with basement exterior foundation walls in place and piers poured to support interior walls.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

Throughout the excavation and foundation work, horses played an important role. As seen here in an October 1922 photograph, concrete is being loaded onto a horse-drawn wagon.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

By October of 1922, exterior foundation walls were in place and the rough concrete basement floor was being poured in sections. The old Capitol sits on an island of soil to the right of the image.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

The northeast corner of the foundation was nearing completion in October of 1922. The walls were ready for the ceremonial setting of the cornerstone scheduled for Armistice Day 1922.



HN-RGI234 Group-70 Younkin Album

In early November of 1922, the steel frame of the new Capitol was rising on the northwest corner. Those attending the cornerstone ceremony would see the new structure begin to envelop the old.