

THE CAPITOL SOWER


THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CAPITOL COMMISSION | VOLUME FOURTEEN | NUMBER THREE | AUGUST 2022

“Dirty Work” Begins

Once the report on substrata and soil conditions under the Capitol site was complete and recommendations for proper sizing and construction of foundations for the new Nebraska State Capitol were made, it was time for the “dirty work” to begin. The first step involved removing trees on the grounds and laying railroad tracks to and around the site.

As trees were being removed, the Nebraska Capitol Commission considered bids for the cost of removing excavation soil, delivering the soil to the State Fair Grounds, and the routing to the Capitol site of rail cars loaded with material and supplies for the construction of the building. At its February 11, 1922 meeting, the Nebraska Capitol Commission reviewed the proposals of the various railroads entering Lincoln-- The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific; The Missouri Pacific;

The Chicago and North Western; and The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy. After reviewing the bids and discussion, the Commission awarded the contract for construction and operation of the state-owned Lincoln, Haitch and Capitol Railway to The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company.

Following the selection of the railroad company, the Capitol Commission began negotiations with the City of Lincoln to allow tracks to be laid on H Street. By March 22, 1922 the City Council and Capitol Commission had reached agreement and authorization for the construction of the railroad tracks approved. Then, just days before the April 15, 1922, groundbreaking ceremony, the Nebraska Capitol Commission selected the bid of the W. J. Assenmacher for excavating and constructing the foundation of the third Capitol on the site. 

Right, a photograph from the Younkin Album in the History Nebraska Collection (HN-RG1234 Group-71) shows tree removal on the south lawn of the Capitol. William L. Younkin, Goodhue's on site representative, photographed construction for the firm and for the Capitol Commission. Below, a cropped detail of the image shows downed trees waiting for removal. The smoke on the right side of the image comes from the dynamite used to remove stumps. Newspaper articles from the time reported shattered tree parts and chunks of dirt raining down around the Capitol.

HN RG1234-71-32



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State-owned Railroad Planned

One of the requirements in the design competition for the third Nebraska State Capitol was fiscal responsibility. Architect Bertram Goodhue proposed building his Capitol in four phases. The first phase, the outer square, was to be built around the old Capitol to save money. The Nebraska Capitol Commission also looked for ways to save money on the project. Rather than transfer equipment, structural material and building stone for the Capitol arriving by rail to horse-drawn wagons or trucks, they determined it would save money to extend a rail line to the site. At the turn of the last century, Lincoln was served by four rail lines, The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific; The Missouri Pacific; The Chicago and North Western; and The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy. In addition, the Lincoln Traction Company operated a street car line within the city.

At its February 11, 1922, Commission meeting, the Nebraska Capitol Commission discussed

proposals from the four railroads to bring freight from the switching yards to the Capitol grounds. In addition, proposals for the movement of excavated soil from the Capitol to the State Fair Grounds were reviewed. The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad presented a proposal to build, at its expense, a rail line from its switching yard east along H Street from 7th to 14th Street and charge the State \$7.50 per car to move material. The other three rail lines joined together to submit a proposal to create a route from 14th and W Street to the Capitol at a cost of \$20.50 per car. It was moved by Mr. Thompson and seconded by Mr. Johnson that the Commission accept the proposal from The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, and direct the Chairman and the Secretary of the Commission to negotiate with the Lincoln City Council to secure a permit for laying tracks along H Street. The motion passed unanimously. The State of Nebraska was about to own and operate a railroad. 🏠



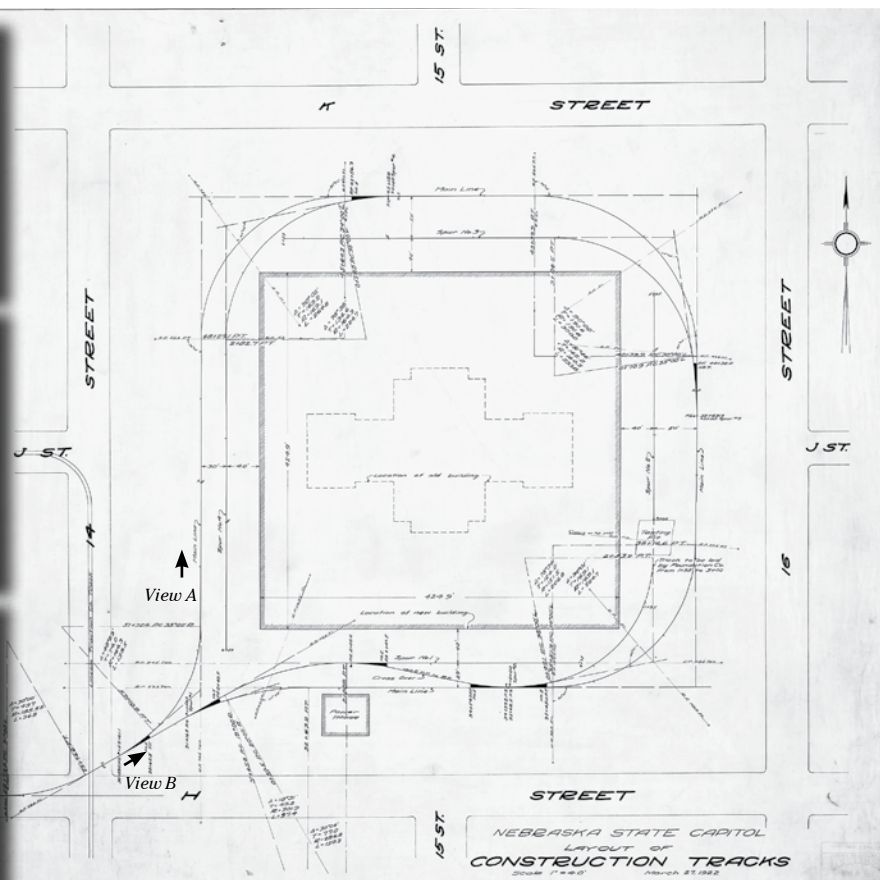
HN RG1234-27-03 View from A



HN RG1234-27-04 View from B




DeFord photo, Nebraska Capitol Collections



Above right, Capitol architect Bertram Goodhue's Capitol site railroad plan from the Nebraska Capitol Collections and above left, History Nebraska photos showing railroad construction. Bottom left, photograph of the railroad tracks near 14th and H Streets.

Foundation Excavation & Construction

The Nebraska Capitol Commission spent the second half of 1921 working with architect Bertram Goodhue to develop plans for the new Capitol. In December of 1921, following the substrata and soil tests, the Commission, with input from Goodhue, hired the engineering firm Jarrett-Chambers Co. of New York to develop the structural engineering plans for the foundation upon which Goodhue would build his Capitol.

With foundation plans ready, on April 14, 1922, one day before Governor Samuel R. McKelvie broke ground for the project, the Capitol Commission awarded the contract for the outer square to The W. J. Assenmacher Company. Mr. Assenmacher assured the Commission the foundation work for the first phase of construction would be completed in six and one half months with horse and man power supplementing the limited machinery of the time. The new Capitol was under construction. 

HN RG1234-70-011



Left, drag lines with scrapers excavated soil from the area that would become the basement. The large scrapers used to excavate and carry soil to the railcars for disposal lacked precision. The work to excavate to the precise floor levels and wall locations was done by smaller horse drawn scrapers and men with shovels. The horse drawn scrapers moved soil to the locations where the cranes could lift the scrapers to transfer soil to the railcars.

HN RG1234-70-016



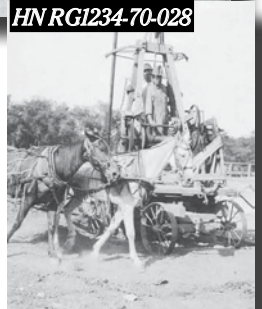
Below, the first concrete of the project is poured. Chutes move concrete from mixers to the piers. Bottom, after the piers were in place, the walls of the basement could be poured. For this large quantity of concrete to be poured, horses moved concrete-loaded wagons around the site. Notice the wagon at the center right edge of the image waiting its turn to unload.

HN RG1234-70-010



Above, engineering plans called for the 600,000 ton building to be built on concrete foundation piers set in the sandstone substrata beneath the site. The sandstone was located 30 to 70 feet below grade in different locations on the 14 acre site. Near the outer wall in the image above, workers hand dug the holes to reach the sandstone and then hand dug the bell-shaped piers 24" deep into the stone. Workers above ground lifted buckets of soil and stone out of the holes using windlasses mounted on wooden frames. Above right, in some instances the pier holes could be dug by horses circling a wagon mounted drilling mechanism.

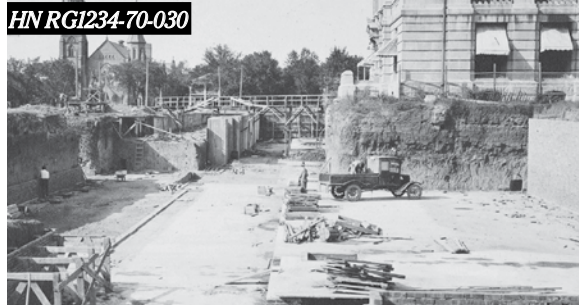
HN RG1234-70-023



HN RG1234-70-026



HN RG1234-70-030



Left, after circling the site clockwise from the northwest, the foundation work moved toward completion in this view to the north from the southwest. During 1st phase construction, office work continued inside the old building. Notice the access bridge for staff, center back of the image.

HN images from the William L. Younkin Albums 70 & 71



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Nebraska Capitol Commission

Nebraska State Capitol
Seventh Floor
1445 K Street
P.O. Box 94696
Lincoln, Nebraska
68509-4696
www.capitol.org
402.471.6691



Capitol Architect
Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, 1869-1924

Preparing for the Cornerstone

HN RG1234-70-040



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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>](mailto:roxanne.smith@nebraska.gov) for more information.

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The coincidence of the end of the World War I, (the Great War, “the war to end all wars”), and the need to build a new Capitol created the opportunity for Nebraskans to honor the sacrifices of the men who fell in service of their country. The Nebraska Capitol Commission scheduled the cornerstone ceremony for the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, Armistice Day, 1922. Because the Great War was still so much on everyone’s mind, a parade of military veterans escorted French General Joseph Joffe to the Capitol for the ceremony.

The photo above shows the nearly completed foundation at the northeast corner just 10 days before the crowd of thousands would assemble to witness the placement of the cornerstone from the second Capitol along side the cornerstone for the new Capitol. 🏛️



Above, the second Capitol's cornerstone laid in 1884.