

THE CAPITOL SOWER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CAPITOL COMMISSION | VOLUME FIFTEEN | NUMBER THREE | AUGUST 2023

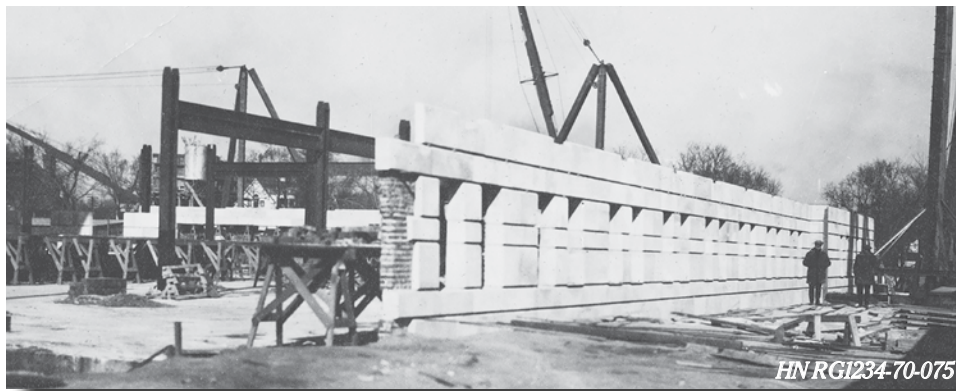
First Phase Construction Begins

During the year following the November 11, 1922 cornerstone ceremony Nebraskans saw Capitol architect Bertram G. Goodhue's monumental building begin to take shape. As contractors worked to build the outer square of the Capitol's base around the existing Capitol, Goodhue and the Nebraska Capitol Commission continued to discuss specifications and bids for the building. The Capitol Commission was concerned with cost and Goodhue was concerned with giving Nebraskans the finest quality building possible.

Bertram Goodhue often traveled to Lincoln in 1923 to attend Commission meetings and discuss his plans. He proposed using the highest quality materials. In his experience, they would best serve the needs of Nebraska and be less expensive over time. To that end he

specified steel beams with concrete to support the brick structure of the building, with Indiana limestone and various marble finishes. Guastavino tile was specified for ceilings, corridors and the interior walls of the Supreme Court and Legislative Chambers.

During the competition Goodhue identified the artists he wanted to decorate the Capitol's interior and exterior. Goodhue had worked with the artists on other projects and knew their skill and how the quality of their work would enhance the Capitol. Hartley Burr Alexander, PhD., worked with Goodhue and the design team to create a synopsis of decoration. Sculptor Lee Lawrie and muralist Hildreth Meiere worked on their designs with guidance from Alexander as he told Nebraska's story. The new Capitol was on its way to becoming a reality. 



In this January 1923 photo, the northeast corner begins to rise. Steel beams were specified for structural support, because they would bear the Capitol's various weight loads better than reinforced concrete. The core walls of Goodhue's Capitol were red clay brick, an exterior facing of Indiana limestone was chosen for color and texture.

Nebraska Capitol Commission Membership

Jim Pillen
Governor, Chairman

John Arch
Speaker of the Legislature
Vice-Chairman

Michael Heavican
Chief Justice
Supreme Court

Kevin Van Den Wymelenberg
Dean
College of Architecture, UNL

Jill Dolberg
Interim Director & CEO
Nebraska State Historical Society

Doug Carey
Congressional District 1

Thomas Sanderson
Congressional District 2

Trent D. Loos
Congressional District 3

Brett Daugherty
Acting Capitol Administrator
Secretary



Beautiful and Durable

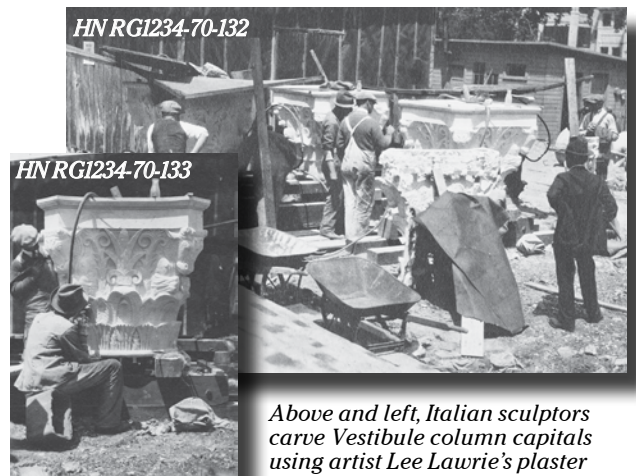
The Statement by the Nebraska Capitol Commission for the “Final Stage of the Competition for the Selection of an Architect to Design and Supervise the Construction of a Capitol for the State of Nebraska” indicated the objective was “to secure for Nebraskans the best Capitol obtainable under present conditions.” As the competition documents written by Thomas Rogers Kimball, FAIA for the Nebraska Capitol Commission indicated, one aim of the competition was to deliver “an inspiring monument worthy of the State for which it stands; a thing of beauty, so conceived and fashioned as to properly record and exploit our civilization, aspirations and patriotism, past, present and future; intelligently designed, durably and conscientiously built, and of worthy materials, and all beautifully and fittingly set, surrounded, embellished and adequately furnished.” Competition winning architect Bertram Goodhue intended to do just that, and despite calls from Commission member and State Engineer George E. Johnson to cut costs whenever possible, Goodhue and then his Associates succeeded in giving Nebraska the best Capitol possible.

Goodhue had built his career designing churches in the Gothic tradition. He had traveled in Europe and the Middle East and seen buildings of stone and marble still in use after hundreds of years. The exterior sculpture and interior decoration of those buildings record the history of the cultures which built them. He planned to provide such a structure for Nebraska. In his thinking, the exterior facade had to be Indiana limestone of the best quality and color, and the most suitable for architectural sculpture. Marble mosaic floors would be durable and artistically and symbolically tell Nebraska’s story. He chose the Guastavino Tile Company to execute the vaults and domes; Guastavino tile was fire resistant, structural, and beautiful. The Nebraska Capitol is seen today as one of the company’s finest achievements. European marble was Goodhue’s choice for columns. Despite the attempt to cut costs by looking domestically, the only marble suitable for the 15 ton Vestibule columns was from Italy, which also supplied stone for the smaller Vestibule and Rotunda columns.

Goodhue collaborated with his long-time sculptural associate Lee Lawrie on the Capitol’s exterior as he created the drawings for the competition. When asked to put the sculpture out for bid, Goodhue refused, indicating his past collaborations with Lawrie and Lawrie’s expertise in architectural sculpture meant the work would be accomplished exactly as intended. Likewise, Goodhue knew that, while young and starting her career, Hildreth Meiere’s artistic training and study in Italy would perfectly suit his vision for the floors and ceilings. With thematic guidance by Hartley Burr Alexander, Ph. D., Meiere created her finest work for Nebraska. Goodhue’s insistence on following the dictates of the competition to create an inspiring monument means every day staff, elected officials and visitors are blessed for having entered the building, as Alexander predicted. 




Above, sections of the exterior limestone facade intended for sculpture were installed as rough blocks. Stages were then built for the sculptors to work, here Solomon and Charlemagne are being carved. The area between the stages holds uncarved blocks awaiting Julius Caesar and Justinian.



Above and left, Italian sculptors carve Vestibule column capitals using artist Lee Lawrie’s plaster maquettes.

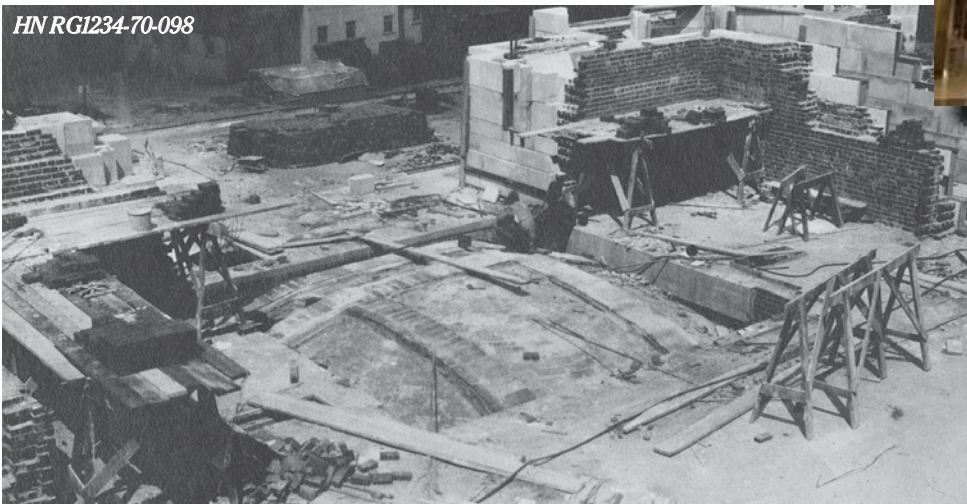
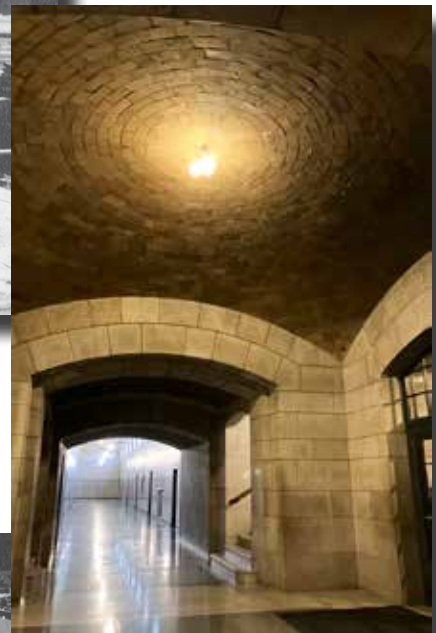
Guastavino Tile

Leaving Spain in 1881, Rafael Guastavino came to the United States to further his career. Educated in Spain as a master builder, in America he was able to showcase his skills as an architect and builder of what would come to be called the Guastavino Dome. He competed for commissions against established American architects, including some who would later compete to design Nebraska's Capitol. Despite losing commissions, his expertise in fire-proof masonry construction was recognized and he was sought out as a consultant and builder on many projects. Early in his career Capitol architect Bertram Goodhue encountered Guastavino's tile domes in Boston and New York. Goodhue quickly realized Guastavino tile would suit his decorative style in the vaults and domes the firm Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson included in the Gothic revival churches they designed. For sound management, Guastavino created Rumford and Akoustolith tile, both used by Goodhue in his early churches and then in Nebraska's Capitol. Their collaboration culminated in the polychromatic tile mosaics created by Hildreth Meiere for Nebraska. As first phase construction was taking place, Guastavino tile was being installed. But the full extent of the use of the beautiful and durable tile would not be seen until the completion of the Capitol in 1932. 



Above, in this August 1923 photo, contractors working on 2nd floor level are installing the 1st floor vestibule's Guastavino dome over a frame. Rafael Guastavino brought the Catalan method of constructing very strong domes and vaults by layering flat tile. The method was less expensive and could be constructed much more quickly than traditional stone construction. One month later viewed from above, photo below, the 1st floor dome was complete with the ribs that would provide support for the concrete and marble 2nd floor entrance and vestibule under construction in this image..

Below, the first floor north Vestibule Guastavino dome as experienced by staff and visitors as they enter the Capitol.



The black and white images in this newsletter are cropped from period photographs taken by William Younkin, Bertram Goodhue's on-site architect. The scrapbooks containing these photographs are in the archives of History Nebraska (HN-1234 Group 70 & 71 Younkin Album).



THE CAPITOL SOWER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CAPITOL COMMISSION | AUGUST 2023

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

County Name Frieze

Capitol architect Bertram Goodhue incorporated many different architectural styles in the design of the Nebraska State Capitol. His intent was to create a new design vocabulary for 20th century architecture. To that end he worked to modernize classical details in the design of the Capitol. Historically buildings were designed with decorative friezes along the top of the facade. Goodhue planned to use that element, but to modernize the decoration he chose the geometry of the letters of Nebraska's 93 counties. He organized the counties aesthetically to provide uniformity and a repeated pattern organizing them based on the number of letters in the county's name.

While the sculptural decoration of the Capitol was carved on site using Lee Lawrie's maquettes, the county names were inscribed in the limestone blocks at the Indiana quarry where they were mined. For ease of installation on

site, every block of limestone on the building was numbered and specifically identified by size and location. That allowed sections of the facade to be assembled, county names carved, then disassembled and shipped to Lincoln for reassembly. All the inscriptions on the Capitol were created in this manner. 



Above, this photo (HN RG1234-70-114) shows the southwest corner of the new Capitol's outer square. County names are visible in the frieze below the cornice. On the corner above the cornice a solid limestone section awaits a relief sculpture of Orestes Before the Areopagites.

Information on the location of county names on the exterior is available at: www.capitol.nebraska.gov/exterior/

Guided Tours are offered Monday-Friday hourly from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except at noon. Saturday and Holidays from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except at noon and Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Please call 402.471.0448 or visit www.capitol.nebraska.gov

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.

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