

# 100 years ago - Finishing the First Phase

Once the J. H. Wiese Company was awarded the contract to construct the first phase of the four-phase (1922 to 1932) construction of the Nebraska State Capitol, work on the outer north and south sections of the base progressed quickly. All through 1923 Lincoln residents and citizens of Nebraska had watched the new building’s walls go up around the second Capitol. By 1924, walls and roofs were being completed and work moved to the interior of the building. During this period, architect Bertram Goodhue and the Nebraska Capitol Commission were reviewing and revising the architect’s initial plans and finalizing interior finishes based on the budget and requests from governmental agencies. As indicated in the competition documents, the project was a collaboration between the architect and the Nebraska Capitol Commission. That collaboration was suddenly disrupted by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue’s tragic and untimely death on April 24, 1924. However grieved the members of the Commission were by Goodhue’s passing, they continued to work with contractors and made decisions regarding building stone, bronze light fixtures, wood door finishes, and plumbing and electrical work. After discussions with the Commission’s Architectural Advisor, Thomas Rogers Kimball and Goodhue’s widow, Lydia Goodhue, Commission members traveled to New York City. On June 25, 1924, they met with Bertram Goodhue’s associates-- Francis L. S. Mayers, Hardie Phillip, and Oscar H. Murray. At that meeting, the Commission and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue Associates, Architects, agreed the reorganized firm would complete the plans and supervise construction of the Nebraska State Capitol. Bertram Goodhue’s vision for Nebraska’s monumental Capitol would be realized. After returning to Lincoln, the Capitol Commissioners resumed their work to see the first phase of construction was completed in time for governmental functions to occupy the outer square of the new Capitol in January of 1925.

MINUTES OF MEETING  
OF THE  
CAPITOL COMMISSION

Meeting of the Capitol Commission was held in the Governor's Office, State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, at 2:00 P. M., Saturday, April 26, 1924.

Members present:

Governor Charles W. Bryan	Lincoln
W. H. Thompson	Grand Island
W. E. Hardy	Lincoln
R. L. Cochran	Lincoln

Pursuant to Notice received per telegram as follows:

\*April 24, 1924

Roy L. Cochran,  
Secretary of the Capitol Commission,  
Lincoln, Nebraska.

Mr. Goodhue died suddenly last night.

Signed: F. L. Mayers\*

a discussion was held by the members of the Commission present with reference to the status of contract between the Capitol Commission and Bertram G. Goodhue; and the progress thus far made with regard to completing plans for the new Capitol. The Secretary was instructed to call Mr. Thos. R. Kimball of Omaha, past Architectural adviser to the Commission, over the telephone, and try and get Mr. Kimball to attend a meeting of the Capitol Commission, if possible, on April 25th. If not possible on that date - then the earliest date possible thereafter.

The Secretary reports the following telegram of sympathy having been sent to Mrs. Goodhue:

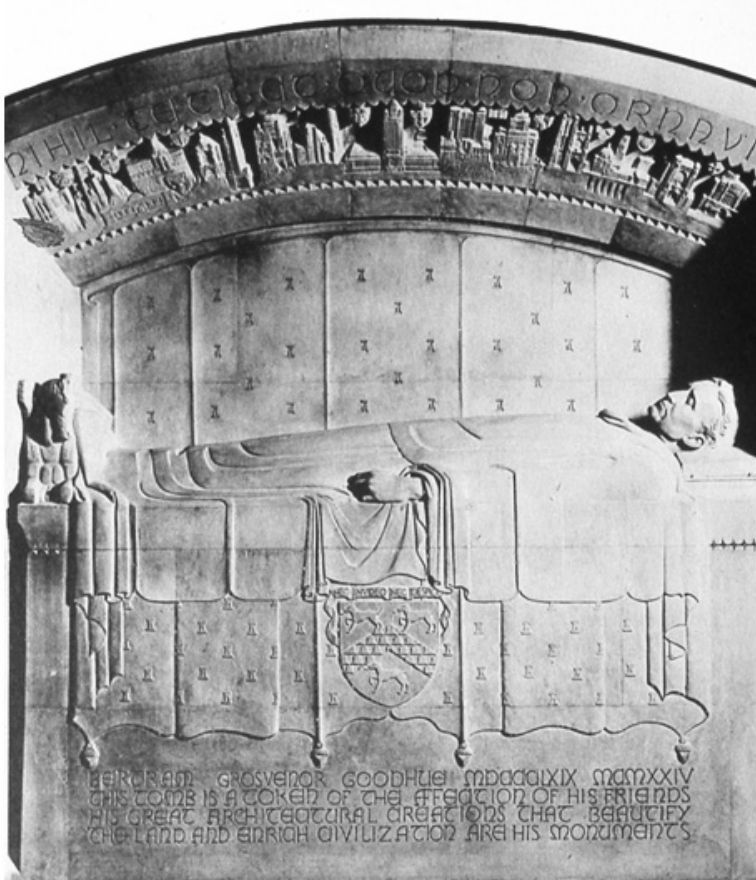
\*Lincoln, Nebraska.  
April 24, 1924.

Mrs. Bertram G. Goodhue,  
#2 West 47th St.,  
New York City.

On behalf of the Nebraska State Capitol Commission, we wish to extend to you our deepest sympathy. In the death of Mr. Goodhue, we feel that the country has lost one of its greatest artists and Nebraska has suffered an irreparable loss of the master mind in the creation of our new Capitol.

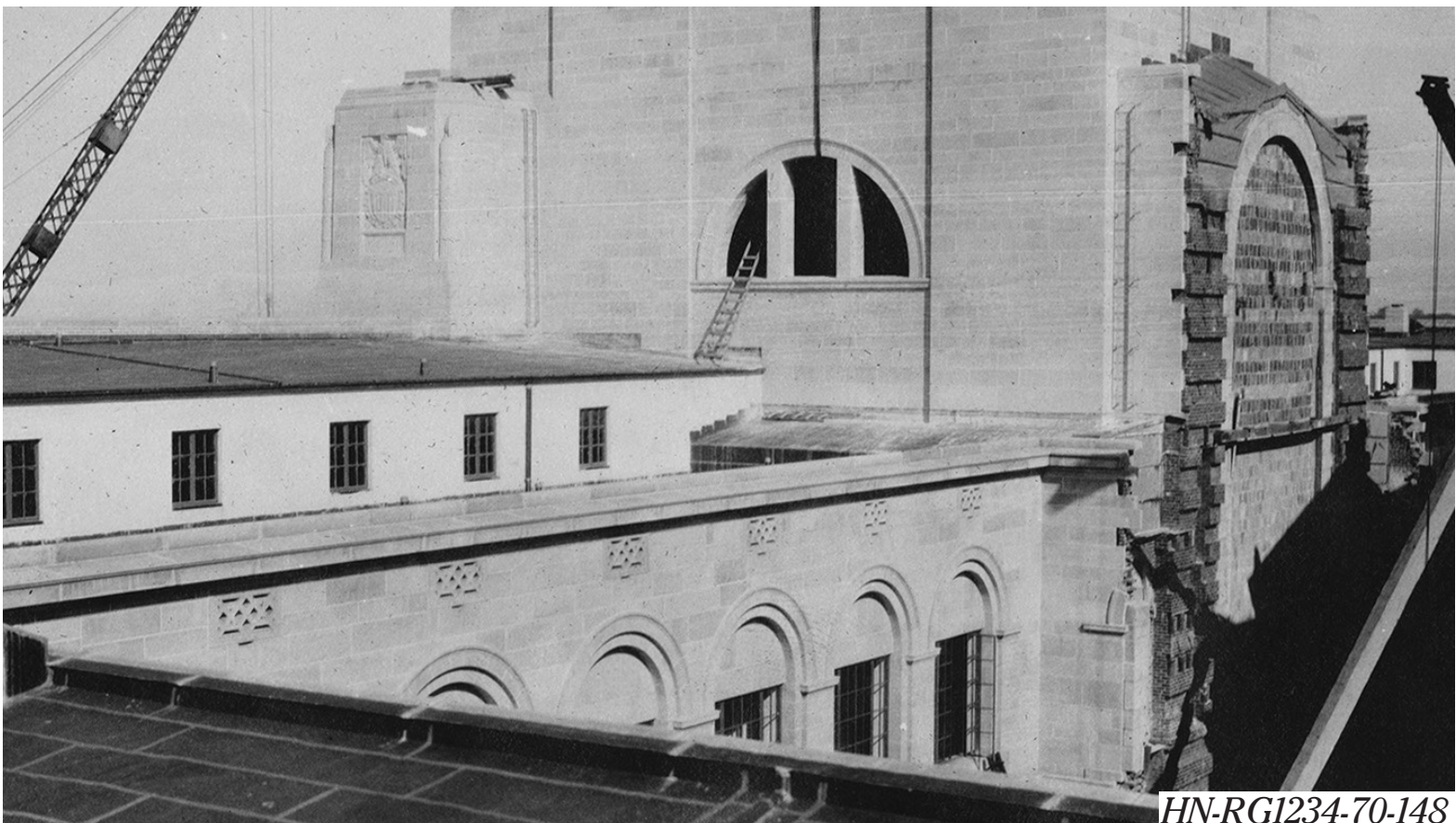
Signed: Governor Charles W. Bryan    Chairman  
R. L. Cochran    Secretary\*

Meeting recessed to the call of the Chairman.



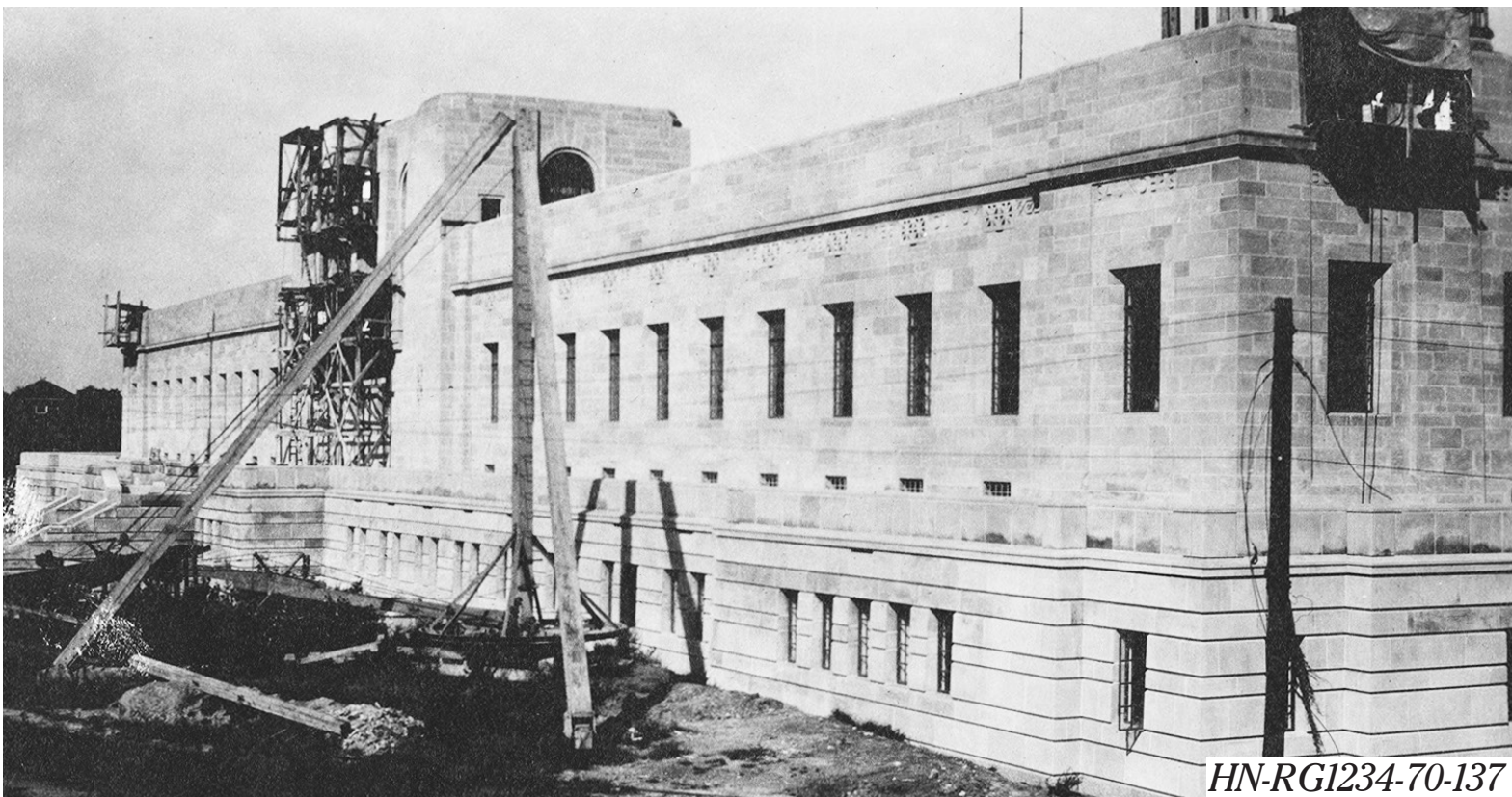
Bertram Goodhue's sudden passing on April 24, 1924, overshadowed the work of the Nebraska Capitol Commission. In the telegram of sympathy to Goodhue's widow, left, the Nebraska Capitol Commission acknowledged Goodhue's artistic greatness and the loss to the nation and Nebraska. Above, carved into the arch of Goodhue's sarcophagus in the Church of the Intercession in New York City, Lee Lawrie placed the Nebraska State Capitol at the apex of Goodhue's most significant buildings. Nebraska's Capitol was, and is, a monument to Goodhue's genius.

In 1924, contractors worked to complete the exterior and waterproof the first phase outer square of the new Capitol. In the photo below, the north Vestibule is enclosed. The ladder leading from the roof to the large arched window indicates the Vestibule windows had yet to be installed. Notice the unfinished wall on the right side of the photo, the south arch opening into the Great Hall was enclosed with clay tile as construction continued, and in anticipation of the demolition of the second Capitol in the coming months.



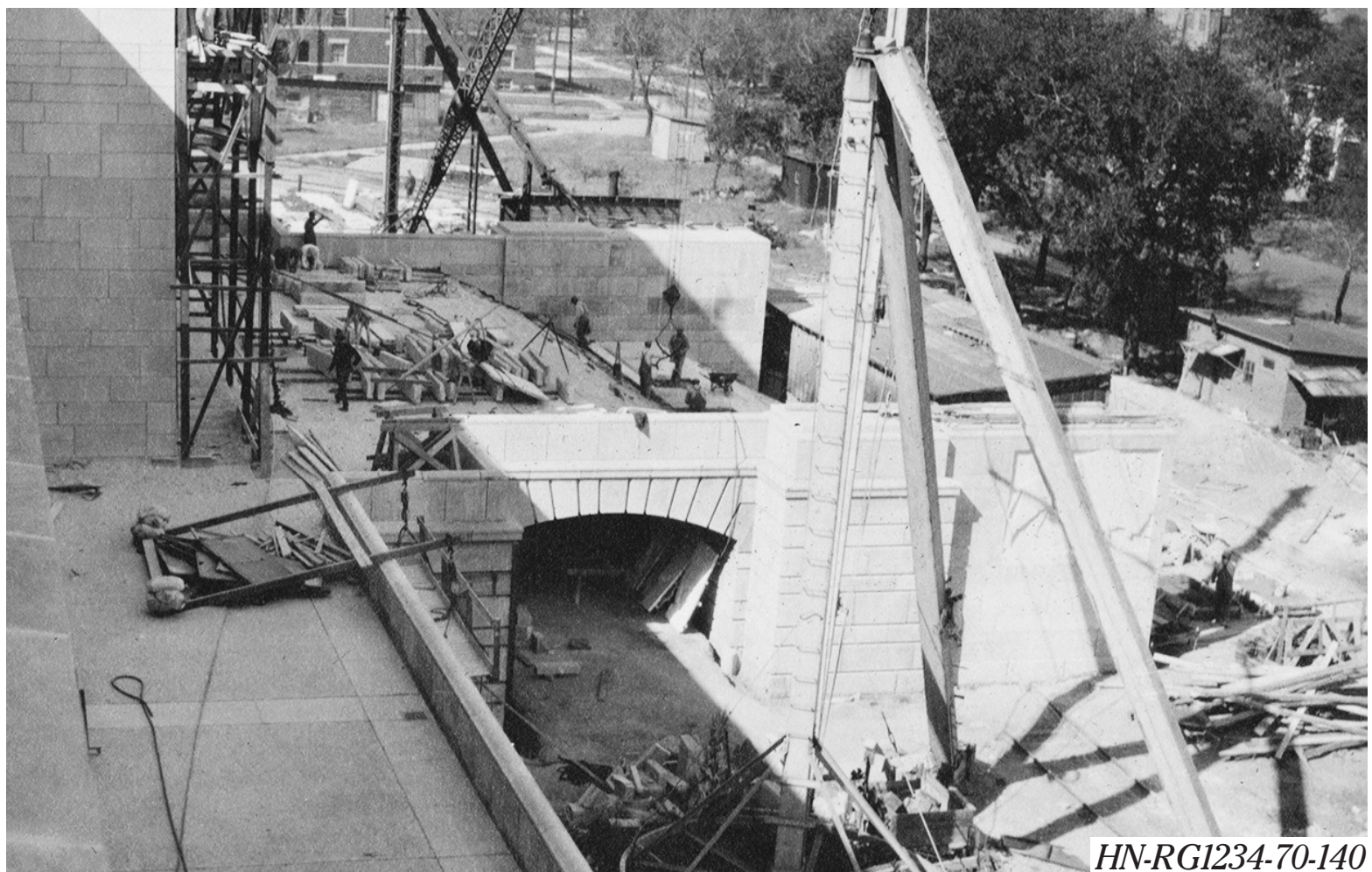
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In the photo of the north side of the new Capitol above, the copper roof is installed, and the windows on the second and third floors are installed. In the photo of the south facade below, the windows on first and second floors are installed, allowing interior spaces to be readied for occupation. Scaffold and hanging scaffold baskets can be seen on the facade. The stonecutters used them to carve Lee Lawrie's relief panels representing the history of government and law into the facade. To the right in the photo, the stonecutters work on the east side of the southeast corner carving a relief representing Milton's call for a free press, they have yet to begin the carving the south side's image of Ethelbert codifying laws for the tribes of Britain. The county names beneath the cornice were carved into the limestone blocks at the quarry in Indiana.



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In the photo below, numerous subcontractors are on site doing various trades. As the stonecarvers work, the granite north steps are being installed and the roof of the first floor, the second level promenade deck, is in place.



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Sculptor Lee Lawrie, with guidance from Goodhue and Capitol Thematic Consultant Hartley Burr Alexander, created the sculptural elements for the Nebraska State Capitol. His working method was to create a clay model in his studio in New York City. Once these models were approved, plaster casts were made and sent to Nebraska. Italian stonecutters chosen by Goodhue used the plaster models to carve the relief and sculptural elements for the building on site. Right, using a plaster maquette for a model, stonecarvers create the capitals for the large Ammonite Rosa Vestibule columns.



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HN-RGI234-70-133

Below, left, a clay model of the small Vestibule column capitals in Lawrie's New York studio, center, a finished marble capital for a column in the Governor's Private Office sits atop a Vestibule capital as they await installation; right, the plaster maquette for the small Vestibule column capitals is now part of the Nebraska Capitol Collections.



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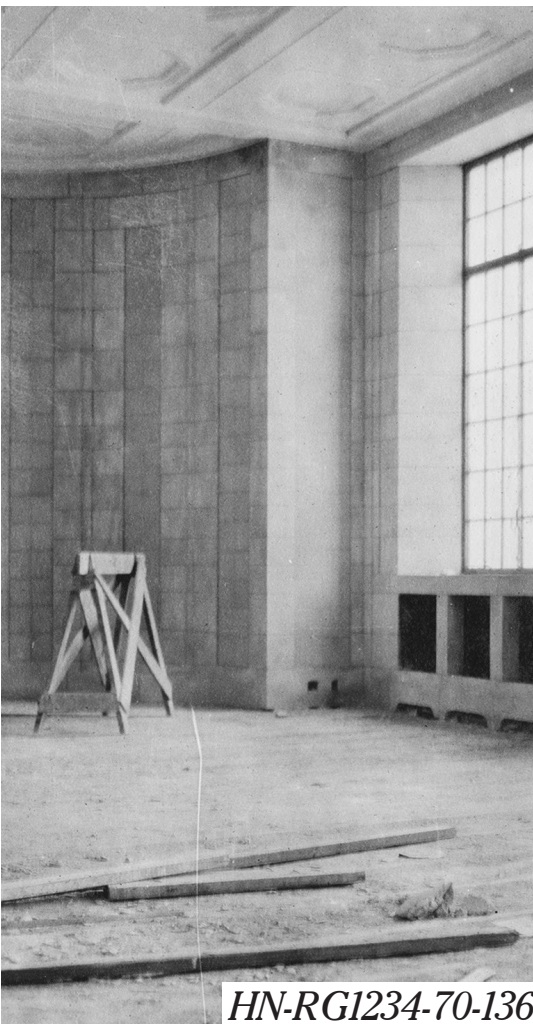


OCC/NCC

The outer square of the Capitol's base houses the Governor's Suite and the Supreme Court. During first phase construction in 1924 these areas were readied for use. The near right photo shows the Judges' bench installed, but the lawyer's bar and lectern is not. In the middle photo, the Governor's Hearing Room is under construction with open radiator cabinets under windows without drapery hardware; the concrete sub-floor is visible. The far right photo shows the Hearing Room almost ready for occupation, the oak plank floor is installed, but the tapestry above the fireplace, the wool rug and the leather chairs are missing.



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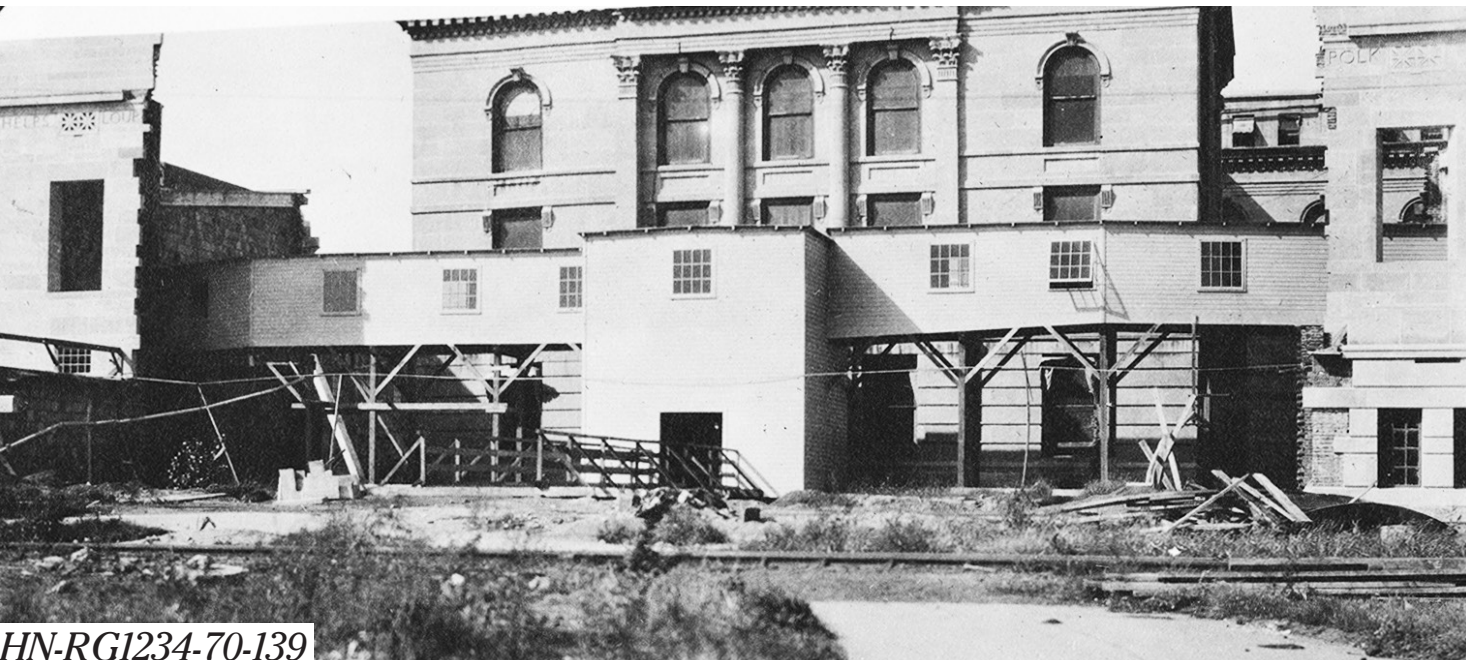


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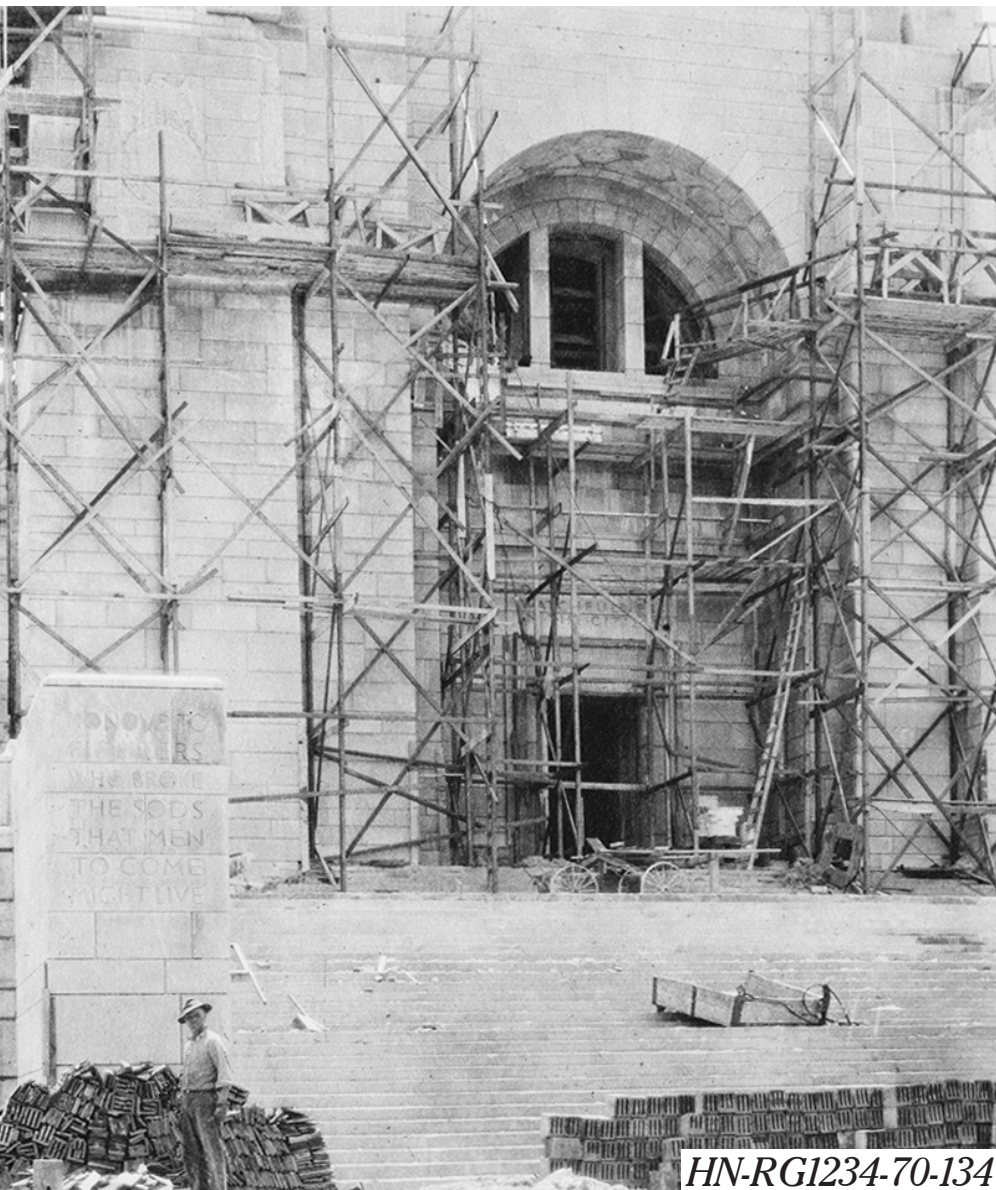
This September 1924, photo shows the temporary covered walkway constructed to allow contractors to move between the north and south sections of the outer square during construction. The elevated walkway remained in place for staff and the public to use once the new sections were occupied in 1925. All during the 1924 construction period, staff watched progress on the new building from the windows of the surrounded second Capitol in the center of the photo.



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HN-RGI234-70-144



HN-RGI234-70-134

Once the walls and roof of the north portal were completed, the next step on the exterior was to carve the relief sculpture. Above left, scaffold provided access to the arch in October of 1924, allowing access to carve the decorative frieze in the arch and to allow access for installation of the large arched windows. Notice the square blocks of stone on the pavilion corners. In the photo on the right, the scaffold has been expanded to allow sculptors access to carve the engaged figures of Wisdom, Justice, Power, and Mercy. The inscription across the top of the wall identifying these figures as "Constant Guardians of the Law" was carved into the limestone blocks at the quarry in Indiana.

These images are cropped from period photographs taken by William Younkin, Bertram Goodhue's on-site architect. The scrapbooks of these photographs are in the archives of the Nebraska State Historical Society (HN-1234 Group 70 & 71 Younkin Album). 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 seeks material associated with the Nebraska State Capitol. For more information about the 100th anniversary of the construction of the Capitol or to donate materials to the Capitol Archive visit: [www.capitol.nebraska.gov](http://www.capitol.nebraska.gov).