

THE CAPITOL SOWER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CAPITOL COMMISSION | VOLUME SEVENTEEN | NUMBER THREE | AUGUST 2025

Commissioners Lead the Way

The selection of an architect and then the construction of Nebraska's new Capitol was overseen by the legislatively-created Nebraska Capitol Commission. By 1925 the first phase of the ten-year, 1922-1932, project was nearing completion. The Commission had hired the Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue Associates to complete the project following the death of Capitol architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue in 1924. With the outer square base of the cross-within-a-square design ready for occupancy, the Commission was making decisions on interior finishes and furnishings and taking bids for the demolition of the still-standing old Capitol and for construction of the second phase of the new Capitol.

Additional decisions regarding heating, plumbing, and electrical work were being made by the Commissioners. There were modifications to the original design scheme including an elevator in the Supreme Court quadrant and the timing of its installation to be discussed. The Commission was meeting at least once a month as they oversaw the entire project. Commission members immersed themselves in every aspect of the project, making decisions ranging from choosing a contractor for phase two, to small details such as door hinges and toilet paper holders.

The citizen members of Nebraska Capitol Commission were the one constant throughout the project. While the Governor and

State Engineer/Secretary of the Commission changed with elections, Walter W. Head, William E. Hardy, and William H. Thompson were there to see the new Capitol built in a fiscally responsible manner while staying true to Goodhue's vision of a monument to inspire Nebraskans to public service and noble life.

Walter W. Head was a banker from Omaha and a national leader in banking and insurance. He served as national president of the Boy Scouts of American for over 20 years, beginning his tenure while serving on the Capitol Commission. William H. Thompson was an attorney in Grand Island who served as mayor and a trustee for Grand Island College. While serving on the Capitol Commission, he was appointed an Associate Justice to the Nebraska Supreme Court, and after his service on the Commission was appointed to fill a vacant seat in the United States Senate. William E. Hardy of Lincoln was president of the Hardy Furniture Company and a director of the Federal Reserve Bank in Omaha. He served the community of Lincoln in many ways and during WWI was chair of the Lancaster County Red Cross. He served as president of the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce. These citizen members, as a team, used their expertise to guide the Nebraska Capitol Commission into Phase Two of Capitol construction and beyond.

Nebraska Capitol Commission Membership

Jim Pillen
Governor, Chairman

John Arch
Speaker of the Legislature
Vice-Chairman

Jeffrey J. Funke
Chief Justice
Supreme Court

Kevin Van Den Wymelenberg
Dean
College of Architecture, UNL

Daryl Bohac
Director & CEO
Nebraska State Historical Society

Doug Carey
Congressional District 1

Jack Wightman, Jr.
Congressional District 2

Katie Spohn
Congressional District 3

Brett Daugherty
Acting Capitol Administrator
Secretary



The Second Capitol Almost Disappears

Phase One of the four-phase construction of Bertram Goodhue's Capitol was completed by 1925, and offices and functions of government were moved from the second Capitol into the outer square of the cross-within-a-square floor plan of the new building. To prepare for Phase Two (construction of the north, south, and east arms of the cross, and center Rotunda), the old Capitol had to be demolished from the center of Phase One's outer square. As the Nebraska Capitol Commission advertised for demolition contractors, they considered several options reflected in the minutes of March 19, 1925. The winning bid, presented by J. H. Wiese Company of Omaha, was accepted on April 1, 1925, with the understanding the Commission would elect which alternative for disposal of materials would suit their needs. The Nebraska Capitol Commission worked with the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture to arrange for the movement of demolition rubble and soil excavated in Phase Two construction to the State Fair Grounds to be used as fill. With that decision, the second Capitol would be gone and buried. The Commission decided on April 28 to keep the black and white floor tile for use in the four Capitol courtyards and to keep the twelve granite columns for a future use. Demolition began on June 1 and was completed by August 1, 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 10:30 A. M., March 19, 1925.

Members present:

Governor Adam McMullen	Lincoln
Walter W. Head	Omaha
R. L. Cochran	Lincoln
Judge W. H. Thompson	Grand Island, after 1:30 P. M.

Also

W. L. Younkin, Clerk of the Works, Lincoln.

Bids were opened, read and tabulated for the demolition of the old Nebraska Capitol, and for the furnishing and erecting of steel shelving for the Supreme Court Library.

For the demolition of the old Capitol, the following bids were received:

J. H. WIESE COMPANY, OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Straight Bid	\$54,500
Alternate #1, Contractor to take all material, deduct	20,000
Alternate #2, Contractor to take all material except Limestone, deduct	12,000
Alternate #3, Contractor to take all material except Marble and slate floors, deduct	19,800
Check No. 747 - Amount	\$7,000.00

W. J. ASSENMACHER COMPANY, LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Straight Bid	\$99,000
Alternate #1, Contractor to take all material, deduct	7,000
Alternate #2, Contractor to take all material except Limestone, deduct	4,000
Alternate #3, Contractor to take all material except Marble and slate floors, deduct	8,000
Check No. 5106 - Amount	\$9,000.00

TRESTER WRECKING COMPANY, LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Would give \$8,158.89 for material in the building.
Check No. 105 - Amount \$818.00.

MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE CAPITOL COMMISSION

Meeting of the Capitol Commission was held in the Governor's office, State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, at 10:30 A. M., April 28, 1925.

Members present:

Governor Adam McMullen	Lincoln
Judge W. H. Thompson	Grand Island
Walter W. Head	Omaha
W. E. Hardy	Lincoln
R. L. Cochran	Lincoln

Also

W. L. Younkin, Clerk of the Works, Lincoln
O. H. Murray New York City.

At a meeting of the Capitol Commission on April 1, 1925, it was decided by the Capitol Commission to accept Alternate #1 of the J. H. Wiese Company which provided for all material to go to the contractor and by the terms of which his figure for wrecking the old building was reduced \$20,000.00. It is now thought that the State should retain the slate and marble from the old building, same to be used in the courts of the new building. In view of this, it was moved by Judge Thompson and seconded by Mr. Cochran that the Commission reconsider their action of April 1st and accept Alternate #3 under the terms of which the slate and marble will be retained by the State and the figure for wrecking will be reduced by \$19,800.00 instead of \$20,000.00, making the total net cost for wrecking the old Capitol \$34,700.00.

On roll call, all members voted in the affirmative.
Motion declared carried.

Mr. Head reported to the Commission that as a result of his conversation with Mr. Wiese, the latter agreed to turn over to the State without charge the twelve granite columns in the old building. It was the sense of the Commission that the disposition of these granite columns be left to the Chairman of the Commission.


(Above left), March 19, 1925, Commission minutes include bids for the demolition of the second Capitol. (Above right), after a month's consideration, at their April 28, 1925, meeting, the Nebraska Capitol Commission determined there were salvageable materials in the old Capitol.



Pink granite columns from the north and south porticoes of the second Capitol were reused by the City of Lincoln, at the Holmes Lake golf course club house (left) and (right) at the Lincoln Children's Zoo. The columns were moved to a storage site after renovations at these two locations.

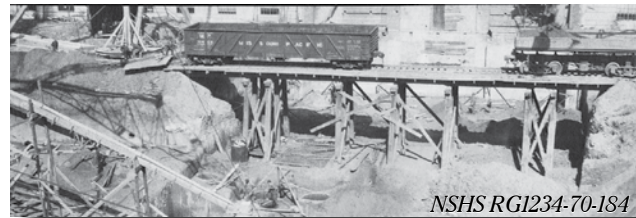


Courtyard Reminders

After the outer square of the new Capitol's cross-within-a-square floor plan was built around the existing second Capitol in 1925, the second Capitol was demolished and rubble removed. The corners that would become the inside courtyards were left alone; areas that would become the basement corridors were excavated. The rail line specially constructed for the movement of materials on and off the construction site was then extended into the now vacant interior of the building site. Workers laid tracks on the unexcavated corner sections and on the trestles constructed to span the north and south basement corridors. Then as foundations and piers were excavated, cranes loaded soil into the rail cars to be hauled away. The corners which would become courtyards remained unexcavated. When excavation was completed, rails coming from the east were removed and basement walls put in place. As the second phase of construction closed the east side of the base, brought the east, north, and south arms of the cross to the center, and built the rotunda, the second Capitol was gone and forgotten. Thoughts of the second Capitol returned in 2016 as the courtyards were excavated for the installation of the fountains intended, but not installed, during original construction. Rubble from the second Capitol was unearthed. 



NSHS RG1234-70-171



NSHS RG1234-70-184

(Left) the second Capitol is gone and excavation has begun. Rubble from demolition can be seen littering the ground.

(Above) To gain access to interior excavation and construction, rails were laid on the ground and on trestles over the excavated areas that would eventually become basement corridors. Rail cars carried excavated soil off site.

Looking to the northwest in the photo on the right, the concrete forms for the north and west basement corridor walls can be seen through the legs of derricks used in construction. On the right side of the image a temporary masonry wall encloses the arch between the Vestibule and Foyer, which will eventually be constructed into the center. The unexcavated area in the corner will become the northwest courtyard.



NSHS RG1234-70-185



During the installation of the courtyard fountains in 2016, contractors excavating the plumbing vaults came upon stone rubble. Upon investigation, (left) Capitol Preservation Architects realized the stone debris, including carved stone, (right), was from the second Capitol.



NSHS images from the William L. Younkin Album 70 Nebraska State Historical Society



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Capitol Architect
Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, 1869-1924

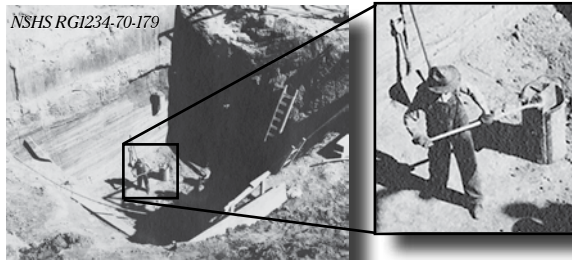
Digging Deeper

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.

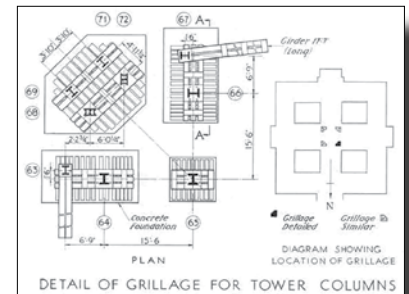
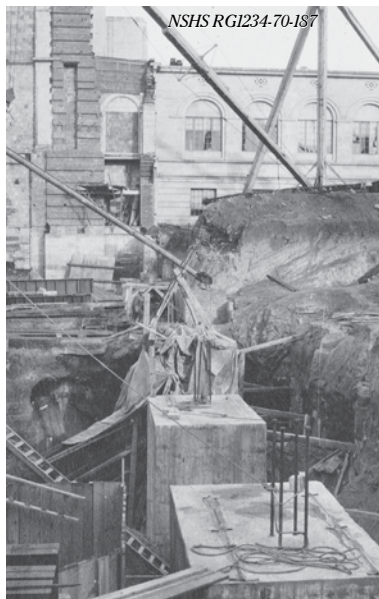
The Capitol Sower, published by the Office of the Capitol Commission, is available online at www.capitol.org. Contact the Tourism Supervisor at [<roxanne.smith@nebraska.gov>](mailto:roxanne.smith@nebraska.gov) for more information.

Please contact us if you have any questions or comments about the content.

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The piers for the tower were one of the first things excavated once the second Capitol was removed. The 40-foot-deep tower piers were dug with a combination of machine and, (above), manpower. Once the excavation work had reached bedrock, the concrete piers were poured, (below).



The structural framework of the tower is composed of four steel legs. Each leg stands on four reinforced concrete piers (diagram above and photo below left). The weight of the tower is transferred from the tower legs onto the piers via steel beam grillage. After the poured concrete piers were set into bedrock, the steel frame grillage, (circled below), was installed on top.

