

A CAPITAL FIGHT

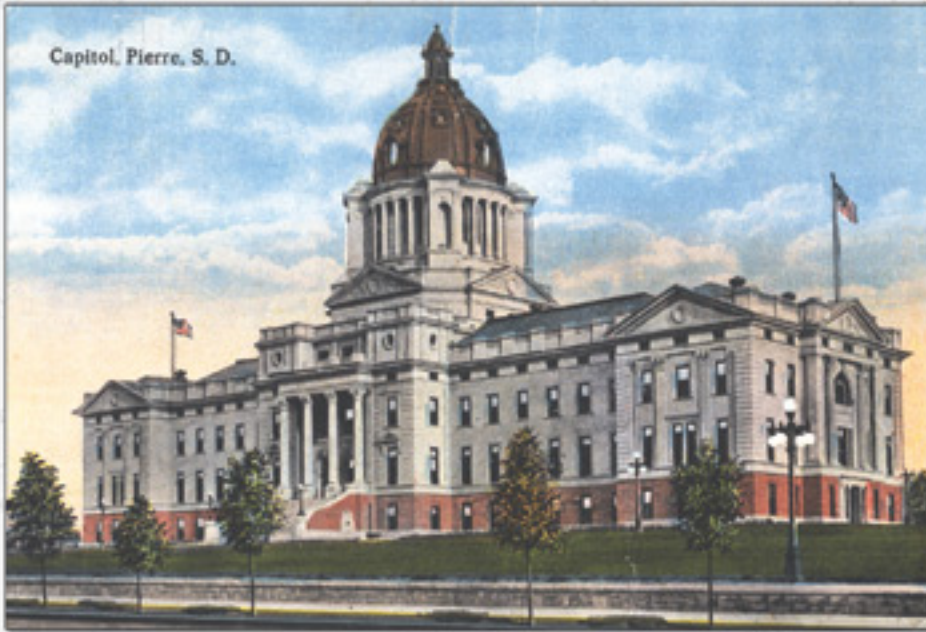
CHOOSING SOUTH DAKOTA'S

CAPITAL CITY



A CAPITAL CHOICE

South Dakota needed a permanent seat of government. Being the capital city brought money, people, and prestige to a community. Several towns including Pierre, Huron, Mitchell, Sioux Falls, and Watertown fought for that honor.



The people voted three times for the capital and cities fought hard and dirty to win votes. Pierre won all three state capital elections.



Communities did not enter the capital fight lightly. The fight brought long-term debt, hard feelings between towns, and involved more than a few underhanded deals. This exhibit examines how South Dakotans chose their capital – the players, the fights, and the outcome. Did they choose wisely?



On June 25, 1908, the granite cornerstone went in. Also a time capsule, the cornerstone holds coins, newspapers, and photographs.



The Capitol celebrates its centennial in June of 2010.



DAKOTA TERRITORY

Governor's Choice

Dakota Territory officially organized in 1861. President Abraham Lincoln appointed his family doctor, William Jayne, as first governor. Jayne picked Yankton to be capital city in 1862.



Yankton became Dakota Territory's first capital in 1862.



William Jayne had no political experience when he became governor. Lincoln and other politicians commonly gave friends and family jobs.



John B. S. Todd was one of Yankton's founders. A cousin of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, Todd likely used his personal connections to gain Yankton the capital.



Organizing the territory became Governor Jayne's first task in June 1861. He ordered a census and established judicial and legislative districts. The first territorial legislature of nine councilmen and thirteen representatives met in March 1862.



The first Dakota Territorial Legislature passed 91 general laws and 25 special laws, including two divorces.

Politics got personal in Dakota Territory. When House Speaker George Pinney voted the "wrong" way, opponents threatened to toss him out the window. Pinney appealed to the governor who stationed troops in the House chamber. Pinney resigned as Speaker, but did not escape his fate. He was tossed out the window of a local saloon.

TERRITORIAL CAPITAL

Fighting for the Capital

The Dakota Territorial Legislature took up the capital's location at its first meeting in 1862. The debate got lively. One observer wrote, "a little blood was shed, much whiskey drank, a few eyes blacked, revolvers drawn and some running done."



Vermillion and Bon Homme fought for the capital. Vermillion settled for a university. Bon Homme never did get the penitentiary it was promised.



At a dinner party, Vermillion capital supporter John Boyle threw a catsup bottle at Yankton supporter Enos Stutsman. Stutsman tossed a volley of tumblers, cups, and chicken bones. Both were ready with fists, but friends intervened. The two shook hands once they cooled off.



Wall clock from the original capitol building, 1862.



Seven territorial governors worked in Yankton during its 22-year tenure as capital. Being capital paid since most government funds for the territory were spent locally. Yankton politicians and businessmen dominated territorial politics for years.



This 2-story wooden building served as the territorial capitol for 22 years.

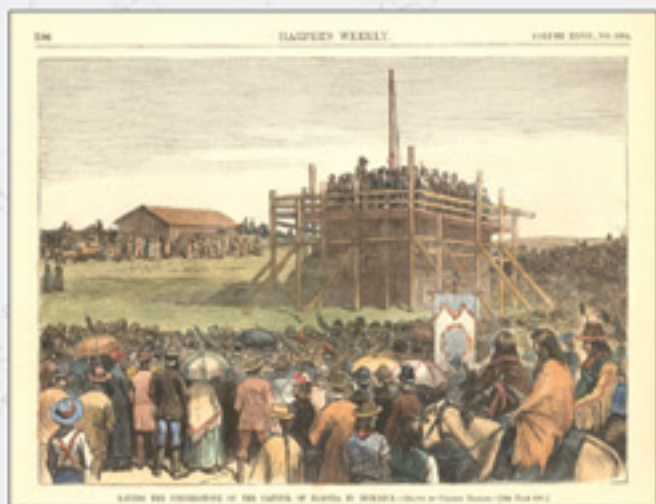


Third territorial governor Andrew Faulk received this quilled deerskin vest as a gift, 1867.

THE CAPITAL MOVES NORTH



In the 1880's, Dakota Territory's population boomed, especially in the north. Relocating the capital made sense. In 1883, Governor Nehemiah G. Ordway appointed a nine-member commission to find a new capital site.



Construction on the Territorial Capitol in Bismarck began in September, 1883.



The Territorial Capitol later served as North Dakota's State Capitol shown here ca. 1883.

Eleven locations vied for the capital. One hopeful town existed only on paper, and two others each had a single building. Bismarck, Odessa, and Steele put in bids. Aberdeen, Pierre, Mitchell, Redfield, Canton, Frankfort, Huron, and Ordway also tried for the prize. The commissioners chose Bismarck in June 1883.



Dubbed "The Capital on Wheels," commissioners visited eleven locations.

Yankton fought the move. A legal order argued that the legislature could not delegate the power to choose a capital site.

The lawman yawned. He could barely stay awake watching the road into Yankton. That would change if the capital commissioners showed up. The legal papers stopping their work crackled in his pocket – just let them try moving the capital. Down the block, an early-morning train rolled in. Only one car behind the engine – that was odd. The lawman frowned – why was it stopping? Within minutes, the train sped on. In the passenger car, the commissioners congratulated their newly elected officers. The law required they organize in Yankton – and they had.

STATEHOOD!

Split down the middle

With populations both north and south of the 46th parallel, Dakota Territory seemed destined to split. In 1885, the southern counties set up a squatter state government for South Dakota. They elected officers and named Huron state capital. None of this was legal without approval from Congress.



Constitutional Conventions in Sioux Falls in 1883, 1885, and 1889 laid the groundwork for statehood. Pictured here are the 1883 delegates.



Faulk County chose their delegate to the 1883 State Constitutional Convention with this ballot box.



This gavel was used at all three Constitutional Convention gatherings.



Congress passed the Enabling Act in 1889. The act officially set up Montana, Washington, North and South Dakota for statehood. All four entered the Union that year.



President Harrison used this pen to sign the 1889 Enabling Act.

President Harrison chuckled. The looks on the faces of the officials around the desk was priceless. Shock, giving way to rueful laughter. Tucking those statehood papers for North and South Dakota under a blank sheet and shuffling them before signing had been inspired. Both were worthy states, sisters in many ways. One was 39th and one was 40th into the Union, but no one would ever know which was which. The Union's first "twins" had been born November 2, 1889.

TEMPORARY CAPITAL 1889

Choosing a site as temporary state capital was the first order of business for the new state legislature. Seven cities sat at the table as serious players in the game. Pierre, Aberdeen, Redfield, Mitchell, Huron, Watertown, and Sioux Falls all wanted the prize. Aberdeen and Redfield only stayed in the game for a few hands. Redfield withdrew and supported Huron.



Pick Watertown!

Watertown held a strong hand in its capital bid. The city had more people than either Pierre or Huron. Eight rail lines made Watertown accessible. Businesses boomed, and eastern money flowed into town. The city had the hotels and meeting spaces state government needed.



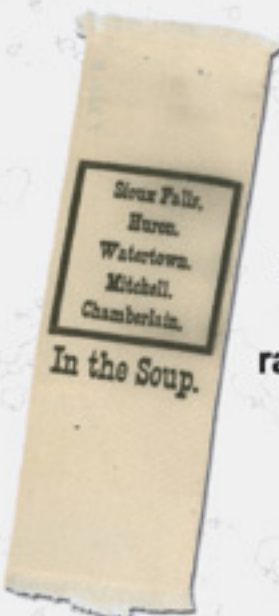
Watertown for the Capital.

Pick Sioux Falls!

Sioux Falls, the big player from the southeast, thought being the state's largest city gave it an edge in the game. People were used to looking to Sioux Falls for goods and services. The city could easily absorb any growth the capital brought.



Sioux Falls
FOR THE
TEMPORARY
CAPITAL.



Pick Mitchell!

Mitchell held a powerful hand in the game, too. Located in the state's most populated region, the town had good railroad connections. Mitchell boasted two large public halls – plenty of space for state government to work.

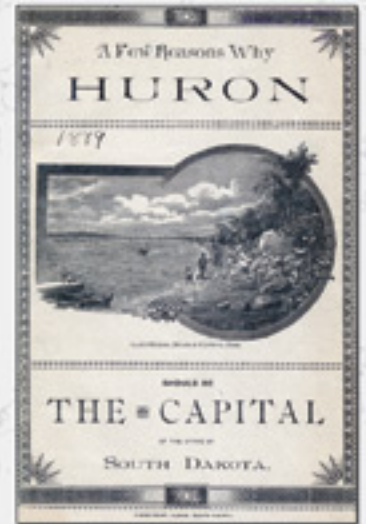
TEMPORARY CAPITAL 1889

What started as a game between seven players became a two-city battle as Pierre and Huron forced the others out. Huron had been the squatter state capital between 1885 and 1889. Being the “tentative capital of a tentative state” had given Huron a taste of what being the capital could mean. The city fought hard for the prize. Pierre proved just as tough a player.

Pick Huron!



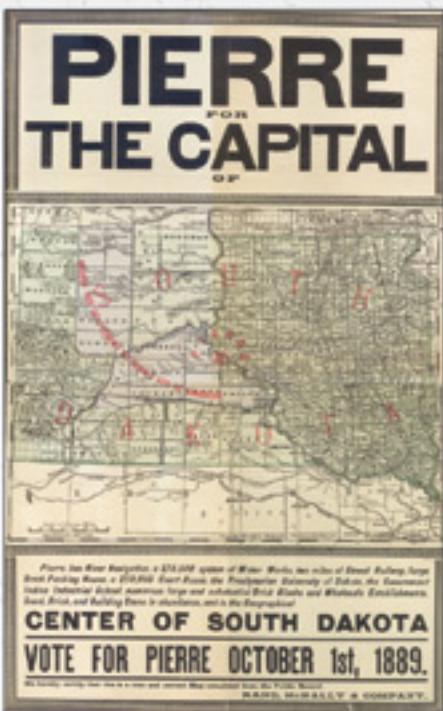
Huron had excellent railroad connections. Promoters claimed Huronites reached 73 towns without changing trains. Pierre residents could only get to 28 towns without switching trains.



Pierre Wins

Pierre won the 1889 capital game. Its location in the middle of the state drew support from east and west. The Missouri flowed by with steamboat traffic. The Chicago and North Western rail line served Pierre. Opening reservation land promised new growth.

Coe I. Crawford of Pierre, is a visitor in Rapid City. He has visited Custer, Hot Springs, Buffalo Gap, and Hill City, and goes from here to Deadwood. While here he is feeling the popular pulse and learning what he can of the sentiment with regard to the capital location. He has found thus far that the people he has met in the Hills are favorably inclined towards Pierre.



Huron tried to trump Pierre's strong location card by claiming the land west of the Missouri would never be as populated as east river. Their location put them closer to more people – and made Huron a better capital choice. Black Hills residents disagreed.

Pick . . . Harrison?

Hand County.
ST. LAWRENCE, Oct. 1, St. Lawrence township for prohibition, 136; against, 33; for minority, 59; against, 93. Huron, 59; Pierre, 73; Sioux Falls 11; Harrison, 9. The entire republican ticket carries with a good two-thirds majority. Harrison is still in the race for permanent capital.

Watertown threw a wild card into the game. To fracture Pierre/Huron support, Watertown promoted “Harrison” – a non-existent town in Hand County – for capital. Hand County merchants spread the word about Harrison's prospects, not realizing they were pawns in a bigger game. Harrison actually won votes in the capital election.

CAPITAL CITY PIERRE

Pierre's victory in the October 2, 1889, capital election enraged Huron. Charges of bribery and other shenanigans flew. None of the game players had spotless records. One citizen noted, "To say that it was a campaign of wholesale corruption of voters is to put the matter in its mildest form."

Election results, October 2, 1889:

Pierre	Huron	Watertown	Sioux Falls	Mitchell	Chamberlain	Harrison
27,096	14,944	11,970	11,763	7,516	2,414	9



Constructing a capitol became the first order of business after the election. The railroad donated the grounds. A two-story wooden building went up to hold legislative chambers and government offices.



Prior to the Capitol construction, House members met in the County Courthouse, center. Pierre, 1892.



Legislators' desk from the original capitol.

The Senator's brow furrowed. He couldn't hear his colleague at the podium at all. Those 124 House members in the upstairs chamber stomped like buffalo. The Senate had requested House members go barefoot to quiet things down below. House members voted to install carpet instead. The Senator sighed. That carpet would have to be rolled back for the dance on Saturday. At least the legislature was under one roof now. It beat having the Senate gather in the Congregational Church while the House met down the street at the courthouse.

PERMANENT CAPITAL 1890

South Dakotans voted in 1890 for the permanent state capital site. The capital would be chosen by majority vote so it was vital that only two towns be in the race. A three-way race could split the vote so no contender won a majority. If that happened, the capital stayed in Pierre for at least two more years. East-river towns chose Huron to oppose Pierre.



Both cities fought hard and dirty. Money flowed into dubious schemes and directly into the pockets of voters. Pierre sold \$30,000 worth of bonds on a \$5,000 city park. Huron sold the town's water plant, fire hydrants, and water mains for \$45,000.

Editors Interviewed

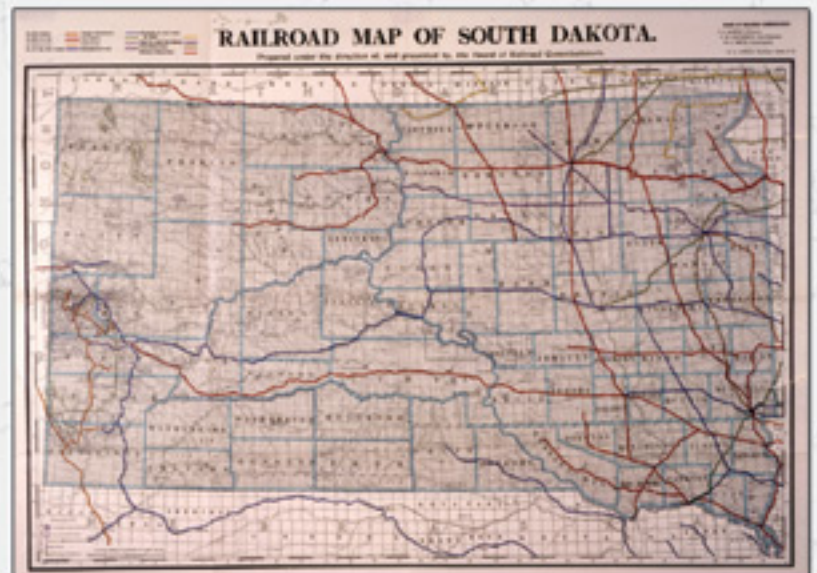
Our reporter this morning interviewed about one half of the editors, who crossed the reservation, whose opinion in their own language we give below...

J.W. Pansley, Herald, Roscoe: "I am happily surprised with the reservation. I expected to see barren wilderness, but saw instead a reasonably good country - certainly a paradise for stock men."

J.E. Hippie, Advance, Parkston: "It is a great deal better stock country than I had any idea. I think it will ultimately produce a great deal for the state."

The trip was a continual round of pleasure. Thanks to the commander in chief McClure and other citizens of Pierre and other officers of the association.

Pierre took the state's newspaper editors on an excursion from Pierre to Rapid City. Thirty carriages made the trek. Wagons hauled tents, mattresses, luggage - and ice for drinks. Pierre hoped showing off west-river country and its potential would swing newspaper support Pierre's way.



WOLSEY FOR CAPITAL!

Pierre may have enticed Wolsey to join the fray at the last minute. Pierre denied having anything to do with Wolsey's bid.

The New Candidate.

A Brief Statement of Facts. The Interests of The People Consulted.

Wolsey The Winner.

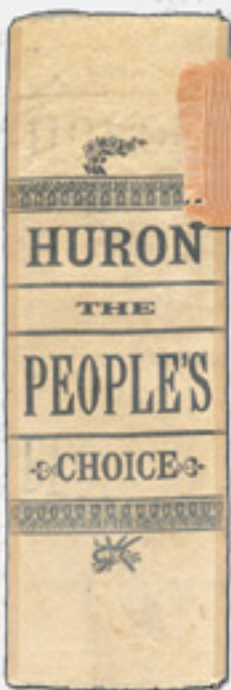
A Million Dollars For The Taxpayers. A Central Location and Excellent Railway Facilities.

THE BEST WAY TO PAY OFF OUR STATE DEBT.

PERMANENT CAPITAL 1890

Both Pierre and Huron had no qualms about skirting the law in the 1890 capital fight. Campaign workers on both sides openly bought votes.

They covered bets and bought drinks. Newspapers endorsed the side that paid the most. Winning meant everything and nothing short of murder seemed too low.



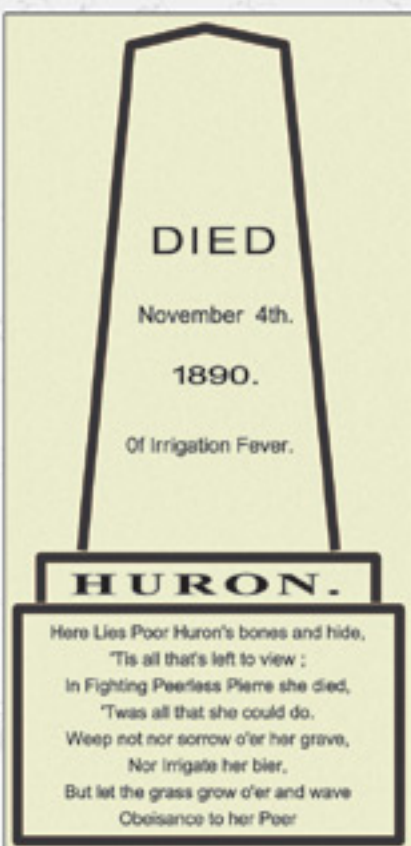
HURON FOR PERMANENT CAPITAL.

Huron issued script money, redeemable at face value only if Huron won. The Rapid City Journal wrote, "It is considered a big joke here and the people of the Black Hills would be chumps to take it."

Both sides denied stuffing ballot boxes but Pierre prepared just in case. Voting registers and ballots were filled out with names from St. Paul, MN, for Precinct 17 north of Pierre – where no one lived. The phony ballots were not cast.



Watertown joined the 1890 race briefly. Rumor had it that Huron paid Watertown \$30,000 to drop out, but no evidence ever surfaced.



On Election Day, Pierre's 41,000 votes easily beat Huron's 34,000. The loser immediately cried foul and accused Pierre of rigging the vote. Huron's daily newspaper even refused to print election returns.



Pierre, ca 1890.

FINAL CAPITAL FIGHT 1904

The 1890 election was supposed to settle the capital location issue. Politics dictated otherwise. Several bills to relocate the capital came before the state legislature between 1895 and 1902. None passed. In 1904, the issue heated up and Mitchell became Pierre's opponent for the final capital fight.



Pierre and Mitchell entertained visitors with speeches and band concerts. Mitchell brought John Philip Sousa's band to the Corn Palace for six days.



To sway voters, the rival railroads offered free tickets. Nearly 100,000 South Dakotans enjoyed free rides to Pierre and Mitchell.



Pierre Wins Again

In the 1904 election, South Dakotans once again gave Pierre a win with 58,617 votes over Mitchell's 41,155. The fight for the capital was finally over.

A GRAND BUILDING

New Building

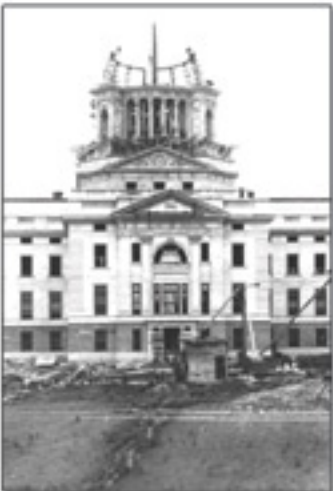
With the capital location settled – *really* settled – planning began for a new capitol. The 1890 wooden building had never met all the state government needs. In 1905, Governor Herreid said, “South Dakota needs a new state house, fireproof, commodious and in harmony with its progress and prosperity.” It was time to build on a grand scale.



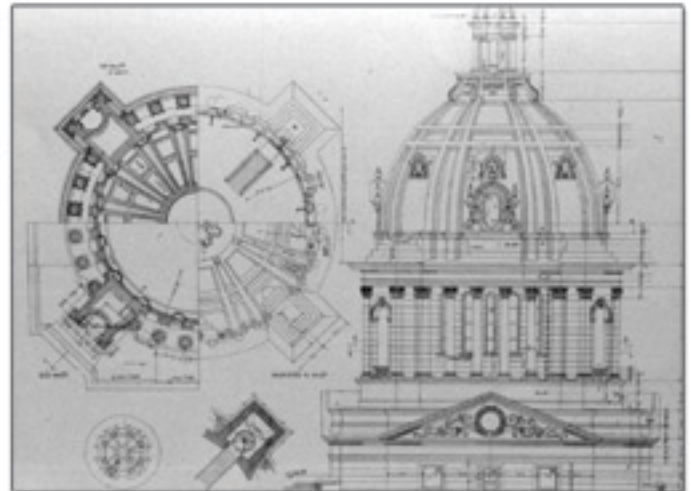
When completed, the capitol used:
cut stone – 70,000 tons
bricks – 3 million
cement – 10,000 barrels
steel & iron – 400 tons
copper – 40,000 pounds
plaster – 25,000 square yards
mosaic floors – 30,000 square feet
marble work – 25,000 feet
hardwood floors – 60,000 square feet
ornamental plaster work - \$18,000

Construction proceeded slowly. The granite time capsule cornerstone went in with great ceremony on June 25, 1908. The stone holds coins, newspapers, architect's drawings, and photos.

Architects C. E. Bell and M. S. Detweiler of Minneapolis designed the new capitol. They had done Montana's capitol before and used it as a model for South Dakota's project.



Built to fit the capitol's exterior dimensions, the outside copper dome is taller than its stained glass interior. Inside, the dome soars 96 feet above the tiled floor.

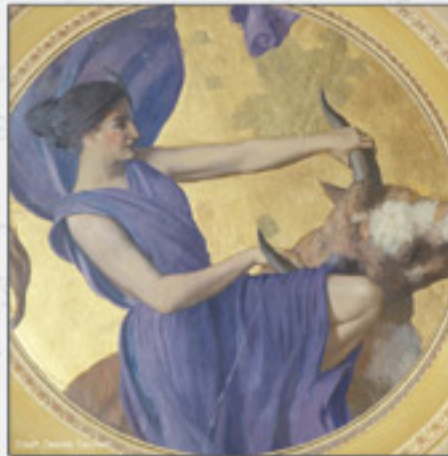
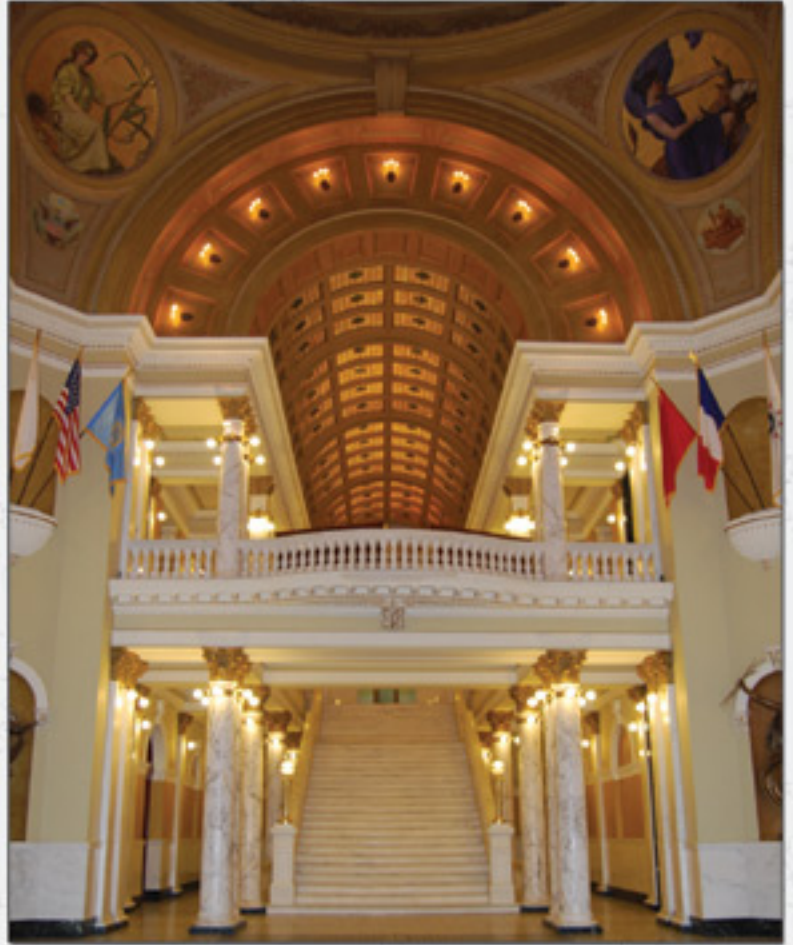


A GRAND BUILDING

The capitol's interior matched its grand exterior. A white marble staircase led visitors to the second floor. Soaring columns, ornate plaster and woodwork, mosaic floors, and stained glass made the building a showplace.



Scagliola columns line the rotunda and senate chamber. Cement embedded with marble dust and dyed yarn went around the concrete pillars. Polished, the columns look like real marble.



Paintings and sculpture adorn the Capitol. Mount Rushmore sculptor Gutzon Borglum made the bronze bust of Peter Norbeck.



He stretched and wiped the sweat from his eyes. Three others laid tile not far away. He could hear their Italian chatter as they quickly placed the small glass pieces. Had they already laid their signature tiles in the mosaic? With over 30,000 square feet of tiled floor, the sixty-six signature pieces would be hard to spot. He wanted to find the perfect place for the bright blue tile resting in his pocket. It would be his mark on this magnificent South Dakota building forever.

A PROUD LEGACY

Restoration

In 1975, restoration work started on the capitol. Original paint colors went back on the walls. Painted details and murals came to light once more. Tile floors, stained glass and woodwork were brought back to their original beauty. The building's facelift was completed for South Dakota's centennial celebration in 1989.

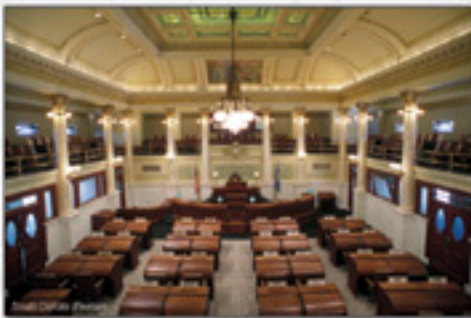


Over the years, the capitol was updated and modernized. More offices were created by adding walls. Fluorescent lights went in. Ornate decoration disappeared under coats of paint.



Historically accurate renovation brought back the capitol's original beauty.

South Dakota's capitol continues to serve as an office building and a showplace. Governor Coe I. Crawford's words at the laying of the cornerstone still ring true: "The new capitol will stand throughout the coming years as an expression of beauty and art. As the people come and go and linger within its walls, they will see in it an expression of the soul of the state."



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