

South Dakotans wish our state Capitol a happy 100th

Author: Becker, BryAnn

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Abstract: First of all, there are a lot of buildings in South Dakota that are 100 years old. Students lie in the middle of the rotunda floor and gaze up 96 feet to the rotunda, and another 65 feet to the top of dome, while Mickelson gives a history lesson.

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Full text: Beneath the dome of the South Dakota Capitol building is a capsule of history and a fair amount of artistry.

Think brushstrokes on murals, terrazzo Italian tiles and bronze sculptures.

Bills have been passed and history has been made in the House and Senate chambers. Twenty-five governors have been in office since it was completed.

Visitors from near and far have climbed the grand staircase. Many have gazed in awe at the Capitol Rotunda's architecture.

The initial structure was completed in 1910 and formally dedicated June 30, 1910. South Dakotans will celebrate the Capitol's centennial Saturday in Pierre.

The centennial is a time to remember the accomplishments of those who have taken care of the Capitol building, says Gov. Mike Rounds in an e-mail last week.

"This Capitol building is a gift from people who wanted to be sure there was a permanent place for people to come and make decisions about the future," he wrote.

The Capitol Rededication Ceremony will include elements of the 1910 dedication. Gov. Rounds will speak. As at the original dedication, members of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows will speak and rededicate the building for the next 100 years, and the Army National Guard Band will perform.

The centennial is a chance for many South Dakotans to view the Capitol for the first time, says John Moisan, a Pierre resident who is co-chair of the Capitol Centennial Committee.

"First of all, there are a lot of buildings in South Dakota that are 100 years old. But I daresay that there aren't any in the condition that the state Capitol is in." Moisan was part of the renovation of the Capitol building in the 1970s and 1980s.

The centennial is a celebration of both the past and the future, says Mike Mueller, co-chair of the Capitol Centennial Committee.

"There's so much going on in the building - I mean that literally and figuratively. The building itself is full of art and architecture and politics and history.

"It has all of those aspects of a building that are so neat to our history and to our way of life. It's been restored and now maintained to its original beauty and grandeur. We look forward to doing that again for another 100 years. There's no foreseeable end of life for that building."

Reach reporter BryAnn Becker at 977-3908.

CAPITOL MEMORIES

Gov. Mike Rounds

"When I was a kid growing up in Pierre, the Capitol grounds were almost like a park to us. They were always green and well-kept. We used to play football after school next to Capitol Lake, where the Visitor Center is right now. It was a perfect, natural football field at the time. I also remember many times this was the place where we'd come and play hide-and-go-seek, in and around the Capitol. And a lot of the junior high kids would hang

out by the short wall along the sidewalk in front of the Capitol."

Jay Mickelson

Under the dome in the Capitol Rotunda, four paintings feature the Greek goddesses Cupid, Ceres, Minerva and Europa. They symbolize the major interests of South Dakota - agriculture; livestock; wisdom, industry and mining; state; and family.

High school Latin and mythology teacher Jay Mickelson knows the history goes back farther than just notes of industry. "These are classical representations," he says.

Mickelson takes his students to the Capitol Rotunda to learn about classical Roman art and architecture.

Students lie in the middle of the rotunda floor and gaze up 96 feet to the rotunda, and another 65 feet to the top of dome, while Mickelson gives a history lesson.

He's been taking students to the Capitol for 30 years.

"I wanted to make that connection to Roman classical art and architecture and get them to appreciate that," he says.

Mickelson, 62, teaches Latin, German and classical mythology and ancient drama at T. F. Riggs High School.

Dusty Johnson

Dusty Johnson got a dose of lobbying in 1995, during his senior year at T.F. Riggs High School in Pierre. The state legislature had decided to cut the Mickelson scholarship program, which was a full-ride scholarship.

"A friend and I cut class for the day and went up to the Capitol and lobbied that issue and just spent the whole day being lobbyists, even though we were just kids," says Johnson, chairman of the state Public Utilities Commission.

"It was only a block that separated us from being school kids and being lobbyists. We got funding reinstated for one year."

Johnson now takes teens to conduct a nonpartisan mock legislative session sponsored by Teen Age Republicans. "There are some things that have been around for 100 years that still bring the same excitement to young people."

Johnson still appreciates the openness and accessibility of the Capitol building. It's a place where the general public feels welcome, he says.

"You go to Pierre and look at who's doing the lobbying, and it's people in cowboy hats and people in bib overalls and people ... who drive truck for a living. People from every walk of life who come to their Capitol to try to make a difference," Johnson says. "You don't get that in most state capitols across our country."

John Moisan

John Moisan was part of restoration work at the Capitol during the late 1970s and 1980s. Moisan, who retired last year after working 35 years for the state, is considered an expert on the history of the state Capitol.

As part of a restoration committee formed by the legislature, Moisan recalls doing research on what the Capitol looked like during the early 1900s.

Moisan remembers uncovering the original artwork on the Capitol walls. "A lot of it was right before our eyes. You couldn't get the detail of what was actually there until you actually scraped off seven layers of paint."

The restoration committee repaired roll top desks, shipped in granite from Vermont, took out the fluorescent light bulbs and replaced them with brass fixtures. They replaced tiles and even door hinges. They also conducted exterior work to the capitol.

By 1989, the restoration of the Capitol was complete. "At three million dollars, that was a good deal," Moisan says. He estimates the Capitol, originally built for just under one million dollars, now is worth about \$65 million.

"Because of the condition, because it's a 100-year-old building, it's the people's building," Moisan says. "The bad news is, more than half the people who live in the state have never seen the building before. Come and see your building, and come and see what it's like. It's a great piece of architecture."

Kelcy Curtis

Kelcy Curtis, 17, of Pierre, saw a different side of the Capitol building during her work as a page this past legislative session.

"I didn't even know there was a fourth floor," Curtis says. "There's so many little things you don't know."

Curtis is struck by the beauty of the Capitol, both during holidays - like after Thanksgiving, when the Capitol is filled with ornamented Christmas trees - and the everyday.

"Once I see the lights of the Capitol, it feels like I'm home. I love the Capitol and seeing it and knowing, I live here," says Curtis. She will attend Oklahoma Christian University in the fall.

Dennis Keith

Dennis Keith has worked in the Capitol building for more than 33 years. His memories are a cross-section of the usual - holiday parties held in the Capitol Rotunda, developing friendships with his co-workers - and the unusual that stem from working in an historic building.

Keith, 59, an audit supervisor for the state auditor's office, has worked in the same west side office on the second floor of the Capitol, alongside the grand staircase, since he started.

Keith saw the building transformed during renovations in the 1980s. When Keith first started working, the walls were painted what he describes as a robin's egg blue.

"They went back and peeled off layers and layers until they found stenciling and recreated it," Keith says.

Masons came to repair the terrazzo tile on the floor outside of Keith's office. Terrazzo tile is a type of Italian flooring made from chips of marble meshed through a process of layering.

"It was very interesting. You'd think, my word, how did they do that back in those days?" he says.

And he recalls significant moments within his time there, including the plane crash on April 19, 1993, that killed former Gov. George Mickelson and seven others. "That was a terrifying thing at the time. ... That's a memory you wouldn't forget," he says.

Keith finds beauty both in and outside of the capitol building. "The grounds around Capitol Lake and the Governor's Mansion are kept up beautifully. That's an important part of Pierre."

CAPITOL FUN FACTS

The South Dakota state Capitol stands 165 feet tall, 142 feet wide and 297 feet long. The building features native field stone, Indiana limestone, Vermont and Italian marble, intricately carved woodwork and specially cast brass.

The state Capitol is home to numerous pieces of artwork, which were created specifically for the structure.

Murals by Charles Holloway can be found in the state Supreme Court Chambers, the Senate Chamber and the House Chamber. (His work in the House of Representatives is the largest mural in the Capitol.)

Edward Simmons crafted the murals which adorn the Capitol Rotunda. The mural in the Governor's Reception Room was painted by Edwin Howland Blashfield. Other paintings created specifically for the Capitol including 18 lunettes (or half moon murals) by William Peaco, located in the building's second floor corridor.

The Capitol also boasts an impressive selection of sculptures and statuary. These include a marble statue of General William H.H. Beadle, who delivered the oration when the corner stone for the Capitol was laid; four bronze sculptures by Dale Lamphere which were commissioned in commemoration of the South Dakota Centennial in 1989; a bust of Governor Peter Norbeck by Mount Rushmore sculptor Gutzon Borglum; and the Sherrard Plate, which was placed in the Capitol in 1912 in honor of Elizabeth Hazelton Sherrard, the founder of the South Dakota Children's Home.

Twenty-five governors have been seated in office in the Capitol since it was completed, beginning with Robert S. Vessey of Wessington Springs who served as governor from 1909 to 1913.

CAPITOL HISTORY

On Feb. 11, 1905, the Committee on Capitol Grounds and Buildings introduced a bill in the South Dakota Legislature authorizing the construction of a permanent state capitol to be erected in the capital city of Pierre, South Dakota.

The bill made its way through the normal legislative channels, receiving a "do pass" recommendation from the House Appropriations Committee before passing the South Dakota House of Representatives on a vote of 74 to 12.

The trip through the state Senate was not quite as easy. The Senate Appropriations Committee sent the bill out "without recommendation" and an amended version passed the South Dakota Senate on a vote of 36 to 8. The final bill was delivered to the desk of Governor Charles N. Herried on March 2, 1905 and signed into law in the spring of that year.

Ground was broken and excavation for the State Capitol began in 1905. The building was designed by Minneapolis architects C.E. Bell and M.S. Detwiler, who patterned the structure after the then new Montana Statehouse (which was designed by Bell). Steam and horse driven tools were used for the excavation process. The corner stone for the South Dakota State Capitol was laid on June 25, 1908. The Grand Lodge of Masons conducted the ceremony, which featured addresses from Governor Coe I. Crawford and General W.H.H. Beadle. The corner stone can still be viewed today on the lower left corner of the front of the Capitol. The initial structure was completed in 1910 and formally dedicated on June 30, 1910. The annex was added to the north side of the building in 1932. The Capitol underwent repairs in the 1930s and 1940s, with the dome being replaced in 1964. A complete restoration was completed between 1976 and 1989.

Source: Bureau of Administration, State of South Dakota

Visit the Capitol Centennial Web site at <http://capitol.sd.gov> for a complete schedule of events.

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