

# THE CAPITOL SOWER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CAPITOL COMMISSION | VOLUME NINE | NUMBER ONE | FEB 2017

## Tools of the Trade

Part of the task of building the current Capitol to house Nebraska's government was finding the best tools for the job. When choosing these tools, the Nebraska Capitol Commission chose architect Bertram Goodhue, his monumental design was the best in the competition. Goodhue then chose the best materials for construction, Indiana limestone for the facade, Italian marble for ornamental components and American Walnut wood for the interior finishes.

Originally, the Capitol housed all offices of state government including the Department of Roads and the Department of Agriculture. Shops and laboratories were the tools provided for their work. There was a kitchen for the cafe. Vaults were built into office suites to protect government documents and store the cash used and received in government operations.

During the 1922-1932 construction of the Capitol, the Nebraska Capitol Commission chose tools future generations of state leaders would use on a daily basis. In each Legislative Chamber, member's desks served as their office; private lounges were provided for member's personal use. The Governor's Suite was divided into four separate spaces to accommodate four separate functions, the Hearing Room, the Reception Room, the Secretary's Office and the Governor's Private Office. Two Court Rooms were constructed. The Capitol Commission purchased high quality walnut furniture for all offices.

There were some instances when the chosen tools or furnishings needed to reflect grandeur and importance of their function. Such was the case when the Capitol Commission furnished the Governor's Suite.

The Office of the Capitol Commission continues the restoration of the original furniture in the Governor's Suite. Following the return of the restored Hearing Room chairs, OCC staff repaired and restored the desk used by the Governor in his Private Office. The Governor's Desk is one of the most exotic pieces of furniture in the Capitol and required staff to use existing shop tools in new ways and create new tools for the task. The resulting restoration greatly improved the condition of the desk and readied it for continued future use by Nebraska's governors.



Above, the Governor's Private Office is furnished with many custom pieces of furniture. The Governor's desk was recently restored.

### Nebraska Capitol Commission Membership

Pete Ricketts  
Governor  
Chairman

Jim Scheer  
Speaker of the Legislature  
Vice-Chairman

Michael Heavican  
Chief Justice Supreme Court

Katherine Ankerson  
Dean  
College of Architecture, UNL

Trevor Jones  
Executive Director & CEO  
Nebraska State Historical Society

Bryce Neidig  
Congressional District 1

Thomas Sanderson  
Congressional District 2

Jim Cudaback  
Congressional District 3

Robert C. Ripley  
Administrator,  
Office of the Capitol Commission  
Secretary



The People of the  
**OCC**  
 Office of the Capitol  
 Commission

ADMINISTRATION

Bob Ripley, Administrator  
 Tom Kaspar, Architect  
 Matt Hansen, Architect  
 Mark Tonjes, Capitol Manager  
 Tammy Honnor, Facilities  
 Construction Coordinator  
 Vacant  
 Administrative Assistant

ARCHIVE

Karen Wagner, Archivist

CARPENTRY

Brett Daugherty, Shop Supervisor  
 Lana Gabel,  
 Furniture Conservator  
 Dawn Hickmon,  
 Furniture Conservator  
 Dan Kratky, Mason  
 John MacKichen,  
 Hardware Conservator  
 Mike Marshall, Cabinet Maker

CUSTODIAL

Perry Shuman,  
 Capitol Conservation Supervisor  
 Richard Mallam, Custodial Leader  
 Rich Naber, Custodial Leader

GROUNDS

Heather Dinslage,  
 Groundskeeper Leader  
 Don Pracheil, Mechanic

MAINTENANCE

Michael Jordan, Shop Supervisor  
 Kent Bonebright,  
 Sheet Metal Fabricator  
 Tahir Karimi, Electrician  
 Jeff Gillett, Plumber  
 John Steele,  
 Maintenance Technician

TOURS

Roxanne Smith,  
 Tourism Supervisor/  
 Special Events Coordinator/  
 Public Information Officer  
 Ted Haubrich,  
 Tourism Aide  
 Matt Hier,  
 Tourism Aide

# OCC AT WORK

Experience and Service

The Office of the Capitol Commission's expert restoration staff were recognized on November 15, 2016 by the Department of Administrative Services for the exceptional work they did repairing and restoring the Governor's Desk. Capitol Administrator Bob Ripley nominated the Carpentry and Furniture team for the Project Award because of the many hours of skilled cooperative work they dedicated to the desk restoration project. Below, left to right, Mike Marshall, Lana Gabel, Dawn Hickmon, Steve Janssen and John MacKichen are pictured with the restored desk before it was returned to service in the Governor's Private Office. 



## Commission 2017 Schedule

The Nebraska Capitol Commission has set its schedule for 2017. The Commission meets quarterly in the Capitol to oversee and review maintenance and preservation of the Capitol, discuss and approve the upcoming budget and projects for the Office of the Capitol Commission and set administrative rules for the use of the capitol. The meetings are held in Hearing Room #1507 on ground floor of the Capitol.

The last meeting date of the year includes a joint Capitol Commission/Capitol Environs Commission meeting.

- February 16, 2017 at 10:00 a.m.
- June 6, 2017 at 10:00 a.m.
- August 22, 2017 at 10:00 a.m.
- November 7, 2017
- Joint Meeting at 10:00 a.m.
- Capitol Commission at 11:00 a.m.

The meetings are open to the public. 

# CONSERVATION PROJECTS

## Governor's Desk Shows Its Age

When Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts gave his approval for the Office of the Capitol Commission to remove the custom made Governor's desk from the Private Office for repair and restoration OCC staff went into action. This very large desk was disassembled in place and taken to the Carpentry Shop for inspection. Numerous defects were found. Extreme fading due to ultra-violet light exposure was evident once staff found the original dark walnut stain on the interior surface. The unfinished underside of the desk top had allowed uneven expansion and contraction of the wood slab resulting in a 1/4 inch bow in the desk top. The original design relied on the drawer fronts to stop drawer movement which caused cracks in the drawer fronts and decorative veneer. The structural supports of the desk had been modified or removed in the past causing damage to key elements of the desk. Despite the many defects, OCC's skilled staff were confident they could successfully do the restoration work. During the time the desk was in the shop, staff used every tool at their disposal and created new ones to handle special tasks. Staff completed the restoration ahead of schedule and returned the desk to the Governor in better than new condition. 



Above left, the damaged desk front. Stickers had been attached to the front, damaging the finish, and there were large cracks in the drawer frame and front. Above and below right, cracks in the drawer front, damaged veneer, soiled and missing finish indicate the desk needed the attention of OCC's skilled staff.



Above, staff discovered a section with the original dark walnut stain once they disassembled the desk. Staff also found the interior support structure had been removed.

Above, shop staff holds a level to the desk top revealing a quarter inch bow in the wood.

# One Step at a Time

Restoring the Governor's Desk to its original condition involved many steps. The first step was to disassemble the desk and document the existing condition. Next staff stripped the damaged desktop and began the long process of gently flattening the warped wooden top. Once that process was underway staff repaired the cracks in the drawer fronts and the veneer in the decorative panels. After these repairs were completed, staff stripped old non-original finish from the desk body, hand scraping and hand sanding the entire desk surface. The restored veneer panels were shellacked and then covered for protection during the rest of the restoration process. The desk body was then reinforced and missing components reinstalled. Once the top was flattened and the desk repairs complete, all surfaces were stained back to the dark walnut original finish. After the desk was reassembled, staff coated the entire desk with a shellac finish for protection.



Left, the project began with stripping and flattening the desk top. With that task underway, repairs were made to the cracked and

broken drawer fronts, below left, initial reinforcement of drawer frame, right, the repair after finishing and with new drawer skirt installed.



Stripping the desk of old and damaged finish, left and below, was a slow and deliberate process.



An important step reinforced the structure of the desk. Above left, the missing drawer skirts were recreated and above right, a frame was added to support the desk top and prevent future sagging. Top and bottom left, the application of dark walnut stain was one of the final steps in the project.



Prior to final step of adding the protective shellac finish to the entire desk surface, project leader Mike Marshall, left, exposes one of the decorative veneer panels he expertly restored, above.

# BEHIND THE SCENES

## Special Tools For The Job

Capitol Cabinet Maker Mike Marshall used all the tools at his disposal as he developed the plan to repair and restore the Governor's Desk. He looked to furniture makers in the past for guidance and even used the carpenter shop itself as a tool. He and furniture staff also provided a tool for future generations of Capitol conservators to use.

To slowly and gradually flatten the quarter inch bow in the 1.5" desk top staff created a press using the ceiling beams of the shop for resistance. After laying the desk top on a base frame, staff used hydraulic jacks and two by four boards to slowly apply pressure in the opposite direction of the warp. With frequent misting and gentle pressure the wooden top was flattened. Staff built custom jigs matching the curvilinear shape of the drawers to enable the repairs in the cracked drawer fronts. Staff learned quickly, you can never have too many clamps for the job.

After removing the existing desk finish and gently sanding flat surfaces, staff used a scraper, a tool used for centuries by craftsmen to smooth and finish wooden surfaces. The scraper is less invasive and removes less material than sandpaper and can be used to reach into tight spaces and curved areas. The past, present and future became part of the Governor's Desk restoration project as staff documented each activity and process for the shop files and the Capitol Archive. The project was given a reference number which was used as staff photographed each step, signage was used for documentation and an explanation of each step included in the file. Future generations of Capitol caretakers will find the documentation valuable. 



Above and below, OCC staff created custom jigs and blocks to allow precise gluing and clamping as they repaired the many damaged areas of the desk drawers. They added blocks to the drawer rails, inset right, to stop the drawers and prevent future damage, documenting the non-original additions.



To apply gradual pressure on the warped desk top staff devised a press in the back of the shop. Left, using two by four boards, jacks, and the shop ceiling, the desk top was gradually flattened using the shop itself as a tool.



The craftsmen creating the Italian Renaissance desks which inspired the design of the Nebraska Governor's Desk would have used scrapers in their finish work, just as, left, Capitol staff did during this project.

# WHAT'S OLD IS NEW

Once the Governor's Desk Restoration Project was underway, OCC restoration staff began to have questions about the original condition of the desk. Finding shadow lines which indicated original components of the desk were missing, they called upon Capitol Archivist Karen Wagner to search the Nebraska Capitol Collections for any early photographic images. Wagner was able to find several images which provided useful information. 



The two images above and left were taken very early in the Capitol's life. The date indicated on the image above is 12-27-27. The Governor's Suite was completed in 1927 with original furnishings in place. While the above photograph looking towards the front of the desk is very interesting, note the spittoon on the floor in front of the desk, it didn't provide the information needed. A second photograph, from the same time period, showed the back of the desk. Enlarging the image for detail, below, staff discerned the missing drawer skirts and a missing support panel in the knee space of the desk. This valuable historic information enabled staff to understand why the desk top sagged and how to reinforce the structure to prevent future damage. Notice the period telephones on the side table.



# CAPITOL EVENTS

## Presidents Day

February 20, 2017

The Capitol will be open for tours from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

## Utility Contractors Display

February 24, 2017

The Nebraska Utility Contractors Association will have a day long display in the first floor rotunda.

## Music Education Week Concerts

February 27,28 March 2,3, 2017

The Nebraska Music Educators Association is sponsoring a series of noon concerts in the second floor rotunda featuring vocal and instrumental groups from across Nebraska.

## Nebraska Statehood Day

March 1, 2017

The Nebraska Sesquicentennial Commission is sponsoring a day long celebration of Nebraska's 150th anniversary of statehood with morning performances in the 2nd floor rotunda and a formal program in the Norris Legislative Chamber at 2:00 p.m.

## Noxious and Invasive Plant Display

March 6-10, 2017

The Nebraska Weed Control Association will educate the public about damages caused by noxious and invasive plants in the first floor rotunda.

## Unclaimed Property Outreach

March 13-17, 2017

The State Treasurer's Office will share their newest unclaimed property publication in the first floor rotunda.

## Youth Art Month Display

March 13-25, 2017

The Nebraska Art Teachers Association will display student artworks in the first floor rotunda.

## Speech-Language-Hearing Display

March 15, 2017

The Nebraska Speech-Language-Hearing Association will have a display in the first floor rotunda.

## No Limits Youth Rally

March 15, 2017

No Limits Nebraska is sponsoring an anti-smoking Kick Butts Day rally on the West Plaza of the Capitol from 8:00 a.m. to Noon.

## Problem Gambling Display

March 20 - 24, 2017

Choices Treatment Center, a DHHS contractor, will have a first floor display in association with the Governor's proclamation of March as Problem Gambling Month.

## Youth Art Awards Ceremony

March 25, 2017

The Nebraska Art Teachers Association will hold a celebration of Youth Art Month in a 2:00 p.m. program in the 2nd floor rotunda of the Capitol.

## Capitol Forum

March 27, 2017

The Nebraska Secretary of State hosts a student poster display in the 2nd floor rotunda focusing on current events.

## UNL Research Presentation

March 30 - April 7, 2017

The University of Nebraska Office of Undergraduate Research will display student research project posters in the first floor rotunda.

## Crime Lab Display

April 3-7, 2017

The Nebraska State Patrol Crime Laboratory will have an educational display in the 1st floor Rotunda.

## NE150 Diverse Origins Event

April 8, 2017

The Cornhusker Boy Scouts Council is sponsoring a program celebrating the Sesquicentennial in the Capitol from 1:30 - 4:00 p.m. with activities for all.

## Social Work Week Display

April 10 - 14, 2017

The Nebraska Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers will have a first floor display on social work in Nebraska.

## Money Smart Week Lighting

April 21, 2017

The Nebraska Council on Economic Education sponsors turning the Capitol tower green.

## State Holocaust Commemoration

April 23, 2017

The Institute for Holocaust Education and the Jewish Federation of Lincoln will remember the Holocaust in the 2nd floor rotunda at 3:00 p.m.

## Arbor Day Holiday

April 28, 2017

The Capitol will be open for tours from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

## Mayor's Run

May 6, 2017

The Lincoln Track Club sponsored youth run around the Capitol will occur between 7:00 a.m. and noon.

## ALS Awareness Display

May 10-19, 2017

ALS in the Heartland will have a display in the first floor rotunda.

## Mental Health Display

May 15-19, 2017

Nebraska Association of Behavioral Health Organizations will have a first floor rotunda display for Mental Health Month.

## Memorial Day

May 29, 2017

The Capitol will be open for tours from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

All events at the Nebraska State Capitol are free and open to the public. 

**Guided Tours** are offered Monday-Friday hourly from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, except at noon. Saturday and Holidays from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, except at noon and Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. Please call 402.471.0448 or visit [www.capitol.org](http://www.capitol.org) for more information.



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FEB 2017

## Nebraska Capitol Commission

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Capitol Architect  
Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, 1869-1924

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## The Key to Success

The final key to the successful restoration of the Nebraska Governor's Desk was a key. The desk's two drawers have functional locks, but the key had been lost for over 40 years. John MacKichan, the Office of the Capitol Commission's Hardware Conservator, used his knowledge and skill to create a key to fit both locks. The disc, or wafer, locks were disassembled to reveal the keyway and the discs. Using a blank key, painted on the surface, MacKichan began the trial and error process of cutting the key. Once placed into the lock, the paint on the key was scuffed where the discs were located. These scuff marks indicated where the cuts in the key would be made. Then, using a file, each cut was made a millimeter at a time. After each cut the key was painted again and returned to the keyway. Scuffed paint indicated that more material needed to be removed. Finally the key was inserted and removed with the paint intact, indicating the cuts were deep enough to properly align the discs to the shearline. The drawers can now be locked and unlocked.



Above, OCC staff creates a new desk key from blank key stock. The slow careful filing process restored the desk drawer locks to working condition.

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

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