

*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides monthly, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

## **Examining the Zeros: 100 Years After the Fire**

This year marks the beginning of the second session of the 90th Iowa General Assembly. Some of this year's *Pieces of Iowa's Past* articles will briefly examine the work of the 10th, 20th, 30th, 40th, 50th, 60th, 70th, and 80th General Assemblies, or observe interesting events that happened during those years.



[Governor Tom Vilsack](#)

The first session of the 80th General Assembly convened January 13 and adjourned May 1, 2003, a 109-day session. The second session convened January 12 and adjourned April 20, 2004, a 100-day session. Included in this general assembly were two special sessions that lasted a combined eight days. The Governor of Iowa was Tom Vilsack, and Sally Pederson served as Lieutenant Governor.

There were 29 Republicans and 21 Democrats in the Senate, and in the House, there were 54 Republicans and 46 Democrats. Vilsack was a Democrat. In total, 150 legislators served during the 80th General Assembly.

Speaker of the House Christopher Rants was elected to the Iowa House of Representatives in 1992 at the age of 25. He served for 18 years in the Iowa House, spending time as the Majority Floor Leader for the Republican Caucus, as well as the Minority Floor Leader. Rants served as Speaker from 2003 to 2007.



[Speaker Christopher C. Rants](#)

Mary E. Kramer served a partial term as President of the Senate in 2003, and Jeff Lamberti became President of the Senate in 2004.



[President of the Senate Mary E. Kramer](#)

In 2002, President George W. Bush appointed Kramer as Chairperson of the White House Commission for Presidential Scholars, and in 2003, Bush nominated her as the United States Ambassador to the Seven Island Nations of the Eastern Caribbean. Kramer held the latter post from 2004 until her retirement in 2006.

Lamberti succeeded Kramer as the President of the Senate in 2004. Lamberti, an Ankeny lawyer, served two terms in the House and two terms in the Senate.



[President of the Senate Jeff Lamberti](#)

## **Two Special Sessions**

Vilsack called the first special session, which ran from May 29 through June 4, 2003, to finish House-passed bills to create an economic growth fund or reform Iowa tax and business regulatory laws.

The second special session was decidedly shorter, lasting just one day. Legislation brought up during this special session, which both convened and adjourned September 7, 2004, included business-related proposals. Possibly the most important legislation passed set aside \$100 million in federal aid for commitments made from the Iowa Grow Values Fund.

## **100 Years After the Fire**

The year 2004 marked 100 years since the Capitol fire of 1904. At the onset of 1904, the Capitol Improvement Commission had dedicated nearly two years to enhancing the Capitol. Their responsibilities encompassed embellishing the public spaces, placing artwork in these areas, fitting a fresh copper roof, refurbishing the dome with gold leaf, replacing windows, and establishing electrical connections throughout the structure.

According to the Executive Council investigating committee, the fire was started by a workman neglecting to extinguish his candle before leaving the worksite.

The engineer overseeing the Capitol Improvement Commission, Crampton Linley, played a crucial role during the fire incident within the building. Present at the time, Linley is credited with saving the structure by navigating through attic spaces to shut doors that separated different wings of the Capitol. This swift action effectively stifled the flames, bringing the fire under control. The day after the fire, while examining the damage, Linley fell

through the ceiling of the House Chamber and died instantly from severe head injuries.

A new exhibit in one of the four ground floor display cases shares the story of the Capitol fire and Linley's heroic actions.

*All the News  
and  
Accurately Told.*

# The Register and Leader.

NO. 554. DES MOINES, IOWA, TUESDAY MORNING, JANUARY 5, 1904.—TEN PAGES

## IOWA STATE HOUSE ON FIRE YESTERDAY; THE LOSS WAS BETWEEN \$300,000 AND \$500,000

*Interior of the House Legislative Chamber and the Adjacent Committee Rooms Are Eaten Out by the Flames.*

*Senate Chamber, Library and the First or Main Floor Offices Were Not Reached by the Spreading Fire.*

*Legislature Will Meet Monday, but Will Have to Provide Quarters for the House to Hold Its Winter Sessions.*

*Origin of the Fire Somewhat Mysterious, but an Investigation Will be Set on Foot at Once by Executive Council.*

Within a week of the opening of the legislature, the beautiful state capitol yesterday furnished material for the flames. The chamber of the house of representatives, which the capitol commission had labored so hard to put in shape and render fair to look upon, is a mass of charred and smouldering ruins.

The galleries, precipitated to the floor below, the false ceiling above and the expensive chandeliers are all huddled in one inextricable mass, over which water played all last night, and which bear mute testimony to the evidence of the element of destruction, which so nearly swept Iowa's \$3,000,000 capitol away.

In the fire a half dozen men were injured more or less seriously.

The loss is estimated variously from \$300,000 to half a million. Governor Cummins places an approximate estimate of \$300,000 upon the damage done, but State Architect Liebke believes the higher figure is more nearly correct.

Last night, the beautiful structure on Capitol hill presented a scene of des-

stars part of the building, he was met by blinding clouds of smoke. The flames quickly spread to the ceiling of the senate chamber. They forced their way about the frame work of the gallery and the combustible material of the ceilings invited the fire.

Buckets of water were poured on the blaze, but without effect, before the arrival of the fire department. Chief Burnett soon had his entire department on hand, but the fight was a hopeless and discouraging one. No place could be found to pour water from above, and the water pressure was insufficient to force the water upwards.

The battle with the flames proceeded until parts of the gallery and false ceiling fell with a crash, and then the true seriousness of the fire was realized.

**Building Saved.**

"Unless we succeed in keeping the flames from extending to the senate chamber the building is doomed," said Chief Burnett.

This fate seemed inevitable, and probably would have occurred had it not been for the insistence of Governor Cummins and the courageous action of T. H. Rattenbury, Consulting Engineer, Lindley and an unknown electrician.



HOW THE STATE HOUSE LOOKED AS IT BURNED.

The Des Moines Register; Jan 5, 1904.

## STORY OF THE FIRE.

### Progress of the Flames in the Capitol From 11 A. M. to the End.

11 a. m.—First fire alarm.

11:10 a. m.—Call for more hose.

11:40 a. m.—General alarm.

1 p. m.—Fire had reached extreme south end of chamber roof and Chief Burnett said the building was doomed.

1:15 p. m.—Fire broke through the partition separating main gallery from dome passage.

1:45 p. m.—Fire reached the partition separating main hall from library and orders given by Governor Cummins to have books removed.

2 p. m.—Sky lights began to fall and chandeliers drop with great crash.

2:15 p. m.—Orders given to keep people from under dome for fear fire had eaten into it and would cause it to fall.

2:30 p. m.—Third line of hose laid to upper south gallery and communication cut off from dome.

2:45 p. m.—Chief Burnett said danger was over if fire did not eat through the holes in partitions on south side.

3 p. m.—Chief Burnett and Assistant Chief Taylor agree that the blaze is under control.

6 p. m.—Executive council met to consider plan as to session of legislature.