

Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, 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 Nines: House and Senate Renovations

This year begins the 89th Iowa General Assembly. Some of this year's *Pieces of Iowa's Past* articles will briefly examine the work of the 9th, 19th, 29th, 39th, 49th, 59th, 69th, and 79th General Assemblies, or observe interesting events that happened during those years.

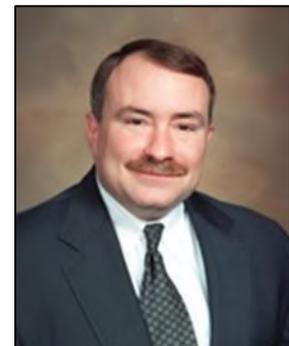
The 79th General Assembly convened for the first session January 8 and adjourned May 8, 2001, a 121-day session. The second session convened January 14 and adjourned April 12, 2002, an 89-day session.



**President of the
Senate
Mary Kramer**

In the Senate there were 20 Democratic members and 30 Republican members. This changed to 21 and 29 due to a special election. The President of the Senate was [Mary Kramer](#).

In the House of Representatives there were 44 Democratic members and 56 Republican members, and the Speaker of the House was [Brent Siegrist](#).



**Speaker of the House
Brent Siegrist**

There were also four extraordinary sessions for the 79th General Assembly. The first 79th extra General Assembly convened June 19, 2001. The second convened November 8, 2001. The third convened April 22, 2002. The fourth convened May 28, 2002.

Iowa's Governor was Tom Vilsack, and the population according to the 2000 federal census was 2,926,324.



**Governor
Tom Vilsack**

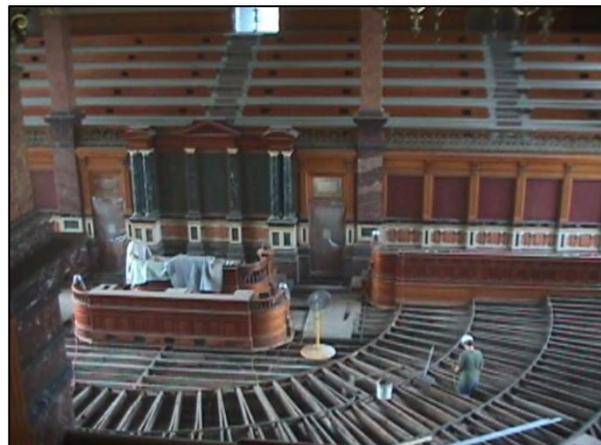
House and Senate Renovations

Twenty years ago, during the 79th General Assembly, renovations began in the House of Representatives and the Senate chambers. The renovations were completed in two phases during the interim periods (usually May through December) when the Legislature was not in the Capitol working.

In 2001 the cleaning and touch-up of the Senate ceiling and the upgrade of the mechanical systems under the floor of the House of Representatives were completed.



Senate ceiling renovations. The desks and chandeliers are covered for protection. Scaffold is for ceiling work.



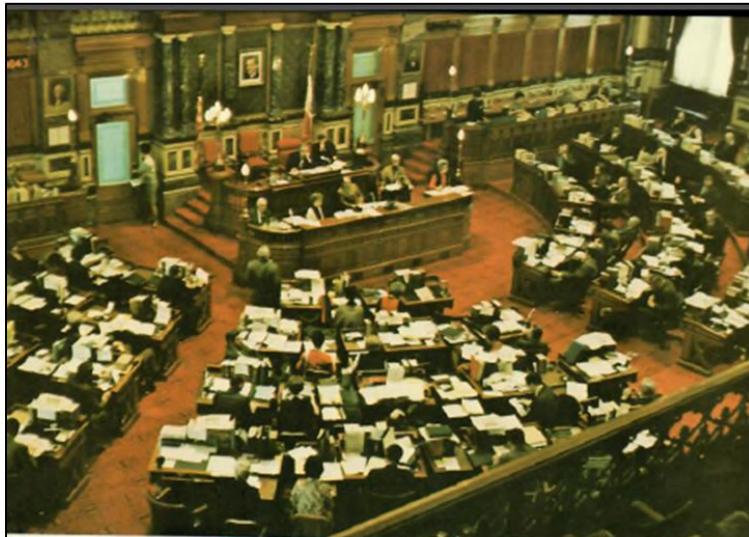
Senate floor removed to update wiring and install new mechanical systems. Notice the top of the photograph. The gallery seating was also removed and restored.

The following year after the legislative session, the House of Representatives ceiling was restored to the post-fire design and the upgrade of the mechanical systems under the Senate floor was completed.

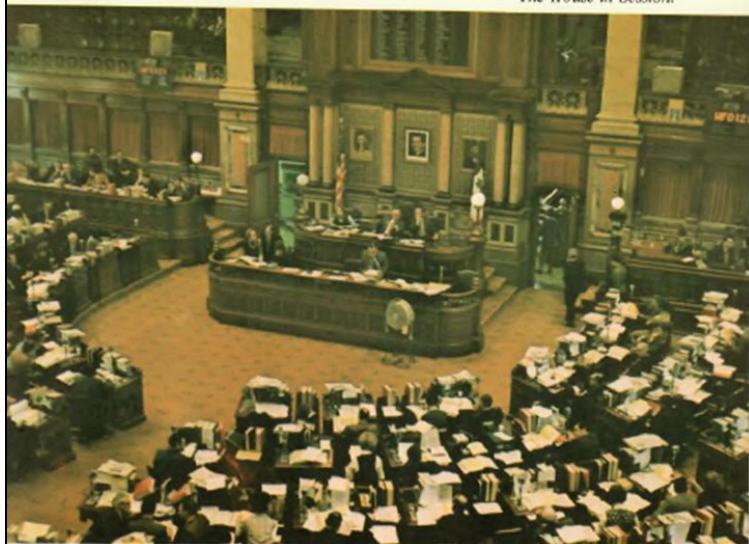
During this time, chandeliers in both the House of Representatives and Senate were cleaned and rewired.

Scagliola* columns in both chambers were repaired, and new carpeting was laid. Members' desks were refinished, and the original ink wells within the members' desks were removed and replaced with new electronic voting systems.

The House of Representatives and Senate chamber renovations completed in 2001-2002 totaled \$8,138,287.69.



The Senate in Session.



The House in Session.

Photos from: *Under the Gold Dome*. Published under the direction of Lieutenant Governor Arthur Neu and Secretary of the Senate Clark Rasmussen. Authorized by the 66th General Assembly, 1975. At the time these photographs were taken the Senate had no electronic voting system. The work done in the House and Senate in 1977 and 1978 was not restoration. It was simply redecorating. These photos were taken before the 1970s redecorating.

***Scagliola is defined as imitation marble or other stone, made of plaster mixed with glue and dyes which is then painted or polished.**

House of Representatives Chamber



House of Representatives prior to the 2001-2002 renovations (1978 design).



House chamber today.

The Speaker's well and both press boxes are black walnut. Draperies are from Burgin Drapery Workroom in Des Moines. The scagliola columns were done by Hayles and Howe, based in England. Douglas Mack oversaw the scagliola work in the House of Representatives.

The carpeting is Axminster carpet, which means the wool yarn is dyed, then woven into strips. The 12-foot strips were then hand-sewn in the House chamber as the carpet was laid. The carpeting was manufactured by the Ulster Company, based in Ireland.



House of Representatives floor during restoration. The 1978 carpeting was removed.

The House of Representatives chandeliers weigh approximately 800 pounds. They were refurbished by St. Louis Antique Lighting Company in Missouri. The chandeliers were purchased from Mitchell Vance of New York in 1904. They were installed after the 1904 fire and have always been electric fixtures.



House of Representatives chandelier wrapped for protection and scaffold above to complete ceiling restoration.



House of Representatives chandelier disassembled for shipping to St. Louis Antique Lighting.



House of Representatives chandeliers returned after cleaning and rewiring.

The Representatives' desks are black walnut. The electrical center and voting system within the old ink well was designed by Renaissance Design Group (RDG). Members' desks were refurbished by Architectural Arts. Both RDG and Architectural Arts are of Des Moines.



Des Moines Register, October 22, 2001

Architectural Arts refinished legislators' desks. House of Representatives desks were completed in 2001 and Senate desks were completed in 2002.



Original ink well inserts from members' desks.





House of Representatives ceiling prior to the 2001-2002 renovations (1978 design).

The House ceiling restoration and faux marbling in the arches above the windows was done by Conrad Schmitt Studios of New Berlin, Wisconsin.



House of Representatives ceiling from top of scaffold.



Senate Chamber



Senate chamber today.

The Senate chamber's chandeliers weigh approximately 500 pounds. They were originally purchased from Mitchell Vance and Company of New York in 1882 and converted to electric fixtures when the Capitol was electrified in the early 1900s. They were refurbished by St. Louis Antique Lighting Company in Missouri. Draperies are from Burgin Drapery Workroom in Des Moines.



The carpeting is also an Axminster carpet hand-sewn on site after arriving in the chamber.

New carpet being hand-sewn and laid on Senate floor.



Senate well woodwork stripped and ready for finishing.

The Senate President's desk and both press boxes are primarily mahogany. The members' desks are mahogany. The electrical center and voting system within the old ink wells were designed by Renaissance Design Group (RDG). The members' desks were refurbished by Architectural Arts.

The ceiling restoration and faux marbling in the arches above the windows was done by Conrad Schmitt Studios. Scagliola columns were done by Hayles and Howe. David Hayles oversaw the scagliola work in the Senate.



The Senate ceiling from top of scaffold.

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have been restored as nearly as possible to original decorative periods. The Senate reflects the original 1880s design and the House of Representatives the 1905 post-fire decoration.

Although a few photographs exist of the House chamber prior to the fire, it would be impossible to restore the House chamber to its original design. Not only is the ceiling structurally different, but the black and white photographs leave no record of the 1880s color scheme.



**House of Representatives circa 1880s
before the fire.**



House chamber today.