

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.

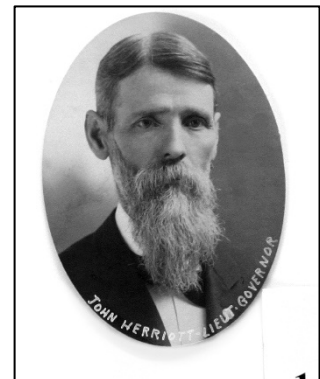
Examining the Zeros: The Capitol Fire

This year begins 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.

The 30th General Assembly convened January 11, 1904, and adjourned April 12, 1904, a 93-day session. The 30th General Assembly had a total of 150 members.

Lieutenant Governor John Herriott presided over the Senate, where there were members from 2 parties. There were 42 Republicans and 8 Democrats.

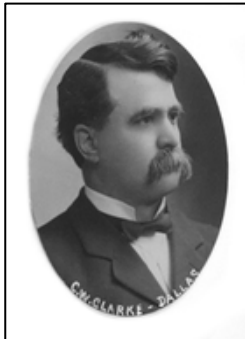
Herriott was born in Pennsylvania on October 20, 1844. He served in the Union Army during the Civil War. He later moved to Iowa, where he was a businessman. From 1895 to 1901, he served as Iowa State Treasurer. He was then Lieutenant Governor from 1902 until 1907, serving under Governor Albert B. Cummins. Herriott died on September 24, 1918.



Lieutenant Governor
[John Herriott](#)

Speaker George W. Clarke presided over the House of Representatives, where there were members from three parties. There were 76 Republicans, 22 Democrats, and 2 Independents.

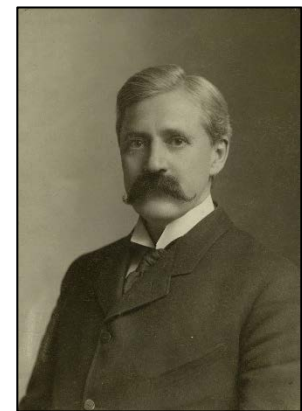
In 1856, the Clarke family moved to Davis County, Iowa, settling one mile east of Drakesville. He taught school in Bloomfield before attending Oskaloosa College, from which he graduated in 1877. Clarke then earned his law degree from the University of Iowa, after which he established a legal career in Adel, Iowa.



Clarke entered politics in 1900, serving as a member of the Iowa House of Representatives, a position he held eight years, the last four of which were as Speaker. From 1909 to 1913, he served as Lieutenant Governor of Iowa. Clarke won the 1912 Republican gubernatorial nomination, then the general election, and was sworn into office on January 16, 1913. He was reelected to a second term in 1914.

Speaker of the House
[George W. Clarke](#)

Governor Albert Cummins, Iowa's first governor to serve three terms, served from 1902 to 1908. During his third term, he resigned to become a United States Senator. In 1904, the 11th amendment to the Iowa Constitution changed years for gubernatorial elections during Albert Cummins' administration. The amendment took effect in 1906. Governors from then on were elected in even-numbered years and inaugurated in odd-numbered years.



Governor
[Albert Cummins](#)

The federal census in 1900 put Iowa's population at 2,231,853.

1904 Capitol Fire

By the beginning of 1904, the Capitol Improvement Commission had been working in the Capitol for about two years. The commissioners were in charge of decorating the public areas of the building, installing the artwork in the public areas, installing a new copper roof, re-gilding the dome, replacing windows, and connecting electrical lines throughout the building.

On January 4, electrician H. Frazer had been working that morning in Committee Room No. Five behind the House Chamber, drilling into the walls to run electrical wires and using a candle to light his way. The investigating committee determined that Frazer had left his work area and neglected to extinguish his candle.



**The Iowa State Capitol Fire
January 4, 1904**

The initial fire alarm sounded at approximately 10 a.m. Many citizen volunteers came to help the fire department. Capitol employees and state officials also assisted in fighting the fire, including Governor Cummins. The fire was finally brought under control around 6 p.m., although some newspaper accounts at the time reported that the fire continued smoldering for several days.

Crampton Linley, the engineer working with the Capitol Improvement Commission, was in the building at the time of the fire and was credited with saving the building. He crawled through attic areas to close doors separating wings of the Capitol, an action which smothered the flames and brought the fire under control. Sadly, Linley did not live long enough to be recognized for his heroism. The day after the fire, while examining the damage to the attic, he fell through.

On January 12, the 30th General Assembly met in the Senate chamber since the House of Representatives was damaged. An emergency appropriation of \$8,000 was made by the General Assembly to cover the cost of temporary repairs necessary for occupancy of the House during the session that was about to open.

**Condition of the State Address
Excerpt from the Journal of the Senate and House
January 12, 1904**

THE LATE FIRE IN THE CAPITOL.

As you all know, a fire occurred in the Capitol on Monday, January 4, 1904, which substantially destroyed the interior finish of the hall of the House of Representatives, wrecked some of the committee rooms in the north wing, and the water used in extinguishing it, damaged to some extent the ceilings of the rooms and offices opening from the north corridor upon the main floor.

The Executive Council made an immediate investigation for the purpose of ascertaining the origin of the fire, and, after examining under oath, every person who had any knowledge of the subject, so far as it could ascertain, it arrived at the conclusion that the fire originated in an air shaft near the southeast corner of room No. 5, and that it came from a lighted candle, left in the shaft by one of the electrical workers engaged in equipping the building with electric lights.

Fortunately the disaster was not so great as at one time it was feared it would be, and a comparatively small sum will be required to repair the injury. A most careful examination of the structural iron, and walls, has been made by the most competent experts that could be employed, and it has been ascertained that they have suffered little injury. For the temporary repairs hereafter mentioned, a few splices and bolts are all that will be necessary, and for the permanent repair the substitution of a few beams, girders and rods.

Under the informal advice of a caucus of the members of the Thirtieth General Assembly, the Executive Council empowered the Capitol Commission to go forward, clear away the debris, and put the hall of the House of Representatives in order for use during the present session. So rapidly has this work been dispatched, that it is now believed that the House of Representatives can occupy it at the close of the coming week.



The picture above shows the Iowa House of Representatives Chamber in 1904 before the fire. Below is a picture of the Iowa House of Representatives Chamber's damage after the fire. The flames burned through the ceiling and caused much of it to collapse to the floor below, while the lower areas of the building were damaged by smoke and water.



Soon after the adjournment of the 30th General Assembly on April 12, 1904, the Capitol Improvement Commission began the work of repairing the fire damage.

Elmer Garnsey was the artist hired by the Commission to decorate the public areas of the building. Therefore, he seemed the logical candidate to be given the additional responsibility of redecorating the areas damaged by the fire.

Garnsey had a very different vision for the decoration, which is why the House Chamber, the old Supreme Court Room, and the old Agriculture offices directly below the House Chamber have a design that is very different from the areas of the building untouched by the fire.

The total loss due to the fire was between \$300,000 and \$500,000.



The Iowa House of Representative Chamber today reflects a post-fire Elmer Garnsey design.