

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 historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

February 12, 2014

THIS WEEK: Decorating the Interior of the Iowa State Capitol

BACKGROUND:

In the 1880s, when the work of decorating the Capitol began, the Capitol Commissioners hired August Knorr to oversee the decorative painting on the "office story," or first floor, and E. S. Miragoli to complete the decorative painting on the second story.

Decorating the Interior of the Iowa State Capitol

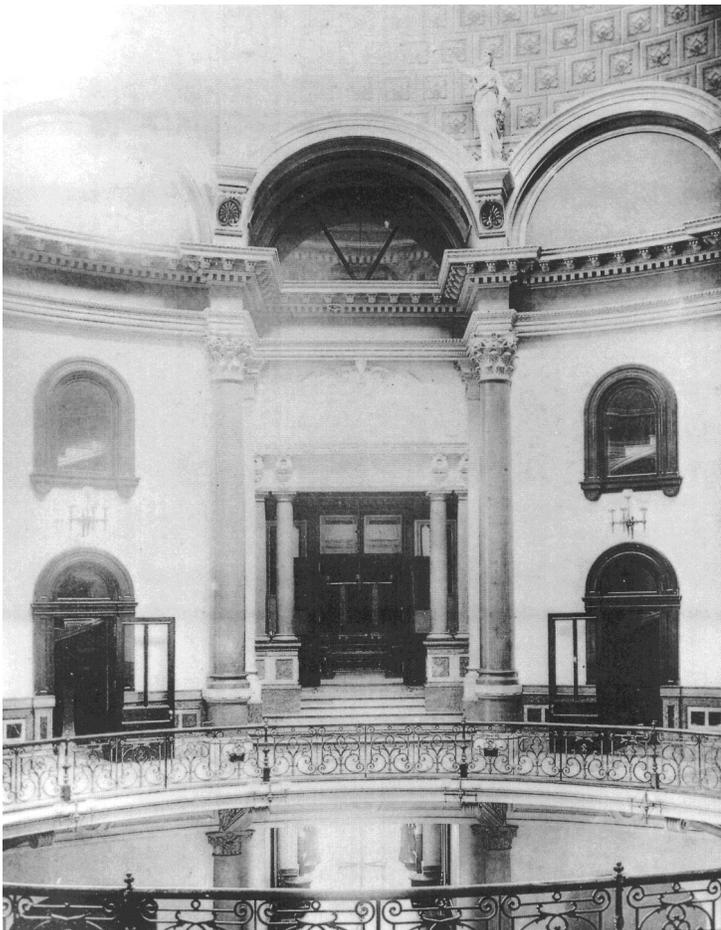
In 1882, Ettore S. Miragoli contracted with the Capitol Commission for "painting and decorating the ceiling and walls of the Senate for the sum of \$3,000.00 and the House for \$3,500.00."

Miragoli contracted in 1883 "for painting and decorating the walls and ceilings of the east wing, including figures, stenciling walls, tinting panels and finishing the entire level of the gallery floor for the sum of \$2,350. The rotunda complete with the ceilings above the granite columns and the entrances to the House and Senate for the sum of \$1,960. The Library ceiling complete and the marbleizing of all the pilasters for the sum of \$2,050."

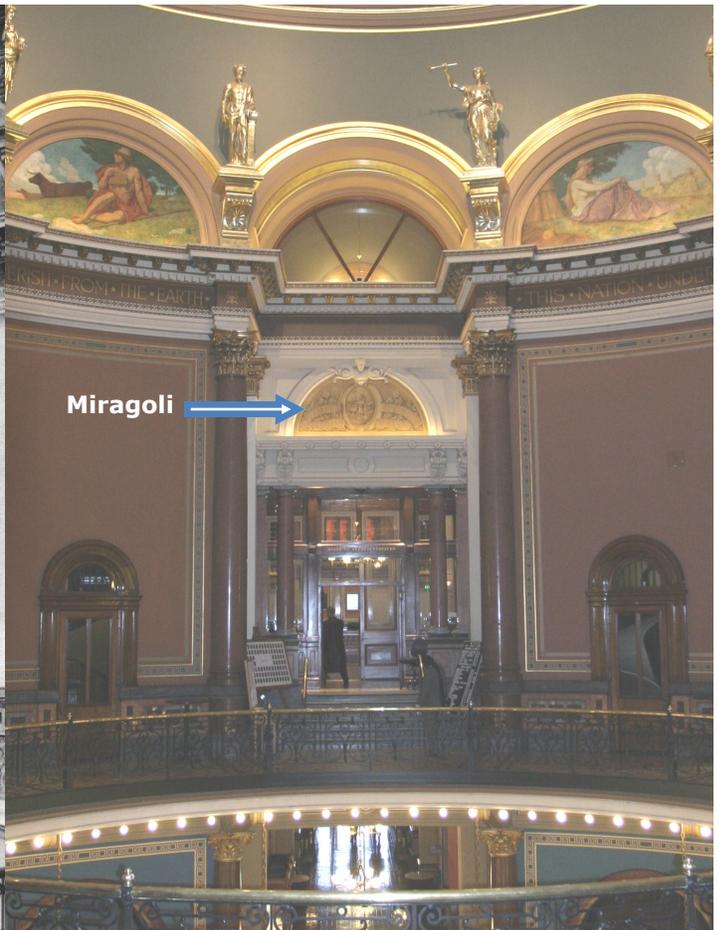
The report of the Superintendent of Finance for the Capitol Commission shows payments to Miragoli between January and December 1883 totaling \$14,343.94.

During the construction of the Capitol, between 1871 and 1886, funds were not available for decorating the public areas. In 1902, the Capitol Improvement Commission contracted Elmer Garnsey to finish the decorations in the public hallways. It was during this time the north end of the Capitol caught on fire. Miragoli's work in the House of Representatives was destroyed by the fire in 1904. Garnsey, already on contract in 1904, naturally created the new designs in the House of Representatives, but he also convinced the Capitol Improvement Commission to allow most of Miragoli's work to be painted over. The Senate Chamber and the Seal of Iowa above the House and Senate doors are the only areas in the Capitol today where Miragoli's work can be viewed.

Miragoli was born in Italy. He studied painting in Milan and worked throughout Italy before coming to the United States in 1870. He has work in Missouri, Illinois, and Kansas, as well as Iowa. He died in St Louis in December 1890 at the age of 49.

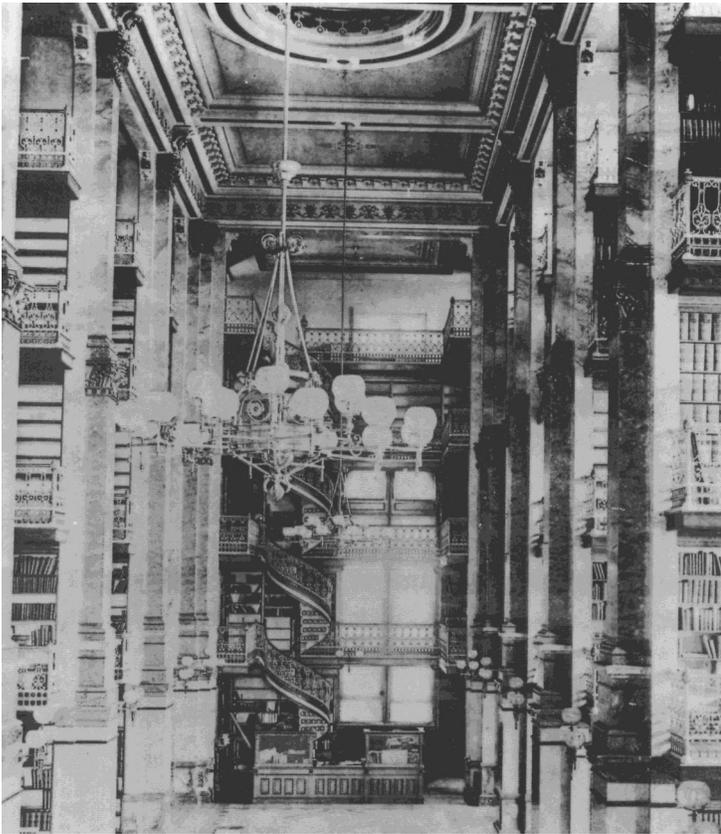


Miragoli

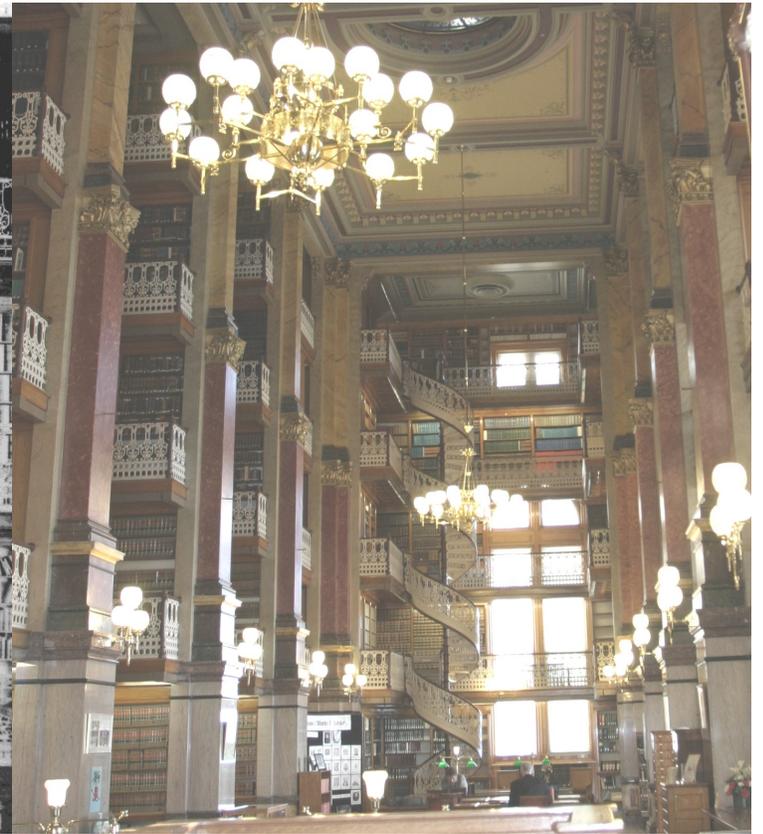


Garnsey

Second floor rotunda looking north

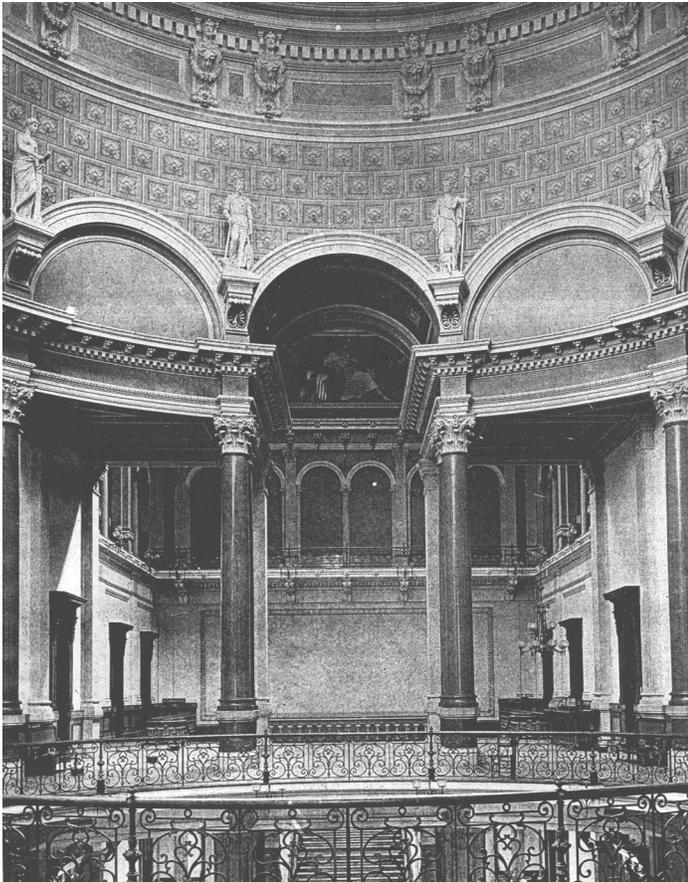


Miragoli

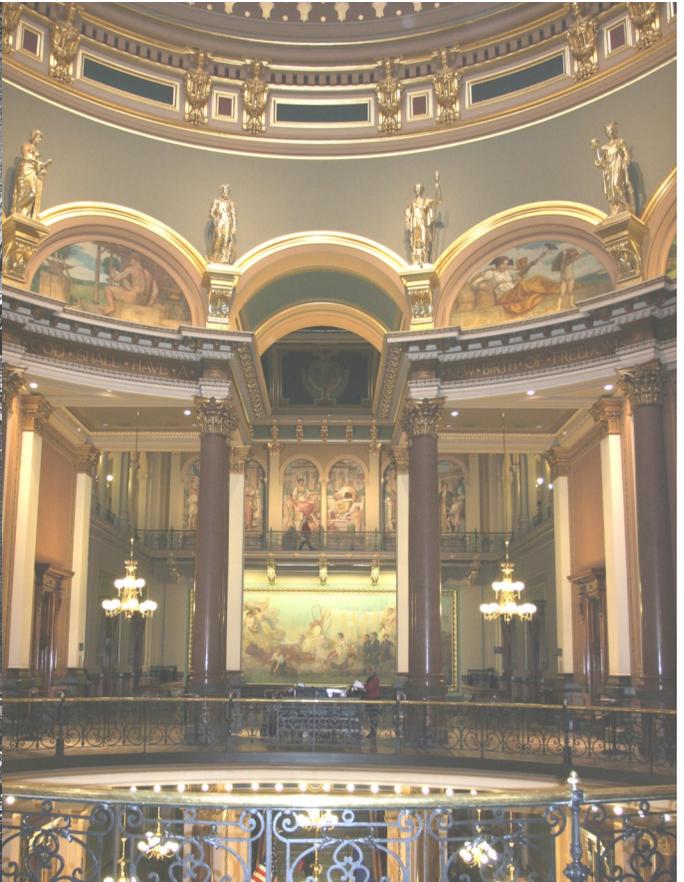


Garnsey

Law Library

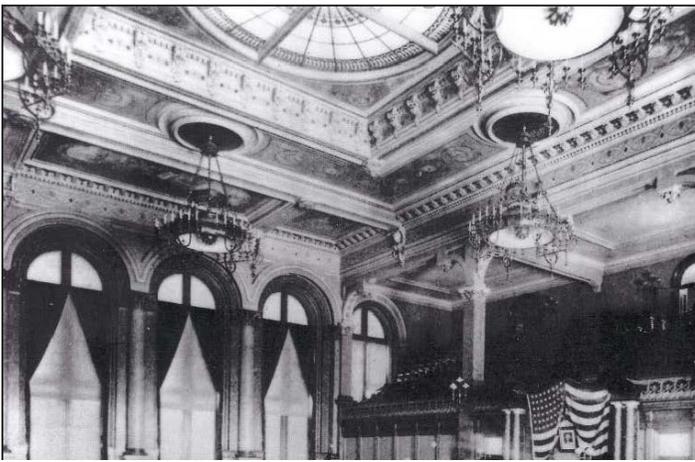


Miragoli



Garnsey

Second floor rotunda looking east



Miragoli



Miragoli

Senate Chamber

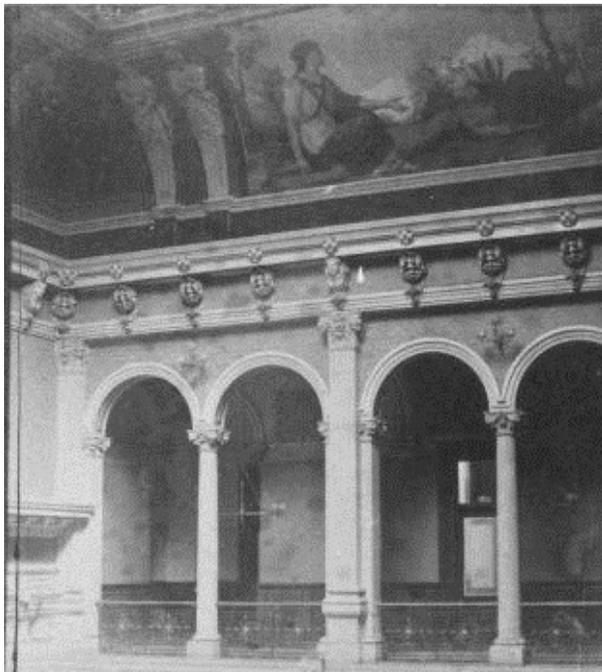


Miragoli



Garnsey

House of Representatives' Chamber



Miragoli



Garnsey

Third floor, northwest corner