

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.

April 29, 2015

THIS WEEK:

Replacing the Iowa State Capitol West Pediment Statues

BACKGROUND:

The west Capitol pediment statues were sculpted by Seraphin Cottin. He finished these statues in 1879 and was paid \$1,540.00. The original statues were carved from the same stone used for all the detailed stone work on the exterior of the Capitol. This light colored stone, Blue Sandstone, came from Carroll County, Missouri, and was chosen by the Capitol Commissioners because of the contrast of color with the brown stone and because of the "ease in cutting." The exterior renovations between 1983 to 2000 included removing and replacing the majority of this Carroll County stone with Indiana limestone from ByBee stone in Bloomington, Indiana. This included replacing the statues in the west Capitol pediment.

(Cottin also sculpted the 12 statues on the interior rotunda of the Capitol around the base of the dome.)



The original Capitol pediment statues

Replacing the Iowa State Capitol West Pediment Statues

From 1880 Capitol Commissioners Reports, reporting on work completed in 1878 an 1879:

On the west or main front of the building, in the pediment, has been introduced statuary carved from the stone of which the building is constructed, emblematical of liberty, justice, and law, the safeguards, as well as agriculture and commerce, the main supports of the State."

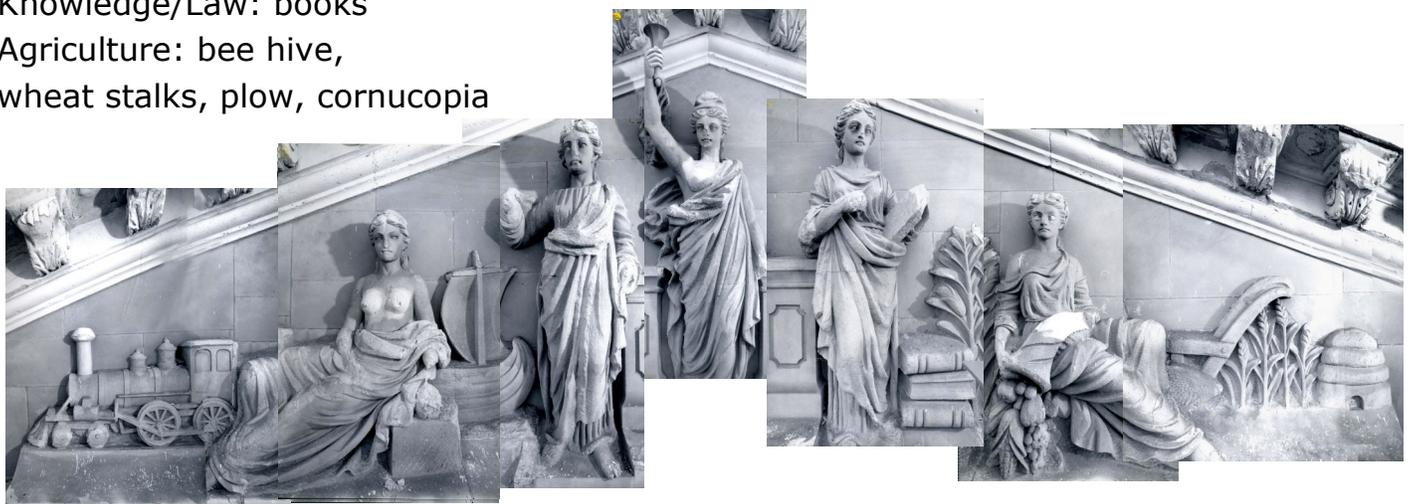
Commerce: locomotive and ship

Justice: scale

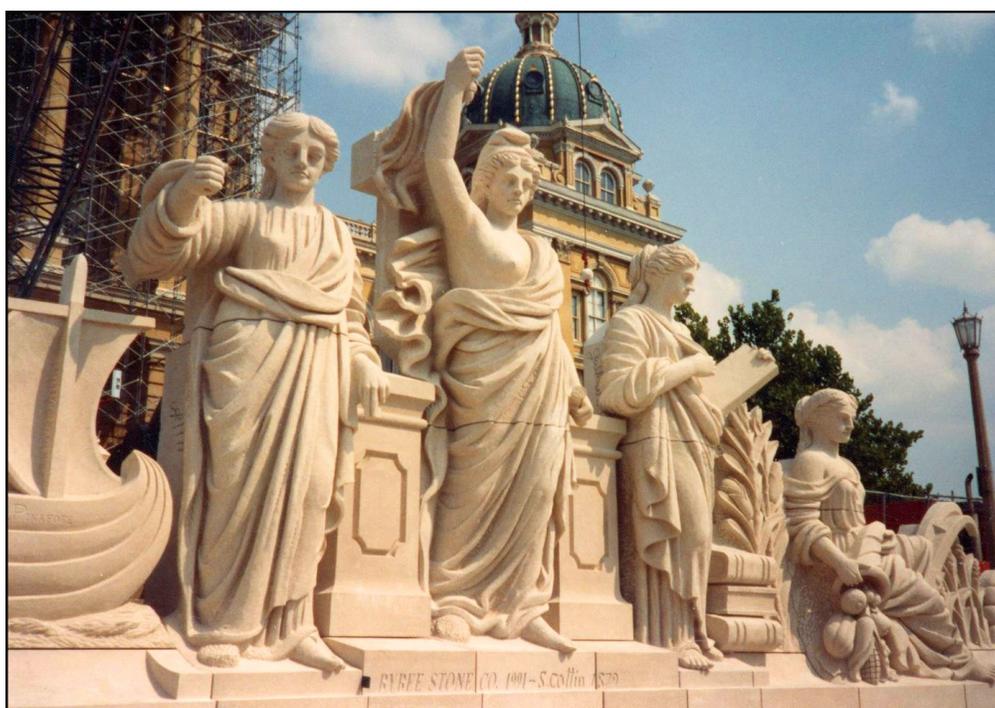
Liberty: torch

Knowledge/Law: books

Agriculture: bee hive,
wheat stalks, plow, cornucopia



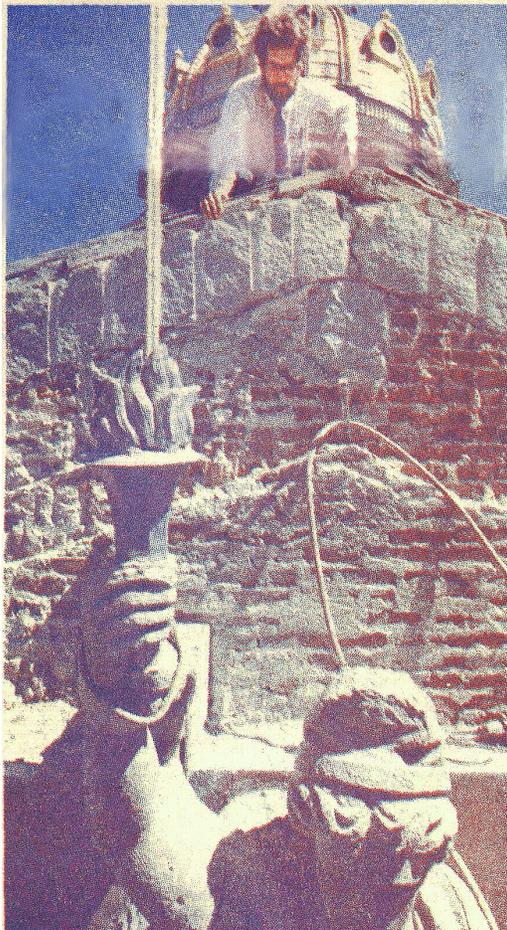
The original Capitol pediment statues photographed individually just before removal.



The newly resculpted Capitol pediment statues just before placement.

The Des Moines Register

Friday, August 31, 1990



Masonry worker Carl Crees, top, checks a worn statue on the Statehouse facade. Architect Ronald Siggelkow watches as another statue's severed arm is lifted.

Delicate project at the Statehouse

By CHARLES BULLARD

Of The Register's Iowa City Bureau

Iowa's statue of liberty lost her arm Thursday.

Working 95 feet above the ground, workers carefully removed the upraised arm and torch from the statue, which looks down from its lofty perch on the west pediment of the Iowa Capitol.

The sandstone arm was gingerly lowered to the ground by a huge crane, the first step in the delicate two- to three-week process of removing five badly weathered sandstone statues from the Statehouse so they can be shipped to Indiana to be copied in longer-lasting limestone.

The statues, which represent justice, knowledge, agriculture and commerce as well as liberty, were carved in 1879, and their features have been blurred by the ravages of time. After 111 years, the soft sandstone is crumbling.

"Literally, you can touch them and it will just flake right off," said Curt Small, project superintendent for Neumann Brothers Inc., the general contractor for the \$34.1 million restoration of the exterior of the Iowa Capitol.

"That stuff is awful rotten," added Dale Forrest, owner of Forrest and Associates, the masonry subcontractor on the project.

Restoration of the deteriorated Statehouse exterior began in the summer of 1983. Officials are hoping to finish the massive project by 1994, but a lack of money threatens that goal.

The removal of the five statues requires the skills of a surgeon and the nerves of a mountain climber.

After seven years of work, bringing the statues down

Removal of statues a delicate project at the Statehouse

CARVINGS

Continued from Page One

safely "is by far the most complex part of the process," said Ron Siggelkow, an architect for Bussard/Dikis Associates Ltd., the architectural firm overseeing the project.

"I'll be glad when those statues are down off there," Forrest said.

Jeff Leisz, a master carver from Bybee Stone Co. Inc. in Ellettsville, Ind., the firm that will be duplicating the statues, flew to Des Moines to watch the removal process. Seeing the statues in the "flesh" will make it

easier when the eight-to-10-month process of carving replacement statues begins, he said.

The stone carver said Indiana limestone was chosen because it is harder than the Missouri sandstone that was used to build the Statehouse more than a century ago. "They don't want to do this again in another 100 years," he said.

Leisz said he and his fellow stone carvers view the Statehouse project

as a "great opportunity. All of us realize we may never have a job like this again."

Although many people don't notice the statues because they're high above the huge columns on the west pediment of the capitol, Siggelkow said replacing them with exact duplicates is a high priority. "We're dealing with a part of the building that truly is an artwork," he said.

Interspersed among the five statues, which are nearly two times life size, are smaller carvings of a beehive, stalks of wheat, a plow, a horn of plenty, stalks of corn, a stack of books, a sailing ship and a steam locomotive.

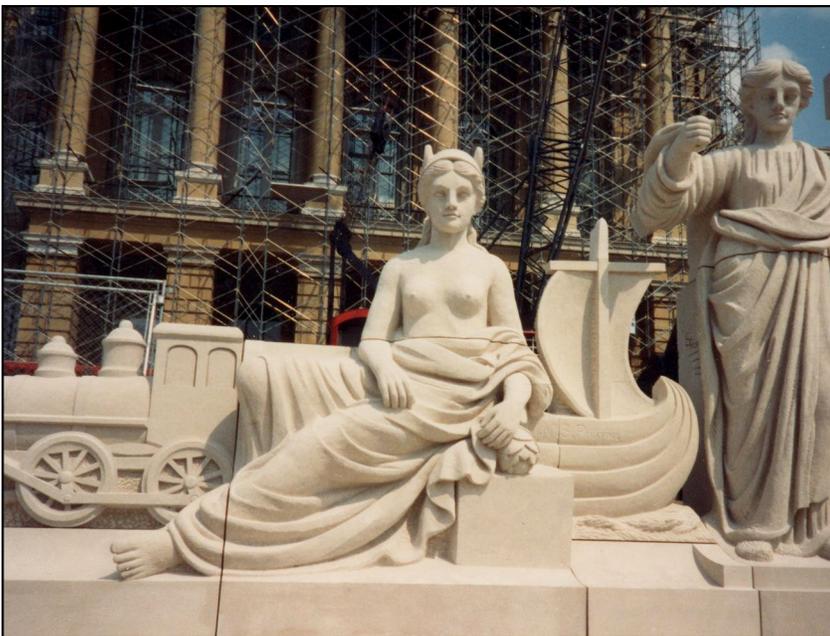
No plans for the statues could be found in the state archives, so the statues themselves must be preserved to be used as models for their replacements. That's why workers were edgy Thursday when liberty's arm was sawed off and gently lowered to the ground.

One slip and the stone carvers would have to work from photographs, a poor substitute for the real thing.

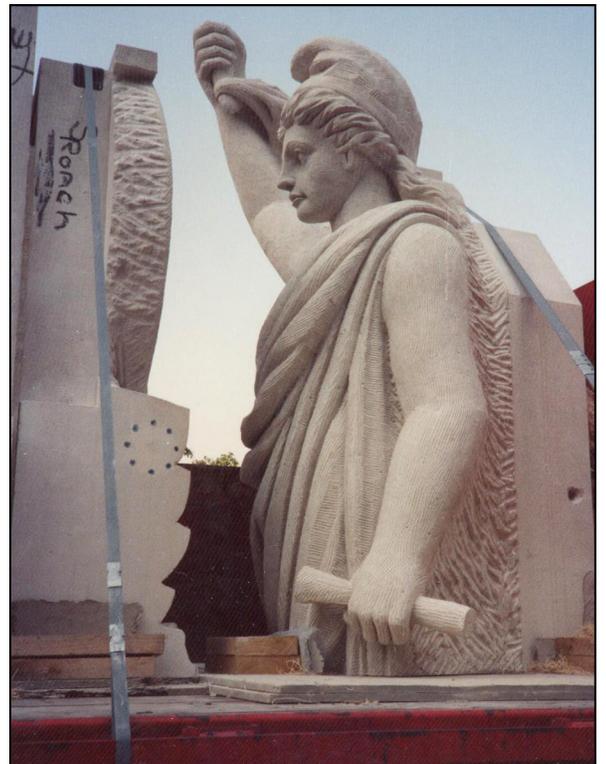
"If it did break off and it hit the ground," Small said, "there'd be nothing of that arm left."



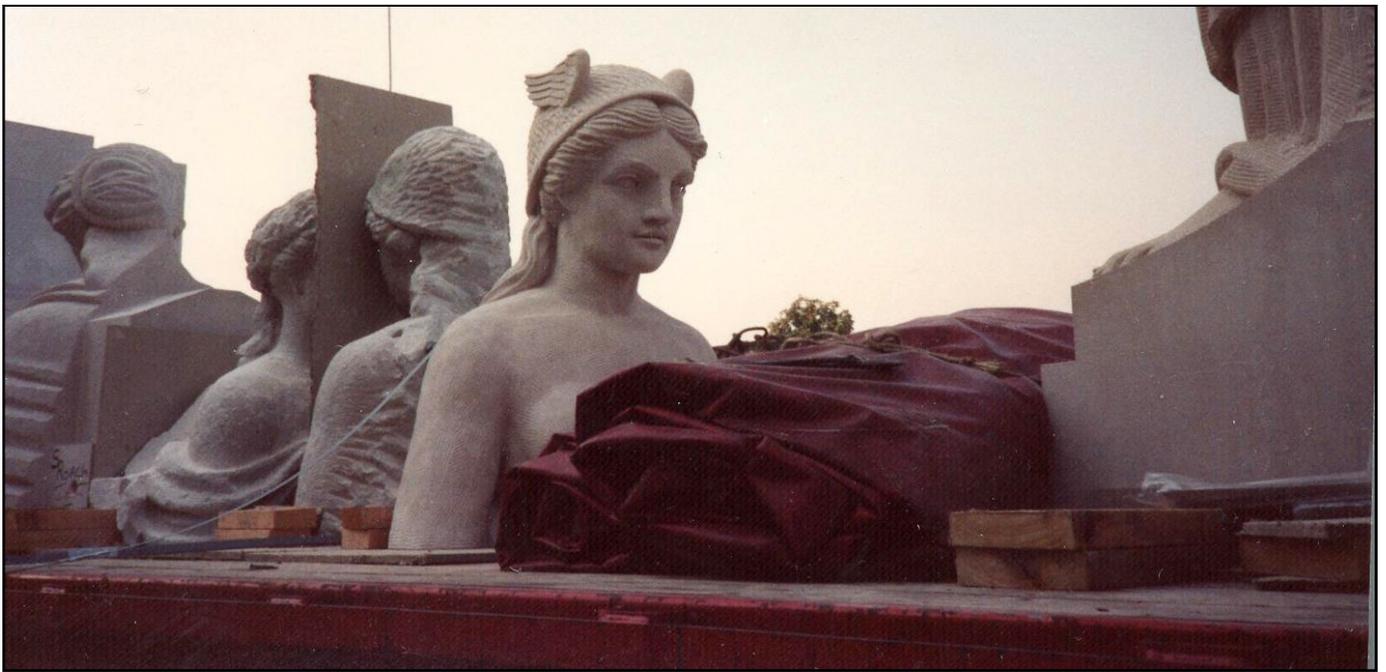
Lifting a portion of *Knowledge/Law* statue into place.



Newly sculpted *Commerce* rests on the west side of the Capitol.



Liberty arrives on a flatbed truck from Indiana.



Commerce in her winged headdress awaits transfer to the west pediment.



Locomotive portion of Commerce on the west side of the Capitol awaits installation.

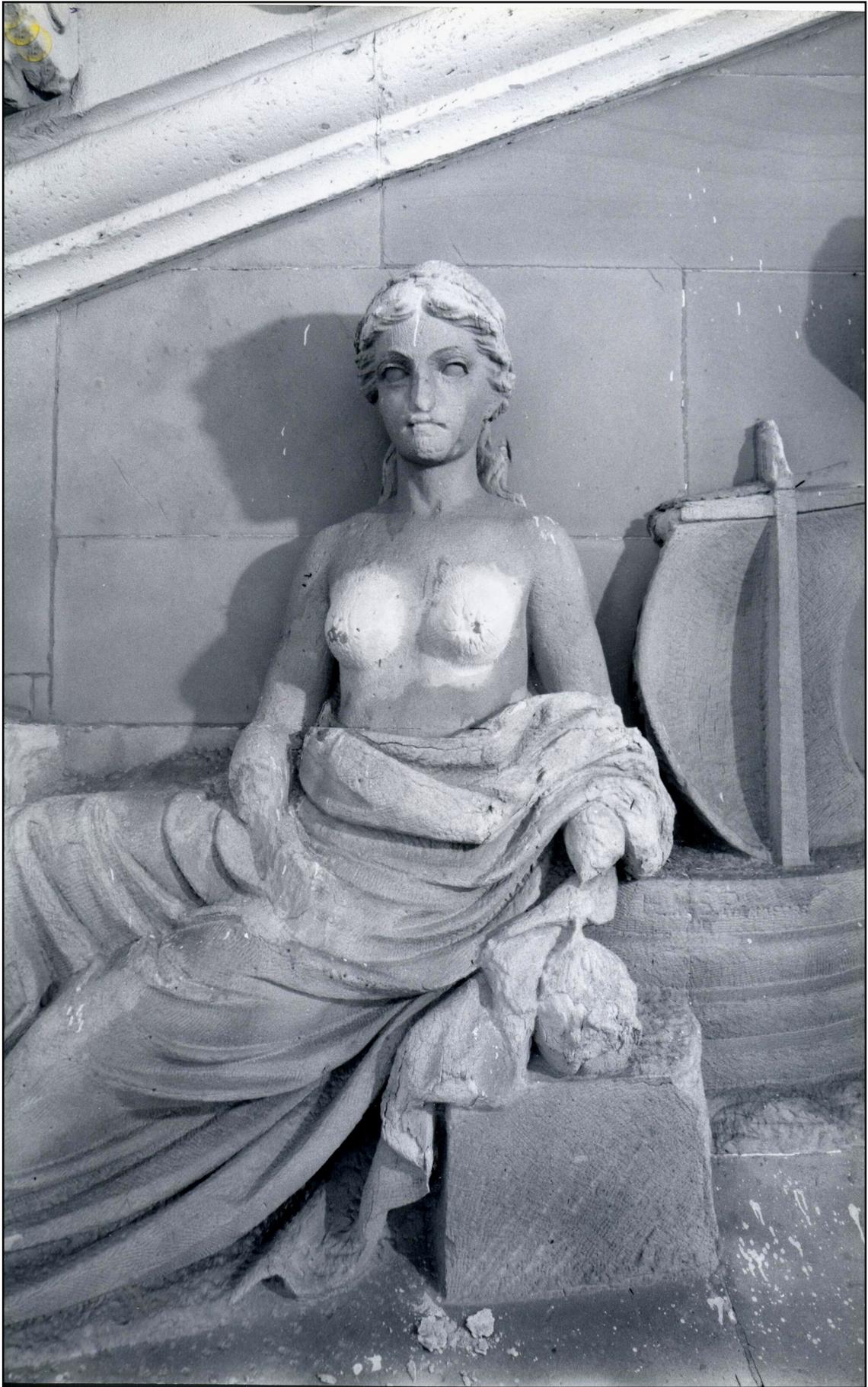


Lifting Locomotive into place.



Locomotive portion of Commerce

These are individual photographs of the 111-year-old blue sandstone statues just before removal in August of 1990.



Commerce



Justice



Liberty



Knowledge/Law



Agriculture



Plow, Beehive, and Wheat portion of *Agriculture*



Pediment with new statues



The original *Locomotive* is in archival storage at the Iowa State Historical Museum in Des Moines.

*Photo by Kay Coats, Collection Coordinator,
Iowa State Historical Museum*



The original bust of *Agriculture* is currently housed at Neumann Brothers Construction in Des Moines, Iowa.