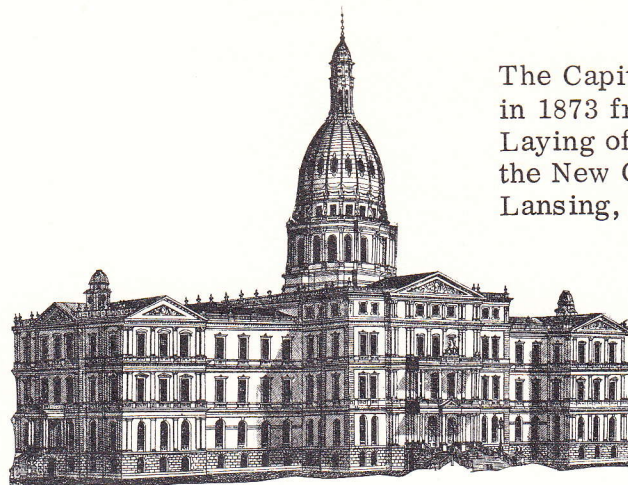


# The State Capitol of Michigan

Jack T. Crosby, Sr.



The Capitol as it was envisioned  
in 1873 from "Proceedings at the  
Laying of the Corner Stone of  
the New Capitol of Michigan,"  
Lansing, 1873.

A Presidential Address Presented at a Meeting of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing.

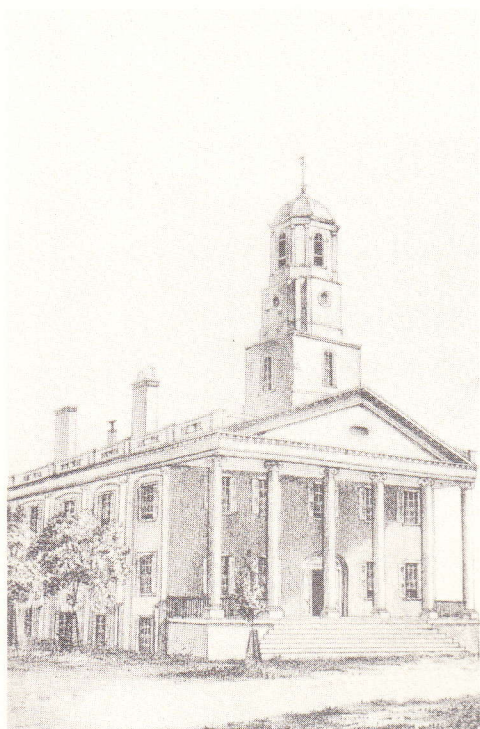
June 6, 1968

In this richly detailed fact-packed and absorbing history of Michigan's State Capitol Building, Jack T. Crosby, Sr. has traced the history of its building and beginnings in Michigan.

Crosby was born in Detroit, Michigan and moved to Lansing in 1912, with his parents. His father, A. D. Crosby, was nationally recognized as an expert stone mason and taught his trade to his son Jack, who followed in his father's footsteps, during and after graduating from Lansing Central High School. He also studied engineering and architecture, which enabled him to understand the technical details involved in constructing Michigan's present capitol building.

With his wife, Gwen, he shares a hobby of historical interest in United States capitol buildings. They have visited most of them--in some states the old and the new structures.

## The Capitols of Michigan



The First Capitol, at Detroit.  
1837-1847



The Second Capitol, at Lansing, 1847-1878.



The Present Capitol as it looked in 1879.

## THE STATE CAPITOL OF MICHIGAN

" The seat of Government shall be in the Township of Lansing,  
County of Ingham. "

This bill was one of the briefest ever passed, and was signed by Acting Governor Greenly on March 16, 1847. Thus, Lansing came into existence, and from its birth has been the Capitol of Michigan. This will be my subject, the majestic capitol building of Michigan.

To make the story complete I should start with the first capitol building, located in Detroit, where the bill was passed that put Lansing on the map. This building was built in 1823 to 1828, as a courthouse for the Territory of Michigan and became the state capitol when Michigan was admitted to the Union in January, 1837.

It was a two-story brick edifice, of Ionic Order, 60 feet by 90 feet, surmounted by a dome 140 feet high with a front portico supported by six columns and the entablature at the sides, supported by pilasters. Its classical design reflected the characteristic influence of that period. It cost \$24,500.00. The corner stone was laid with Masonic service on September 22, 1823.

When the 12th Legislature, the last to hold session in the building, designated Lansing to be the site of the capitol, it was abandoned at the close of the session, March 17, 1847. The contents of the corner stone were removed and later placed in the corner stone of the present capitol. From 1848, until it

was destroyed by fire in 1893, it was used as a school by the Detroit Board of Education. Incidentally, it survived Lansing's first capitol by 11 years, which also burned after having been abandoned by the lawmakers.

The first capitol erected in Lansing, built in 1847, and ready for Michigan's 13th Legislature in 1848, was of simple and graceful design, 60 feet x 100 feet in size, at the cost of \$22,952.01, including a 16 foot addition, added in 1865. It was a two-story frame structure, painted white with green wooden shutters and a tin cupola or dome mounting its roof. It was called the temporary capitol, as the original designers of Lansing had set aside Block 249, the highest site in Lansing, as the grounds for a permanent capitol.

This building, later called "the barn" as it was so uncomfortable, was erected in the block bounded by Washington and Capitol Avenues, and Allegan and Washtenaw Streets. It was used as the capitol until January 1, 1879, when the new capitol was ready for occupancy. At that time the entire square block was divided into lots and sold by the Board of Auditors. The lot containing the building was purchased by the Piatt brothers. They used it in the manufacture of wood handles until it was destroyed by fire in February of 1883.

In 1852, the need of more room and a fireproof structure brought about the passage of an act to erect a "State Office Building" in the center of Block 249. So at the cost of \$15,500.00, a two-story brick structure about 100 feet by 40 feet with over 7,000 square feet of floor space was built. This provided office space for the State Treasurer, Auditor General, Secretary of State, and the Land Commissioner. In 1863, an addition was built, almost doubling its size. This building was used until 1870,

when it was razed so construction of the new capitol could begin. The brick and other salvage materials from this building were purchased by Charles W. Butler and were used in the construction of the Butler Block, built in 1872 on the northwest corner of Washington and Kalamazoo. This building was later razed to make way for the present J. C. Penny Company store.

Governor H. P. Baldwin recognized the inadequacy of the buildings as to size and the fact that the capitol was not fireproof. So in his inaugural message to the Legislature on January 4, 1871, he urged that they should provide for the erection of a suitable capitol building.

A bill "to provide of the erection of a new capitol" was introduced in the Senate, February 14, 1871. The Senate passed the bill on February 28 and it was passed by the House of Representatives on March 22. With the Governor's signature on March 31, 1871, it became a law.

The bill provided an appropriation of \$1,200,000.00 for the building of the capitol, \$30,000.00 for the erection of a temporary building to accomodate the state offices occupying the building to be razed, and \$10,000.00 for incidental expenses. The Governor was also directed to appoint three Commissioners, to be known as the "Board of State Building Commissioners" with the Governor to be an additional member, ex-officio and president of that board. A secretary, not a member of that board, was also to be appointed.

Governor Baldwin sent to the Legislature the names of Ebenezer O. Grosvenor of Jonesville, James Shearer of Bay City, and Alexander Chapoton of Detroit, to be Commissioners. They were confirmed by the Legislature on a joint ballot. Allen L. Bours of Lansing was appointed Secretary.

This board continued until the completion of the capitol, eight years later, with exception of the President of the Board, being vested in the Governor. Therefore, work commenced under Governor H. P. Baldwin, continued under Governor John J. Bagley and was completed with Governor Charles M. Croswell as its President.

During the entire term of this Commission, of over eight years, no regular monthly meeting was omitted, and many special meetings were held, as necessary, frequently lasting until after midnight. At all meetings, a full Board was in attendance and all matters brought before the Board had its final disposition, by an unanimous vote. At completion, they returned to the state \$15,110.46 in unused money.

The first job of the Commission was the erection of a temporary building. This was done for \$30,693.94, slightly over the appropriation. This was a three-story brick building with a 66 foot frontage on Washington Avenue at the southwest corner of Allegan Street. Construction was started June 5, 1871, and the building was occupied in November of that year. It was used by the state until the capitol was completed. After the state offices moved out, it was rented for mercantile and office use. In 1880, it was offered to the City of Lansing at an option of \$17,000.00, but the proposition was defeated by a small margin at the polls. The state continued ownership until Governor Grosbeck arranged the sale of it to the United Cigar Store Company for \$405,000.00. They erected the United Building on the site. When the United Company failed, the building was purchased by Eastern interests and leased to the Woolworth Company.

Twenty sets of plans were submitted in response to an advertisement of the Commission for plans on a new capitol building for Michigan. On January 24, 1872, the examination of all the plans was completed and on the first ballot, the plans of Architect Elijah F. Myers of Springfield, Illinois, were the unanimous choice.

The style of architecture of the capitol is Palladian. It is a classical style with its origin in the architecture of Greece and Rome. The building consists of a center section with a dome, and wings extending north, south, east and west, forming a cross. The outside walls of the main part are higher than the wings and the dome with the graceful lines adds beauty to the complete building. The building being set in the center of four square blocks is given a beautiful background with a large expanse of lawn, shrubs, and trees.

The dimensions of the building are: the length, not including porticoes, 345 feet and 2 inches; depth, 191 feet and 5 inches; height, 265 feet. Including the porticoes and steps the dimensions are 420 feet by 274 feet. The height from floor to diaphragm is 150 feet. The building covers 1-1/6 acres, has 139 rooms, and the walk around the outside is 1,320 feet.

On July 15, 1872, N. Osburn & Company of Rochester, New York and Detroit, Michigan were awarded the contract to construct the capitol, for the sum of \$1,144,057.20, the work to be completed by December 1, 1877. The subcontract for the stone work and other parts were given to Richard Glaister and James Appleyard.

The original plans showed a subbasement with 9 miles of steam pipes and air ducts for heat and ventilating. The ventilation functioned for years, making the building very comfortable,



but later, with remodeling, these ducts were closed with paneling and the capitol lost its original air conditioning.

The basement had a boiler room at each end, each having a battery of three large low pressure boilers, for heat only. The chimneys at each end were mounted with small domes. These boilers have now been replaced with heat furnished by the city Board of Water and Light, and elevators now installed in the chimneys go to the Senate and House. The original building also had pumps for a water supply in case of necessity or a failure of the city supply.

With the finding of the original plans the question of who had what office was answered. On the first floor were offices of the Secretary of State, State Treasurer, Auditor General, Commissioner of State Lands, Adjutant General, Quartermaster, Inspector General, Board of State Auditor, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Commissioner of Insurance, Commissioner of Railroads, State Board of Health, State Board of Agriculture and State Museum.

On the second floor was the Senate at the south end and the House of Representatives at the north end. The office and reception rooms of the Governor, Commissioner of Labor, Commissioner of Banking, Board of Pardons, Telephone and Telegraph office, and Legislative Post Office, were also located on this floor.

On the third floor were located the State Library, Senate and House galleries, Supreme Court and the Attorney General.

On the fourth floor was a room I wish was still there. It was an interesting feature, a cozy room called "The Pioneers' Hall." Here Michigan Fathers and early pioneers assembled from time to time to chat over the past, wonder at the present

and dream of the future. Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have had tape recordings of these meetings? Also on the fourth floor were the large tanks that furnished water for the hydraulic elevator and for various offices. Here also was the ascent to the dome.

In the general instructions to the architect, some of the prices listed were:

Limestone	\$ .65 per cu. ft.
Brick	7.00 per thousand
Sand	.85 per cu. ft.
Mason wage	3.50 per day ( 10 hours )
Carpenter	2.50 per day ( 10 hours )
Laborer	1.75 per day ( 10 hours )

The brick was furnished by two companies. First by George B. Hall of Detroit, who had a yard on the east side of the Grand River near the Detroit and Lansing Railroad and in the neighborhood of the Mineral Spring Hotel. Mr. Hall had 70 acres of the finest brick clay he had ever seen. He said it was 50 to 75 percent better than any around Detroit. Also the finest fire clay was discovered by Hall on Willett's farm, eight miles from the city. By September of 1872, he had deposited half a million brick on the capitol grounds and expected to manufacture another 12 to 13 thousand by the close of the season, then he would go woodchopping for the fuel supply for the next season. In October, 1875, Hall went broke due to freezing weather at the brick yard.

Several millions of common brick were required for backing up the stone work. So James M. Turner and John Jordon, formed the Riverside Brick Company to furnish bricks for the capitol. ( This was the old brick yard on East Michigan. )

The corridors of the first, second and third floors are paved with marble from Vermont. The basement floor was originally

battleship linoleum, but after a fire in the east wing, a green and white terrazzo floor was installed in the 1920's. All beams, girders, stairways, etc., are of iron. John Siddons of Rochester, New York, was the contractor for the galvanized iron work and Charles Vogel was his superintendent. The roof is of especially made tin from Wales. The windows were glazed with polished English plate glass, installed by I. Gillett of Lansing, imported by E. A. Boyd of New York and manufactured by Ravenhead & Sutton of Lancashire, England.

The glass ceiling in the Senate and House were furnished by George A. Misch & Company of Chicago. The panels represented the seals of each of the States. Done in ruby and white, with the Michigan seal being over the presiding officer and the United States seal over the entrance of each hall. The second tier from the outer edge showed various products and industries of Michigan. The balance of the panels contained various ornamental designs. These glass ceilings were removed when the Senate and House were redecorated a short time ago.

An allegorical representation of the rise and progress of Michigan is carved in bas-relief on the main pediment of building on the east front. The stone carving was done by Richard Rutter, the design was originated by Herman Wehner who was Prussian born. He came to America with his father at the age of six, and settled on the banks of the Sebewaing River, studied under Henry K. Brown of New York City. He was about 25 years old when he designed and built a scale plaster model of the pediment. This was done in his studio in one of the rooms in the capitol. The work took about four months. J. Roberts of Detroit also had his "studio" in the basement. He modeled the plaster ornaments for the interior.

The massive doors at the main entrances were made at the shops of George F. Doemling, No. 7 Fort Street East in Detroit, the cabinet work was by Doemling and the wood carving by F. Lapp.

The foundation was made of limestone, sand and cement. The limestone came from Lamont, Illinois, was crushed and prepared on the capitol grounds. In the summer of 1873, the foundation was completed.

October 2, 1873, the cornerstone of New Hampshire granite was laid. That was a day Lansing will never forget. All business places were closed. To help entertain the crowd, posters warning everyone to "PREPARE FOR OCTOBER 2, CORNERSTONE DAY. Everyone must be fed." Another poster by J. Esselstyn & Son, a grocer, said they were prepared to furnish provisions of every kind--"Remember! There will be a host of people here, and we must feed them! Get Ready!"

The 7,000 residents of Lansing did prepare. The newspapers of that time give the number of visitors all the way from 30 to 100 thousand. But 40,000 was most frequently mentioned. Regular and special trains from Saginaw, Jackson, Flint, Grand Rapids, and many other trains arrived with 6 to 20 coaches each and still hundreds were left behind. You had to elbow your way through humanity to get anywhere. Hotels and private homes were taxed to the limit.

Despite all the efforts of Lansingites to make the visitors comfortable, jokes in outstate newspapers sprang up about visitors, such as: "Sleeping on two straws," "Roosting on the ridgepole," "Taking the soft side of a plank," and "Camping under a billiard table."

But the weather was perfect, and all in all it was a great day.

The program consisted of a parade of over a mile in length, with General William Humphrey, Chief Marshall, the Police, the Military, the civic officers, Knights Templars, Masons, and the IOOF, sixteen bands, including Lansing Cornet Band, Detroit Light Guard Band, Constantine Band and First United States Infantry Band, Governors, Senators, Representatives, Judges, Mayor and City Councilmen in attendance.

Introductory address was given by Governor John J. Bagley and the prayer by Right Reverend Samuel S. McCoskry. The oration was delivered by Honorable William A. Howard, and the cornerstone was laid by the Michigan Masonic Grand Lodge, with Honorable Hugh McCurdy of Corunna as Grand Master.

With the cornerstone laid, the work continued. The superstructure was of Amherst, Ohio sandstone, clamped endwise together at angles, repeated each alternate course to the top of the building. The clamps are 9 inches long, 1/4 inch thick and 1 inch wide, set into the stones for 1-1/2 inches, and are made of wrought iron, dipped into linseed oil while hot. One-eighth inch of mortar is around each stone.

High school students were constant visitors to the site, and were allowed if they didn't ask too many questions that would stop men from working. Some boys received jobs as messengers, as call boys for the derrick operators, and carried water in tin pails with a dipper for the workmen. At that time employees had a water break but no coffee break. All of the men drank from the same dipper. Since the Board of Health had not as yet established its sanitary rules, or even the testing of drinking water, the water came from wells on the capitol grounds.

It was a novelty to watch the stone saw. People could not understand how a flat strip of soft iron, moving back and forth with water carrying sand onto the block of stone could cut it in

two. This type of saw was in use until recent years, when the cutting sand was replaced by diamond edges on a steel blade.

It was also interesting to watch the stone carver cut the bas-relief in the stone from the 1/2 scale plaster model, using calipers to locate points on the stone with relation to those he had marked on the model. After finding many of these spots on the stone, the object he was carving would take form and with his skillful use of the mallet and chisel he would remove the unwanted stone and a perfect image would appear.

The lumber used in the capitol, clear of all knots, wind-shakes or defects, was dressed and piled upon the grounds under cover for at least two years before being used. The underside of the stairways are paneling with carved mouldings and have no nuts or bolts showing as they are in the form of ornamental rosettes. All of the wood floors are of three-inch Norway pine. The massive interior doorways, windows and wainscoting are of white pine, except in the Governor's quarters, where black walnut was used, which was finished to represent ebony. All other woodwork is finished to imitate English branch walnut.

In 1905, electricity was installed, replacing the original lighting of gas. The copper chandeliers, complete with figures of moose and deer and lettering of the state seal that hang in the halls and the prised chandeliers of the House and Senate were electrically illuminated. Other gas lights were replaced with new electric ones.

Around the rotunda balcony are impressive oil portraits of former governors. Just below the balcony of the upper dome are eight paintings of Michigan, arts, industry, and professions in oil, by an artist still unknown. The balance of the interior of the dome is highly decorated with elegant designs in rich blues and gilt topped with stars in a sky of blue.

The rotunda floor on the first story is paved with blocks of glass, 1-1/2 inches thick, supported by a frame of iron, in which each glass panel is closely fitted. This rotunda is 44-1/2 feet in diameter.

Many of the workmen were from Lansing, but some of those like General Superintendent James Appleyard from Detroit, and Richard Glaister, who was in charge of the stone work, moved too and became residents of Lansing after the capitol was finished. Appleyard's wife Johanna died September 17, 1873, at the age of 38. Work was suspended for three days. About a year later he remarried. Appleyard built a large brick house on the southwest corner of Kalamazoo and Walnut Streets and a duplicate on the southwest corner of Ottawa and Walnut Streets. This one he lived in. A few years ago it was owned and occupied by Fred M. Alger, Jr., former Michigan Secretary of State, and Ambassador to Belgium. The house has now been razed and part of the new State Highway building occupies the land. The heaviest piece of limestone brought to the capitol weighed 13,600 pounds and the sandstone weighed 16,800 pounds. Then a piece for the front portico was brought, 15 feet by 6 feet by 18 inches, weighing 20,000 pounds.

May 14, 1878, while lowering a large cornice stone in position on the south portico, the mast of the derrick broke, letting the stone of about six tons drop. Two men on top of the stone were injured, but not seriously. In its fall it damaged most every step on the south portico. The amount of the damage was about \$5,000.00 and several months delay.

On December 6, 1878, a gas test was run. One thousand four hundred jets were lighted for four hours consuming 18,000 cubic feet. The company said this was satisfactory.

December 20, 1878, the capitol had its first fire, caused by spontaneous combustion in the House of Representatives. After cleaning and oiling the desks, the floor was swept and the sweepings were left in a dustpan next to the wood wainscotting near the west entrance. The fire broke out about midnight, destroying three or four feet of wainscotting and several yards of carpet.

Finally the day arrived when the building was completed and dedication day was set for January 1, 1879. The exercises were held in Representatives Hall with Governor Charles M. Croswell presiding. The service was opened with music by the Knights Templars band of Lansing. At that time it was rated the finest band in the state. Addresses were given by all the living ex-Governors of Michigan and the final report of the Building Commissioners was read by E. O. Grosvernor, the Vice President. Governor Croswell then formally accepted the building on behalf of the state. Reverend T. P. Prudden, pastor of the Plymouth Congregational Church of Lansing, closed the meeting with the benediction.

A paragraph from the report of the Commission is worth repeating:

" The Commission has aimed to erect a capitol worthy of the dignity of the State, massive and elegant, void of all trivial ornamentation and pleasing in appearance, of enduring material, substantial in construction, and perfect in workmanship, and while earnestly endeavoring to accomplish this, that we have not been unmindful of the injunction of the Legislature to make no expenditure exceeding the appropriation. "

As I look back I recall many changes outside of the capitol. At one time there was an arch at the entrance of the ground on Capitol Avenue at Michigan Avenue in the form of an " M " which was illuminated at night. Also, flowers and plants have been



arranged in beds, forming the American flag, a star, and a large block "M." Civil War cannons, that kids like to play on, guarded the east front until called to service in the Second World War, not to fight as they once did, but to be melted into some new war product.

One day the Legislature passed a law that all public building doors must swing out. When they left they had to pull the capitol doors in, so the exterior door had to be rehinged. This made it necessary to remove some decoration on the keystone over the doors so they could open all the way as the decoration hung below the tops of the doors.

In 1901, a curved dash Oldsmobile made its way up the front steps of the capitol. This same car was also driven up the steps of the national capitol in Washington, D. C. As a youngster I was in the crowd that watched so-called "human flies" climb the capitol building.

The big change was made in 1953, when the lines of 735, 24-watt light bulbs were replaced by flood lights flashed onto the capitol dome. At this time the two small domes at the north and south ends of the building had to be removed as they cast large shadows on the dome. Governor G. Mennen Williams pushed the button officially lighting the 37 new floodlights, which are of less expense to operate and maintain.

In 1951, the trip up the long flight of stairs to the dome was closed to visitors on the recommendation of the state fire marshal. This trip was open for 80 years, with as many as 35,000 people a year making the climb. On peak days there were as many as 2,000 going up and down the metal stairs to the dome.

In September of 1965, Lieutenant Governor William G. Milliken accepted a certificate, signifying that photographs, architectural measurements and any history of Michigan's historical capitol to be preserved in the Archives of the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C. Let us make sure that not only the records are saved, but let's keep our Number One historic building, OUR MAJESTIC STATE CAPITOL.

\*\*\*\*\*

The author is greatly indebted to the following in the preparation and publication of this brochure . . .

Mrs. Geneva Kebler Wiskemann, Reference Archivist, Archivist Section, Historical Commission, who assisted in obtaining and studying the original blueprints of the Capitol Building.

Richard Hathaway, Head of the Michigan Section, Michigan State Library for use of the scrapbooks in the Jenison Collection.

Helen Wallin, Publicist, Information & Education Division, Michigan Department of Conservation, for typing of the manuscript.

Public Relations Department, Jack White, Director, Oldsmobile Division of General Motors Corporation, for producing four hundred copies of this brochure.

And . . . to my wife, Gwen, for editing and helping with the original draft.

Historically,

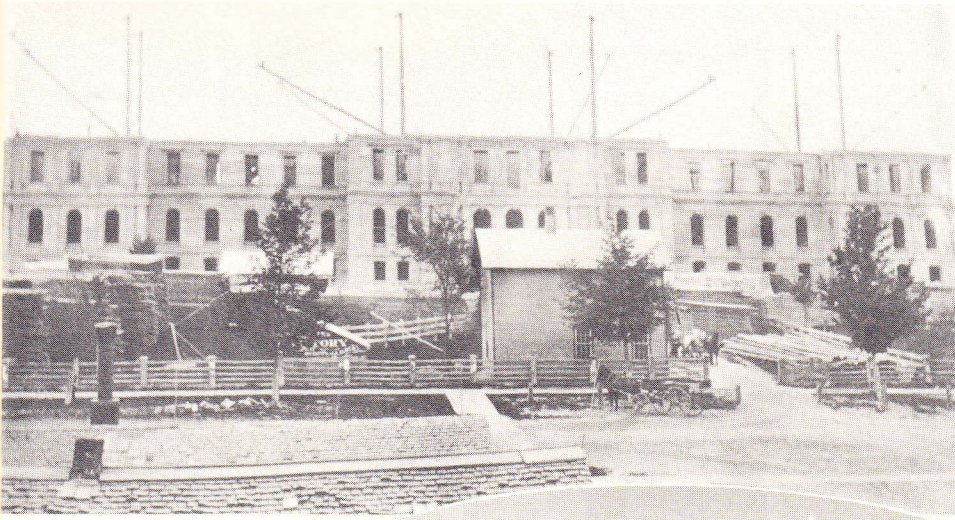
Jack T. Crosby, Sr.



One o  
and a  
taken

## Our new Capitol under construction

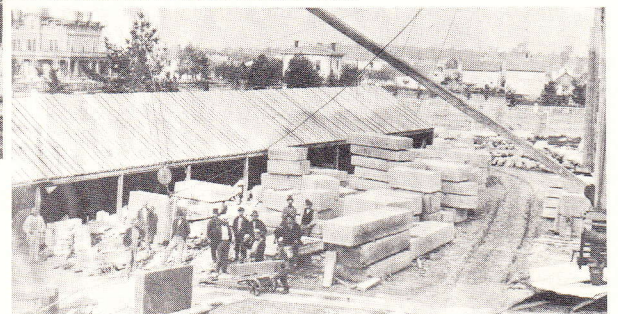
This view was taken  
May 31, 1875.



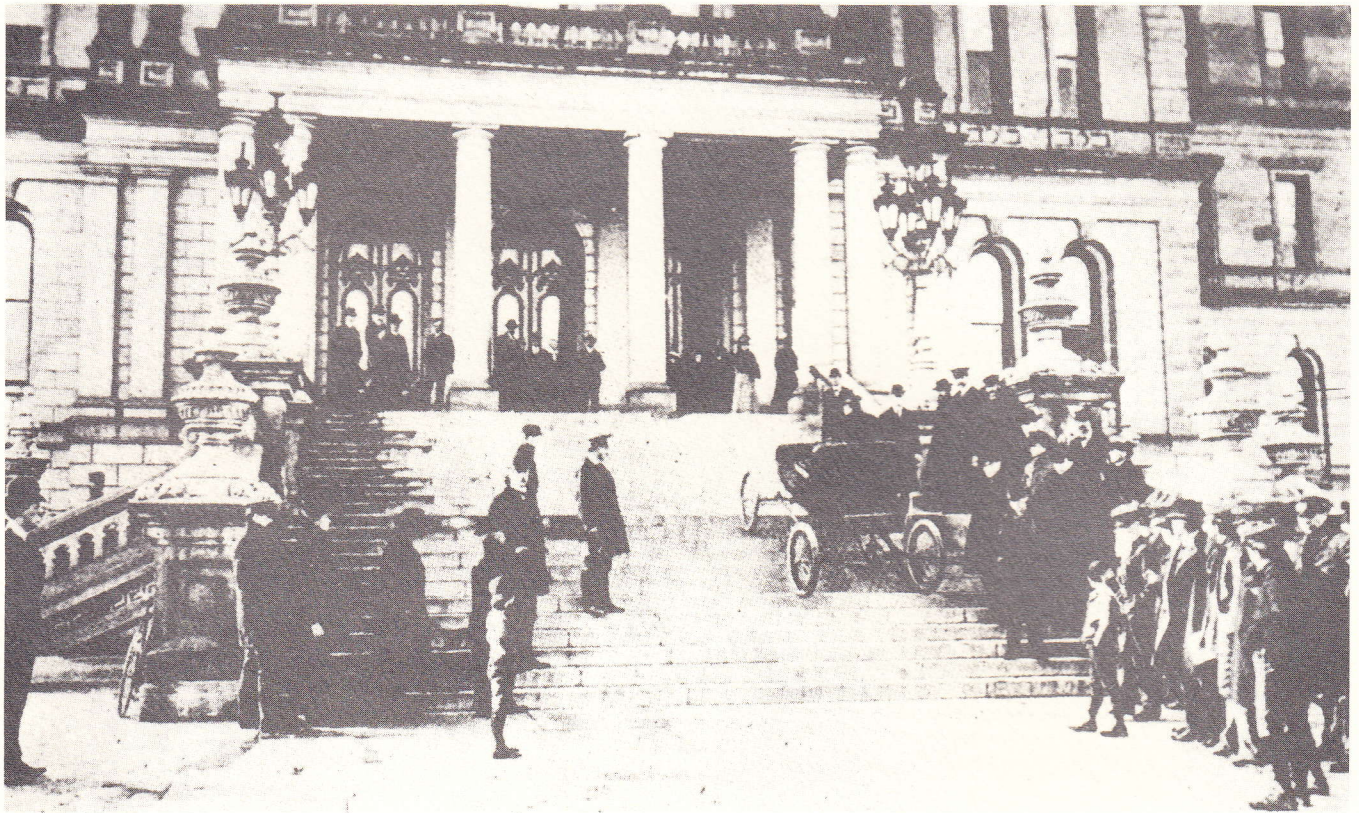
East view of Capitol as it appeared September 19, 1877.



One of the large stones passing up Michigan Avenue  
and a view of the stone yard in front of the Capitol  
taken June 12, 1876.



20



*Oldsmobile Climbing Michigan State Capitol Steps as an Advertising Stunt*

All Historical Society of Greater Lansing members, local schools, libraries and friends of the Society may have copies of this brochure free of charge, courtesy of Oldsmobile Division.