

A PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE LIBRARY AND SUPREME COURT BUILDING

1908-1910

Part 1 Exterior Construction

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Connecticut State Library**

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State Archives PG 220, Box 12 oversized

The newly built Connecticut State Library and Supreme Court Building at 231 Capitol Avenue in Hartford was described in 1910 as "one of the most beautiful structures in this country and said by some to be the handsomest building in New England."

Hartford Courant Dec. 17, 1910, p. 18



State Archives, PG 220, Box 2, folder 9



Prior to 1910, the State Library was located in the State Capitol, where it had been housed since 1878. By 1906, the space for the Library was inadequate. The collections were dispersed in four locations throughout the building and over 13,000 new items were being received each year. Portraits of the Governors of Connecticut were displayed along the walls, and the Charter of the Colony of Connecticut and other valuable archival material were stored in free-standing vaults.

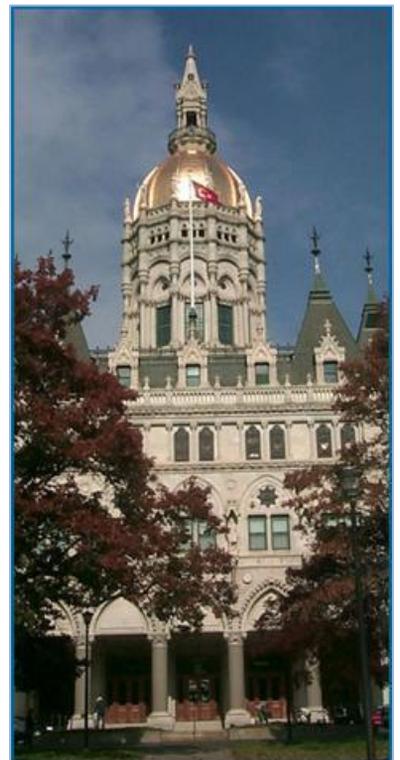


State Library Portrait

In his 1906 *Annual Report* State Librarian George Godard comments: "It has been my thought and hope that some provisions might be made ...whereby all the books of the library could be brought together, where the several portraits and paintings could be properly and safely hung, where regularly constructed vaults for invaluable records and papers might be accessible, and where rooms or special apartments for study could be provided and proper provisions made for the development and work of our State Library."

The Commission to Make Repairs on the Capitol and to Procure a Site for a New Building for State Officials was charged with solving the space problem, not only for the State Library, but also for all the other agencies that were residing in the State Capitol. A *New York Sunday Herald* article from August 5, 1906 presented its solution:

The Capitol itself proving so inadequate to meet the demands made upon it by increasing State business, it was deemed best to do something toward relieving the congestion there. To enlarge the Capitol and preserve its present symmetry was impossible. Moreover, the building not being thoroughly fireproof, it was not considered an ideal repository for the State's valuable collection of books, documents and portraits. It being decided, therefore, that it should be the library which should have a home for itself, the fact was brought to notice that the Supreme Court room was hardly what it should be and that, in any event, it should be near the State's law library. Hence the intention to keep court and library under one roof.



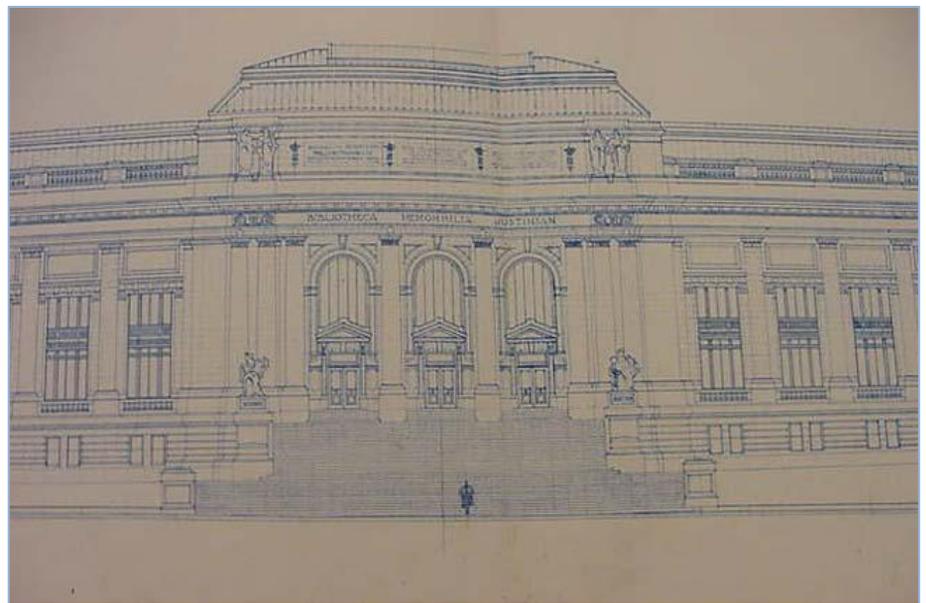


Architects Donn Barber of New York and E.T. Hapgood of Hartford envisioned a design based on an adaptation of the Italian Renaissance style of architecture. The design included three wings off of a central lobby, the State Library on the left, Memorial Hall in the center and the Supreme Court on the right.

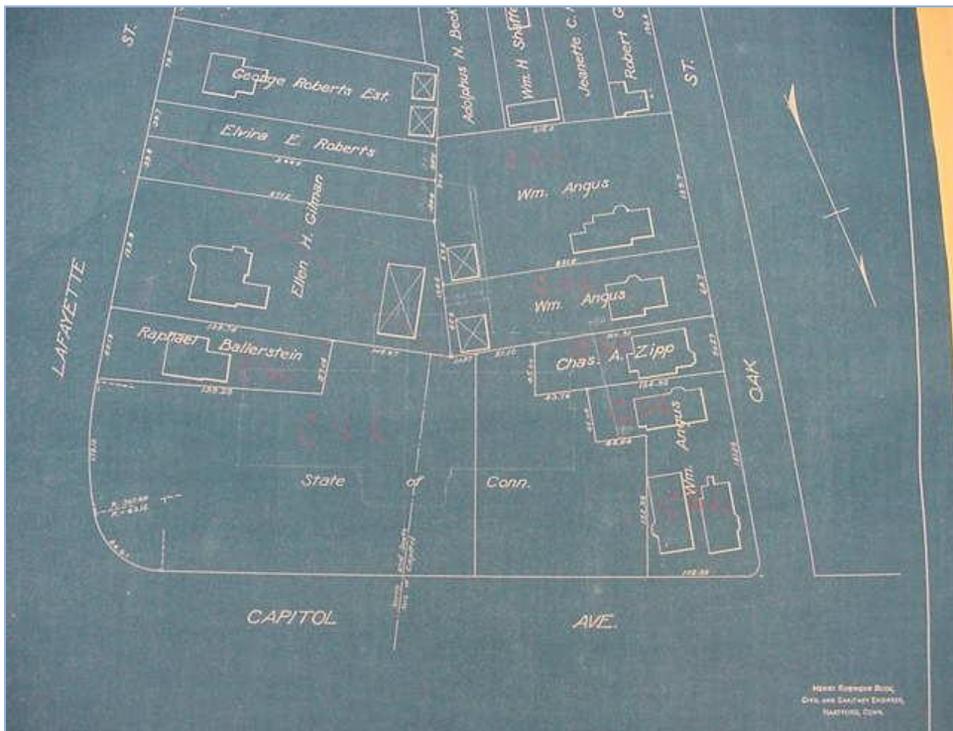
Connecticut State Library and Supreme Court Building Plans and Elevations, v. 2 Probate vault 727.8 C 716d

"According to the architects, the classical features outlined in their proposal of 1906 expressed the "dignified purpose of the building". Though not in the Gothic architectural style of the Capitol, the similarity in "color and materials, scale and general mass" between the two buildings ensured that the structures would "harmonize well".

Connecticut Bar Journal v. 67, 1993, p. 484



State Library Collection



The property purchased for the new building was directly across the street from the State Capitol. This plot map indicates with a faint white T-shaped outline the placement for the new building. The front stairs will be where the word "of" appears in "State of Conn" in the foreground. All the surrounding properties were privately owned.



With the groundbreaking on July 29, 1908, Godard's vision for a new library was underway. This photo taken Jan. 7, 1909, looking south from the State Capitol, shows the progress of the excavation. The main entrance of the building will be near where the largest tree stands in the middle foreground. The grid of planks on the right outlines the excavation area for the Supreme Court. Washington Street in on the far left (east), Lafayette Street on the near left (east) and Oak Street (partially shown) on the right (west).

Men excavated the site with shovels and pickaxes and loaded the debris into horse-drawn wagons.

State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Undated



The builder and general contractor for the project was Marc Eidlitz & Son of New York. Construction began on October 23, 1908 and according to the terms of the contract, the building was to be completed by October 1, 1910. This view is looking southeast, toward Lafayette Street, and shows the excavation of the Memorial Hall and Library sections of the building. The foundation for the central portion of the building extends down to bedrock. Private residences were precariously close.

State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated Dec. 9, 1908, detail



Ramps led into the excavation area to allow wagons to deliver supplies and remove debris. In this photograph from Dec. 5, 1908, horse drawn wagons are lining up on an area not yet excavated which will be the Supreme Court side of the building. The line of planks the man is standing on in the middle foreground outlines the front (north) wall of the Court side.

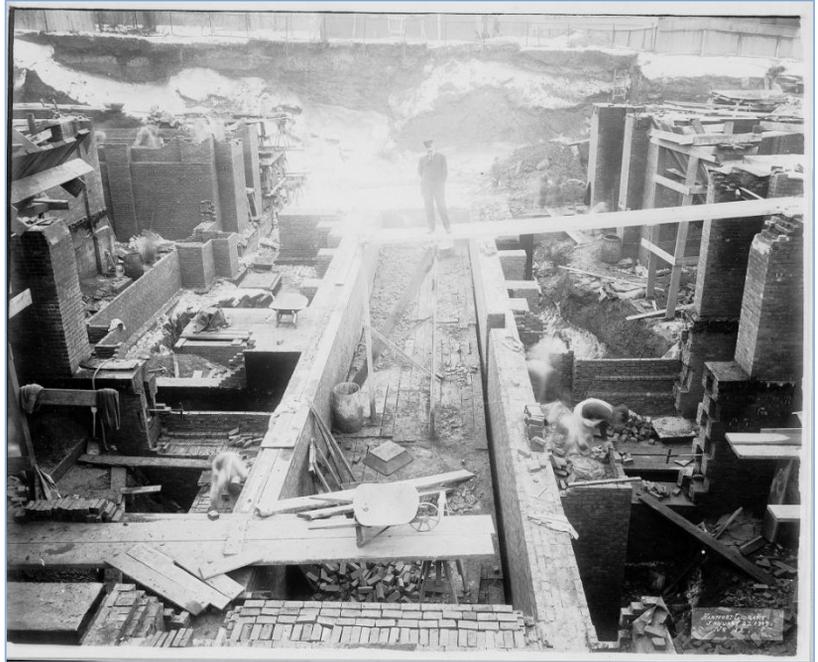
State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated Dec. 5, 1908

State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated Jan. 1, 1909



Looking south from the State Capitol. Derricks are in place and foundation footings are visible on the Library side (to the left). In the foreground on Capitol Avenue, horse-drawn wagons are carting away debris while an automobile travels down the street. Photo taken Jan.1, 1909.

Over 5 million bricks were used in the construction; many were manufactured by the Tuttle Brick Co., of Middletown, CT. These men are laying bricks on January 22, 1909; the high temperature was only 27 degrees.



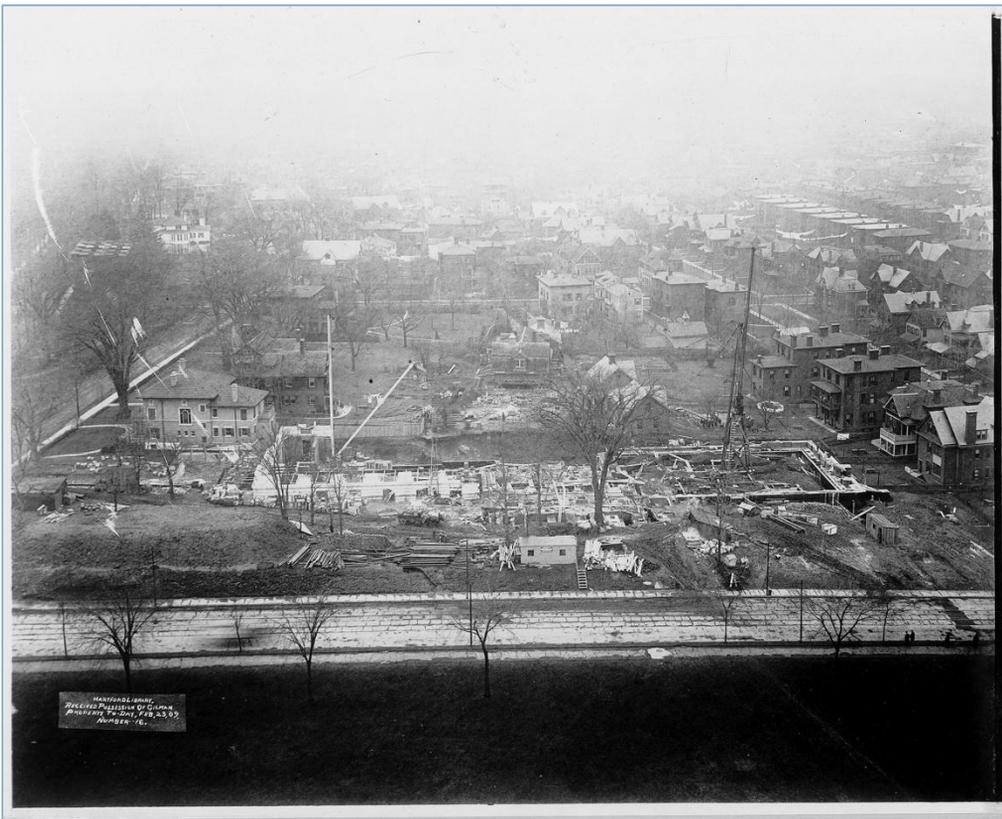
State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated Jan. 22 1909

Looking south into what will be the basements below Memorial Hall. The Library is on the left side, the Court on the right. All the footings for the building are of stone concrete, and the foundation walls, up to the finished grade, are of brick laid in Portland cement mortar. Photo taken February 5, 1909.

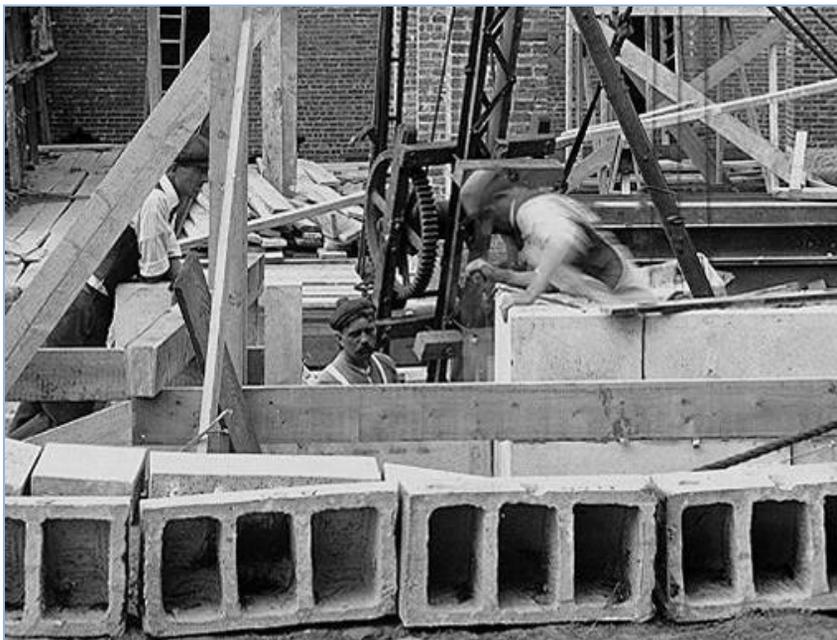


State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated Feb. 5, 1909

State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated Feb. 23, 1909



Looking south from the State Capitol on February 23, 1909. Foundation walls for the Supreme Court side are visible (right) and progress continues on the granite exterior walls of the Library side (left). The granite is from the Bethel Quarry in Bethel, Vermont.



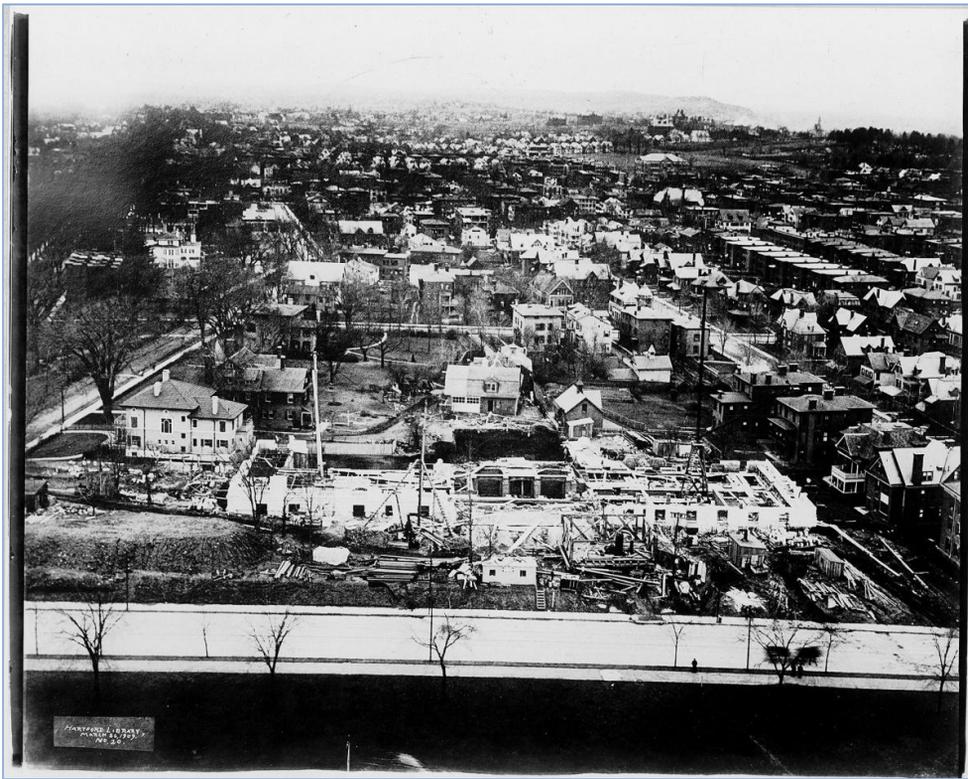
Many of the men working on the project were Italian immigrants. One worker, Francesco DeCorleto of Hartford, hid a letter in a wall and it was recently discovered. Read "Message in the Wall", in *The Connector* April 2004 for details of the discovery.

State Archives, RG 60, Box 1.



State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated April 26, 1909

Looking north on April 26, 1909. The State Capitol is in the background. Bricklayers are working on exterior basement walls. The steel beam will support the floor of the ground level offices under Memorial Hall. The area will be used for a packing room, repair shop and bindery, a general storeroom and a locker room. The large rectangular opening with scaffolding at the middle top of photo will be the entrance to Memorial Hall. In the center of the photo, the small arched doorway with the ladder inside is still used today at the bottom of the lobby stairs.



State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated March 26, 1909

Looking south from the State Capitol. Exterior walls are progressing for the Library and Supreme Court Side. The three large arched opening in the center are in the ground level probate vault. Horse-drawn wagons loaded with debris head down Capitol Avenue. Balustrades under the Library Reading Room windows have been installed.

On May 25, 1909 the cornerstone was laid in the northeast corner of the building facing Lafayette Street. Library staff, including the Misses Penfield, Evans, Herman, Prickett, Yale and Pearson celebrated on the Capitol lawn. The cornerstone contains Connecticut and U. S. flags, books, photographs and coins, a piece of the Charter Oak and the day's Hartford newspapers.



State Archives, PG 220, Box 9, folder 106

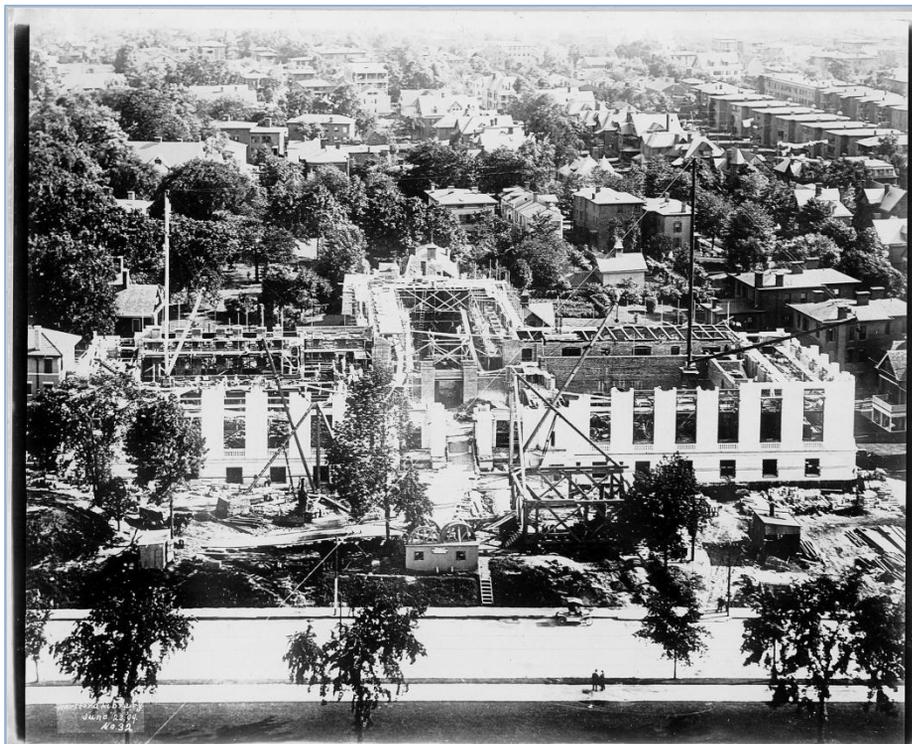




State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated July 7, 1909

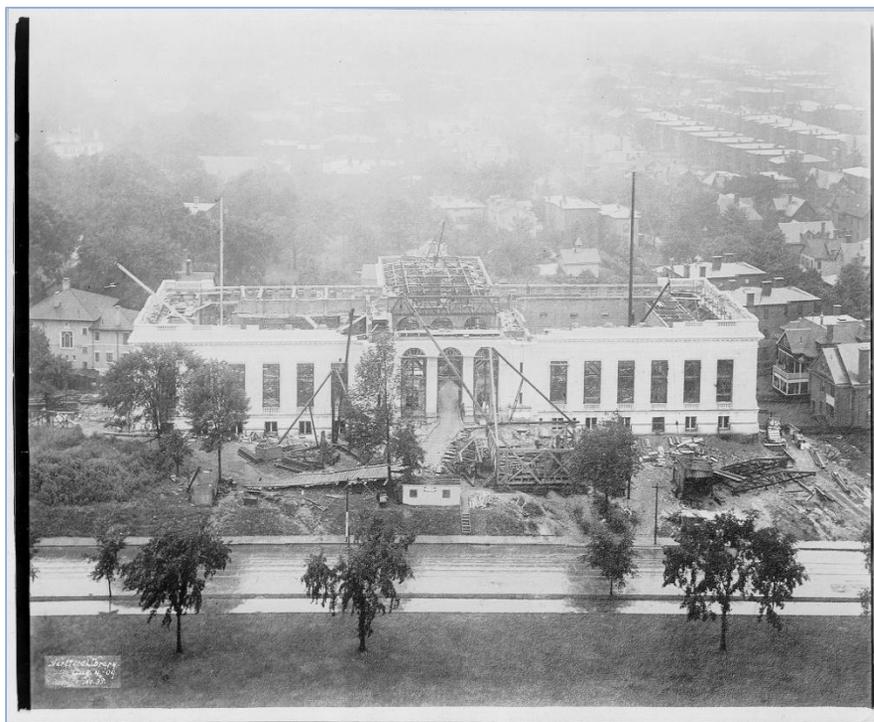
Looking east toward Lafayette and Washington Streets with the Supreme Court room in the foreground. Men are laying bricks on what will be the front (north) side of the building. Workers are also up on the balcony level of the Library Reading Room. The stairs in the center background to the right of the derrick are off the Balcony going to what is now level 6. The large rectangular opening on the left of the stairs frames the big window on the east end of the balcony.

By June 23, 1909, the T-shaped outline of the building was clearly evident. The State Library on the left, the Supreme Court on the right, Memorial Hall (now part of the Museum of Connecticut History) in the center. The ramp in front is leading into the Main Lobby.



State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated June 23, 1909

Looking south from the State Capitol. Roof balustrades for the front and sides of the building are being installed. On the Library side, steel beams will support the roof over the stacks area.



State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated June 23, 1909

State Archives, RG 60, Box 1. Dated Sept. 1, 1909



By September 1, 1909, the front facade is nearing completion. The three openings framed in brick above the main entrance are doorways in the high attic. A horse and buggy wait on Capitol Avenue.



Artisans on top of the scaffolding finish decorative carvings over the main entrance. The granite pillars were turned in Barre, Vermont, and each weigh 25 tons.

State Archives, RG 60, Box 1, undated, ca. Fall 1909



State Archives, PG 220, Box 2, Folder 9

Thirty-four granite steps lead up to the entrance. The terms "Knowledge" "History" and "Justice" were later inscribed over the portal.

State Archives, RG 60, Box 1, undated



The back (south) of the Supreme Court side of the building. Memorial Hall is on the right.

State Archives, RG 60, Box 1, Dec. 22, 1909



The back (south) of the Library side of the building. Memorial Hall is on the left. Most of the windows opened into the book stack area.

The view from the roof looking east. The sloping faces of the roof are covered with copper and the flat portions with vitrified tile. The triangular skylights will filter light into the attic areas. Memorial Hall is on the right with three small windows and the huge skylight. The three windows on the left are in the high attic.



State Archives, RG 60, Box 1, Oct, 27, 1909



State Archives, PG 220, Box 1

Artistic landscaping complimented the building and unified the site with the State Capitol Grounds.



State Archives, PG 220, Box 1



State Archives, PG 220, Box 3, Folder 9

Four ten-foot high statues created by French sculptor Francis M. L. Tonetti adorn the intricately carved pillars by the sides of the main entrance. Representations of the Arts and Science are placed over the pillars on the Library side; History and Justice decorate the Supreme Court side. They were completed in September 1913 and lifted into place by crane the following month. Information on the model for the "History" statue is available in *The Connector*, January 2001, "Rae M. Jones and "History".



Art



History



Justice



Science



State Archives, PG 220, Box 12, oversized

State Librarian George Godard and his staff moved their offices to the new building on November 28, 1910. Godard reflected in his 1910 *Annual Report*: "We have seen gradually brought to completion our new State Library and Supreme Court Building, dignified and beautiful in its architecture, solid and substantial in its construction, and complete and convenient in its arrangement."

Sources consulted for this compilation included:

- State Archives, Picture Group 220, Connecticut State Library 1909-1976
- State Archives Record Group 12, Records of the Connecticut State Library
- State Archives Record Group 60 , Commission to Make Repairs to Capitol and Procure Site for New Building for State Officials.
- State Archives Record Group 128, Ex Libris Club Records
- The *Connecticut State Library Echo*
- The Report of the State Librarian*
- The Hartford Courant*
- Vertical file folder “Connecticut State Library – Building” at the Library

Any many thanks to the support and expertise of the fine staff of the State Archives, History and Genealogy Area, and the Museum of Connecticut History.