

100

FACTS

FOR 100 YEARS:

THE MANITOBA  
LEGISLATIVE BUILDING



THE LEGISLATIVE  
ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA



ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DU MANITOBA

## THE MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE BUILDING

*On July 15, 1920, Manitoba officially opened our current Legislative Building. This is the third legislative building to house the Assembly since Manitoba became a province in 1870. Manitoba's Legislative Building accommodates the Legislative Assembly as well as offices for the Premier, the Lieutenant Governor, and the ministers and deputy ministers of Government departments. In honour of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of this building, this booklet contains 100 facts about the history, construction, and use of the Manitoba Legislative Building.*

Edited and researched by the staff at the Legislative Library of Manitoba. References on file.

Legislative Reading Room  
Room 260 - 450 Broadway  
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Telephone: (204) 945-4243  
Email: [reading@leg.gov.mb.ca](mailto:reading@leg.gov.mb.ca)

## BACKGROUND

1

Between 1871 and 1873 the Assembly met in the first Legislative Building, a log structure on McDermot Avenue purchased from A.G.B. Bannatyne and refurbished to house the Assembly. When a fire destroyed the building, the Assembly sat temporarily in the court house and then later the old Law Courts Building.

2

From 1884 until 1919, the second Legislative Building, at the corner of Kennedy and Broadway, housed the Assembly.



## PRE-CONSTRUCTION

3

By 1909, with a booming economy and population that had grown seven fold since 1881, many felt that the province needed a larger and more impressive building. The 1911 Department of Public Works annual report said "The congested state of all the Departments in the Legislative Buildings renders necessary the erection of more commodious buildings at the earliest possible date."

4

The provincial architect initially suggested putting two new wings on the second Legislative Building at a cost of \$400,000, but those plans were later abandoned.

5

In late 1911, the province announced a two-stage competition to design a new building. In the first stage, architects would submit only sketches. From those entries five firms would be asked to submit detailed plans. The winner would be given a \$10,000 prize and a commission of \$100,000. The competition was open only to subjects of the British Empire. The cost for the new building was to be \$2,000,000.

6

The province specified a design that included a main entrance hall, a "spacious ante-room in connection with the legislative chamber", a chamber "seating capacity of 125 in order to provide for the new portions of the province as well as the future growth of the older parts" and public galleries accommodating 300 people. The building was to have separate administrative entrances, rooms for the Premier, Speaker and Lieutenant-Governor, Members and Ministers, in addition to committee rooms, smoking room, reading and writing rooms, museum, general office, and library.

7

From 67 submissions, five firms were asked to submit plans. Four were from Canada and one from the United Kingdom. [Alternate designs, clockwise from top left - Brown and Vallance - Montreal; E and W.S. Maxwell - Montreal; Clemesha and Portnall - Regina; Sharp and Brown - Toronto]



8

The winning entry, from Simon and Boddington of Liverpool, was described in these terms: "The design is one of dignity, well-proportioned and harmonious, and the treatment lends itself to the position it will occupy when built."



## DESIGN

9

The design has been called a spare classicism or "Neo-Grec" style. It incorporates many Greek, Roman and even Egyptian architectural elements. In the words of one commentator: "The building is an example of government using the classical visual vocabulary ... to portray civic law and order."

10

The building has a basic floor plan in the shape of the letter 'H' contained in a rectangle 100 meters (328 feet) by 103 meters (337 feet).

11

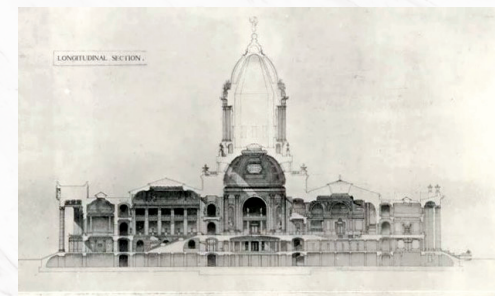
The building's floor area is 24,959 square meters (268,656 square feet) containing about 198,218 cubic meters (7,000,000 cubic feet).

12

Sources vary on the height of the dome often listing it as 240 or 245 feet. A fact sheet on the Golden Boy, prepared when the statue was restored in 2002, lists the top of his torch at 77 meters (255 feet) above the ground. Given the statue's height to the top of the torch is 5.25 meters (17.2 feet), the top of the dome must be 71.75 meters (237.8 feet).

13

There are two domes, the outer dome and an inner dome which is seen when standing in the Rotunda.



14

The original plans called for an interior observation deck, open to the public, on the building's 5th floor, just below the outer dome and above the inner dome. This part of the plan was abandoned as too expensive.

15

The City of Winnipeg entertained plans for a mall running down Memorial Boulevard to Portage Avenue where a new city hall would have been built. The City eventually abandoned the idea.

## CONSTRUCTION AND MATERIALS

16

Construction began in the summer of 1913. The work suffered setbacks and would take almost 7 years to complete. Obstacles included labour and funding shortages connected with the First World War, a scandal involving the original contractor, a Royal Commission called to investigate the building's construction, the subsequent resignation of a Premier and a change of government, and labour unrest during the Winnipeg General Strike.

17

The Winnipeg Tribune, in 1917, argued that the new "government would have been well advised when it took office if it had caused the structure to be torn down, and a sensible building, commensurate with the requirements of the province substituted."

18

Excavation work began in July of 1913, removing 16,000 cubic meters (565,035 cubic feet) of soil in 31 days. After five days of excavation the site for the building was moved 13 meters (43 feet) south and the terrace adjacent to the building was raised by 0.6 meters (2 feet), very likely with at least some of the already excavated soil.

19

The building rests on 421 concrete caissons, which pass through 14 meters (46 feet) of glacial Lake Agassiz clays before hitting limestone bedrock.

20

The estimated weight of the building is 243,851,258 kg (24,000 tons).

21

By 1914, 1,231 architectural drawings had been created for the project.

22

The dome, as well as much of the rest of the building, was to have been constructed from reinforced concrete. This aspect of the design was later changed, and steel frame construction was used throughout the building, including the dome.



23

The outer dome is supported by four compound girders, weighing 98,557 kg (97 tons) each.

24

Tyndall Stone is used throughout the building, from a quarry in Garson, Manitoba. Its mottled appearance is the result of burrows made by organisms moving through the muds of a soft ancient seafloor.

25

Fossils in the Tyndall Stone include sponges, gastropods (snails), cephalopods (relatives of squid) and trilobites. The largest fossil, found at the east portico, is 1 metre wide (3 feet) and 30 cm (1 foot) high.

26

Marbles used in the building include Tennessee marble for flooring, Botticino marble from Italy for the Grand Staircase, and Ordovician Black Marble, likely from Vermont, for interior decorative purposes. The marbles also contain fossils.

27

Exterior steps are made from Butler granite quarried in Ontario while Bedford Limestone, from Indiana, is used in most of the statuary. It is the oldest stone in the building, dating to slightly more than 2.5 billion years ago.

28

Several geological periods are represented by the stone in the building, with the Tyndall stone and Tennessee marble dating from the Ordovician period, roughly 440 to 450 million years ago, the Bedford limestone from the Mississippian period roughly 350 million years ago and the Botticino marble from the Jurassic period, 190 million years ago.

29

According to the building's architect, Frank W. Simon, hardwoods used for doors and trim included birch for the basement, oak for the first and third floors and walnut for the second floor.

30

Pneumatic clocks were installed throughout the building, controlled by a central clock.

31

Government departments and staff moved into the building before it was completely finished. According to the Public Works department annual report for 1916, the East and West ends of the North wing had been closed in and occupied by the Comptroller-General, Game Guardian, Noxious Weeds Commissioner, Superintendent of Buildings and Moving Picture Censor Board, among others.

32

In 1917 half the basement, three floors in the northeast wing and one in the northwest wing were occupied.

33

Heating for the building required 400 radiators.

34

In September 1919, the building was unofficially opened by the Prince of Wales during a reception held in his honour.

35

In November of 1919, the Golden Boy was installed.



36

By October 2, 1919, book stocks and other materials had arrived in the Library.

37

The Public Works annual report for 1919 says: "The interior, while not complete, is in such shape that the forthcoming Session of the Legislature will be held in the Building with a fair amount of comfort and at least vastly improved facilities over those provided heretofore in the old Building." The Assembly does meet, from January 22<sup>nd</sup> to March 27<sup>th</sup>, in the new chamber, which was not yet decorated.



38

The building officially opened on July 15, 1920, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Manitoba becoming a province. Approximately 15,000 visited the building that day. A band, symphony orchestra and refreshments were part of the festivities, which also included dancing.

39

Final costs were \$9,379,000. An itemized statement issued by the Public Works department included \$150,000.00 for furnishings and finishings, \$219,551.29 for plumbing, heating and ventilation, \$157,172.72 for electrical work and \$296,023.59 for repairing defective work.

40

A 1921 article in *Western Canada Contractor* stated: "Manitoba has every reason to be proud of her new Parliament Buildings at Winnipeg, for it is perhaps the most imposing structure in Western Canada and one of the most outstanding pieces of architecture in the whole Dominion."

41

Commentators and departmental annual reports often referred to the building as the Provincial Parliament Building. This usage continued for many years.

## FEATURES

42

The Grand Staircase is 6.1 meters (20 feet) wide and composed of 3 sections of 13 steps. It is made from Botticino marble from Italy.



43

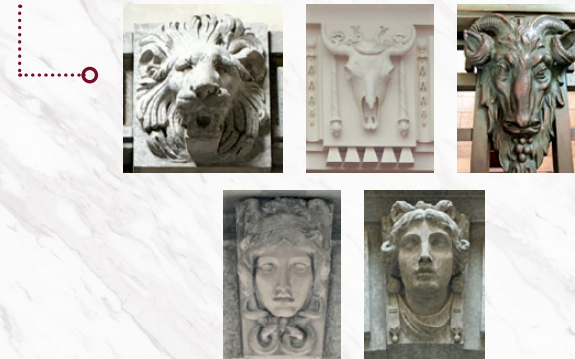
The skylight above the Grand Staircase is in fact two skylights, an inner and an outer structure.

44

The bison flanking the Grand Staircase are made of bronze and weigh approximately 2,268 kilograms (5,000 pounds). They were designed by Georges Gardet of Paris, who also created the Golden Boy.

45

In the main hall, overlooking the Grand Staircase, can be found lion heads, cattle skulls and rams heads. The head of Medusa looks north, over the staircase, balanced by the head of Athena at the staircase's foot.



46

The Rotunda, 20 meters (64 feet) in diameter and 26 meters (84 feet) high, is ringed by 4 pairs of Corinthian columns. In the center a marble balustrade, four meters (13 feet) in diameter, allows visitors to look down on the Pool of the Black Star.

47

The seating in the Chamber is arranged in a horseshoe shape, which is unique in Canada.



48

Frank Worthington Simon, senior partner of Simon and Boddington, designed the bison escutcheons found on the Chamber doors to face each other. Only the bison facing to the left were cast, so all the bison face the same way.



49

The building has empty niches where statues were planned but never installed.



50

Elements in the building's electric light fixtures include clawed and cloven feet, cobras and lion heads. Those flanking the entrance to the chamber, and around the circumference of the Pool of the Black Star, have sea creatures on the base, and male and female heads just under the shade.



## THE GOLDEN BOY

51

In 1915 Frank W. Simon selected the French sculptor Georges Gardet to create the figure for the top of the dome. Simon repeatedly changed his designs for the dome statue. He worried about the forces the statue would have to withstand, particularly from the wind and engaged Sven Bylander, a Scandinavian engineer from London, England, to solve the engineering problems involved.

52

The statue is believed to have been modelled on the 16<sup>th</sup> century statue of Mercury by Giovanni da Bologna. Its official name is Eternal Youth and Spirit of Enterprise.

53

In 1918 the statue was cast in bronze at the Barbidiene Foundry in Paris. Accounts vary but the factory was damaged in the war, though the already completed statue was unharmed. Loaded on a ship for transportation across the Atlantic, the French government commandeered the ship and the statue is believed to have made several trips across the Atlantic and into the Mediterranean as ballast before finally reaching New York (some accounts mention Halifax). It was then shipped by rail to Winnipeg.

54

Reports on the statue's size and weight have varied widely over the years. Official government figures are now 5.25 meters (17.2 feet) tall from base to torch tip with a weight of 1,650 kilograms (3,640 pounds). The statue's torch is 77 meters (255 feet) above the ground.

55

The statue was washed and polished and given two coats of varnish in May 1937, cleaned again in 1946, and painted gold in 1951. The paint lasted only three months. Later that year the coverings and coatings were removed, the statue was burnished, and 23.5 karat gold leaf applied. 50,000 square inches of gold leaf were used, equivalent to roughly six ounces of gold, at an estimated cost of \$3,200.

56

In 2001 inspections found that the 2.75 metre (9 foot) steel support shaft for the statue was rusting. The province announced that the Golden Boy would be removed from the Dome for repairs. On February 9, 2002 a large crane lowered the statue to the ground.

57

From February 12 to March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2002 the Golden Boy was on exhibit at Manitoba Museum. Over 114,000 visitors saw the statue at the museum.

58

Repairs and renovations included removing the light attached to the torch in 1967, since the holes drilled in the statue to accommodate the electrical cord had been contributing to the decay of the support post; monitoring instruments were installed to measure the stress levels on the statue including two accelerometers measuring wind vibrations, fibre optic sensors in the statue's heel to measure the stress on the joint where he is attached to the dome, and a temperature gauge. The statue was sandblasted with California walnut shells before being painted with four coats of a special primer.

59

On July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2002 the Golden Boy was set up in a special booth at the Forks Market for gilding with 24 carat gold leaf. The entire restoration project had a final bill of \$1.1 million dollars.



60

On September 5, 2002 the Golden Boy was raised back up on to the dome. On October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002, Queen Elizabeth II officially rededicated the Golden Boy.

## INTERIOR

61

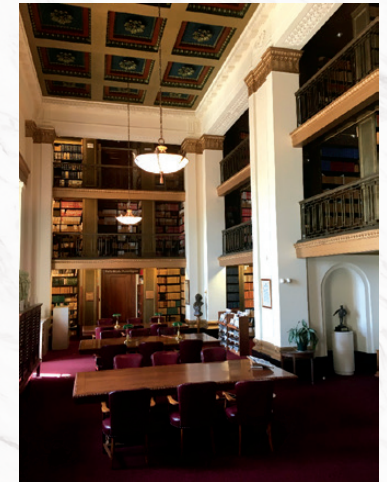
The Lieutenant-Governor's reception room (in the east corridor) is used to receive royalty and other dignitaries. The room's Prince of Wales Chair is reserved for visiting royalty.

62

Room 200, also know as the Manitoba Room or the Chandelier Room, is used for special functions. Portraits of King George V and Queen Mary, painted by V.A. Long in 1915 hang on either end of the room. Portraits of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, done by Dennis Fildes in 1962, adorn the other walls.

63

Room 260 houses the Reading Room of the Manitoba Legislative Library. Its three tiers of book stacks have space for 25,000 volumes, with additional space under the Chamber. Access to the upper tiers is by two spiral staircases, or by the Room's original elevator.



64

Rooms on the east side of the building have odd numbers, rooms on the west side have even numbers, which regularly confuses newcomers to the building.

65

There are various plaques on the walls of the Legislature commemorating events in Manitoba history. The plaque commemorating Manitoba's entrance into confederation went missing in October of 1974.



66

A tunnel running under Broadway Avenue connects the Legislative Building with the central powerhouse. It is part of a system of tunnels (not publicly accessible) linking other provincial government buildings with the powerhouse, which supplies heat to all these buildings.

67

Two large vaults are located in the basement. An original copy of the Magna Carta, while not on display at the building, was stored there in 2010.

## PORTRAITS AND ARTIFACTS

68

The mural above the Chamber entrance is by the English artist Frank Brangwyn. He described it as an allegory of the Canadian effort in the First World War. It was installed in March 1921 and underwent restoration in 2014.



69

The Chamber murals are by Augustus Vincent Tack, from New York. Among the figures represented, individually or in groups, are Justice, Knowledge and Wisdom, Tolerance and Magnanimity, Fortitude, Prudence and Temperance and Faith, Hope and Charity, as well as Mercy and Understanding. The figures of Courage and Vigilance and Sacrifice and Loyalty were influenced by the recent experience of the First World War.

70

Located on the first floor on the west side of the building, the Members Gallery contains pictures of MLAs from all 42 Assemblies in the province's history, as well as members of the short-lived Legislative Council, and the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia.



71

It is customary for retiring Speakers to have a portrait commissioned. Portraits of former Speakers, of both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council, can be found on the second floor on the southwest side of the building.

72

Painted portraits of Manitoba's Premiers currently grace the walls of the committee rooms on the south side of the building. On the second floor of the northeast wing are photographs of the premiers. A new Premiers Gallery is expected to open on the second floor later this year.

73

The Hall of Honour, first floor, east side of the building, features the Books of Remembrance which list the names of Canadian war dead from the Boer War to the Korean War. Plaques commemorating Manitoban regiments and divisions are also found in the hall.

74

The names of recipients of the Order of Manitoba can be found on the second floor on the east side hallway.

75

The Trailblazers Gallery, found on the second floor on the west side of the building, was unveiled on August 21, 2018 to honour 18 women who were/are in positions traditionally held by men or who have worked to forge new pathways for women in Manitoba.

76

The Keystone Gallery, on the west side, lower level, of the building, hosts rotating exhibits which showcase Manitoba art and heritage, while promoting access by Manitoba arts and heritage community organizations. In July of 2020 a time capsule containing contributions from Members and staff of the building was added to the gallery. It will be opened on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building, in 2120.

77

In September 2019, Manitoba's two maces went on permanent display in a cabinet on the second floor. The original mace, which saw service for the first 13 years of the Assembly's history, and its replacement, are the symbols of the Legislature's authority. The current mace is 151.75 cm (60 inches) in length and weighs 10kg (22 pounds). It is made of gilded brass.



## STATUES / SCULPTURE

78

The statue of Queen Victoria at the front of the grounds was moved from the site of the second Legislative Building. It was commissioned after her death in 1901. The cost, in 1904, was \$15,000.

79

The pediment above the entrance to the building is supported by 6 Ionic columns. The figures in the pediment were designed by Albert Hemstock Hodge of Scotland, and carved by the Piccirilli brothers of New York.

80

In Frank W. Simon's description of the pediment, the central figure represents Manitoba. In the left hand corner "Enterprise beckons the workers to the Land of Promise." A bull is "led by Europe, signifying the immigration from Europe and adjoining the central figure is a group of father, mother and child, the new family in the land. In the right hand corner are two figures embracing and clasping a jar, whence issues a stream of water. These represent the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers fertilizing the earth. Next is a ploughman with his horse, tilling the soil, whilst the male and female figures bring the fruits of the Soil of Manitoba."



81

On the outside of the building, at the four corners of the base of the dome are representations of Agriculture, Art, Industry and Learning, designed by William Birnie Rhind of Scotland and carved by F.A. Purdy of Vermont.



Agriculture

Art



Industry

Learning

82

The east entrance is flanked by statues of La Verendrye and Lord Selkirk. The west entrance has statues of General James Wolfe and Lord Dufferin. All these statues were designed and carved by the Piccirilli brothers of New York.

83

The Sphinxes on the roof, representing Wisdom and Knowledge, and the figures on the east and west pediments, representing War and Peace, were designed by Albert Hemstock Hodge. F.A. Purdy sculpted the Sphinxes, while the figures on the pediments were sculpted by the Piccirilli brothers.

84

There are 40 statues and monuments on the grounds or in Memorial Park and the median on Memorial Boulevard.

85

The current statue of Louis Riel, by Miguel Joyal, put in place on the south grounds on May 12, 1996 (the 126<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the Manitoba Act) replaced an earlier statue that had stood for 24 years. The original statue is now located at St. Boniface College.



## EXTERIOR / GROUNDS

86

The Fort Osborne Barracks and Drill Shed were still standing on the west side of the grounds and were not demolished until after the Legislature was completed.

87

During the Great Depression, a portion of the grounds of the Legislature was given over to vegetable gardens. A total of 82 plots for unemployed men were laid out in the spring of 1935.



88

The Manitoba Plaza, which includes the fountain on the south grounds, was officially opened on October 4, 1995 by Governor General Romeo Leblanc. The plaza commemorates the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the province.

89

The 6 greenhouses on the grounds grow 75,000 bedding plants annually with 40,000 planted on the grounds, and the rest distributed to other government buildings.

90

As of 2020, the grounds were home to 175 mature elm trees.

## EVENTS

91

The Queen's visit for the province's centennial in 1970 meant that a special session of the Legislature was held on July 15, 1970. A plaque commemorating the visit is at the south entrance to the building.

92

Many films and television productions have used the building as a set, including *The Diviners* in 1990 and *Capote* in 2004. The Reading Room has been a courtroom, law office and, of course, a library. The 2003 Governor General's New Year's Message was recorded in the Reading Room.

93

Roughly 1000 events take place yearly in the building or on the grounds, including rallies, protests, media events and concerts.

## RENOVATIONS

94

In June of 1994, work began on repairing the steps at all four entrances.

95

The Members' Lounge became smoke free in 1997.

96

The outer dome received new copper sheathing in the summer of 2002.

97

In November 2007, Manitoba became the first legislature in the country to install an accessibility ramp at its front entrance.

98

Both the interior and exterior skylights over the Grand Staircase were replaced in 2012.

99

The Chamber was made wheelchair accessible in the summer of 2017. The Chamber floor was raised 2.5 feet, front-row desks were moved forward to allow wheelchair access between the first and second rows and a ramp was installed on the opposition side of the house. The renovation received a Heritage Winnipeg Conservation Award in 2018.

100

Work began on the building's first gender neutral washroom (2<sup>nd</sup> floor, west side) in 2016.

THE LEGISLATIVE  
ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA



ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DU MANITOBA