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Work under way to restore Senate

By Carl Manning

The Associated Press

With bare wood floors exposed and the furniture removed, the Senate chamber looks more like an abandoned warehouse than an opulent citadel of legislative power.

But Vance Kelley envisions a chamber looking much as it did after it was remodeled in the mid-1880s, so that senators from that era would feel at home.

"If they were to come back and walk into that space, they wouldn't see that much changed. It would be intact from what they would remember," said Kelley, the architect who is project manager for the Statehouse renovation project.

Work on the chamber began during the last week of May and is part of a nine-year, \$135 million project started in 2001 to restore the Statehouse from top to bottom, inside and out. Senators will be back in the chamber for the 2006 session starting in January.

"It's going to be a modern functioning Senate chamber. It has to work with today's technology and work for the next hundred years," Kelley said. "But we also want to capture the spirit and character of the chamber."

That means keeping modern conveniences, such as wiring for computers and telephones, inconspicuous while putting the chamber's character on display.

The story of the Senate chamber is intertwined with the piecemeal construction of the Statehouse. The oldest part of the five-story building is the east wing, started in 1865 and completed in 1873. The Statehouse was finished in 1903.

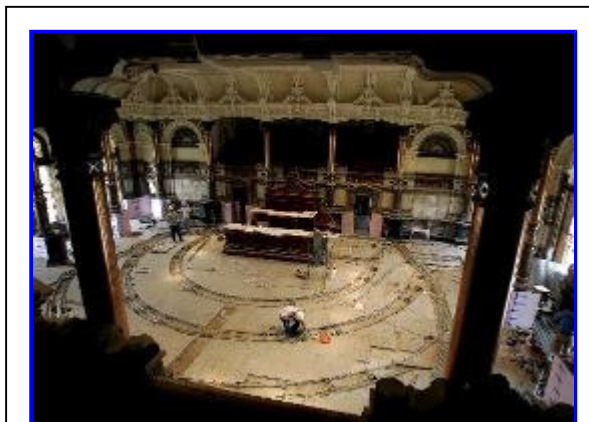
The chamber, in the east wing, first was used in 1869 by both the House and Senate with a divider down the middle. A decade later, the House had its own chamber in a new west wing.

After the Senate had its own space, remodeling was completed in 1885 to rival the more ornate House chamber.

"The senators wanted something that would compare to that so they began working on the Senate chamber," said

BY THE NUMBERS

The following is a glance at ongoing Statehouse renovations.



The Associated Press

William Smith and other DL Smith Electrical workers run wires through conduits in the floor of the Senate chamber at the Kansas Statehouse. Work on the Senate chamber began in late May and is the latest phase of a nine-year \$135 million plan to renovate the entire Statehouse.

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Christy Davis, acting director of the Kansas State Historical Society's cultural resources division. 9: Years renovations are projected to last
135: Millions of dollars the project is expected to cost
1865: Year construction of oldest part of the Statehouse began

The key isn't ripsaw renovation but attention to detail, such as intricate plaster designs on the ceiling and moldings, and flowers and stems arching over the chamber windows. 2010: Year renovations are expected to be complete
On the Net:
Statehouse Restoration Project: <http://www.kshs.org/places/capitol/capmiss.htm>
Senate chamber: <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/senategop/chamber.html>

Finding the original look required poring over old photographs, drawings, newspaper articles and other writings of the time. Purple Wave Auction Co.: <http://www.purplewaveauction.com/>

"What we're doing is cleaning and preserving and removing some of the more modern intrusions that aren't appropriate to the character of the space," Kelley said.

The two visitors galleries had theater seats from the 1950s, which will be replaced with something more compatible. Chandeliers from the 1970s will give way to ones crafted to look like the originals. Wall sconces reflective of the period will be added.

Since they have no historic value, the 1970s chandeliers are being sold on an Internet auction site.

Much research went into determining how the chamber's walls and ceilings had been painted, said Joy Coleman, the other project manager.

"The overall color will be white with gold highlights," she said. "It's going to look richer. The current scheme is kind of flat, and the ceiling is going to look higher and more ornate."

The red carpet will be replaced by one based on old photographs and written descriptions -- a Victorian botanical design with colors ranging from pink to dark red, plus gold and green.

"We don't have too much information, but we do have enough to give an appropriate interpretation," Coleman said.

For years, the original black and white marble tiles on the sides and back of the chamber were hidden by carpet, perhaps to reduce noise. They will be restored to their former luster and won't be covered.

"Over the years, we've covered things up, but we haven't destroyed anything significant," said Statehouse architect Barry Greis.

The original cherry wood desks of the 40 senators will be in three semicircle rows with a wide aisle down the middle rather than in straight rows as they have been in recent years.

The hollow columns of bronze and copper with cast iron bases and decorative grills will revert to circulating air.

"It's a terrific thing to do with historical property, to use the features as originally intended," Greis said.

But some things won't change. Two private boxes flanking the front gallery were enclosed years ago as offices and will remain that way.

"The office space is too valuable," Greis said.

The restoration also put to rest rumors about ceiling murals or stenciling being covered with paint and plaster years ago. No evidence has been found that such decorative touches ever existed.

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