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Governor Cuomo Announces Completion of Major Restoration Projects at the New York State Capitol

Completed Projects Include Renovation of the Hall of Governors, Reopening of the Assembly Skylight, and Installation of Historical Items throughout the Capitol

New Museum Quality Exhibits to Line Capitol Hallways and Make Treasured Artifacts Accessible to All New Yorkers

[1]

Albany, NY (January 4, 2012)

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the completion of major restoration projects at the New York State Capitol, as well as the installation of museum quality exhibits throughout the building featuring many artifacts never before publicly displayed that tell the history of New York. Governor Cuomo commemorated the occasion with a ribbon cutting in the Governor's Reception Room and with the unveiling of the restored Assembly skylight.

"The restoration of the Capitol is a symbol of our efforts to restore confidence and performance in our state government," Governor Cuomo said. "The Capitol was once a shining symbol of democracy, but it has been degraded by years of neglect. The building has now been brought back to life ahead of schedule and at less cost to taxpayers. Now, our Capitol will once again be a beacon for all New Yorkers, welcoming them to be a part of their state government -- present, past, and future."

Last year, Governor Cuomo announced a significant acceleration of the Capitol restoration project, which had led to the completion of work years ahead of schedule. Originally, the entire 14 year restoration project was scheduled for completion in July 2014, but under the Governor's revised timetable, work is now expected to be substantially completed by the fall of 2012. The Governor's new plan also reduced the project costs by \$2.3 million.

Senate Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos said, "In just one year, we've restored the people's confidence in their government and proven that Albany can be functional and accountable to New York taxpayers and their families. And, thanks to the leadership and vision of Governor Cuomo, the physical restoration of the Capitol is now complete - - ahead of schedule and under budget. This announcement builds on our many successes and once again shows what we can accomplish by working together. On behalf of my Senate colleagues, I look forward to many more good things to come in the year ahead."

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver said, "The New York State Capitol is truly an historic structure. Landmark legislation that has changed the lives of New Yorkers, and all Americans, has been debated in these hallways. I applaud Governor Cuomo for making the restoration of the Capitol, and the unveiling of the exquisite Assembly skylight, a priority. Generations of New Yorkers who visit the Capitol can now appreciate its treasures."

Commissioner of the Office of General Services RoAnn Destito said, "Governor Cuomo's commitment to giving state government back to the people is evident with the beautiful renovation of the Capitol. It is an honor for our agency to be a part of making more of this magnificent building accessible to all New Yorkers and to serve as the stewards of the historic items that are now on display."

Harold Holzer, Senior Vice President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and an advisor to the restoration to the Hall of Governors, said, "The paintings in the Hall of Governors have long deserved a display equal to their historical and artistic importance, one that again makes them easy to see and at last brings context to the leaders they portray. Governor Cuomo's leadership in re-conceiving the Hall of Governors will at last make the pictures more accessible and more meaningful for the public. I thank the local museum community for contributing so much to this new installation and interpretation, especially Mark Schaming of the State Museum, Tammis Kane Groft of the Albany Institute of Art, Capitol Architect James Jamieson, State Archivist Christine Ward, and Matthew Bender of the New York State Commission on the Restoration of the Capitol."

Matthew Bender IV of the New York State Commission on the Restoration of the Capitol said, "The Capitol Commission applauds Governor Cuomo for energetically pursuing the restoration of this National Historic Landmark. The commission congratulates the Governor on achieving his goal of reopening the Capitol to the public and breathing new life into this historic building. The newly reinstalled portraits in the Hall Of Governors, with improved lighting, new labels, and historic artifacts from the New York State Museum, will serve to enhance the visitor's experience. The newly restored and reopened Assembly skylight and staircase are also examples of Governor Cuomo's commitment to completing the restoration of the Capitol's main public spaces for New York citizens to enjoy this year and in the future."

The following is a partial listing of the new exhibits at the New York State Capitol and Empire State Plaza. A listing can be found at hallofgovernors.ny.gov [2].

EXHIBITS IN THE CAPITOL

Hall of Governors

The historic Hall of Governors on the second floor of the Capitol was renovated to make it a more welcoming and meaningful place for members of the public and visiting school groups. The Hall, which provides the only access to many offices within the Executive Chamber including the Governor's office, holds portraits of the past governors of New York State.

The restored Hall of Governors includes:

- **New Portraits and Historical Timeline:** A number of portraits of former governors that were missing from the collection were restored and brought to the Hall of Governors, including Governor John Jay and Governor William Seward. Additionally, all portraits in the Hall of Governors were reorganized to be displayed chronologically, biographies of each pictured governor were placed beneath each portrait, and a timeline was installed on the walls of the Hall to provide historical context.
- **New Website:** A new website – hallofgovernors.ny.gov [2] – has been created with additional historical documentation. The website is accessible by smart phones, offering a walking tour of the Hall of Governors and enabling visitors to listen to highlights from speeches and view writings of former governors while touring the gallery.
- **Additional Artifacts:** The Hall now features documents chronicling New York's early statehood, including:
 - A copy of the first state constitution from 1777
 - A letter from George Washington expressing confidence in General George Clinton in 1777
 - Documents pertaining to the abolition of slavery
 - Artifacts from a number of governors pictured in the Hall, including Samuel Tilden, Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, Al Smith, Franklin Roosevelt, Nelson Rockefeller, and Hugh Carey
 - A copy of the General Association of 1775, a statement of revolution regarding the intent to form a new government, produced one year before the Declaration of Independence.

Governor's Reception Room

Commonly known as the War Room for its striking ceiling mural, this second floor space now showcases several treasures that tell part of New York's early history. The exhibit includes:

- A bronze cannon dating to 1630
- An exhibit on the evolution of the Great Seal of the State, which went through a several changes since its inception in 1777
- Artifacts associated with Governor DeWitt Clinton and the construction of the Erie Canal, including the original cask used by Governor Clinton to open the canal in 1825
- Models of the *Victorine*, a Hudson River sloop built in 1848, and the *Half Moon*, a Dutch exploration ship sailed by Henry Hudson in 1609.

Flag Room

The first floor flag room, which has long been home to numerous state battle flags, now contains preeminent examples of historical military paraphernalia, dating from before the Civil War to the present day. Items include military uniforms, hats, helmets, and commendations.

Capitol Fire Exhibit

A display of items associated with the 1911 fire that devastated the Capitol is located on the first floor, just beyond the Flag Room.

Assembly Staircase

Best seen from the fourth floor, the renovation restores the Assembly skylight and staircase to its original 1879 grandeur. The restoration also recreated the intricate hand-stenciled red and gold walls and rebuilt intricate stone carvings and masonry. The restoration involved removing elements of a 1940s renovation that had nearly destroyed the top of the staircase.

The renovation of the Senate staircase is the last major piece in the Capitol restoration. This project was scheduled to be completed in July 2014, but under the Governor's revised timetable, work is now expected to be complete by the end of 2012.

Assembly Lobby

The history of the New York State Assembly is told through:

- The display of historic legislation supporting women's suffrage, reform of labor and

employment practices, and the creation of the Niagara Reservation, the nation's oldest state park

- Documents pertaining to the Factory Investigating Commission, which was established after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire
- A clock that originally hung in the Assembly Chamber circa 1835

Senate Lobby

Artifacts representing the historical contributions of the New York State Senate include:

- A bust and documents from State Senator and Governor William H. Seward
- Numerous pieces associated with Philip Schuyler, a member of the first State Senate
- A desk from the Senate Chamber from the late nineteenth century

State Street Lobby

The State Street lobby now features items to commemorate President Ulysses S. Grant, whose body lay in state in the Capitol following his death in 1885. Items in the lobby include a bust of President Grant and historical photographs from this solemn occasion.

Judiciary Exhibit

A display of historical legal artifacts is located on the second floor outside the room currently known as the Blue Room, which housed the Court of Appeals in 1883. The exhibit includes items associated with jurists James Kent, Robert R. Livingston, Benjamin N. Cordozo, Learned Hand, Robert H. Jackson, George Bundy Smith, and Judith S. Kaye.

1861: Banners for Glory

This exhibition in the East Entrance Lobby on the second floor commemorates the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War by showcasing eight historic flags from the New York State Battle Flag Collection dating to the war's opening in 1861. This exhibit honors the 100,000 soldiers from the Empire State who rallied around the flag during the course of the Civil War.

Legislative Correspondents Association (LCA)

Located between the Senate and Assembly Chambers on the third floor, the LCA exhibit features artifacts from notable former journalists that have covered state government.

EMPIRE STATE PLAZA CONCOURSE

First Response and Law Enforcement Vehicles

A number of vehicles similar to those used to support rescue and recovery efforts in communities statewide following the devastating storms from the summer of 2011 are on display. These include a Zodiac boat used in numerous rescues and a Humvee used to move troops and supplies.

Transportation Collection

An eclectic display of historical modes of transportation offers visitors a first-hand look at some of the state's transportation treasures, including:

- Governor Nelson Rockefeller's executive limousine
- A 1932 Packard Phaeton
A rare 1931 Pierce-Arrow type 43
- An Adirondack guide boat
- Several historic commercial wagons

State Police

The New York State Police have been serving the people of New York since 1917. This collection features some characteristic items from their storied past, including:

- A 1966 Harley Davidson Electra-Glide
- Trooper uniforms and shields
- An iconic Stetson hat
- A 1973 Plymouth Fury State Police car that handled routine and interstate patrols

OUTSIDE THE CAPITOL

Empire State Plaza Ice Rink

The ice rink is now open for the first time since the winter of 2007-2008. The rink offers free ice skating every day from 11:00 – 8:00. Skate rentals, a full-service snack bar, and a locker room are all on-site.

FURTHER INFORMATION

A listing of new exhibits and activities at the New York State Capitol and Empire State Plaza can be found at hallofgovernors.ny.gov [2]. The Capitol is open until 7:00 PM on weekdays and until one hour after session ends on days when the Legislature is meeting. Public tours are conducted Monday through Friday at 10:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 2:00 PM, and 3:00 PM. Online reservations are available for tour groups of ten or more at www.ogs.ny.gov [3].

On Governor Cuomo's first day in office, January 1, 2011, he issued an Executive Order that reopened the Hall of Governors to the public after it had been closed since 1995. On that same day, Governor Cuomo also ordered the removal of concrete barriers that had stretched the length of the Capitol along State Street.

Source URL: <http://www.governor.ny.gov/press/010412restoration>

Links:

[1] <http://www.governor.ny.gov/>

[2] <http://hallofgovernors.ny.gov>

[3] <http://www.ogs.ny.gov>