

OLD STATE CAPITOL:
Analyzing a Photograph







KentuckyHistoricalSociety

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ANALYZING A PHOTOGRAPH

THE LAST LEGISLATIVE SESSION AT THE OLD STATE CAPITOL, 1908

CONTENT RECOMMENDED FOR FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS

OLD CAPITOL OVERVIEW

When the state legislature appointed a commission to choose an appropriate location for the state capital, Frankfort was one of three cities in the running. In order to persuade the commission to choose Frankfort, local residents offered the commissioners several incentives, including boxes of glass, pounds of nails, hinges and locks and a sum of \$3000.

After fire destroyed the first two capitol buildings, the General Assembly enacted legislation in 1827 that authorized the construction of yet another capitol. A committee convened to request designs, offering \$150 premium for the best submission. Gideon Shyrock, a 25 year old architect from Lexington, Ky., presented the winning design.

Echoing architectural styles of the day, he designed the building to resemble a Greek temple, a nod to the democratic ideals of ancient Greece. Shyrock added interesting details that compel visitors to take a closer look. A domed lantern in the center of the building brings light into an otherwise dark interior. A circular stone staircase, held in place by a large keystone on the second-floor landing, adds drama to the interior.

Replaced by the new Capitol in South Frankfort early in the 20th-century, the building now serves as a museum on the history campus of the Kentucky Historical Society. The subject of extensive restoration work since the early 1970s, the Old State Capitol looks today much as it did in the 1850s.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Politics in the Old State Capitol

Ignoring ongoing construction, the legislature convened here in 1829. For the next 80 years, it would be the center of Kentucky political history. Within its chambers, political leaders debated Kentucky's role in the Civil War and voted not to ratify the amendments to the United States Constitution that ended slavery and extended civil rights to freed slaves. Discussions on segregation, women's rights and the political scandals of the 1888 embezzlement of state funds by state treasurer James W. "Honest Dick" Tate all took place within the Capitol or on its grounds.

The building was the only pro-Union state Capitol occupied by the Confederate army during the Civil War. Plans to swear in a Confederate governor and establish a Confederate state government were ruined by the approach of the Union army just days before the Battle of Perryville in 1862.

In the aftermath of the bitterly contested gubernatorial election in 1899, the state legislature met here in 1900 to decide the winner. An assassin, hiding in an office in the Old Capitol Annex next door, shot the Democratic claimant, William Goebel, as he approached the Capitol. Armed citizens and State Guard soldiers occupied the grounds and, for a time, Kentuckians threatened to fight their own miniature Civil War. A plaque marks the site outside the building where Goebel, the only governor in United States history to be assassinated while in office, fell.

THEME | 20th Century Kentucky Legislators

OBJECTIVE | To analyze a photograph of the last legislative session at the Old State Capitol in order to better understand how the building was used.

CORE CONTENT CONNECTIONS | SS-04-5.1.1; SS-EP-5.1.1; SS-05-5.1.1; AH-04-3.4.1; AH-05-3.4.1

Last General Assembly in the House Chamber of the Old Capitol, 1908

By the early 20th century, critical unattended repairs and cramped spaces plagued the capitol building. In 1904, the legislature voted to spend \$1 million on a new capitol building to be erected on the same spot. However the design proved too large for the lot and a new location had to be found. The state purchased property in South Frankfort for the new Capitol, which was completed in 1910. In 1908, the General Assembly met for the last time in the 1830 Capitol, before moving into the new Capitol, then under construction.

ARTIFACT LIST

1. Last General Assembly in the House Chamber of the Old Capitol, 1908, 1987PH01, cn.vol1.117.1-2.lastsessionOSC

VOCABULARY

We encourage you to introduce the following vocabulary words independently or in conjunction with the pre-visit activities.

Legislature	<i>an organized body having the authority to make laws for a political unit</i>
Capitol	<i>a building in which a state legislative body meets</i>
Capital	<i>a town or city that is the official seat of government in a political entity, such as a state or nation</i>
Law	<i>a rule of conduct or action prescribed or formally recognized as binding or enforced by a controlling authority</i>
Bill	<i>a proposed law put before the legislature</i>
Portrait	<i>a pictorial representation of a person usually showing a face</i>
Pose	<i>a bodily attitude or posture</i>
Primary source	<i>an artifact, document, recording or other source of information that was created at the time of study</i>

ACTIVITY

For this activity, have the students complete the attached worksheet to learn more about the last legislative session in the Old Capitol. Wait to tell the class about this last session until after they have completed initial observation and analysis of the photograph.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Ask students to write a letter to their legislator, or ask students to write bills and have the class vote on whether they become laws.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

www.history.ky.gov



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1. Based on the title of this photograph, who do you think the gentlemen sitting at the desks in the picture are?

legislators businessmen lawyers

2. In the portrait, the people are _____.

standing sitting both

3. In the portrait, the gentlemen sitting at the desks look: (circle all that apply)

happy sad serious focused

4. Which word(s) best describes their pose?

relaxed stiff other _____

5. Describe what the people in the photograph are wearing.

6. Describe the furniture and decorations in the room.

7. What do you think they have been working on?

8. What do you see in the photograph that makes you think that?

9. Do you notice any women in the room? If so where are they?

10. Who do you think is sitting in the balcony? Why?

11. Do you think this photograph accurately reflects how the building was used during the 20th century? Why or why not?
