The 113-year old Michigan State Capitol is a national landmark, originally designed by Elijah Myers. Considered the most historical building in Michigan, it is the place where every decision was made that developed the state.

Construction started on the building in 1872 and was completed in 1879. In the years that followed, a combination of remodeling and neglect had nearly extinguished the ornate beauty and grace of the original architecture.

In response to increasing demands for room, an earlier renovation added 50,000 sq ft of space by constructing half floors which de-
Old time plasterers (circa 1920) pause for a break. William Reichenbach’s uncle is on the left holding the hod. Note the wood lath in the background.

The skilled hands of Reichenbach’s expert plasterers lovingly restored plaster details destroyed by years of neglect.

Oxidation, smoking, and neglect of the years had destroyed the original historic character of the building. Lack of maintenance had allowed the building to deteriorate.

When it was decided to renovate the building, the goal was to restore the national landmark to its former glory while maintaining function. To accomplish this, the half floors had to be removed while badly damaged walls, ceilings and ornamentation had to be restored and less severely damaged areas were repaired.

Renovation began in 1988 and was completed this year.

Richard Frank, FAIA, of Saline, MI was the preservation architect selected for the job, and The Christman Company of Lansing, MI was selected as construction manager.

The William Reichenbach Company of Ochemos, MI
Reichenbach craftsmen helped restore the Capitol’s interior to its original stateliness.

Expert plasterers taught other crew members time-honored techniques.

was selected to perform all the lathing and plastering work on the project.

CEO William Reichenbach started as a plastering apprentice after serving in the Navy during World War II. He started his own plastering business in Lansing, MI in 1952 and recently celebrated the company’s 40th year in business.

Highly decorated columns combine with colorful fleur-de-lis to recreate the rich atmosphere of Michigan's history.

The Michigan State Capitol project crew of lathers, plasterers and laborers celebrate the William Reichenbach Company's 40th year.
Before restoration began, interior walls were stripped down to the brick base.

After restoration, moulded plaster graces this archway.

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Landmark — cont’d from page 19

His son, James, is President of William Reichenbach Company.

Reichenbach employs an average of 80 union employees, carpenters, plasterers, lathers and drywall finishers.

The work included producing a new plaster cornice, measuring 5,207 ft long, 3,252 sq yds of new plaster ceilings and 14,770 sq yds of new plaster walls.

A crew of 10 lathers, 30 plasterers and 30 laborers performed the work, all of which was done on site.

Reichenbach’s staff of plasterers includes some real “old-timers” that were experts in producing moulds and doing the necessary ornamental plastering. These people were able to teach the other plasterers the skills required to do their job, including making all their screeds from plaster.

When Reichenbach’s crew began, old plaster on the walls had been removed. His crew applied a one in. coat of new plaster on brick and metal lath. The base coat for the wall plastering was gypsum plaster with sand.

The finish coat on walls and ceilings was a lime and gauging plaster which had to be troweled smooth. The finish had to be completely unblemished to prepare the surfaces for a unique, ornate painting job.